



## **Edinburgh Napier University**

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

**June 2021**

#### **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.



## Enhancement-led Institutional Review

### Follow-up Report

1. **Introduction**
  - 1.1 The Edinburgh Napier University Enhancement-led Review (ELIR) was held in December 2019 and the Outcome and Technical Reports were published in March 2020. The University was judged to have effective arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience. In response to the publication of the Outcome Report, an action plan was produced and endorsed by the University Learning, Teaching, Assessment & Student Experience Committee (LTASEC) in May 2020 and approved by Academic Board in June 2020. The action plan sought to focus primarily on the eight areas of recommendations detailed within the report, though it also detailed the intention to consider issues for development highlighted within the Technical Report which did not form recommendations within their own right, to ensure that these continued to be tracked and monitored beyond ELIR. Progress against the action plan has been monitored during 2019/20 and 2020/21 and an updated plan was considered at LTASEC in February 2021.
  - 1.2 This follow-up report has been prepared by the University Quality & Standards team on behalf of the Vice-Principal for Learning & Teaching in collaboration with the ENSA Vice President for Representation and Volunteering. The draft report was considered by LTASEC Committee in February 2021 alongside the updated ELIR Action Plan, and approved by Academic Board in March 2021.
2. **Context of this report**
  - 2.1 It is important to acknowledge the significant impact on University business posed by the Covid-19 pandemic during the period since our ELIR took place. The publication of the ELIR Outcome and Technical Report in March 2020 coincided with the nation-wide lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the closure of our Edinburgh Campuses and a requirement to prioritise action to support staff and students in transitioning to online and blended delivery. As will be noted within this report, some actions have understandably not yet progressed as far as would have been anticipated had this been a typical academic year.
3. **Main areas in which action has been taken by the institution since ELIR**

There were eight specific areas identified for consideration in the Outcome Report, progress made in relation to each of these are discussed below:

### 3.1 **Student Representation**

- 3.1.1 We were asked to ensure that there are clear representative structures in place at all levels, and in particular at school level, for all modes of delivery including online learning. Make certain that there are effective arrangements in place for the recruitment, training and support for all students undertaking a representative role, including and beyond programme level, for a variety of activities, including school and institutional-level committees, approval boards and institution-led reviews
- 3.1.2 We have made positive progress with regards to this recommendation. In 2019/20 colleagues from ENSA worked in partnership with colleagues from the University, primarily from within the Department for Learning & Teaching Enhancement (DLTE) to review and redesign the online training course for student representatives prior to the commencement of the 2020/21 academic session. This provided opportunity to ensure consistent information was shared by both ENSA and the University and to allow more effective signposting to additional support and guidance available for representatives taking on responsibilities beyond the programme representative role. We also worked in partnership to develop alternative approaches for student representative elections in an online-environment. An update on the recruitment and training of student representatives was presented to University LTASEC in November 2020 which confirmed that 326 programme reps were in place of which 290 had completed training (the proportion of trained reps being comparable to previous years).
- 3.1.3 In November 2020, an online training session was delivered to student committee members by the University Quality & Standards Team and the ENSA Vice President for Representation and Volunteering. Student members of all University and School committees were invited to attend. The session covered the University committee structure, terms of reference of the committees and key information relating to committee operations, including commonly used terminology. The session was attended by 11 of the 13 student committee members and the presentation has been added to the ENSA online rep training course. We are continuing to monitor student engagement in our Committees.
- 3.1.4 ENSA is seeking to make significant changes to its constitution to present a new structure for student democracy at Edinburgh Napier to permit a wider demographic to become directly involved in shaping ENSA's campaigns and activities. The current Student Executive, comprised of 11 members (including Sabbatical Officers), would be replaced with the 'ENSA 50', a group of 50 students representing a much wider range of student views. This group would include 'reserved' places for particular student groups, such as direct entrants, non-UK students, online and transnational students, Team Napier representatives, and postgraduates. This change is subject to the outcome of a referendum requiring at least 10% of current ENSA members to vote in the ballot. A campaign remains live at the time of writing to encourage students to have their say.

3.1.5 In relation to approval boards and ILR panels, both processes have been incorporated into the ENSA online rep training and the opportunity to volunteer as a student panel member is promoted here, and on a dedicated Student Voice page on the University student intranet, 'MyNapier' with instructions provided on how to apply (see <https://my.napier.ac.uk/your-studies/student-voice>). Following an expression of interest, students receive introductory training from the Quality & Standards Team, followed by a one-to-one briefing session once programme documentation is received to help the student member to prepare areas to explore during the approval or review event contextualised to the evidence set presented.

### 3.2 **Student Voice and Student Engagement**

3.2.1 We were asked to continue to develop mechanisms to enhance student engagement and respond to the student voice. Routinely monitor the effectiveness of the arrangements in place, including specifically, the consistent operation of student-staff liaison committees and effectiveness of the merger of the Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee with the Student Experience Committee. Ensure that students are supported to raise matters at relevant levels of the governance structure, appropriate action is taken as a result and outcomes disseminated to the student body.

3.2.2 Workshops were organised in collaboration with SPARQS in four of our six Schools (the final two were postponed due to Covid) and the workshops explored questions around the reps' perceptions of their roles before, during and after SSLCs and how well supported they felt by activities and procedures within the Schools and the findings from the workshops were shared with School Heads of Learning & Teaching. The key area for enhancement emerging from these workshops was a need to support communication between representatives and the wider student body. Campus closures have led to SSLCs having to be conducted online and this has exacerbated this challenge for some reps in being able to effectively gather student views from across the cohort. Work has been underway, led by the Head of Learning & Teaching in the School of Arts & Creative Industries to develop an SSLC platform within MSTeams that will allow greater consistency in how students can raise queries and concerns to the reps as well as improving communication back to the student body. The implementation and roll-out of this will be closely monitored over the coming year with the intention of it impacting on practice in all six Schools.

3.2.3 The development of a new SPA is underway. The new version of the partnership agreement will be in operation for 3 years, corresponding with the new ENSA strategic plan. The new document will be overseen by USAF (University and Students' Association Forum). The SPA will outline the updated priorities, goals and objectives regarding student voice and engagement.

3.2.4 A new Student Voice webpage has been created on the student intranet, MyNapier (see link in 3.1.5), to promote and provide information to all students about voluntary extra-curricular opportunities to engage

academically, including as panel members, as committee members, and as student colleagues in the Students as Colleagues programme. The page is signposted from newly developed Student Futures employability resources.

3.2.5 The effectiveness of our sub-committees of Academic Board, including following the merger of the Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee with the Student Experience Committee, was recently reviewed by Ernst & Young as part of an internal audit commissioned by the University Audit & Risk Committee. The audit raised no cause for concern.

### 3.3 **Tailored Support for Students Including Those Studying Off Campus**

3.3.1 We were asked, in the context of the University's growth agenda, to ensure there is a systematic and embedded approach to supporting all groups of students. Continue to develop support mechanisms for online learners, graduate apprentices, transnational education students and other groups studying off campus to ensure accessibility of services, sustainability and a positive student and staff experience. In particular, the University was asked to carefully monitor the personal development tutor staff/student ratios as student numbers grow.

3.3.2 Work initially commenced to scope the extent of the support available to students studying online, given the specific strategic growth amongst this population. A thematic review of the professional services support available for students who study online was undertaken in trimester one of 2019/20. The following student-facing professional services were contacted and invited to participate in the review: Student Futures; Student Wellbeing & Inclusion; Information Services; Bright Red Triangle; Department for Learning & Teaching Enhancement; Widening Participation (including Academic Skills); Marketing and External Relations (inc. Student Communications); Global Online Support Team; School Support Service; English for Academic Purposes. The review identified a number of examples of good practice in support for students studying online including 24/7 support available via the Information Services helpdesk; tailored library guide support for students studying at a distance; embedded academic skills provision within online programme delivery; and the range of online resources available to support career development. The review also highlighted some areas for enhancement including ensuring that inclusive language was used in University-wide communications to recognise that not all students study on campus or have access to physical campus facilities and to ensure that the support available for students who study online was explicitly stated. The review report was considered by Quality & Standards Committee at its meeting in February 2020 with the intention that responses to the recommendations would be reported back to the Committee. We had not anticipated that the pandemic would result in all of our students requiring support at a distance, the review outcomes had provided the University with some reassurance that we were building upon a strong and robust foundation to adapt to this temporary transition online. The pandemic has meant that the formal reporting of progress has not yet been made to the Committee, though a number of the

recommendations have now been superseded by University-wide practice in supporting all of its students studying at a distance.

- 3.3.3 During the pandemic, TNE programme leaders have continued to work closely with our international partners to adapt the delivery models in response to the suspension of 'flying faculty'. This close contact has also allowed programme leaders to monitor and ensure that support mechanisms continue to be offered effectively to students by our TNE partners.
- 3.3.4 The University's Personal development Tutoring (PDT) Forum continues to meet regularly and remains responsible for monitoring PDT staff: student ratios across the University, and it is acknowledged that ratios remain challenging. The PDT Forum is heavily involved in student support initiatives specific to supporting students through the Covid disruption. These are: the development of student engagement monitoring processes to ensure contact with students can be made in a timely manner by PDTs; the development of a monthly seminar series involving key University student support services, to provide key information to help PDTs support students' wellbeing and overall University experience. Once these initiatives are in place the Forum will conduct a review of PDT student:staff ratios across Schools and subject areas.
- 3.3.5 As mentioned above, the proposed change to ENSA's constitution is seeking to extend the support available on academic issues to our students regardless of mode or location of study (currently ENSA are only formally representative of students who study on campus).

#### 3.4 **Postgraduate Research Culture**

- 3.4.1 We were asked, in line with the strategic objective to enhance the research community and sense of belonging for postgraduate students, consider introducing a structured and longitudinal institution-wide induction, to include appropriate training and development. This recognises positive steps the University has taken to enhance the arrangements for monitoring students' academic progression.
- 3.4.2 Work has been focussed on seeking to support the research community as it works off campus. We had planned to launch a PGCert in Researcher Skills Development, but this was put on hold with the intention of a launch in Autumn 2021. This will create a structured programme for students primarily on our professional doctorate programmes. We have continued to focus on researcher development activities and a new Researcher Developer was appointed into the Research, Innovation and Enterprise (RIE) team to deliver the programme and establish a robust process of evaluation. The evaluation report produced for 2019/20 academic session and reported to the University Research Degrees Committee indicates that the programme is helping our PGR students feel part of a research community and helping to build research culture. For example, at a recent online Researcher Skills Forum, whilst 10% of researchers felt part of a research community at the start of the forum, this increased to 33% by the

end of the forum. There was also a 10% increase in how attendees felt supported as a researcher as a result of attending the forum. When asked about their favourite part of the day, opportunities to network was listed by 27% of attendants. During remote working RIE have run university level induction events for the March and October cohorts, adapting what would normally be a day face-to-face event into 2 morning webinars, and had input from our PGR student reps at the October event to help integrate the new students. At the October student induction, 38% of attendees agreed they felt part of a research community at the start of the event. By the end of the induction, 83% of attendees agreed that they felt part of a research community. Furthermore, 20% more attendees felt supported as a researcher by the end of Induction. 83% of attendees had met someone knew, and when asked about their favourite part of the event, 60% of attendees mentioned some element of networking/getting to hear from others. Following the induction, 100% of attendees said they were very likely to attend further development opportunities. We are also holding monthly coffee clubs to help our new students to informally network and ask questions, again to help them settle into PGR life at Napier, and will continue to monitor and evaluate impact of these informal sessions.

### **3.5 Training for Postgraduates who Teach**

3.5.1 We were asked to ensure that all PGR students who teach complete the mandatory course prior to commencing teaching.

3.5.2 The University's Department of Learning & Teaching Enhancement (DLTE) has worked with the Research, Innovation and Enterprise Officer to convert the teaching course for PGR students into an online version which has been running during last academic year. PGR students were also signposted to all the DLTE activity around online / blending teaching during the pandemic. Students on the course continue to be a mix of students who are new to teaching and those with more experience. At the point of preparing this report we have not yet reached a point where all students who are teaching have completed the course prior to commencing teaching, though we are confident that all students who teach have access to support for their teaching. This remains an area of focus for the Research Degrees Committee.

### **3.6 Approach to Institution-led Review**

3.6.1 We were asked to ensure that the current institutional approach to reviewing postgraduate study considers more fully the wider student learning experience beyond student progression. There would also be benefit in the University ensuring it includes an appropriate level of externality and considering the extent to which the method will continue to be fit-for-purpose as postgraduate research student numbers grow. In addition, the University is asked to establish a systematic and timely mechanism for reviewing the contribution of the professional support services to the quality of the student experience.

3.6.2 At the time of our ELIR we had recently amended the procedures for Institution-led review to lead to greater institutional oversight of process

and consistency. In addition, we were also seeking to make more effective use of the enhanced data and evidence resources afforded to underpin review as part of evidence-based enhancement. Since the review visit we have been working hard to embed the new approach and initial outcomes have been positive. A beneficial outcome of the revised approach is that the review reports now include thematic recommendations and commendations which can be more readily consolidated at a University-level informing a greater strategic approach to quality enhancement. The impact of School or University strategic initiatives can be more readily drawn out, for example a range of commendations associated with the development of employability skills were found within all of the ILRs conducted over the last 12 months. The procedure now includes a formal follow-up meeting a year following the review to ensure that progress continues to be underway in addressing the recommendations and taking forward the commendations. While just one of these has taken place and been reported to University Quality & Standards Committee at the time of writing (further follow-up meetings are scheduled for the coming months), it was evident that this additional element adds value and purpose to the ILR approach. It also affords an opportunity to offer feedback on the effectiveness of the University's ILR approach and inform the annual report on the effectiveness of the Quality Framework to Academic Board.

3.6.3 We have made some progress in developing a systematic and timely mechanism for reviewing the contribution of the professional support services to the quality of the student experience. A paper was presented to University LTASEC in September 2020 summarising approaches undertaken elsewhere within the Scottish Sector and it was agreed that we should extend annual monitoring and review reporting by Quality & Standards Committee to include student-facing professional support services. Work is underway to develop a procedure for approval by Quality & Standards Committee at its meeting in May 2021 for implementation in Autumn 2021.

3.6.4 Work to ensure that the review of postgraduate study considers more fully the wider student learning experience beyond student progression and incorporates externality has not yet progressed, though DLTE has agreed to work closely to support the Convenor of the Research Degrees Committee in taking the planning forward in 2020/21 academic session.

### 3.7 **External Examiners Reports**

3.7.1 We were asked to make external examiner reports accessible to all students in order to give them the opportunity to engage in discussion and consideration of this element of the assessment process.

3.7.2 Our external examiner report templates are explicit in stating that the reports may be shared with students and the myProgramme Handbook template provides students with information related to the role of the external examiner. In addition, there is an expectation that external examiner reports should be shared and discussed as part of standard SSLC committee business, though this could be more transparent in the



published SSLC guidance for staff and further detail could be added to the myProgramme Handbook to ensure that all students are aware that they may request access to external examiner reports for their provision.

3.7.3 Work is planned as to how reports, and any accompanying responses might be most effectively published for students on the University VLE. The School Support Service is leading on this work, with progress overseen by the University Quality & Standards Committee. In addition to this, consideration is being given as to how we communicate to students on all of the quality assurance mechanisms in place around assessment, including marking, moderation and external examining and how the academic assessment regulations impact on student degree classification outcomes. We anticipate that this will be taken forward as part of joint working between ENSA and the Department of Learning & Teaching Enhancement (DLTE) in the 2020/21 academic session.

### 3.8 **English Language Proficiency for TNE Programmes**

3.8.1 We were asked to review, within the academic year, the English Language entry criteria and proficiency of students on all TNE programmes to ensure future student intakes have adequate language proficiency on entry.

3.8.2 While the pandemic disruption impacted on our ability to complete this task within 2019/20 academic session, a thematic review has now been completed and reported to Quality & Standards Committee in February 2020. The review considered the matters raised during the ELIR process and reviewed University policies and practices. Programme leaders were interviewed as part of the review methodology. It concluded that the University has a robust English Language Policy in place and that the English language entry criteria remained adequate. The review concluded that the overall admissions procedures work well, though there were opportunities to tighten some areas particularly regarding the support offered to new partners who may be less familiar with the University's policies and recommendations have been made to amend some elements of the collaborative agreement and approval processes to strengthen expectations. The review also highlighted that greater use could be made of the resources offered by the University's English for Academic Purposes team and further work could be undertaken to raise the profile of this team. The University Collaborative Provision Committee will have responsibility for oversight of progress against the recommendations set out within this thematic review over the next 12-24 months.

## 4. **Update on Commended Areas**

4.1 We received seven commendations in the ELIR Outcome Report. The timing of the publication of the report coincided with campus closures and the need for University-wide communications to focus on the immediate crisis meant that we did not celebrate and disseminate this positive practice as widely as would have been usual, as activity refocused across the University. However, the pandemic has provided a lens through which we have continued to build upon our commended practice, and some examples are offered in the following paragraphs.

- 4.2 The University was commended for its systematic enhancement of leadership in learning and teaching, and the role and contribution of the School Heads of Learning & Teaching in particular have proven effective during the Covid crisis – offering a clear communication line between and across the six Schools and the University Leadership Team in managing and mitigating learning and teaching challenges associated with the pandemic University-wide. Similarly the partnership working between academic and professional services staff has been even more important throughout these last twelve months in continuing to support our students through the disruption to their studies and wider-University experience.
- 4.3 We have continued our efforts to support widening participation through the last twelve months, recognising the particular challenges that pandemic may have had on our vulnerable student populations. Our Widening Participation Team has led initiatives to provide additional support for students with WP flags, including 232 students benefitting from extended laptop loans and other measures to minimise the impact of digital poverty, and peer-to-peer support delivered through ESTABLISH to 215 students. In addition, as part of our institutional work exploring resilient learning communities – a joint project will be underway between the University’s PDT Forum, the Widening Participation Team and the Hub for Success to engage care experienced students in research to record biographical information about the University experience and challenges from the perspective of care experienced students.
- 4.4 We were commended for the support that we offer to developing student’s skills in employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship and this too remains increasingly critical as our students enter an uncertain graduate landscape. Work has continued with our Student Futures Team moving rapidly to transfer its portfolio of careers events, talks and training online to ensure that our students continue to have opportunities to prepare themselves for their graduate careers.

## **5 Next Steps**

- 5.1 LTASEC will continue to monitor progress against the ELIR Action Plan at least annually reporting to Academic Board as required.

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