



This document is available  
in English and Welsh

# Student Guide for QAA Reviews in Wales

June 2024



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# Purpose of this guide

This guide is primarily intended to support students, student representatives, Lead Student Representatives (LSRs) and members of staff who support students when engaging with a QAA Cymru-led external quality review. It is designed to provide an overview of student engagement in a review, and to help students and providers plan and engage with all parts of the review method.

While the timelines and stages for each review method may vary, there are similar engagement activities for students across both methods. This guide covers the methods, roles and responsibilities, focusing on the responsibilities of students and how they can fully contribute to the review by working in partnership with their provider. This guide should be read in conjunction with the relevant Review Handbook.

*Students play a crucial role in the quality assessment of higher education. All providers have student engagement strategies and mechanisms that include a variety of student engagement and representation opportunities.*

This guide does not replace the Review Handbooks for the relevant review method but offers supplementary advice to enable students to engage fully with the review. If you have a specific query relating to the review, you can contact QAA Cymru at [ARCAdmin@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:ARCAdmin@qaa.ac.uk).

Throughout this guide, universities and colleges are referred to as providers. The language used in reviews can become technical, therefore a glossary that lists key definitions and terms used in relation to reviews has been included at the end of this guide (see [Annex 1](#)). You will be able to identify these key terms in ***bold italics***, where they are mentioned for the first time, throughout this guide.

The Review Handbooks also have a 'Definition of key terms' annex, which can be used alongside the glossary provided in this guide. Additionally, there is a [QAA glossary](#) with a wider range of terms used in ***quality assurance*** and ***quality enhancement***.





# Higher education reviews in Wales

Responsibility for higher education is devolved to the four nations of the UK. This means that the regulatory system of higher education in Wales is distinct from that of Northern Ireland, Scotland and England although it is part of the wider UK higher education landscape. Each nation has a regulatory system which aligns with specific agreed reference points for **academic standards** and **academic quality** set by the relevant funder/regulator. The main reference points are outlined in [Section 3.1](#). The approach ensures the quality of qualifications, learning and teaching are common across the UK.

For higher education in Wales, the regulator and funding body is the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (Medr). Under the [Higher Education \(Wales\) Act 2015](#), Medr is required to assess, or make arrangements to assess, the quality of education provided in Wales by, or on behalf of, each **regulated provider**. On behalf of the Welsh Government, Medr also assesses providers that wish to apply for and maintain specific designation, the mechanisms through which students can access student support for named HE courses. The use of **external reference points** when talking about reviews and review methods demonstrates that quality assurance of UK higher education is part of a wider system of agreed practice. QAA Cymru-led review methods are specifically developed for higher education in Wales and consider the requirements for Wales as well as the wider requirements of the UK.



## 2.1 External reference points

The [Quality Assessment Framework for Wales \(QAF\)](#)<sup>1</sup> sets out Medr's model for quality assessment. It is underpinned by a set of baseline regulatory requirements consisting of external reference points used in higher education and review.

The external reference points used in review, known as the **relevant baseline requirements**, are:

[The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland \(FHEQ\)](#)

[Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales \(CQFW\)](#)

Welsh language requirements<sup>2</sup>

[UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#), including the Characteristics Statements and Subject Benchmark Statements, where they apply to the types of qualifications and subject provision offered by the provider

Review is one part of the QAF, and the QAF includes other activities undertaken by Medr to assess the quality of higher education that are separate to QAA's reviews. This includes triennial assurance reviews, annual review of data from the National Student Survey (NSS), and annual assurance statements from governing bodies of providers. More information on the external reference points used in review can be found in the glossary at [Annex 1](#).

## 2.2 Review methods in Wales

There are two types of review for higher education providers in Wales:

### [Gateway Quality Review: Wales \(GQRW\)](#)

is for providers who want to evidence they meet the relevant baseline regulatory requirements in order to apply for or maintain specific course designation in Wales, or who wish to apply for a Fee and Access Plan (become a regulated provider).

### [Quality Enhancement Review \(QER\)](#)

is for providers regulated by Medr. It ensures they meet the relevant baseline requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales, and has an enhancement focus.

Information related to student engagement within these reviews is supported by the Review Handbooks which can be accessed on the QAA website.

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of publication, the most recent version of the Quality Assessment Framework was published in July 2022: <https://www.medr.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Quality-Assessment-Framework-July-2022-English.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Given that QAA review covers English and Welsh-medium provision, some aspects of the Welsh Language requirements are considered. The Welsh Language requirements are also regulated by the Welsh Language Commissioner (see the QAF, p4, for more information): <https://www.medr.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Quality-Assessment-Framework-July-2022-English.pdf>.

## 2.3 The review methods

Review methods in Wales have the following common characteristics:

### Design and purpose

- They are developed and reviewed by QAA Cymru in partnership with providers and sector bodies in Wales to meet the requirements of Medr.<sup>3</sup>
- They take place on a cyclical basis and are designed to ensure students receive a high-quality academic experience and that academic standards are set and remain secure.
- They confirm the comparability of standards across providers in Wales, as well as the UK, and demonstrate that qualifications retain their value over time.
- They use the same set of external reference points (see [Section 3.1](#)).
- They take account of Welsh language commitments (see [Annex 6](#)).

### Process

- They are carried out by a group of peer reviewers. Every review team will always include a student reviewer.
- There is engagement with the student body in the review process. The process allows for a Lead Student Representative who engages in the review process on behalf of the student body (see [Section 4.2](#)).
- The basis of the review is a self-assessment prepared by the provider. There is also opportunity for the student body to submit their own submission (see [Section 5](#)).
- There is always a site visit by the review team. The review team meet staff and students during the visit. Some meetings maybe held online to improve accessibility (see [Section 4.3](#)). Review teams always meet with students.

### Reporting and outcomes

- The draft report is shared with the LSR for checks of factual accuracy.
- Review reports are published on the QAA website and available as a public source of information. Reports are also published by the **European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)** as part of a [wider database of quality assurance work](#) undertaken within the **European Higher Education Area (EHEA)**.
- A successful GQRW outcome can inform an application for specific designation in Wales. Successive reviews contribute to maintaining this status.
- After two successful GQRWs, providers can apply to become **regulated** by Medr.
- Once a provider has successfully applied to become regulated, they will be reviewed under the QER method.

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<sup>3</sup> The current version of the QER method was developed in 2022-23 and involved extensive engagement with higher education providers and stakeholders.



# Key stages of student involvement in a review

Students play a critical role in the quality assessment of higher education and provide valuable insight for the review team. The student contributions to the review highlighted below support the review team to understand what it is like to be a student at the provider under review, including how students are engaged in decision-making, quality assurance and quality enhancement.



*It is established practice that students are equal partners in the formulation, implementation, operation and evaluation of the quality assurance and enhancement approach taken by a provider. Working in partnership with students also extends to provider's preparations for the review.*

## 3.1 Student engagement and contributions to review

Students can participate in the review by:

- nominating a Lead Student Representative (LSR) who is involved throughout the review
- creating the student submission and promoting student engagement - led by the LSR
- contributing to the student submission through description and evaluation of the academic experience and student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement at the provider
- ensuring the student submission reflects student views
- working in partnership with the provider throughout the review
- being involved in the preparation of the provider self-assessment (QER only)
- keeping staff aware of the development of the student submission or other student-led contributions
- attend meetings with the review team prior to and during the review visit.

QAA Cymru expects that:

- Providers and students work in **partnership** to prepare for the review. Partnerships should be equal and based on mutual respect, shared goals and use the different skills, knowledge, expertise and capabilities that each bring to the partnership.
- Students **choose how they contribute to the review**, and there are various ways to do this, including written, audio or video formats, or a combination of these.
- Students **make use of existing information** to bring together their student submission, rather than running new data collection activities.
- A wide range of students and student representatives **meet with the review team** during the visit. These meetings are confidential.



## 3.2 Roles in review: Students and the Lead Student Representative

The student body has an essential role in supporting student engagement during the review and is invited to nominate a **Lead Student Representative** (LSR). Students can have input into the review through participating in the writing of the provider's self-assessment, attendance at meetings before and during the review visit, nominating an LSR, preparing and contributing to a student submission, and developing and implementing the action plan after the review.

The LSR is the main point of contact between QAA and students studying at the provider under review. The role allows students to play a central part throughout QAA reviews. During the review visit, the LSR will meet with the Review Team and is responsible for liaising with the Facilitator to ensure consistent communication between the student body and the provider. It is important that QAA has a clear point of contact with a representative of the student body throughout the process. It is expected that the LSR receives copies of key correspondence from QAA Cymru. The LSR and Facilitator are also expected to work together to disseminate information about the review.

### Key actions for the LSR throughout the review are to:



- be the main point of contact between QAA and the student body
- oversee and coordinate the student submission and other student contributions as agreed with the provider
- assist in the selection of students who will meet the Review Team during the visit
- ensure continuity of student activity throughout the review process
- coordinate comments from the student body on the draft report when it is shared with the provider
- work with the provider to develop an action plan based on the review findings.

### 3.2.1 Selecting a Lead Student Representative

Choosing an LSR is an important task for students. The LSR should be able to represent the views of the diverse student body (although views are usually gathered through a range of existing means). The LSR will normally oversee the production of a student submission, if they wish to submit one, and should collaborate in the development of the provider's self-assessment.

The role also involves selecting and preparing students to meet with the review team during the review visit and attending these meetings, as well as contributing to checks on the draft report and any action planning process. These commitments need to be taken into consideration when taking on the role.

For providers with a well-established and active students' union (SU) or equivalent, a SU Officer typically takes on the role of LSR. The decision to appoint the role to an individual may be agreed at a SU meeting. Some providers do not have a formal students' union or equivalent, but providers are encouraged to find ways to engage with students during the process. Where no formal **student representative body** exists, the provider should support students to identify a volunteer from the student body. The LSR role is voluntary and the LSR should be appointed by the students themselves.

QAA Cymru will provide advice and guidance for LSRs at the relevant provider meeting(s), which includes advice on the review process and the national context in which it takes place. As the LSR role is significant and the student submission adds value to the process, it is expected that the provider supports the LSR throughout the process. This support includes administrative and logistical support as appropriate and required during the review.

Where it is not possible to identify an LSR, QAA Cymru expects to meet students and student representatives at each key stage of the review process. If an LSR is not nominated at all or is not nominated in the early stages of the review, QAA Cymru requires a clear point of contact with a representative of the student body.

For information on handovers between Lead Student Representatives, for example when a review spans across two academic years, please see [Annex 4](#).

### Selecting an LSR - tips/suggestions:

- If there is no SU or equivalent, the LSR may be chosen from the pool of student representatives, or a member of staff may approach student representatives for nominations and/or volunteers.
- A group of student representatives can agree to work together and nominate one lead representative to act as the LSR. Two student representatives can share the LSR role - please keep the QAA Officer informed if that is the case.
- The LSR can consider ways in which the tasks can be shared among fellow students - for example, with other SU officers.
- Staff can provide support for the LSR.
- The provider may be able to offer the services of a central or departmental administrator to support the LSR.
- If help is not offered, the LSR should ask for support from the Facilitator (see [Section 3.3](#)).

## 3.3 Roles in review: Facilitator

The provider is invited to nominate a member of staff who will facilitate the review in liaison with the QAA Officer and the LSR. Like the responsibilities of the LSR, the Facilitator ensures that the organisation of the review and related communications are consistent.

During the onsite visit the Facilitator is expected to provide the Review Team with advice and guidance on provider structures, policies, priorities and procedures. This role helps to direct the reviewers to information to help make the process as time efficient as possible.



## 3.4 Protocols for the LSR and Facilitator

Protocols for the LSR and Facilitator are set out in the relevant Review Handbook, and a summary is outlined below:

LSR and Facilitator should:	Neither should:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ observe the review process objectively</li> <li>✓ communicate clearly with the Review Team and the QAA Officer</li> <li>✓ assist the provider or student body in understanding matters raised by the Review Team</li> <li>✓ correct any factual inaccuracies</li> <li>✓ observe the conventions of confidentiality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ act as an advocate for the provider or a particular view</li> <li>✗ use any information gained in the review in a manner that allows individuals to be identified</li> </ul>

The relevant Review Handbook will also set out the protocols for attendance at meetings. Where the LSR and/or the Facilitator are in attendance, they should observe the meeting only and not participate unless invited to do so by the Review Team. The LSR and Facilitator can take notes during meetings but should treat these as confidential. The Review Team has the right to request that the LSR and/or Facilitator disengage from the review at any point during the review process. This may be done if it is considered that there is a conflict of interest, or that the presence of either will inhibit discussions.

Meetings	LSR	Facilitator
Review Team meetings with students	✓	✗
Review Team meetings with staff	✓ if agreed by the provider	✓
Final meeting of Review Team, as relevant to the review method	✓	✓
Private meetings of the Review Team	✓ if agreed by the Review Team	✓ if agreed by the Review Team
Review Team meeting to agree findings and judgements	✗	✗



# Key stages of a review

Although each review method is bespoke, each review will have five key stages for student involvement:



Each of these stages will be an important part of the review, although they may be titled or described differently and will have varying timescales depending on the review method. Each stage offers important opportunities for student engagement and participation, and these are described in more detail below. There is also additional guidance on the student submission in [Annex 2](#).

## 4.1 Early preparation and submission

Each review method includes meetings between the QAA Officer and the provider, which are set out in the Review Handbook. These provider meetings can be either face-to-face or online.

As well as discussing the review process, meetings with the QAA Officer are used to confirm the detailed schedule for the review including the deadline for submission of evidence from both the provider and students. The meetings are also an opportunity to find out about the logistics for the visit(s).

Once the date for the onsite visit is confirmed, QAA Cymru expects the provider to disseminate that information to the student body and inform them how students can contribute and engage with the review process. It is good practice for the LSR and Facilitator to work together to agree on ways in which students can be informed and involved and identify support for the LSR.

The LSR can use the provider meeting(s) as an opportunity to liaise with the QAA Officer about the student submission and how students will be selected for meetings with the Review Team. There is further information about the student submission in [Section 5](#). Student selection is the responsibility of the LSR, but they may choose to work in partnership with the Facilitator or other students to do this.

It is helpful for the LSR to discuss with the QAA Officer the number of meetings with students that are likely to be held and the number of preferred participants in each meeting. QAA review teams expect to meet students and their representatives during review visits. For QER, at least one meeting with students will be confidential but other meetings may be joint events to allow students and staff to inform the team of their engagement in enhancement activities and to elaborate on the case studies put forward for the review.

After the Preparatory Meeting, staff and students prepare and then upload the provider self-assessment, student submission and supporting evidence in line with requirements set out in the Review Handbook and deadlines agreed with the QAA Officer.

Individual students might be invited by the provider to take part in a review project group to represent the views of students and input to the provider's review preparations.

## 4.2 Preparing for the onsite visit

Typically, the Review Team will want to meet with a group of 10 to 12 students. This may include undergraduates and postgraduates, where the provider has postgraduate provision. If there is large-scale provision in both areas, the Review Team is likely to request separate meetings. Similarly, the Review Team may request to meet separately with postgraduate research students.

The LSR will want to consider selecting students from across the subject departments, both full-time and part-time, and in different years of study, as well as those studying across English and Welsh provision. It can be helpful to create a matrix of the student body to support the selection process and ensure good representation across the institution. It is usual for some of the selected students to drop out - for instance, due to illness or other commitments - so it is useful to keep track of numbers and invite stand-ins as appropriate.



### Key actions for the LSR (early preparation and submission)



- Read the review handbook and student guide to understand the review process, the LSR's role in the process and the contribution of students. Prepare any questions for the QAA Officer to answer.
- Prepare a plan for developing the student submission (see [Section 5](#)) and share this with the QAA Officer at the meeting.
- Meet with the Facilitator to discuss plans for preparing the student submission and any support needed to gather evidence for the submission (see [Section 5.1](#)).
- Discuss any plans with the Facilitator for involving students in the provider submission.

It is helpful for the LSR to arrange a briefing event for students meeting the review team before the Review Visit. This is an opportunity to summarise the review process and student involvement. This is a good opportunity for student representatives to ask questions about the process, the review visit or the student submission. The LSR may seek help from the Facilitator or other senior staff to work in partnership to help arrange this type of event and to support the briefing. A list of questions intended as prompts to help students in their writing of the student submission are given in [Annex 2](#). This list may also be useful for student briefings as a guide to the 'type' of questions that may be asked in meetings with the Review Team. It is useful to consider what aspects of the student academic experience work particularly well and what students may consider good practice.

QER provides an opportunity for students and staff to hold joint meetings with the review team and the LSR will need to consider carefully the participants for such meetings. These meetings would usually focus on the enhancement aspects of the review and students' contribution to the provider's approach to quality enhancement and case studies submitted as part of the review (QER Handbook, Section 2 and Annex 5).

The LSR can always seek support from fellow students and the Facilitator throughout the review. A checklist of activities is provided in [Annex 3](#) to support the LSR's organisation and preparation.

### Key actions for the LSR (preparing for the onsite visit)



- Select students from across different subject areas, modes, levels, English and Welsh medium, and years of study to meet the Review Team.
- Arrange a briefing event for students so they are aware of the purpose of the review, their role in a student meeting and the areas and types of questions they may be asked (see [Annex 2](#)).
- Introduce and share the provider self-assessment and student submission with students selected to meet the Review Team.
- Keep a reserve list of students in case some are unable to attend on the day.
- Be prepared to answer questions about the student submission and how it was put together, along with its key messages.



## 4.3 Onsite review visit

The onsite visit enables the Review Team to meet staff, students and other stakeholders, as appropriate to the review. The duration of the onsite review visit will depend on the review method and on the size and nature of the provision and any quality assurance themes emerging from the provider's self-assessment and initial contact meetings.

### Schedule

The QAA Officer will share a schedule for the onsite visit with the Facilitator and LSR. This schedule will outline the Review Team's activities including proposed meetings with students. Once this is received, the LSR should confirm the students who will attend each meeting with the Facilitator. There may be some changes and some students may no longer be required and some may not be available for meetings, especially if times have changed. The LSR should confirm meeting days, times and venues with the relevant students.

### Meetings with students

As noted above, there is a selection of potential questions that the Review Team may ask in the meetings with students, as shown in [Annex 2](#). However, it is important for all students who meet the Review Team to answer the questions that are asked because they may have a specific focus based on the Review Team's lines of enquiry. It is important that students are open and honest with the Review Team. The Review Team is interested to hear the views of students and what it is like to be a student at the provider. If there is a concern, this should be anonymised. The student meeting is strictly confidential and no individual student's comments will be reported back to the provider or attributed to a named individual. Students are encouraged to provide answers and accounts based on the typical overall student experience and not focus on isolated incidents that may have affected themselves personally, unless invited to do so by the Review Team.

### Format

It is normal for meetings with the Review Team to take place in person. However, some meetings may take place virtually or some people join remotely, for example, where staff and/or students are located at different campuses or work/study remotely. This also applies to **transnational education (TNE)** provision, overseas branch campuses or delivery partners. (Normally these students will be selected and invited by the Facilitator.) The protocols for virtual meetings will be discussed and agreed with the QAA Officer prior to the review visit.

### Throughout the visit

During the visit, the Review Team will be in daily contact with the LSR and Facilitator to clarify any evidence or provide further information. The LSR and Facilitator, together or separately, may also suggest informal meetings with the Review Team to alert them to any information which may be useful to the review.

#### Key actions for the LSR (onsite visit)



- Confirm students to attend meetings with the Review Team, including confirmation of the time, day and location of the meetings with the students.
- Make students aware of the confidential nature of the meetings with the Review Team.
- Encourage students to provide feedback on the overall student academic experience and not individualised complaints or concerns.
- Keep in regular contact with the Facilitator and Review Team.
- Provide any information to support any clarifications or further information required by the Review Team.

## 4.4 Reporting the outcomes

When the review has been completed, the provider, LSR and Medr will receive a report which covers the judgements of the review. The judgements for each review method, and the associated wording, are set out clearly in the relevant Review Handbook. Currently, the judgements used in QER and GQRW differ.

QER judgements	GQRW judgements
Meets requirements	Confidence
Meets requirements with conditions	Limited confidence
Does not meet requirements	No confidence

'Meets requirements' and 'Confidence' are **positive** judgements.

The draft review report is sent to the provider and LSR to check its factual accuracy. After moderation and checks for factual accuracy, the final review report and judgements are sent to Medr, and the report published on the QAA website in English and Welsh. Full details of the reporting process can be found in the Review Handbook.

### Key actions for the LSR (review outcomes)



- Check the draft report for factual accuracy.
- Disseminate the findings of the review on publication of the report.
- Work with the provider to put together an action plan based on the findings.



# Preparing a student submission

Student contributions provide invaluable insights to the Review Team. The student submission is key evidence for the Review Team's desk-based analysis because it is an independent piece of evidence which has been created by students to represent the views of the student body. The student submission should help the Review Team understand what it is like to be a student at the provider, and how the provider and student body work in partnership. For QER, the provider and students may wish to develop a joint contribution for the Review Team, and this should be discussed with QAA at the start of the review preparation.

The student contribution provides wider perspectives on the experiences of students alongside other evidence such as data and the provider self-assessment. The Review Team is interested in understanding how students are engaged in decision-making, quality assurance and quality enhancement processes, and how this engagement impacts on their student experience. A list of questions intended as prompts to help students in their writing of the student submission are given in [Annex 2](#).

Regardless of the type or format of the student contribution, if made separately from the provider self-assessment it should include a statement explaining how it was compiled, who was involved, and the extent to which its content has been shared and endorsed by the student body. The final submission should also be shared with the provider prior to the visit.

For QER, the student submission should be no more than 5,000 words. This limit should also be more than adequate for GQRW. It can be helpful to use some or all of the headings provided for the provider self-assessment, but these do not need to be followed. Historically, student submissions have been predominantly in written format, but other formats using audio, podcasts or a combination of formats may be used. [Annex 5](#) provides a guide for alternative formats for the submission. Students may also contribute commentaries in a vignette-style to the provider self-assessment or, for QER, develop a fully integrated provider and student submission. The latter must be clearly signed by the LSR.

Students can also contribute student-led case studies alongside the provider self-assessment. Annual Quality Reports, where they are produced, can summarise challenges and solutions which have been identified and provide useful evidence for the review.<sup>4</sup> In QER, students can provide an oral update to their contribution at the First Team Meeting. Further guidance on the student submission is provided in [Annex 2](#).

The student submission is a significant piece of evidence in the review, and it will, therefore, often involve discussion with staff who may support students in the development of the student submission. There is an expectation of transparency in the review which means that both provider and students will share materials produced for the review before it is uploaded to the QAA secure online site.

The approximate deadline for uploading the submission to the QAA secure online site is detailed in the Review Handbook and the appointed QAA Officer will confirm the precise date. If in doubt, the LSR can contact QAA Cymru at [ARCAdmin@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:ARCAdmin@qaa.ac.uk).

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<sup>4</sup> The QAF states that Annual Quality Reports are one of the mechanisms for achieving Student Partnership in Wales for regulated higher education providers (paragraph 41ii, p.9).



### The student submission should:

- ✓ represent views of the diverse student body
- ✓ be an opportunity for the student body to evaluate and conclude how the provider works in partnership with students
- ✓ evaluate how the provider responds to student concerns and contributions when deliberating and designing academic programmes, policies and processes
- ✓ be **evidence-based** and explain the sources of evidence that inform the comments and conclusions made
- ✗ not name or discuss the competency of individual members of staff
- ✗ not include any reference to personal grievances
- ✓ be an opportunity for students to draw the attention of the Review Team to processes or practices that work particularly well that the Review Team may wish to consider as areas of good practice
- ✓ be concise.



## 5.1 Selecting evidence

QAA Cymru encourages students to use external datasets which are publicly available and other data available from the provider to provide evidence for the insights in the student submission. QAA Cymru can help direct students to available data as part of the preparatory stages of the review. Evidence may be found in existing information, survey results and recorded outcomes of meetings with staff and students.

It should not be necessary to conduct surveys especially for the student submission. Students may wish to comment on the outcomes of the National Student Survey for their provider, or information on completion rates, graduate outcomes or graduate destinations. Students may also consider other data or information which supports points raised in the student submission. QAA Cymru encourages the provider to support its students in finding and engaging with evidence.

Examples of evidence are provided in Figure 1 below. These are not exclusive and are not presented in any order of priority or importance. Each provider will have its own set of evidence to inform the student contribution.

**Figure 1: Examples of evidence to inform the student submission**

- Annual Quality Reports
- Student representative structures and number of active student representatives
- National Student Survey data
- Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) data
- Internal (provider-led) survey data
- Minutes and information shared at meetings involving students such as quality assurance committees, boards of study, student-staff liaison committees - the names and terms of reference of committees and groups will vary across providers
- Strategies, policies and procedures - for example, Student Engagement Strategy, Student Engagement Policy, Student Charter, Welsh language
- Student-led teaching awards
- Student involvement in provider initiatives such as widening participation, review of assessment methods, support for BAME, equality, diversity and inclusion and/or other underrepresented students
- Student involvement in teaching and learning initiatives and projects
- Case studies - short evaluative pieces to evidence a particular activity, for example, development or updating of provider-facilitated internships
- Outcomes of any student-led campaigns or initiatives that have enhanced the student experience - for example, longer library opening hours



# Annex 1: Glossary of terms

This glossary provides short definitions of terms used in this guide, commonly used during a review and as part of quality assurance and enhancement processes. The definitions are not exhaustive, and this glossary should be used in conjunction with the relevant Review Handbook.

Term	Definition
academic integrity	<p>A commitment, even in the face of adversity, to six fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage. It implies compliance with ethical and professional principles, standards and practices by individuals or institutions in education, research and scholarship. The opposite of academic integrity is unethical practices such as plagiarism, collusion, contract cheating or academic misconduct.</p> <p>See <a href="#">this video</a> that explains what academic integrity is, the consequences of academic misconduct and support available to students.</p>
academic misconduct	Action(s) which gain, or try to gain, an unfair academic advantage. This could include collusion, plagiarism or contract cheating, as well as use of unauthorised resources in assessment.
academic quality	A comprehensive term referring to how, and how well, higher education providers manage teaching and learning opportunities to help students progress and succeed.
academic standards	The standards set by degree-awarding bodies for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. Providers are responsible for defining their own academic standards by setting the pass marks and determining the grading/marking schemes and any criteria for classification of qualifications that differentiate between levels of student achievement above and below the threshold academic standards. See also 'threshold academic standard'.
appraisal (QER)	Used in QER to mean the scrutiny and evaluation of evidence provided by the institution which is then supported by triangulation in meetings during the visit. <b>Reappraisal</b> will be required in instances where either there has been a fundamental change in approach or processes in relation to quality assurance and risk management since the last review.
area for development (GQRW)	A judgement made by the review team. A change to the area for development has the potential to enhance quality and/or further secure the reliability and/or comparability of academic standards.
area of ongoing development (QER)	Recognition of an action(s) initiated from the effective use of a provider's own quality procedures to secure in full the actions being taken to address an identified weakness.
confirmation (QER)	Used in QER to mean the verification of the validity of practice or continuing development of practice, through submission of relevant evidence. Where there is little or no change between reviews, this allows <b>reconfirmation</b> of continuing and effective practice.

Term	Definition
commendation (QER)	In QER, review teams may commend practice that they identify as a process or way of working that makes a particularly positive contribution to the student learning experience within the context of the provider.
condition	A condition is attached to an unsatisfactory judgement to identify the more substantial matter or matters of concern that form the focus for follow-up action that will be required to complete the review. Conditions will reflect recommendations that are considered to require urgent and serious action.
credit	A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study and expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level. The number of credits at a specified credit level indicates the amount and difficulty of the learning achieved, based on notional hours of learning. See also <a href="#">What is Credit? A guide for students</a> .
EHEA	The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is a group of 50 countries that cooperate to achieve comparable and compatible higher education systems throughout Europe. Member countries follow the <a href="#">Bologna Process</a> .
enhancement priority (QER only)	An enhancement priority is an area of strategic focus selected by the provider for the review which is of particular value or benefit to the provider. It may be an area of challenge that the provider is seeking to address; an area where particular emphasis is being placed; reflect investment in a change initiative; or an example of exemplary practice. This may include working with other providers and the wider sector on specific sector-wide enhancement themes. Enhancement priorities demonstrate the approach of the provider to the management and enhancement of its provision. Typically, three or four areas would be put forward. They may form a recurrent theme in the self-assessment or may be a more detailed example or case study within a particular section.
EQAR	The European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) is the official register of Quality Assurance Agencies who comply substantially with the <a href="#">European Standards and Guidelines</a> (ESG).
evidence-based	The conclusions of the provider (in its self-assessment) or the Review Team are based on evidence. This includes quantitative and qualitative data, meeting records and papers including materials which have been submitted to the Review Team as part of the review process. Findings from meetings held during the review visit also contribute to the evidence base.
external examiner	An independent expert appointed by a provider to comment on student achievement in relation to established academic standards and to look at approaches to assessment.



Term	Definition
external reference points	<p>Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured by the higher education sector.</p> <p>Baseline requirements, the external reference points set out for external quality review by Medr, are:</p> <p><b>The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)</b></p> <p>The FHEQ sets out a hierarchy of qualification levels and states the generic requirements for qualifications to be awarded at each of these levels. The Framework shows which qualifications are at the same level and indicate how one qualification may lead to another, either at the same or a higher level.</p> <p><b>Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)</b></p> <p>The CQFW describes the qualifications system in Wales including work-based learning, further education and higher education. The CQFW illustrates progression into higher education and describes credit accumulation and how providers can facilitate credit transfer.</p> <p><b>UK Quality Code for Higher Education</b></p> <p>The Quality Code sets out the fundamental principles expected of the UK Higher Education sector in their management of academic standards and quality. It emphasises the role of providers in assuring the quality of the experience they offer to students, supporting student engagement, and ensuring external referencing is used to ensure the integrity of awards and the quality of provision. This applies to both English and Welsh medium provision.</p> <p>Where appropriate to the type of programmes delivered by an institution:</p> <p><b>Characteristics Statements</b></p> <p>Characteristics Statements outline the common features of a qualification type. They set out the distinctive features of a qualification type, and help support higher education institutions in the design, maintenance and delivery of their awards. They are designed to go into more detail than the relevant qualification descriptors for the qualification frameworks for higher education. Characteristics Statements offer a practical and useful reference point for higher education providers.</p> <p><b>Subject Benchmark Statements</b></p> <p>Subject Benchmark Statements set out the knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills that are expected of those graduating in a range of subject areas, and explain what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity. They are used as reference points in the design, delivery and review of academic programmes.</p>

Term	Definition
governing body	The group that has overall responsibility for the educational character and mission of an institution. The governing body may be called the Council. It is made up of internal and external members. Internal members include the head of the provider and student and staff representatives. External members are appointed to the governing body with experience which is valuable to the provider. The provider is accountable to the governing body.
GQRW	<p><b>Gateway Quality Review: Wales (GQRW)</b></p> <p>The review method for providers who want to evidence they meet requirements of specific course designation in Wales for student support or who are seeking regulation by the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (Medr).</p>
QER	<p><b>Quality Enhancement Review (QER)</b></p> <p>The process by which Medr continues to ensure regulated providers meet the standards of higher education in Wales (including relevant UK agreed baseline requirements). The overall aim of QER is to inform a provider's governing body, students, Medr and the wider public whether it meets relevant baseline expectations of the QAF - including how it sets and maintains academic standards; maintains a high-quality academic experience; and supports the emphasis in the QAF on improving student outcomes and the student academic experience.</p>
quality assurance	The systematic monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching, and the processes that support them, to ensure that the standards of academic awards meet the Expectations set out in the Quality Code, and that the quality of the student learning experience is being safeguarded and improved.
quality enhancement	<p>Using evidence to plan, implement and evaluate deliberate steps intended to improve the student learning experience.</p> <p>Enhancement will take place at multiple levels within the provider and in a range of ways. Enhancement may involve continuous improvement and/or more significant step-changes in policy and practice to improve the effectiveness of the student learning experience. It may involve whole provider change or innovation at programme or departmental level.</p>
recommendation	Review Teams make recommendations where they agree that a provider should consider changing a practice, policy or a process in order to safeguard academic standards and to assure the quality of learning opportunities.
regulated providers	A regulated provider is a higher education provider that is subject to Medr's regulatory powers. The <a href="#">Medr website</a> has more information and a list of regulated providers.
self-assessment	A document submitted by the higher education provider and used as evidence in a QAA review which the provider uses to assess its own performance. In QER this document is called the self-analysis and in GQRW it is called the self-evaluation.

Term	Definition
specified improvements (GQRW)	A judgement made by the review team in GQRW which identifies matters that are already putting, or have the potential to put, quality and/or standards at risk.
Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)	The <a href="#">Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area</a> , also known as the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), provide the framework for internal and external quality assurance. The latest version is from 2015 and are made up of three parts: (1) internal quality assurance, (2) external quality assurance and (3) quality assurance agencies.
student representative body	A body that represents the collective views of the students within a provider. Many providers have a formal students' union (SU) or students' association (SA). These structures usually have officers elected by the student body with an overarching lead representative – for example, a student president.
Student submission	A report prepared by students at a provider under a QAA review which is submitted as evidence in the review. Its purpose is to help the review team to understand what it is like to be a student at the provider, and how students are involved in quality processes.
threshold academic standards	The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student must demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national qualifications frameworks, Characteristic Statements and Subject Benchmark Statements.
transnational education (TNE)	Higher education learning opportunities that are provided outside the UK but lead to an award of a UK degree-awarding body.

# Annex 2: Questions to aid the preparation of the student submission

These questions are provided as prompts to help students in their development of the student submission. They do not all have to be answered and do not form a template. All of the answers should be evidence-based and represent the views of the wider student body.

These questions may also be useful in discussions with students as to the 'type' of questions that may be asked in the Review Team meetings with students.

- Is the provider fair, explicit and consistent in how it recruits and admits students, including through the medium of Welsh?
- Does the provider seek to identify individual student needs? How well are individual needs supported by the provider?
- Is the publicly-available information about the provider accurate and up-to-date and provided in English and Welsh?
- Are students given appropriate information about what they need to learn and achieve to be successful?
- Are Welsh language requirements accounted for in its policies and practices related to the student academic experience?
- Are the courses well-designed and sufficiently challenging?
- Do teaching and learning methods, including blended learning, accommodate students with different learning styles?
- Are teaching, learning and assessment opportunities in the medium of English and Welsh available to students and readily accessible?
- Do students have the opportunity to work with the provider to shape and co-produce practical aspects of their learning experience?
- Are there opportunities for work-based learning? Is appropriate advice and guidance available for students involved in work-based learning?
- Are students involved in checking courses are relevant and up to date, such as through module or course evaluation/ surveys, participation in approval panels?
- Are students assessed fairly, consistently and in ways that test what has been learnt and are consistent with programme documentation relating to course outcomes?
- Are students able to be assessed in the medium of Welsh?
- Are students provided with assessment feedback that is timely, helpful, constructive and provided in the medium of Welsh (where appropriate)? Does it identify how students can improve?
- Are students given guidance on **academic integrity** and how to avoid **academic misconduct**?
- Are **external examiner** reports made available for student representatives to read and comment on? Are these comments acted upon by the course team or more widely by the provider? Are students told what actions they are taking?



- Does the provider enable students to be independent learners, and analytical, critical and creative thinkers? Are students helped to develop personally and professionally?
- Are complaints about the student experience and appeals against academic decisions dealt with in a fair and timely way?
- Does the provider involve students in the identification, implementation and evaluation of its enhancement priorities?
- Does the provider create an environment for research students where they can learn how to do research and achieve academic, personal and professional outcomes?
- What student representative structures are in place? What backing do students receive from the provider to support these structures, such as training for the role?
- How visible and accessible is the student representative structure to the student body?
- To what extent does the provider's strategies and approaches encourage a partnership approach to student engagement?
- Do students engaged within the student representative structures reflect the diversity of the student population? Are there any groups of students that are not engaging or more difficult to engage with?
- How are students engaged in quality assurance and enhancement activities? Where are students represented on decision-making committees?
- Are students informed of actions or changes made in response to student feedback?
- Does the provider recognise the contribution of students to quality assurance and enhancement processes? If so, how?

# Annex 3: Checklist of key LSR review activities

This section is intended to provide an overview of the key activities with which the LSR is involved during the review and in preparation for the onsite visit. It is printable and can be used as a log to record review activities. It may be helpful to insert key dates when they are known, such the dates for the onsite visit. The LSR and Facilitator should work together during the review to support the process and the Review Team.

Initial contact between QAA and the provider	Date required	Done ✓
Student representative body identify a Lead Student Representative (LSR)		
LSR meets with the Facilitator to discuss how students and student representatives will be able to contribute to the provider self-assessment		
LSR should consider the value of running an event which informs the student body and student representatives of the review process and ways in which students are able to contribute		
LSR discusses how students can contribute and support the review process with the Facilitator; this could be through focus groups, discussions, participation in planning/working groups or other activities		
The student body and student representatives should review and evaluate the work that has been completed by the provider since the last review (as appropriate). This will enable the development of a collective student view on progress, change and further development needs - this can be captured in the student submission		
The student body and student representatives should compile and review any notes or minutes on their engagement in quality assurance and enhancement processes		
LSR should consider what types of existing qualitative and quantitative information capturing student views may be available from the provider; the LSR can seek guidance from QAA Cymru or the Facilitator if needed		
LSR should start considering the scope and design of the student submission		
LSR should highlight any areas of student engagement which the student body and student representatives would like the review to focus on		

LSR and Facilitator attend the provider preparatory meeting with the QAA Officer: <b>Date of preparatory meeting:</b> ..... (insert date when known)		
LSR discusses with the Facilitator any support that may be needed, such as administrative support or help with arranging briefing events		
If it is likely that the LSR will no longer be a student at the provider when the onsite visit takes place, arrange for a successor and book a date for a handover meeting		

<b>Early preparation and submission</b>	<b>Date required</b>	<b>Done ✓</b>
LSR completes the student submission and shares with the student representative body, Facilitator and provider		
LSR uploads the student submission <b>Deadline for submission:</b> ..... (insert date when known)		

<b>Preparing for the onsite visit</b>	<b>Date required</b>	<b>Done ✓</b>
For QER, LSR and Facilitator attend the First Team Meeting with the Review Team and QAA Officer. The LSR can provide the team with an oral update to the student submission.		
LSR considers the draft schedule for the Review Visit and with the help of the provider identifies students to meet with the Review Team - it may be helpful to use a matrix approach to include a diverse group of students		
LSR provides any further student-owned documents that the Review Team has requested via the QAA Officer		
LSR should consider running an event for student representatives before the onsite visit where they may ask questions and clarifications on the process, the provider self-assessment and/or the student submission		
LSR should provide student representatives with any documents which have been submitted so they may prepare for meeting with the Review Team		

Review visit	Date required	Done ✓
<b>Scheduled onsite visit dates:</b> ..... (insert dates when known)		
LSR and Facilitator establish an equal working relationship with the Review Team		
LSR reviews the (updated) schedule for the Review Visit with the Facilitator		
LSR informs the Facilitator of students to meet with the Review Team - to pass on to the QAA Officer		
LSR should be available for the regular meetings with the QAA Officer and Review Team as needed. LSR should aim to ensure work with the Facilitator and Review Team is scheduled around any academic commitments, such as lectures and seminars		
LSR and the Facilitator work with the Review Team to provide any additional evidence needed to clarify matters		
LSR and the Facilitator attend the final meeting with the Review Team		
For QER, LSR and Facilitator meet with the review team to receive feedback on the provisional findings.		

Reporting the outcomes	Date required	Done ✓
LSR should be available to comment on the draft reports correcting any factual inaccuracies. <b>Deadline for comments on draft report to be sent to Facilitator:</b> ..... (insert date when known)		
When the reports are published, the LSR should ensure that the report is shared with the student body and student representatives and that they are aware of areas which the provider may prioritise. <b>Date of report publication:</b> ..... (insert date when known)		
LSR and the student representative body work with the provider to develop the action plan (as appropriate)		



# Annex 4: Handover between Lead Student Representatives

QAA review processes can span over 12 months, therefore sometimes there is a change in LSR. If the LSR changes during the review process, it is important to make sure that a proper handover is provided.

This is to provide consistency and ensure student contributions are not affected by any changes that may occur. The student representative body and the provider should work together to ensure that an effective handover is facilitated between the outgoing and the incoming LSRs, and that the QAA Officer is kept informed of changes.

Likewise, any annual handover of students' union officers, or equivalent, should include any actions and initiatives which have arisen from a previous review and how these are addressing challenges agreed by predecessors in the student body. It may be useful to record and include information on why certain decisions did or did not work in practice so that lessons learnt are not lost between incoming and outgoing student representatives.

The checklist at [Annex 3](#) can provide a helpful record for a handover to another Lead Student Representative. The handover also provides an opportunity for celebration of achievements led by students and in partnership with the provider.

# Annex 5: Guidance on alternative formats for a student submission in QAA reviews

This guidance is intended to provide assistance to students who wish to provide non-written submissions for QAA Cymru reviews, either as a supplement to or replacement for a written submission. This should be used in conjunction with the relevant Review Handbook.

## General comments

Creating a non-written submission can be a great way of reflecting the particular experience at a provider and might help involve more students in the process. Remember: this is the key opportunity for students' views to contribute to the review - it is important that it is effective in providing the Review Team with information it can use.

It may also be helpful to make use of a written supporting document, to provide background information that may otherwise be hard to convey, such as evidence sources and details on the student body.

## Privacy

Remember: it is important to respect participants' privacy in all types of submission. If the submission is to be shared with the wider student body, those involved need to be happy for their video clip or sound bite to be published, as it is possible that the provider may be able to identify them. If students wish to remain anonymous while providing evidence, steps can be taken to avoid identifying them (either through careful filming, podcasts or making use of written supporting documents).

## Audio/video submissions

Audio/video submissions<sup>5</sup> can be an excellent way of showing Review Teams in a very immediate way what students think about their provider. They can also be confusing and hard to follow if they are not clearly recorded - the submission should have audible vocals, a clear structure and content that is relevant to the review. They should also have some form of introduction setting out relevant background information that enables the Review Team to understand what they are about to see. This would also be a good opportunity to include information about who has been involved in the submission, which students it does not cover, and where the evidence has come from.

The Review Team will not find a visual tour of the campus useful, nor the filming of a single focus group without any conclusions. If focus groups or interviews with students are filmed as part of a submission, there should be an explanation of how they have been put together, who was involved, and the conclusions across all the focus groups and interviews.

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<sup>5</sup> The QAA secure electronic site which hosts review documents limits the size of some audio and video files. This might mean an audio/video submission needs to be separated into smaller files before it is submitted. Guidance on audio/video files sizes and formats will be shared at the initial provider meeting.

If a provider has students involved in film or media production, they may want to get involved in producing the student submission. Remember, however, that there's no judgement on film production skills! The most important thing is to ensure that the Review Team gains a good understanding of the issues being raised and that clear evidence is presented.

In terms of format, video files and supporting documents can be provided in the same folder when uploading to the secure electronic site. It is strongly recommended that the video is in a format compatible with Windows Media Player to keep things consistent for the Review Team: **.wmv**, **.avi**, **.wmd** or **.wav**.<sup>6</sup> The maximum file size is 250MB.<sup>7</sup>

## Podcast submissions

Podcast or soundbite student submissions should follow similar principles to video submissions. Podcasts can be particularly useful for capturing the views of students who do not want to be on camera. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that recordings are audible and that it is clear to the audience what they are listening to.

The Review Team will **not** find interviews with individual students useful if they do not have any conclusions. As with video submissions, it is recommended that recordings of students talking should be backed up with evidence. For example, to show that students are concerned about access to the library, use some statistics to back this up and present them alongside recordings of students. Using some written evidence can also help with this.

To keep things consistent for the Review Team, the following formats are acceptable for podcast or soundbite submissions: **.wmv**, **.avi**, **.mp3** or **.wav**.

## Presentations

Artwork or other presentations can provide a visual representation of students' views. Involving art or design students can help with this. For example, present an infographic cover of the written report, including a visual representation of key statistics or comments.

Remember, however, that the student submission should meet the key criteria in the general comments above.

These submissions should be sent as a **.pdf** file.

## Uploading

All submissions should be uploaded to the QAA secure electronic site. The Facilitator will coordinate the upload.

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<sup>6</sup> See this link for a full list of file formats: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-gb/topic/file-types-supported-by-windows-media-player-32d9998e-dc8f-af54-7ba1-e996f74375d9>

<sup>7</sup> See this link for file limits: <https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/office365/servicedescriptions/sharepoint-online-service-description/sharepoint-online-limits>

# Annex 6: Welsh language commitment

This section is only relevant to providers who have a Welsh Language Compliance Notice, as set by the [Welsh Language Commissioner](#).

QAA is committed to treating the Welsh and English languages equally in our work in Wales, in line with the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. QAA has a Welsh language policy which sets out how QAA uses the Welsh language in its day-to-day business to deliver services, including the external review of academic standards and quality.

All documentation relating to reviews is produced in both languages, as are all review reports. For reviews of providers in Wales, we seek to recruit bilingual reviewers and review managers. Our recruitment process actively supports this objective.

In any review of higher education providers in Wales, we acknowledge the right of any person, including reviewers, to use the Welsh language. We will normally seek to agree the use of the translation facilities existing within a provider and will provide our own interpretation or translation facilities where that is not possible.

We ensure that in the initial review planning meetings, the QAA Officer identifies the language preferences expressed by the provider and individual participants for the conduct of the review, determining what elements of the review process are to be conducted in Welsh, and making arrangements for translation where all participants are not bilingual.

Providers and students may submit their documentation in both languages at their discretion.

Following agreement about which elements of the review will be conducted bilingually we will agree arrangements for simultaneous translation (between Welsh and English) of those review proceedings that we have agreed to conduct bilingually. QAA would normally meet the additional costs.

We acknowledge that the extent to which Welsh and English are routinely used varies between providers. We respect these differences and seek to appoint bilingual review managers to facilitate the smooth operation of the review process in providers where Welsh is extensively used.

QAA will correspond with providers in Wales. The timescales set out in the Handbook acknowledge the need to ensure that the Welsh language is treated no less favourably than the English language. The final agreed version of the review report is translated into Welsh for all reviews. QAA maintains a Welsh language helpline for individuals wishing to contact QAA by phone.

There is further information on the Welsh language in the review methods in the Review Handbooks. QAA's [compliance notice](#) is also available on the website.



# Annex 7: Resources

## Medr resources

- [Medr website](#)
- [Quality Assessment Framework for Wales \(QAF\)](#)

## QAA resources

- [Gateway Quality Review: Wales \(GQRW\)](#)
- [Quality Enhancement Review \(QER\)](#)
- [QAA website](#)
- [QAA Glossary](#)
- [What is Credit? A guide for students.](#)

## Reference points

- [Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales \(CQFW\)](#)
- [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland \(FHEQ\)](#)
- [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#)
- [Subject Benchmark Statements](#)
- [Characteristics Statements](#)

## Welsh Government resources

- [Higher Education \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)
- [Tertiary Education and Research \(Wales\) Act](#)

## Welsh language resources

- [Welsh Language \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#)
- [QAA's Welsh Language Compliance Notice](#)

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