Edinburgh Napier University

Follow-up Report to the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)

July 2016

Preface

One year after publication of their ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to submit a Follow-up Report to QAA Scotland. These reports are also submitted to the Scottish Funding Council. Follow-up Reports are written in the institution's own words and require to be endorsed by the institution's Governing Body prior to publication on the QAA website. Guidance on the content and structure is provided by QAA Scotland.

Institutions are asked to focus on the action they have taken since the review and to include an indication of the effectiveness of that action. ELIR reports highlight positive practice as well as areas for development, and institutions are encouraged to comment on key areas of activity relating to good practice that they have prioritised since the ELIR.

Follow-up Reports are discussed with institutions as part of the ELIR annual discussion meetings. They also form the basis of a follow-up event which involves institutions that were reviewed around the same time coming together to explore the ways they have responded to their ELIR outcomes. This activity is intended to emphasise the enhancement-led nature of the review method.

Enhancement-led Institutional Review Follow-up Report

1.   Introduction

1.1   Edinburgh Napier University participated in the third cycle of Enhancement-led Review (ELIR) between February and March 2015 and was judged to have effective arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience. Following publication of the ELIR Outcome and Technical Report in June 2015, we produced an action plan, which was endorsed by the University Learning, Teaching & Assessment (LTA) Committee in September 2015 and approved by Academic Board in October 2015. The action plan was comprehensive, capturing more than the four areas for development highlighted in the ELIR Outcome report, as it was intended to also formally capture additional areas highlighted within the Reflective Analysis as being under development to ensure that these continued to be tracked and monitored beyond ELIR. Progress against the action plan was monitored during 2015/16 and an updated plan was considered at the University's LTA Committee in May 2016. Given that the preparation of the Reflective Analysis had been informed by the University's current Strategy towards 2020, it was not surprising that some of the areas for development identified by the ELIR team aligned with our own strategic areas for development set out with our Corporate Plan. Where appropriate, the Operational Corporate Plan was also updated to take account of ELIR recommendations.

1.2   Commitment to communication was identified as an area of positive practice in ELIR, and as might be expected, the outcome of ELIR including the areas of positive practice and the areas for development were shared across the University community in a number of different ways, including within the Principal's Campus Conversations.

1.3   This follow-up report has been prepared by the Quality & Standards team on behalf of the Dean of Learning & Teaching. The draft report was considered by LTA Committee in May 2016 (which includes student members), and then in accordance with the University governance structures was also considered by Academic Board prior to being formally approved by University Court in June 2016.

2.   **Context of this report**

2.1   During the ELIR visits in 2015, we were preparing for significant changes to facilitate the delivery the strategic objectives set out within Strategy 2020. In August 2015, the University was restructured from three Faculties into six

schools. Each School is now led by a Dean of School, who is supported by a number of School Academic Leads (SALs) who have responsibilities for Learning, Teaching & Assessment; Quality; Student Experience; Internationalisation; and Research (in addition, the Business School has a SAL for Online Education). A post of Dean of Learning & Teaching was created and the Department for Learning and Teaching Enhancement (DLTE) formed incorporating the Academic Strategy and Practice and Academic Professional Development departments. A Research and Innovation Office (RIO) was established and is led by the Dean of Research and Innovation. International Development and External Affairs was restructured into two directorates International Operations (which also included integration of the international programmes team, previously based within the Business School) and External Relations and Communications. A new directorate, the School Support Service was also established to provide professional and administrative support to each of the six schools. Student & Academic Services was also restructured during 2015/16 to more effectively support the University's academic structure, including the creation of an employment and opportunities team, incorporating the existing careers service, confident futures team and academic skills. Academic Quality was re-titled Quality & Standards and now includes the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct function.

2.2   In addition, the Student's Association was renamed as Edinburgh Napier Students' Association (ENSA). The University welcomed the positive practice identified in ELIR 2015 regarding its commitment to working in partnership with the Students' Association across a wide range of strategic and operational developments. This practice continues as senior leaders in the University meet with the ENSA Sabbaticals on a monthly basis to support the alignment of priorities. The University recognises that maintaining a positive and constructive partnership with the Students' Association can, at times, be challenging, particularly at times when priorities do not fully align and where resources are restricted, however, the University remains committed to building on the positive partnership practice identified through ELIR.

2.3   Since ELIR, changes have also been made to the governance of the University regarding sub-committees of Academic Board to reflect the changes made across the wider university structures; University Learning, Teaching & Assessment Committee (convened by the Vice-Principal), Student Experience Committee (convened by Assistant Principal – Student Experience) and the Research and Innovation Committee (RIC) report directly to Academic Board. Quality & Standards Committee, Collaborative Partnerships Committee and the School LTA Committees are sub-committees of the University LTA Committee. Research Degrees Committee which oversees the research student experience is a sub-committee of the RIC. The effectiveness of the governance structures

continue to be monitored and overseen by the University Secretary's Office, as part of standard annual processes.

2.4   During this academic year, the new structures have been bedding down, though routine business has continued as usual. University Leadership Team (ULT) and wider Senior Leadership Group (SLG) continue to reflect on the effectiveness of these structures to ensure that they are working as intended. In addition, we have established a wider Senior Leadership Forum, incorporating ULT and SLG and senior leaders from across the University. This approach facilitates the engagement of the wider voice in shaping key issues and processes, as we work towards meeting the aims of Strategy 2020.

2.5   We recognise that change can be challenging and support has been provided to the new School Academic Leads by the Vice Principal, Assistant Principal (Student Experience), and Deans of Learning & Teaching and Research through regular meetings and developments forums this academic year. Plans are currently being made to evaluate the School Academic Lead role with a view to further enhancing its pivotal role in the School and wider University.

3.   Main areas in which action has been taken by the institution since ELIR

There were four specific areas identified for consideration in the Outcome Report, progress made in relation to each of these are discussed below:
- New frameworks for transnational education
- Postgraduate research student experience
- Use of the virtual learning environment
- Assuring quality during significant change

Progress made in relation to each of these areas for development is detailed below.

3.1   **New frameworks for transnational education**

3.1.1   It was recommended that we should continue to progress existing plans to develop new models for managing transnational education (TNE), given the University's strategic objective for a significant increase in the volume of TNE activity. In particular, the University should continue to explore staffing models, opportunities for student representation, and student support.

3.1.2   The Director of International Operations has led on the development of the University's Online and TNE Strategy which was endorsed by the Collaborative Partnerships Committee in April 2016 and approved by Academic Board in June 2016. The strategy is underpinned by the objective to provide an

academically challenging and engaging learning environment and consistently high quality student experience underpinned by pedagogic research and innovation. The strategy builds on our successful track-record of delivering and growing TNE in Hong Kong, India and Singapore and on our more recent investment in developing a standardised, sustainable and scalable model for delivering online higher education. The strategy is also cognisant of the areas of positive practice relating to the University's engagement with international partners highlighted in ELIR 2015.

3.1.3 The strategy focusses on delivering higher education off-campus through four different modes:

- The University's Global Online Higher Education model;

- An extension of our online model, establishing a Global Online Blended model with elements of delivery and student support provided through partnerships;

- A partner-supported model of TNE, based on long-established approach of delivering Edinburgh Napier programmes jointly with and through international partners;

- An International Centre model offering an Edinburgh Napier branded multi-disciplinary learning environment delivered through partnership (at least one such Centre is to be established by 2020).

3.1.4 The strategy includes a number of different indicators of success against which the strategy will be monitored and judged between now and 2020. The Assistant Principal (Student Experience) has also been working closely with the Director of International Operations during the development of the Online and TNE Strategy to ensure that we can continue to offer an excellent, personalised student experience to all of our students, regardless of the mode of delivery of their programme. A phased approach to introducing our internal satisfaction survey has been successful in consistently seeking student feedback on their learning experiences for undergraduate and postgraduate students who study in Edinburgh and through our online programmes. During this academic year, the Business School has also piloted the introduction of the internal satisfaction survey into programmes delivered in partnership, building on the approaches already undertaken within the School of Nursing.

3.2 Postgraduate research student experience

3.2.1 We were asked to continue to reflect on the ways in which we maintain oversight of the holistic research student experience, in the context of the planned growth in research student numbers (including arrangements for monitoring and enhancing the research student experience as well as ensuring

there is enough capacity amongst academic staff to provide effective supervisory support for the planned increase in numbers). We were also encouraged to extend the opportunities for research students to gain teaching experience, ensuring that students are trained and supported to fulfil this role.

3.2.2 We continue to make progress to enhance the research student experience and responsibility for the general oversight of research students sits with the University Research Degrees Committee (RDC) under the guidance of the Dean of Research and Innovation. Following the recent University Restructuring, the RDC was re-formed with a revised remit and an Academic Leader for Research Development appointed. Both RDC and Researcher Development roles are fully supported from The Research and Innovation Office (RIO). To strengthen student engagement from 2016/17 a research student representative will be added to the membership of the RDC. Colleagues within RIO are also seeking to work more closely with the Students' Association to strengthen research student engagement and representation.

3.2.3 This year Research Degree Programme Leaders (RDPLs) have been established in each of the new six Schools, to be responsible for research degree matters within their Schools. This has included the production of action plans to address matters raised within the Postgraduate Research Student Experience Survey (PRES) 2015 report, and monitoring progress against the action plans. The RDPLs all sit on RDC and take a prominent role in reviewing aspects of the research student experience. A key feature of current initiatives has been the involvement of all six RDPLs, working together to ensure consistency of practice and an enthusiasm to share good practice and to support the development of a University-wide research student culture.

3.2.4 To enable a review of the wider, holistic research student experience, a major Research Student Journey Project has been established to examine every aspect of student experience from pre-application through to alumni. This project is being supported by the University's Sustainable Futures team, and will consider both administrative, academic and development issues throughout the student journey and the project will span the next three academic years working towards 2020. A number of workshops have already been held to map out the project scope and subsequently it was agreed that the project will allow us to examine the roles and responsibilities of staff involved in supporting research students at each stage and how these interact together. Possible areas for improvement will be identified and plans for changes to working practices/procedures will be developed as appropriate, leading to the provision of an improved service to students. The development of this major project represents our commitment to enhancing every aspect of our research student provision.

3.2.5 During this academic session, the RDPLs have conducted a review of facilities in each School, in terms of computers, desks etc. available for research degree students. Following this review, and in response to student feedback, enlarged

computer storage has been organised for research students. Named email addresses are also planned to be introduced for research students, which mirrors staff email address configuration (Student email addresses at Edinburgh Napier are based on student number) and this is intended to support research students in feeling more integrated into School research cultures. Related to this, feedback from students gathered during this review highlighted that facilities are not the central issues concerning students at this time; rather issues of communication and community have appeared as more significant. To address this, areas where students can meet and talk informally have been established in the Schools based at the Merchiston Campus, in addition to the University's wider social spaces project aimed at upgrading the social and learning spaces available for our students. In recognising that not all of our research students physically study with us in Edinburgh, in April 2016, a Fulbright Scholar, a Professor from USA has been funded to review student experience and propose ways in which web based materials could enhance their experiences. Monitoring the effectiveness and impact of these initiatives will fall under the remit of the Research Student Journey Project.

3.2.6   In 2016, we held our first University Research Conference, bringing together staff and research students from across the University. This was a successful event and will continue to be offered on an annual basis. The conference is in addition to each School's Research Degree Conference which are intended to be developmental and supportive. A number of research students who had delivered outstanding presentations within the student conference were encouraged to deliver at the University-wide Research Conference to showcase their research and to provide further development opportunities. In addition, this year awards were established to recognise and celebrate outstanding research student performance including contribution to the research community within the University. We have also funded student-led initiatives to enhance the research culture in the University, for example research students within the School of Computing have introduced a 'Write Now' initiative at Merchiston Campus to encourage staff and research students to put aside time each week to meet together to write research papers etc. as part of a supportive community. These are positive examples of how we are continuing to strengthen the research culture at Edinburgh Napier University.

3.2.7   In the ELIR report, we were asked to extend the opportunities for research students to gain teaching experience, ensuring that students are trained and supported to fulfil this role. In response, a sub-group of RDC, led by a Professor in the School of Computing, has been formed to develop a University-wide policy on teaching opportunities and expectations for research degree students, with appropriate training support. The policy is due to be presented early in 2016/17 academic year.

3.2.8   We acknowledge the concerns identified in ELIR regarding ongoing sustainability and capacity for research degree supervision. The convenor of RDC plans to lead an initiative to map current supervision rates, identify areas of under or over capacity and develop a strategy to build capacity. However, we recognise accurate and reliable management data is critical to inform this work. A research management system is currently under development and will be rolled out during 16/17. This will allow us to collect the relevant data for analysis and a report will be prepared by the end of 16/17 with plan to address any capacity issues. In addition, discussions are underway regarding the extent to which research degree supervision capacity could be further increased through enhanced training and development.

3.3 Use of the virtual learning environment (VLE)

3.3.1   The ELIR report asked us to build on the positive work carried out at the programme level to provide a comparable student experience of module delivery, develop clear guidelines on threshold requirements for the information to be included on the virtual learning environment at the module level. We have been reviewing the use of our VLE (Moodle) more broadly.

3.3.2   In June 2015, we commissioned an internal audit to be conducted by Scott Moncrieff on the effectiveness of our VLE at enhancing student satisfaction. The review assessed the adequacy of processes with the University which seek to ensure that maximum efficiency and effectiveness is obtained from the VLE. The audit report included a number of recommendations, one of which aligned with the ELIR findings around inconsistency in the use of the VLE. In response, a VLE Executive Group was formed and led by the Dean of Learning & Teaching. This group established a working group to propose minimum standards and recommend associated guidance and resources to support these expectations. The group met on four occasions between March and June 2016 and are a final outcome of their recommendations was endorsed at LTAC in May 2016. It is now planed that these are rolled out across the University in 2016/17 supported by School based staff development and support from information services and learning technologists.

3.3.3   The VLE Executive Group will be responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives related to the VLE. The strategic group has also updated the Moodle Academic Forum's remit to support the outputs from the working group. The Executive Group's remit also includes strategic communication and so the first in a series of *Moodle for Academics Newsletters* was issued in April 2016 to showcase examples of academic practice, and to report on service related news and events.

3.4 Assuring quality during significant change

3.4.1 In the final area for development, we were asked to continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing quality framework during the organisational restructure, particularly as responsibilities are delegated to schools when the faculties were disestablished.

3.4.2 In advance of the restructure into schools, the then Head of Academic Quality prepared a paper detailing business continuity for the implementation of the Quality Framework during the move to a school-based structure. The proposal was approved by the Academic Strategy & Enhancement Committee in May 2015 and was disseminated across the three Faculties.

3.4.3 Following the establishment of the new Schools in August 2015, and once the School Academic Leads (SALs) for Quality post-holders had been confirmed, the Quality & Standards team were proactive in developing close and effective working relationships with the SALs. This was intended to support them as they took on duties related to quality management, and to ensure a consistent approach University-wide.

3.4.4 The Dean of Learning & Teaching working in partnership with the Quality & Standards team coordinated two away days focussed on the operationalisation of the Quality Framework. This was attended by all of the SALs for Quality, as well as a number of the SALs for LTA. These away days provided an opportunity for a review of Sections 1 & 2 of the Quality Framework (designing, developing and approving taught award or credit-bearing provision; internal monitoring and review of taught award or credit-bearing provision). This resulted in amendments to enhancement the Quality Framework, which were considered and approved by Quality & Standards Committee in May 2015. The effectiveness of these changes will be monitored and reviewed during 2016/17 academic session, as part of usual business by the Quality & Standards team. One of the approved changes to our Quality processes builds upon one of the areas identified as positive practice within ELIR: reflective culture. Within our Reflective Analysis we highlighted practice within the Business School around its approach to annual monitoring and review which has increased staff engagement within the processes and facilitated the sharing of good practice. We have agreed that this approach should be adopted within all Schools and the Quality Framework has been amended accordingly.

4. Any other Matters

4.1 Although this report has highlighted the significant changes that the University has been managing during the year following ELIR, we have continued to make good progress regarding many of our strategic objectives and have continued to undertake projects which have been identified as sector-leading.

In the year since ELIR, we have made good progress towards our strategic goal for 100% of teaching staff to have gained Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy and 115 colleagues have achieved Fellowship (at the appropriate level) since the ELIR Report was published. Indeed the dialogue route to Fellowship within ENroute, our internal recognition framework, has been highlighted as an example of good practice by the Higher Education Academy. We were also delighted that our Students as Colleagues project (http://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/dlte/resources/SAC/Pages/SAC.aspx) was the subject of a keynote address at the 2016 QAA ELIR Conference.

4.2 During this year, the University has continued to engage productively with the QAA Enhancement Theme. For example, we received QAA funding for the *International Students' Transition Scoping Project*. Within this project, support activities across the University were mapped out, and although a wealth of transition practices were identified, this mapping also highlighted some duplications and gaps in provision and confusions in terminology, suggesting a potential lack of communication and coordination in our approach to transitions. Therefore, we are developing a project which is currently entitled *Hub for Effective Students' Transition and Engagement.* It aims to improve the communication and coordination surrounding transition practices and research at the University. It will be an online platform with information on the different transition research project and initiative pilots. We also are launching new activities for international students, starting September 2016, targeting some of the gaps identified in the scoping project. These initiatives were co-designed by students and will be carried out by students for incoming international students. Indeed, research to date indicates that student engagement is effective in supporting transitions and improving retention. Our next QAA funded research project will look at the needs and expectations of international students in terms of transition support - and will include an evaluation of those new activities. We hope to produce some publications around the findings of the scoping project to participate in the effort of coordination and communication regarding transition practices. Finally, we started some staff development workshops, which aim at facilitating a conversation between international students and university staff.

4.3 Finally, we would like to highlight that in 2016/17 we will be offering our second annual inclusivity week to further equip staff with the knowledge, skills and awareness of inclusive LTA practice. The week will aim to raise important questions about equality of opportunity, student expectations and experiences, and how we develop a wider inclusive culture within the University. As part of this week, staff and students from across the University will be invited to share their teaching and learning innovations, pedagogic research and scholarship into equality.

5   Concluding Remarks

5.1   In the year following ELIR, we are confident that we have made good progress in addressing the areas for development highlighted in the ELIR report and are continuing to progress the strategic areas identified within our reflective analysis (and subsequent ELIR action plan). We continue to be committed to building on the positive practice identified in ELIR 2015, regarding our approach to developing and implementing strategy, the alignment and focus of our activities to the objectives set out in Strategy 2020 has helped to retain stability and momentum during these institutional changes.

5.2   Further information on any of the content presented within this follow-up report can be obtained by contacting the Dean of Learning & Teaching (B.Webster-Henderson@napier.ac.uk).

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