Enhancement-led Institutional Review of Abertay University

Technical Report

December 2021

Contents

About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method

The QAA website explains the method for [Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)](#) and has links to the ELIR handbook and other informative documents.[1] You can also find out more about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)](#).[2]

Further details about ELIR can be found in an accompanying [brief guide](#),[3] including an overview of the review method, information about review teams, and explanations of follow-up action.

About this review

This is the Technical Report of the ELIR conducted by QAA at Abertay University (the University). The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 5 October 2021 and Review Visit on 29 November to 3 December 2021. The review was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Mr Matt Adie (Student Reviewer)
- Mr Mark Charters (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Brian Green (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor David Lamburn (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Gavin Lee (Coordinating Reviewer)
- Professor Alyson Tobin (Academic Reviewer).

In advance of the review visits, the University submitted a self-evaluative document (the Reflective Analysis) and an advance information set, comprising a range of materials about the institution's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards.

The impact of COVID-19

QAA made some amendments to the ELIR process to accommodate the ongoing pandemic, most notable of which was that the ELIR was conducted entirely online. The ELIR was undertaken while the pandemic, and the institution's response to it, was a key part of the context. Although this was part of the context of the review, the team considered the institution's approach to quality and standards from the time of the last ELIR in 2016. It is acknowledged that the review took place at what was a very challenging time, and the ELIR team and QAA Scotland are grateful to staff and students for their engagement in the review.

About this report

In this report, the ELIR team:

- delivers a threshold judgement on the current and likely future effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for managing academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience.

The threshold judgement can be found on page 3, followed by the detailed findings of the

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[1] About ELIR:
  www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review.
[2] About QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland
[3] Brief Guide to ELIR: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/brief-guide-to-elir-method.pdf

review given in numbered paragraphs.

Technical Reports set out the ELIR team's view under each of the report headings. Shorter Outcome Reports are provided that set out the main findings of the ELIR for a wider audience. The Outcome Report for this review is on the QAA website.[4]

ELIR Technical Reports are intended primarily for the institution reviewed, and to provide an information base for the production of thematic reports that identify findings across several institutions.

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[4] Outcome Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Abertay-University

Threshold judgement about Abertay University

Abertay University has **effective** arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience.

This is a positive judgement, which means that the University meets sector expectations in securing the academic standards of its awards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience it provides, currently and into the future. This judgement confirms there can be public confidence in the University's awards and in the quality of the learning experience it provides for its students.

1   Contextual information about the institution, student population and the review

1.1   Summary information about the institution

1   Abertay University (the University) is a small, modern university based in Dundee with a student population of circa 4500 and staff community of circa 475. The University offers a broad portfolio and is recognised for the vocationally-based nature of this provision.

2   The University is constituted under the Abertay University (Scotland) Order of Council 2019. This order replaced prior constitutional documents from the creation of the University in 1994 and revisions to the configuration of Court and Senate to reflect changes to staff and student governors, and elected members of Court and Senate (paragraph 162). Following recommendations in ELIR 2016, the University has undertaken a review of academic governance and governing committees and implemented a revised committee structure and process from 2019.

3   Since the last ELIR, the University has engaged in extensive consultation and engagement with students, staff and governors on the development of a new strategic plan which was launched in February 2020. Abertay's Strategic Plan 2020-25 sets out ambitions, activities and key performance indicators.

4   The core purpose for Abertay remains broadly consistent with the previous strategy (2015-20):

- 'To offer transformational opportunities to everyone who has the ability to benefit from Abertay's approach to university education.

- To inspire and enable our students, staff and graduates to achieve their full potential and to have a positive impact on the world around us.

- To prepare students for the world of work and a life of learning'.

5   The Strategic Plan 2020-25 outlines two significant thematic changes: a commitment to build on the University's expertise in computer games, cyber security and computer science through targeted digital transformation; and a focus on academic collaboration, particularly internationally.

6   The University undertook a review of academic and professional services structures in 2019. The University is structured into:

- three academic schools: Business, Law and Social Sciences (BLS); Applied Sciences (SAS); Design and Informatics (SDI). Each academic school also has a number of divisions

- two academic units: Graduate School; Abertay Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy

- six professional services units: Strategic Planning; Finance, Infrastructure and Corporate Services; External and Corporate Relations; People Services; Governance; Student and Academic Services.

7   The University is led by a small Executive Team comprising the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Vice-Principal (Strategy and Planning) and the University Secretary. Academic School Deans are supported by Heads of Divisions and each school has a Head of Teaching, Quality and Learning Enhancement (TQL). Each Head of TQL has responsibility for quality and strategic pedagogical development in their school (paragraphs 131 and 132).

8   The AbLE Academy replaced the University's Teaching and Learning Enhancement unit and is led by the Dean of Teaching and Learning. The 2019 restructure saw this area transition from being a professional services unit to an academic unit with institutional responsibility for the leadership of teaching and learning. The school TQLs also have a role with the AbLE Academy providing leadership for thematic priorities across the institution (paragraphs 129 and 130).

9   The University has an active Students' Association and a developing partnership exists between both organisations. The Students' Association has undergone significant governance and operation changes since the 2016 ELIR, and the commitment to partnership and constructive engagement with the University is reflected through the re-establishment of a Student Partnership Agreement for 2021 (paragraph 35).

1.2   Composition and key trends in the student population

10   The undergraduate population of 4,576 (headcount), accounts for 93% of the University's student population, and is composed of a majority of Scottish-domicile students who have represented 77-79% of the total population from 2016 to 2021. Over 30% of students admitted to the University do so with 'advanced standing' from further education (FE) colleges into stages 2 or 3 of its degree programmes.

11   The University's postgraduate taught (PGT) student population has grown slightly from 2016 to 2021 (10%) - from 312 to 343 (headcount), with growth predominantly in the international population (from 8% of the population to 17%). This reflects a strategic drive from the University to broaden the recruitment base and increase the diversity of the student population.

12   The postgraduate research community remains small, and while there was growth in intake during 2016-21, peaking at 30 postgraduate research (PGR) students in 2017-18, the PGR population has reduced slightly from 127 to 118 over this period. The small decrease has largely been from a reduction in the Scottish PGR population.

13   During the period 2016-21, the number of students studying with the University's collaborative partners has significantly reduced, from 2092 in 2016-17 to 190 in 2020-21. This is a direct result of the University's decision to terminate its partnership with the Systematic Educational Group International (SEGi), Malaysia (paragraph 210). The University's Strategic Plan outlines the intention to grow international partnerships and, during 2021, the University has agreed new partnerships in Bucharest and Hong Kong with these partnerships commencing from September 2021 (paragraph 208).

14   The University has a strong commitment to widening access and in 2020-21, 16.2% of its Scottish-domicile undergraduate entrants were from Scottish Index of Multiple

Deprivation (SIMD) 20 postcodes, with 33% of entrants from SIMD40 (MD-40).

15   The University operates a comprehensive and clear, contextualised admissions approach, with 16-19% of its student intake eligible for a contextual offer (paragraphs 57 and 58). The University deploys this approach to reflect the breadth of diversity and the range of elements which can impact an applicant's opportunity to secure grades. The University notes in its Reflective Analysis (RA) that from its analysis of its admissions information, less than half of students eligible for a contextual offer are from SIMD20 backgrounds.

16   The University identified in the RA that student retention is a strategic priority and presented data demonstrating a gradual decline in student retention across almost all categories (Scottish-domiciled, SIMD, gender, age, ethnicity, disability) between 2014 and 2020. Based on the most recently published data (2019-20), the University's non-progression performance was significantly above the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Performance Indicator Benchmark for retention. 14.7% of undergraduate entrants to the University were no longer in higher education one year after joining against a benchmark of 9.4%, with the University fully recognising this (paragraphs 68-73).

17   At institutional level, the University's student population is broadly gender-balanced with 48% female:52% male in 2020-21. This figure has remained broadly consistent since 2016. However, the University recognises that the gender balance within seven of its academic subject areas are subject to significant imbalances, with intakes of more than 75% for one gender. The University holds a Bronze Athena SWAN award and three schools have or are submitting applications for departmental-level recognition.

1.3   Commentary on the preparation for the ELIR, including contextualisation

18   The ELIR team was able to confirm that the University took a collegiate and consultative approach to preparing for this ELIR. The Reflective Analysis (RA) confirmed that a steering group was established to lead and manage the University's preparations. The ELIR team learned that this steering group had broad representation and engagement across the staff and student community. A range of mechanisms were used as part of its participative approach including: large-scale events involving staff and students; discussions at key university committees; and the use of a range of online methods to support staff and student feedback - which was important to offer with ELIR preparations being undertaken during the pandemic. Staff and students who met the ELIR team reflected positively on the opportunities for engagement in the development of the RA and went on to outline effective use of students as AbLE consultants to inform the development of the RA (paragraphs 25, 36 and 129).

19   In identifying its contextualised themes for the ELIR, the University chose to align these with its Strategic Plan 2020-25 and the Learning Enhancement Strategy 2020-25. It also engaged in discussions around the possible themes with student representatives at the Students' Association Representative Council (SRC), with the ELIR Steering Group supporting the SRC to develop an ELIR survey, which was run by the Students' Association to seek the views of the broader student population (paragraphs 25 and 27-29)

20   The University identified four contextualised themes for the review:

- student experience
- skills to succeed
- digital technology
- access to education.

21   The ELIR team is content that the approach adopted by the University to setting the contextualised themes was robust and appropriate, effectively balancing quantitative and qualitative information. The ELIR team was able to confirm that the contextualised themes identified by the University effectively represent the challenges that it currently faces.

1.4   Summary of the follow-up to the previous ELIR

22   The 2016 ELIR identified five areas for development. The ELIR team was able to confirm that the University has responded to and made progress across all of the recommendations arising from ELIR 3. In response to ELIR 3, the University developed a detailed action plan with named responsibilities and regular progress updates, which was monitored by the ELIR Steering Group, with updates being provided to the Teaching and Learning Committee and the University Senate. The Reflective Analysis (RA) provides a comprehensive analysis of the progress and action taken with the recommendations since 2016 (paragraphs 189-194).

23   The ELIR team concluded that the approach taken by the University, and progress made, reflects an effective approach to responding to the ELIR 3 recommendations and supported ongoing enhancement.

1.5   Impact of engaging students in ELIR preparations

24   Students were effectively engaged in the preparations for this ELIR including as members of the ELIR steering group and through a number of students being involved in the RA writing groups that were established - which ensured a strong, student-focused approach during the drafting process. Students' views were also sought through the University's committee structures.

25   The ELIR team noted the innovative use of the AbLE Academy student consultants (paragraphs 36 and 129) to support the development of the University's RA, in particular the effective role they played in leading the development and delivery of a student survey to canvas opinions from the broader student community, to inform the development of the RA. These survey results helped inform the development of the RA and selection of the University's contextualised themes. It is the ELIR team's view that the University's approach to engaging its students in the ELIR development and preparation process has played an important role in supporting the developing partnership between the University and the Students' Association (paragraphs 27-33).

2   Enhancing the student learning experience

2.1   Student representation and engagement

26   The University has effective arrangements in place to support the engagement and representation of students, including responding to student feedback. This is demonstrated through its use of effective student representation systems and a range of mechanisms which effectively ensure feedback from students is routinely collected, analysed and acted upon in order to improve the student experience. The ELIR team was presented with clear evidence of steps taken by the University to ensure students remain informed of how their feedback is driving change at programme and module level.

Approach to student representation

27   Students (both undergraduate and postgraduate taught) are primarily represented through the Students' Association's Academic Representative System and Students' Representative Council (SRC) (newly structured in session 2020-21), which provides formal representation at a class, divisional and institutional level. Students who met with the ELIR

team demonstrated a strong understanding of how this system works and its positioning in relation to other student feedback mechanisms.

28   The University and Students' Association share responsibility for the recruitment of student representatives. Student representatives have the opportunity to attend formal training delivered by Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs). Students who had attended this training stated that it had been helpful in preparing them to undertake their role. The ELIR team also learned that student representatives who participate in roles such as Institution-led Review (ILR) panel members, or are members of university committees, are also provided with specific induction training delivered by the University.

29   The ELIR team learned that, since the 2016 ELIR, several changes have been made to the representative system, including changes to the Students' Representative Council (SRC) which has reduced the size of its membership with class representatives now reporting through division representatives. Division representatives also now attend University Academic School Committees with the University viewing these committees as a 'key link between students and academic staff' (paragraph 160). These changes aim to provide greater clarity on partnership working between students and staff. The University and Students' Association recognise that these new arrangements are still to be fully embedded, with student engagement with these systems having been lower than expected, particularly at divisional level. The ELIR team understand that the University and Students' Association intend to implement a refreshed approach to recruitment and training of student representatives during the 2021-22 academic year.

30   At school and division level, feedback from student representatives is primarily considered through Student Voice Fora, which are co-chaired by the School Head of Teaching, Quality and Learning Enhancement (TQLs) (paragraphs 131 and 132) and a nominated class representative, with meeting agendas jointly set. These meetings are held once per term and provide the opportunity to bring together students, their representatives, and members of staff, including heads of division and programme and module leaders. The University recognised that while staff and student representative attendance was often strong in these fora, more could be done to strengthen the engagement of the wider student population.

31   This view was also echoed by students who met the ELIR team, who noted that while these fora could be effective, there was often inconsistencies in their operation between divisions and schools. As a result, there was often an overreliance on individual members of staff to act in response to student feedback and, consequently, more informal methods of engagement between staff and student representatives were viewed as a popular alternative. While the ELIR team recognise informal engagement between staff and student representatives can often result in the timely resolution of issues, the team would encourage the University to explore with staff and students how good practice associated with the convening and operation of Student Voice Fora could be identified and shared across the institution to develop a more consistent approach, which ensures actions are suitably distributed.

32   Postgraduate research students are represented by school-based reps who interface with the University's Graduate School (paragraphs 94-99). Students confirmed to the ELIR team that these systems worked effectively and were confident that raising issues with their student representatives results in appropriate and timely resolution by staff.

33   The ELIR team was able to confirm that students studying with the University's collaborative partners have access to opportunities to provide feedback on their studies. The ELIR team noted that the individual mechanisms used were often bespoke to each partnership rather than there being a university-wide expectation (paragraph 218). Similarly,

the communication of issues identified through the student feedback mechanisms employed by the University's partnerships, relied on the ongoing engagement between its Link Tutors and the partner institution (paragraph 216). While this approach did not seem to present any current challenges to ensuring appropriate student representation, the ELIR team believe there would be value in the University considering how these arrangements could be enhanced as it proceeds with its plans to expand its collaborative provision (paragraphs 207 and 208).

Student partnership working

34   The University and Students' Association recognised that the past relationship between both organisations had often been difficult. It was noted, however, that significant progress has been made since the 2016 ELIR to transition the relationship into being more stable and productive. Regular formalised meetings between Students' Association Officers and the University Executive have been introduced, to supplement existing informal meetings, to support stronger communication between both organisations. The ELIR team recognised that these formal meetings have only taken place since the start of this academic session (2021-22), and as such it is too early for the University and Students' Association to evaluate their impact. The ELIR team view the measures being taken to strengthen the partnership between both organisations as a positive step in the right direction.

35   The University and Students' Association adopted a new Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) in April 2021 which outlines their immediate, shared strategic priorities. This agreement was developed in specific response to the COVID-19 pandemic and, as such, focuses on ensuring clear partnership working, maintenance of effective student representation during the pandemic and future planning informed by experiences of lockdown engagement activities. The ELIR team heard from both senior staff and sabbatical officers that this SPA was proving effective and has informed work to create a new longer-term SPA, which is expected to be approved in January 2022. The ELIR team understands the overarching themes for the new SPA centre around building student communities and implementing further reforms to the Student Representative System.

36   The ELIR team learned of a range of opportunities on offer for student partnership working in the University's enhancement work including the requirement for student membership of the Abertay Learning Enhancement Fund (ATLEF) projects (paragraph 135) and a number of student-led ATLEF projects (paragraph 136). The ELIR team also heard about Student AbLE Consultants (paragraphs 103 and 129) working with staff on enhancement projects and reviews. Examples of successful enhancement projects include students leading on the further development of university guidance on blended learning to ensure this guidance is more engaging and accessible for students, partnership projects with the Students' Association exploring student engagement spaces, and the development of a Students' Association-led micro-credential qualification called 'Welcome to the CommuniTay' (paragraph 76). Student representatives and staff who met with the ELIR team, recognised and valued these partnership opportunities and their positive contributions to the University's enhancement activities. However, student representatives did indicate that there was limited awareness from the wider student body of these activities and how to participate.

37   The ELIR team also noted the recent establishment (session 2021-22) of a 'Student as Partners Management Board' co-chaired by the Students' Association President and the Dean of Learning and Teaching which, at the time of this ELIR, had met once. The Board has been established to enhance 'the partnership approach being developed between Abertay Students' Association and the University and enable the student voice to permeate all levels of the University's quality and developmental processes'. The ethos of the Board is based on co-creation across the University.

38   The ELIR team commends the University for establishing a strong culture of partnership working with its student body which ensures effective student representation and engagement in the range of institutional enhancement projects currently underway. The introduction of the student AbLE consultant role in particular has further embedded student partnership into enhancement activity.

Listening and responding to student voice

39   The University uses a range of structured and less formal approaches for gathering student views to enable it to listen to and respond to the student voice. Examples include participation in the National Student Survey (NSS), an annual internal survey for postgraduate research students and the use of an internal university-wide module evaluation survey.

40   The ELIR team noted that currently the University does not routinely survey the experience of its postgraduate taught and collaborative student populations beyond asking them to complete module evaluations. Given the University's ambitions to grow these student cohorts, the ELIR team encourages it to reflect on its approaches to gathering feedback to better understand how students have experienced their entire programme and the wider opportunities available to them.

41   Module evaluation surveys take place in week 10 of each semester across all taught provision. Module leaders are responsible for reviewing the feedback collected through these surveys, identifying areas of good practice or further improvement in relation to course delivery and informing students of any resulting changes.

42   Institutional oversight of student surveys is provided by the University's Teaching and Learning Committee, which is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the results of, and school responses to, both the NSS and module evaluations. The Senior Management Team (SMT) and the University Senate receive an annual report highlighting key themes emerging from the NSS, which assists the University in prioritising enhancements in response to this survey feedback. Analysis of programme-level student survey data is undertaken as part of the University's approach to annual programme monitoring (paragraph 178).

43   In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University began to utilise short Pulse Surveys as a means of quickly identifying key concerns among the student population in relation to its pandemic response. There is evidence to suggest that the findings from these Pulse Surveys played a critical role in influencing how the University adapted its response - for example, arranging additional time for student-to-student discussions to strengthen the sense of student community online. Students who met with the ELIR team had only limited awareness of the Pulse Surveys or how they had been used during the recent pandemic. Noting the insight these surveys had provided the University in helping refine its response to COVID-19, the ELIR team view the introduction of Pulse Surveys as a positive development and would encourage the institution to consider how student awareness of these surveys, and the actions resulting from them, could be further enhanced.

44   Across all the University's mechanisms for gathering student feedback, there is evidence of a commitment from staff to ensure students are subsequently informed of how their feedback has been used to influence change. For example, the University requires Module Leaders to ensure students are advised of how feedback provided in module evaluations will be used to enhance delivery in future years.

45   The ELIR team noted the extent to which students across all constituencies indicated that they were routinely kept informed of the actions stemming from their feedback and could provide examples of how this worked in practice.

2.2   Recognising and responding to equality and diversity in the student population

46   Overall, the University has an effective approach to recognising and responding to equality and diversity among its students, and has a successful long-standing ambition to widening access to study. The University has appropriate mechanisms in place to support it to proactively monitor the changing characteristics of its student population and the ELIR team saw evidence that it takes appropriate steps to ensure it can continue to deliver an inclusive and accessible learning community for all.

Equality and diversity

47   The University embeds its priorities with respect to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across its core operational strategies with performance against these priorities reported holistically within the institution's biennial equality and diversity mainstreaming report. While institutional responsibility for equality and diversity sits formally with the Principal and Senior Management Team, there is a strong commitment across the University to ensuring this work is progressed in partnership with both staff and student involvement.

48   This partnership approach is largely achieved through the University's 'Lead Voices' Programme, which enables staff and student volunteers to act as advocates for individuals or groups with particular protected characteristics. The University provides introductory training and ongoing support for those individuals taking on the 'Lead Voice' role, with regular opportunities also available for 'Lead Voices' to work collectively on shared issues. The ELIR team noted that, following the Programme's launch in 2016-17, its achievements have included influencing several changes across the University including the development of an annual Diversity Week and the introduction of a new Pregnancy and Maternity Policy for staff and protocol for students.

49   The University recognises that while staff engagement with the 'Lead Voices' Programme has been strong, more work is required to increase student engagement with, and recruitment to, the 'Lead Voice' role. This requirement was also confirmed during the Review Visit, with students who met the ELIR team demonstrating little awareness of the 'Lead Voices' programme, or of the contribution any resulting changes have made towards creating a more inclusive university community. The ELIR team understands that work was being progressed with the Students' Association, to enhance recruitment including raising awareness of the Student Lead Voice roles among the wider student population. The ELIR team view these plans positively and would also encourage the University to consider how it can develop a systematic approach to evaluating the programme's longer-term impact.

50   The ELIR team commends the University for its reflective approach to proactively supporting and embedding equality and diversity in its enhancement activities. This is evidenced by a wide range of initiatives and developments to support equality, diversity and inclusion, including the University's 'Lead Voices' initiative (paragraph 48 and 49) and its inclusive employability support for students with autism (paragraphs 53), which demonstrates an ongoing commitment to building an inclusive and accessible learning community and environment for all.

Monitoring and responding to diversity in the student population

51   The University is able to monitor and identify changes in its student population and there is evidence to suggest that where significant trends are observed, it takes appropriate steps to ensure it can continue delivering an inclusive and quality student learning experience for all. For example, having witnessed a 56% increase in the number of students declaring a disability between the 2015-16 and 2020-21 academic years, with a notable increase in declared mental health conditions, the University undertook a review of its

Student Mental Health Policy and has since invested in further expanding the capacity and availability of counselling support available to students throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

52   The University has engaged with and achieved several independent charter mark processes including the Race Equality Charter, Athena SWAN and Scotland's Mental Health (SAMH) Charter for Physical Activity and Sport, in order to assure itself of the effectiveness of its support, as well as utilising these processes as reflective opportunities to learn and enhance its approach to EDI. Recent work on its renewal application for the Race Equality Charter has also been used to support understanding of key issues with retention (paragraphs 68-73).

53   The University also undertakes to adapt the delivery of its core services to better meet the individual needs of particular students and communities. Specific examples include launching a tailored employability programme in August 2020 for students with autism, to better support students in transitioning from university into graduate employment (paragraph 53) and the production of a series of guides to assist disabled people and their carers in assessing the accessibility of key campus spaces. The University noted in its RA that these guides afford these individuals 'greater independence and agency when planning visits to the campus'. The ELIR team also learned that work had been undertaken to use functionality available as part of the University's virtual learning environment (VLE) to support staff in ensuring the accessibility of their online learning content.

54   The ELIR team viewed these developments as positive examples, illustrative of the University's approach to ensuring an accessible and inclusive learning environment for all its students. The ELIR team did note, however, that the impact of these enhancements in improving the student experience is not routinely and systematically evaluated by the University. The ELIR team would encourage it to reflect on the benefits to be realised from developing an evaluation approach which supports it to both quantify and also communicate the impact of these service enhancements.

Widening access

55   Widening access to, and participation in, higher education has been a long-term strategic ambition of the University. This ongoing commitment is reiterated and strengthened in the new Strategic Plan 2020-25, which commits the University to further expand upon its performance in widening access, by 'offering transformational educational opportunities to those who have the ability to benefit from Abertay's approach to education'. Widening access was a contextual theme for this ELIR (paragraph 20). The RA confirms that the University anticipates this ambition will be achieved by further expanding the number and variety of routes through which students can obtain an Abertay degree.

56   The ELIR team is able to confirm that significant support is provided by the University to students joining from widening access backgrounds, including a dedicated Widening Access and College Recruitment Officer who is responsible for leading engagement with external community learning teams and working with prospective students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The ELIR team also learned about work undertaken with specialist partners to support prospective students from specific backgrounds in considering the value of undertaking university study. For example, a partnership with a local charity provided specific mentorship, induction-support, and scholarships for care-experienced students. Students who met with the ELIR team were clearly very familiar with the University's support for widening access, with a number commenting that the extent of its engagement with the local community had been a defining factor in their opting to study there (paragraph 113).

57   The University has employed a Contextual Admissions Policy since 2014, under which the institution can lower the entry requirements for a particular course where the

applicant meets one or more set criteria that are indicative of prior educational disadvantage. The ELIR team learned that since the policy's introduction, an increasing percentage of the University's undergraduate intake has been eligible for a contextual offer (2020-21: 19%; 2016-17: 16%) and around 30% of the eligible intake has required an offer to be made under this policy each year.

58   In the 2020-21 academic year, 16.2% of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants to the University were recruited from the 20% most deprived (SIMD20) postcodes. This figure meets the cross-sector target of 16%, as set out by the Commission on Widening Access, but falls short of the target the University set in their Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council. Staff discussed with the ELIR team during the review, that the broader definition of deprivation and disadvantage, adopted within the University's Contextual Admissions Policy, had enabled it to identify individuals experiencing prior educational disadvantage more widely, irrespective of postcode. The ELIR team learned that through evaluation of recruitment data, the University intends to make further refinements to its Contextual Admissions Policy in the coming academic year that would allow it to leverage planned enhancements to Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) data to identify students eligible for a contextualised offer in a more granular way.

59   The RA confirms that currently, 30% of entrants progress with advanced entry into programmes of study with the University through a formal articulation path. Formal partnership agreements are in place with both Dundee and Angus College and Fife College that enable any student who secures a pass in select Higher National Diploma (HND) courses to be automatically accepted for further study. At present, 60% of articulating students progress into Abertay from these partners. A specific induction programme, known as the Abertay College Transition (ACT) programme is offered by the University to support articulating students from these partners to make the transition successfully from college to university study. Feedback from the very small numbers of students with direct experience of this programme was broadly positive, with the ELIR team believing there would be benefits to the University in working with its two main college partners to ensure information on the ACT programme is more widely communicated to students.

60   The ELIR team was also able to confirm that appropriate arrangements are in place to support students from widening access backgrounds beyond their initial induction. For example, the University provides tailored assistance to estranged students, which enables students within this group to access a bursary, peer-based mentoring, and accommodation should a student find themselves homeless or unable to secure external accommodation. The University has also recently reviewed its 'Students with Caring Responsibilities' protocol to provide greater clarity to students on the advice, guidance and support available during their studies, using the staff and student 'Lead Voices' programme to deliver this (paragraphs 48 and 49).

2.3   Supporting students in their learning at each stage of the learner journey

61   The University has an effective and student-centred approach to supporting students, with a comprehensive range of services and activities available to them throughout their studies.

Support for student transitions and induction

62   All students are supported in their transition to the University with access to Abertay's general induction programme, which provides information on the various student-facing services and systems offered. Students who articulate from the University's college partners also have the option of enrolling on the online Abertay College Transition

(ACT) Programme', which provides a bespoke induction offering for students commencing their study with advanced entry (paragraph 59). Students spoke positively about their induction experience at the University, particularly its welcoming approach and focus on encouraging student feedback from the very start of their studies. Students also valued the opportunity that the induction process had provided to find out more about key university services, such as the Library and the VLE.

63   Staff discussed with the ELIR team, work that is currently being progressed as part of the programme of activities it is undertaking linked to the QAA 'Resilient Learning Communities' Enhancement Theme to establish an enhanced induction programme for students, which will make use of micro-credentials. This programme will include a compulsory online module 'Being Successful at Abertay' which will complement existing induction arrangements and further assist students in preparing to make the transition to university study. The ELIR team learned that this new approach would take a longitudinal view of induction, utilising diagnostic testing at an early stage in the process to recommend personalised development opportunities that were more aligned with a student's individual development needs. At the time of the ELIR, the phased introduction of the micro-credentials programme had just started. Students participating in the 'Being Successful at Abertay' module within the programme spoke positively about their experience, noting that the module had helped them to have a better understanding of what was expected academically, as well as to identify their personal ambitions for university study.

Student support

64   Students are able to access a wide and comprehensive range of support services through the University's Support Enquiry Zone (SEZ) which is the 'student-facing' part of its centralised support services, and is led by the Student and Academic Services Directorate. Students spoke very highly of the quality of support available through the SEZ, noting that staff here were often their first point of contact and were effective in supporting them to resolve challenges when needed.

65   In response to a significant increase in demand for their counselling and mental health services, the University has taken steps to increase both the capacity and availability of these services to students, investing in a qualified mental health nurse and an externally sourced out-of-hours helpline for students (paragraph 51).

66   Students noted that while the support services offered through SEZ were of a high quality, there was variability in the awareness of academic staff of the services offered. Since the last ELIR, the University has taken steps to establish greater consistency in the advice and signposting provided to students by academic staff, primarily through the introduction of the School Academic Advisor (SAA). The SAA is a part-time (0.5 FTE) academic post, who is a member of each school's teaching team, with the post holder responsible for providing support to the student community, providing pastoral support for students, and acting as a key link between academic and programme staff and the University's centralised support services. In discussion with current SAA role holders, the ELIR team learned that as part of the University's response to tackling its issues with retention, it had recently established a Student Success Officer role (SSO), with these role holders specifically identifying and supporting students at risk of withdrawing (paragraphs 68-73).

67   In the RA, the University views the SAA role as a valuable addition within the wider support environment, ensuring students are provided with consistent advice about centralised student support services. However, students indicated to the ELIR team that the role of the SAA was often unclear to them. While accepting that the establishment of the SAA role was recent, staff with responsibility for quality and enhancement activities

commented positively on the collaborative relationships that are building between the SAA, TQL and SSO roles. The ELIR team view the creation of the SAA role as a positive addition to the University's student support environment and plans to tackle retention and encourage it to consider how the responsibilities of, and support provided by, these role holders can be clarified and better communicated to students.

Student retention

68   The University fully and openly discussed with the ELIR team that it continues to recognise and experience a considerable challenge in relation to student retention. The most recent figures (2019-20) show that 86.1% of all new entrants returned to study in Year 2, which represents a material decrease from the 88.1% recorded in the 2016-17 academic year. The University's performance within the UK-wide Performance Indicators (UKPIs) confirms its retention rate to be significantly below the benchmark. Notably, retention rates across specific demographics, such as SIMD20, male, mature, and disabled students, are also below the University's average and have been demonstrating a negative trajectory over the past four reporting years.

69   The University primarily uses data from a learning analytics (LA) tool (known as the Study Goals app) to identify where students have disengaged and are at risk of non-continuation. Introduced in 2018-19, this tool draws on student attendance data, engagement with the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and assessment profiles to provide a consolidated picture of a student's overall engagement with their studies. This information is used to target support for students deemed to have disengaged with their studies and is used effectively as a proactive trigger for interventions from both the SSO and SAA (paragraphs 66-67 and 70). However, in discussions with students and reviewing information within the Advanced Information Set (AIS), the ELIR team learned of concerns over the accuracy of the attendance monitoring data in the LA tool. Given that improving student retention is a priority for the University, the ELIR team believes it would be beneficial to evaluate the effectiveness of this tool in monitoring attendance and to consider how it can be enhanced to further support the identification of students at risk of disengaging from their studies.

70   The ELIR team and staff discussed the newly-created SSO role, which has been established this session to improve the University's approaches to identifying students at risk of withdrawing from their studies. The SSOs are drawing upon and analysing the LA data to identify students at risk of withdrawing and are offering targeted interventions to support students to continue with their studies. While this approach has only recently been introduced, initial signs are positive with the ELIR team hearing that the SSOs were already achieving positive results and were able to anecdotally evidence the early impact of their role on student retention. The SAAs who met the ELIR team confirmed that they are already working closely with the new SSOs and colleagues in Student Services to appropriately support students.

71   The ELIR team understands that the diagnostic testing of new students, introduced from the start of session 2021-22, which is being implemented as part of the new micro-credentials-based induction programme (paragraphs 63 and 76), will support the provision of enhanced analytics for programme leaders, including cohort strength profiles which consider cohort outcomes and will be used, where necessary, to support further study skills interventions. The recent introduction of the Student Support Officer role, along with the targeted data-driven approach to identifying and supporting students at risk of withdrawal, was viewed as a positive development by the ELIR team. Notwithstanding the weaknesses in the data accuracy (paragraph 69), the ELIR team view the University's approach to using learner analytics information to identify and connect with students who are not engaging with their studies as a timely development. The use of this information,

combined with the recent introduction of the Student Support Officer role, is viewed positively by the ELIR team as an opportunity to developing greater institutional understanding of the reasons behind student withdrawals.

72   During the Review Visit, the ELIR team learned that a summative analysis of retention trends that had been considered by the University's Court in November 2021, identified specific challenges in relation to assessment, admissions, students' sense of belonging and the reporting of student numbers to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The ELIR team heard that further analysis would be undertaken on these themes as a priority, with a view to collating a formal plan to improve retention that would be led by the Deputy Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The ELIR team noted that routine reporting of progress against this plan would be shared with both the University Court and Senate.

73   The ELIR team recommends that the University builds on its emerging plans aimed at improving student retention, by developing an evidence-based institutional approach to identify, implement and regularly evaluate the impact and effectiveness of interventions on its retention performance.

Building communities and a sense of belonging

74   Alongside its targeted interventions for at-risk students (paragraph 70), the University is committed to improving student retention through creating a strong sense of belonging and community among its students. It currently offers a range of approaches to support this ambition. For example, Student and Academic Services operate a peer-based mentoring programme that allocates all incoming first-year students a peer mentor. Formal training is provided by the University to prepare mentors, who are 'experienced' students, to undertake this role. The RA states that student engagement with this scheme among first-year entrants currently sits at around 10%.

75   The University Peer Mentoring scheme is complemented by several peer-assisted learning schemes run at a divisional level which provide opportunities for student skills development and socialisation. Examples include a peer-assisted learning programme that enables Psychology and Counselling students to refine their skills and build mentor and mentee relationships between year cohorts, and a programme within the Division of Law which actively involves the University's LLB graduates in mentoring students studying for their Law Diplomas, enabling students to access a large network of current and future professionals within their discipline.

76   Students can also access a wide range of student-led societies that serve a broad spectrum of student interests and hobbies, allowing students to engage with the wider student community, develop transferable skills and build networks with local employers. As part of the University's new micro-credentials' initiative the Students' Association have designed and delivered a 'Welcome to the CommuniTay' module which gives new students a greater understanding of the society and sports activities on offer. The ELIR team understands that the University intends to evaluate the impact of this new module, as part of the wider monitoring of the micro-credentials programme (paragraph 63).

77   In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University was effective in developing its VLE and existing online communication platform to create dedicated spaces at programme and 'stage-level' which support the establishment of either staff and student, or student-only communities allowing staff and students to interact. In 2020, to support greater online socialisation, 50 student mentors were recruited by the University to act as 'online community volunteers'. The ELIR team learned that, at the time of this review, the University is evaluating the impact of this initiative.

78   A recommendation from the 2016 ELIR asked the University to review its approach to communicating with students, particularly in relation to informing them of changes to institutional policy and regulations. The ELIR team view the University's response positively, learning that it has developed and launched a new 'MyAbertay' intranet portal that enables the University to effectively communicate important announcements and changes to students. The current COVID-19 pandemic has presented an increased and ongoing need for clear and consistent communication to students. Students confirmed to the ELIR team, that the University's approach to communication throughout the pandemic has been broadly positive, with its regular student newsletters and the MyAbertay app viewed as most beneficial.

Assessment and feedback

79   The University's Principles of Assessment, its Assessment Policy and Internal Moderation Guidance promote the use of a consistent approach to assessment setting, marking and providing student feedback (paragraph 166). The University has continued to utilise its online approach to support management of assessment for coursework submission, examinations and providing students with marks and feedback. In response to COVID-19, the University introduced a range of measures to ensure fair assessment (paragraph 167) which students viewed favourably.

80   The University is committed to continuing to work on enhancing the quality and consistency of assessment feedback to its students. Through information from both its annual monitoring and Institution-Led Quality Review processes it is fully aware of concerns raised by students around the consistency in the quality of the feedback they receive on their assessments. This position was also confirmed by students who met the ELIR team. In conversations with staff, the ELIR team learned the matter is currently being discussed across the institution and a planned response was in the initial phases of development at the time of this review. The University believes this response will provide greater consistency in student feedback, achieved through the sharing of good practice and increased use of standardised feedback documentation and templates. The ELIR team recommend that the University should continue to work with staff and students (across all modes of study), to address the improvements that students would like to see around consistency in the quality of the assessment feedback they receive, ensuring the impact of changes in feedback practice can be appropriately evaluated

Graduate employability and outcomes

81   The University's participation in the most recent Graduate Outcomes Survey identified that 59% of its graduates from the 2017-18 academic year were employed in graduate-level occupations 15 months after completing their studies. The University recognises that this figure is significantly below the Scottish sector average of 71% for modern universities. It has identified this as a key area for strategic development within its Employability Strategy, which sets out the University's intention to increase the proportion of graduates within graduate-level occupations to 75% by 2025. The ELIR team encourage the University to reflect upon and evaluate the effectiveness of their current approach which, in the view of the team, indicates a disconnect between the extensive suite of employability activity on offer to students and the impact of this activity in driving progress towards the desired graduate outcome metrics.

Graduate attributes

82   To achieve its targets for graduate-level employment, the University intends to fully embed its 'Abertay Attributes' within the curriculum and across the range of extra and co-curricular activities offered to ensure all students are 'provided with equal access to employability support and development'. The University reviewed its 'Abertay Attributes' in

2019-20, affirming the continued relevance of the 'Intellectual', 'Personal', 'Professional' and 'Active Citizen' dimensions while adding a further 'Digital' dimension to better align with the focus of the University's Strategic Plan (paragraphs 3-5).

83   Currently, the University's quality assurance processes, including documentation supporting programme and module design, require staff to demonstrate how course delivery will support students in developing competency across each of the attributes. Staff spoke positively about embedding the 'Abertay Attributes' within the curriculum, viewing this as helpful in module and programme development and supporting students to identify key skills and capability for future employment.

84   Students who met with the ELIR team demonstrated a more limited understanding of the purpose and focus of the University's current 'Abertay Attributes'. However, through the examples they shared with the ELIR team, they effectively demonstrated that there is a strong alignment between the skills developed completing course assessments and the Abertay Attributes. The University recognises that more work is needed to increase student understanding and awareness of the attributes. To support this an AbLE Academy Student Consultant was engaged to ensure the language used to describe the attributes was more accessible to students (paragraphs 36 and 129). The ELIR team also learned that the University intends to provide the opportunity for students to self-assess their development against the 'Abertay Attributes' as part of its new longitudinal micro-credentials induction programme (paragraph 63).

Work-related learning and work experience

85   The ELIR team heard about the extensive range of employability-focused activity currently delivered through the curriculum, including a range of live projects with industry partners. The ELIR team found there to be a good range of co-curricular based activity that enables students to enhance their transferable skills, including the Ethical Hacking Society's guest lecture series and the student-run 'Securi-Tay' Conference. The University also recognises student participation in extracurricular activities through the awarding of a series of skills and community-based digital badges that are added to a student's Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR).

86   The University recognises the value of formal work experience in supporting the professional and personal development of its students, with an ambition to introduce a formal element of work-based, work-related or enterprise learning across all its programmes by 2022-23. Students stated that while these opportunities were valuable, currently access to them was inconsistent, with insufficient opportunities to access formal placements. Academic staff indicated to the ELIR team that support was provided by the Careers and Partnerships Offices to help them to identify suitable placement providers. However, staff recognised that current practice around placement organisation and management could be inconsistent. Given the University's ambition, the ELIR team encourages it to reflect on the current staff resource available to support this activity and continue to work to ensure that the organisation and management of formal placements provides parity of experience for all students.

87   The ELIR team noted significant evidence of wide-ranging and strong partnership working between the University, employers and the local community. Examples include the delivery of professional practice projects within the School of Design and Informatics and 'Practice-based Innovation' modules within the School of Business, Law and Social Science. In both cases, students are given the opportunity to plan, produce and present an interactive media project to an external client, supporting the application of their subject knowledge and the development of professional consultancy skills. Students spoke extremely positively about the opportunities available to them within their programmes to engage with their

professions and highly valued the skills and experience this brought to their personal and professional development. Staff spoke positively about the strength of partnership working with industry, viewing it as being key to curriculum development, extending and embedding learning from placement activities in the curriculum, and informing authentic approaches to assessment.

88   The University also provides support for students who may wish to explore starting their own business. The University's Bell Street Ventures (BSV) provides dedicated support to students and graduates at all levels to develop their business ideas, including producing business plans, financial forecasting, and working through legal issues and funding options. The ELIR team learned that a number of student ventures have been successfully launched with the support of BSV and that these enterprises are currently having a positive impact across several sectors, including Healthcare, Design and the Voluntary Sector.

89   The ELIR team commends the University's commitment to preparing students for employment, which has resulted in well-established links with employers, positive impacts on curriculum development and systematically integrates work-based and work-related learning across programmes. The use and extent of work-related opportunities across the curriculum are recognised and strongly valued by students.

2.4   Postgraduate taught and research student experience

90   The University has an effective approach to managing and enhancing the postgraduate student experience which is consistent with sector expectations. At the time of the ELIR, the University had around 343 postgraduate taught and 118 postgraduate research students, setting out a strategic ambition to grow postgraduate taught numbers as part of its Learning Enhancement Strategy 2020-25 (paragraphs 120-122).

Postgraduate taught students

91   Oversight of the postgraduate taught (PGT) student experience is managed by each of the academic schools, with institutional oversight of postgraduate programmes and the student experience monitored through its quality assurance processes, such as annual monitoring and ILR.

92   Student support, representation and feedback mechanisms mirror those of undergraduate students (paragraphs 64-67, 27-33 and 39-45), with PGT students benefitting from the additional support offered by the Graduate School (paragraphs 94-99). Students are clear as to who their student representatives are, how their feedback is gathered and used to enhance their experience, and were able to provide a number of examples of how their feedback had brought about change. PGT students viewed module evaluation surveys, as being a particularly effective means of capturing and responding to their feedback.

93   While PGT students recognise they had opportunities to engage with the Graduate School through events and access to both space and facilities, they commented that they do not feel a strong sense of belonging and connection with the wider university postgraduate and research community. Staff acknowledged this change in student perception, with many believing this is an unfortunate consequence of the ongoing pandemic and a move to online delivery and remote access for these students. The ELIR team heard that plans were under development at the time of the review to specifically address these concerns. The ELIR team would encourage the University to progress with this work in order to ensure that, regardless of location of study, all PGT students have appropriate opportunities to engage in the activities offered by the Graduate School and feel part of the wider university research community.

Postgraduate research students

94   The Graduate School plays a key role in the development and support for postgraduate research (PGR) students. The School is physically located within the university campus in Dundee, offering dedicated flexible study and social spaces to the research community, including open plan desks, computer facilities equipped with specialist software, meeting spaces, seminar rooms, and social spaces. All postgraduate students (research and taught) have access to hot-desk study space, with research students able to request a permanent space as determined by their study needs.

95   Since the 2016 ELIR, there has been continued investment in staffing and resources of the Graduate School, enhancing support for research design, statistics and grant writing, as well as investing in key software to support tracking of personal and professional development for PGR students. PGR students spoke enthusiastically about their experiences of the Graduate School, particularly valuing the benefits that come from co-locating students which they view as supporting a meaningful research community and fostering opportunities for peer learning and sharing. The ELIR team noted this feedback is consistent with information provided by the University in the AIS.

96   Oversight of the PGR student experience is managed by Graduate School staff. Monitoring of PGR student progress is undertaken through, at least, monthly supervisory meetings with outcomes, actions and development needs recorded within a digital portfolio for each student. Decisions on progression are made through an Annual Progress Review process. As part of this process, students are required to complete an annual progress report and presentation to a Review Panel which makes recommendations on progression. There is also a Personal Development Planning process which supports PGR students to consider their professional development needs, their training needs to support progression, and to develop wider research and employability skills for their future career. PGR students articulated that they were broadly happy with the supervision and progress review activities offered by the Graduate School, with this position consistent with the outcomes of the University's Institution-led Review considering the PGR student experience.

97   PGR students are represented by school-based Research Degree Representatives who are members of the University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (paragraph 159). Students can also provide feedback on their experience through the annual Research Student Survey and through the Graduate School Forum which meets at least once per term. PGR students confirmed there were sufficient opportunities to provide feedback on their learning experience and that their feedback was valued and responded to by staff at the University.

98   Following the introduction of national lockdown restrictions in spring 2020, the University introduced a 'Policy for supporting PGR students during COVID-19' to ensure appropriate support for PGRs who had been significantly impacted by the pandemic. The policy introduced a range of measures including extensions and suspension of studies, financial support and hardship, mitigating circumstances, access to facilities and development opportunities, annual monitoring and completion. Students welcomed the support they had experienced during lockdown, including the increased supervision available and the responsive approach from the University to support on-campus access for students struggling to work and undertake their research at home.

99   The Graduate School offers a wide range and comprehensive suite of development opportunities through its annual Research Development Programme which includes regular seminars, workshops, retreats, training courses and offers a bespoke Leadership in Higher Education Programme delivered by Advance HE. PGR students present annually at the Graduate School Conference, sharing outcomes from their research with peers, supervisors

and the wider university community. Students view this conference as an important opportunity to hear about the research work of others, make connections to support peer learning and sharing of experiences and expertise.

100   PGR students spoke positively about the University's proactive approach to encouraging them to seek and actively engage with both external and internal continuing professional development opportunities. Both staff and PGR students valued the wide range of support and training available to them, the networks fostered through the monthly student and staff research seminar series, and funding opportunities to support engagement at external conferences and training.

101   The University operates a robust policy and appropriate support for postgraduate students who teach. All postgraduate research (PGR) students who wish to teach are required by the University to complete its mandatory 'Preparing to Teach' programme, delivered by the AbLE Academy (paragraphs 129 and 130). This programme is currently offered twice per year, with the University recognising that the timing of PGR student enrolments and the start dates of this programme can be an issue for some students. Changes to the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) mean PGR students will no longer be able to access this postgraduate certificate (paragraph 148). The ELIR team understands that the AbLE Academy plans to develop an alternative programme for these students, which will be submitted for accreditation with Advance HE, allowing future students to gain recognition as an Associate Fellow.

102   Students confirmed that they are supported to undertake teaching as part of their PGR experience and had, in the past, valued the opportunity to engage with the PGCAP programme. Some PGR students confirmed that they were not always clear about how teaching opportunities are advertised to students, believing there would be benefits to both the University and PGR students if the University developed a protocol for recruitment to teaching opportunities.

103   A number of PGR students who met the ELIR team also had the opportunity to become Student AbLE Consultants, valuing the opportunities this role provides to contribute to enhancement and learning and teaching research projects (paragraphs 36, 38, 84, 112 and 129).

2.5   Learning environment

104   The University has effective arrangements in place for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the learning environment. Since the 2016 ELIR, the University has continued to review its approach to learning and teaching, developing what it describes as a 'sticky campus' in which staff and students have access to, and use of, campus-based facilities and digital technologies, with a focus on informal learning and technology-enhanced spaces.

105   The University has also made significant investments in both its physical campus, as well as its digital infrastructure to support learning and teaching. Key investments have included a major refurbishment of the library which created diverse spaces to support independent, social and group study; the creation of a Collaborative Learning Suite - a technology-enriched learning environment designed to support active and collaborative learning; and a number of school-based facilities including new laboratories and technology enhanced learning spaces.

106   The University has set out in its Learning Enhancement Strategy (paragraphs 120-122) and Digital Strategy (paragraph 125) - a commitment to 'using digital technologies to provide accessible, inclusive, engaging and inspirational teaching and learning'. Achieving this means the University has committed to a significant financial investment over the next

five years to deliver digital transformation across all areas of its activities. Implementation of the University's Digital Strategy is being coordinated by the recently-appointed Head of Transformation who has led a range of consultation activities with staff and students to inform the implementation plan and a range of strategic projects to enhance systems, infrastructure and process (paragraph 125). The ELIR team learned that key priorities within the digital transformation project include enhancing data access and data-driven decision-making, supporting systems integration, and continued development of staff digital skills and competencies. Monitoring, review and evaluation of the work will be progressed by a Programme Board in early spring 2022 with key targets and outcomes to be set, and will be reported to the Senior Management Team.

107   A review of the University's virtual learning environment (VLE), completed in 2018, resulted in the procurement of a new VLE. Staff and students were actively consulted as part of the procurement process, with staff and the Technology Enhanced Learning Support (TELS) team working collaboratively on the transition of teaching materials on to the new VLE. In response to student feedback during the procurement phase, the consistent use of a standard template for teaching content has helped with student engagement. The new VLE received positive feedback from staff and students. The ELIR team also heard from staff that the VLE has improved consistency of use and is supporting the University to capture learning analytics data linked to student retention, helping to identify students at risk of disengaging from their studies (paragraph 69).

108   The new VLE is also viewed by the University as being particularly effective in supporting the rapid pivot to online and blended learning approaches that was required as part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In meetings with the ELIR team students fed back positively regarding the University's use of technology during the pandemic, particularly valuing the use of lecture capture to support their studies. Students stated that they would welcome the long-term adoption of lecture capture to support the delivery of curriculum content. Staff also recognised the advantages of lecture capture as an effective tool for supporting online and remote teaching. The ELIR team was informed during the review that, in response to student feedback, the University was working on procuring a new content capture system which would better integrate with the VLE.

109   In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid shift to online learning, the TELS team and the AbLE Academy produced a series of written guidance, templates and online resources and offered training to staff in the use of key technologies. Workshops were also developed, delivered and tailored to meet the needs of academic staff in each of the divisions. Further support was also provided by the TELS team for students in session 2020-21 through the introduction of the 'Learning how to learn online' module. Work has continued into 2021-22 to support staff and students to move to blended learning, including developing a series of blended learning principles, a student guide to blended learning produced in collaboration with the Students' Association, and support materials available through the VLE for staff and students.

110   Students confirmed that, during the pandemic (which remained ongoing during this ELIR), they had been supported to engage effectively with online learning and teaching, and affirmed the work of the TELS team and the AbLE Academy. Students also spoke positively about being able to remotely access learning resources and materials through the library.

2.6   Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience

111   The University has an effective approach to enhancing the student learning experience. This is evidenced in a range of ways, including arrangements to support the engagement and representation of students and its approaches to routinely gathering,

analysing and responding to student feedback, which allow students to be clear that their feedback is valued and acted upon. Making greater use of learning analytic information and the recent introduction of the Student Support Officer role is a positive development towards a better institutional understanding of the reasons behind student withdrawals.

112   The University is commended for establishing a strong culture of partnership working with its student body which ensures effective student representation and engagement in the range of institutional enhancement projects currently underway. The introduction of the student AbLE consultant role in particular has further embedded student partnership into enhancement activity.

113   The University has a successful long-term and ongoing ambition to widening access to study. The University has appropriate mechanisms in place to support it to proactively monitor the changing characteristics of its student population. The University is commended for its reflective approach to proactively support and embed equality and diversity in its enhancement activities. This is evidenced by a wide range of initiatives and developments to support equality, diversity and inclusion, including the University's 'Lead Voices' initiative and its inclusive employability support for students with autism, which demonstrates an ongoing commitment to building an inclusive and accessible learning community and environment for all.

114   The University has an effective and student-centred approach to supporting students at each stage of their learner journey, providing a comprehensive range of services and activities to support students during their learning experience. The University's commitment to preparing students for employment - which has resulted in well-established links with employers, positive impacts on curriculum development, and systematically integrates work-based and work-related learning across programmes - is commended. The use and extent of work-related opportunities across the curriculum are recognised and strongly valued by students.

115   The University has effective arrangements in place to manage and enhance the postgraduate student experience. All postgraduate students receive support from the University's Graduate School which provides access to campus-based facilities and resources, as well as offering a wide range of development activities and events to support the research community. Both academic staff and postgraduate research students value the role of the Graduate School in fostering a research community and supporting research development, however, given feedback from its postgraduate taught students, the ELIR team encourages the University to work to ensure that, regardless of location of study, this student group has appropriate opportunities to engage in the activities offered by the Graduate School and feel part of the wider university research community.

116   The University has effective arrangements in place for managing and enhancing the quality of the learning environment, evidenced by the significant investments in both its physical campus, as well as its digital infrastructure to support learning and teaching since the last ELIR. The University has made effective use of its new VLE, coupled with significant development of staff skills training and pedagogical approaches to support staff and students with the transition to a more blended approach to the delivery of teaching and learning.

117   The University is asked to build on its emerging plans aimed at improving student retention, by developing an evidence-based institutional approach to identify, implement and regularly evaluate the impact and effectiveness of interventions on its retention performance.

118   In response to student feedback and information contained within its quality assurance processes, the University is asked to continue to work with staff and students (across all modes of study), to address the improvements that students would like to see

around consistency in the quality of the assessment feedback they receive, ensuring the impact of changes in feedback practice can be appropriately evaluated.

3 Strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching

3.1 Strategic approach to enhancement

119   Overall, the University employs an effective approach to enhancing learning and teaching and the wider student experience managed through its Learning Enhancement Strategy, governance and committee structures, and supported by the schools and the Abertay Learning Enhancement Academy (AbLE). This is evidenced by the range of opportunities provided to staff to enhance their pedagogic practices and to share best practice both centrally and within their schools. The ELIR team heard that staff are well-supported and have a clear understanding of the range of support available to them.

Development and implementation of strategy

120   The Learning Enhancement Strategy (LES) (2020-25) is one of four core strategies underpinning the University Strategic Plan (paragraphs 3-5) and was produced following a broad range of consultation events held in 2019 involving senior management, the academic schools, professional services staff and students. Staff and students also had appropriate opportunities to comment on the LES through university committees and through Students' Association structures. Staff and students confirmed to the ELIR team that they had been given a number of opportunities to contribute to the development of the LES, with staff explaining how they had done so, by participating in workshops, focus groups, leadership forums and divisional meetings.

121   The Deputy Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor has responsibility for the delivery of the LES, which incorporates five key strategic priority areas: Teaching Excellence; The Student Journey; Digital Education (which is also covered within the University's Digital Strategy); Academic Partnerships; and Pedagogic Research. Three of these five strategic priorities - Digital Education, Partnerships and The Student Journey - are led by a School Head of Teaching, Quality and Learning Enhancement (TQL) (paragraphs 131 and 132). The remaining two priorities - Teaching Excellence and Pedagogic Research - are led by AbLE's Quality Enhancement Manager and the Dean of SAS, respectively.

122   The ELIR team notes that the ambitions set out in the LES include pedagogic research as a priority area and that pedagogic research also features in the Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy, with 'Effective Learning and Pedagogy' being one of six areas of pooled excellence that cut across organisational structures to address key research challenges. At the time of this ELIR, approximately 25% of staff are undertaking pedagogic research. The ELIR team understands that the University has recently established a leadership group of academics with expertise in pedagogic research to lead on developing an approach and programme of work to support the University's ambitions to raise the quality of its pedagogic outputs. The ELIR team view this as a positive development in supporting the University to successfully deliver both the Learning Enhancement and Research and Knowledge Exchange strategies.

123   While the LES was approved by TLC and University Senate in January 2020, the ELIR team understands that the 'illustrative indicators of success' for this strategy have continued to be subject to discussion and revised. Senior staff and academic staff confirmed to the ELIR team that the 'indicators of success' for LES are still in development and these are 'intentionally developing over time'.

124   While the ELIR team accept that it is entirely appropriate for the University to revisit the 'success indicators', especially given the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it was clear from meetings with a range of staff, that there is a lack of understanding beyond senior colleagues of the focus or priorities of the LES or how progress is being monitored and evaluated. The ELIR team, therefore, encourage the University to reflect on its current approach to the dissemination, monitoring and evaluation of the LES, believing there are benefits to the University from ensuring greater staff awareness of the strategy and its indicators of success, with more regular reporting on progress at university and school-level committees, supporting it to systematically track progress of the Strategy's implementation (paragraph 157).

125   The Deputy Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor is also responsible for the delivery of the University's Digital Strategy. A recent update to the LES indicates that a number of actions within the Digital Education priority area of this strategy will actually be developed within the University's Digital Strategy. The implementation of the Digital Strategy is being taken forward by the Head of Transformation (paragraph 106).

126   Given the importance that the University currently places on digital learning, reflected as a theme within its strategies, and the investment identified for the digital transformation project (see paragraph 106), the ELIR team believes there would be benefit in the University ensuring that the senior colleagues leading on the delivery of both strategies and the digital transformation project, work closely together, in order to ensure consistency across strategies and allow the University to achieve the maximum impact from this work. The ELIR team also believe there would be benefits to the University in clarifying, for both staff and students, how its digital ambitions will be delivered across both the Learning Enhancement Strategy and the Digital Strategy, confirming which staff roles are responsible for delivery in each identified priority area and ensuring that progress across these work areas is effectively coordinated, monitored and reported upon (paragraph 157).

127   The ELIR team understands that the LES also refers to the expectation that 'subject areas will develop additional subject-specific indicators'. In meetings with staff, the ELIR team learned that KPIs are incorporated into annual operational plans, with Teaching and Learning annual reports also produced at school, division and programme level (paragraph 178). In reading a sample of these reports, the ELIR team's view is that currently the format of these reports does not readily map to the key areas of the LES and, as a result, very few school reports seemed to comment on their contribution to the delivery of the LES.

128   Overall, the ELIR team concluded that the University employs a broadly effective approach to strategic planning in relation to learning and teaching, with a particular strength being the widespread consultation with staff and students during the formulation of the University Strategy and its underpinning strategies, including the LES (2020-25). The ELIR team recommends that the University should undertake work to ensure that among all staff there is a clear understanding and ownership of these strategies, and how they inform institutional priorities and actions. In support of this, the University is asked to enable effective and systematic implementation, supported by appropriate monitoring and evaluation of impact to ensure the achievement of strategic goals.

The Abertay Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy

129   The Abertay Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy, led by the Dean of Teaching and Learning has oversight of the implementation of the Learning Enhancement Strategy (LES) and provides strategic and operational leadership for teaching and learning across the University. AbLE also offers a range of development opportunities for staff, including leading on the delivery of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP), the University's 'Going for Gold' scheme, a seminar series and a biennial conference. AbLE also

supports a number of student consultants who work with staff on the delivery of a range of enhancement projects (paragraph 36).

130   The ELIR team understands that AbLE and TELS work collaboratively through mechanisms such as a digital forum, chaired by the TQL lead for Digital Learning. This collaborative working has resulted in a number of positive developments including the production of a set of principles for blended learning and support materials provided through the VLE (paragraphs 108 and 109). Academic staff commented very favourably about the work undertaken by both AbLE and TELS, confirming that these units work well together. The ELIR team view these structural changes positively and while it is too early to determine the impact, the University is encouraged to evaluate the effectiveness of this change, especially in light of the increased demand for support for online teaching and learning.

School Heads of Teaching Quality and Learning Enhancement (TQLs)

131   The three-school based Heads of Teaching Quality and Learning Enhancement (TQLs) provide a direct link between the AbLE Academy and the academic schools, and have lead responsibility for ensuring colleagues are kept informed of changes to university policies and regulations (paragraph 8). These university-wide roles support the delivery of three of the University's thematic priorities of Digital Education, Partnerships and The Student Journey. The TQLs report to the Dean of Teaching and Learning in AbLE on these thematic priorities and the appropriate Dean of School for their contribution to their academic area.

132   In discussions with the ELIR team, staff viewed their Head of TQL as an important and effective point of contact for advice on regulation within each school and also provided support and information on good practice in assessment. The three Heads of TQL also explained that they work collaboratively, which helps them to identify good practice from across the wider university for dissemination within their schools. While these Head of TQL roles are very new, the ELIR team view their appointments as a very positive development in supporting the dissemination and sharing of practice across the University, encouraging it to ensure progress with plans to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the roles once established.

3.2   Impact of the national Enhancement Themes and related activity

133   The QAA national Enhancement Themes are an important external reference point for the University and make a demonstrable contribution to its policy and practice for enhancing teaching and learning. Engagement with the Enhancement Themes is broadly in line with sector expectations, with the University actively contributing to the Themes since their introduction, including both staff and students contributing to sector events such as the QAA Enhancement Conferences.

134   The University's participation in the current Enhancement Theme ('Resilient Learning Communities') is led by the Dean for Teaching and Learning, supported by the Enhancement Themes Steering Group formed in February 2021. The continued use of a cross-disciplinary institutional team, which draws on the expertise of academic and professional services staff and has appropriate student representation, continues to be the core of Abertay's approach to the internal management of its Theme activities. The Dean for Learning and Teaching reports on progress with the University's Enhancement Theme plans to TLC.

135   In previous years, the budget received for participating in the Enhancement Themes has been augmented by university funding to support pedagogical projects aligned with the Themes, known as the Abertay Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund (ATLEF). The ELIR team understands that, at the time of this review, this funding is currently under

development as part of the replacement for the AbLE Associates scheme. The ENABLE fund will, in future, support projects within the University using its Enhancement Themes' budget.

136   The RA outlines a number of initiatives that have arisen as a result of Theme work. The Student Transitions Theme (2014-17) linked into the University's strong widening participation ethos and saw the institution support five student-led ATLEF projects on a range of topics (paragraph 36). During the final year of this Theme, 10 staff-led projects played an active role in the development of institutional policy and practice - for example, a project considering the accessibility of the University's online teaching and learning environment was considered during the work to procure its new VLE (paragraphs 107-109).

137   The University used the opportunities presented by the 'Evidence for Enhancement' Theme to review its annual monitoring processes and use of data (paragraph 178). Outputs from the Abertay-led 'Intangibles' collaborative cluster project have contributed to the development of the Learning Enhancement Strategy (paragraphs 120-122). In the RA, the University states that the success of the Theme has been 'less about the individual projects and more about helping to support the ethos of evidence-led approaches to enhancement'.

138   In the current Theme ('Resilient Learning Communities'), the University is leading the Personalised Approaches to Resilience and Community (PARC) collaborative cluster, with plans to focus on its retention activities (paragraphs 68-73), and the development of a suite of micro-credentials to support student transitions (paragraphs 63, 71, 76).

139   The University recognises in the RA that more needs to be done to increase the visibility of the Enhancement Themes across the institution, noting the linkage between Theme activity and the origin of outputs and resources is not apparent beyond members of the senior team. The ELIR team also supports the University's position, with the majority of the wider staff body who met the team largely unaware of outcomes, resources or activities that had taken place as part of the University's current or previous Themes work. The ELIR team encourages the University to further develop its plans, through its Enhancement Themes Steering Group, to improve staff awareness and participation in Themes-related projects and consider how this work can more explicitly be linked to supporting the delivery of university strategies and plans.

3.3   Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice

140   The University has an effective and systematic approach for identifying and sharing good practice, using a range of formal and informal mechanisms, which are provided both centrally and locally, with the AbLE Academy (paragraphs 129 and 130) playing an important role in supporting the sharing and dissemination of practice linked to enhancing teaching and learning.

141   The University's biennial Learning and Teaching Conference provides opportunities for staff to share their practice and engage in productive discussions around learning and teaching. These conferences are complemented by smaller thematic seminars run monthly (since 2013) by the AbLE Academy. Staff play an active role in deciding the focus of each seminar, ensuring these sessions reflect current issues and remain relevant to their intended audience. Staff confirmed that they had found engagement with the workshops and seminars delivered by the AbLE Academy and TELS teams to be particularly beneficial during the move to online learning, seeing these as an important opportunity to share best practice and learn new digital skills with colleagues. This activity has also resulted in the production of a range of high-quality online resources that have helped staff feel more confident in their approach to online delivery (paragraph 109).

142   There are also a number of opportunities for staff to present their pedagogic practice and research, including as part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) (paragraph 148) where colleagues are expected to present their work to the wider academic community either by contributing to one of the University's internal seminars/workshops or by participation in QAA's Enhancement Conferences. Schools and divisions also hold meetings to discuss good practice linked to learning and teaching with school annual away days, having this as a core item within their broader agendas. Staff who met the ELIR team spoke positively about the range of development activities available to them.

143   The identification and sharing of good practice is also embedded within the University's committee structures and key quality assurance processes including programme approval, Institution-led Review (ILR) and annual monitoring (paragraphs 169-173 and 174-178). Although a standard template is used for annual reports, the ELIR team's view, based on the sample provided, is that there is variability across the schools, divisions and professional services on the reporting of good practice. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) also plays an important role in identifying and sharing practice at university level (paragraph 160). All ILR and programme approval panel and committee members are expected to disseminate the examples of practice they learn about within their schools, divisions and professional service areas, with the ELIR team broadly content that this is indeed the case. In the academic schools, the School Academic Committee plays an important role in the sharing of ideas and practice.

3.4   Engaging, developing and supporting staff

144   The University has a comprehensive range of effective mechanisms (both formal and informal) for engaging, developing and supporting staff that are responsive to the needs of staff and aligned to the University's strategic direction - creating a supportive community for staff who feel engaged. The AbLE Academy, the TELS team and the Graduate School work collaboratively to provide a comprehensive range of staff development activities for those involved in learning, teaching and research. These include the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP); a biennial teaching and learning conference; a workshop and seminar series; its 'Going for Gold programme; development for postgraduates who teach; and support for research supervisors.

145   Staff spoke very positively about their engagement with the range of activities available. Development for programme leaders is also provided by the AbLE Academy, with staff who had participated in this programme confirming that they had found it supportive and effective in developing them in the programme leader role.

146   The People Services directorate coordinates induction for new staff, support for career progression and promotion, a staff review scheme and aspects of staff development such as leadership and managing staff. Newly-appointed staff spoke favourably about their experience of induction into the University, finding the online mandatory training to be of particular value.

147   The University set a target to have 100% of all staff involved in teaching and learning having some type of professional recognition by the end of 2020. Staff can achieve this by completing the University's 'Going for Gold' programme or the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP). At the time of the current ELIR around 75% of academic staff have Fellowship with Advance HE. Influenced by the ongoing pandemic and recognising the impact of staff turnover, the University recognises its original target as unrealistic. The current Learning Enhancement Strategy (paragraphs 120-22) sets an indicator of success specifically relating to new staff, with the expectation that 'staff appointed for teaching and supporting student learning (including relevant professional

services staff) gain appropriate national professional recognition within two years of joining the University.

148   At the 2016 ELIR, the University had in place a mature Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching (PGCert HET) which was, at that time, accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA). In 2018, as part of a successful reaccreditation by HEA, the University revised the PGCert HET, with the scope of the new programme (the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP)) embracing 'both teaching and research'. As a result of a number of operational challenges and feedback that the programme did not meet the needs of either its students or their managers, at the time of this ELIR, the PGCAP is subject to further redevelopment which returns its focus to teaching and learning. The appointment of a new Head of Researcher Development means the Graduate School will be able to widen the University's capacity to support early career researcher development separately (paragraphs 99-101).

149   The support provided by the AbLE Academy and TELS was viewed by staff as being particularly important in enabling colleagues to swiftly and successfully transition their teaching and learning online at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (paragraphs 79, 108-110, 130 and 141). Staff spoke about the value of the development events offered, the production of a suite of supporting resources delivered at this time and that their feedback was used to enhance future sessions. Further support for staff was also provided at division level. The RA states that the University's Audit and Risk Committee commissioned an independent audit of its approach for blended delivery, the outcome of which was positive (paragraph 167).

150   The ELIR team understands that in response to the pandemic, a short life working group which was formed initially to guide staff through the early stages of online delivery, has become the University's Learning Technologies Development Forum, chaired by the TQL SAS who has the strategic role for Digital Education. The ELIR team remains unclear about the role of this forum in supporting the delivery of the digital theme within the Learning Enhancement Strategy and the Digital Strategy, and the digital transformation project (paragraphs 106 and 125).

151   The University has an academic promotion policy, and a set of role profiles which set out responsibilities at the various grades. Workshops led by People Services and the Deans of school support staff with the promotions process, with staff commenting positively on the support available. Promotions take place annually and the University's grade structure is underpinned by the Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA) system. The University also operates a review scheme for staff, with colleagues articulating how the mandatory Annual Development Discussions with their line manager helps to prepare them for career progression, outlining examples of how these conversations aided them to identify and access appropriate career development opportunities.

152   The University participates in the Aurora leadership development programme for women both as mentors and mentees. Mentoring opportunities are also available, for early career academics, through the Teaching, Research and Academic Mentorship Scheme (TRAMS) which is a partnership involving a number of other UK institutions. Academic staff spoke very positively about their involvement in this scheme and explained how discussions on progression and promotion have been particularly beneficial to them.

153   The ELIR team commends the University, through the activities delivered by the AbLE Academy, the TELS team and the Graduate School, for providing a comprehensive range of staff development and support opportunities, both formal and informal, to those involved in learning, teaching and research. These development opportunities are responsive to the needs of staff and the University's strategic direction and contribute

to a supportive culture.

3.5 Effectiveness of the approach to implementing institutional strategies and enhancing learning and teaching

154   Overall, the University employs an effective approach to enhancing learning and teaching and the wider student experience managed through its Learning Enhancement Strategy, governance and committee structures, and supported by the schools and the Abertay Learning Enhancement Academy (AbLE).

155   The University has systematic mechanisms in place for identifying and sharing good practice, using a comprehensive range of both formal and informal mechanisms to achieve this. The University's governance and committee structures and quality processes also support this. The recent appointment of the School Heads of Teaching Quality and Learning Enhancement (TQLs) is seen as a positive development to further enhance the identification and sharing of good practice across the University.

156   The University, through the activities delivered by the Abertay Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy, the Technology Enhanced Learning Support team and the Graduate School, is commended for providing a comprehensive range of staff development and support opportunities, both formal and informal, to those involved in learning, teaching and research. These development opportunities are responsive to the needs of staff and the University's strategic direction and contribute to a supportive culture.

157   The University employs a broadly effective approach to strategic planning in relation to learning and teaching, with a particular strength being the widespread consultation with staff and students during the formulation of the University's Strategic Plan and its underpinning strategies, including the Learning Enhancement Strategy (2020-25). The University is required to undertake work to ensure that among all staff there is a clear understanding and ownership of these strategies, and how they inform institutional priorities and actions. In support of this, the University is asked to enable effective and systematic implementation, supported by appropriate monitoring and evaluation of impact to ensure the achievement of strategic goals.

4   Academic standards and quality processes

4.1 Key features of the institution's approach to managing quality and academic standards

158   The University has effective arrangements for managing the quality and securing the academic standards of its awards. Procedures are clear, comprehensive and applied consistently across the University. The ELIR team was able to confirm that the university policies and procedures meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) guidance to higher education institutions on quality (2017-22). The University has mapped its policies and processes to the Quality Code and is aware of areas for further development. Abertay's Academic Governance Framework aims to ensure that the quality and standards of its provision are monitored and enhanced to improve the overall experience of students.

Governance of quality and learning and teaching

159   The University Court is the University's governing body. Chaired by the University Principal and Vice-Chancellor, the Senate is the senior academic body of the University with responsibilities for teaching and learning activities, awards and credit-bearing provision, along with providing the strategic overview of the taught academic portfolio, quality

assurance and enhancement. Senate has two sub-committees to which it delegates aspects of its responsibility. These are the Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC). RKEC has responsibility for regulatory processes and compliance, and policies for research degrees. A number of boards/panels including assessment boards report directly to the Senate.

160   The TLC has two sub-committees - Academic Quality and Standards (AQSC) and the recently-established Partnerships (PC) (paragraph 163 and 213). School Academic Committees (SACs) for the three academic schools also report to the TLC, and work in partnership with the AQSC to ensure that quality and standards are upheld and enhanced. Each of the SACs have responsibility for the strategic direction of enhancement and dissemination of best practice in the schools and receive matters from school Student Voice Fora (paragraphs 30 and 31). Short Life Working Groups (SLWGs) report and make recommendations on specific issues remitted to them by Senate and other committees. The ELIR team is content that the Academic Governance Framework (paragraph 163) sets out appropriate terms of reference and membership of relevant committees, with their minutes demonstrating they meet their remits.

161   Executive responsibility for managing and enhancing quality and assuring standards rests with the Deputy Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, assisted by the Dean for Teaching and Learning and the Dean of Research of the Graduate School. The Graduate School has operational responsibility for research degree provision (paragraphs 94-99) and AbLE provides support for quality enhancement (paragraph 129-130). The ELIR team was able to confirm from meetings with staff that there is a sound understanding of the various roles and structures in place to support the assurance and enhancement of teaching quality and standards at school and institutional levels.

162   The ELIR team noted that, since the 2016 review, changes to the University's governance arrangements have been introduced, including updating the constitution of the University Court by Order of Council in 2019; changes to the membership of Court; and the reconfiguration of the Senate, including revised arrangements for delegation to Senate committees.

163   The ELIR team also noted that the University reviewed and revised its Academic Governance Framework in 2018-19, with the aim of improving the quality and efficiency of academic processes. Its new framework replaces two previous governance frameworks - one for teaching and learning, and one for research. The University planned to review this new framework after one full academic session, but this has been postponed for a year due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic. The newest version of the governance framework was approved by Senate in June 2021 in order to approve the establishment of a new Partnerships sub-committee of the TLC with oversight of aspects of the University's collaborative provision (paragraph 213). The ELIR team is content that the current academic governance framework is clear, and enables a consistent approach to the enhancement of quality and academic standards within the schools.

164   In the RA, the University describes its approach to managing quality and to setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards as a multi-faceted one which includes a number of elements: Institution-led Review (ILR); annual monitoring and reporting; periodic programme approval, and monitoring and review; strategic planning; academic regulations and the management of assessment; and the use of external reference points. Taken together the quality assurance processes provide a framework for securing academic quality and standards.

Regulation and assessment

165   The University maintains three sets of regulations covering its undergraduate, taught and research postgraduate programmes, setting out its requirements and expectations for students, with these supplemented by programme-specific requirements and other policies and guidance where appropriate. The University's academic regulations were revised in 2015-16 and are reviewed annually before being submitted for approval by TLC and the Senate.

166   The University expects module and programme-level assessment policies, practices and procedures to align with a common set of agreed principles, standards and expectations which, on the whole, were well understood by students and staff the ELIR team met and reflected in documentation reviewed by the team (paragraph 79). The University's Principles of Assessment, its Assessment Policy and Internal Moderation Guidance promote the use of a consistent approach to assessment setting, marking and providing student feedback. The Assessment Principles outline that assessment should be designed to improve student learning, recognise and reward achievement, be progressive, inclusive, authentic and support student transition. The University monitors adherence to its Assessment Principles through the AQSC (paragraph 160).

167   The management of assessment of students was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the University developing policies, including a COVID-19 Fair Assessment Policy, to ensure students were not unduly disadvantaged. In order to assure itself that academic standards were not compromised as a result of these measures, two reviews were commissioned - one by the University's auditors and the other by its Audit and Risk committee (paragraph 149). These reviews provided substantial assurance to the University that the measures taken were effective and that controls were satisfactory. There was only one recommendation relating to ongoing review of the academic governance framework. The ELIR team's view is that the University's regulatory framework is appropriate, and the changes made to policies to ameliorate the impact of the pandemic on students are in line with measures taken by the wider sector. Arrangements for the assessment of doctoral degrees are overseen by the Graduate School and conform with sector expectations (paragraph 96).

168   The ELIR team noted that a paper produced for the University Senate and Court related to student retention, referred to the use of 'scaling' as a means of adjusting module marks to compensate for weaknesses in the conduct of assessment, with 'scaling' referred to in the paper as 'being uncommon'. The paper goes on to outline that the use of 'scaling' is one of a number of actions potentially used by the University to improve retention. In meetings with staff, it was confirmed that the University currently does not have processes, regulations, guidance, or protocols referring to 'scaling' or marks adjustment which would ensure a consistent institutional approach capable of central oversight. The ELIR team recommends that the University introduces an appropriate and consistent policy for the scaling of marks before the start of the 2022-23 academic year. This policy should be communicated to staff, students, external examiners and collaborative partners.

Programme approval

169   The University's policies relating to the development, approval, and modification of programmes and associated modules are aligned to sector expectations, taking account of the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF), relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, and relevant qualifications and professional accreditation requirements. Institutional guidance is comprehensive and aims to promote a consistent approach.

170   The University's approach to programme approval has been revised in response to the 2016 ELIR. This review indicated the need for the University to 'tighten arrangements for

securing the accuracy and clarity of reporting at institutional level including in centrally-produced programme review documentation', necessitating a review of the programme approval processes. Additionally, the review of the University's Academic Governance Framework (paragraph 163) resulted in the creation of the AQSC, where one of its roles involves the centralisation of programme and module approval, removing the power of the academic schools to approve their own academic provision.

171   The resultant programme development and approval processes are documented in the University's Programme Approval and Change Management Handbook, with other associated guidance. This documentation confirms the arrangements for approval at various stages of the process before final approval by the Senate, and specifies matters to be taken into account in the developmental work and the full process. New programme proposals commence at the school level and the ELIR team was able to confirm, from the sample of documents provided, that there are appropriate separations between considerations of the business case and academic requirements.

172   Programme approval advisory panels and programme change approval panels scrutinise proposals and make recommendations to the AQSC and the TLC. Membership of the panels is appropriate, including external representation and representation from accrediting bodies where relevant. The University's approach to student representation on approval panels has developed from observer status to full membership with effect from the 2021-22 academic year, thus meeting the expectations of the Quality Code.

173   Procedures for amendments to existing provision and for module approval, elective changes, programme and module cessation, requirements for joint/combined programmes, and creation of the definitive record are clearly set out. Normally, the University's programmes and modules are approved without a time limit, but programmes are usually reapproved in accordance with the procedures and timelines set out in the University's ILR process. Staff demonstrated a good understanding of the programme and module approval processes. Due to the pandemic, the University implemented reviews and changes to modules in an agile but robust manner to enable student success with effective quality controls in place. The University provides supportive training for staff and students involved in the relevant processes. Documentation scrutinised by the ELIR team, including programme and module approval documents, enabled it to confirm that institutional sector expectations are being adhered to.

Institution-led Review (ILR) and annual monitoring

174   The University's Institution-led Review (ILR) process is a systematic and consistent approach to reviewing all credit-bearing provision. The 2016 ELIR recommended that the University implement a 'detailed and self-reflective scrutiny of all provision at the subject level with ample opportunity for engagement by external subject specialists'. The ELIR team was able to confirm that, following a review of its processes, the University's revised arrangements appropriately address this recommendation and a forward schedule of ILR activity is in place.

175   The examples of ILR documentation provided in the University's AIS and reviewed by the ELIR team, were consistent with the University's ILR guidelines, demonstrating the use of appropriate external expertise and student representation. The ILR process is also supported by information and data sets provided by the University's Strategy and Planning Team for each academic area being reviewed.

176   Discussions with a range of staff groups confirmed that the ILR process was now seen as central to the University's quality and enhancement processes. Student reflection on their involvement in ILR was also positive with student representatives commenting positively on the training provided by the University prior to participation in the ILR process

(paragraph 28).

177   ILR reports and their related action plans are reviewed initially by AQSC and TLC prior to being reported to Senate. Following TLC approval, the ILR action plans are monitored and overseen annually at the respective School Academic Committee (SAC) (paragraph 160). Completion of the actions is reported to TLC. In cases where the ILR results in a 'limited effectiveness' or 'not effective' outcome for an academic area, TLC and University Senate may mandate additional progress reporting to the relevant SAC and TLC.

178   In a development resulting from the 2016 ELIR recommendations, the University's annual monitoring process now encompasses school, division and programme-level reporting. Programme and division annual reports are reviewed and approved at SAC, with any actions being monitored by this committee. School Annual Reports are also considered at the relevant SAC, prior to submission and formal approval at AQSC, which also progresses recommendations. AQSC also reviews the annual reports produced by the University's professional service areas. In terms of the PGR student experience, the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee approve the Research Degrees Annual Report. Oversight by TLC ensures that key themes and issues arising from school annual reports are noted and disseminated at institutional, school, Students' Association and professional service levels.

Review of professional services

179   The review and reporting process for the University's student-facing professional services is currently based on services' annual reports and plans which focus on teaching and learning, and the broader student experience. The University acknowledges that its current arrangements require a review in order to ensure they align with SFC guidelines and expectations, the ELIR team agree with the University's position.

180   The ELIR team understands that a comprehensive review of all the University's student-facing professional services is planned for April 2022. The ELIR team noted that the University intends to undertake this review based on the current academic ILR guidelines which had been amended to establish the 'Institution-Led Review 2020-24 Handbook: Support Services', to ensure a systematic approach to the 2021-22 Professional Services review. The ELIR panel welcome this development and asks the University to continue with its plans to revise and implement a process for reviewing student-facing professional services to ensure a continuous, systematic review of services from academic year 2022-23. The ELIR team, therefore, recommends that the University ensures that the new processes link effectively to the existing institution-led review process for academic areas, allowing for institutional oversight, fully engages students, and incorporates appropriate externality.

4.2   Use of external reference points in quality processes

181   The University effectively uses a range of external reference points in the setting, management and enhancement of its academic standards and quality processes. These are embedded in core quality and enhancement processes.

182   The University aligns its policies and processes to the Quality Code. Following the introduction of the revised Quality Code, the University mapped its approach, policies and processes to ensure it complies with the Expectations and Core practices. As a result, it is aware of areas which are fully aligned, those where development is required and what action is being taken. The ELIR team was able to confirm that relevant sections of the Quality Code are referenced in policy and procedure documents.

183   Programmes and their constituent modules are mapped to the relevant level of the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF), and this is checked as part of the

University's approval and reapproval processes. The University regards Subject Benchmark Statements as key reference points in the development of programmes and modules, and the ELIR team was able to confirm that, along with SCQF levels and reference to relevant professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) accrediting requirements, these are referred to in programme specifications.

184   A high proportion (over 60%) of the University's programmes are accredited by at least one PSRB. Their requirements are considered at all stages of programme development, approval, reapproval and review. Where possible, university approval, monitoring and review events are scheduled to coincide with PSRB events. Appropriate external expertise (from academia, business and industry) is required and is used effectively in the development and approval of new programmes, and in annual monitoring and ILR processes.

External examining

185   The University regards external examining as an important component in securing academic standards and assuring itself of the quality of its provision. External examiners play a key role in ensuring the rigour and integrity of the University's assessment process and help identify good practice and areas for enhancement. The University has clear policies and procedures which outline the criteria for appointment, which the ELIR team can confirm broadly meet with sector norms. Arrangements for the appointment of external examiners for research degrees are overseen by the Graduate School and the Dean for Research, and these broadly conform to sector expectations.

186   The induction of external examiners is facilitated at school level with some central support provided by Student and Academic Services (SAS). The ELIR team would encourage the University to consider taking steps to assure itself that a consistent approach to the induction of external examiners is applied across the institution.

187   External examiners are required to submit an annual report which is scrutinised at school and programme levels, with areas of concern addressed through action plans and annual monitoring processes (paragraph 178). External examiners receive a response to their reports from programme teams. Central monitoring of external examiner reports results in the preparation of a university overview report providing thematic analyses and identifying key features emerging from the external examining process which is considered by the TLC.

188   The ELIR team was able to confirm that all staff and students have access to external examiner reports, with responses to these reports available in programme, division and school annual reports. However, students who met the ELIR team had no understanding of the role external examiners play in assuring the quality and standards of their awards, or of how they can access external examiner reports for their programmes. The ELIR team would therefore encourage the University to further reflect on how it can make external examiner reports more accessible to students and more effectively communicate the role that its external examiners fulfil in securing the quality and integrity of the University's awards.

4.3   Commentary on action taken since ELIR 3

189   The 2016 ELIR identified nine areas of positive practice and five areas for development and the current ELIR team agreed with the University that it has made significant progress in the majority of these development areas and has worked to address them all. The majority of the areas of positive practice remain strengths for the University and it has undertaken activity to further develop its practice. The University's ELIR Steering Group coordinated the delivery of the action plan that was developed to address the 2016 ELIR recommendations, with its work being monitored by the Teaching and Learning

Committee and reported to Senate. Through its meetings with staff and students it is evident to the ELIR team that a range of staff, from the academic schools and professional services, along with a range of students, have been actively involved in the follow-up actions from the previous ELIR.

190   Following ELIR 2016, the University has evolved and formalised its approach to evaluating institutional change. In November 2020, the University approved a formal project governance framework and policy to assist in project implementation and review. A central project register is maintained by the Projects and Business Change Team and is routinely reported to committees. The ELIR team identified examples where this revised approach had been effectively implemented, including the withdrawal of accelerated degree programmes, and the investment and redevelopment of the library and physical teaching spaces (paragraph 105). The ELIR team consider, however, that there is still scope for the University to adopt a more consistent approach to evaluating institutional change in order to ensure effective and systematic implementation and evaluation (paragraph 157).

191   The University successfully implemented the institution-wide review of all taught provision that was planned for 2017-18. The ELIR team was able to confirm that the detailed process documentation developed, and the implementation of the revised Institution-led review (ILR) process for the schools and divisions aligns with Scottish Funding Council and QAA expectations. The AbLE Academy also produced a thematic analysis of the key themes arising from these ILRs. The action plans arising from this review activity were ultimately approved by the University Senate, with TLC continuing to monitor the implementation of these plans. Importantly, a systematic rolling cycle for future ILRs is now in place (paragraphs 174-177).

192   The University was asked to tighten arrangements for securing the accuracy and clarity of reporting at institutional level. The AIS and RA indicate that appropriate progress has been made with this recommendation, with the University reporting that committee decisions are affirmed through the Chair's approval and circulation of minutes and actions, which encompasses, for example, changes to modules and programmes, and annual reporting. The ELIR team reviewed a range of committee minutes and outputs from quality processes which were included in the AIS - for example, action tracking from annual reports at programme, division and school level, and, despite inconsistency in format and style, were able to identify the effective tracking and reporting of institutional decisions.

193   The 2016 ELIR highlighted that students found it difficult to successfully navigate the University's multi-channel approach to student communication, with important information being lost. The University has outlined clear action taken to improve communication with students including: the launch of a new student-facing intranet (MyAbertay) (paragraph 78) and the virtual learning environment (VLE) (MyLearningSpace) (paragraphs 107); regular community newsletters and improved communications with students through the Students' Association; and a reinvigorated student partnership agreement from 2020-21 (paragraph 35). Students reflected positively on the improved approach to communications from the University, recognising particularly that during the COVID-19 pandemic this has necessitated and allowed regular, clear communications in changing and unsettling times.

194   The previous ELIR had identified Feedback Week (introduced in 2014-15) as an approach which had potential for supporting student attainment and had encouraged the University to continue with its plans to review the purpose and focus of this approach. The RA provides evidence of the University progressively evaluating the overarching purpose and shape of feedback week, gradually adopting a more decentralised model that enables staff to exert flexibility in exactly when and how feedback and feedforward activities for students are delivered in their provision.

4.4   Approach to using data to inform decision-making and evaluation

195   Overall, the University has an effective approach to using data to inform its decision-making and support its evaluative processes linked to learning and teaching. The University's current Strategic Plan (2020-25) is supported by a published set of 15 KPIs, with a summary of progress against these reported annually to the University Court and routinely within the institution. Each of the University's supporting strategies have an underpinning set of indicators, with these being agreed for the Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE), Learning Enhancement Strategy (LES) and Employability Strategy. The Strategic Plan provides a framework for the University's annual operational planning process which ensures the alignment of school and service area plans to its strategic objectives.

196   The RA outlined a series of core activities which utilised data in decision-making and evaluation, highlighting student number planning, portfolio review, Outcome Agreement and key performance indicators. The Strategic Planning Office has a central function in preparing and sharing data and analysis, and it was evident that data informed a comprehensive suite of key university processes.

197   A range of data is considered in the University's key quality processes - primarily Institution-led Review (ILR), annual monitoring, and programme approval, and periodic programme review. It was evident from the sample of quality reports reviewed by the ELIR team, including annual monitoring reports, that academic schools were able to access a range of data to support their evaluation; however, there were considerable variations in the level and quantity of data presented through these reports and the effectiveness of the analysis.

198   While it was evident that data was available and informed core quality processes, and that the Strategic Planning Office appears to be responsive in providing data for analysis at school, division and programme level, it was not clear to the ELIR team that consistent, comparable data was routinely available to all relevant staff without request. The ELIR team believes there would be benefit to the University of building on the outcomes of the recent Enhancement Theme ('Evidence for Enhancement') to further develop the ethos of data-informed and evidence-led enhancement throughout the institution.

199   The University makes effective use of its well-established approaches to seek feedback from staff and students including module evaluations, Student Voice Fora, its internal survey for PGR students, NSS and staff engagement surveys. In meetings with staff, the ELIR team noted that staff engagement surveys have enabled colleagues to reflect and comment on institutional priorities, with their feedback taken onboard in strategic developments linked to learning and teaching, estates development, and staff support and development. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the University strengthened its approach through the introduction of 'Pulse Surveys' which allow it to gather more 'real-time' information on matters of current concern (paragraph 43).

200   The ELIR team also observed that a wide range of platforms and sources were being utilised to collect and share data, particularly relating to student engagement. Staff commented that, for the future, they would appreciate greater integration of the data and presentation of this in an analytical, role-related and user-facing manner. In turn, this would support a more consistent application and use of this data to inform decisions, actions and planning.

4.5   Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards

201   The University has an effective approach to securing academic standards. Its Academic Governance Framework enables sound oversight of quality and standards, and its policies are comprehensive, clear, and well understood by staff and students. Its regulatory

framework is appropriate, and its processes are structured and administered effectively. The University's quality arrangements are aligned to the Quality Code and other key reference points and it is aware, through its mapping to the Quality Code, of areas where enhancements can be made. There is appropriate student engagement in quality and review processes. The University makes systematic use of its external examiners and other external stakeholders in approval and review mechanisms.

202   It is recommended that the University introduces an appropriate and consistent policy for the scaling of marks before the commencement of the 2022-23 academic year. This policy should be communicated to staff, students, external examiners and collaborative partners.

203   The University should continue with its plans to revise and implement a process for reviewing student-facing professional services to ensure a continuous systematic review of services from academic year 2022-23. The University should ensure that the new processes link effectively to the existing Institution-led Review process for academic areas, allowing for institutional oversight, fully engages students, and incorporates appropriate externality.

4.6   Effectiveness of the institution's approach to self-evaluation, including the effective use of data to inform decision-making

204   Overall, the University has an effective approach to self-evaluation, through self-reflection including its use of data to inform decision-making and reporting.

205   The University ensures that appropriate information and data sources are available to inform reflection, planning and action at module, programme, division, school, service and institutional levels.

206   The University has an ongoing commitment to continuing to ensure that enhanced data and evidence sets, and analysis of this information is provided to staff so they can use this to further inform their practice. This data supports evidence-informed decision-making to enhance learning, teaching and the wider student experience.

5   Collaborative provision

5.1   Key features of the institution's strategic approach

207   The University's strategic approach to collaborative activity is articulated in broad terms in its Strategic Plan (2020-25) in which it describes the focus on academic collaboration as a major change from its previous strategy. Its Learning Enhancement Strategy (LES) provides further information on its objective to 'enhance partnerships and modes of delivery to provide a more flexible offer, particularly for postgraduate taught provision and international students' (paragraphs 120-122). The LES also identifies the University's ambition to develop five new online qualifications by 2025, growing income from online and franchise provision.

208   The ELIR team understands that the University views its partnership activity as part of its broader mission to provide a range of routes into an Abertay degree, working with partners to deliver programmes beyond its Dundee campus. The University confirmed that it has commenced on a growth strategy, to increase collaborative provision which it describes as 'measured and building on its strengths'. The Strategic Plan also confirms the University's continuing commitment to working with college partners as part of its approach to widening access to ensure that one-third of its student intake come directly from the college sector (paragraphs 55-60). The University has agreed new partnerships in Bucharest and Hong Kong with these partnerships commencing in September 2021. The University also outlined

its intention to grow the PGT student population predominantly through partnership development.

209   The University has also confirmed its intention to develop online and blended qualifications, some of which will be delivered in partnership, in accordance with the ambitions set out in its Learning Enhancement Strategy and Digital Strategy. The ELIR team heard that the University is currently seeking to procure a partner to help progress the development of online programmes. The University confirmed it will retain responsibility for the quality and standards of all teaching, assessment and quality processes associated with any provision approved to be run by this partner. The University also confirmed it is not currently funded to deliver graduate apprenticeships; however, it will consider them in future if the opportunity arises and is at a very early stage of exploring collaborative research degree provision.

210   Currently, the University has a small portfolio of collaborative partnerships. At the time of the 2016 ELIR, the University had recently rationalised its franchise provision. Since then, it has continued to support articulation, franchise and validation arrangements with two further education colleges. While it has retained partnership arrangements with two overseas institutions and has developed a further two new partnerships, it has terminated its longstanding and substantial relationship with SEGi University in Malaysia due to a material breach of quality assurance procedures on the part of its partner, which was identified through the University's quality assurance arrangements. The ELIR team was able to confirm, through consideration of information supplied in the AIS, that the termination of this partnership was a considered, and effectively managed process. The University and SEGi worked closely to ensure academic standards were maintained and appropriate arrangements put in place to support the students impacted by this decision. The ELIR team was able to confirm that appropriate 'teach-out' arrangements for students were developed, implemented, and delivered in a satisfactory way. The University had maintained a working relationship with this partner, had ensured the continued application of its regulations and processes, and worked to ensure that the interests of students were protected.

211   To support its strategy to grow its collaborative provision, the University has revised its processes for the approval and management of partnerships, which were approved in May 2021. The ELIR team's view is that these processes are effective and are also mapped against the Quality Code, and the University is aware of an area where it needs to develop its approach to mapping validation provision against the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework*. The processes for the approval of a partnership and of the programmes to be delivered, run in tandem in a staged process.

212   The University has developed a Partnerships Handbook, Guidance for Partnership Approval panel reviewers and a Procedures Manual detailing the expectations and arrangements for the management and delivery of provision. In each Procedures Manual, programme teams are expected to qualify arrangements to cover the totality of the student journey including the admission and induction of students, the setting and moderation of assessment, assessment marking and student feedback, link tutor arrangements, regulatory matters and arrangements for capturing student voice. All students have access to a programme handbook which contains information relevant to their programme of study. The ELIR team's view is that these processes are comprehensive and enable the business case and quality arrangements to be thoroughly explored before approval. The ELIR team was able to confirm that approvals were conducted in accordance with the University's expectations.

213   In addition, the University has recently amended its Academic Governance Framework to create a Partnerships Committee which is a sub-committee of TLC (paragraph 163). This Committee provides oversight of teaching-related partnerships, reviews the

effectiveness of partnership documentation (including forms, guidance, procedures and processes which are reviewed annually), manages quality assurance visits reporting to TLC or the AQSC as appropriate, and produces an annual report to TLC. The Partnership Committee also maintains and monitors the University's register of collaborative partners

214   Although the Partnership Committee had only met on three occasions at the time of this review, the ELIR team was able to confirm that the committee is meeting its terms of reference and has the potential to be able to assure and provide appropriate oversight of the quality of partnership provision. The ELIR team encourages the University to keep under review the remit and function of the Partnership Committee as it pursues its strategic partnership aims and as the Committee settles into and develops its expertise in relation to its remit.

215   In 2020-21, 380 students were studying with the University's collaborative partnerships and programmes. Students indicated that they highly valued the flexible study options offered through studying a collaborative degree with the University, as well as its extensive connections to industry. The ELIR team noted that these observations were consistent with students studying in Dundee, further emphasising the University's reputation for strong industry engagement within its provision (paragraph 85-89).

216   The ELIR team noted the key role played by the University's Link Tutors which is core to the success of partnership activity. These staff oversee and support the academic programme delivery, planning and assessment, including Board of Examiners which are convened by Abertay University. Staff and students confirmed the importance of Link Tutors in facilitating student support and successful transition to studying with the University and went on to explain how these tutors are instrumental in helping create a comparable learning and teaching experience for students studying with partner institutions, both locally and internationally. The ELIR team also learned that academic staff in partner institutions have full access to all of the University's academic development opportunities (paragraphs 144-153). The ELIR team understands that staff have engaged with workshops linked to their particular school/division but, as of yet, there was no evidence of staff from partner institutions engaging with the University's PGCAP (paragraph 148).

217   The University produces a bespoke student-facing Partnership Programme Handbook for each of its collaborative programmes which provides students with information on the structure of their programme, and specific information on arrangements for assessment, student support and gathering of their feedback.

218   Students studying across the range of the University's collaborative partners confirmed that they had a range of opportunities to provide feedback on their learning experience. In the majority of cases, this involved either completing formalised surveys operated by the University's partners and/or providing feedback directly to staff. The ELIR team remains unclear as to the extent to which the surveys completed by collaborative students reflect the University's standardised approach to module evaluation for its Dundee-based provision. Staff with responsibility for supporting collaborative partnerships did, however, indicate that there are specific opportunities for Abertay staff to meet with students studying at collaborative partners to listen and respond to feedback, with this playing an important role in enhancing the student experience. The ELIR team believes there would be benefit in the University reviewing its existing arrangements for gathering student feedback across its partners in order to ensure greater consistency of approach and support the University to have greater institutional oversight of the student experience to support enhancement.

219   Overall, students studying with collaborative partners were broadly positive about their learning experience, confirming they both identified as, and valued being, Abertay

University students. The University has been actively trying to establish a stronger sense of community between students studying with collaborative partners and those based in Dundee. Examples include opportunities for shared teaching and collaborative working between students at Abertay and Fife College as part of a shared employability module.

5.2 Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative provision

220 The University has an effective albeit developing approach to managing its current partnership provision, securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience. Its approach has been mapped against the Quality Code and it has identified areas for future enhancement. Procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of partnerships are detailed, robust and embedded in the institution's quality arrangements. Recent changes to the University's Academic Governance Framework to create a Partnerships Committee, which is a sub-committee of TLC, will provide it with greater institutional oversight of the delivery of its partnership provision. University Link Tutors play a pivotal role in the successful delivery of each partnership programme. Students confirmed that overall they are well supported and have appropriate opportunities to provide feedback on their learning and teaching experience.