Quality Enhancement and Standards Review

Abertay University

Review Report

March 2024

Contents

Introduction

This is a report of a review under the [Quality Enhancement and Standards Review](#) (QESR) method conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) as part of Phase 1 of the Scottish Quality Enhancement arrangements at Abertay University.

The review took place on 7 March 2024 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Iona Beveridge (Coordinating Reviewer)
- Nairne Brown (Student Reviewer)
- Mark Charters (Academic Reviewer).

QESR is Phase 1 of a two-phase approach that enables the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to fulfil its statutory obligation under Section 13 of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005* to ensure that provision is made for assessing and enhancing the quality of fundable higher education provided by fundable bodies for academic quality and enhancement between 2022-24. The second phase of QAA's external quality review arrangements starts in 2024-25 to coincide with the implementation of new tertiary quality arrangements.

The main purpose of this review was to:

- provide assurance about the provider's management of its responsibilities for academic standards to inform an enhancement-led full institutional review in Phase 2

- provide assurance about the provider's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities for students to inform an enhancement-led full review in Phase 2

- report on any features of good practice

- make recommendations for action.

About Abertay University

Abertay University (the University) is a small, modern university situated on a compact campus in the centre of Dundee. The University offers a broad portfolio and is recognised for its vocationally based provision, with a strong focus on teaching and preparing graduates for the world of work. In accordance with institutional strategy, growth of transnational partnerships is a current objective for the University. Abertay's Strategic Plan 2020-25 sets out ambitions, activities and key performance indicators, and its key purposes remain:

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

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

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

The University is structured into four academic schools (the School of Applied Sciences; the School of Business, Law and Social Sciences; the School of Design and Informatics; and the Graduate School); the Abertay Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy, together with international and UK partnerships. There are six professional units: Strategic Planning and Governance; Finance, Infrastructure and Corporate Services; External and Corporate Relations; People Services; and Student and Academic Services.

In 2023-24, the University has a total student population of around 4,650 (headcount) studying on campus, online or through a transnational education partnership. The student population is divided as follows: 3,640 undergraduates; 870 postgraduate taught; 140 postgraduate research. Of the 2023-24 student population, 902 were studying part-time and 265 were studying at the University's collaborative partners. The staff community has been maintained at circa 450.

Findings

From the evidence presented, the review team is confident that Abertay University is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

Good practice

The QESR team found the following **features of good practice**.

- **Approach to improving retention:** The University has implemented systematic and integrated enhancement procedures to improve retention rates. This includes a data-driven approach to supporting students at risk of disengagement or withdrawal, a proactive process to supporting student transitions, and effective collaborative working between academics, services and students (paragraph 7).

- **Supporting student transitions through microcredentials:** The University has taken an effective and proactive approach to student transitions through the development of a suite of microcredentials that provides core academic literacies and supported peer learning. This has embedded support and development for academic success and for building student communities to support retention and inform enhancements within each programme (paragraph 10).

- **Digital learning experience:** The University provides a high-quality digital learning experience for students through its use of blended learning approaches and accessible virtual learning environments. Staff and students are effectively supported through a range of activities to develop digital skills and use digital tools and technologies for learning (paragraph 29).

- **Use of data for enhancement:** The University has made progress in its use of data to support enhancement, planning and decision-making. There has been investment by the University to develop the skills, capacity and infrastructure required for the effective use of data, and progress in developing data dashboards and the availability of data analysis to staff at all levels (paragraph 47).

Recommendations for action

The QESR team makes the following **recommendation for action**.

- **Thematic analysis of Institution-led Review:** The University does not undertake an overall analysis of Institution-led Reviews while the review cycle is in progress. Therefore, the University should implement routine thematic analysis of the outcomes of its Institution-led Reviews at key points within the cycle of reviews, to ensure identification of thematic trends in good practice and areas of development which require institutional oversight or action (paragraph 33).

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Strategic approach to enhancement

1   The QESR team is confident that the University has in place effective arrangements to monitor, review and enhance its strategic approach to enhancement. The team considered a range of evidence including: the University's Learning Enhancement Strategy 2020-2025 and associated action plan; the University's annual report to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on Institution-led Review (ILR); the institution's annual Outcome Agreement Self-Evaluation Report; and minutes from meetings of the University's Senate, Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC), and Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). In addition, the team met with a range of staff and students to explore the effectiveness of strategies to direct, monitor and evaluate enhancement across the institution.

2   The University's Learning Enhancement Strategy, approved in 2019, identifies five key institutional priorities: teaching excellence; the student journey; digital education; academic partnerships; and pedagogic research. Implementation of the Strategy is overseen by the TLC with each strategic priority implemented through a series of activities captured through an overarching action plan. The action plan utilises a series of illustrative 'indicators of success' for each of the actions in the Strategy, such as the inclusion of embedded blended learning opportunities, and staff engagement with the Abertay Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy. Evaluation is built into specific projects designed to deliver institutional strategies and the QESR team found this was evident in the University's use of a project proposal and monitoring system for their Digital Strategy. Institutional monitoring and reporting of key strategies for enhancement is undertaken through annual reporting on progress to TLC and Senate.

3   Implementation of university strategies by Schools and Professional Services is undertaken through annual operational planning with a standardised template requiring all activities to align with, and demonstrate their support of, institutional priorities. Senior academic and professional service staff confirmed how operational planning is informed by institutional strategies and that there was clear alignment between enhancement activities and institutional strategies. The QESR team learned how annual academic planning at School and divisional level was informed by university strategies with clear examples offered, including the enhancement of student employability and digital learning.

4   A key priority for the University has been to achieve improvements in student retention. The University's undergraduate retention rate, across all years of study, from 2022-23 to 2023-24 is 84%, aligned to its previous five-year average of 83%. The University has set a strategic ambition to retain 90% of students across all years. The University acknowledges that retention for SIMD20 entrants remains below its overall Scottish Domicile Undergraduate Entrants (SDUE), while retention for mature students (21+), the majority of which are students entering higher education from partner colleges, remains at the SDUE level. The University identified the continued impact from the pandemic as a key factor for persistent low retention rates and is taking steps to meet its target of 90%.

5   The University has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of retention rates by programme, stage, division and School, together with a range of protected characteristics and entry points. The team heard from senior staff and saw in examples of Institution-led Review reports, that divisions and programmes with low retention outcomes were required to address these through specific enhancement action plans. The University has developed data dashboards to support senior staff and programme leaders so they have better oversight of module performance and the ability to target interventions for students who may be at risk of withdrawal (see paragraph 44).

6   The University has continued to implement support for students at risk of withdrawal or disengagement through its Student Success Officers and School Academic Advisers who provide proactive interventions to encourage engagement and provide targeted support. In meetings with students, the QESR team heard that students were confident about how to raise concerns and where to seek support. Academic and professional support staff described the introduction of Student Success Officers and School Academic Advisers, the discussion of specific enhancement action plans at division and programme level, together with the use of data dashboards and data analysis, as an integrated and collaborative approach in supporting students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes. The University should continue with the approach and evaluate the impact on retention to ensure success in its ambition.

7   In summary, the University has implemented systematic and integrated enhancement procedures to improve retention rates. This includes a data-driven approach to supporting students at risk of disengagement or withdrawal, a proactive process to supporting student transitions, and effective collaborative working between academics, services and students. The QESR team consider this to be a feature of **good practice**.

8   In the academic session 2021-22, the University developed its microcredential offer to help students transitioning into higher education with the development of core academic literacies to support academic success. The University has worked proactively with the sector on the development of these microcredentials through the QAA Enhancement Themes and through leadership of a Collaborative Cluster exploring personalised approaches to resilience and community. A key feature of the microcredentials is supported peer learning using Student Module Assistants, who are students employed as peer facilitators of learning within the microcredential suites. They offer synchronous contact points for students to ask questions, gain support or be directed to academic staff. Students are also involved in the co-development and review of microcredential modules. This approach has embedded a strong partnership framework between the University and the student body for the ongoing development of the microcredential suites.

9   In meetings with the QESR team, students were positive about how the microcredential offer had supported transitions and provided a strong introduction to the University. This was further supported by evaluative activities undertaken by the University which commended the use of student module assistants for co-creation and supporting student needs, as well as the use of diagnostic assessments to enable a high-level overview of cohort strengths and areas for development which informed interventions in subsequent modules.

10   The QESR team identified the effective and proactive approach to student transitions taken by the University through the development of a suite of microcredentials that provides core academic literacies and supported peer learning. This has embedded support and development for academic success and for building student communities, and the team considers that the development of the microcredential suites as a proactive measure to support retention and inform enhancements within each programme is a feature of **good practice.**

Student partnership

11   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor, review and enhance its approach to student partnership. The team considered the Current Student Partnership Agreement (2022-2025), analysis of student feedback, information on student representation minutes of the Students as Partners Board, and Information on Unitu - an online platform. In addition, the team met with staff and students to explore the effectiveness of the current partnership arrangements and student satisfaction in

this area.

12   The overarching framework for student engagement is set out in the Current Student Partnership Agreement (2022-2025) which sets out the priorities agreed between the student body and the University over a three-year period. It is reviewed annually to reflect the nature of the agreement as a working document.

13   A key mechanism for the student voice to be heard, are student voice forums. The QESR team heard from students that elected class and division representatives give feedback to the University during Student Voice forums and receive updates from the University on what is being done to resolve issues and close the feedback loop. The team was told that lecturers respond quickly and fully to feedback they have received through emails. Students can also approach their Students' Association Sabbatical Officers and raise issues who, in turn, can raise the issues in meetings with the senior leadership team.

14   The University has been trialling an online platform, Unitu, which allows users to give and receive feedback in a flexible manner. It is managed by student representatives and monitored by partner leads at the Students' Association and the Abertay Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy. Comments on the platform can be shared and responded to by both academic and professional service staff as needed. The online platform was introduced in a limited pilot to a small number of programmes in 2022-23 and was further extended to the entire School of Business, Law and Social Science and the Division of Engineering and Food Science in 2023-24. The online platform allows the University to move away from traditional approaches to the student voice and allow an ongoing conversation between staff and students, even when students are not on campus

15   The University provides multiple routes for students to work in partnership with staff. Notably, the AbLE Academy provides a range of opportunities for staff and students, such as student research assistants, who collaborate through their EnAbLE projects, open to joint bids by staff and students to collaborate on institutional enhancement projects. The AbLE Academy also engages student consultants to work in partnership on key institutional priorities and student module assistants to co-create microcredentials, and to promote the resources available at open days and events. The University also funds projects by staff and students on topics, such as sustainability.

16   The QESR team considered the University has a wide range of effective and accessible student support services. The students met by the team were very positive about the Student Enquiry Zone and the library as clear points of contact for support and that there is good support available, and it is easy to access support or referral to another service as appropriate. They confirmed that academic issues can be dealt with by talking to module leaders or class representatives, and that more specialist services, such as counselling and learning support, are also available to students.

Action taken since ELIR 4

17   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its actions taken in response to ELIR 4. The team considered the ELIR 2021 Action Plan; ELIR Follow-up Report; Institution-Led Review 2024-30 Handbook: Support Services, Adjustment of Marks Policy; and minutes from meetings of the TLC and AQSC. The team also explored the institution's ELIR 4 responses in meetings with staff and students.

18   ELIR 4 identified five recommendations. The QESR team saw from the Technical Report and the action plan that the University has completed three recommendations relating to the review of professional services, and the policy with regard to adjustment of

student marks and effective implementation of university strategies. The University has made satisfactory progress on the remaining two recommendations - student retention and feedback on assessment with further work ongoing. A strategic lead was identified to take forward the actions and the University's TLC receives regular reports on each of the recommendations.

19 A review of all professional services was carried out within one event in May 2022. A Short-Life Working Group (SLWG) comprised of students, academic and professional services staff was convened on behalf of the Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) to consider and develop the approach for the review of professional services. A revised approach and associated new review handbook were approved by TLC in June 2023. The new cycle of professional service review commenced in academic session 2023-24 and professional staff confirmed that good progress had been made in the preparatory phases. Plans to evaluate the new method were being considered at the time of the review and the QESR team would encourage continuation of these plans ensuring the effectiveness of the new review method.

20 In April 2022, a new policy relating to the adjustment of student marks was approved, to commence in the academic session 2022-23. The University has developed a communications strategy to inform staff and students about the introduction of the policy and confirmed that, although the policy had not been used in practice since approval, it was regularly discussed at Programme Assessment Boards.

21 The recommendation relating to the effective implementation of university strategies has been met and the University undertook a review of institutional key performance indicators (KPIs) to ensure appropriate monitoring and reporting on institutional strategies. The team saw from the evidence submitted, that there is effective use of these KPIs. Awareness and engagement of academic and professional service staff with strategies the University has developed, has improved through the development of an Engagement Framework. Regular meetings communicate priorities and progress with strategies. Academic and professional service staff are aware of university strategies and how these are informing developments and enhancement activities (paragraph 3). The University acknowledges that its response to this recommendation requires a long-term approach and will utilise learning from these activities as it develops its new Strategic Plan and Learning and Teaching Strategy.

22 There is a strategic focus and robust oversight of retention challenges across the institution that continues to be a key priority for the University. A comprehensive analysis of retention rates by programme, stage, division and School; and a range of protected characteristics and entry points has been undertaken, and this provided confidence to the QESR team that the recommendation has been met. The QESR team would encourage the University to continue with its integrated approach to the enhancement of student retention, implement evidence-based interventions to improve retention, and ensure evaluation of the effectiveness of these interventions in achieving this ambition (see paragraphs 4-7).

23 To address the recommendation concerning consistency of feedback, the University established a Short Life Working Group (SLWG) on assessment in the academic session 2022-23. The SLWG included students, academics and professional services and led to a recommendations paper in June 2023 to enhance and ensure further consistency in practice (see paragraph 36). The AbLE service has also worked to review resources, support and development opportunities for staff to support more effective assessment and feedback practices. Developments include workshops and regular practice-sharing seminars on assessment and feedback, as well as student-facing sessions on assessment and feedback literacies. Staff and students were positive about the development and support for feedback practice. The University acknowledged that enhancements to assessment and feedback are

ongoing and that this will be a key feature of the new Learning and Teaching Strategy.

Sector-wide enhancement topic

24   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering. The QESR team considered the specific evidence provided by the University relating to the Enhancement Topic; Learning Enhancement Strategy; Digital Strategy; principles of online and blended learning information about the microcredential suites; minutes from key institutional meetings; and met with staff and students**.**

25   In response to the new SFC tertiary enhancement topic - [The future of learning and teaching: defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering](#) - the University has built upon its initial work on online and blended learning introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The University has developed a set of principles to support the transition to online and blended learning, as well as to set clear expectations for learning and teaching. The QESR team was clear, from discussions with students and staff, that the University has embraced a supportive blended learning approach, mainstreaming key developments such as pre-recorded lectures to support flexibility in learning, and prioritisation of learning interactions on campus, such as seminars, tutorials and workshops.

26   The University has introduced a series of changes to ensure those studying online or at a distance have a consistent, high-quality student experience. Enhancements include updates to student voice mechanisms through the pilot of an online feedback platform which supports the new blended learning system by allowing feedback to be collected without the need for on-campus focus groups. In addition, the provision of microcredentials, to increase digital literacy among students and staff, was also found to be helpful. The QESR team also heard how students valued the benefit of having access to a microcredential in advance of starting at the University.

27   The QESR team learnt from staff that the move to a blended approach to learning supported retention among the diverse student demographic at Abertay which was confirmed by students who welcomed access to pre-recorded and recorded lecturers, as well as the flexibility offered by blended learning. However, it was acknowledged by both staff and students that a blended learning approach was not the preference for all learners. The team learned that the University was considering the best approaches to prioritise on-campus interactions and community building through learning and teaching approaches, such as block teaching and focusing on physical skills - for example, laboratory skills.

28   Support for staff and students in developing digital skills and using key learning and digital technologies is further supported through the AbLE Academy and the Technology Enhanced Learning Support (TELS) team who offer a range of workshops, guidance and training for staff and students (see paragraphs 14 and 15). The AbLE Academy has also continued to offer their 'AbLE Bites' sessions and Blended Learning Summer Camps, at programme and division level, to support developments in digital learning. The University has also recently established a new Learning Technologies Development Forum to support communication and implementation of the Digital Strategy, as well as to help identify development and infrastructure needs, and continue to challenge enshrined pedagogies. The Jisc 2023 digital insights survey provided the University with information on how students were using the technology and what made a difference to their learning and working experiences. The results allowed the University to benchmark the experience of their students on their learning situation, digital platforms and service, and the use of technology in learning. The Jisc 2023 survey results were positive, with 85% of students at Abertay rating the overall quality of the online learning environment as excellent or good. Abertay ranked ahead of the sector benchmark in terms of support provided to enable

students to access online platforms and services off campus.

29   The University provides a high-quality digital learning experience for students through its use of blended learning approaches and accessible virtual learning environments. Staff and students are effectively supported through a range of activities to develop digital skills and use digital tools and technologies for learning. The QESR team was confident that students have a strong and effective digital learning experience at the University and that this is a feature of **good practice**.

Academic standards and quality processes

Key features of the institution's approach to managing quality and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards

30   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to managing quality and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards. The team considered a sample of quality process reports, relevant guidance documents for annual monitoring and institution-led periodic review, along with minutes from institutional committees, and met with staff and students.

31   The QESR team found that the University's arrangements for managing quality and setting standards meet the Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and align with the guidance issued by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Institutional procedures relating to programme development and approval are aligned to sector expectations expressed in the Quality Code and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF). The Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) - a sub-committee of Senate - has responsibility for approving new programmes and considers such approvals, taking account of reports from Programme Approval Advisory Panels, Programme Change Advisory Panels and recommendations from the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). AQSC approves module and programme changes.

32   Within the University's approach to Institution-led Review, it conducts thorough and robust annual monitoring and periodic review. All programmes, divisions, Schools, support services and partner institutions are required to produce annual reports. Programme, division and partner annual reports are approved at school level, while school and support service reports are approved by the AQSC. Annual reports focus on both quality assurance and ongoing enhancement and include actions to be progressed as follow-up to the monitoring process. Action plans prepared in response to periodic reviews are monitored through the annual monitoring process and are approved by Senate. TLC receives an annual report on institutional insights gathered from annual monitoring reports. The QESR team considered the overall approach is effective in facilitating alignment of periodic review outcomes and actions within the continuing annual quality processes, and enables oversight of progress at both school, service and institutional levels.

33   Institution-led periodic reviews of divisions, partnerships, support services and postgraduate research degrees are undertaken by panels which include staff, students and external members. Detailed reports identify key strengths/commendations and recommendations on areas for improvement or enhancement. These are considered at school and university level, through the AQSC and TLC, and reports with associated action plans are ultimately approved by Senate. The QESR team found that the University does not currently undertake annual analysis of Institutional-led Reviews. Since there may only be a very small number of reviews taking place each year, thematic analysis may not be appropriate on an annual basis**.** However, the lack of such analysis at a mid-point, results in a lack of opportunity to consider cross-institutional themes or trends in good practice, areas

for development, or other issues which may require institutional response or oversight. The QESR team **recommends** that the University implements routine thematic analysis of the outcomes of its Institution-led Reviews at key points within the cycle of reviews to ensure identification of thematic trends in good practice and areas of development which require institutional oversight or action.

34   Evaluation of the effectiveness of support services is governed by the same principles as the processes for the review of divisions, partnerships and postgraduate research degrees**.** The revised process for professional service review that was approved in June 2023, in response to ELIR 4, focuses on cross-institutional objectives and themes, and how service areas collaborate in respect of a theme, rather than on provision in individual service areas (paragraph 25). Subsequent to the review of all professional services that took place during the 2021-22 academic year and no periodic reviews of services taking place in 2022-23, the new process is being implemented from 2023-24. A further professional services review of 'building learning communities' is scheduled to take place in the second term of the academic year, with the theme of 'sustainability' to be reviewed in 2024-25.

35   In accordance with institutional strategy, growth of transnational partnerships is a current objective for the University. The Partnership Committee, reporting to TLC, provides oversight of partnerships and includes a range of senior officer, staff and student representatives within its membership. The Dean of International and UK Partnerships provides leadership and works closely with the Dean of Teaching and Learning. Operational elements of partnership delivery align with the University's core quality arrangements and are defined by thorough and considered processes for managing the full lifecycle of a partnership. These are set out in an Academic Partnership Handbook and resourcing considerations linked to partnerships are included within core annual planning processes. The QESR team is confident that the University has given careful and comprehensive consideration to the development of robust processes for partnership development and management**.** The University is continuing to reflect upon and enhance the processes to establish standard, annual due diligence considerations in addition to those undertaken at the development stage. The University is encouraged to maintain this proactive and considered approach as it continues to grow its portfolio of partnerships.

36   The University has focused on improving consistency and quality of feedback on assessments, and, more broadly, has kept assessment policy and procedure under review through a Short-life Working Group (SLWG) established in 2022-23. The group reports to TLC and a range of recommendations from the group were approved by TLC in June 2023, for implementation in 2023-24. Areas of focus for the University have included introducing a set of feedback principles, supporting student feedback literacy and piloting a new assessment brief template to develop consistency of the information provided to students on their assessments. The University intends to monitor the impact of its work on assessment through student feedback, and continuing review by the SLWG.

37   The University mapped its practice to the QAA External Examining Principles during the 2022-23 academic year and proactively engaged with feedback from external examiners. TLC receives an institutional overview of the reports submitted by external examiners, and subsequently provides recommended actions at the institutional level to address feedback and seeks to encourage members of TLC to act upon the feedback at more local levels.

Use of external reference points in quality processes

38   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to the use of external reference points in quality processes. The team considered the mapping of institutional policy and process against the Quality Code, policies and a sample of reports for annual monitoring and Institution-led Review,

policy for the review and monitoring of partnerships, minutes from key institutional committees, the annual overview of external examiner reports, and annual SFC reporting. In addition, the QESR team also met with staff and students with responsibilities and experience of quality assurance, enhancement and academic standards.

39   The University makes effective use of the Quality Code in the development of its policies and procedures for quality assurance and enhancement. The University maintains a detailed map of how the Quality Code informs and enhances the institution's policies, procedures and principles - demonstrating clear alignment with the Expectations, Core and Common practices of the Code.

40   The QESR team considers that external reference points are used effectively to inform quality processes and the development and review of policy. This includes the use of external examiners, employers, professional standards and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), and student participation in quality Scotland resources in annual monitoring and Institution-led Review. The development of the institution's approach to the review of professional services also evidenced engagement with sectoral developments such as the [QAA Focus on Professional Service Partnership](#).

41   Engagement with sector Enhancement Themes was also clearly demonstrated through the institution's work on retention and its leadership of a Collaborative Cluster exploring [Personalised Approaches to Resilience and Community](#) through its use of diagnostic assessment in the microcredentials suite (see paragraphs 8 and 9). A key feature of the microcredentials is supported peer learning using Student Module Assistants. Students are also involved in the co-development and review of microcredential modules. This approach has embedded a strong partnership framework between the University and the student body for the ongoing development of the microcredential suites.

42   Development of new policies and processes was also clearly informed by sectoral reference points and demonstrated an integrative approach to meeting and aligning the expectations for quality and standards. The team saw an example of this in the recently approved Academic Partnership Handbook which engaged with a range of sectoral reference points including the Quality Code Advice and Guidance on Partnerships, QAA Characteristic Statements for qualifications involving more than one degree-awarding body, and a range of government agencies related to the management and monitoring of collaborative provision.

Use of data and evidence to inform self-evaluation and decision-making

43   The QESR team is confident that the University has in place effective arrangements to monitor and review its approach to the use of data and evidence, and to inform self-evaluation and decision-making. The team considered institution-level analysis of student feedback, Institution-led Review reports since 2021-22, the approach to annual monitoring, the Retention, Progression and Module Performance update, and met with staff and students.

44   Retention continues to be a key priority for the University and a systematic integrated approach to the issue has been implemented (see paragraphs 4-7). At institutional level, the University has enhanced business intelligence systems through the introduction of a range of data dashboards, such as the retention, progression and achievement dashboard launched in January 2023. These dashboards have supported senior staff to make interventions on retention, by identifying module performance differences through Programme Assessment Boards and setting actions for further investigation and development. This new approach to data has also supported programme leaders to have

better oversight of module performance and target interventions for 'at-risk' students. In 2021-22, as a direct result of analysing the data on student retention, the University appointed a Student Success Officer in each School to monitor attendance on modules across the University and to alert colleagues to issues that require intervention. As a result of this intervention, in the academic year 2022-23, the University implemented an assessment at week four to identify struggling students. While retention rates fell in 2022-23, the team considered that this may be the continuing impact of the Covid pandemic and further monitoring will be required to assess this in the future.

45   A range of data is considered in the University's key quality processes, primarily Institution-led Review reports, annual monitoring and student feedback. Quality reports reviewed by the QESR team demonstrated that academic schools and divisions were able to access a range of data, through the new Business Intelligence (BI) dashboards such as Application, Enrolment and Entry Standard data; Student Progression, Attainment and Satisfaction data; and employability data to support their evaluation of programme performance. However, evaluation is currently largely metric-driven, and how impact is being evaluated is currently being considered by the University.

46   The University takes appropriate consideration of institution-wide student feedback, such as the National Student Survey (NSS) and Jisc surveys. Staff informed the team that all comments from the NSS are reviewed and reflected upon, and Jisc surveys are used to monitor attendance and virtual learning environment usage. Programme teams review the data and implement an action plan to address issues raised by students. Actions arising from the reviews include an increase in the number of suitable online textbooks for LLB Hons students and improvements to the recruitment and balanced representation of women on Art, Design and Technology programmes. A 'You Said, We Did' approach is taken in response to Jisc surveys, and a positive example of an outcome from these surveys has been investment in a new capture system for lectures which has aided learning, accessibility and quality of online materials in line with the University's new post-pandemic, blended-learning approach.

47   The University has made progress in its use of data to support enhancement planning and decision-making. There has been investment by the University to develop the skills, capacity and infrastructure required for the effective use of data and progress in developing data dashboards and the availability of data analysis to staff at all levels. The QESR team consider this to be a feature of **good practice.**