



Enhancement-led Institutional Review of Heriot-Watt University

Outcome Report

March 2015

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About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method

A dedicated page of the QAA website explains the method for [Enhancement-led Institutional Review](#) of higher education institutions in Scotland and has links to the ELIR handbook and other informative documents.¹ You can also find more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.²

Further details about the enhancement-led approach can be found in an accompanying [ELIR information document](#),³ including an overview of the review method, definitions of the judgement categories, and explanations of follow-up action. It also contains information on the Scottish Funding Council's response to ELIR judgements.

About this review

This is the Outcome Report of the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Heriot-Watt University. The review took place as follows: Part 1 visit on 27 to 29 January 2015 and Part 2 visit on 16 to 20 March 2015. The review was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Professor Alan Davidson (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor Stephen Doughty (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor Clare Pickles (Academic Reviewer)
- Dr Sarah Ingle (International Reviewer)
- Ms Emilia Todorova (Student Reviewer)
- Mr Peter Watson (Coordinating Reviewer).

This report sets out the overarching judgement formed by the ELIR team on:

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

It is possible for the overarching judgement to be expressed in three levels, which indicate that the institution's arrangements are: effective; have limited effectiveness; or are not effective. More detail on these categories is provided in the ELIR information document.

The overarching judgement for this report can be found on page 3, followed by the areas of positive practice and the areas for development.

A more detailed [Technical Report](#) is also available for this review.⁴ The Technical Report sets out the ELIR team's findings under each of the headings in the ELIR 3 method.

¹ Further information about the ELIR method:

www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/enhancement-led-institutional-review.

² Further information about QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.

³ ELIR information document: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=61.

⁴ Technical report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10007764.

About Heriot-Watt University

Heriot-Watt University (the University) was awarded University status in 1966; its vision is to be world-leading within all of its specialist areas of science, engineering, technology and business. It has around 32,000 students studying in disciplines intended to prepare students for professional practice in science, engineering, the built environment, computer science, business, management, languages, and textiles and design. Academic provision is undertaken across five campuses: three in Scotland and two overseas in Dubai and Malaysia, which were set up in 2005 and 2012 respectively. West London College has been a partner since 1993 and an Associate Campus since 2012, the University being its sole academic partner for degree-level provision.

A distinctive feature of the University's provision is the large number of students enrolled on programmes through the University's Approved Learning Partners and through distance learning. Approved Learning Partners, of which the University has approximately 50, are partnerships in which the University retains responsibility for curricula, learning outcomes, assessment, award and all quality assurance matters, with the partner being responsible for providing local support and teaching for specific University programmes of study. In 2013-14 the total number of University students studying with Approved Learning Partners was around 11,200; the University also registered around 8,000 independent distance learners. Of the total student population (all modes of study and locations), almost two-thirds of students are non-UK based. As a result, the University considers itself to be Scotland's 'international university'.

Overarching judgement about Heriot-Watt University

The University has **effective** arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience. These arrangements are likely to continue to be effective in the future.

This is a positive judgement, which means the University has robust arrangements for securing academic standards and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

Areas of positive practice

1 The ELIR has identified a number of areas of positive practice, and these are summarised below.

2 **Effective implementation of clear vision and strategy** - the University is implementing a clear strategic vision to become a genuinely international institution. It has made significant progress in integrating its UK and overseas activities to achieve its objective of operating effectively as one institution worldwide where students can access University study flexibly through a range of modes of study in multiple locations. Significant time and effort has been taken to align institutional strategies and processes to support strategic aims.

3 **Flexible provision of learning opportunities** - the University delivers a diverse range of learning experiences by offering provision across its campuses, through independent distance learning and with academic partners worldwide. Programmes are run in multiple locations through multiple modes of study. This flexibility can allow students to switch easily between different modes of study and location depending on the programme, and on their needs and circumstances.

4 **Staff and student engagement in institutional strategy** - the University has taken a consultative and collaborative approach to ensure staff and student engagement with, and ownership of, its new Learning and Teaching Strategy. Development of the Strategy has involved both academic and professional services staff.

5 **Culture of internationalisation** - the University's global ethos is embedded in the institutional culture and operational processes, and, therefore, is recognised as part of everyday practice by staff and students. There is a genuine and considered approach to creating an international experience for all students and staff. This will be enhanced by the University's recent revisions to academic management structures, which are likely to facilitate more effective communication across locations. It will also be aided by the efforts to increase opportunities for staff and student mobility.

6 **Student partnership** - there is a constructive and effective partnership between the University and the Heriot-Watt University Student Union. This is illustrated by the work the University and the Student Union are carrying out jointly on: graduate attributes; the development of representative systems in Dubai and Malaysia; and the Student Union Learning and Teaching Oscars, and Graduate Teaching Awards, which recognise and reward good teaching by University staff.

7 **Management of academic standards across delivery modes and locations** - the University has developed a number of mechanisms for ensuring the effective management of academic standards, including securing these standards across the diversity of its worldwide provision. The University's principle of securing identical academic standards is underpinned by the implementation of its own Code of Practice for the

Management of Multi-Location, Multi-Mode Programmes and through its Chief External Examiner system.

Areas for development

8 The University is asked to consider the areas summarised below.

9 **Learning resources, support and environment** - review availability and monitor student access to online journals and eBooks, ensuring that students are fully aware of the ways in which they can access these resources. The University is asked to ensure that there is alignment between the demands of curricula and the resources available to support students achieving learning outcomes. In respect of the Dubai campus, the University should make progress to improve the learning environment and learning support provision, giving appropriate consideration to student views.

10 **Postgraduate research student induction and training** - ensure all postgraduate research students receive effective and consistent induction irrespective of when or where they commence their studies. In addition, the University is asked to review the policy and training provision for research students who undertake teaching related activities to ensure all students fulfilling this role are trained and supported to do so, and that there is appropriate linkage between training and teaching opportunities.

11 **Sharing practice on distance learning** - consider the ways in which the existing enhancement action plans, or other systematic processes, could be used to share good practice, both current and emerging, in distance learning provision. This is in the context of the University delivering a very significant volume of distance learning provision.

12 **Student representation** - progress plans to create representative structures for students studying with an Approved Learning Partner or through independent distance learning, building on positive representation systems evident in the Edinburgh and Dubai campuses, and emerging in Malaysia.

13 **Student transcripts** - consider recording the name of partner organisations and location of study on student award certificates or transcripts for those students studying with an Approved Learning Partners. In doing so, the University should consider the impact of its current policy on the clarity and transparency of information provided to stakeholders.

What happens next?

14 QAA Scotland will continue to engage with the institution through the annual discussion visits, which, amongst other matters, consider the ways in which the institution is responding to the ELIR outcomes.

15 One year after publication of the ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to provide a Follow-up Report to indicate how they are responding to the outcomes of ELIR. Institutions also engage in a follow-up event with colleagues from other institutions to explore the ways in which the ELIR outcomes are being implemented. The final version of the institution's Follow-up Report is published on the QAA website.

Further information

16 A more detailed [Technical Report](#) is also available for this review. The Technical Report sets out the ELIR team's findings under each of the headings in the ELIR 3 method.

17 This review and its findings relate to the institution as a whole and do not provide information about individual programmes of study or subjects. For further information about those, contact the institution or visit its [website](#).

18 University sector institutions in Scotland also engage in systematic Enhancement Theme activity. Further information about that work, which has a sector-wide and institutional focus, can be found on the [Enhancement Themes website](#).

19 Further information about QAA Scotland and the enhancement-led approach, including the ELIR method, can be found on the [QAA website](#).

20 For further information about the Scottish Funding Council see www.sfc.ac.uk.

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