



Quality Enhancement

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This report is published in both English and Welsh.

Scrutiny Panel (QSSP) to evaluate the work of Academic Board and advise the full Board on signing annual assurance statements relating to quality and standards for the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). The QSSP is discussed further at paragraph 79.

1.2 Composition, key trends and anticipated changes in the student population, including information on retention, progression and outcomes

7 The University has approximately 2800 undergraduate students, mostly full-time, and 230 postgraduate students, with about half studying full-time and half part-time, plus several thousand other part-time students. Total student numbers declined since 2013-14 principally because of a decrease in the number of international students.

8 The University enrolls 45% of its students from the local region. A high proportion of students are from areas where participation in higher education is typically lower, a high proportion of students disclose a disability with over 26% of students receiving a Disabled Students' Allowance in 2016-17 and over 70% of the University's students in recent years are classified as mature students. Overall, 88.9% of students fall into one of these three categories.

9 The University tracks retention rates closely (see paragraph 61) and has a Retention Working Group that reports to its Access and Retention Group. Actions resulting from the Working Group correlate with increased student retention from 84.2% in 2015-16 to 85.6% in 2017-18, and a steady increase in progression from 78.9% in 2013-14 to 83.9% in 2017-18. The percentage of students receiving a first class or 2:1 in their first degree has also increased in recent years to 68.2% in 2017-18.

1.3 Commentary on how the provider supports national priorities

10 The University launched a Civic Engagement Strategy for 2018-21 with detailed actions designed to increase active citizenship and volunteering, engagement with public service boards, supporting schools and young people, innovation and social capital through Innovation Hubs, and ensuring that these actions have a tangible impact. The University seeks to meet regional skills needs by working with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board to map its courses against the Regional Skills and Employment Plan. It also engages closely in development related to the North Wales Growth Deal in order to explore how it can support its aims.

11 A Widening Access and Participation Strategy sets out the University's commitment

2 Enhancing the student learning experience

2.1 Strategic approach to enhancing the student experience

25 The University's approach to enhancing the student learning experience is primarily 'top down' and strategically driven but it also allows for ground-up initiatives prompted by staff and students. The strategic framework is set by the University's overarching Vision and Strategy and its 14 supporting strategies, particularly the SSSLA which was developed during 2017 through processes of consultation and discussion with students, staff and external stakeholders such as local employers.

26 The SSSLA has five priority actions: a relevant curriculum; 'great teaching'; innovative assessment; personalised support; and students as partners. The Academic Board has overall responsibility for enhancement while operational development is led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and closely monitored by the LTQC. The University identifies an annual enhancement theme which is systematically developed and monitored through the establishment of special cross-University working or task and finish groups. The most recent and planned annual enhancement themes were: Assessment and Feedback 2017-18; Digital Capability 2018-19; Employability 2019-20, with some themes spanning multiple academic years. The review team heard evidence from staff and students of their participation in developing and implementing these annual themes.

27 The University has developed explicit mechanisms for communicating, monitoring and evaluating its strategic enhancement initiatives. It uses the 'ADRI model' of continuous improvement (approach, deployment, review and improve) to focus particularly on organisational change in the University's learning and teaching methods. In 2014, the University closed its central educational development unit and, from 2016, developed a new cross-University system for supporting organisational change in learning and teaching. The core Academic (cr)2.6s.4 (pr)0.(es)-1.7 5.1 (g. Teduc)-1g (hi)-1 ()Tj0.001 TevmpI

2.2 Approach to working in partnership with students

30 The University has developed the involvement of students in the management of learning and teaching in two main ways. Firstly, the capacity and autonomy of the Students' Union have increased since the former Students' Guild became an independent union with charitable status in 2016. The increase to its block grant from the University has allowed it to increase its number of professional staff from two to eight, and to provide a greater range of services including management of the student course representation system, an Advice Centre and the employment of a Welsh-speaking student adviser. Secondly, the University's Student Engagement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy has defined how the University supports and enables students to engage with, and participate in, quality assurance and enhancement activities and provide feedback on their student learning experience from admission to graduation. One indication of the significant role that the elected Students' Union officers play in the management of the student learning experience is their contribution to the University's Self-evaluative Analysis for its review which was written jointly with the Students' Union and which contains a section of 14 pages, for which the Students' Union was the lead author, describing how the University and the student body jointly work together.

31 The students are represented by their elected officers, usually the Students' Union President and the Vice-President, on the principal governing committees of the University, including the Board of Governors, Academic Board and the two Faculty Boards. Student representatives can be members of programme validation panels and act as representatives on panels for complaints, student discipline and appeals. Students are represented on over 20 of the University's key decision-making bodies. It was clear from meetings with the elected student officers that they have a comprehensive understanding of how the University is managed and can present a student perspective to governors and senior managers.

32 The data is held in the following locations: 3d1.7 (ti)how

2.3 Recognising and responding to diversity in the student population, including approaches to widening access, the needs of specific groups of students and by mode, level and location of study

35 High proportions of students at Wrexham Hills and The Priory had a reading age of 10 or below, compared to 10% of students at Wrexham High School. The proportion of students at Wrexham Hills and The Priory with a reading age of 10 or below was 10% (10/100) and 10% (10/100) respectively, compared to 10% (10/100) at Wrexham High School.

and supported in accordance with the University of Wales procedures. In 2017-18 there were 34 students preparing for University of Wales awards and this number is expected to decline steadily.

40 In 2015, the University agreed a partnership arrangement with the University of Chester and enrolled its first students in January 2016. In 2017-18, there were 42 students registered under this arrangement. The partnership with the University of Chester received a positive Partnership Periodic Review in 2018 and was renewed for a further five years.

41 Slightly different arrangements for the regular monitoring of student progress and

students but on the last two occasions only one student had attended. An online SVF was subsequently arranged during 2018 but only one response was received and that was from a completing student who was entirely complimentary. The Research Committee had reviewed the option of reintroducing the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey as a way of obtaining and benchmarking research student views and satisfaction but had decided, in January 2019, that the cost of its use per student registered (currently £76) outweighed the benefits. The last available report on the outcomes of the University's internal feedback questionnaire for research students dated from June 2017. 45 students had responded. While satisfaction with supervisory teams (90%) and research skills training (76%) was high, significant minorities of students had expressed concern about the research environment, academic resources and physical resources. A further internal online survey, which opened in June 2018 and closed in February 2019, was still to be analysed and would be reported to the Research Committee in May 2019. However, the breadth of the survey would be limited by the fact that only 25% of students had fully completed it. The annual monitoring forms returned for students of both validating universities do include feedback from individual students, and where this is of generic relevance, it is considered and acted on by the Research Committee. In the context of the Expectations *B5* and *B11* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the existing recommendations from the external review of PGR provision, the ongoing work to address them, and the intention of the University to apply in due course for research degree awarding powers, the review team **recommends** that the University intensifies its efforts to obtain systematic feedback from and engage its PGR students. In this context, the University should ensure the timely evaluation of feedback for consideration by the Research Committee and review the mechanisms it uses to encourage both the students' participation in opportunities for feedback and in designing actions in response.

2.5 Supporting students in their development as learners

46 As noted in paragraph 29, the University has articulated and disseminated a clear strategy for supporting student learning which is well understood and appreciated by both students and staff. The SSSLA, developed jointly with students in 2017, sets out clear objectives which are monitored through the use of an action plan and targets are reviewed regularly by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (LTQC). The distinctive features of this approach were recognised as strengths in the Teaching Excellence Framework 2017 Statement of Findings, which particularly mentioned course design, assessment practices and work-based learning, which ensure a curriculum relevant to regional employers. The SSSLA is closely allied with the University's Employability Strategy and Action Plan: 85% of programmes involve credit for work-related learning and a third of the curricula is recognised by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

47 Learning and teaching take place in the context of a student population of which 88.9% of students are from low participation areas (POLAR3) and/or are mature students and/or receive a DSA. The evidence seen and heard by the review team demonstrated a central focus on increasing retention by supporting attendance, achievement and progression. Data provided by the University show significant improvements in retention and progression since 2015-16, although the rate of improvement has slowed over time. A core method for supporting student attendance, progression and TjEMC /l1 (though)5.deeou3n -38.97-1 1.8 (e, a

2.7 Supporting the Welsh-medium student learning experience

53 At a strategic level, the University sets out a definite commitment to Welsh language higher education provision in its Vision and Strategy, which is supported by its Welsh Language Policy. Additionally, the SSSLA has specific targets for Welsh-medium provision. The recent appointment of a Welsh Language Champion, who works with the faculties in the development of Welsh-medium opportunities, is a further positive development. A Welsh Language Academic Development Plan, monitored by the Access and Retention Group, outlines key priorities in relation to the SSSLA targets. The development of

and the local cross-border region. Each strategy is accompanied by plans, which specify measurable outcomes that are regularly monitored through formal decision-making committees.

3 Supporting the enhancement of learning and teaching

3.1 Strategic approach to forward planning, including the use of information to identify priorities designed to enhance learning and teaching, and approaches to implementation and evaluation

identify and celebrate staff engaged in innovative teaching practice. Staff identified the Supporting a Holistic Approach to Programme Enhancement (SHAPE) initiative as particularly helpful in supporting the design and development of new programmes and ensuring the University's curriculum design principles are systematically embedded across its provision. The Academic Development Team is a further mechanism through which innovative

success of the SSSLA. The SSSLA, therefore, operates as a clear strategic driver of change within the University. However, the team noted that it is too early to fully determine the impact of this approach, for example, in relation to retention, and this was recognised by staff the review team met. Overall, the review team is confident that the University's approach to enhancement articulated within SSSLA and Enhancement Framework will continue to operate effectively.

4 Academic

with evidence indicating that students are key to the process through their participation in detailed discussions with the Panel in relation to the quality of their learning experience.

4.2 Key features of the approach to setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards

77 The University has comprehensive regulations and rigorous processes in place in relation to student attainment and the awarding of academic qualifications. The main mechanism for the setting and maintenance of academic standards are the programme approval and revalidation processes together with the use of External Examiners to confirm student attainment and consistency with external reference points. Chief External Examiners provide a valuable means of ensuring consistency across different subject areas. LTQC considers a detailed, analytical overview report of external examiner reports, which includes recommendations for future enhancement. Further, Academic Board discusses a degree outcomes comparative analysis and similar information is distributed to Faculties, thereby informing future strategy and policy developments and helping to ensure an equitable experience for all students.

78 The University's programme approval process has recently been reviewed and enhanced. Enhancements include increasing student involvement in the validation process and in 2017-18, 67% of validation panels included a trained student representative. A clear strategy is in place for increasing this number further. All validation panels include an external subject adviser. During the review visit, academic staff discussed a wide range of examples of relevant discussions with employers in relation to proposed programme changes. While programme validation is through LTQC normally for five years, minor changes to programme content mid-cycle are put to the Academic Programmes Sub-committee for approval. The process requires evidence that current and prospective students have been consulted about the changes.

79 The Board of Governors (BoG) established a Quality and Standards Scrutiny Panel (QSSP) in 2017 that includes a cross-section of Governors, some from a higher education background and others with no higher education background. The Panel scrutinises paperwork related to quality and standards from the Academic Board throughout the year. This includes an Annual Standards Overview Report provided to QSSP and the BoG at the end of the academic year, with progress updates on any matters of concern. Based on evidence received, QSSP submits a detailed report to the BoG, along with a recommendation regarding the submission of the annual HEFCW quality assurance statements. This two-tier process to aid assessment of evidence to support the submission of the annual statements appears thorough and effective.

4.3 Use of external reference points in quality processes

80 The Regulations, Policies and Processes are mapped against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and, in turn, the European Standards and Guidelines, as evidenced by a University mapping exercise. Members of validation panels receive a useful checklist and they are required to comment on 'currency with appropriate external reference points including the qualifications framework and any professional body requirements'. The University maintains a PSRB register and validation and accreditation evidence indicates an active and positive involvement with such bodies, in line with the University's employability strategy. Oversight of quality process on LTQC is aided by the inclusion of an external quality adviser to provide impartial advice and support.

81 The University is proactive in ensuring that all staff are kept up-to-date with regulatory requirements relating to quality and standards. For example, it provides relevant training in the academic quality frameworks including *The Framework for Higher Education*

4.4 Commentary on action taken since the previous review and identification of matters arising from the Prior Information Pack not otherwise explored

The 2013 QAA Institutional Review reached four separate judgements of 'meets' (ti)-1 (od)5.1[s]-1.

106 External examiners sample the work of students studying at partner providers and

5.2 Information on the extent and nature of collaborative provision and plans for change

113 Locally, the University works with five UK further education colleges to offer higher education. These partnerships, while at different stages of maturity, appear unproblematic. There are no specific plans to expand this network further.

114 From an international perspective, the University has developed an International Strategy in which it aims to grow significantly its transnational education (TNE), predominantly in Asia. The University is, and has, planned the resourcing of this expansion. Much of the growth in partnerships overseas is comprised of private colleges to which the University franchises a broad spectrum of programmes from sub-degree to Master's Level.

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