Higher Education Review: Wales of Grŵp Llandrillo Menai

March 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review: Wales conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Grŵp Llandrillo Menai. The review took place from 15 to 18 March 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Jethro Newton
- Dr Nicola Jackson
- Miss Emily Connor (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)[1] setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review: Wales the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
    - the maintenance of academic standards
    - the quality of student learning opportunities
    - the information provided about higher education provision
    - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] A dedicated section explains the method for Higher Education Review: Wales[3] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the Glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code
[2] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[3] Higher Education Review: Wales web pages:
www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Higher-Education-Review-Wales.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Grŵp Llandrillo Menai

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Grŵp Llandrillo Menai.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Grŵp Llandrillo Menai.

- The sustained proactive and systematic support for students who are preparing for their engagement with higher education (Expectation B4).
- The highly effective use made of external examiner reports to inform quality development (Expectation B7).
- The sustained and cohesive partnerships with employers which support curriculum development and delivery (Expectation B10).
- The effectiveness of HEQASG in identifying opportunities and initiatives for enhancement of learning and teaching (Enhancement).
- The detailed use of its online tracking system (eDRAC) for assisting learners in reflecting on their learning and in enhancing their skills and confidence as learners (Enhancement).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Grŵp Llandrillo Menai.

By September 2016:

- develop arrangements to maximise the use made and impact of the student representative system (Expectation B5)
- strengthen mechanisms for ensuring that all students are informed of the outcomes of institutional and module-level survey (Expectation B5)
- improve planning and communication between delivery staff to avoid overload in the timing and scheduling of assessments (Expectation B6)
- put in place a procedure for the periodic review of its Pearson provision and ensure that appropriate training is provided for review panel members and programme teams (Expectations B8, A3.4).

About Grŵp Llandrillo Menai

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai (the Grŵp) was founded in April 2012 following the merger of three successful colleges spread over a wide area of North Wales. The original colleges were Coleg Llandrillo (CL), Coleg Menai (CM) and Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor (CMD). These are preserved in the new structure as member colleges. The new Grŵp created an umbrella organisation to oversee the operation of the three member colleges, and completed the

merger process that had commenced in 2010 when Coleg Llandrillo merged with Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor to create Grŵp Llandrillo Menai.

The Grŵp employs 2,000 staff and delivers courses to around 34,000 students, of whom around 1,000 study on higher education programmes.

The Higher Education Strategic Plan 2015-18 illustrates the Grŵp's vision and the College's rationale, which is to further strengthen and develop provision where there is evidence of regional and/or national demand, and identified coherent progression pathways for learners, underpinning the Grŵp's capacity, academic expertise and associated resources.

Due to its diverse further education curriculum, work-based learning and adult and community learning curriculum, the College has been in a position, in terms of resources, to develop higher education programmes to meet sector need; these programmes address specific regional needs. For example, the foundation degree (FdA) and BA one year programme in British Sign Language and Deaf Studies have been developed in partnership with the wider deaf community to encompass appropriate qualifications, accredited by the Institute of British Sign Language.

The College operates a bilingual policy, governed by the Grŵp's Welsh Language Scheme. While this was agreed in 2014, the College has provided Welsh medium and bilingual higher education courses at its Coleg Menai and Meirion-Dwyfor sites for many years. The Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes at these colleges have been offered through the medium of Welsh, are highly successful, and attract good numbers of students.

In 2011, Bangor University (BU) became the Grŵp's key strategic partner for the development and provision of higher education, including foundation degrees, embodied in the strategic partnership. The Grŵp also works collaboratively with the University of South Wales (USW), Glyndŵr University (GU) and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). Partnership agreements are in place with each of these universities. In addition to this the Grŵp works with other awarding partners, including Pearson and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), to deliver higher education programmes in Library Studies, Construction and Engineering.

The Grŵp is one of only three colleges directly funded for higher education in Wales. The Grŵp offers foundation degrees and bachelor's degrees in a range of vocational disciplines, as well as post-compulsory education qualifications. Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNC/D) are also offered at CL's Rhos campus, CMD's Dolgellau campus and CM's Llangefni and Bangor campuses. One postgraduate programme is offered at CL Rhos.

The Grŵp has a range of higher education provision that is directly funded, in addition to franchised provision. This provision is delivered over three campuses, with the large majority being delivered at the Coleg Llandrillo campus.

The Grŵp has previously had two QAA reviews. In 2008 it underwent a Developmental Review, and received recommendations around the development of the strategic approach to teaching and learning and enhancement mechanisms, and in 2013 it underwent a Foundation Degree Review, which resulted in recommendation around employer engagement, workplace learning, study skills and assessment turnaround. Good practice was also identified regarding the development of the lead tutor role. Both reviews had positive outcomes overall. The action plans from both reviews have been addressed successfully.

The Grŵp has recently undertaken an institutional reapproval to deliver Glyndŵr and Bangor University programmes in 2015.

The Glyndŵr approval panel considered that staffing policies within the submission were comprehensive, and these were shown as evidence of good practice. The panel also identified that learning resources and student experience were exemplary and clearly showed what was available to Glyndŵr University students at the Grŵp, and at the University through links with Grŵp libraries. The Grŵp has since met two Glyndŵr institutional approval conditions in relation to an explanation of higher education operational management structures and processes, and how the Grŵp's management interfaces with University management.

Bangor University has also commended the Grŵp on the following during the recent institutional approval: its strong employer-focused provision, which has an emphasis on producing skilled graduates; the pastoral and academic support available to students, including in areas such as career advice and welfare services; the academic standards of its higher education provision; the support offered to students transitioning from further education to higher education; the approachability, responsiveness and commitment of both teaching and the support staff; the key roles of the Higher Education Development Manager and the Higher Education Academic Leader in providing an effective link between the Grŵp and Bangor University, and in helping to ensure consistency across the Grŵp's programmes.

The College has implemented all of the actions required to meet the Bangor University institutional approval conditions.

Explanation of the findings about Grŵp Llandrillo Menai

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations

Expectation (A1): In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* are met by:

- **positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications**
- **awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes**

b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics

c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework

d) consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.1 The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is responsible for the senior staff who coordinate the Grŵp's higher education curriculum planning, development and validation, specifically the Assistant Principal Business Services and Higher Education Manager. All course validations across the Grŵp are coordinated by this team. The Grŵp works with four university partners, the largest being Bangor and Glyndŵr Universities, and with the awarding organisation Pearson.

1.2 The Grŵp's higher education provision is mapped against external benchmarks, including *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), through the awarding bodies and Pearson's curriculum development processes. Partnership agreements show that the awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that qualifications align with national expectations. Subject Benchmark Statements and *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* (updated to Characteristics in 2015) are referred to when the Grŵp designs a new programme.

1.3 The awarding bodies have responsibility for ensuring that learning outcomes are aligned to relevant qualification descriptors through their own validation processes. Subject and foundation degree benchmarks are referred to during programme design. Staff check

benchmarks and use terminology appropriate for learning outcomes. Internal validation panel members refer to a checklist to verify programmes.

1.4   Bangor University (BU) checks programmes during validation, managed by BU Quality Assurance and Validation Unit, as seen, for example, for Hospitality Management, following feedback from BU.

1.5   When the Grŵp conducts curriculum design, USW/UCLan are invited to contribute to deliberative discussions, according to a design process and approval flow map overseen by the Strategic Curriculum Group. The case study seen is for FdSc Computing. This process applies to all higher education programmes, regardless of the awarding body.

1.6   For curriculum design of Pearson programmes, teams ensure that they familiarise themselves with relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Programme structures show overall credit for each year, and foundation degrees include work-based learning (WBL) modules/real work environment experience.

1.7   Students have access to programme information, including credit values, through the virtual learning environment (VLE) and handbooks. There is a UCLan template for handbooks including a checklist that is updated each year. BU validated programmes have handbooks developed by the Grŵp. For university partners, handbooks are forwarded and uploaded on the VLE. Pearson documentation is uploaded in standard form to the VLE. Aims and learning outcomes are contained within validation documents and in programme specifications.

1.8   University partners and Pearson are responsible for ensuring that their programme specifications and learning outcomes are in accordance with Subject Benchmark Statements. External examiners check that assessments are of an appropriate standard.

1.9   When designing programmes, the Grŵp programme teams meet internally to discuss benchmark application to programme aims and indicative content, including learning outcomes. External consultation/feedback with current students, past students and employers is also sought and applied.

1.10   An established validation process is in place to govern the design of qualifications at the Grŵp. The process enables the College to align with QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics, assign credit values correctly and apply the relevant national credit framework and Subject Benchmark Statements. The design would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.11   The team examined documentation including a curriculum design process map, partnership agreements and validation documents, and programme handbooks and checklists. The team also interviewed senior staff, students, teaching staff, and support staff.

1.12   Partnership agreements show that the awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that qualifications align with national expectations.

1.13   A curriculum design process is in place at the College which applies to all higher education programmes, regardless of the awarding body. Internal validation panel members refer to a checklist to verify programmes.

1.14   When designing programmes, the Grŵp programme teams meet to discuss the application of benchmarks to programme aims, indicative content and learning outcomes. External consultation and feedback is sought with current students, past students and employers. Staff confirm that reference is made to benchmarks and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) when designing, validating and revalidating programmes. Engineering staff consulted professional bodies regarding industry standards, as did staff in Health Studies. PGCE staff enabled the inclusion of bilingual content.

1.15   Students have access to programme information, including credit values, through the VLE and handbook. There is a UCLan template for handbooks that is updated each year and a handbook checklist. Standard documentation is used for Pearson's programmes. Bangor University-validated programmes and Pearson have the Grŵp-developed handbooks in line with the College template. For university partners, handbooks are forwarded and uploaded onto the VLE. Aims and learning outcomes are contained within validation documents and in programme specifications.

1.16   The evidence tested indicates that established processes are in place to govern the design of qualifications at the Grŵp. The College follows QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics, to assure that credit values are correctly assigned and align with the relevant national credit framework and Subject Benchmark Statements. The Expectation is met, with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.17   The Grŵp adheres to the academic governance arrangements and regulations of its awarding bodies, set out in partnership agreements, and through centre approval for Pearson. These indicate that it has delegated responsibilities to undertake assessment activities that contribute to the award of academic credit and qualifications.

1.18   The academic frameworks and regulations that the College operates are established as part of programme approval processes, and standards are set out in programme specifications. The Grŵp's role in securing academic standards varies by partner and programme. For franchised programmes, the Grŵp adheres to the university provider policies. For Pearson and Bangor University-validated provision, the Grŵp has developed policies which meet the expectations of the Quality Code, Pearson Quality Assurance procedures and the BU validation manual.

1.19   Programme aims and learning outcomes are laid out in programme specifications and student handbooks, which are uploaded to the VLE.

1.20   There are systems, processes and documentation showing that transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations govern how the College and associated awarding bodies and organisations award academic credit and qualifications. The design would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.21   The team examined a range of partnership agreements, policies, templates and validation documents both in paper form and uploaded to the VLE. Programme specifications and student handbooks were inspected on the VLE. The team interviewed senior and teaching staff, students and employers.

1.22   Senior staff are tasked with maintaining academic standards, and ensure that minutes of the Higher Education Quality and Academic Standards Group (HEQASG) go to the Higher Education Group, attended by the higher education managers with curriculum responsibility. Teams have annual monitoring responsibility and take note of benchmarks and other reference points during validation. Students describe their involvement in programme design and validation, for example in 3D Animation.

1.23   Employers have input to programme development and design in various ways. The British Deaf Association has informed course content and delivery, and library employers have informed both inception and modifications to programmes to ensure fitness for purpose. Catering employers have also influenced curriculum design to ensure that the course meets school and care sector standards.

1.24   Awarding body periodic review ensures that programmes remain fit for purpose. For the three Culinary Arts courses, employers and students were consulted prior to meetings with Bangor University. For the revalidation of Engineering courses, teams secured input from PSRBs: the Institution of Civil Engineers and the Chartered Institute of Building. Revalidation of the PGCE ensured the incorporation of bilingual content in line with the College policy and targets, using awarding body programme specifications. Computing staff

confirm that the recent revalidation referenced Subject Benchmark Statements in their latest form.

1.25   For Pearson programmes, teams use 'off the shelf' modules and the Pearson programme and module specifications. The College has also been able to rework modules and learning outcomes to ensure an appropriate context, subject to approval by Pearson. For example, a new Engineering module is in development in consultation with the nuclear industry, and an environmental module developed by the Grŵp has subsequently been adopted nationally by Pearson. Cross-programme review also takes place at senior level and is fed down to programme teams.

1.26   There is a clear process and documentation showing that transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations are applied, which ensure that the Grŵp and associated awarding bodies and organisations correctly award academic credit and qualifications. Teams work closely with awarding bodies and Pearson to assure the award of academic credit. The Expectation is therefore met, with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.27   The Grŵp is required to adhere to the governance arrangements as set out by its awarding bodies in their partnership agreements and in the centre approval document for Pearson programmes. The Grŵp's role in securing academic standards varies by partner and programme and by the awarding bodies' regulations. The Grŵp has delegated responsibility for assessment that contributes towards credit and overall awards.

1.28   Programme specifications set out the academic framework and regulations that have been established as part of programme approval. Awarding bodies keep a definitive record of each programme and its approved qualification, including any changes. This is then used by the Grŵp as the reference point for delivery and assessment, monitoring and review and any use in public information, including programme specifications, that is available to current and prospective students on the awarding bodies' respective VLEs or in their prospectuses.

1.29   HEQASG has overall responsibility for ensuring that academic quality is in place and consistently applied and for the application of these programme specifications. This committee reports upwards through the governance structure to Curriculum, Students and Standards Committee and the Higher Education Group to ensure complete institutional oversight of academic standards. Through programme teams, the Grŵp maintains and provides information on the aims and intended learning outcomes of programmes, ensuring that they are up to date in programme handbooks, which also include module specifications. These are all linked to the relevant FHEQ level and Subject Benchmark Statement. The awarding bodies keep records of all programme specifications that are approved. This process would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.30   The review team tested the Expectation by considering documentation produced by the Grŵp, including checklists and agreements between it and its awarding bodies. The team met senior and academic Grŵp staff.

1.31   During course design, proposed courses are scrutinised at validation events to ensure that they align to the FHEQ. Validation events also consider Subject Benchmark Statements as part of a checklist, which further ensures alignment with external reference points.

1.32   Programme specifications are available to applicants through the website and are issued to students during induction. They are also available online through the virtual learning environment to enable students' access to the overall learning outcomes for their course.

1.33   Through scrutiny of the approach taken by the Grŵp to the provision and maintenance of records of higher education provision, and meeting staff and students, the review team finds that the Grŵp meets this Expectation. The management of programme specifications for its awards is appropriate. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.34   The Grŵp's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has overall Grŵp-level responsibility for the strategic development and coordination of the higher education portfolio and for curriculum planning. In carrying out this responsibility the CEO is supported by the Principal of Coleg Llandrillo, who holds Grŵp responsibility for business development, and the Assistant Principal for Business Services and Higher Education, also based at Coleg Llandrillo. Validations across the Grŵp structure are coordinated by the Higher Education Development Manager (HEDM), and the Quality Manager manages the quality processes. Each of the three Coleg Principals is responsible for curriculum delivery for programmes delivered at their respective sites. Programme Area Managers (PAMs) are responsible for the standards of the programmes in their areas.

1.35   In the committee structure the Strategic Curriculum Group (SCG), chaired by the CEO and reporting to Tîm Polisi, provides strategic direction on curriculum growth and market-related matters, while HEQASG addresses quality, academic standards and regulatory matters, and exercises deliberative oversight of curriculum delivery. HEQASG reports to the Curriculum, Students and Standards Committee (CSSC), a subcommittee of the Board of Governors, and to the Higher Education Group.

1.36   The Grŵp uses a staged process for the approval and development of a new programme. The first stage includes an internal academic planning process for the approval of the business case of programmes. This academic planning discussion is informed by market, financial, and resourcing information and by consideration of the rationale for the proposed provision. This involves prior discussion of the programme proposal that commences at the level of an individual coleg, and which is led by that coleg's Principal and the Assistant Principal for Planning. The new programme proposal then proceeds to the SCG where labour market and resource considerations are addressed. At this juncture a decision is made on whether the proposal can proceed to validation.

1.37   Following completion of this internal academic planning stage, academic approval is subject to the procedures, regulations and academic governance arrangements of the awarding bodies, as determined in partner agreements and Pearson centre approval. Documentation indicates that the Grŵp has some delegated responsibilities for assessment that contributes to awards and credit.

1.38   For Glyndŵr University, UCLan, University of South Wales, and Bangor University franchised programmes, the universities are responsible for curriculum design of their own awards. For Bangor-validated provision, the Grŵp develops the curriculum proposal, while programme design for non-university provision is the responsibility of Pearson as the awarding organisation.

1.39   There is a comprehensive set of documents illustrating the development and approval process for each university, and for Pearson provision. Validation and approval events take place, which ensure that regulations are complied with and which focus on learning outcomes, assessment and module specifications, and on academic standards and

the quality of learning opportunities for prospective students. In addition to partner academic department and university-level scrutiny, events and processes also incorporate the use of externality. External advisers, drawn from both academia and industry or the professions, are involved in programme approval. Their contribution incorporates comments on comparability of standards with similar provision elsewhere and other standards-related matters.

1.40   The Grŵp has a set of processes in place, supported by those of awarding bodies, which would enable it to meet Expectation A3.1.

1.41   The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of programme design and approval guidance, and academic regulations and frameworks, through scrutiny of documentation and through meetings with staff, students and employers.

1.42   The team noted that, while approval processes ensure that the standards and level of awards are in accordance with the prevailing academic frameworks and regulatory responsibilities, the Grŵp's role in securing standards varies by partner and by programme according to the various institutional agreements. For its franchised programmes, the Grŵp adheres to university policies. For Pearson and Bangor University validated provision, it has developed policies that meet Quality Code expectations and the requirements and procedures, respectively, of Pearson and Bangor. At the Grŵp, HEQASG is responsible for ensuring that academic regulations and frameworks are in place and are implemented consistently. The team notes that steps are taken by the Grŵp to ensure that staff are aware of, and make use of, external reference points such as Subject Benchmark Statements, qualification frameworks, and foundation degree characteristics when designing programmes.

1.43   While quality assurance, validation processes and operational matters are defined by the university partners, the Grŵp benefits from formal liaison arrangements such as partnership boards. For example, the Bangor University Strategic Partnership Board is chaired by the Coleg Llandrillo Principal, while the Assistant Principal, Business Services and Higher Education also attends. The Grŵp's higher education programme leaders attend partner award boards for franchise provision.

1.44   The documentary evidence made available to the review team illustrates various examples of the Grŵp successfully gaining approval for programmes validated by, or franchised with, its university awarding bodies. The programmes developed by the Grŵp and validated by Bangor University follow procedures in that University's Validation Manual. These procedures also apply to re-validation. The Grŵp provides the University with a full programme proposal in the form of a validation document, which is considered by a validation panel. This is accompanied by other documentation such as programme handbooks, employers' guides (for foundation degrees), endorsement by employers, and evidence of student engagement discussions, together with Grŵp institutional documentation. The team concurred with the Grŵp's view that this provides a robust framework for validation. It ensures that all new foundation degrees and other degree provision developed by and with the Grŵp are subject to internal and external scrutiny involving industry and input from academic representatives. The team saw an example of a BA Hospitality Management validation which showed feedback from the approval panel and confirmed that conditions had been met.

1.45   For programmes designed and developed by other awarding bodies, and for Bangor franchised programmes, validation documents are developed by the university partner. Here, Grŵp staff are invited to contribute during the approval process through their links with partner academic departments and collaborative provision units. The team notes various examples of recent interaction between Grŵp staff and franchise partners. In the Glyndŵr University process, the Glyndŵr Academic Leads comment on the delivery proposal form prior to attendance at validation meetings and at the full validation panel meeting. The Grŵp is also visited for continuation of approval purposes. The latter was illustrated by the provided partner approval example of the BA Fine Art revalidation.

1.46   The validation process for USW provision enables Grŵp involvement at various stages. Here modules may be written by Grŵp staff, who also attend planning meetings and have membership of curriculum teams. In the example provided of the USW validation of the PGCE/PCET (Professional Certificate in Education) programme, the Grŵp course team staff and the Assistant Principal, Curriculum, contributed to the validation meeting at USW.

1.47   For Pearson provision, new programmes are approved through completion of the BTEC vocational qualification approval form. This is made available to Pearson, along with sample assignment briefs, internal verification of the briefs, the programme plan and staff CVs. The team was informed that as existing programmes are well established, no new programmes had been approved or validated. The review team notes that discussions aimed at developing a Higher National programme for the local nuclear industry are at an early stage.

1.48   External advisers, drawn from both academia and industry or the professions, are involved in programme development and approval. Their contribution incorporates comments on comparability of standards with similar provision elsewhere and other standards-related matters. For foundation degrees developed by the Grŵp, the team notes examples of employers and students feeding into curriculum planning, and of course teams discussing validation proposals with employers at the design stage.

1.49   Programme modifications are carried out following awarding body procedures and in accordance with the Grŵp's programme review process. Through engaging in the Grŵp's programme reviews, programme teams endeavour to ensure that programmes continue to reflect the needs of learners and of PSRB requirements. For programmes validated by Bangor University, if changes are required, the relevant form is completed and discussed with the external examiner prior to the examination board. A programme review meeting is then convened to discuss and ratify suggested changes that do not exceed awarding body guidelines. Programmes franchised from Bangor or other awarding bodies are required to follow changes implemented by the franchisor.

1.50   When a university-approved programme reaches the end of its approval term it is revalidated through the formal periodic review/re-approval procedures laid down in the regulations of the university. Among the examples of this seen by the review team was the re-validation of the Bangor-validated Foundation Degree in Photography. Students informed the team that the event included two students from each year of the programme together with a local photographer. Review of, and modifications to, Pearson programmes is undertaken through the Pearson annual centre review process.

1.51   The team formed the view that staff understand the Grŵp's internal academic planning and approval processes, the validation processes of awarding bodies, and the expectations for higher education provision. This enables it to make a positive contribution to the various processes.

1.52   Overall, regulations and processes for programme design and approval for university and Pearson awards are in place and are understood by staff. This leads the team to conclude that Expectation 3.1 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.2): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:

- **the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment**
- **both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.**

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.53   Programmes are operated in accordance with the validation, franchise and qualification approval agreements of each awarding partner. The academic regulations of each awarding body and awarding organisation set out the principles and regulations governing assessment. They document the processes and frameworks that address the management of assessment, including extenuating circumstances and the operation of assessment boards. These regulations define the responsibilities of each partner in relation to oversight of academic standards for each programme component. Specific responsibilities for assessment vary according to the agreement with each awarding partner.

1.54   Awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that student achievement of learning outcomes receives credit through moderation processes, external examination and the operation of boards of examiners. For programmes validated by Bangor University and for Pearson provision, examination boards and credit transfer boards are held at and administered by the Grŵp. For other provision, boards are held at and administered by the awarding body.

1.55   The appropriateness of assessment methods to be used in taught programmes for testing the achievement of relevant learning outcomes is scrutinised in programme approval procedures, and through periodic review by university partners if there are amendments to assessment. There is a defined process for modifications to a programme. A programme specification is available for each programme. The mapping of assessment tasks to learning outcomes at module and programme level is outlined in these documents and in student handbooks, which are now available to students online. Assessment is also reviewed as part of the internal module evaluation process and annual programme monitoring and review process.

1.56   The College has processes in place which would enable it to meet the Expectation.

1.57   The review team examined a range of documentation to test how effectively processes relating to the award of qualification and credit operate in practice. This includes academic regulations, assessment board minutes, module and programme specifications, programme and module handbooks, external examiners' reports and programme annual monitoring review. The team also met a wide range of staff and students to discuss the assessment of academic standards.

1.58   From discussions with staff and from reading institutional documentation, it was evident to the team that steps are taken by the Grŵp to ensure that staff are aware of and follow the relevant approved regulations for each awarding body. The team noted that for learners undertaking higher education programmes approved by Pearson and for Bangor University-validated programmes, the Grŵp operates its own overarching assessment policy and procedures. The Grŵp assessment policy and procedure provides information on

assessment (formative and summative), submission through plagiarism-detection software, and on feedback, grading, deadlines and word counts. It also provides guidance on the recognition of prior learning/prior experiential learning, assessment through the medium of Welsh, and on the external award of credit and qualifications. Regulatory information and policy and procedure is articulated to learners in programme handbooks, programme VLEs, and module pages. The team learned, however, that use of the VLE for such purposes is not yet universal across all programmes. Learners undertaking higher education programmes awarded by Glyndŵr, USW, and UCLan are advised to review the policies and procedures available on the programme VLE or in the Programme Handbook, and on the awarding body's website.

1.59   Through the programme approval process, the awarding body seeks assurance that assessment is closely aligned to the academic standards of the awards, and that the design of assessment is sufficiently robust in testing the achievement of relevant learning outcomes.

1.60   For university-approved provision, programme handbooks and programme specifications map assessment to learning outcomes at appropriate levels. Module outcomes are mapped to the programme learning outcomes, and assessments are used to demonstrate evidence of achievement of the module outcomes.

1.61   The team learned that for Bangor-validated programmes, the Grŵp is centrally involved in developing the programme specification. For its franchised provision with Glyndŵr, USW and with UCLan, programme specifications are devised by the awarding body, though the team was informed that Grŵp staff work closely with Glyndŵr counterparts in the development of such documents and that they are able to adapt them where appropriate, including translating specifications into Welsh. For Pearson qualifications use is made of the template provided by the awarding organisation, with learning outcomes being specified in the relevant units.

1.62   The review team notes, however, that the Pearson 'off the shelf' programme specifications do not specify programme aims or programme outcomes.

1.63   For Bangor-validated programmes, the College's internal assessment processes enable the Grŵp to ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment, and that both UK threshold standards and the awarding body's own academic standards have been satisfied.

1.64   For its Bangor-validated provision and its Pearson programmes, the College operates internal verification and moderation procedures for both assessment briefs and the marking of student work. In accordance with the Grŵp policy on second marking of higher education assessments, samples of work for each assessment are second marked with sampling being based on high grades, failures, and borderline marks. These measures ensure that learning outcomes are appropriately assessed and that results are moderated. For Glyndŵr, UCLan and USW programmes, assessments are also checked through the university's own processes, through standardisation and through use of their internal and external moderation activities. For assessment and academic standards purposes, for programmes under all these validating arrangements, the Grŵp assures itself through its own internal monitoring and review processes.

1.65   Taken together, these procedures assure consistency and fairness in the setting and marking of assessments. There are effective standardisation and verification procedures in place, as described above, to monitor that this happens.

1.66   Assessments for university awards and for Pearson are also subject to external examination (or verification) through the external examiner (or verifier) system. A review of external examiners' reports confirms the appropriateness of assessment in maintaining

academic standards and comparability with UK threshold standards. Staff demonstrate good awareness of all processes for assessment and the importance of their proper application in upholding standards.

1.67   Records of Grŵp-managed assessment boards for university awards and for Pearson qualifications confirm that decisions for the award of credit at module and course level are made in accordance with awarding partners' defined processes. Appropriate externality is achieved through the participation of external examiners who are invited to assessment boards. External examiners are involved in assessment processes through confirming the setting and achievement of learning outcomes. For Bangor and Pearson programmes, oversight over examination awards boards, and over the annual programme monitoring process, is also exercised by the Grŵp's Boards of Studies. For other university-validated programmes, examination boards are chaired and administered by the respective awarding partner.

1.68   Overall, for all of these awards the Grŵp, working with its awarding partners as stipulated by institutional agreements, has appropriate systems in place to ensure that the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable, and that the award of qualifications and credit is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.69   The universities and Pearson have systems in place for monitoring academic standards, as detailed in their regulations. These regulations and the Grŵp's internal systems and procedures define processes for the monitoring and review of programmes that address whether academic standards are being maintained.

1.70   The Grŵp has an appropriate quality monitoring cycle in place. Each programme leader within the Grŵp is responsible for producing an Annual Programme Review (APR) report. For Pearson Higher National provision, these are designated as Annual Programme Monitoring Reports (APMRs). All reports include coverage of matters relating to academic standards, such as comments from external examiners on assessment, student achievement, and the administration of examination boards. These reports are reviewed by the line-managing Assistant Principal, and are signed off by the Grŵp's Quality Assurance Manager prior to submission to the relevant awarding partner. A summary of key strengths and areas for development from the APR process is reviewed each December at a meeting of HEQASG. Issues arising are then summarised in the annual higher education Self Evaluation Document and are carried forward into the Grŵp's Quality Development and Enhancement Plan.

1.71   The awarding body and awarding organisation requirements, combined with the Grŵp systems for programme monitoring and review, would enable the Grŵp to meet Expectation A3.3.

1.72   The review team examined documentary evidence showing university, Pearson and Grŵp systems for programme monitoring and review, and also comments and recommendations in external examiners reports. The team tested the operation and effectiveness of these quality assurance procedures, and the regulations and guidance on monitoring and review, by meeting staff and students involved in the various processes.

1.73   The review team found that the Grŵp implements effective review and monitoring procedures for each university-approved programme which meet the requirements of that university. These include procedures for the management of modules, for programme monitoring and review, and for end-of-module evaluation.

1.74   These procedures are informed by external examiners' reports and student feedback. Reports by university-appointed external examiners consider whether programmes meet academic standards. Examples seen by the review team confirm the presence of high standards both in the quality of the provision and in student work. For Pearson directly funded programmes, both internal moderation and the external verification undertaken by Pearson-appointed external verifiers confirm maintenance of academic standards. External verifier reports for these programmes inform the Pearson annual review process.

1.75   The periodic review or revalidation/re-approval of programmes for university provision takes place according to the relevant institutional agreement and to the awarding body's regulations and guidance on periodic programme review. Universities also undertake

institutional re-approval periodically, and these reviews include an element of drill-down to programme level. Review documents and reports from the College are considered through the universities' committee structures. The focus of periodic review is on the continued academic health of an award or group of subjects. An example of this is the periodic review and revalidation of the BA Fine Art undertaken recently by Glyndŵr University, and the revalidation by the University of South Wales in 2014 of the Grŵp's PCET programme. The schedule and cycle for periodic review, with dates, is maintained by the HEDM. Programmes undergoing periodic review are monitored at the Grŵp through the SCG and Higher Education Group.

1.76   For Pearson provision, the awarding organisation undertakes an annual review visit, recently redesignated as a Quality Management Review, at which the Grŵp's Lead Internal Verifier and Pearson programme leaders are present. This process includes the verification of standards. However, senior staff at the Grŵp confirmed to the team that there is no procedure for undertaking the periodic review of Pearson programmes, either by the awarding organisation or by the Grŵp itself.

1.77   Externality is required in the universities' validation, periodic review (re-validation/re-approval), and institutional re-approval processes. Standards set or being achieved are appropriately reviewed at this stage. The College may be invited to nominate external academic and industry representatives for university re-validation events. Employer involvement is central to the development of all foundation degrees and the team heard from employers that there is employer involvement in programme review. Evidence requested by the team confirms that there is external input to the Grŵp's own approval, review, and monitoring processes in relation to securing appropriate academic standards. Furthermore, Bangor University appoints external moderators and external specialists to act as critical friends and to support the Grŵp in developing new programmes and for monitoring and reviewing existing ones.

1.78   For both university-approved awards and for Pearson provision, staff at the Grŵp share a common understanding of how programme monitoring and review works and follow procedures effectively. External examiners confirm that academic standards are met. For Pearson provision, though there are effective processes for annual review, neither the awarding organisation nor the Grŵp has in place a procedure for the periodic review of programmes. This contributes to the recommendation in section B8.

1.79   Overall, there are processes in place for the monitoring and review of academic standards for university awards and for Pearson qualifications and these are understood by staff. This leads the team to conclude that the Expectation is met and that the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:

- **UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved**
- **the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.**

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.80   Staff at the Grŵp are invited to comment on validation documents from other partners. Bangor University-franchised courses are developed by the university partner. Grŵp staff are involved in developing the curriculum, registration and quality assurance.

1.81   The Grŵp's assessment policy and procedure provides information and guidance on assessment. It dictates procedure, including second marking of higher education assessment. Bangor has internal assessment processes that enable the Grŵp to ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded appropriately. The Grŵp produces Annual Programme Reviews (APRs), which are prepared by programme leaders, sent to the relevant Assistant Principal, signed off by the Grŵp's Quality Assurance Manager and sent to the awarding body. Summaries are reviewed at HEQASG.

1.82   External examiner reports indicate that standards are upheld, and as described in section B8, themes and issues from these reports, together with good practice, are fed into the Quality Office and used to inform improvement and enhancement themes. These are monitored through the Quality Office's Higher Education Quality Development and Enhancement Plan.

1.83   The Pearson internal moderation/verification process involves a similar process through the external moderator; awarding bodies engage with their external examiner. Bangor appoints external moderators as 'critical friends'. Employers are involved in the development of foundation degrees in a variety of ways, discussed in section B10.

1.84   The Grŵp's higher education timetables are designed to allow learners to work or meet caring responsibilities alongside studies. Students describe being able to do so.

1.85   A systematic framework for validation of Bangor's courses ensures that all new foundation degrees or degrees developed in partnership with the Grŵp have been subject to internal and external scrutiny, involving multiple partners from industry and practising academics. Validation procedures are also followed in line with other partner awarding body requirements.

1.86   The Grŵp manages networks of employer partnerships through higher education, further education, work-based learning (WBL) and adult and community learning (ACL) partners. The Grŵp has focused on relationships with regional employers such as North Wales Police and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, to deliver vocational higher education provision which meets sector needs, as illustrated in section B10.

1.87   Assessment at the Grŵp operates under an overarching policy and procedures for learners undertaking higher education programmes that have been validated by Pearson or by Bangor University. The Grŵp operates programmes in accordance with validation, franchise and qualification approval agreements for each awarding body.

1.88   Learners undertaking programmes awarded by partner institutions and Pearson are advised to review the policies and procedures, which are available in the Programme Handbook posted on the VLE and on the awarding organisation's website. Awarding bodies ensure that student achievement of learning outcomes receives academic credit through moderation, external examination and the operation of boards of examiners.

1.89   Awarding body procedures are in place, allowing consultation between partners to ensure that UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved, and that the academic standards of the university are appropriately set and maintained. Oversight is assured by the use of external examiners and moderation, as governed by the relevant policies and processes required by the universities and Pearson. The design of programmes includes consultation by relevant stakeholders, including employers. The design would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.90   The team examined a range of documents, policies, partnership agreements, examiners' reports and minutes of validation meetings. Staff and students were interviewed in meetings, and the team met employers.

1.91   The CEO reports close collaboration with awarding partners, particularly Bangor. Staff confirm that across a range of programmes, discussions take place with awarding bodies, employers and professional sector bodies to inform design and delivery of programmes. Engineering staff, for example, have liaised with the Institution of Civil Engineers and the Chartered Institute of Building to inform the re-validation of their programmes with Bangor. For the periodic review of Culinary Arts, students and employers were invited to a focus group to inform the process at Bangor. Similar tripartite discussions take place in Deaf Studies and Health programmes to engage industry and the awarding body. Changes to the British Sign Language and Deaf Studies programmes have been made to ensure fitness to meet industry needs and standards; discussions with stakeholders for the PGCE have secured its bilingual content.

1.92   Senior staff described consultation with the Arts Council of Wales and local galleries as well as individual photography employers. For Health programmes, consultation has involved the regional Health Board and the NHS to ensure that the curriculum is fit for purpose. For the FdSc Policing, design and delivery has involved liaising with the North Wales Police Service and UCLan to ensure a good fit of curriculum with subsequent police training.

1.93   Employers have input to programme development and design in various ways. The British Deaf Association has informed course content and delivery, and library employers have informed inception and modifications to programmes and provided industry expertise to bolster delivery and ensure fitness for purpose. Catering employers have also influenced curriculum design to ensure that the course meets school and care sector standards.

1.94   Periodic review by awarding bodies ensures that programmes remain fit for purpose. For the three Culinary Arts courses, employers and student views were sought prior to the meetings with Bangor University. For the re-validation of Engineering courses, also with Bangor University, teams secured input from the Institution of Civil Engineers and the Chartered Institute of Building. Re-validation of the PGCE ensured the incorporation of bilingual content in line with Grŵp policy and targets, using awarding body programme specifications. Computing staff confirm that the recent revalidation referenced Subject Benchmark Statements in their latest form.

1.95   Sustained and strategic involvement with external examiners and moderators to inform and secure academic standards is documented in section B7.

1.96   The Grŵp's processes and quality practice ensure that external and independent expertise is used at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards, and that the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained. The Expectation is met, with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.97   In reaching its judgements about the maintenance of the academic standards of awards, the team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Grŵp is effective in managing its responsibilities, in conjunction with the degree-awarding bodies and organisation, and is effective in maintaining academic standards. From its scrutiny of a wide range of evidence, and through the meetings that the team was able to have with staff and students, the team concludes that effective use is made of relevant subject and qualification benchmarks and external expertise in the development of programmes and their subsequent approval and monitoring, with qualifications being set at an appropriate academic level. Furthermore, the team confirms that effective use is made of input from external examiners and link tutors from the degree-awarding partner.

1.98   The team does not identify any good practice in this area, or make any recommendations, although the recommendation under Expectation B8 is cross-referenced to Expectation A3.4 as it orientates around the need for a process of, and associated support for, periodic review of the Grŵp's Pearson provision.

1.99   The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the Grŵp's degree-awarding bodies and organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B1: Programme Design and Approval*

Findings

2.1 As specified previously, the Grŵp does not award higher education qualifications. All awards are made through partnership arrangements. Responsibility for final academic approval rests with the relevant university or Pearson. Though formal overall responsibility for programme design and approval rests with the quality assurance processes of either a university partner or Pearson, the Grŵp uses its own internal processes for resource-related approval and for programme development in conjunction with those of its validating partners.

2.2 Responsibilities for programme design vary between awarding body. Under its validating arrangements with Bangor University, the Grŵp takes the initial lead in designing the programme specification. For franchised provision, under arrangements with Glyndŵr University, UCLan, and the University of South Wales, the specification is developed by the validating partner in consultation with the Grŵp's Programme Leader. For Pearson provision, programme and unit specifications are provided by Pearson, though some units may be devised by the Grŵp.

2.3 These awarding partners are responsible for the alignment of their awards with the FHEQ and other external reference points. New programmes undergoing validation, or revalidations of existing programmes, are subject to the regulations of the relevant awarding partner. A revalidation and approval event was recently completed by Bangor University for the FdA in Photography.

2.4 The development, design and approval of programmes through university and Pearson processes, and Grŵp processes where applicable, such as the use made of an internal business case approval stage, and an internal pre-validation procedure led by the HEDM, would enable the Grŵp to meet Expectation B1.

2.5 To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the team examined documents relating to strategic and curriculum planning, the relevant Grŵp organisational structures, and university and Pearson regulations on programme development. The team also held meetings with staff at all levels within the Grŵp, and with employers.

2.6 The review team noted that the Grŵp's curriculum portfolio, a substantial proportion of which has historically been directly funded, is geared towards vocational provision. This is reflected in the Grŵp's Higher Education Strategic Plan, which identifies regional skills needs as a priority driver, together with a commitment to bilingual provision.

2.7 The team learned that to facilitate higher education portfolio development, the Grŵp has implemented an internal approval process that focuses on the rationale, business case, and resourcing of new programme proposals, prior to submission of a proposal to an awarding body. Under this strategic portfolio planning process, prior to the formal consideration of the rationale and business case, curriculum plans for new programmes are discussed at the level of the individual coleg. In this, each coleg Principal is supported by an Assistant Principal for Planning. The operationalisation and Grŵp management oversight of

curriculum planning falls under the responsibility of the Assistant Principal for Business Services and Higher Education, located at Coleg Llandrillo.

2.8   Decision making on new higher education provision is the responsibility of the Strategic Curriculum Group (SCG), chaired by the CEO, where decisions are made on whether a proposal can proceed to validation. SCG, which reports to Tîm Polisi, exercises oversight of both new and legacy provision. It is responsible for ensuring that the Grŵp maintains a curriculum that aligns with strategic aims and regional employment needs and avoids duplication and internal and external competition. SCG meets regularly and involves a senior manager from each of the three constituent colleges. They receive approval request forms, and consider rationale, Grŵp impact and resource needs as identified on the form. The relevant Assistant Principal or Programme Area Manager will normally attend to discuss a proposal. The proposed funding source (whether direct or franchised) is considered early in the process. For franchised provision, evidence is required of initial discussions with the relevant university, together with information on the viability of delivery. SCG may request further information before making a final decision. This may include evidence of regional demand, of employer and learner support, and progression opportunities. Proposals will either be approved in principle, subject to curriculum planning and the outcome of the university's validation approval process, or declined with feedback.

2.9   In reflecting on this internal planning process for approving the business case, the review team formed the view that it is implemented effectively and is well understood by staff.

2.10   The team looked at documentation illustrating the curriculum design, development and approval process for university-validated programmes and for Pearson provision, paying particular attention to the Grŵp's own documentation and internal processes leading up to validation. For new provision, Programme Area Managers, in discussion with their Assistant Principal for Planning and Development, make use of a Curriculum Development Approval Request Form for submission to SCG. The approval process is detailed in the College's Curriculum Planning and Development Handbook, and the 'HE Validation Process with a HEI partner' flowchart outlines the new programme validation process. Though the review team heard that discussions are under way to develop provision for the regional nuclear industry, existing Pearson provision is well established and there are no recent examples of new programme design.

2.11   The team scrutinised the procedures whereby proposals that are approved in principle are taken forward to validation. The team noted that the relevant Programme Area Manager (PAM) and HEDM begin the validation process. The latter liaises with the potential higher education validating partner to request a schedule for the validation process. For Bangor-validated provision the Programme Leader and PAM lead the writing of the programme validation document with the delivery team. The protocols for writing the documentation are located on a central drive and are communicated to the development team by the HEDM. For provision franchised from Glyndŵr, UCLan and University of South Wales, the specification and validated document are written by the validating university. The Programme Leader works closely with the university through the process. For this provision an approval visit takes place, taking the form of a site visit to consider resources, accommodation and staffing. Any supplementary documentation appertaining to validated provision, such as programme handbooks, employer and learner support documentation, staff CVs, and internal approval minutes, are prepared and collated by the Programme Leader and PAM. For directly funded new programme provision, programme teams are invited to nominate three potentially suitable external specialists (academic and vocational experts) from whom the university will select at least one to attend the validation.

2.12   These arrangements and procedures are understood by staff and work effectively. However, approved specifications for Pearson programmes are provided 'off the shelf' by Pearson. It was apparent that these do not contain a rationale for the choice and combination

of units and options from which the delivered programme is constructed, nor are programme aims or programme learning outcomes specified. As a consequence, links between intended programme outcomes and student assessment in Pearson programmes are not clear.

2.13   The review team notes that, prior to any awarding body approval or validation event, the Grŵp itself implements an internal pre-validation process. For this purpose, the HEDM devises a calendar of internal pre-validation events, and a schedule that includes dates for submission of final proposed documentation to the validating university. In this internal pre-validation process, the Programme Leader presents the draft specification. This validation document is scrutinised by the HEDM, the Assistant Principal HE Business Services, and the relevant Assistant Principal Planning and Development. Supporting evidence from learners and employers is also considered at this stage. From this process, feedback is provided to enable the Programme Leader and delivery team to complete the final specification prior to submission to the university-led validation event, which is held at the Grŵp. Partner validation manuals detail the processes of validation and possible outcomes. The team saw a range of validation and re-validation documentation illustrating approval by universities for Grŵp-delivered programmes. Staff with whom the review team met and, where relevant, employers, confirmed that they understood these processes and arrangements, which work effectively.

2.14   The team also looked at procedures for making changes to programmes. Grŵp programme teams discuss possible changes to modules prior to end-of-year examination boards. For programmes validated by Bangor University, if changes are required, the requisite form is completed and discussed with the external examiner in advance of the examination board. This is followed by a formal programme review meeting, which is convened to discuss and ratify suggested changes that do not exceed awarding body guidelines. Programmes franchised from other awarding bodies (USW, GU and UCLan) are required to follow changes implemented by the franchisor. For Pearson programmes, any proposed changes or adaptations are taken forward through the annual centre review process, under procedures stipulated by the requirements of BTEC Quality Management Review.

2.15   In conclusion, the Grŵp has effective internal approval and internal pre-validation processes and also understands its responsibilities as delegated from partner awarding bodies. There is a robust system of academic and resource planning in place for the internal resource-related approval of new programme proposals. The Grŵp operates appropriate procedures to comply with academic regulations set out by its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Staff with whom the team met understood internal processes and the validation processes and expectations of awarding bodies as applicable to higher education. This enables them to make a positive contribution to these processes. Overall, therefore, the Grŵp is effective in discharging its responsibilities for the design and approval of programmes in respect of university and Pearson awards. This leads the team to conclude that the Expectation is met and that the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission*

Findings

2.16   The Grŵp has an admissions policy which covers applications for Pearson and BU validated programmes. The respective awarding body policies apply for other franchised programmes. The Grŵp's operations for admissions are operated centrally, with administration completed by Learner Services, and interviews undertaken by programme teams. All students are interviewed upon application, which enables the Grŵp to offer opportunities for applicants to disclose any additional learning and support needs they may have before enrolment.

2.17   The policies and procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met, adhering to the principles of fair admission. Students are treated equitably upon application, with clear guidance about the process of application provided to applicants on the website and in the prospectus.

2.18   The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing policies and procedures relating to admissions, and met senior, support, and teaching staff, and students.

2.19   The Assistant Principal Learner Services has overall responsibility for recruitment operations and is supported by a team of managers, who each take responsibility for a coleg. Student Advisors enable better responsiveness to the volume of applications and Widening Participation agenda, giving pre-entry guidance to applicants and students. During recruitment Learner Services work closely with staff, who all receive training, guidance and support for interviews. Learner Services receive feedback from admissions tutors following the recruitment period to inform future practice, which is monitored by HEQASG.

2.20   Students met by the team reported that accessing information about higher education at the Grŵp, and the actual admission process, are straightforward, with initial information located online and followed up by interview to enable decision making via telephone or face-to-face discussions. In FdA Childhood Studies, a student had been referred by their employer, and a progression student had been encouraged by their further education tutor to apply.

2.21   The Grŵp operates a bilingual policy governed by its Welsh Language Scheme, agreed in 2014 and available on the VLE. This is reflected in the admissions process, where initial interviews are conducted in Welsh as required.

2.22   The interview process enables the Grŵp to find out if applicants require any further support during their studies as part of its Widening Participation agenda. Interviews help to determine whether applicants may benefit from being recommended to the Grŵp's 'Looking Forward to Higher Education' course, a 10-credit module awarded by Glyndŵr University, which is designed to develop the advanced skills required in higher education. Most students had been offered the opportunity to participate in this course following their interview. This initiative is offered to facilitate the step up in study level to higher education and earns participants 10 credits. It aims to support critical thinking, research and evaluative skills required at higher education. Students who had taken up the opportunity to participate in the initiative described this course in positive terms, were positive about the impact of the initiative, and reported that it had been very useful in building confidence, particularly after a

lengthy break in study. The scheme itself has a high completion rate, with a large proportion of students continuing into, and being retained on, higher education study following progression from further education.

2.23   Applicant data is reviewed through the committee structure, with numbers against target reported to Tîm Strategol. Applicant numbers are monitored by Programme Area Managers at Tîm Rheoli, who monitor for recruitment intervention purposes. Any offers made to applicants are subject to the attainment of appropriate qualifications. Feedback is made available to unsuccessful applicants. A Higher Education Admission Panel considers any offers or rejections that are brought into question.

2.24   The performance and effectiveness of the admissions policy is reviewed annually by the Assistant Principal Learner Services, and is monitored by HEQSG.

2.25   As a result of the procedures and policies being in line with principles of fair admission, and given the supportive framework within which they are operated, the team considers this Expectation to be met, and the risk is low. The policies and procedures also enable the Grŵp to approach students with the support that they may require during their period of study.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.26   The Grŵp articulates its vision through the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, outlining expectations for lecturers and learners to support high quality learning and teaching.

2.27   Staff employed are suitably assessed to ensure that they have appropriate qualifications, as laid out in the recruitment and selection policy. The awarding body partners review all CVs and approve any changes to partnership teaching teams.

2.28   All staff receive an induction before they start teaching, which is supported by the Grŵp's Teaching and Learning Handbook, shared with staff on the Grŵp VLE. A scheme of work/session plan template is used to encourage consistency in planning and embed cross-cutting themes. Staff plan a variety of approaches and differentiated activities and resources to meet learner needs. Teaching and learning mentors are nominated within programme areas to support and signpost staff to relevant resources, to underpin and develop pedagogic practice.

2.29   Staff receive a formal teaching observation on a biennial cycle, with newly appointed staff observed during the first eight weeks of commencing their teaching duties.

2.30   Teaching observation outcomes are used as part of staff Annual Performance Review, with actions and good practice agreed following observation. This is visited in Annual Performance Review with each line manager. The criteria outlining expectations at higher education level are detailed within the Higher Education Observation Form, referenced to the Quality Code and the Higher Education Academy's (HEA) UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) expectations. Information is available to staff online via the Grŵp portal and outcomes are used to support development of practice by staff. A peer observation scheme has been implemented, scheduled on alternate years, designed to develop and share good practice. Mentors are nominated within programme areas to support staff to develop pedagogy at programme level. Staff can request further training/development in discussion with their line manager. Programme Managers receive observation reports that identify areas for development and good practice, and these are disseminated via the Quality Office risk report (RAG coded), which then informs staff development as well as enhancement and staff development themes. Learning Walks and Learner Panels are also in place. Peer assessment is used to support reflection and pedagogic development. The personal development plan resulting from observation identifies areas for development.

2.31   Lecturers engage in 'supported experiments' to reflect and trial new pedagogic strategies; these are shared with programme teams and through the annual Higher Education Teaching and Learning Conference and the Insight journal, published in 2014 with the intention of being a regular production.

2.32   Lecturers are encouraged to develop scholarship via Bangor University's HEA Fellowship route and can undertake degree and postgraduate qualifications where not already held. Staff also participate in the Higher Education Teaching and Learning

Conference. All lecturers undertake an annual performance review with their Programme Manager, governed by the Grŵp's Performance Review Policy.

2.33 Student outcomes are monitored via completion, attainment and success rates; key performance indicators also include teaching observation judgements, reviewed and moderated through programme area self-evaluation and Grŵp self-evaluation. Learner voice and learner surveys, including NSS, are used to monitor effectiveness and are collated in an annual report. The Grŵp also conducts an annual online survey of all higher education learners during Term 1. The results of this survey, carried out by QDP, are reported at Tîm Polisi, Tîm Rheoli, HEQASG and CSSC. The course level reports are available to staff on the Grŵp portal and to learners via the learner portal.

2.34 Systems and policies are in place to ensure that provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices are planned, delivered and monitored in a strategic and systematic way. This enables higher education teaching and learning to support higher education students to develop advanced skills as independent learners. The processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.35 The team examined policy and strategy documents, including the Grŵp's Teaching and Learning Strategy and the Equality and Diversity Policy, and a sample of evidence such as staff CVs, the Teaching and Learning Handbook, templates for schemes of work and session plans, teaching observation documentation and student survey instruments, as well as the Student Charter. The team interviewed students and staff to discuss learning and teaching practices and opportunities.

2.36 Staff employed are suitably assessed to ensure that they have appropriate qualifications, articulated in the recruitment and selection policy. The awarding partners review all CVs and approve any changes to partnership teaching teams.

2.37 Staff receive an induction and handbook when they start teaching within the Grŵp. Templates for schemes of work and lesson plans are used to encourage consistency in planning, supported by the Teaching and Learning Handbook. Teaching and Learning Mentors are used in programme areas to support and signpost staff to relevant resources, to support and develop pedagogical practice. Probationary staff report close support from academic team colleagues and they are allocated a mentor who provides ongoing practical and pedagogic advice. Transition staff new to higher education are also supported, with an opportunity to observe an experienced member of staff.

2.38 Observation outcomes show that all of the sessions observed in 2014-15 and 2013-14 were judged as Good or Excellent thus demonstrating maintained standards. National Student Survey (NSS) scores are positive for learning and teaching. Teaching, assessment and feedback have seen improvement, as judged by NSS scores over three years. Observation judgements are reviewed and moderated at programme and College level by the Quality and Performance team, who conduct a moderation/sharing good practice panel for each programme area. An observation report is produced annually by the Quality Office and used to inform strategic planning and staff development; this is also discussed in staff teams. Learning Walks are also used to talk directly to students in class. Peer assessment has been introduced as part of the biennial schedule, and is proving to support reflection and pedagogic development; staff described the positive impact this is having on reflection and pedagogic practice. Peer observation pairings are sensitive to staff skills and attributes, and may be within or between subject teams. Both peer and formal observations are supported by training of both observers and observees.

2.39 Students are encouraged to disclose any disability in order to be supported in line with the Grŵp's Equality and Diversity Policy. They receive an induction at the start of the

year, including information about learning opportunities and support, and are made aware of their responsibilities around the Student Charter.

2.40   Students have access to study skills sessions delivered by the learning centres; personal one-to-one support is also available, as is study skills support through the VLE. Students receive feedback on assessment verbally and on feedback sheets; they feel that this is of good quality, although not timely in every case. They also use ongoing dialogue with tutors via eDRAC, the electronic individual learning plan, on the student portal; this is universally used and students value it and find it useful. Opportunities for achieving learning outcomes are clearly mapped onto assessment, as indicated by module handbooks and assignment front sheets.

2.41   Full-time students receive at least two personal tutoring sessions per term and are able to access tutors on request via an 'open door' policy. The team heard that part-time FdA Childcare students are not receiving tutorials, however. Students can monitor their academic development through the VLE grade book. This work is being expanded on in 2015-16. Tutorial delivery is supported through a Personal Tutorial VLE.

2.42   The Higher Education Conference is used to help staff to develop pedagogy and to share good practice through workshops and through the use of guest speakers. Two staff review, evaluation and development (RED) days are also used to deliver staff development themes across all levels of delivery each year.

2.43   Lecturers are encouraged to develop scholarship through the HEA Fellowship route, via the BU scheme. Ten staff were supported in 2014-15, of whom seven achieved Fellowship or Senior Fellowship, and nine will be undertaking an application for 2015-16 via a volunteer process. Staff qualified as Fellows support the further dissemination of good practice via the Higher Education Conference, the Insight journal and a research booklet. Supported experiments are also written up for the staff portal Learning and Teaching 'tile' on the VLE. Lecturers who deliver higher education provision are prioritised for support to undertake degree or postgraduate qualifications if not already held. Lecturers undergo Annual Performance Reviews as part of a performance review policy. This includes annual observation and evaluates actions set.

2.44   Learner survey results are analysed annually by HEASG; action is reviewed by CSSC. A learner voice update report is submitted to HEQSG. The NSS is used as a key performance indicator (KPI): teaching, assessment and academic support were all above National Benchmark (NB) in 2015, while personal development was one per cent below NB. QDP has been used for several years to conduct an annual online survey available to all students. It has similar questions to the NSS but is open to all years. Course-level reports are available to staff and to learners on the portal. Results are reported to HEQSG. NSS and QDP results are triangulated to inform follow up focus groups. NSS is used as a KPI following observation outcomes. Learner completion, attainment and success rates have improved over the past three years and KPIs are monitored at Tîm Polisi and CSSC.

2.45   The Grŵp offers a Looking Forward to Higher Education course with a 10-credit module to help transition from further to higher education. Students report that this is very helpful, that normally all students are offered this, and that despite being a one-week course, it is very effective in building their confidence.

2.46   The teaching observation schedule has been adapted for the current year. Within each department, 50 per cent of established staff receive a formal teaching observation, while 50 per cent engage in peer observation.

2.47   For the formal teaching observation scheme, new criteria have been developed to focus on higher education needs, aligned to the Quality Code and HEA's UKPSF, and in line

with the Grŵp's learning and teaching strategy, with paperwork developed to record outcomes against this framework, including a handbook and revised record form. The scheme guidelines and documentation were agreed following consultation with members of the Academic Services team, consisting of representatives across the Grŵp, including members of staff. The process supports opportunities for delivery in the medium of Welsh, included as a performance measure and target within the Learning and Teaching Strategy, alongside NSS teaching scores.

2.48   Outcomes of formal observation are used to inform the Annual Performance Review process and salary progression, including completion of new lecturers' probationary period. Training and development needs, identified during the process, are collated by the Teaching and Learning Manager at the completion of the observation period and programme area training priorities are shared with Programme Managers and teaching teams via the Annual Observation Report, which articulates areas of good practice and themes for development. The proportion of observations judged Excellent or Good has remained high for the last two years. New outcomes will reflect the UKPSF in exceeding or meeting expectations, and are moderated in a systematic fashion. New staff receive both formative and formal elements of the observation scheme.

2.49   The team considers that the new observation scheme focused on higher education through criteria developed according to the UKPSF, linked to Annual Performance Reviews and a central report to inform staff development and share good practice, and formalised through access to HEA Fellowship, constitutes a strength. This good practice is recognised in section 4 of this report on the Enhancement of Student Learning Opportunities.

2.50   It is clear that the Grŵp systematically reviews and enhances the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices in higher education, to ensure that pedagogy and practice is reflective and developmental, and that good practice is shared. This enables all students to develop as independent and advanced skills learners in responding to the demands of higher education study. The Expectation is met, with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*

Findings

2.51   The Grŵp's Higher Education Strategic Plan 2015-2018 sets out a strategic goal identifying targets for learner development and achievement and identifies priority areas for action. Cross-Grŵp and Curriculum Managers are responsible for relevant sections of the plan, and progress towards meeting actions is undertaken by the Principal of Coleg Menai, and monitored by Tîm Polisi.

2.52   This Strategy is underpinned by the Teaching and Learning Strategy, Higher Education Strategic Plan 2015-2018, skills strategy and learner voice strategies.

2.53   The operational plan sets targets and KPIs and these are mapped to strategic objectives. For example, retention is shown to be improving. This is used to set curriculum plans at programme level in order to determine budget and spending. HEQASG and Tîm Rheoli receive annual monitoring reports to identify enhancement themes. Mechanisms to evaluate performance are articulated in the Quality Framework. The Grŵp uses internal surveys, learner panels and observation feedback to identify how learners can be supported, with HEQASG having overall responsibility.

2.54   Key performance indicators used to measure the impact of strategies include retention, attendance, attainment (by type of award), destinations of leavers from higher education, learner voice, use of the VLE, and use of eDRAC. Areas for quality enhancement are identified in the Quality Development and Enhancement Plan, for example improving attendance and retention.

2.55   An Equality and Diversity Policy is in place. All students receive an induction supported by a handbook that provides information about the learning opportunities and support available, and by a Student Charter. Study skills are developed through sessions provided via the Learning Centres and on the VLE; personalised support is also available to students on a one-to-one basis.

2.56   Students are asked to disclose any disability, learning difficulty or learning support need at application so that these can be appropriately supported in line with the Grŵp's Equality and Diversity Policy. Students identified with additional learning needs can access tailored packages that include welfare and academic support.

2.57   Transition to higher education is supported in a planned manner using the Looking Forward to Higher Education course. Group tutorials are used to reinforce study skills. In addition, one-to-one tutorials are used to support both academic and personal development. A tutorial framework and guidance is available to staff in a VLE tutorial programme. Students can also access Grŵp Study Skills through the VLE course, and can access additional support through drop-in sessions in learning centres. Learning resources and support staff facilitate the development of academic skills.

2.58   Learning resources are provided by the universities, specifically e-journals. This is supplemented by significant investment in books, e-books and online resources by the Grŵp.

2.59   Employability skills are embedded within all foundation degree programmes with the inclusion of employer-based learning modules that are contextualised to programme area.

2.60   Students receive feedback on assessment feedback sheets, which include developmental targets. Personal tutors also undertake one-to-one reviews to review progress and targets. Students are encouraged to monitor their own academic development through the use of the VLE Grade Book and eDRAC. The Grŵp is further developing its use in higher education in 2015-16.

2.61   Students are able to feed back in a range of ways to ensure that learning opportunities are developed and enhanced, including module feedback, surveys such as NSS, and expression of group views via student representatives. Outcomes are fed back via a 'You said, we did' system on the Learner Portal and through the programme VLE. Students' module evaluations are analysed at programme level and actions required to improve the quality of learning opportunities are added to the Annual Programme Review Quality Improvement Plan.

2.62   Student survey results are analysed annually by HEQASG and action taken in response is reviewed by CSSC and disseminated to learners via the Learner Portal.

2.63   The continuous professional development of staff is identified and supported in a number of ways and the Grŵp holds Investors in People status.

2.64   Planned strategies and processes are in place to support student engagement with higher education and achievement of their aims, and these would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.65   The team examined a range of evidence, including policy and procedural documents, and committee minutes and reports. Students and staff were interviewed with respect to students' opportunities to develop their academic, personal and professional skills in higher education.

2.66   Students report that they find accessing entry straightforward, with initial information located online and followed up by interview to enable decision making, via telephone or face-to-face discussions. In FdA Childhood Studies, a student had been referred by their employer, and a progression student had been encouraged by their further education tutor to apply. Students self-declare any additional learning needs, and support is given for application for allowances. Tutors are also able to identify additional learning needs during induction and on programme, and can liaise with support services at any time to generate support. Students were able to describe the support put in place following a declaration of additional learning needs, although the time period between diagnosis and the onset of support was quite lengthy.

2.67   All full-time students receive tutorials. Tutors select from a framework of general themes to deliver, although these are common to further education. Access to tutors is good and based on an 'open-door' approach beyond formal scheduling. In BA Management and Business, students report that the tutor emails a schedule every two weeks. Most students receive a mix of one-to-one and group sessions. Students report that in FdA Childhood Studies, part-time students do not receive tutorials and have expressed a wish to do so. In Fine Art, tutorials are combined with regular group critique sessions, which students see as very productive. In Photography, critique was found to be less challenging. At Dolgellau, a PGCE student commented that tutorials had been less frequent the previous year, but had increased in response to student comment. Again, an open-door approach is in place. Students confirm that they have regular tutorials in groups and one-to-one, and can access tutors on request at any time. Culinary Arts have weekly tutorials, which are supportive and challenging.

2.68   Students know where to locate programme specifications (on the VLE) and may also be issued with hard copy, for example in British Sign Language and Deaf Studies and the

PGCE. Other courses use the awarding body's VLE and students are clear about accessing this. Students are also aware that documents such as assessment policies and regulations are available on the VLE; other sources of information and support include student services.

2.69   Support is offered by the Grŵp for the step up in study level to higher education. Some students had participated in the Looking Forward to Higher Education course, and most students had been offered this opportunity. Students described this course in positive terms and as very useful in building confidence, particularly after a lengthy break in study. Study skills are delivered and made available in response to need, and are regularly accessed by students.

2.70   Students use eDRAC and find it useful in promoting development of skills and an ongoing formative dialogue with tutors.

2.71   Target setting appears inconsistent at times; a Sports Science student uses the learner portal for systematic target setting in discussion with tutors at designated points in the year; in Health and Social Care, target setting is very useful and occurs every two weeks, but an Art and Design student does not do this. The majority of students find the eDRAC system very valuable and supportive of academic dialogue.

2.72   Students were clear about assessment requirements and schedules, with information systematically posted on the VLE. However, most students had experienced bunching of assignments and reported that tutors sometimes seem unaware that it is an issue. Students reported some adjustments in response to their feedback, but for some it affects performance and is regarded as inevitable. An Art and Design student reported some confusion about date and mode of grade release for modules.

2.73   Students are aware of marking and moderation procedures, and receive both formative and summative feedback on their work. This takes a range of forms, including verbal, in writing and electronically on eDRAC. Feedback in Policing is given verbally first to assure its formative nature, followed by the release of grades. Students are aware of a four-week response policy after work submission, but a minority of students report delays in receiving feedback that have affected their ability to develop their work. If dissatisfied, students normally talk to their tutor.

2.74   Students are aware of the Student Charter though they do not report ongoing use. Students complete module evaluations, use the student representative system and have attended some committees. They are not aware of the 'You said, we did' system.

2.75   Students are generally positive about access to resources, and Sport and Culinary Arts students particularly so about access to Bangor University's e-library. Art and Health students were less so: a Health student had been unable to source a key text and had not been directed to an alternative. A Culinary Arts student was very positive about the physical facilities (restaurant and training kitchen) and reported ample access to these. Support staff confirm that students can access paper resources in the Grŵp's learning centres, and have full access to awarding body e-libraries. Electronic resources for students on Pearson courses are ordered in by the Grŵp's learning resource centres on request to ensure consistency of resource access across higher education.

2.76   The Grŵp operates a bilingual policy governed by its Welsh Language Scheme, agreed in 2014, and both are available on the portal. Staff are required to identify opportunities for delivery through the medium of Welsh, with a developmental delivery target set annually. Documents such as the Student Charter are bilingual. Some students report variability in the availability of bilingual documentation, on the VLE for example, and in bilingual delivery. For PGCE students delivery is bilingual, while delivery of the 3D Animation and Games Development is mostly in English, reflecting the perceived student demographic.

In Policing, students receive weekly tuition in the Welsh language to support a progression requirement of a Level 2 qualification in Welsh. In Fine Art, tutorials and initial interviews are conducted in Welsh as required. The higher education assessment policy dictates that all assessments can be undertaken in Welsh and students are aware of this, although a small proportion reported that this opportunity had not been made available to them as Welsh speakers.

2.77   Student Services have responsibility for careers and employability, and a Careers Wales member of staff is contracted on a part-time basis throughout the year to give dedicated higher education careers advice to students. Higher education learners achieve employment rates of 70 per cent, which is marginally below the comparator of 72 per cent, although this is partly due to a high proportion (21 per cent) of leavers electing to continue studying a higher education programme part-time or full-time compared with the comparator of 18 per cent. Overall, three per cent of learners completing higher education programmes are unemployed, which is comparable to the national average.

2.78   Analysis of performance data in 2014-15 has shown that retention has improved from 85 per cent in 2013-14 to 89 per cent in 2014-15, whereas attendance of 83 per cent is below the Grŵp's target. While retention is improving, the Grŵp has identified that it would like to improve retention further, to the same level as further education, which is 92 per cent, and present attendance to 86 per cent. In order to do so the Grŵp has identified this as an enhancement theme.

2.79   Employers interviewed by the team report regular and sustained involvement with the Grŵp to inform and strengthen design and delivery of courses, for example through focus groups. Overall, they find the Grŵp's students professional and positive, with clear communication routes to report any issues. Students report embedded opportunities within their curriculum to support employability.

2.80   Students indicated a range of strengths communicated by learners, including positive and informative induction, and clear information on the Grŵp's website. Students feel involved and give examples of changes made following feedback, for example to assessment schedules and library inductions. Students are aware of the NSS and know how the results are used to improve their experience. They consider that lecturers know their subjects well and communicate relevant industry experience. A careers guidance service is provided and students gave examples of planned sessions where their career development was discussed and supported, including CV writing. They have access to sufficient resources, and also commented that they are able to access resources at partner universities. Many of the students feel that their personal development and wellbeing are improving as a result of being a student within the Grŵp. A student studying Fine Art commented: 'I used to have bad anxiety, but now I'm much happier talking to people'. Another student on the Hospitality Management course said: 'tutors all ensure that the foundation is there to help us cope'.

2.81   The systematic steps taken by the College to enable students to prepare effectively for, and engage with, their higher education studies is **good practice**.

2.82   A range of systems, practices and resources are evident to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. These are systematically monitored and evaluated by the Grŵp, enabling students to prepare effectively for, and engage with, their higher education studies. The Expectation is therefore met, with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.83   Student expectations for contributing the 'learner voice' are outlined in the Learner Involvement Strategy and enforced by the Grŵp's Learner Entitlement Policy. The College outlines its commitment to engaging with the views of students through a variety of methods in order to enhance their overall experience. These mechanisms include internal institution-wide surveys, module evaluations, focus groups and engagement with student representatives.

2.84   The Grŵp has a student representative system, which allows engagement with students on a course level in meetings with programme staff. A Student Representative and a Deputy Representative are elected at the start of each year. A Higher Education Officer is funded by the College and is supported by Learner Services. The Higher Education Officer is invited to sit on, and produce reports for, committees at senior levels of the Grŵp, including the Higher Education Group and the Board of Governors. Additionally, Learner Panels are held twice a year with students and managers, and the Students' Union Officer holds focus groups with students on a range of issues. The Grŵp operates a student representative system, supported by Learner Services, who offer training to representatives at the start of the year; however, the training is not compulsory and when tested, a number of student representatives had not attended. Despite this omission, the approach taken by the Grŵp would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.85   The review team tested the effectiveness of student engagement in the College through meetings with staff at all levels, collating examples of students' experiences as representatives and students. The team reviewed a variety of evidence, such as committee minutes and training plans, and explored content presented on the VLE.

2.86   Students are able to give feedback through a range of formal mechanisms, such as module evaluation surveys, learner panels, focus groups and institution-wide surveys. Module evaluations are currently completed on paper but will be moving online to encourage turnout. Results are analysed at programme level, where actions are used to inform annual review and quality development processes. Themes that emerge through committees from student feedback are reported through the committee structure to CSSC, Tîm Rheoli, Tîm Polisi and HEQASG. Students are also able to feed back at the end of their placements to both the provider and the Grŵp about their experiences on placement.

2.87   Student focus groups are held for courses in response to lower NSS satisfaction scores. Outcomes are reported to HEQSAG and actions are monitored for improvements. NSS and other survey results are discussed at programme team meetings to ensure that staff are aware of student issues.

2.88   A Learner Voice conference is held annually for students to engage with themes relevant to the issues faced by students at the College. For instance, an activity was held at the last conference, aiming to strengthen communication between representatives and the Grŵp, with ideas and actions reported to CSSC and Tîm Rheoli. National Union of Students Wales is proactive in working and training the Grŵp representatives, who have received awards in the past for campaigns for both further education and higher education provision.

2.89   The Grŵp has a Student Charter that articulates the responsibilities and access to support that students have during their studies. The Charter is produced bilingually and is

available to students to view via their VLE. However, when asked about this by the team students said that they were aware of the Charter but did not know what it was or its function. Student representatives receive a certificate at the end of the year in recognition of their role. Academic staff receive brief guidance from Learner Services about the role and function of student representatives.

2.90   While the Grŵp articulates its commitment to the use and input of the student voice, there is not a clearly defined direction for the development of the student representative system. Figures are recorded and monitored on an ongoing basis for recruitment and training within Learner Services, but key performance indicators and actions are not set, and the system is not evaluated for the continual development of the student representative system. The team observed that changes are incremental rather than systematic and deliberative. Therefore, the team **recommends** that the Grŵp should develop arrangements to maximise the use made and impact of the student representative system.

2.91   Broadly, students met by the team reported that their feedback was acted upon, and were able to provide a range of examples of previous and current academic developments to their courses. Students can see how their feedback is used in meetings through action points, minutes and the relationship with their tutors. Students are less clear about how their feedback is used after module evaluation and institution-wide surveys. The Grŵp feeds back on surveys through the 'You said, we did' section on the VLE; however, from the students with whom the team met, it appears as though the awareness of the campaign, and the outcomes of actions taken in response to the issues raised, is poor. Therefore, the team **recommends** that the Grŵp should strengthen mechanisms for ensuring that all students are informed of the outcomes of institutional and module-level surveys.

2.92   As the Grŵp takes deliberate steps to ensure the inclusion and representation of the learner voice, the team concludes that this Expectation is met and the associated risk is low. In order to improve, the team recommends that further steps are taken to support the continual, deliberative development of the student representative system, and to ensure that all students are aware of how their feedback is used by the Grŵp.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*

Findings

2.93   Assessment policy and practice for higher education programmes are governed by awarding body regulations. For Glyndŵr University, University of South Wales and UCLan franchised programmes, the Grŵp follows awarding body processes. For programmes validated by Bangor University and for Pearson provision, the Grŵp has delegated responsibilities. The Grŵp's own assessment policy and procedures reflect those of partner universities. Under the operational oversight of the Higher Education Development Manager (HEDM), the Grŵp seeks to implement its policy rigorously to ensure a robust approach to assessment matters. The assessment policy articulates procedures for the design, marking, and quality assurance of assessment at an appropriate level.

2.94   Arrangements for the preparation of assessments, and for internal verification and moderation, vary according to arrangements with individual partners. The Grŵp has in place its own internal verification and moderation procedures which it uses where applicable. For university awards, processes are in place to ensure that assessment is reliable, and external examiners' reports confirm that assessments are appropriate and meet relevant academic standards. Pearson provides information to the Grŵp on the role of its external examiners and reports confirm that assessment meets relevant academic standards. These policies and procedures would enable the Grŵp to meet Expectation B6.

2.95   The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of these and other arrangements by examining relevant Grŵp and awarding body documentation relating to assessment, and through meetings with students, and academic and support staff.

2.96   Assessment policies and processes are articulated through the Grŵp's website, with links via the VLE to the home page for each programme and module page, where both handbooks and awarding body information can be accessed. The Grŵp's Quality Team undertakes an editing and oversight role. This enables transparency of internal and external access. Information on how assessment criteria are used, types of assessment, late submission of work, academic integrity and plagiarism, including penalties, and academic appeals, is provided in programme and module handbooks.

2.97   All awards have an assessment strategy, which is set out in the programme specification to ensure that programme learning outcomes are tested through a variety of methods. Module specifications outline the learning outcomes, assessment requirements and tasks, weighting, length or duration, and assessment criteria.

2.98   Staff use a variety of assessment tasks, which address relevant learning outcomes to engage students and to develop transferable skills. The team also notes that assessment and feedback practices are informed by consideration of professional practice and vocational aspects of programmes. External examiner reports highlight the professional knowledge of staff and students. Staff participate in scholarly activities to inform assessment type and feedback and to address issues raised by external examiners. Staff development is provided at Grŵp and programme area level where new policies are being introduced.

2.99   Students informed the review team that they are provided with an assessment schedule at the start of the year with deadlines for submissions. Use is also made of the online tracking system to enable students to reflect on their progress, including on assessment matters.

2.100   The review team explored student experiences of whether assessments are well timetabled, allowing them to plan their workload, and whether timely feedback on performance is provided. Students are in general well informed and understand the process of assessment both through written material and through briefings by staff. However, some students informed the review team that they have experienced bunching of assignments and that this makes it difficult for them to manage their workload. The review team later learned that the bunching of assignment scheduling had been identified as an issue by an external moderator and had prompted an action requirement by the Grŵp for programme teams to review submission dates to ensure cross-referencing across units. While noting this, the team **recommends** that the Grŵp should improve planning and communication between delivery staff to avoid overload in the timing and scheduling of assessments.

2.101   Academic misconduct is taken seriously by the Grŵp. Procedures are in university regulations or in the Grŵp's own Unfair Practice Policy. Guidance on these matters is shared with students during induction. For Bangor-validated programmes and Pearson-approved programmes, suspected unfair practice cases are investigated in accordance with the Grŵp's policy. Here, an Unfair Practice Panel determines sanctions if unfair practice is established. The panel is independent of programme teams and uses a prescribed set of sanctions to ensure an equitable and consistent approach. For Glyndŵr, University of South Wales, and UCLan programmes proceedings are conducted in accordance with the universities' own regulations.

2.102   Procedures for extenuating or mitigating circumstances for university or Pearson provision vary according to the partnership arrangements. For Bangor and Pearson approved programmes, the Grŵp holds responsibility for considering extenuating circumstances requests and for administration of boards. In contrast, Glyndŵr, UCLan, and South Wales universities use their own internal procedures to consider applications. For all programmes and provision, adjustments are made either through the extension of the submission deadline, or by adjustment to the assessment method for protected characteristics students so as to avoid disadvantage. Any change to assessment methods is required to take account of learning outcomes to ensure that academic standards are not compromised. In exploring matters relating to reasonable adjustments, the team notes that provision is made for deaf students to use sign language or digital recording for assessment on their foundation degree programme. The Grŵp's policy provides for the submission of work in Welsh. However, the team heard from some students that this option had not been made available to them at the point of assessment.

2.103   The team found that procedures are available to students who wish to seek recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL) or recognition of prior certificated learning (RPCL). Both RPEL and RPCL are considered for relevance and currency in accordance with procedures, while potential RPL is considered at the initial interview stage and is noted on the application form. Provision for RPEL and RPCL is set out in the relevant validation or revalidation document and applications are considered at a Credit Transfer Board. Information is made available in programme handbooks. The team concludes that arrangements are thorough and are implemented effectively.

2.104   The review team explored arrangements for setting assessment tasks and for internal verification and moderation. Arrangements vary between awarding body partners. For University of South Wales awards, the university sets the assignments and undertakes the internal verification, while the Grŵp undertakes the moderation. For Glyndŵr University programmes, the Grŵp undertakes the moderation and writes the assessments in

conjunction with the external examiner who undertakes the external verification. In turn, UCLan sets the assessment for its franchised programmes and completes both the verification and moderation. For Bangor-validated awards, the Grŵp undertakes the moderation and writes the assessments in conjunction with the external examiner who undertakes the external verification. Assessment for Pearson provision is undertaken under Grŵp procedures in conjunction with the external verifier. These arrangements are understood by staff and work effectively.

2.105   The review team notes that the Grŵp is adopting greater use of electronic submission for feedback and recording of progress. Students are able to submit assessments through plagiarism-detection software. The implementation of the software requires all Bangor and Pearson assessments to be submitted with a plagiarism-detection report, while programmes franchised from Glyndŵr University also operate under stringent plagiarism requirements and guidelines. Use is also made of an assignment checker on the VLE. These arrangements are thorough and are understood by students. The security and integrity of assessment is further protected by other means. Assessments are approved by external examiners and internal verifiers, and drafts are sent to examiners or are placed on the VLE on a staff-only access basis. Invigilation is organised by a dedicated independent examinations team, while students have unique identifications for examinations and for submission of assessments for anonymous marking.

2.106   The team also took the opportunity to consider the assessment of work-based learning, and noted that a number of programmes either drew students from workplace environments, or enabled students to gain experience in work-based situations. Employers contribute to assessment on a number of programmes, thus ensuring that assessment meets industry needs. Students and employers with whom the team met confirmed that students receive appropriate information in advance of placements and receive feedback from Grŵp staff, as appropriate to the type of assessment.

2.107   The review team learned that in accordance with Grŵp policy, there is a requirement for feedback on summative assessment to be provided within 20 working days of submission. In testing this requirement, the team notes that for some students these deadlines are not being met. However, the team was encouraged to note that Grŵp monitoring and internal and external student feedback survey procedures have identified this issue and that actions are in place to address this matter. Students receive feedback on their performance in a variety of forms, including oral, written and electronic, with the intention of informing future learning and development.

2.108   Assessment boards for Bangor University and Pearson awards are held at the Grŵp. These are administered by Grŵp staff and chaired by an Assistant Principal. The examination board is preceded by a module board. These arrangements enable the Grŵp to monitor the assessment of validated provision. For Pearson qualifications, standards verifiers are invited to attend. Other university partners monitor the assessment of franchised provision through assessment boards that Grŵp staff attend. Each board, including those administered by the Grŵp, follows a set structure and agenda to ensure consistency, and any conflicts of interest are minuted. The Grŵp's Quality Assurance Manager is coopted onto all boards to ensure compliance with awarding body and awarding organisation regulations, and to advise Chairs on the powers and authority of the board. Pre-assessment boards are also held for the programmes of each awarding body. Prior to examination boards, external examiners are provided with a pack of information including credit transfers, unfair practice cases, and minutes of extenuating circumstances meetings. Policies and guidance documentation are available to the external examiner on the relevant programme VLE. From meetings with staff, the review team concludes that these arrangements are understood and work effectively.

2.109   In exploring whether reviews are undertaken by the Grŵp of its assessment processes, the team was satisfied that arrangements are in place to ensure effective

oversight of assessment. For example, assessment processes are considered during the development of self-assessment documents and annual programme monitoring reports, and procedures are used for the annual review of assessment and the administration of assessment.

2.110   This oversight is exercised under the aegis of HEQASG, which is charged with responsibility for overseeing the process for reviewing assessment-related policies. HEQASG ensures that appropriate regulations are adhered to for each awarding body or awarding organisation. HEQASG receives examination board minutes and reports from examination board chairs. In addition, each coleg Principal receives extracts from RAG reports covering assessment matters, and these are also placed on the student VLE. Meetings of Boards of Study are held after examination boards to consider a cluster of programmes. The purpose of these meetings is to review actions arising from the APR process as well as actions arising from examination boards. One enhancement outcome of these processes during 2014-15 was the introduction of Awards Manager for the purpose of recording student achievement.

2.111   In conclusion, the team is satisfied that assessments are subject to external examination or external verification, as appropriate. Policies and procedures for the assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning are in place and are effective. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met, and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.112   The process for external examiner appointments for Bangor University (BU) is articulated in the awarding body's regulations. In practice, BU requests that the Grŵp nominates two candidates per programme, compatible with the Criteria for Appointment set out in the Validation Manual. Similar arrangements are in place for all university partners, in line with national criteria. The role of the external examiner is described in the BU validation manual. The universities have responsibility for informing external examiners of their responsibility and procedure. Pearson appoints a standards verifier.

2.113   When appointed, the external examiner is contacted by the Programme Leader who shares access to the VLE, and resources such as course handbooks and assessments. Programme leaders work with the external examiner to confirm assessments, arrange site visits and meetings with students, and sampling of work. External examiners meet students via online videoconferencing or face to face.

2.114   External examiners and moderators are invited to attend relevant assessment boards and are provided with a pack of information containing minutes, credit transfers, unfair practice and summarised extenuating circumstances minutes. Policies, procedures and other relevant documentation are made available to all external examiners via the programme VLE. The minutes from internal and external examination boards are circulated to all relevant parties including external examiners, moderators and awarding partners.

2.115   Contact with the external examiner from an institutional perspective is via the Higher Education Academic Leader (HEAL), who maintains the definitive list of external examiners and external moderators appointed to the Grŵp. The HEAL ensures that external examiners and moderators are provided with all relevant information prior to exam boards. The Grŵp has established links with both external examiners and moderators. Regular contact is made throughout the year and programmes have adopted quality development, programme enhancement strategies suggested by the examiners to improve the quality of the learner experience. Opportunities for enhancement are identified in some external examiners reports. The level of detail is, however, varied.

2.116   Submission of most external examiner reports is done in a formalised way, from the awarding organisation to the CEO and Principals of the Grŵp. Reports are passed to the Quality Team for scrutiny before being distributed to programme leaders and managers for discussion and review in the programme APR.

2.117   Partner universities working with the Grŵp require the external examiner to submit a template that identifies the issues discussed.

2.118   Reports are passed to the Quality Department before being distributed to programme leaders. Once received, they are subject to quality assurance and review procedures as described in section B8. Responses are uploaded to the programme VLE, where they are available to both staff and students. Actions are sent to the external examiner by the Grŵp. Strengths and areas for development are logged centrally by the Quality Team together with any required remedial actions. They are risk coded (RAG) by the Quality Office and used to inform strategic planning by the CEO and coleg Principals.

2.119   The process for external examiner appointments for Bangor University (BU) is articulated in the awarding body's regulations. Pearson appoints a standards verifier. The

formal role of the BU external examiner is fully described in the Validation Manual and is also included in the Higher Education Guide to Internal and External Exam Boards.

2.120   The Grŵp's external examiner systems and processes are established in line with required procedure, governed by awarding body and Pearson regulations. Issues are considered by senior and Grŵp management and discussed and actioned by staff teams. Outcomes are logged centrally and risk coded. A central report is used to inform strategic and operational planning, and fed back to staff and students. Processes are therefore in place to enable the Grŵp to monitor and action external examiner findings and make good use of the outcomes.

2.121   Documents inspected by the team include relevant policies and procedures including validation documents and a full range of examiner's reports. Students and staff were interviewed concerning their involvement in external examination processes and practices.

2.122   Staff interviewed confirmed that systems are being followed, and that there is sustained engagement with external examiner deliberations, advice and guidance. Bilingual discussions take place with the external examiner for the PGCE, and are seen to support progression and delivery, using bilingual materials and online materials for example. In Policing, the external examiner meets students and staff and supports liaison between the Grŵp and the awarding body. External examiner reports are sent to the Quality Team for RAG coding and the formal systems, including discussion and action planning by staff teams, are followed. Staff from other disciplines confirm similar practices: Deaf Studies staff report a very supportive relationship with their external examiner. Progress on actions is reviewed by teams at three points in the year. Students are engaged in these discussions in all courses via the student representatives system; those in FdA Animation are described as 'Fully in the loop'.

2.123   Senior staff confirmed that students contribute to deliberations at team level, although it remains a challenge to engage with part-time students. Student representatives are invited to Boards of Study, although attendance is variable.

2.124   Students reported that they have recently met external examiners or moderators, for example in BA Business and FdA Childhood Studies, and discussion with students is commented on in some reports. Students are aware of external examiner reports on the VLE, which they feel are clearly displayed, although few have accessed them. Some students are involved in programme responses to external examiner comments. Outcomes are fed back to students via the 'You said, we did' system and displayed, although students interviewed were not aware of this system. Both external examiner reports and outcomes are displayed on the VLE student portal.

2.125   Senior staff confirmed that external examiner reports are normally sent to the CEO, then to the Quality Team, which collates and RAG codes any issues. These are then sent on to the relevant assistant principals and programme managers for discussion and action planning, included in the quality improvement plans (QIPs) following annual review. Teams revisit progress on the QIPs on a regular basis. The summary of trends and themes is examined by the Quality Team to identify Grŵp-wide issues, and a report submitted to HEQUAG. Actions are fed back to the awarding bodies, and to Pearson via the annual review process. The awarding bodies impose timelines for actions, and progress in meeting these is monitored by link staff. Outcomes are also used to inform staff development themes and strategic and operational planning via HEQUAG.

2.126   The effective use made of external examiner's reports to inform quality development is **good practice**.

2.127   It is clear that the Grŵp has the required processes and practices in place, and that these are systematically followed, to ensure that scrupulous use is made of external examiners. The team conclude that the Expectation is met, with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*

Findings

2.128   The Grŵp implements review and monitoring procedures for each programme in accordance with the expectations of the relevant awarding body or awarding organisation. The Grŵp has a Quality Framework, the requirements of which inform monitoring and review processes and the annual self-evaluation.

2.129   The Grŵp's annual quality monitoring cycle includes the production of an Annual Programme Monitoring Report (APMR) and action plan. Issues arising from APMRs are reviewed on a regular basis at course team meetings. Outstanding matters feed into the process for developing the annual higher education self-evaluation document and, thereafter, the Quality Development and Enhancement Plan (QDEP). This process is undertaken by HEQASG, which meets intermittently to review progress against actions arising from the annual quality cycle and has oversight of quality and standards matters. Issues may be taken forward to the Higher Education Group, the deliberative body to which HEQASG reports, or, on matters such as student progress and attainment, to the Curriculum, Students and Standards Committee (CSSC), a subcommittee of the governing body. The College's operational planning process incorporates monitoring of institutional KPIs, and reports on this are presented through the year to Tîm Rheoli and Tîm Polisi, with summative reports being presented to Tîm Strategol and to CSSC, which considers Grŵp performance. These arrangements would enable Expectation B8 to be met.

2.130   The team tested the operation and effectiveness of the Grŵp's quality assurance policies and procedures in the context of its obligations to its university awarding bodies and to Pearson, by scrutinising Grŵp annual monitoring and external examiners' reports, and by discussing processes and procedures during meetings with staff, students, and employers.

2.131   The Grŵp has in place arrangements designed to secure effective programme management and programme monitoring. For programme management purposes, programme leaders report to a Programme Area Manager (PAM) and have responsibilities that include student recruitment, liaison with students, course monitoring, and chairing course team meetings. The PAMs meet on a regular basis at Tîm Rheoli meetings. The Grŵp has recently taken steps to strengthen and to standardise monitoring on a cross-Grŵp basis by replacing its lead tutor system with higher education curriculum coordinators. With close links to the HEDM, it is intended that, acting as a conduit, these coordinators will provide greater consistency in curriculum coordination and monitoring, thereby enhancing higher education practice. From discussions with staff, and through scrutiny of institutional documentation, the team formed the view that programme management arrangements work effectively.

2.132   The review team considered the procedure whereby all programmes are reviewed annually through the annual programme monitoring and review process. In this review cycle all higher education programmes complete a summative annual internal review document (APR). Teams make use of prescribed evidence sources as set out in the APR template. This reporting process is informed by external examiners' reports and by student feedback. The APR culminates in a QIP for that programme, which reviews the previous year's actions and sets a new agenda for action going forward. The team saw various examples of reports highlighting areas for action and improvement. The APR also highlights good practice for

dissemination. As part of this process, good practice issues are also summarised by the Higher Education Academic Leader (HEAL) using a traffic light system.

2.133   Each APR is reviewed and approved at a Board of Study prior to submission to the relevant university or to Pearson. Each of these Boards is chaired by an Assistant Principal and includes the Grŵp Quality Assurance Manager. The team was informed that students also attend and participate in the development of the QIP. This agenda for action is reviewed through the year at termly programme team meetings. All APRs must include actions from external examiner, and this element is confirmed by Boards of Study.

2.134   These Grŵp-based procedures for annual monitoring are effective, are understood by staff, and are used for quality improvement purposes. The procedures also are used for end-of-module evaluation. Here, students are able to comment on various matters relating to teaching and learning, and are also able to provide open comments. However, students whom the review team met, while aware of the process, indicated that they were not informed by their tutors of actions being taken to address issues that they raised in these module-level surveys.

2.135   Following completion of APR self-evaluations by the Grŵp's programme teams, the reports enter university awarding body quality processes or the Pearson annual review process. At this stage of the process, the chair of the relevant Grŵp Board of Study signs off each APR prior to them being sent to the awarding body and external examiner. They are placed on the programme VLE for transparency. In addition, the Assistant Principal for Learner Experience completes a summary of APRs and these summaries are made available to each coleg Principal.

2.136   The APR stage of the annual monitoring cycle is followed by completion of an annual Grŵp-level higher education self-evaluation document, which makes extensive use of quantitative and qualitative data, and of the APRs for all GLM provision. The annual self-evaluation document reviews provision against the Quality Code and culminates in the Grŵp's Quality Development and Enhancement Plan (QDEP). Both of these monitoring and review reports are discussed by the HEQASG. The team noted that the latter Plan makes use of APMRs and generates two sets of actions: a Quality Development Plan, which identifies quality assurance actions or proposed changes in process; and a QDEP, which identifies a set of enhancement themes. Some items for action may be added in-year. These reporting arrangements contribute to the effectiveness of HEQASG in taking forward proposals for improving quality assurance procedures and for enhancing learning and teaching.

2.137   The work of the HEQASG in overseeing the implementation of procedures for quality and standards has recently been strengthened by the introduction of a Corporate Working Group which, reporting to HEQASG, assists the latter on a cross-Grŵp basis in the implementation and operationalisation of quality policy and procedure, including on matters relating to monitoring and review. This arrangement, which is designed to achieve greater consistency, appears to be working well.

2.138   A further aspect of the Grŵp's approach to monitoring and review is the use made of a RAG report system, including as a mechanism for evaluating programme reviews. The RAG report incorporates monitoring of actions on issues raised in external examiner reports or in other external or internal reports, and of areas for dissemination identified in APR improvement plans. The RAG report is updated on a termly basis and is discussed in meetings of the HEQASG. The RAG report and relevant external reports are disseminated to relevant senior staff for action twice in-year, and used as a basis for staff development events to address themes arising from the reports. The RAG reporting system makes a valuable contribution to the effectiveness of the Grŵp's arrangements for quality monitoring and contributes to the good practice identified in section B7.

2.139   The Grŵp also makes use of its monitoring processes to explore causes for concern that might arise either with students or with provision more generally, and noted that such matters can be fed through the monitoring process. For example, the team saw evidence of a quality probes audit procedure being used for monitoring and checking programme performance. This academic health check resulted in an improvement-oriented action plan being put in place for a Higher National programme. In addition, the team noted a recent example of the Grŵp's annual higher education survey being used to address issues raised in NSS results. The outcomes of this in-house survey are reported to Tîm Strategol for action. The review team also noted that the performance of programmes is monitored through the Grŵp's operational planning process. This process incorporates monitoring of institutional KPIs, and reports on this are presented through the year to Tîm Polisi and, where necessary, to the CSSC.

2.140   The review team also considered matters relating to programme withdrawal. The team's attention to this had been prompted by consideration of matters noted above, such as performance monitoring and use made of the quality audit 'academic health check' procedure, and also by the recent decision to discontinue the International Foundation Programme, that the Grŵp attached importance to course viability in terms of student numbers, and that such matters are kept under review through monitoring applications and targeted enrolment, historical under-recruitment, and also student retention. The team notes that Tîm Polisi, the SCG and the CSSC exercises oversight of such strategic issues. The team was informed that monitoring of programme currency and viability can lead to programme closure/discontinuation of provision and noted that the Grŵp has an agreed planned procedure for managing closure to secure the academic interests of students. The FdA Energy and Power programme was withdrawn for 2015-16 as a result of such monitoring and the Grŵp worked closely with its university partner to protect student interests and to support them in finding alternatives. The team also considered the evidence provided in relation to the withdrawal of the International Foundation Programme and was reassured that, following discussions with the validating university, appropriate arrangements were being made to manage out the current cohort. The team was satisfied that the Grŵp had procedures in place to manage such cases of programme withdrawal or closure effectively.

2.141   The review team also considered arrangements for periodic review of the College's higher education provision. For university-approved provision, the periodic review and re-validation of programmes takes place according to awarding body regulations and guidance on periodic programme review. The focus of these periodic reviews is on the continued academic health of an award or group of subjects. The review team saw examples of this in documentation for the periodic review and re-approval of the BA Fine Art undertaken recently by Glyndŵr University, and the re-validation by the University of South Wales of the PCET programme. Universities also undertake periodic re-approval at institutional level, which includes some scrutiny at programme level. Review reports are considered through the universities' committee structures. The calendar for forthcoming periodic reviews is maintained by the Grŵp HEDM, and programmes scheduled for periodic review are monitored at the Grŵp through the SCG and the Higher Education Group, as is the process for institutional re-approval.

2.142   The review team scrutinised arrangements for the review of Pearson provision. Documentation provided to the team shows that the awarding organisation undertakes an annual review visit, under procedures stipulated by the requirements of BTEC Quality Management Review. This Centre Review process, attended by the Grŵp's Lead Internal Verifier, Quality Manager, and Pearson programme leaders, includes the verification of standards. In preparation for this review, the Grŵp prepares a self-assessment. However, while this process appears to work well, and is informed by the Grŵp's own annual programme monitoring process, the team was unable to find in the relevant Grŵp documentation any description of a periodic review process for its Pearson provision.

Furthermore, senior staff at the Grŵp confirmed that there is no procedure for undertaking the periodic review of Pearson programmes, either by the awarding organisation or by the Grŵp itself. In view of this, the team **recommends** that the Grŵp should put in place a procedure for the periodic review of its Pearson provision and ensure that appropriate training is provided for review panel members and programme teams.

2.143   In concluding its enquiries on arrangements for monitoring and review, the review team assessed the role of higher level deliberative committees and noted that all committees review their terms of reference annually. The team also learned that the HEQASG carries out an important function in reviewing academic policies. The team noted evidence of the annual review of policies being undertaken by a review group established under the direction of HEQASG, in readiness for the following academic year. To take this forward, the Quality Assurance Manager identified groups of staff with appropriate expertise, who were tasked with reviewing and amending policies, procedures, and strategies, to ensure their continued relevance to higher education provision. Following the presentation of an update to HEQASG, the outcomes were presented to Tîm Polisi, on matters such as extenuating circumstances and student admissions procedures.

2.144   The team concludes that for university-approved awards, staff at the College understand and implement procedures for programme monitoring and review that are systematic and effective. For Pearson provision, procedures for programme monitoring are similarly effective. However, for Pearson provision, though there are effective awarding organisation processes for annual review, neither Pearson nor the College has in place a procedure for the periodic review of programmes. This leads the team to conclude that the Expectation is met and that the associated risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints*

Findings

2.145   The Grŵp has its own internal complaints and appeals procedure, which is explained to students at induction and which is available on the VLE and external website. For franchised programmes, students are required to follow their respective awarding body procedures, to which they are signposted directly via the VLE.

2.146   Complaints are managed centrally by the Grŵp, by a qualified Governance Officer, and support is made available to those students who wish to make a complaint. The policies are available bilingually and the Grŵp makes proactive arrangements through induction and the VLE to ensure that students are fully aware of the processes that need to be followed. The policies and procedures that the Grŵp uphold are fair and transparent. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.147   The review team evaluated the effectiveness of these arrangements by reviewing external information on the external website, and by meeting senior staff, support staff and students. The team reviewed a range of evidence, including complaints and appeals policies and review, and viewed the Grŵp's VLE.

2.148   Students are able to make a complaint about any of the Grŵp's services, including teaching, advice and the facilities, as well as any improper treatment that a student feels they have received. The procedure for complaints includes guidance and timeframes for students presented via a flowchart. Students are asked to speak to their Personal Tutor or Programme Leader in the first instance, and, if an issue cannot be resolved, to escalate to Learner Services, the Students' Union or the Programme Manager. Upon receipt of a complaint the Governance Officer logs the details, which are passed onto the relevant Assistant Principal and Tîm Polisi. Confirmation that the complaints will be formally dealt with is sent to the complainant within five working days. A staff member will be appointed as an Investigating Officer who will, after completing an investigation, submit a report to the relevant Assistant Principal. The complainant will then be informed, normally within 15 working days, of the outcome of the complaint.

2.149   Within five days of receiving the outcome of the initial complaint, the complainant has the ability to request an appeal with clear reasoning as to why they are unsatisfied with the response given. The appropriate Assistant Principal refers to their Principal or Executive Director to consider the appeal and respond. An appeal panel may be convened, which consists of the complainant, Investigating Officer, Learner Services manager and another member of staff. Panels are typically convened within 10 working days upon submission of the appeal. The final outcome is then communicated within a further five working days. The process is thorough and independent, to ensure fairness and accuracy.

2.150   Procedural awareness was the lowest scoring question for students in the NSS; however, action has been put into place and when tested, students were aware of where to find regulations and support for complaints and appeals. The Governance Officer provides independent advice and support for students wishing to make a complaint, and students are able to bring support or a representative to appeals panels.

2.151   Appeals information and guidance is detailed in a Higher Education Assessment Confirmation and Appeals Policy, which includes routes, timescales and responsibilities of

staff. For appeals, the procedure articulates two different routes and explains the responsibilities of both staff and students. In each case an appeals procedure is identified by the Governance Officer and provided to complainants. Support is available through the Higher Education Academic Leader or Quality Assurance Manager. Reasonable adjustments can be made for a complainant with protected characteristics. Proceeding/process letters are completed and issued for all completed appeals, regardless of students' awarding body, and all proceedings are recorded and filed confidentially within the Quality Department. Managers are trained on data protection awareness and principles in order to equip them with the guidance on releasing information relevant to complaints and appeals.

2.152   An annual analysis of complaints is compiled in a report that is discussed at Curriculum, Students and Standards Committee to look at any themes that arise and to ensure compliance. Both polices for complaints and appeals are reviewed as part of the annual cycle, with reports sent to Tîm Polisi to ensure the appropriateness of the policy and its application.

2.153   The Grŵp has received positive feedback on its complaints policies and procedures from Estyn, with the inclusion of informal complaints monitoring seen as good practice. The Governance Officer and Assistant Principal Learner Experience are currently contributing to a research bid on effective complaints handling, contributing to the sector on effective complaints handling, recognising their firm understanding of supported, accurate and transparent complaints handling.

2.154   As a result of the transparency and clarity of complaints procedures for students, and the amount of support that is available to them, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low. The Grŵp shows a commitment to supporting students through the process, and by reviewing complaints data and the policy itself, indicates an obligation to ensuring the effectiveness of procedure in practice.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.

Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*

Findings

2.155   The Grŵp has longstanding collaborative relationships with four university partners, the largest being Bangor and Glyndŵr Universities, and with awarding organisation Pearson. This provides the basis for maintaining academic standards and ensures the quality of learning opportunities for students. Strategic partnership agreements are in place with each university.

2.156   The Grŵp manages networks of employer partnerships through higher education, further education, work-based learning (WBL) and adult and community learning (ACL) partners. The Grŵp has focused on relationships with regional employers such as North Wales Police and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) to deliver vocational higher education provision that meets sector needs.

2.157   Collaborative work is ongoing with the BU Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) to strengthen scholarly activity links between the Grŵp and BU. The Grŵp's higher education staff research interests have been collated and shared with CELT, who, in turn, are sharing these with relevant BU academic staff.

2.158   The Health and Wellbeing Public Lecture programme is in its sixth series as part of a collaboration between the Grŵp, BU and the regional health board (BCUHB), supported (and funded) by Public Health Wales. Attendance includes the general public and students, and the series has been well received.

2.159   Careers Wales provide contracted higher education careers advice to learners, on a 0.6 full-time equivalent basis. This contract is currently being revised to cover the whole of the Grŵp.

2.160   The Grŵp's strategic vision is focused on local employment needs, including new developments with an Anglesey power plant and other major employers, as well as existing partner sectors including hospitality, libraries, policing and the deaf community. WBL has a dedicated team, and new work experience placements are governed and vetted through the Safety, Health and Environment Management Policy and Safety, Health and Environment Management Plan. Records are kept and resource and support are available for staff.

2.161   For FdSc Policing, there is a range of links with UCLan and the North Wales Police Service. A tripartite local agreement supports Health provision, as does a public lecture series. The Deaf Studies higher education provision has been developed in close partnership with regional employers and the deaf community in North Wales.

2.162   There is strategic and operational support for working with organisations other than the degree-awarding body, based around an employability strategy for students. This would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.163   The team examined a range of policy and other documentation. Students, staff and employers were interviewed about partnership working.

2.164   Employers report sustained and cohesive relationships and contact with the Grŵp, which has generated ongoing learning opportunities for students. The British Deaf Association, for example, reports a long-term association with the Grŵp, with the coordinator involved in assessment and informing course content. Employers find the Grŵp is more accessible following merger, and that it has more presence and a greater range of expertise available, for instance in Hospitality. Communication is described as straightforward and sustained, for example by Galeri Caernarfon and Conway County Council.

2.165   Employers are confident in the delivery of higher education programmes in the Grŵp. In Deaf Studies, the fact that the course coordinator is themselves deaf gives credibility to the programme and is seen very positively by the deaf community. With respect to employability of Grŵp graduates, employers are again very positive, with Catering students appreciated for their hands-on practical skills and attitude. The part-time mode of study is particularly useful for those working in the library industry. The Galeri provides exhibition space for students, and the opportunity to be involved with workshops. Students are reported to be professional and enthusiastic in this setting.

2.166   The focus groups involving employers are well received and support an effective ongoing two-way dialogue. In the hospitality industry, for example, individual members have been involved with course development, and some have supported dissertation research.

2.167   Some employers have been involved in course content development, delivery and assessment, for example the British Deaf Association. Library employers have also contributed to modifications to programmes and offered industry expertise to bolster delivery. Catering employers have informed design of the curriculum to ensure that the course meets school and care sector industry standards.

2.168   Guidance to employers is via ongoing discussion and in some cases is dictated by industry standards. Induction for students is being strengthened via discussions with the Grŵp. Employers feel that they are able to feed back to students and the Grŵp regarding progress and any issues arising, through systematic and regular communication.

2.169   Work with employers is aligned to the Grŵp strategic plan and the Teaching and Learning Strategy, including employment opportunities and needs in the community - for deaf interpreters, for example - and Welsh Government requirements for employability.

2.170   Students state that employability is integrated in their curriculum, for example in BA Business. In Policing, senior police officers address the students, who are encouraged to become Special Constables; several current students have done so. Students are required to carry out 10 weeks' police work on this course, and this is facilitated by the Grŵp. Progress of the learners on this programme is tracked on the North Wales Police website to encourage transition and recruitment.

2.171   Healthcare students are allocated a work-place mentor. Students also normally have industry-related work-based learning. The FdSc in Healthcare Practice derived from industrial liaison that revealed a need for development of the course in a tripartite collaboration between the Grŵp, the health board and the awarding body.

2.172   Both Construction and Culinary Arts have ongoing industry liaison with small and medium-sized enterprises, dialogues supported by regular focus group breakfast meetings. Sport students report good match and mutual gain between their industry-based work and their studies.

2.173   The sustained and cohesive partnerships with employers, which support curriculum development and delivery, are **good practice**.

2.174   The team considers that effective use is made of opportunities to work with organisations other than the degree-awarding body to deliver learning opportunities. The Expectation is therefore met, with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols.
This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.175   The College does not offer any research degrees.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.176 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities the team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All the Expectations are met, with low risk, apart from Expectation B8, which is met but with moderate risk.

2.177 There are four recommendations in this area, two in B5, and one each in B6 and B8. The recommendation in B8 is also cross referenced to Expectation A3.4. The recommendations in B5 relate to the need to maximise the use made of and impact of the student representative system and the need to strengthen the means by which students are informed of the outcomes of surveys. The recommendation in B6 relates to the need to avoid overload in the timing and scheduling of assessments by improving both planning and communication. The recommendation under B8 relates to the need for a process of periodic review for Pearson provision and the provision of appropriate support for both those carrying out the review and those teams subject to it.

2.178 In addition to making the above recommendations the team also identifies three areas of good practice. The first is under Expectation B4 and relates to the sustained proactive and systematic support for students in helping them prepare for their higher education. The second is under B7 and relates to the highly effective use made by the College of external examiner reports to inform the development of quality. The third relates to the sustained and cohesive partnerships that the College has developed with employers, which support both curriculum development and delivery.

2.179 The quality of student learning opportunities at Grŵp Llandrillo Menai **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Quality Code, Part C: Information About Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The Grŵp provides prospective students with information on its website on courses and how to apply. This includes information about the entry qualifications that are required for study and links to further guidance and support through the application process, and during the study period. Publicity information is prepared by the relevant higher education programme leader then passed to the Grŵp's Marketing and Communications team using information derived from programme validation documents, as referenced in section A2.2.

3.2 The Grŵp has formal approval and checking processes for all published information, which the Marketing Manager has overall responsibility for in order to ensure consistency. HEQASG maintains oversight and responsibility for public published information, including ensuring that programme leaders sign off final print information. Programme leaders and Programme Area Managers check document accuracy and a schedule with checklist is in place for the checking of print and web materials by the Marketing Manager. Drafts are sent to programme teams from Marketing and Communications for proof and amendments, using information derived from UCAS, which has been updated following changes to validation documents. For partner providers, the Grŵp's Marketing Manager checks that each document adheres to the correct awarding partner protocol. Each awarding partner is then involved in checking accuracy of public information by considering any drafts that are submitted prior to publication and print. These procedures would enable Expectation C to be met.

3.3 The review team tested the effectiveness of the Grŵp's management of information by exploring with staff how protocols are put into practice, examining policies and procedures relating to information and scrutinising a range of examples of online and printed information. The team also spoke to students about the accessibility and accuracy of information prior to application and during their studies.

3.4 All printed information and the external website are subject to checks by the Marketing Manager. A formal schedule for checking online and printed information is monitored as course information is produced. However, the team could find limited evidence for the systematic and comprehensive oversight of accuracy of information on the website. The Marketing and Communications team has final approval of published information. Prospectuses follow a standard format, are available on the external website and are printed bilingually to ensure that linguistic access needs are met. In meetings with students and staff, the team was made aware that incoming students are directed to the website to ensure that they receive the most up-to-date information.

3.5 Students said that information available to them prior to application was substantive and enabled them to understand the aims and scope of their prospective courses. Students met by the team commented favourably on the amount of support and guidance that they received when applying.

3.6 Following admission, student feedback is used to inform developments and changes to the amount and quality of information through information gleaned from Learner Panels

and Learning Walks. NSS questions are monitored and used as a source of indicative feedback, though no routine and systematic check with students is used to inform the College's approach to information.

3.7   Programme handbooks, course leaflets and employer handbooks are updated annually with course information provided by the Programme Leader. Students are issued with programme handbooks and module information during induction, which can also be accessed online via the virtual learning environment. These resources are available bilingually.

3.8   The Grŵp outlines processes for the production of certificates and transcripts for each of its validated programmes. Clear processes are in place for each respective awarding body to ensure the accuracy of grades presented to students by Higher Education Academic Leaders, Exams Officers and Registry before issuing students with their certificate.

3.9   The Grŵp has robust processes for checking the production of published information before uploading, which are not wholly reflected in procedures for systematic and comprehensive oversight of accuracy of information on the website. Overall, the accessibility of bilingual information to prospective and current students, and the review of this information to ensure that it is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy, mean that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.10   In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information produced about the College's provision, the team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The team scrutinised a range of documentation (both published in hard copy and electronic versions) made available to prospective, current and former students and other stakeholders.

3.11   Overall, the team finds that the Grŵp has considered the formal requirements of Expectation C and has ensured that it can demonstrate its compliance with the broad expectation. The Grŵp has approval mechanisms in place for ensuring that published information is accurate.

3.12   The team does not identify any good practice or make any recommendations in this area.

3.13   The quality of the information produced about the Grŵp's provision **meets** UK expectations.

4   Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Findings

4.1   The Grŵp's Higher Education Strategic Plan 2015-2018 outlines a number of strategic goals, such as achieving excellent student success, and a range of strategic priorities, which include ensuring robust and rigorous quality improvements in higher education delivery, success and outcomes. This is all informed by the Grŵp's mission to 'inspire success by providing excellent education and training'.

4.2   While there is no specific enhancement strategy, the Grŵp has in place a Quality Development and Enhancement Plan (QDEP), which is completed at the end of the calendar year as part of its quality cycle and which is discussed at HEQASG. Both the Strategic Plan and the QDEP identify a number of higher education quality improvement and enhancement themes for 2015-16. These are aligned to the priorities and actions for the 2015-18 planning period. These themes are being taken forward through a number of enhancement initiatives that have been identified in the QDEP. Together with these themes and the initiatives that underpin them, the Grŵp has in place other policies, processes, and activities that facilitate enhancement of learning opportunities. These include the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy (December 2015); Teaching and Learning: Sharing Good Practice 2014-15; Learning Walks; in-house higher education staff development conferences and RED events (review and evaluation days); a teaching observation scheme; and an annual programme monitoring process. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

4.3   To test the effectiveness of arrangements to support enhancement, including strategically driven initiatives, the review team examined documentation and held meetings with both students and staff at the Grŵp.

4.4   The team considered the Grŵp's Quality Framework document and formed the view that while it informed the Grŵp's approach to quality improvement, it could be strengthened by a more extensive and explicit focus on enhancement. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy sets out a teaching and learning action plan, and identifies targets, performance measures, and specific actions on matters such as the impact of classroom observations, learner outcomes, dissemination of good practice, participation in supported experiments, and improving assessment feedback. The team concludes that this strategy, and the actions identified, coheres well with the Grŵp's stated strategic priorities and enhancement commitments.

4.5   HEQASG exercises deliberative oversight of enhancement. For example, its terms of reference indicate that it is responsible for monitoring the higher education QDEP and for monitoring the impact of quality enhancement initiatives and of actions taken to improve the quality of learning opportunities. Two types of actions emerge in the context of the QDEP process. The first, QDP actions, require a change to an aspect of quality processes or the development of a new quality assurance process. In turn, QEP themes require a deliberate change that leads to improvement.

4.6   The team explored how enhancement themes are identified. Reports and data received by HEQASG are discussed by members for the purpose of collectively agreeing themes and initiatives to be taken forward. HEQASG identifies enhancement initiatives and opportunities by evaluating the outcome of a range of quality assurance procedures. These

include annual programme monitoring, student feedback through learner voice updates, external examiner feedback, monitoring of KPIs, and outcomes from teaching observations.

4.7   One example considered in detail by the team was the use made of APRs by the Grŵp's Quality Team on behalf of HEQASG. A number of current enhancement themes correlate directly to the APR process. For 2015-16, through using the QDEP planning process, HEQASG has identified five thematic initiatives. These include developing the use of the VLE to support teaching and learning, improving the use of the online tracking system (eDRAC) and the electronic individual learning portal (eILP) for electronic learner target setting and progress tracking, and improving attendance and retention by monitoring 'at risk' learners through eILP. Enhancement initiatives also include developing scholarly activity through engagement with the Higher Education Academy, and using teaching and learning 'supported experiments' for developing pedagogy and learning opportunities. Other themes and initiatives are added through the year.

4.8   From these deliberate steps being taken at Grŵp level, the review team draws the following conclusions. Firstly, in reflecting on the effectiveness of the Grŵp's use of internal quality evaluation processes for enhancement purposes, the team saw documentary evidence confirming that effective self-evaluation processes and practices are in place for supporting enhancement. Secondly, the QDEP process and the work of HEQASG illustrate effective use of quality assurance for quality enhancement purposes and point to a planned approach to the enhancement of the quality of student learning opportunities. The effectiveness of HEQASG in identifying opportunities and initiatives for the enhancement of learning and teaching is **good practice**.

4.9   The team explored further some of the aforementioned enhancement initiatives. The team also took the opportunity to consider in detail a number of other institutional activities that support enhancement of the quality of student learning, and of the pedagogic and academic practice of staff, which contribute to the enhancement ethos being successfully fostered by the Grŵp.

4.10   The Learning Walks scheme has been introduced during the present academic year. Here, PAMs, employers and members of the governing body are able to hold conversations with students in their learning environment about their experiences on a number of quality-related topics. Supported by a programme of training, the scheme is structured around several themes central to the learning experience. In the first year of the scheme the focus of the Learning Walks is on programme induction processes, the use being made of eDRAC and the individual learning portal (eILP) for assisting student progress and target-setting, and issues around assessment, such as the quality and timeliness of feedback on assessed work. Outcomes are being collated into a shared document located on the VLE with reports being made to Tîm Rheoli and to the governing body. These arrangements are understood by staff and have potential for enhancing the student experience in a number of ways, including through links with employers.

4.11   Furthermore, from meeting students the review team noted their positive experience of the eDRAC initiative, and the value they attach to it in enhancing their skills and confidence as learners. In addition to their access to one-to-one tutorials, this online tracking system, which is accessed through the eILP, facilitates target setting and action planning for and by learners through discussion with their personal tutors. The growing importance of eDRAC, including with Level 6 learners, signals its emerging enhancement potential for assisting students in reflecting on their learning and on the feedback they receive from tutors. The detailed use of the online tracking system (eDRAC) for assisting students in reflecting on their learning and in enhancing their skills and confidence as students is **good practice**.

4.12   The review team also considered the use being made of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) as a means of enhancing the professional development of

staff and for providing opportunities for teaching improvement. The College has undertaken a detailed mapping process against each of the standards that identifies a comprehensive range of opportunities for staff to align their activities as teachers to the framework. In addition to setting out the range of activities in which staff are involved, such as curriculum design and development, assessment, design of student learning, and advanced scholarship, this mapping tool sets out how staff are supported and how activities are monitored. Support includes a range of CPD opportunities available to teachers and others who support student learning. Aligned to this use of the UKPSF is the support and encouragement being provided to higher education staff for achieving Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy, including through partnership working with Bangor University's Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching. To date, 23 staff have either achieved or are working towards Senior Fellow, Fellow, or Associate Fellow status, a trend that reflects well on the Grŵp's efforts to enhance the pedagogy and academic practice of its higher education staff. The most recent cohort of staff to have worked towards Fellowship are now cascading their experience to other colleagues on a mentorship basis.

4.13   The team also notes the use being made of the teaching and learning observation scheme. This scheme, which is mapped against the UKPSF, is managed at an operational level by PAMs, who are trained by internal and external trainers with expertise in the use and implementation of such schemes. Observation data are collected centrally and aggregated to provide information against each programme area. This analysis is made available to Tîm Rheoli managers in the form of annual observation reports which can be used to enable Teaching and Learning Mentors to provide professional support, and to inform training priorities. Trend analysis is undertaken at Grŵp and programme area levels, and reports are made to HEQASG in the form of higher education observation reports. This provides a basis for identifying good practice, areas for generic improvement, and also potential enhancement themes. Where observations are judged to exceed expectations, the staff concerned are invited to convert their practice into a case study format. As a consequence, some 70 teaching and learning case studies have emerged from the scheme to date, and these are accessible through the VLE teaching and learning tile.

4.14   In furthering its enhancement profile, the Grŵp has engaged successfully with several work strands of the all-Wales Future Directions (FD) initiative. It has participated in the FD Steering Group, and also the work strands for Learner Journeys and Inspiring Teaching. The Grŵp was also successful in its bid for a Digital Footprint project which, informed by HEA employability guidelines, has produced outputs that have been used to enhance student employability. The Inspiring Teaching work strand led to the sharing at sector level, of the Grŵp's teaching and learning good practice booklet, containing case studies under the Grŵp's internal 'supported experiments' initiative. This dissemination took place in the context of the Higher Education Academy toolkit resource, Enhancing the Curriculum, which has been made available to all higher education providers in Wales.

4.15   In considering matters relating to enhancement and improvement, the review team also considered what mechanisms and arrangements are in place at the Grŵp for identifying and sharing good practice, including provision for staff development to support enhancement of student learning through enhancement of academic practice. To assist them, the team was able to draw upon a number of sources, such as the self-evaluation document, and other institutional papers that evidenced the ethos that the Grŵp seeks to encourage to support the enhancement of learning and teaching, including the deliberations of HEQASG.

4.16   The sharing of good practice can arise in various ways at the Grŵp, including from the continuing professional development opportunities presented to practitioners from teaching, advanced scholarship, or the development of pedagogic and academic practice. Some sharing of pedagogic research has taken place through the publication of an in-house journal, *Insight*, though to date there has only been one issue.

4.17   Good practice that merits dissemination can be identified through processes identified earlier, including Teaching and Learning Observations and Learning Walks. Dissemination can take place within programme team or PAM meetings, through occasional teaching and learning conferences or development days, such as the RED events (review and evaluation days) on topics such as assessment, and through the work and activities of the Teaching and Learning Manager and the teaching and learning mentors. The team saw evidence to illustrate how the outcomes of the observation scheme are used in relation to higher education delivery across the Grŵp for the purpose of sharing good practice, and how examples of teaching excellence are used to inform areas for further development. Use is made of RAG reports, on a planned and systematic basis, to inform staff development in areas of practice identified by external examiners. This contributes to the good practice identified in B7.

4.18   The agendas and proceedings for annual one-day Higher Education Conferences provide further illustration of how examples of good practice are disseminated. This annual event provides opportunities for staff to engage in reflective practice, and for current enhancement themes, such as the 'supported experiments', to be showcased. Initiatives such as 'supported experiments' enable experience of research and experimentation to be shared around various pedagogic strategies that have been successfully used with learners, on topics such as feedback to students, collaborative learning, academic skills, and setting learner objectives. Conference workshop and plenary sessions enable staff from each curriculum area to discuss practice which is then shared openly on the Grŵp portal as a 'Teaching and Learning Sharing Good Practice' resource. In addition to the focus on the Grŵp's enhancement themes, as identified through HEQASG, conferences also afford the opportunity to share practice on regulatory matters such as unfair academic practice, academic standards, and maximising student engagement.

4.19   The evidence confirms that deliberate steps are being taken by the Grŵp, in a planned and systematic manner, to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities and that these arrangements are working effectively. The team concludes that the Expectation is met, and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.20   In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of learning opportunities the team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The team judges that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

4.21   The team examined a range of examples of enhancement that demonstrated a proactive use of systems and structures, and which effectively and continuously develop the quality of learning opportunities. The team identifies two areas of good practice in this area. The first is to do with the detailed use made of the Grŵp's eDRAC online tracking system, which helps students to reflect on their learning and enhances their skills and confidence. The second relates to the effectiveness of Higher Education Quality and Academic Standards Group in identifying opportunities and initiatives for enhancement of learning and teaching.

4.22   As a consequence of the approach that the Grŵp takes at a strategic level to improve the quality of learning opportunities, the enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

5 Commentary on Internationalisation

5.1 The Grŵp has an International Office which undertakes work overseas with higher education partners. The Grŵp currently runs an International Foundation Programme and has marketed its offer abroad through an agency. However, following a review conducted by the Grŵp, it plans to withdraw the programme due to visa complications and local competition.

5.2 The Grŵp has good links with the British Council on a range of initiatives and has various partnerships within and outside the European Union. These partnerships involve various exchanges of teaching practice, the delivery of lectures and projects abroad, receiving lectures at the Grŵp, and the development of assessment tools for small and medium-sized enterprises across Europe.

5.3 The Grŵp has a strategy from 2014-16 for its international offer to 2016, but with the planned withdrawal of the International Foundation Programme, this will not be renewed.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 22-24 of the [Higher Education Review: Wales handbook](#)

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx

Academic standards
The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award
A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

Blended learning
Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

Credit(s)
A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body
A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning
A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'.
See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award
The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement
The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Expectations
Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

Flexible and distributed learning
A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.
See also **distance learning**.

Framework
A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

Framework for higher education qualifications
A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FHEQIS).

Good practice
A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

Learning opportunities
The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcomes
What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Multiple awards
An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

Operational definition
A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

Programme (of study)
An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

Programme specifications
Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

Public information
Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code
Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Subject Benchmark Statement
A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard
The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)
An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation
Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.