

Learning from ELIR 2003-06

Managing assurance and enhancement: Evolution and progression An interim report



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Preface

The approach to the management of quality and standards in Scotland is enhancement-led and learner centred. It was developed in partnership with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Universities Scotland, the National Union of Students in Scotland (NUS Scotland) and QAA Scotland.

In the four years since its inception, the enhancement-led approach to managing quality in Scotland has excited considerable interest both in the UK and internationally. It is very pleasing to report that the approach in Scotland now finds resonance with approaches in a number of other countries, most notably Ireland, Finland, New Zealand and, increasingly, in America. As we consolidate the enhancement-led approach to assuring quality and standards, we will look to build on these and other international links to shape future development.

With the first cycle of enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) almost complete, it is timely to publish this interim report of evolving approaches to the strategic management of quality assurance and enhancement across the Scottish higher education sector. The ELIR reports demonstrate that institutional systems continue to be judged rigorous and robust in assuring the quality of provision and the maintenance of academic standards. The evidence of the reports also clearly demonstrates the shift in emphasis in institutional quality systems towards enhancement, and the improvement of the student experience. The enhancement focus has facilitated a more integrated approach to quality management and an articulation between quality processes and strategic planning processes that is a more effective and imaginative driver for change.

This interim report provides an overview of progress over the last four years in managing assurance and enhancement in the Scottish higher education sector. It is the first of a planned series of reports on different aspects of the enhancement-led approach. Forthcoming interim reports will address approaches to internal subject review, student engagement and e-learning, with final reports on these topics, taking cognisance of all ELIR reports from the first cycle, published during autumn 2007. These reports will provide evidence of the impact to date of the enhancement-led approach, to inform national and international debate and, more particularly, guide the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) as it takes forward its strategy to support the implementation and embedding of a quality enhancement culture.

May I take this opportunity to thank the members of SHEEC, through its Chair, Professor Kenneth Miller (Vice-Principal, University of Strathclyde), for their key role in progressing the enhancement-led approach to quality and standards in Scottish higher education.



Professor Charles W Munn, OBE, FCIBS

Chief Executive The Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland

Chairman QAA Scotland Committee

Background

This paper is based on an analysis of 15 reports of enhancement-led institutional reviews (ELIRs) conducted at Scottish higher education institutions during the period September 2003 to June 2006, as detailed in Annex 1. The ELIR method embraces a focus on the effectiveness of the student learning experience which is linked to the strategic management of quality assurance and quality enhancement. For the purposes of ELIR, enhancement is defined as taking deliberate steps to bring about continuous improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience of students. This perspective is consistent with the Scottish Executive's Lifelong Learning strategy and, in particular, the need to develop a quality framework which is 'fit for purpose', and which puts learners' needs at the centre of educational systems¹.

The Scottish higher education sector is small but diverse, containing within it a wide range of institutions of varying missions and sizes, cultures and organisational complexity, including three designated small specialist institutions of which two currently have their provision accredited by other institutions in the sector. Across the sector, institutions approach the enhancement agenda from a variety of starting points and perspectives. The ELIR method has the flexibility to address this diversity while systematically addressing key aspects of managing provision. Within the defined method and focus of ELIR, the institution's reflective analysis has a specific purpose to explain the institution's mission and context, and how the mission is effected through institutional structures and processes. It is supported by a number of case-studies to illustrate the institution's approach to enhancement. As the starting point for discussion, the reflective analysis shapes the key points of the dialogue between the institution and the ELIR team. Thus, while each ELIR report covers broadly the same aspects of provision, it represents the outcome of an engagement with the institution, which will necessarily address the institution's own state of evolution and particular strategic priorities to promote enhancement, with differing emphases from one institution to another. Bearing in mind this diversity, the examples of institutional approaches included in this report have been selected primarily to illustrate developments across the sector over the last three years, rather than simply as exemplars of good practice, and have not been attributed to individual institutions.

The ELIR reports themselves are a rich repository of evidence of how the enhancement-led approach to quality management is developing in the Scottish higher education sector. Collectively, they demonstrate the ways in which institutional quality systems are evolving to provide a focus not only on the assurance of quality and maintenance of academic standards, but also on quality enhancement. There is clear evidence that these institutional systems now support processes and procedures which increasingly view the quality of educational provision, in a holistic way from the perspective of the learner, in order to more effectively promote continuous improvement of the student learning experience.

¹ Learning to improve: quality approaches for lifelong learning, Lawrence Howells, Scottish Executive, Edinburgh 2005.

ELIR reports are structured around three main sections: internal monitoring and review of quality, standards and public information²; the student experience; and the effectiveness of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement. These three sections follow a common structure comprising an overview and a commentary. The evidence of the overviews of internal structures, systems and processes is, in general, quite detailed, while the commentaries provide deeper insight into their effectiveness and the way in which they interact to support quality assurance and quality enhancement. This analysis draws primarily on the evidence contained in the first and third main sections.

Summary

From the evidence of the first three years of ELIR, the following conclusions emerge:

- institutional quality management processes are providing robust assurance of quality and academic standards at the same time as beginning to incorporate a key enhancement function
- institutional strategies for quality enhancement are driving policy development and practice that is increasingly learner centred
- institutional management structures are supporting a collegiate approach to the development and implementation of enhancement-led strategies and policies
- in general (and excepting the very few cases where the process is under development), internal subject review is being operated effectively, providing confidence of institutions' ability to manage quality and maintain academic standards at the subject level
- internal subject review reports are developing into a key mechanism for the enhancement of the student experience
- student representation and student engagement in quality processes have been making significant advances in support of the enhancement of the student experience.

² This section includes consideration of the institution's use of a range of external reference points including the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), the Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), and subject benchmark information, published by QAA; and student, employer and international perspectives.

Introduction

1 The aim of this report is to provide a general overview of evolving approaches to the strategic management of assurance and enhancement in the Scottish higher education sector. To this end it examines institutional quality systems and the extent to which, within Scotland's higher education institutions, they now serve a dual role, continuing to provide a robust quality assurance and maintenance of academic standards, while at the same time fostering the enhancement of the student learning experience. Of particular interest is the extent to which quality systems are becoming less retrospective and more evaluative, and the extent to which strategic planning and quality processes are becoming more interlinked and learner centred. There is evidence that institutional strategies reflect a more holistic approach to the enhancement of the student learning experience, and that institutions are seeking to engage students more proactively and productively in quality processes. At the strategic level, the development of partnerships between some institutions and their student associations in particular policy areas illustrates the changing culture.

2 The diverse institutions of the Scottish higher education sector approached enhancement from a variety of starting points. Institutions have benefited from having in place robust structures and processes for assuring quality, most of which could readily be modified to increase the focus on enhancement. For a number of small institutions whose provision is accredited by other institutions in the sector, engagement with the enhancement-led agenda has afforded an opportunity for more fundamental restructuring and development of new internal processes. Indeed, the ELIR process itself is reported to have been a valuable developmental tool in this regard, where institutions have been able to align internal strategic planning processes with institutional reflection on enhancement in preparation for their ELIR review. Within the sector there is a spectrum of levels of engagement with the enhancement agenda, which in part reflects institutional heritage, culture and strategic priorities for development. However, the evidence of the ELIR reports to date suggests that all institutions are embracing the enhancement-led approach within their own strategic context, and making steady progress. In general, the ELIR reports demonstrate that the sector as a whole is embracing enhancement, and that within institutions there is in progress a systemic shift to support enhancement. The impetus thus far has been predominantly 'top-down', but with evidence of increasing strategic involvement of middle managers as structures and processes evolve to become more enhancement-led. The challenge now is to secure wider engagement at all levels within the institution.

3 The following sections explore in more detail a number of the features which emerge from the reports as key elements in the strategic management of assurance and enhancement: the role of senior and middle management; the collegiate role of committees; institutional enhancement strategies; the integration of enhancement in quality frameworks; internal subject review; student engagement; and the continuing evolution of enhancement-led systems.

The role of senior and middle management

4 Typically, overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the enhancement-led approach is located at vice-principal level (or equivalent). However, enhancement strategies which address the student experience as a whole, by their very nature go beyond learning and teaching. Indeed, they are likely to impact on a range of other service areas including estates, information services, student support and academic administration. Committee structures are beginning to reflect this holistic approach.

5 In general, responsibility for the operation of institutions' enhancement strategies rests with a hierarchy of senior managers at institutional level and middle managers, located within faculties, colleges or schools, supported by administrative officers at the different levels. So far, enhancement has tended to be absorbed into the roles and remits of established posts, albeit with evidence of significant reconfiguration.

6 Whether the academic structure is faculty, school or college based, it is clear from the evidence of the ELIR reports that middle managers play a key strategic role in supporting enhancement. For example, in faculty or school based structures, deans have a significant strategic role in supporting enhancement, both in terms of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' processes. Similarly, where the institution has a collegiate structure, heads of colleges working with their directors of learning and teaching are key channels of 'up and down' communication between the institution and the schools within their colleges. In a number of institutions there is evidence that deans have become members of senior management groups, which enables them to play a more authoritative corporate role, both in influencing institutional policies and in encouraging their adoption at the local level, as well as encouraging a flow of information and dissemination of good practice in both directions. Through their participation in university committees, they have a key role to play in linking institutional and local enhancement initiatives, and in optimising the strategic management of resources and support for academic staff to promote quality enhancement at the local level. As a group, they also have a key role in promoting consistency of policy and practice across the institution. Two institutions have further strengthened the corporate role of the dean through the appointment or election of deans with particular and distinctive responsibilities for quality assurance and enhancement: in one case, two appointed deans have special responsibilities in addition to their managerial role in the faculty; in the other case, two elected deans have a specific remit to support quality and standards at institutional level.

7 In many faculty and school-based structures, vice-deans or associate deans are seen as pivotal in communication between the institution, subject areas and academic staff. While they have a key role in managing quality assurance processes, enhancement is an increasingly prominent element of their work, partly through the developing links between assurance and enhancement at local level, and partly through their participation on central committees dealing with quality matters. Working closely with the vice-principal (or equivalent) for learning and teaching, they also have a key role in the implementation of quality enhancement strategies. In some institutions, the significance of this role has led to the development of small, informal cross-university groups with a deliberative function, which helps to promote sharing of policy and practice, as well as facilitating the implementation of institutional strategic goals.

Collegiate role of committees

8 The reports indicate widespread revision of committee structures, particularly of institution-level committees to facilitate better strategic links, but also in order to promote more effective communication with local committees to support development and enhancement. This is being achieved in a variety of ways: through reporting links, cross membership and extended membership to include representation from key service areas. There is also evidence that committee remits have been revised, in some cases to include both quality assurance and quality enhancement. These changes serve to underpin and make explicit the linkage between quality assurance and quality enhancement, and thereby strengthen the strategic drive for enhancement.

Institutional enhancement strategies

9 Institutions have taken a variety of approaches to the development of enhancement strategies. In some, quality enhancement is integral to the institution's strategic plan, while in others it sits as a related but separate strategy, focusing more directly on improving the student learning experience, informing both the institution's overarching strategic plan and, in some cases, the learning and teaching strategy. In other institutions it is a more narrowly focused sub-strategy of the teaching and learning strategy, or indeed, is built into the teaching and learning strategy. Where no formal teaching and learning strategy has previously existed, the development of an enhancement strategy appears to act as a stimulus to develop a separate more narrowly-focused learning and teaching strategy. Two institutions explicitly differentiate between strategic enhancement and activities involving good practice, innovation and experimentation. In their view, for an activity to be truly enhancement-led, it must result from the implementation of a defined strategy.

10 The formulation of such strategies would appear to reflect a learning process, helping institutions to develop their understanding of quality enhancement and, thus, how best to develop existing quality frameworks to be more enhancement facing. For example, the ELIR report for one institution affirms that the development of a strategy is linked with restructuring to promote 'a deliberate coherent process of university-wide change, which is intended to be achieved through a culture of critical reflection on learning and teaching and joined-up thinking and action'. In another case, the ELIR report highlights how the institution's approach encapsulates the link between quality assurance and enhancement, noting that 'the enhancement of the student learning experience has two key drivers: planned strategic development through which the institution aims to anticipate and respond to the needs of the students it recruits, and a structured process of continuous review and reflection on current practice and provision'. Interestingly, in one institution the enhancement strategy for teaching and learning complements the strategy for research development, the development of a 'community of learners' being central to both: '[this] strategy situates the learner at the centre of the educational process, viewing all staff and students as part of, and contributing to, a community of learners and the continued enhancement of all aspects of provision'.

11 In general, senior managers recognise the need to create a sense of ownership of institutional enhancement strategies in order to encourage staff and students to proactively support it. Some ELIR reports have noted a correlation between involvement in the formulation of the strategy and a purposeful sense of ownership. This applies to staff and, in particular, to students. In the case of the latter, reports indicate the desirability of engaging with the wider student body rather than relying solely on student representatives on committees and working groups. Some smaller institutions have taken deliberate steps to involve staff more through planned staff development days and annual enhancement events. In one larger institution, the ELIR report noted that the institutional group responsible for developing and driving the enhancement strategy held open forums with different groups of staff including, for example, programme and course leaders, to discuss common themes in teaching and sharing of good practice.

12 The evidence of the reports indicates that to be fully effective, strategic approaches to enhancement have to reflect the nature and structure of the organisation, with actions designed at both institutional and operational levels. The reports indicate that the greatest impact is achieved where institutional-level actions are complemented and supported by a range of initiatives and projects at institutional, intermediate and subject levels to form an integrated and coherent plan. The reports also provide evidence of the impact of achieving a balance between top-down and bottom-up initiatives in order to effectively engage academic and support staff. This is also seen to be important in facilitating collaborative initiatives that bring together different groups of staff, as well as developing effective partnerships with students and students' associations. Where the institutional structure is devolved, and particularly where the culture is seen to be more collaborative in nature, it is likely that development will progress at different rates in different subject areas. In these circumstances, one report counsels that the institution should take steps to assure itself that the strategic implementation of enhancement is at least meeting a minimum threshold across the institution.

13 In a small number of institutions where there is an established practice of undertaking institution-wide thematic reviews, this mechanism has been readily adapted to support enhancement, with evidence of some alignment with national enhancement themes.

14 The reports also indicate the importance of recognising in the quality enhancement strategy the development needs and professional aspirations of individual practitioners. For example, a small number of institutions are using internal subject review as a tool to support staff development. In others, mediating initiatives are found to be effective drivers for change where internal development funds are being used to support projects at intermediate and subject level, the topics of which can be scoped to harmonise with the institutional strategy.

15 Centres for academic practice (or their equivalent) are seen to have a significant role to play in facilitating the enhancement of learning and teaching. For example, one institution has recently established a 'Learning Enhancement Network' comprising members of its Centre for Academic Practice and faculty representatives. The ELIR report indicates that this network has been designed to afford a dynamic vehicle for

identifying and bringing together incremental improvements in departmental practice and aligning these with institutional strategies. This in turn facilitates the sharing and dissemination of good practice, as well as identifying areas where support and advice are required. Similarly, at another institution, the Teaching and Learning Service planned to embark on support level agreements with faculties thus providing the basis for a strategic link between individual initiatives and institutional strategy. Another institution has adopted a distinctive regional approach having initiated in-house seminars and discussion forums, sharing initiatives and good practice which have been extended to include staff from neighbouring institutions.

Integration of enhancement in quality frameworks

16 The reports indicate that, in general, enhancement strategies are developed, monitored and reviewed by a standing group led by the vice-principal for teaching and learning (or equivalent) and, typically, include a range of senior and middle managers and student officers. They may also include representation from relevant service areas. Such groups generally report to a central committee for learning and teaching. The enhancement strategies generally describe the principles used to guide quality enhancement activities at all levels, identify the bodies, procedures and specific actions required, and are most frequently reported to be effective when accompanied by a systematic implementation plan, including provision for evaluation and measurement of success. Indeed, the measurement of progress in terms of the impact of enhancement-led approaches appears now to be a matter of keen interest across the sector.

17 The ELIR reports indicate that in the majority of institutions the enhancement function is rooted in robust and pre-existing quality assurance procedures, which are shifting their emphasis from teaching to the learning experience, in order to more effectively address improvement of the overall student experience. The more reflective and evaluative approach evident in much internal reporting is helping to nurture the development of a reflective and learner-centred culture. Thus, for example, the ELIR reports indicate that a number of institutions have come to view reports of the outcomes of annual monitoring and review processes as a potentially powerful tool for the capture and dissemination of good practice. It is also evident that such reports, often incorporating action plans, can help middle managers to develop strong and productive links between the assurance and enhancement of quality, and between annual quality and planning processes. Such reports can more effectively support and inform planned strategic enhancement at the institutional level, while also providing a mechanism for bottom-up comment on institutional strategies for enhancement as well as evidence of engagement. Likewise, top-down planning processes can be used to promote strategic alignment with the institution's enhancement agenda: one report in particular describes how institutional objectives are reflected in faculty strategic planning templates, covering all aspects of provision including estates, teaching and learning, academic and support services, staff development and research, thus addressing different facets of the student experience in a holistic way.

Internal subject review

18 The conduct of internal subject review is one of the key elements on which the 'confidence' judgement in the ELIR report rests. The ELIR reports indicate a variety of approaches to internal subject review. In some institutions subject review comprises a holistic review of all aspects of a department's operations, including general strategy, research, resources and community links, as well as the quality assurance of taught and postgraduate research provision. In other institutions, the process is more closely aligned with past models for external subject review, focusing primarily on the quality assurance of taught provision in a particular discipline or set of cognate disciplines. The reports confirm the rigour and robustness of the process in the majority of institutions. Two institutions were still in the process of developing procedures for internal subject review at the time of their ELIR.

19 In accordance with Scottish Funding Council guidance for subject reviews, all subject review panels now include at least one external subject expert. In addition, a number of institutions explicitly provide for industry or employer representation where appropriate. While the evidence suggests that on the whole professional statutory and regulatory body accreditation visits are not subsumed within the internal subject review process, three reports make explicit reference to the possibility of combining these processes. The composition of the panel and locus of the review varies from one institution to another: in some the event is coordinated centrally and the panel is chaired by a vice-principal (or equivalent); in others it is coordinated at faculty level and chaired by the dean. The ELIR reports indicate increasing involvement of staff of academic practice centres (or equivalent), whether in membership of the panel or in supporting the subject area in the production of its self-evaluation.

20 The ELIR reports indicate a growing focus on the student experience in the internal subject review process in terms of the composition of the review panel, the review panel's engagement with students in the subject area and the scope of the review. The ELIR reports indicate that at the time of their ELIR reviews at least nine of the 15 institutions had included a student member on the review panel, while a further three were considering inclusion of a student member. Review panels meet with a range of staff and students, including members of staff/student consultative committees; some institutions have developed a more formal engagement with the student members of these committees, in which they submit a written submission to the review panel or formally comment on the self-evaluation document.

21 Subject review reports typically provide a detailed commentary, which includes consideration of the quality of teaching and learning, as well as addressing engagement with external reference points, notably the Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, subject benchmark statements and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), published by QAA. In the majority of cases, the outcomes are reported through institutions' quality committee structures with year-on reporting of how subject areas have responded to the review reports. There is clear evidence that internal subject reviews continue to provide robust assurance of academic quality and maintenance of academic standards. Moreover, in many institutions subject review is developing into a key vehicle for the promotion and embedding of enhancement at the subject level

which articulates with institutional strategies and faculty/school plans. Indeed, some ELIR reports note that the development of institutional strategies for enhancement is having a positive impact on the self-evaluation aspect of the subject reviews, encouraging a more reflective approach. In at least one case subject review is explicitly linked with peer review of teaching and identification of staff development needs. In all cases, the outcomes of the reviews inform institutional and faculty/school/college strategic planning processes, as well as providing a forum for the identification and dissemination of good practice.

Student engagement

22 The evidence of the ELIR reports suggests that since the inception of the Quality Enhancement Framework, there has been significant development in student representation generally, and more particularly in student engagement at the strategic level. On the whole, ELIR reports indicate that institutions have an open and strong partnership with their students' associations which is often greatly assisted by a proactive approach on the part of the students' association. However, there is also evidence that the enhancement agenda can and does place a heavy burden and expectation on student officers. Recognising this, two institutions have established an additional sabbatical post in support of education, thus increasing the capacity of students and staff to deal with teaching and learning matters. Achieving an effective communication link between class representatives and students' associations is often challenging. Attempts have been made to facilitate the communication link, for example, through the creation of student officers at the subject level to liaise between the student/staff consultative committees and their students' associations. An alternative approach, which one institution was considering at the time of its ELIR, is the establishment of a 'Students' Parliament', comprising in membership all the student course representatives, as the basis for a unified system of student representation. Another institution, focusing more on the diversity and demography of its student body, was conscious of the need to 'stop trying to fit the students into existing structures and start shaping the structures around students'. To this end, the Students' Association was establishing Students Taking Action and Representing groups, including, for example, a group for international students, a group for postgraduate students and a group for women. Another institution had funded a full-time student development coordinator, based in the Students' Association, to facilitate student engagement with quality assurance processes. As indicated above, student membership on internal subject review panels represents a significant new engagement in a challenging role, for which a number of institutions have provided specific training to enable student members to participate fully.

23 Student engagement at the strategic level is clearly a very powerful driver for enhancement, as exemplified by those institutions where a strong and productive partnership exists. Such partnerships have led, in one case, to a joint strategic initiative to address issues of student representation and engagement, and in another to collaboration in an employability strategy to develop graduate skills. However, wider student engagement remains an ongoing challenge for most institutions involving a significant culture change. A further challenge, particularly important for some institutions, is posed by the diversity of the student population in terms of

mode, timing and place of study. The ELIR reports indicate that a number of institutions have developed or are developing virtual learning environment systems to facilitate support and communication between student representatives, the students they represent and their Students' Association. These important developments are in some cases underpinned with the provision of institutional guidance on the role of student representatives and, more widely, through the provision of training in collaboration with the Student Participation in Quality Scotland Service (sparqs).

Evolution of enhancement-led systems

24 The early ELIR reports from 2003-04 show a recognition on the part of institutions that effective implementation of enhancement requires linkage between different institutional strategies. To this end, early enhancement strategies in those institutions served to codify existing activities and act as a catalyst for change, giving visibility to the idea of enhancement and highlighting the links between existing strategies. In one report, for example, the institution's enhancement strategy is described as 'a management tool capable of sharpening prioritisation of resource allocation and a monitoring tool capable of showing evidence of progress', and as 'a catalyst for support services to work together the better to support student learning'. As management tools, quality enhancement strategies are seen to facilitate a synthesis of separate existing strategies, for example, with regard to staff development, research, flexible provision, the use of information technology in learning and teaching, employability, assessment and responsiveness to student needs. The commentaries in these reports indicate that to be fully effective, enhancement strategies need to articulate with institutional structures and quality processes at different levels, so that enhancement is planned and strategically directed. In some institutions this articulation is clear, in others where greater emphasis is placed on the role of the individual practitioner in supporting enhancement, the systemic linkages are less clear. For example, one ELIR team identified the need to balance individually and institutionally driven enhancement with involvement at the operational level (for example, faculty or school), so that enhancement is managed and overseen at the middle management level. Another ELIR team noted that internal processes are not yet delivering the kind of evaluative and forward looking reports required to fully support the development of an enhancement culture. More than one ELIR team were encouraged to note institutional plans to undertake further modifications to procedures and give increased emphasis to enhancement and quality management, as well as encouraging further reflection on the constitution of some academic committees with a view to supporting enhancement more effectively.

25 ELIR reports from 2004-05 demonstrate the significant progress made by a number of large, well-established institutions in their understanding of the dynamics involved in managing enhancement. In these examples, modification of quality systems provided greater synergy with institutional strategies and evidence of enhancement beginning to penetrate to the operational level. In these institutions it appears that the emphasis in quality assurance processes was gradually shifting from teaching to the student learning experience in a range of ways, for example, through increasing emphasis on specific evaluation of the effectiveness of student learning;

more effective evaluation of information from programme monitoring and review at the institutional level; and more systematic follow-up and dissemination of good practice. The evidence of the reports indicates that revision of the roles and remits of senior and middle managers, combined with revision of remits of senior committees and refocusing of quality processes, was providing a framework for more deliberate and coherent strategic management of enhancement. The reports also show the development of a more operational approach to enhancement which articulates with strategic planning processes. One ELIR report highlighted the institution's view that 'The quality enhancement strategy provides a deliberate, coherent process of University change [which] is intended to be achieved through a culture of critical reflection in learning and teaching; closing of all feedback loops; joined-up thinking and actions, improving the flow of quality related information; and disseminating good practice'. Other ELIR reports show specialist institutions, in their own distinctive contexts, making rapid progress in the development of their own quality assurance arrangements and conscious of the need to review academic and management structures, including the clarification of interrelationships between committees and the role of individuals. In one such example, the institution was using its quality enhancement strategy to link top-down strategy with bottom-up practice, focusing on six key elements of the academic environment that make a distinctive contribution to the student learning experience.

26 The majority of ELIR reports from 2005-06 show institutions continuing to strengthen the enhancement-led approach, developing well-integrated procedures for linking assurance and enhancement in annual monitoring and periodic review. For some, the alignment of subject-level enhancement agendas with institutional strategy was explicitly expressed as an institutional objective, with internal subject review representing a primary link between quality assurance and quality enhancement. One ELIR report noted that 'Staff who have been directly involved are particularly positive about the benefits of the [subject review] process in leading to quality enhancement, and a shift from the perceived compliance culture engendered through previous processes'. Collectively, these ELIR reports reinforce earlier evidence of the pivotal role of middle managers in coordinating and implementing enhancement-led approaches. One ELIR team commented that 'Changes in the sub-structure of the Learning and Teaching Board, such as the recognition of the value of the Associate Deans Operations Group and its inclusion in the formal committee structure...together with annual refinements in processes and activities, such as the development of a University-wide Enhancement and Annual Monitoring Event, illustrate an evolutionary and dynamic approach to enhancement activity...!.

Areas for further development

27 An important aspect of the ELIR process is that it offers the opportunity for institutions to reflect on the effectiveness of their management of quality assurance and enhancement and, in discussion with ELIR teams, to identify not only what is working well but what is working less well, and why. Over the first three years of ELIR, the reports identify a number of commonly occurring matters which are currently problematic or challenging. These fall into seven broad areas, as detailed in

Annex 2: strategic development; organisational structures and quality processes; staff development; student engagement (including representation and feedback mechanisms); approaches to the development of effective learning, including implementation of Personal Development Planning; assessment; and matters relating to the Academic Infrastructure (including programme specifications and some issues relating to the use of the SCQF). Institutions will be addressing these matters individually as part of their internal follow-up to the reviews. In the wider context, the identification of these challenging aspects of quality assurance and enhancement will inform ongoing deliberations by the partners in the Quality Enhancement Framework in various national forums, on the development of cross-sector strategic support for the embedding of enhancement, and the future management and focus of the national enhancement themes.

Conclusion

28 The ELIR reports provide substantial and rich evidence that established and robust institutional quality assurance processes and procedures are evolving to promote an increasing focus on enhancement, and develop a more holistic approach to the continuous improvement of the student experience. This means that quality assurance processes are beginning to articulate more effectively with wider institutional strategies to support enhancement of the student experience. The reports demonstrate growing expertise in the strategic management of assurance and enhancement, the operation of monitoring and review processes to promote enhancement, and engagement with students to support quality assurance and enhancement. However, the sector is not complacent. The reports also indicate that institutions recognise the need to build on what has been achieved thus far, through the continued refinement and embedding of enhancement, to sustain and progress the significant culture change that is taking place.

Annex 1

This interim report draws on the evidence of the following ELIR reports:

The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama	March 2004
University of Glasgow	April 2004
Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh	May 2004
Bell College of Technology	January 2004
University of Dundee	November 2004
The Glasgow School of Art	February 2005
Edinburgh College of Art	March 2005
University of Aberdeen	April 2005
University of Strathclyde	April 2005
The Scottish Agricultural College	May 2005
Bell College of Technology (Follow-up review)	November 2005
Glasgow Caledonian University	December 2005
Heriot-Watt University	February 2006
University of Paisley	April 2006
University of St Andrews	March 2006
Napier University, Edinburgh	April 2006

Annex 2

Areas identified for further attention and development by ELIR teams in individual reviews, and which occur commonly across the 15 ELIR reports, are listed below. Institutions will be addressing these matters as part of their internal follow-up to the reviews. In the wider context, the identification of these challenging aspects of quality assurance and enhancement will inform ongoing deliberations by the partners in the Quality Enhancement Framework in various national forums, on the development of cross-sector strategic support for the embedding of enhancement, and the future management of the national enhancement themes. These aspects include the following.

Strategic development

- Effecting strategic implementation of enhancement strategies.
- Evaluating effectiveness of the implementation enhancement strategies.
- Assessing and managing risk.
- Targeting resources to support enhancement.
- Sustaining the enhancement-led approach.

Organisational structures and quality processes

- Restructuring and strategic linkage between institutional committees.
- Balancing priorities at subject level and overarching institutional strategy.
- Continuing to increase the focus of annual and periodic review processes towards enhancement.
- Systematising programme monitoring reporting procedures.
- Using centres for learning and teaching more effectively to support institutional enhancement strategy.

Staff development

- Engaging individual staff with the enhancement-led approach.
- Responding to staff development needs to deliver enhancement.
- Linking enhancement strategies, staff development and academic promotion procedures.
- Identifying mechanisms for the effective dissemination of good practice.
- Using peer review of teaching as a staff development tool.

Student engagement

- Improving consistency of approaches to student feedback and management of learning opportunities (with particular regard to postgraduate research provision).
- Improving student representation at a strategic level.
- Improving representation of postgraduate students on committees.
- Developing more effective systems for the election of class representatives.
- Improving systems for student feedback, including closure of feedback loops.

Development of the effective learner

- Implementing Personal Development Planning and progress files.
- Improving effectiveness of academic advisory systems.
- Improving provision for non-campus based students.
- Improving equity of provision in multicampus institutions.
- Improving progression data.

Assessment

- Improving consistency of approaches to grading.
- Improving the timing of feedback provided to students on their academic performance.
- Improving the transparency of information on grading issued to students.

Academic Infrastructure

- Making more effective use of programme specifications to support programme design and development, and to communicate learning outcomes to students.
- Making more effective use of the SCQF, including appropriate alignment with its credit requirements, linked to the articulation of intended learning outcomes.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
www.qaa.ac.uk

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