



Annual Quality Report 2019/20

Executive Summary

November 2020

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Registry
Academic and Student Support Services
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annual Quality Report provides a holistic overview of the operation of the University's academic quality system during the 2019/20 academic year. This report, and previous annual quality reports, provide assurance to the Council that the system in place provides confidence that the University appropriately sets and maintains academic standards, and systematically monitors and evaluates teaching and learning, identifies enhancement opportunities, and supports students to succeed.

Quality Enhancement Review

In March 2020, the QAA conducted the University's [Quality Enhancement Review \(QER\)](#) (Section 2). The University had a successful outcome which confirmed that:

- Cardiff University meets the requirements of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) Part 1 for internal quality assurance;
- Cardiff University meets the relevant baseline regulatory requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales.

The outcome affirms that the University has robust arrangements for securing academic standards, managing academic quality, and for enhancing the quality of the student experience. The Review Team made no recommendations. The University has therefore been awarded the QAA Quality Mark for meeting or exceeding UK expectations for quality and standards. This is an excellent outcome and Council can be assured on the design and operation of our academic quality system.

In accordance with the QER process, the University has published an [action plan](#) addressing the Review Team's affirmation, and explaining how it will capitalise on the commendation.

One matter discussed as part of QER was the arrangements for education governance (Section 3). The information submitted to the QER team recognised the number of different committees, groups and networks through which discussions and decisions on matters relating to academic standards, learning and teaching, and student experience take place. The QER report noted that the team found it difficult to understand the current education governance structure. Consequently an area of focus in 2020/21 will be the review and enhancement of education governance arrangements to ensure clarity, effectiveness, and accountability.

Variation of Arrangements and Safety Net

2019/20 was an extremely challenging year, requiring a significant response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report (Section 4) reflects on the University's approach to dealing with and mitigating against the significant disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and a period of industrial action.

The Senate Regulations permit the Vice-Chancellor to vary arrangements in exceptional circumstances which are beyond the University's reasonable control to minimise the impact on the student learning experience. Examples of exceptional circumstances include labour disputes, including strikes and other industrial action, and epidemics of infectious diseases.

A Framework for Variation was introduced to permit Heads of School to make variations to the arrangements for teaching and assessment in response to the industrial action and a further Framework adopted for the disruption resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure that all activities could be delivered remotely from 16 March 2020.

Staff responded positively and swiftly to ensure that equivalent provision was made available to students and ensured that, by the end of the academic year, students were given the opportunity to progress to the next stage of the degree programme or to be awarded a degree.

Due to the continued disruption from the Covid-19 pandemic, a Framework for Variation for 2020/21 was also implemented. The Framework provided an approach for schools to consider the education provision the University could confidently deliver in 2020/21 and to review how education provision would be delivered in 2020/21, taking into consideration the University's obligations under consumer protection law. The Framework enabled changes to be made to programmes for the 2020/21 academic year, ensuring a blend of on-campus and online learning and support.

A Safety Net policy was introduced to ensure that students' award classification in 2019/20 reflected their academic attainment on the degree programme, and that the degree classification was not affected by any potential dip in their academic performance in assessments undertaken during a period of disruption. The policy also ensured that the University maintained oversight of academic standards and a consistent approach was applied to all students.

It is evident from the actions taken to vary arrangements and the introduction of a safety net policy that our robust academic quality system can flex to ensure continued oversight of the student experience and the maintenance of academic standards.

Monitoring and Review

We have comprehensive procedures, which meet external requirements as evidenced by the QER, which ensure that we can monitor and review our education provision, and enable enhancement opportunities to be identified and action taken (Section 5). However, it is not immediately evident how the procedures collectively and efficiently provide the necessary oversight. Therefore, a single monitoring and review policy will be introduced in 2020/21 to provide an overarching statement specifying of our approach for monitoring and review.

A new annual review and enhancement procedure (ARE) was implemented in 2019/20 based on the following principles:

- evidence-based: using data to highlight areas for focus and review;
- proportionate: no longer a one size fits all process; schools are only required to submit an explanation and action plan where data identified they were below benchmark;
- timely: in place of an annual submission by Schools, specific areas of focus are reviewed at the appropriate time in the academic cycle to ensure that prompt action would be taken when required;
- connected: enabling annual review to be linked to College and School review performance review cycles, avoiding repetition and allowing strategic focus.

The new approach was well received by staff who have positively highlighted the benefits of a more proportional and timely approach. However, whilst there were improvements in the provision of data in 2019/20, there continues to be feedback from staff of the need to further enhance the availability of data to better inform discussions on areas of focus for ARE. There will be a need to address the staff feedback in 2020/21 to ensure that ARE continues to be an effective process for the annual review of our educational provision.

The 2019/20 ARE identified areas of risk where actions were required, and also provided assurance that there are no schools where the overall quality of provision is or is likely to become inadequate; all schools meet the baseline requirements for academic standards.

Academic Standards

The University will, as required, publish a degree outcome statement by the end of 2020 analysing the degree classification profile and articulating the results of an internal institutional review. The University annually reviews its degree outcomes as part of ARE process.

The review of degree outcomes shows that there has been an increase in the proportion of students attaining good degrees (1st and 2-1) over the five-year period (2014/15 to 2018/19), from 78% to 83%. The increase of 5% points in the proportion of students achieving good degrees is broadly similar to the sector increase of 4% and remained unchanged between 2017/18 and 2018/19 at 83%. The review undertaken also shows a significant lower degree classification outcomes for BAME students.

The BAME Awarding Gap Group is to develop an action plan, which will be confirmed in 2020/21. The actions will be themed to consider the University culture, admissions, curriculum content and learning environment, student support and cases and extracurricular activities. The measurable outcome will be to eradicate the BAME award gap long-term with an aim to reduce the gap to less than 5% by 2025.

Arrangements for the conduct of Examining Boards were varied in 2019/20 to address issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and, from 16 March 2020, meetings of Boards were conducted remotely. Additional guidance and support was made available to members of Examining Boards to ensure that the meetings were conducted effectively and efficiently. External examiners have commented

favourably on the conduct of meetings and, in future years, remote attendance will continue to be supported.

As Examining Boards were conducted remotely, the Framework for the conduct of Examining Boards and the External Examiner Report Form were revised to ensure there were appropriate discussions relating to academic standards and quality and a record retained. Analysis of the Examining Board reports indicates that there were no concerns raised by the external examiners regarding the academic standards of awards.

Analysis undertaken by the Awards and Progress Committee of degree classifications (Section 5.5) shows that the proportion of students gaining a 1st class degree in 2019/20 was 36% (an increase of 5% points) and that the proportion of students gaining a good degree (1st and 2-1) was 87% (an increase of 4% points).

In order to understand the reasons for the change in the degree outcome profile and the increase in the proportion of students attaining a 1st class degree in 2019/20, the Awards and Progress Committee has asked schools where there was a notable increase in the proportion of 1st class degrees, for further information and to identify if actions are required to protect the academic standards of awards. The analysis of the reason for the change of degree outcomes profile in 2019/20 will be included in next year's annual quality report.

Admissions

There were considerable challenges to address during the last admissions cycle (Section 6). The UK and Welsh Governments brought in a number of single year policy changes and legislation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic applicable to undergraduate admissions, awards, and appeals processes. The University was well positioned to manage these changes, taking appropriate and timely action through the University's Silver Response Group and the Recruitment and Admissions Strategy Group.

Applicants were kept informed through timely email communications, social media, web-based FAQs, along with placing significant resource on responding to general enquiries. An analysis of the impact of the changes due COVID-19 on enrolment and quality (tariff) will be undertaken once enrolment figures are available in January 2021.

A new contextual admissions policy was implemented in October 2019 which allowed the University to make informed decisions of contextualisation based on a breadth of weighted indicators of deprivation. Full analysis of the impact and effectiveness of the revised contextual admissions policy will be undertaken in January 2021, once final enrolment data is available for 2020/1 entry.

Student Partnerships

The University received from the Students' Union 'The Student Voice', its recommendations for the enhancement of the student experience, and provided a response (Section 7). Four partnership projects will be run in 2020/21, to respond to

thematic areas, and will be monitored via a group jointly chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Education and Students and the Students' Union President.

The Council has received the Relationship Agreement between the University and the Students' Union and the Student Charter and a schedule has been agreed for the review of both document for 2020/21.

Student Experience

This year's NSS results have seen a disappointing decline of 3% (from 84.41% in 2019 to 81.43% in 2020), compared to a sector-wide decline of 1% (Section 7). This suggests that whilst Covid-19 may have impacted on the sector outcome, the University has seen a more significant decline, potentially due to a wider range of factors, including industrial action. Cardiff's score of 81.43% for overall satisfaction remains marginally within the benchmark of 83.74% set by HEFCW.

Longitudinal analysis of NSS shows a decline of almost 10% over the past 5 years, from 90% overall satisfaction in 2015, to 81% in 2020. The University has some systemic areas of concern including Assessment and Feedback, Organisation and Management, and Student Voice.

School action plans are being developed as a matter of priority to address the disappointing NSS scores and an institutional plan is being submitted to HEFCW. School actions will be incorporated into Student Experience Enhancement Plans (SEEPs) and monitored by College Deans and via the ARE process.

A 'Transforming Assessment Group' was established in early 2020 to transform assessment and feedback processes across the University. The group has focussed on its substantive task of taking a more strategic view of how assessment and feedback might be transformed and has developed an action plan to enhance assessment literacy, to ensure markers and students have a shared understanding of criteria and standards.

A significant achievement in Spring/Summer 2020 was the development and implementation of a Digital Learning Framework, to ensure high quality online learning opportunities for students. The impact has been a significant investment in digital learning tools and resources, and a step-change in the way that academic staff are supported in delivering blended learning. There has also been a significant increase in resources available to students to support them in their online learning.

Student Cases

The policies and procedures for academic appeals, academic misconduct, fitness to practise, student conduct, student complaints and review requests for decisions made under University procedures were revised for the 2019/20 academic year. The updated procedures for 2019/20 have streamlined some processes which in the mid and long term will be beneficial to managing the volume of cases received by the University (Section 8).

The stabilisation actions identified in the 2018/19 annual quality report, to support the volume and complexity of cases being handled, have been progressed and implementation will be completed in 2020/21. However, the level of risk for student cases has not been lowered until the stabilisation package is fully implemented and staff trained. It is also a recognition that there may be significant challenges during 2020/21 in managing an increased volume of student cases. There is the potential for a higher volume of cases because of the variations to the delivery of educational provision and in supporting students become familiar with new expectations for conduct.

Risk Assessment

A summary of the risk assessment status for each area of academic quality system is provided in the below table.

Area	Red	Amber	Green	Change since 2018/19
Quality Enhancement Review			Green	New
Education Governance		Amber		New
Variations to Arrangements			Green	New
Programme Development			Green	↓
Monitoring and Review		Amber		↑
Collaborative Provision			Green	=
External Examining			Green	=
Degree Outcomes		Amber		New
Admissions			Green	=
Student Partnership			Green	New
Student Experience	Red			↑
Assessment and Feedback		Amber		↓
Publication of Results		Amber		=
Student Cases	Red			=

Green No significant issues identified and actions not required
 Amber Issues identified and action in place to address

Red Significant issues identified and/or action plans being developed to address

Two areas are identified as red status signifying serious issues of concern which require immediate attention: Student Experience; and Student Cases. The report identifies the immediate actions being taken to address these concerns.

There have been changes to the categorisation of areas in the 2018/19 report as outlined below:

- Examination paper errors has been removed as formal examinations in examination halls were largely replaced by other forms of assessment in 2010/20 because of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Academic regulations is included under QER;
- Annual Review and Enhancement, Periodic Review, and Accreditation by Professional Bodies, have been combined to form the Monitoring and Review area;
- Programme Approval Policy and Curriculum Design and Enhancement have been combined under Programme Development.

Assurance

The report provides assurance to Council that the University:

- can continue to have confidence in all quality policies and processes operated during the 2019/20 academic cycle;
- can continue to have confidence that the standards of awards have been appropriately set and maintained; and
- has identified key quality enhancement activities and actions for the 2019/20 academic year which address identified risks.

The report also informs Council assurance statements to the HEFCW, with regards the below statements, as specified in the [Quality Assurance Statements for the Governing Bodies of Regulated Institutions](#) and the [Quality Assessment Framework for Higher Education in Wales](#).

1. The governing body has received a report taking account of the external quality assurance review, and an action plan has been put in place and implemented as appropriate, in partnership with the student body.

Council has received the reports of the QER undertaken in March 2020 and has approved an action plan.

2. The methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes are, to the best of our knowledge, robust and appropriate.

The annual quality report details the actions which are being taken improve the student academic experience and student outcomes.

3. The standards of awards for which we are responsible have been appropriately set and maintained.

The annual quality report confirms the arrangements for setting and maintaining the academic standards of awards, including:

- arrangements for the development of new degree programmes;
- the monitoring and review of degree programmes;
- role of external examiners.

The outcome of the QER also confirms that the University meets the relevant baseline regulatory requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales which include:

- The Framework for Higher Education Qualification (FHEQ);
- The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW);
- The expectations and the core and common practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

The University will publish its Degree Outcome Statement by the end of 2020.

4. The governing body has considered a report on the annual dialogue between the institution and the student union or equivalent, scrutinised student survey outcomes and confirmed that action plans had been put in place and implemented, in partnership with the student body.

Council received The Student View, outlining key themes and issues that the Student Union considers could be improved or introduced to benefit the student experience, and the University's response.

Council has also received the student survey outcomes and the annual quality report which confirm the actions being taken in response to survey outcomes. Council is also aware of the institutional NSS action plan submitted to HEFCW.

5. The governing body has received a copy of the relationship agreement between the institution and the student union or equivalent, and a copy of the student charter, both of which have been reviewed within the past year – confirmation that these have been undertaken.

Council has received the Relationship Agreement between the University and the Students' Union and the Student Charter, and is aware of the schedule for the review of both documents in 2020/21.