

WiseWales

Annual Quality Report Guidance

2014/2015

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Overview

Welcome to your guide to producing an Annual Quality Report (or 'AQR' as we'll refer to it from now on), a tool which will facilitate the identification of issues that compromise the quality of the student experience, as well as areas of great practice that deserve commendation.

This guidance will provide instruction on compiling an evidence-based report representing the views of students, with which to initiate a dialogue between your students' union and university. By doing so, both parties can work together in partnership to develop solutions which enhance the university experience for all invested, and disseminate the good practice already taking place within the institution, and across the nation.

Why create an AQR?

Students' Unions change and evolve on an annual basis, as every new academic year brings a new set of sabbatical officers and a new cohort of course representatives; a brand new mix of personalities, ideas and creativity. This can, however, be quite challenging on three counts:

1. University processes can be complex to navigate and it can take time to identify which route to take when tackling a particular issue
2. Data collection about the student experience tends to only happen once a year; towards the end of term
3. Once issues have been identified, resolution can be a lengthy process – sometimes longer than an academic year, due to the nature of some university administration processes

This can lead to – and often has led to – the repetition of certain issues year on year due to a lack of continuity from one officer to the next, or difficulty in finding compelling evidence early in the year. It has also proved problematic at a time of formal review (i.e. what was then the QAA Institutional Review and what will soon be the Higher Education Review) when students are expected to produce a *Student Written Submission*, which reviews the student experience over the last **six** years!

This guidance seeks to support you in gathering evidence annually to support your own campaign work and to provide valuable long term information for next year's team so they can build upon it. They can either continue where you left off or compare situations to see where improvements have happened and where further action is required. This should also provide you with a powerful tool to approach your institution on an arising issue by providing you with longitudinal data - a snapshot of what the student experience looks like year on year - allowing for the identification of particular trends.

Student engagement is undergoing a cultural shift in Wales, whereby we now strive to empower students to own their unique expertise and become partners with their institution, so that they are equally able to influence learning and teaching, as well as their overall university experience. By compiling an AQR collectively, the student body will be empowered to work collaboratively with their university to mould and shape their university experience into a bespoke, powerful education of which to be truly proud.

Things to Consider

Aside from the introduction and conclusion (which we personally recommend you keep in the traditional sequence) the following sections can be arranged in whichever manner best represents and communicates the views of your student body. Examples have been provided throughout this guide to give you an idea of what an AQR looks and feels like, but the document is **completely open to your own interpretation**.

A few things to remember when planning and writing an AQR:

1. Back up what you say with evidence

- This strengthens the credibility of your document and can be both qualitative and quantitative. Evidence can include:
 - Minutes from staff-student committee meetings
 - Anecdotal Reporting
 - Long-Answer Questionnaires
 - Number-scoring questionnaires
 - Opinions Polls
 - NSS Data
- Using sites like Survey Monkey, you can design the data collection tools yourself to ensure they're as relevant and personal to your student body as possible
- Make the most of the resources you already have though. NSS results, for example, can be valuable and are easy to access, allowing you to identify trends over periods of time
- Alternatively, many universities already carry out their own internal surveys of students, it may be helpful to locate and use this information

2. Keep the students' wants and needs at the heart of this document

- Try to involve as many students as possible in the production of your AQR to ensure that it truly is owned by them. Not only does this maximise the opportunity for a variety of student communities

to have their voices heard, it also gives the AQR more power and credibility in the eyes of the university. There are many ways to achieve this. You could:

- Engage with the presidents of clubs and societies
- Invite students to focus groups
- Hold a fun, interactive Question Time session
- Meet with course representatives or faculty representatives if you have them
- Circulate an institution wide e-survey
- Investigate modules or courses which have received low student feedback scores and obtain the feedback documents where possible
- Facebook discussion groups
- Think about whether or not you can afford to incentivise student involvement – be creative, it doesn't have to be a cash prize!

3. Give critical appraisals

- By 'critical' we mean fair and balanced evaluations
- It's important to assess which areas are in need of improvement, but it's also crucial to highlight areas of good practice within the university as well
- Don't forget, this document is a tool with which to lobby your institution for change to benefit the student body, but it must always be carried out in a constructive and fair manner

4. Keep things clear and concise

- Keep it simple, structured and easy to follow. How many times have you read a document that was littered with complicated jargon and buzzwords, and just felt your eyes glaze over?
- It's not meant to be an overly long-winded document, so don't panic if it doesn't seem *long* enough. Make sure that you've addressed the students' key issues, made critical evaluations and constructive suggestions, whilst backing up your work with evidence where possible

5. Make time for the process!

- Look at your resources and the timeframe you've got to work with; can you commit to two hours a week on this document? Four hours? Set a target and stick to it (your Wise Wales Development Officer will be more than happy to keep you on track)

6. Enjoy it!

- This document is a powerful tool for enacting change – the more effort you put in, the greater the benefits you'll reap
- It will also be instrumental in the handover process for future sabbatical officers; it's a legacy you can leave behind which will not only inform the work of future officers, but provide the groundwork for the university's next formal review by the Quality Assurance Agency

Once the content of your AQR is complete, why not liaise with some keen, creative students and with their help shape it into something eye-catching, easy to follow and memorable?

Here are some vibrant and very well-structured examples of AQRs:

[Bangor University](#)¹ | [University of Cumbria](#)²

¹

<http://www.undeb.bangor.ac.uk/academic/annual%20statement%20English%202014.pdf>

² [http://s3-eu-west-](http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/1485/d002b1644b80017b89accb3fef7e229f/UCSU%20Annual%20Report%202011-12.pdf)

[1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/1485/d002b1644b80017b89accb3fef7e229f/UCSU%20Annual%20Report%202011-12.pdf](http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/1485/d002b1644b80017b89accb3fef7e229f/UCSU%20Annual%20Report%202011-12.pdf)

Section 1: Introduction

The Beginning

- What does this document hope to achieve?
- Where have you gathered your evidence from?
- How many students were involved?
- Ideally, give a short summary of which areas the institution is performing well within; it's important and to acknowledge the positives, as well as any negatives.
- If possible include a quoted response from a university spokesperson to demonstrate their acknowledgement of areas for improvement and encourage them to make a public commitment to enact change

How effectively has the university addressed the recommendations of the previous annual student report, audit or review?

- What were the recommendations from the Quality Assurance Agency? Click [here](#)³ to search for your institution by name and find the recommendations from the last QAA formal review process.
- Has anything been done to address these issues?
- If yes, what?
- If no, why not? Was an attempt made? Can you suggest an alternative/improved strategy?
- If changes or improvements have been made, evaluate them!

Make a recommendation!

- For this section, set a few overarching action points to raise to the university, carefully selecting the most important issues affecting the student body
- This might also be a good place to include a final university response from a notable spokesperson; this will demonstrate to your student body that the university is invested in the student experience, creating a sense of partnership.

³ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/Pages/Institutions-A-Z.aspx>

Section 2: Academic Standards

What are the hot topics?

- Time to bring in your evidence and supporting data!
- What are the key issues surrounding academic standards? For example, do students know how to access external examiners' reports? Are they involved in the design, approval and review process of modules and assessment methods?
- What key changes has the university made since the last review in this area?
- How well have they worked?
- What does the union/guild recommend to address these issues?

Examples:

The university currently has no structures in place which allow students to contribute to the design and delivery of academic courses.

or

Students at this university are members of the committees responsible for the design and delivery of academic courses; their views are listened to and influence the process from inception, to delivery.

Make recommendations and set action points!

- **Set a few action point requests for the university to address, i.e.**
 1. *Academic schools to include external examiners' reports on the agenda of their course rep-staff panels or ensure that these reports are clearly identifiable on their individual school pages*
 2. *University to work with the union/guild to develop a project in which students are able to feed into the design, development and review of modules*
 3. *Academic schools to work with the union/guild to clearly promote the role of a course rep, detailing how reps feed into areas such as the audit process and boards of studies, etc.*
- Try to include a university response if possible!

(Please note that the examples and action points in each section are purely to demonstrate the structure of the document – be sure to tailor it to the relevant needs and issues surrounding your student body)

Section 3: How effectively does the university manage the *quality* of students' learning opportunities?

What are the hot topics?

- This would be a good section to use past NSS results. For example, "in 2011, 2012, and 2013, the category of student satisfaction scored X, X and X, indicating [this particular] pattern".
- Are students adequately involved in providing feedback on their courses?
- Do students get to influence **quality enhancement**?
- Do students know what happens when feedback is given?
- Does the university or the students' union close the feedback loop?

Examples:

The university has structures in place to collect academic feedback from students; however the majority of students are unaware what happens to this data once collected.

or

University representatives attend course representative council meetings once a semester to thank students for their feedback and report on the subsequent actions taken as a direct result of this feedback.

Make recommendations and set action points!

1. *The students' union/guild to work with the university to implement Student-Led Teaching Awards to enable students' to share what they love about learning and teaching at this institution and to allow staff to share best practice on their teaching styles/innovative learning resources*
 2. *The students' union/guild to work with the university to ensure that the feedback loop is closed by hosting feedback sessions during course representative council meetings*
- Try to include a university response if possible!

Section 4: How effectively do the university and students' union work together in partnership?

What are the hot topics?

- Is there legitimate and valid student representation at every decision-making level of the university?
- Are students aware of the notion of working in partnership between the university and the collective student body, and if not, would the university know how to address this?
- Who manages the academic representation system?
- Are structures in place to ensure course representatives feel comfortable, respected and know their voice is valued at and student-staff meetings, as opposed to being considered tokenistic, tick-box members of the committees?
- What kind of schemes does the university offer, if any, to allow students to submit proposals for change, to be enacted in partnership?

Examples:

At this university, students are considered to be consumers in an educational transaction. Their wants and needs are considered, as the university aims to achieve high customer satisfaction. Student feedback on university decision making is requested on a post-hoc basis.

or

Valid student representation exists at every level of the institution's decision making bodies. Students are more invested in the outcomes of the decisions that directly impact upon them, and exert influence over these processes from the very beginning.

Make recommendations and set action points!

1. *The university will ensure that space is available for student representation to join the decision making committees at every level of the institution if this does not already exist*
2. *The university should create a system where students are encouraged to submit proposals for change and where possible, team students with university staff to enact these changes together*
3. *Support the students' union in arranging Student-Led Teaching Awards, to allow students to commend what they love about learning*
- 4.

and teaching at the university, to demonstrate appreciation for, and disseminate, best practice.

- Try to include a university response if possible!

Section 5: Assessment and Feedback

What are the hot topics?

- This is an ideal place to utilise as much evidence as you can get hold of – things like NSS results, Survey Monkey questionnaires are ideal and easy to use
- What are the university's formal policies around assessment feedback? Are they currently being adhered to?
- What were the lowest scoring questions?
- What were the highest scoring questions? Again, remember to acknowledge positivity where it exists!

Examples:

Students currently have no say in the design and delivery of assessment methods.

or

The university adheres to a strict and timely feedback policy for students' submitted work and students are satisfied with this

Make recommendations and set action points!

1. *Agree between the university and students' union/guild a timeframe for assessment feedback and incorporate this into the institutional charter/partnership agreement*
- Try to include a university response if possible!

Section 6: Learning Resources

What are the hot topics?

- What do we mean by learning resources? These could include:
 - Laboratories; IT facilities; library provision; contact time with both academic and support staff; ease of access to shared study material; the quality of physical study spaces; access to quiet study spaces; access to rare or specialised study material, or even study support services.
- Again, use your supporting statistics to describe recent trends
- What has been the general feeling these past few years?
- How do students feel right now?
- What are the key areas for concern?
- What is the university already doing, and, is it working?
- What does the union/guild propose for things to improve?

Examples:

Library resources for certain specialist subjects are extremely limited, with students experiencing lengthy waiting times to access these materials.

or

Lecture recording has now become common practice, which ensures that students unable to attend certain lectures due to personal or unforeseen circumstances are still able to experience the learning and teaching experience to a rich standard.

Make recommendations and set action points!

1. *The students' union/guild to work with university's IT department to improve facilities where possible based on the feedback of course representatives*
 2. *The union/guild to work with the university to evaluate library provision and ensure that students reading specialist subjects are well catered for*
- Try to include a university response if possible!

Other section titles could include:

- Library Provision and Opening Hours
- Interdepartmental Communications for Joint Honours Students
- Public Information provided by the university: how accurate and informative is it?
- The provision of information related to course costs: how transparent is it?

You will likely have a wealth of information to draw inspiration from, so don't feel under pressure to choose the aforementioned section titles; choose the most pressing and relevant topics that reflect the views of your student body.

Final Section: Conclusion

What are the overarching conclusions you can make about how the university attempts to deliver the best possible student experience?



What does the university do well and what are the students pleased with?



Go on to identify those recurring issues that need addressing



Offer some concluding suggestions on how the university and students' union/guild can work together in partnership to move forwards in enhancing the student experience



Remember, if the evidence gathered throughout the document casts the university in a predominantly negative light, try to communicate this as sensitively and diplomatically as possible, to strive for a professional and friendly relationship with your institution



Finally, what was the overall response to this report from the university?

Key Literature

Annual Report:

<http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/1485/d002b1644b80017b89ac3ef7e229f/UCSU%20Annual%20Report%202011-12.pdf>
– University of Cumbria Students' Union

Annual Statement 2013:

<http://www.undeb.bangor.ac.uk/academic/annual%20statement%20English%202014.pdf> – Bangor University Students' Union

Guidance on good practice in funding of effective, democratic student unions, and student representation:

http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2012/W12%2009HE%20Student%20Union%20Funding.pdf - Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)

Provision of information for students on cost of study:

http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2010/W10%2007HE%20Provision%20of%20information%20for%20students%20on%20costs%20of%20study.pdf – HEFCW

Wise Wales 'Have Your Say' Toolkit:

<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/pageassets/campaigns/nations/wales/hewales/he-representation/WISE-Toolkit.pdf> - Wise Wales

Partnership for Higher Education in Wales:

<http://www.hew.ac.uk/wp/media/Partnership-Statement1.pdf> - Wise Wales

For more information or to arrange further support, please contact one of the Student Partnership Consultants at Wise Wales:

heather.ferguson@nus-wales.org.uk
jessica.rumble@nus-wales.org.uk

Wise Wales: Funders

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