CARDIFF UNIVERSITY OF WALES
UNITED KINGDOM

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1. CONTEXT: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WALES AND OTHER SYSTEMS

Cardiff is one of Britain's major universities, with its own Royal Charter and a history of service and achievement dating back to 1883. Its international reputation attracts staff and students from throughout the UK and from the rest of the world. The University is located in and around the City's magnificent civic centre.

The University is the largest constituent institution in the Federal University of Wales with 25 departments and schools organised into five faculties: Business Studies and Law; Engineering and Environmental Design; Health and Life Sciences; Humanities and Social Studies; and Physical Sciences. There are now nearly 14 000 students; 11 035 are undergraduates and 2 900 are pursuing postgraduate studies.

There are over 2 600 full time and part-time staff employed by the University; approximately 1 500 are employed in academic, research and technical capacities while 1 100 provide administrative and secretarial support.

Formed from the merger of University College Cardiff and the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology in 1988, Cardiff's mission is to establish itself as 'an innovative research-led university institution recognised locally, nationally and internationally for the high quality of its research, teaching and course provision and of the environment which supports its students and staff.' It aims 'to achieve the highest quality in all activities of the institution' and 'to enhance the quality of both teaching and learning.'

Since the merger of the two colleges, quality assurance procedures have been developed to promote quality enhancement across the work of the institution.

As with all higher education institutions, Cardiff has participated in an Academic Quality Audit by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) (1993). Starting in the academic session 1993/94, thirty academic subjects have so far been subject to the Teaching Quality Assessment Process (TQA) conducted by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). All have been approved and almost 50 per cent have been rated as 'excellent' or 'worthy of recognition and reward'. Of the twelve Departments which were assessed in 1995/96, 60 per cent were found to be 'worthy of recognition and reward'.

1.1. Academic Quality Audit: Higher Education Quality Council

The Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), which is responsible for undertaking academic quality audits of institutions of higher education in the whole of the United Kingdom, undertook an audit at Cardiff in January 1993. Cardiff decided to use this audit as an opportunity to carry out a thorough review of all its quality assurance arrangements, building on commendable practices and developing activities already present within the institution.

The audit team met with a range of individuals and groups. The team was provided with extensive documentation describing and exemplifying aspects of the University's quality assurance arrangements. For example: planning and policy statements; promotional publications; prospectuses; video material; committee and board minutes. The team held discussions with more than 200 individuals.

A Task Group of senior professorial staff was appointed to advise the then Principal on courses of action to be adopted in the light of the report of the Audit. Subsequently, a number of very significant developments took place in the period between January 1993 and September 1994 which had important implications for the re-design of quality procedures in the institution. These developments addressed both matters which were already in hand within the University, and issues raised by the Audit:

- consistency in the application of quality assurance mechanisms;
- course approval procedure;
- committee structures and reporting routes for quality assurance;
- support and monitoring of postgraduates;
- disseminating good practice;
- improvements in student record keeping;
- strengthening the remit of the Student Services Committee;
- reviewing the work of the Equal Opportunities Committee;
- extending staff development opportunities;
- enhancing the use of student feedback;
- reviewing the operation of Staff/Student panels.

A ten year strategic plan setting out Cardiff's Mission Aims and Objectives was produced in 1993. An Academic Quality System Manual, covering both taught schemes of study and research degrees, became operational at the start of the 1994/95 session. An Administrative Quality System Manual, covering central administrative services, was introduced during the 1993/94 academic year, and a Working Group to Review Decision-Making Processes and the Committees System became operational. As a consequence of the Group's work, new committees were introduced in 1995. Revised promotion procedures were also adopted.

The University continues to build on these structures, systems and procedures which underpin its robust continuous quality improvement strategy.

1.2. Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) in Wales

Created in 1992, The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), has a statutory responsibility for funding the provision of Higher Education in Wales from the public purse. The

Further and Higher Education Act, 1992, sets out the context within which the quality of higher education is to be assessed.

TQA in Wales has similarities with the English system, but there are some significant differences (Table 1), which have developed in recognition of the smaller and more intimate nature of the Welsh sector. There is a strong concern in Wales to work in a spirit of co-operation and partnership with the institutions and from the start, the HEFCW indicated that its approach to quality assessment would evolve incrementally on the basis of partnership.

Table 1. **Major features of quality assessment in England and Wales**

	England	**Wales**
Self-assessment before the visit	Yes	Yes
Ability to nominate own assessor	No	Yes
Consultation on panel membership	No	Yes
Institutions visited	100 per cent	
Assessment manager		100 per cent
Profile approach	No	Yes
Number of key elements	Yes	Yes
Panel judgement	6	4
Reports	Numeric	Descriptive
Feedback session to staff	1	1
Consultation on report	Yes	Yes
Published institutional response to report	No	Yes
Financial reward	Yes, from 1996	Yes, from 1993

The philosophy of the current process in Wales stems from two documents issued by HEFCW. The first, 'Partnership in Assessment'[1] -- a consultative circular issued in July 1993 by HEFCW -- proposed the general terms and principles on which assessment of quality might be based. The second, issued in May 1994 by HEFCW and entitled 'The Assessment of Quality in the Higher Education Sector in Wales: Future Directions'[2] set out the framework for assessment and suggested some possible directions in which the assessment process might develop.[3]

While the main purpose of the assessment framework in Wales is to provide HEFCW with direct assessment of the quality of education at the point at which the students experience it, the framework can provide opportunities for improving the quality of provision by the dissemination of good practice. However, the ultimate responsibility for assuring and improving the quality of provision rests with the institutions themselves.

1.2.1. Key features of the assessment framework in Wales

The key features of the teaching quality assessment process in Wales are documented in the HEFCW, Quality Assessment Programme Guidelines for Assessment.[4]

- the concept of 'fitness for stated purpose' of the provision;
- acknowledgement of, and respect for, the mission of each individual institution within the assessment process;
- a spirit of partnership between assessors and the institution, non-inspectorial in its intent;
- an assessment process which starts with the institution's self-evaluation and an explicit articulation of its own expectations in respect of quality of provision;
- the central focus of the assessment is the management and promotion of students' learning;
- expression of the total learning environment as a quality profile, built around key elements;
- acknowledgement and reward for provision which is of high quality;
- prime responsibility for quality resting with institutions.

1.2.2. TQA: Main Stages

The main stages of the Teaching Quality Assessment consist of:

- self-evaluation of the quality of programmes and courses, drawing on the institutional arrangements for internal review;
- preparation of the self-assessment report based on the agreed key elements which define the student learning environment;
- analysis and evaluation of the self-assessment report by peer assessors;
- assessment visit by a team of peer assessors under the supervision of an assessment manager;
- preparation of draft and interim reports as the basis for further dialogue with the institution;
- the institutional response; leading to a final report, including the institution's response, published by HEFCW.

1.2.3. Key Elements

The learning environment for the student in higher education in Wales is assessed in terms of four key elements: **Programmes and Curricula; Teaching and Learning; Academic Support for Students; Student Achievement.** The different strengths and weaknesses of each of the four key elements of the provision are described using a range of **quality descriptors**, linked to a colour spectrum (see Figures 1 and 2) Assessors come to a collective judgement for each of the key elements and this results in a **quality profile**. Assessors come to a final judgement based on a balanced view of the quality profile. All judgements state whether the quality of provision is **approved** or **not approved**. Provision which is approved must have a profile which is above the indigo zone on the spectrum.

1.2.4. Key Elements: indicative aspects

Each of the four key elements is subdivided into 'indictative aspects', as shown below:

1.2.5. Programmes and Curricula

- Clarity of aims and stated purpose.
- Programme design.
- Course/unit/module planning.
- Validity of curricular aims against external expectations.

1.2.6. Teaching and Learning

- Teaching strategies and choice of methods.
- Teaching delivery and learning processes.
- Practical and field studies.
- Assignment and project work.
- Expectation of the standard of students' work.

1.2.7. Academic Support for Students

- Assessment of learning.
- Tutoring and monitoring of progress.
- Academic ethos of the department.

1.2.8. Student Achievement

- Learning outcomes;
- Experience and qualifications of students on entry.
- Completion rates and qualifications achieved.
- Specific issues.
- Overall achievement of curricular aims.

Assessors can consider and report on other indicators such as: student support and guidance services; staffing and staff development; the availability and use of resources, including accommodation. These indicators are taken into account if they enhance or detract from the quality of the student learning environment. They are not normally reported on separately.

To support improvements in the quality of the student learning environment, assessors also report, at departmental level on: quality enhancement, including arrangements for monitoring and ensuring the quality of programmes; recent improvements in the quality of provision and plans for future improvements in quality.

1.2.9. The Process

In Wales the Teaching Quality Assessment process (TQA), begins when the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) officially notifies the institution that a particular subject is to be assessed. Normally the notification is at least 6 months in advance; more recently advanced planning has enabled institutions to have up to 2 years notice of the assessment.

The next stage involves a joint consultation process between the institution and HEFCW at which the scope of the assessment and the composition of the assessment panel is discussed. Welsh institutions have the opportunity of nominating a specialist assessor to join the assessment panel and of commenting on the finally proposed membership. HEFCW recruits the assessors and trains them.

The planning, organisation and conduct of the assessments, including drafting of reports, is carried out by **assessment managers**, who are also trained by HEFCW. An assessment manager is assigned to an institution; arrangements are made for this individual to visit the institution and the department(s) whose provision is being assessed. Several visits may take place prior to the assessment to discuss the process, the significant stages for the assessment and the preparation of the self-assessment report (SAR) which is sent both to HEFCW and to the assessors. The SARs produced by departments are a central feature of the assessment. They set the initial agenda for the assessment visit.

The assessors visit the institution, accompanied by the assessment manager. An institutional nominee usually a senior academic or administrator, with observer status, normally attends meetings and discussions and has access to papers and documents used by assessors. The nominee assists the assessment team by providing an institutional perspective on relevant matters, but does not contribute to judgements or decisions on the quality of the provision. The panel will meet with staff and students, attend classes and observe a wide range of documentation provided by the department.

At the end of the visit the outcome of the assessment is announced to the department together with a brief summary of the strengths and weaknesses. A department then normally comments on the draft and interim reports and sends final comments to HEFCW. If the quality of provision is deemed to be ‘worthy of recognition and reward’, then HEFCW provides financial reward, either in cash for development work or, more often, as funded places.

2. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE METHODS

The internal quality assurance methods that are in place within the institution stem from the University's Corporate Plan and Quality Policy. **The Corporate Plan** sets out the University's mission and objectives for the period to the year 2003. Three mission aims are particularly relevant:

- "to achieve the highest quality in all activities of the institution;
- to enhance the quality of both teaching and learning;
- to respond to the changing needs and aspirations of students."

The University's **Quality Policy** identifies the personal responsibility of staff for their contributions to the provision of the students' educational experience within a supportive environment. Staff, students and employers are named as major stake holders in the academic provision of the University and are encouraged to participate in the process of quality enhancement.

The concept of a quality-conscious environment is promoted through the formulation of educational policy, the promulgation of good practice, the selective allocation of funds to support innovation and staff development.

The Academic Quality System is derived from the University's Corporate Plan and Quality Policy. Its purpose is Quality Enhancement: the process of continuously improving Quality. It applies to all Academic Departments.

The working tool of the System is the comprehensive **Academic Quality System Manual**. Building on considerable good academic practice and existing quality assurance, it was developed during the academic session 1993/94, introduced in 1994/95, reviewed and revised after one year of operation. It contains the details of the **internal quality assurance methods** which are in place and importantly, it incorporates feedback loops which inform, modify and improve the quality of the educational provision.

The Quality System encompasses: Quality Control, Quality Assurance, Quality Audit and Quality Assessment. (Please refer to the Glossary of Terms for definitions).

Whereas Control and Assurance are primarily internal responsibilities, Audit and Assessment are the responsibilities of HEQC and HEFCW respectively. However in practice, Audit and Assessment, in many ways are shared functions between the University and the external agencies.

A number of **University Committees** have responsibilities within the Quality System namely: the Senate, the Standing Committee of Senate, the Graduate Research Board, the Research Committee, the Teaching and Learning Committee, Departmental Boards, and Boards of Studies. The **University of Wales** has responsibility and power at a federal level.

Direct responsibility for the Quality System rests with the **Academic Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC)**, which oversees the Quality Policy and the implementation and operation of the procedures. Diagram 1 (at the end of this document)**, Main Decision-Making Committees and Groups**, shows the relationship between these bodies.

Important aspects of the University's quality assurance and control procedures are contained in the Handbook of Academic Regulations, the Student Handbook and the University of Wales Calendar.

For example, the Handbook of Academic Regulations deals with regulations applicable to Taught Schemes of Study and Research Students, while the purpose of the Student Handbook is to help students obtain the maximum benefit from their time spent at the University. It provides information on matters as diverse as Emergency Telephone Numbers and Personal Tutors, to Recreation and Sports Services, Students Complaints Procedure and Guidance on Plagiarism.

Diagram 2 charts the key elements of Cardiff's Academic Quality System and outlines the inter-relationships between the quality assurance committees, processes and methods. Different colours are used to distinguish between quality assurance, control, assessment and audit. Diagram 3 provides an example of a process flow diagram for the annual review of schemes of study (quality assurance), which is part of the Quality System.

3. EFFECT OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE ON THE MANAGEMENT AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

To illustrate the complexity of ways in which both internal and external quality assurance affect the management and decision-making processes, two important quality processes will be considered: the **Internal Quality Review (IQR)** and the external **Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA)** carried out by HEFCW.

3.1. Internal Quality Review (IQR)

Developed in 1993, this process is specific to the University: its form is **not** imposed by external requirements but is influenced by them. It is based on Departmental self-evaluation and peer assessment. In summary, the formal process of Internal Quality Review is designed to:

- evaluate the quality and fitness for stated purpose of the academic provision and the total student earning environment;
- evaluate the effectiveness of the department's quality assurance mechanisms;
- assist the Department in its preparation for the HEFCW Quality Assessment;
- assess the Department's research performance.

Diagram 4 shows the various steps undertaken (Areas of the process flow diagram concerned with management and decision making are shown in green.)

The process is overseen by the Academic Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC), in consultation with the Research Committee and the Graduate Research Board. Departments are selected for review on a rolling cycle of no more than five years (Account is taken of the visits by external accrediting bodies to the departments to try to avoid duplication.)

Once a department has been selected for review by AQAC, it appoints its own **Departmental Quality Review Team,** comprising the Head of Department and at least one other member of the academic staff. A **Quality Review Panel**, including external advisers, is appointed by the Vice

Chancellor on the advice of AQAC.(See Glossary for the membership of the panel and criteria used to select Advisers.)

The Department produces a **Departmental Profile** which describes and evaluates the quality of provision and research within the Department and which sets out how the Department intends to achieve its targets for improving quality. Strengths and weaknesses, improvements to date and further anticipated improvements are included. Explicit criteria against which the Department is making its judgements are identified.

The Quality Review Panel receives the Departmental Profile before visiting the Department together with other information such as degree scheme documentation and schedules of assessment. Other items, such as handbooks, prospectuses, external assessors reports, projects and dissertation guidelines are available in the base room during the assessment. The Panel visits the Department for between one and three days, reviewing the claims made in the profile and the supporting evidence presented.

The Panel produces a **Management Report** which contains an evaluation of the Department's strengths and weaknesses, an assessment of its objectives and the extent to which they are being met; it places the work of the Department in the context of the University's activities as a whole. Depending on the outcomes of the IQR, the Review Panel normally makes recommendations on any actions which need to be taken by the Department, and by appropriate University Committees; for example the Board of Studies, the Research Committee, the Estates Committee or the Teaching and Learning Committee.

Implementation of any recommendations approved by appropriate Committees of the University is monitored by the Academic Quality Assurance Committee in consultation, where appropriate, with the Research Committee and the Graduate Research Board. The Department comments on the Report and can be asked to provide progress reports on implementation of improvements.

After the Review one of the members of the Review Panel is designated to maintain contact with the Department in respect of quality related matters. A year after, the same individual meets formally with the Head of Department and senior colleagues to advise the relevant committees on the progress made in the Department since the Internal Quality Review took place. Thus the quality loop is completed.

Note. The Research Committee's objective in participating in the Review is to assess departmental research performance to ensure that the research being pursued is of the highest quality attainable by a department, within its level of resourcing. Information gathered assists the research committee to support excellence or potential for excellence and address shortcomings.

3.2. Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA)

The philosophy underlying the Teaching Quality Assessment carried out by the HEFCW and the major differences compared with the process in England were explained earlier. The TQA process is shown in Diagram 5.

Starting with a **Self Assessment Report (SAR),** produced by the academic Department, a panel of external peer assessors, appointed by HEFCW, assesses the quality of teaching provision.

Diagram 5 illustrates the impact of TQA on the major committees: areas concerned with management and decision-making processes are shown in green. For example, there is a decision-making stage at step 2 where the University is allowed to nominate one of the external assessors. Another example, this time of an internal quality process affecting an external quality process, is shown at step 4 of Diagram 5: management decisions arising from outcomes of the Internal Quality Review (which precedes the TQA process), influence the content of the SAR.

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee, as the main quality decision-making body, has important roles in the TQA process. At step 5 the Committee approves the SAR which is sent to HEFCW: its knowledge and overview of the IQR process also ensures that the processes are integrated. After the TQA visit has taken place and the interim report has been received, AQAC approves the University's response, which will normally include an action plan identifying improvements to be undertaken and setting out responsibilities.

Thus teaching quality improvement is being achieved at Departmental level and through AQAC (the main quality committee), linking with other University Committees. For example by referring recommendations to Planning and Resources Committee changes can be achieved which effect an improvement in policy, strategy and resource allocation. By AQAC linking with the Teaching and Learning Committee, pedagogic improvements are being achieved. Outcomes from the TQA processes have also influenced the development of the University's Information Strategy.

4. IMPACT OF EXTERNAL QUALITY REQUIREMENTS ON THE INSTITUTION

It is difficult **directly** to attribute the impact of external quality requirements on all the recent changes occurring at structural, cultural, curriculum and governance levels within the University, because many would have happened in any event.

The recent changes need to be viewed as part of an evolving process of continuous quality improvement and are set against the background of the contextual changes described in Section 1. They reflect the tremendous changes in culture within higher education itself: a heightened awareness of the use and, in some instances, the misuse of league tables; the public's perception of higher education provision and the national and international raising of consciousness about quality in higher education institutions. The changes form part of the University's response to the 35 per cent increase in student numbers in the last 5 years, the process of modularisation, and raised expectations on the part of its students.

Table 2 provides specific examples of the recent developments at Cardiff. It needs to be read in conjunction with the internal quality assurance methods which are in place within the institution.

Table 2. **Recent changes in structural, cultural, curriculum and governance levels**

New committees

- **Structural Level**: Academic Quality Assurance Committee, Academic Services Committee and Graduate Research Board were all set up in September 1995, replacing some existing committees.
- **Cultural Level:** Teaching and Learning Committee set up in September 1995.
- **Curriculum Level**: September 1995, Boards of Studies have a changed role: more closely focused on management of schemes of study.
- **Governance Level:** September 1995 Departmental Boards, equivalent to senior management teams, advise the Head of Department on policy issues, strategic development and resourcing.

New managers

Structural/Cultural Level

September 1993 Director of Registry and Academic Secretary appointed: responsible for Quality Support and Development.

September 1995 Pro Vice Chancellors replace Vice Principals and have a more closely defined executive role. One has a remit for Teaching and Learning. May 1996 Teaching Quality Assessment Officer appointed.

Change of role for heads of departments (HOD)

- **Structural Level:** August 1995, HOD role and responsibilities are more clearly defined, *e.g.* responsible for quality in the Department.
- **Cultural Level:** Move away from collegiate to managerial role.
- **Curriculum/Governance Level:** Boards of Studies report to the Departmental Board which is advisory to the HOD.

Deployment of resources

- **Structural Level:** A Department rated as 'excellent' in the TQA keeps the extra money from HEFCW. Academic Infra Structure Money used for improving the student learning environment.
- **Cultural Level:** Teaching and Learning policy effects a shift in culture. University decides to consider allocating earmarked resources to support Teaching and Learning initiatives.
- **Curriculum Level:** TQA reports raise awareness of the need to earmark resources for Teaching and Learning initiatives.
- **Governance Level:** No change. Funding for teaching still allocated on a student number basis.

Staff development practices

- **Structural Level:** Audit highlighted the need for an institutional policy and strategy and a review of resource allocation.
- **Cultural Level:** Raised awareness of the importance of staff development in teaching. Departments expected to nominate staff to act as assessors. The institution is considering looking at the possibility of introducing a qualification for teachers of higher education.
- **Curriculum Level:** On going awareness of the need for maintenance of subject expertise and updating.
- **Governance Level:** Formalisation of written staff development policies within departments.

Approaches to teaching and learning

- **Structural Level:** Teaching and Learning Committee is a focus for the University.
- **Cultural Level (June 1996):** Teaching and Learning Policy approved. Information and Library/Computing Strategy approved. University encourages involvement in national projects, *e.g.* Teaching and Learning Technology Programme.
- **Curriculum Level:** Policy for Welsh Language Teaching approved.
- **Governance Level:** Estates Strategy approved, *e.g.* lecture theatre refurbishment.

5. CASE STUDIES OF TWO DEPARTMENTS

Two heads of department, were interviewed using the case study questions. Department 1 is social science based, while Department 2 is science based. Both had participated in a recent TQA in the academic year 1995/96: both were 'approved'. Department 1 had been assessed as "worthy of recognition and reward', the highest level of assessment.

Department 1 has 70 staff, 400 students and 10 courses. Four years ago it was half its current size. The Head of Department describes it as ' research-led, which leads to high quality teaching'.

Department 2 has 20 staff, 210 students and 8 degree schemes. The number of undergraduates and staff have grown significantly in the last ten years. The department is described by the Head as 'research active and striving to benefit from the synergy between research and teaching.'

The results of these interviews are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. **Interviews with two heads of department (HOD)**

Issue 1 -- How does quality assessment enter the management and decision-making process?

HOD 1:

- It underpins the professional context of the work of the department and is an integral part of everyday life.
- Long association with quality assessment through external accreditation by 3 chartered institutes.
- First department within the institution to have a management team; the on-going search for quality improvement drives the management of the department.
- Department's Teaching Committee and Management Team both have a specific brief for quality.
- Staff/Student Panel is an important aspect of the decision-making process.
- Teaching quality performance is linked to staff appraisal.
- Considers that there is a strong correlation between professionalism and achieving a high RAE rating and a high TQA assessment.

HOD 2:

- Revised the processes of how courses were reviewed.
- Prompted a more critical appraisal of the student progression statistics.
- Staff development policy was instituted.
- Instituted a process of peer teaching observation.
- Instituted an annual 'away day' to discuss long term issues.
- Since the TQA visit a Director of Undergraduate Studies has been appointed to have a stronger over-view of the courses.

Issue 2 -- What is the impact on governance?

HOD 1:

- The impact has been such that each member of staff takes great pride in their personal teaching, tutorials and availability to students.

HOD 2:

- Defined the remits of committees, and time tabled regular and important meetings on an annual basis.
- Produced flow diagrams for some important committees, showing how the department responds to students (Diagram 7).

Issue 3 -- Impacts on institutional management generally?

HOD 1:

- Effective internal academic quality system is in place.

HOD 2:

- Institution has introduced AQAC, to monitor a department's response to external quality assessment.
- Raises awareness of the status of teaching at institutional level.

Issue 4 -- Impacts on the nature of academic work and the distribution of academic and administrative staff time?

HOD 1:

- Quality assurance has become part of accepted practice, despite the fact that there are no rewards for administration.
- Everyone has worked longer hours and harder in the last three years to maintain the Department's standing as a research leader. All staff are involved in administration. A work load distribution model, monitored with points, is used to ensure fairness. The department does not believe that poor performers should be moved into administration.
- As the student numbers have increased, so the need to maintain a high quality organisation within the Department has become more important. The rewards provided by HEFCW and the University for high research ratings have enabled new staff to be appointed based on the enhanced research activity. Without these staff the extra teaching and administration could not have been accomplished. This illustrates the important relationship between teaching, research and administration.

HOD 2:

- Quality assurance is good in principle, but the time and effort involved is out of all proportion.[HOD spent three months working on the SAR].
- Department now spends more staff time operating the QA documentation, observing lectures, analysing student questionnaires and undertaking course reviews.
- Raised awareness of how QA influences the courses and the way we teach.

Issue 5 -- Relationship between quality assurance systems and educational outcomes

HOD 1:

- TQA has raised the department's awareness of the need to focus on two issues:
- Student achievement, the need to improve the proportion of first and upper second class degrees. The need to monitor job outcomes for students and to ensure that strong links are maintained with placement practitioners during the students' year out and to take up contacts at the end of a student's course.
- Next session a graduate school will be formally set up to focus on the special needs and aspects of postgraduates.

HOD 2:

- TQA has raised awareness and caused department to look more critically at the distribution of degree results and the employment of students.
- In response to QA and modularisation, a data base to track students and analyse their performance has been set up. Includes data on entry requirements, academic history and degree result. Data can now be transferred electronically to Academic Registry.
- Instituted an end of course student questionnaire reviewing the three years of the course.

Issue 6 -- The validity of assessment

HOD 1:

- Both the preparatory internal audit (1992)and the actual HEQC audit in 1993 were well organised, proper processes, where the 'right 'questions were asked, weaknesses were exposed, and subsequently issues raised and addressed. The department had good results; much was happening at an informal level but the department needed to formalise matters in order to achieve high quality.
- The TQA (1996) was a valid process: about nine months of preparation were involved. It demonstrated that staff take teaching seriously, this is partly related to links with professional practice and research.

HOD 2:

- Overall the TQA process was valid but it failed to take account of the fact that the department had only just embarked onto a modular system and that the department was the first of its type to be assessed.

Issue 7 -- Where the aim of the quality assessment process is improvement/enhancement, does it work?

HOD 1:

- Yes. Would like to see better co-ordination between the accreditation by professional bodies and TQA visits.
- QA mechanisms put into place in the department within the last three years have led to an improvement in quality, which has been endorsed by the outcomes of the TQA report.

HOD 2:

- Yes, but improvements could be achieved with significantly less effort.[The institution already has an annual and ongoing quality process].Teaching Plans could be used as the basis of assessment. A programme of unannounced 'spot' visits could be used.

Issue 8 -- Relationship between accountability, value for money and quality improvement.

HOD 1:

- Strong relationship between the three. Accountability and quality improvement are very obvious benefits.
- Value for money is more difficult to determine. There is a high cost in staff time for preparation, it is similar to the RAE and professional body visits.
- The 'down' side is that rewards are by no means so obvious. HEFCW and the University should reward departments more for excellent teaching.

HOD 2:

- TQA stimulates accountability and quality improvement.
- Under lying philosophy is good but the process does not give value for money.

Issue 9 -- Incentive structures for staff

HOD 1:

- QA has raised the profile of the following: personal pride in taking teaching seriously, appraisal by students, staff development (essential).
- There is still very little incentive for taking on responsibility for course directorship or administration. Promotion does not take these essential practices into account.

HOD 2:

- Staff take a more student-centred view of their work.
- Staff maintain and improve their lectures.
- No financial reward or time off for staff.

Issue 10 -- Impact on institutional mission overall.

HOD 1:

– Audit ensured that the institution and the department developed a clear mission (Academic Quality System).

– TQA prompted the department's special five-year plan.

HOD 2:

– It makes the institution consider the role of teaching in its mission.

Issue 11 -- Impact on student experience of HE

HOD 1:

- Raised the student expectation of quality of teaching: staff have had to react to this.
- The same expectation is seen when the students have spent a year out in professional practice.
- Audit and TQA together with modularisation has enabled the department to raise the quality of its courses: a greater number of options are available to meet student demands and expectations.

HOD 2:

- Believes that overall it will lead to improvements in the student experience.
- Student learning comes to the fore rather than staff teaching.
- Department is reviewing and monitoring progress more quickly.
- Some concern that staff time spent on bureaucratic processes will have little direct effect on student learning.

Issue 12 -- Extent to which quality assessment takes account of external influences, *e.g.* labour markets

HOD 1:

- Very sensitive to professional body requirements.
- Good result on TQA enhances students' job prospects and also helps in promoting the department to prospective students.

HOD 2:

- New degree schemes have been put together following professional institute guidelines.
- Department's degrees deliberately emphasise ways of thinking and transferable skills to make students marketable.

Issue 13 -- Did your department benefit as a result of TQAs in other departments?

HOD 1:

- Discussed certain aspects of TQA's with other HODs and looked at other departments self assessment reports.

HOD 2:

- A little. Talked to one HOD and acquired some Self-Assessment Reports. Meetings with some members of the Academic Quality Committee were helpful.

Issue 14 -- Have there been any opportunities for you to pass on your experiences?

HOD 1:

– Yes. Informal opportunities and presentation of seminars to English Universities.

HOD 2:

– Yes. Informally to another department, in a faculty meeting and at AQAC.

While it is interesting to contrast the responses of the Heads of Department, in many ways it is unfair to compare them because the context for each, for example the departmental history and reference to research, which is of high quality in both departments, is missing. Having said this, it is clear that there are differences in the maturity of their quality systems.

The two Departments appreciate the benefits associated with having good quality systems in place at departmental and institutional level. Both realise that the systems are necessary in order to teach and manage the increased number of students in their respective departments.

The relationships between student skills, knowledge and achievement, the requirements of the workplace, professional body requirements, promotion of the department and marketability of students have all been brought into sharper focus because of the institution's quality assurance systems, the HEQC Audit and the TQA process.

Department 1 views the relationship with professional bodies and the concomitant quality implications as extremely important, while Department 2, with its graduates seeking wider ranging positions, and its single professional body, considers the relationship to be important but less significant (this demonstrates the difference between a department which is professionally driven and one which provides a broader education.).

The 'down' side of external quality assessment as perceived by the two Heads of Department, is undoubtedly the time and effort required together with duplication of effort of some processes and a minimum reward for a Department and for staff. Comparisons are inevitably made with the Research Assessment Exercise which can offer much greater financial rewards.

Both Heads demonstrate a determination to continue with the process of continuous quality improvement and are clearly focused on knowing more about their students and on improving support.

6. INTERPRETATION OF THE OUTCOMES FROM THE QUALITY ASSESSMENTS: FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The outcomes of the 1993 Academic Quality Audit carried out by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) and of the 30 Teaching Quality Assessments (TQAs) which have taken place since 1993, have been significant but their impact must be seen in the context of Cardiff's own plans for quality assurance.

Probably the **Academic Quality Audit** has had the greater impact on the mission, aims and strategies of the institution because it was concerned with fundamental structural matters and coincidentally took place at a time when Cardiff was in the process of improving its own quality assurance procedures.

Teaching Quality Assessments have had the effect of re-affirming strategic institutional plans. They have assisted the central administration and Heads of Departments in the on-going process of embedding a quality culture, as the interviews with the Heads of Departments demonstrate. The teaching and learning processes have become more sharply focused: the processes of preparation, reflection, and getting 'the house in order' to meet a TQA deadline have undoubtedly raised the profile of quality assurance in Departments. Some Departments already highlight success in a TQA, particularly when recruiting students.

However, there are concerns: in particular about the amount of time and effort involved as well as the number of external audit/assessment processes which often appear to duplicate or overlap *e.g*. TQAs and professional body accreditations. There is tension too between what the institution views as important in terms of quality assurance and what may be imposed from outside. A somewhat cynical view is that TQA shames Departments into putting systems, processes and structures into place: pressure is being placed on the recalcitrant. The perceived danger is that a compliance culture develops, with the institution and its Departments pursuing pathways determined or suggested by external assessors and where compliance with the assessment becomes the objective. Counterbalancing this line of argument is the fact that in the UK the TQA process is based upon 'fitness for purpose' and not 'fitness of purpose'. Indeed it is imperative that assessors are not influenced by a preconceived 'gold standard'.

Perhaps the over-riding concern is that trust has been replaced by external audit and assessment, thus reflecting a strong mistrust at Government level of an institution's capability to run and manage its own affairs. Indeed, Cardiff would argue that, for many years, it has successfully managed its own affairs and standards.

Undoubtedly, the major effect of external quality assessment on internal management and decision-making has been to encourage the institution to make explicit those quality procedures which formerly were largely implicit, and to focus its attention on continuous quality improvement.

7. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Academic Quality Assurance Committee: Its purpose is to assist the University to realise its quality-related aims and objectives through the development, implementation and oversight of the University's Quality Policy and Quality Assurance procedures and in particular to implement the process of Internal Quality Review. It has the power to make recommendations to all appropriate bodies. In carrying out Quality Reviews the Committee works jointly with the Research Committee.

Annual Review of Schemes of Study: Normally undertaken by the Boards of Studies which report to the appropriate Departmental Board, which in turn, reports to the Academic Quality Assurance Committee.

Covers: Academic content and structure of courses, teaching and assessment methods, assessment procedures, regulations, classifications and student progression, administration of the scheme, documentation (including prospectus entries and student handbooks), admissions procedures, entrance requirements, procedures for monitoring student progress, academic resources.

Reviews utilise a critical appraisal from the Head of Department or nominee and as appropriate: examination and degree results, student tracking data, External Examiners' reports, examination officers' reports, student questionnaire returns, the report of the Departmental Educational Development Panel or equivalent, staff-student panel reports, admissions statistics, information on first destinations.

Academic Validation Panel: Appointed by the appropriate Faculty Dean and normally comprising six members, both internal and external, and including individuals with relevant subject expertise. One of the external members is usually a nominee of the University of Wales Subject Panel.

Boards of Studies: Specifically, they review annually the schemes of study or part schemes under their aegis; formulate detailed proposals for new schemes of study; consider and advise Departmental Boards on policies and regulations relative to schemes of study; agree schedules of assessment for schemes of study.

They are responsible for ensuring that suitable procedures exist for the monitoring of student progress in all schemes of study under their jurisdiction and that full information on these procedures is made known to students.

Departmental Board: Senior management team in the Department.

Departmental Profile: Provides the opportunity for a description and evaluation of the quality of provision and research within a department and for the department to set out how it intends to achieve its targets for the improvement of quality.

Departmental Quality Review Team: Whose function it is, in conjunction with the academic staff of the department, to produce the Departmental Profile against which the review is conducted.

Educational Development Panel: A forum established by the Head of Department to promulgate good teaching practice, encourage desirable innovation in teaching and learning methods and formulate teaching policy.

Internal Quality Review: The process of reviewing, on a rolling cycle of no more than five years, the quality of teaching and research work in a department. The process is based on self-evaluation.

Quality Assessment: The process of external review of, and judgements about, the quality of teaching and learning in institutions. Quality Assessment is a statutory responsibility of the Funding Councils.

Quality Assurance: Encompasses all the policies, systems and processes directed to **ensuring maintenance and enhancement** of the quality of educational provision in Higher Education.

Quality Audit: The process of external scrutiny aimed at providing guarantees that institutions have suitable quality control and assurance mechanisms in place.

Quality Control: Relates to the **arrangements** (procedures, standards, organisation) within Higher Education institutions **which verify** that teaching and assessment are carried out in a satisfactory manner.

Quality Descriptors: Define the key characteristics of the provision *e.g.* major strengths and few if any shortcomings.

Quality Enhancement: The process of continuously improving quality.

Quality Profile: The basis of a working instrument which departments and assessors can use to describe the quality of provision being assessed.

Quality Review Panel: Appointed by the Vice Chancellor on the recommendation of the Academic Quality Assurance Committee, following consultation with the Research Committee and the Graduate Research Board. Composition: Chairman, no more than two external advisers, one joint nominee of AQAC and the Graduate Research Board, one lay member of Council, no more than two nominees of the Research Committee.

Staff Student Panels: A representative body of both staff and students from all schemes of study at both undergraduate and post graduate level in the Department. The composition is determined by the Head of Department and at least two consultative meetings are held per session.

As a minimum, the Staff-Student panel is entitled to raise with the relevant Board of Studies and/or the Departmental Board, matters relating to schemes, courses and modules and be consulted on proposed major changes. The Panel also comments on the processes for obtaining student feedback, contributes to the annual review of schemes and is entitled to be advised of the outcomes of their intervention.

Student Questionnaires: Students comment by means of a questionnaire on the quality of delivery of all modules/courses delivered by the Department. Students also comment on the overall quality of schemes offered by the Department.

Teaching and Learning Committee: Its responsibility is to develop and review policies for and promote improvement, innovation and good practice in teaching, learning and assessment methods.

Teaching Plans: Each year Departments produce five year time scale Teaching Plans in the context of institutional strategies and objectives. Plans are reviewed by the Departmental Boards and advice is sought from the Department's Educational Development Panel on the teaching and learning aspects prior to the submission of the Plan to the University's Teaching and Learning Committee. The nature of Teaching Plans is currently under review.

University of Wales: A federation of constituent and associated institutions, of which Cardiff is the largest. It has degree awarding powers and provides a facilitating role in the development and promotion of teaching and research collaboration.

Validation of New Schemes of Study: This process ensures that new schemes of study offered by the University are of a consistently high educational standard comparable to the best schemes offered elsewhere. Internal validation refers to the University's own processes through Academic Validation Panels. External validation refers to the processes of external bodies *e.g.* The Institute of Electrical Engineers or, to the processes of the federal University of Wales.

NOTES

1. Partnership in Assessment. Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. W93/30HE. 1993.

2. The Assessment of Quality in the Higher Education Sector in Wales: Future Directions. Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. W94/36HE. 1994.

3. Outcomes from the deliberations of the Joint Planning Group of the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom (CVCP), concerning quality assurance in higher education, may well change the current direction of the assessment process in Wales).

4. Quality Assessment Programme Guidelines for Assessment. HEFCW.

DIAGRAM 1. DECISION-MAKING COMMITTEES AND GROUPS

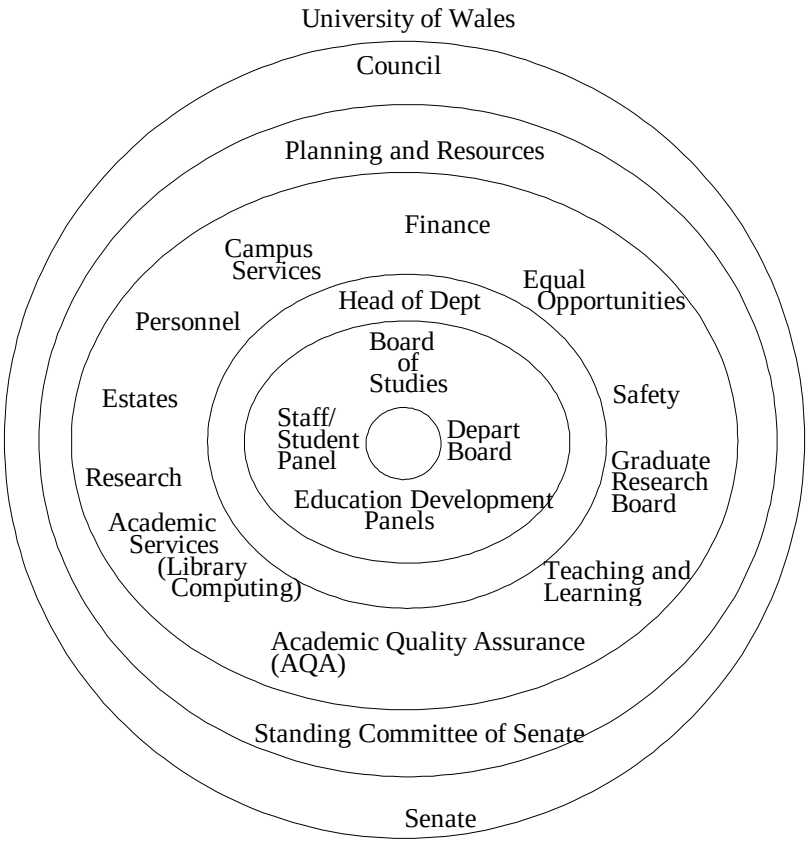

Diagram 2: Academic quality system manual

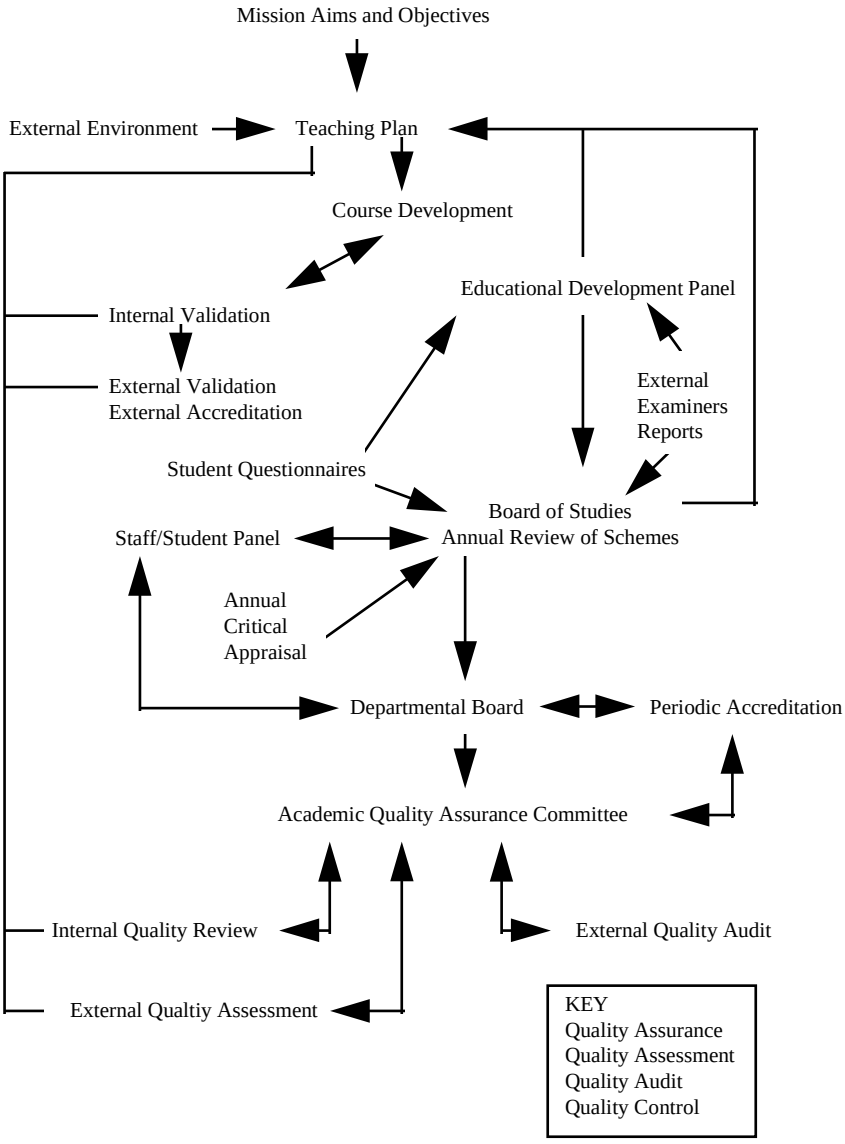

Diagram 3: Annual review of schemes of study

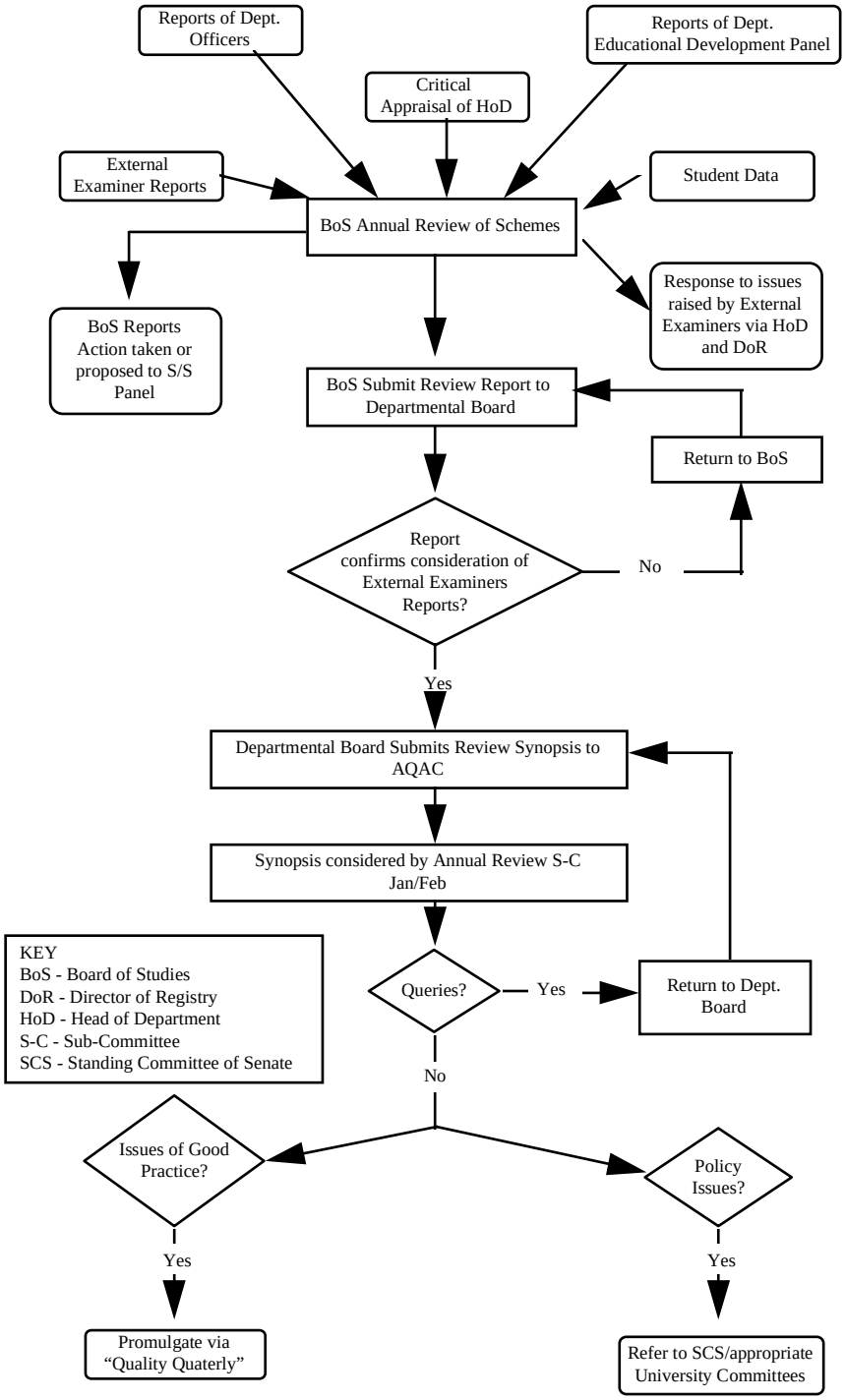

Diagram 4: Internal quality Review (IQR)

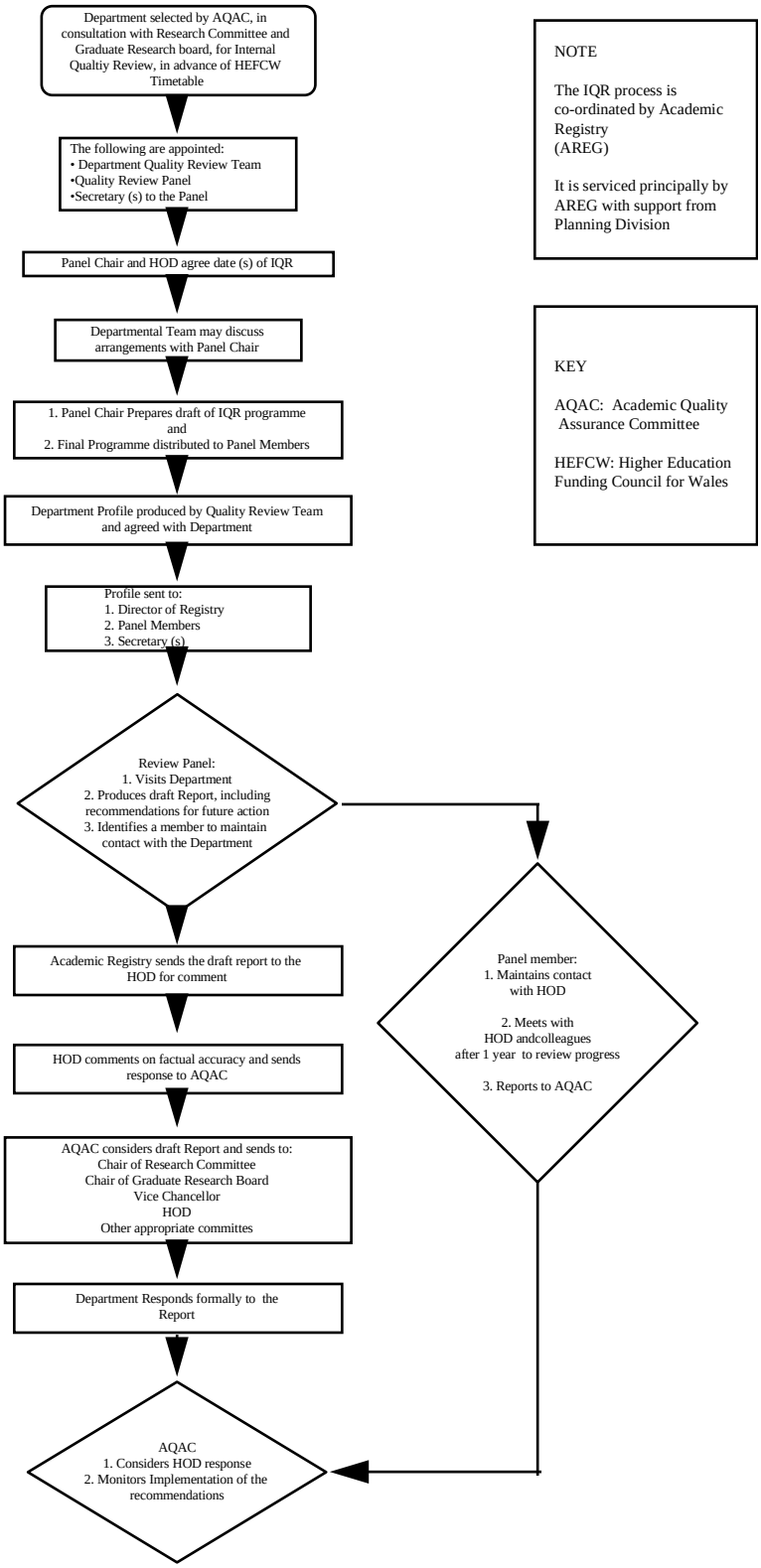
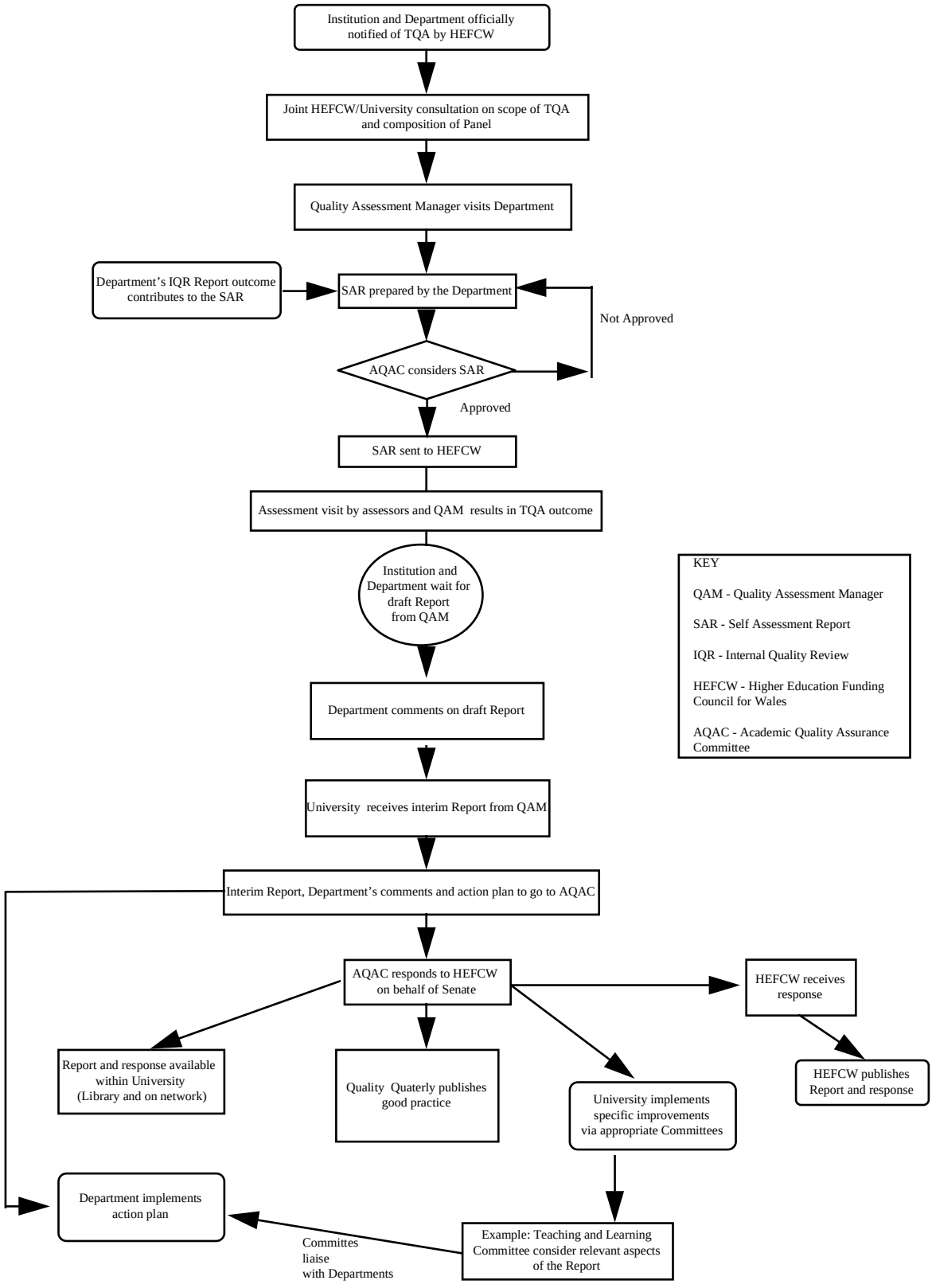
Diagram 5: Teaching quality assessment TQA at Cardiff