



# Enhancement-led Institutional Review of Heriot-Watt University

## Technical 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.<sup>1</sup> You can also find more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>2</sup>

Further details about the enhancement-led approach can be found in an accompanying [ELIR information document](#),<sup>3</sup> 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 Technical 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).

In advance of the review visits, the University submitted a self-evaluative document (the Reflective Analysis) and an advance information set, comprising a range of materials about the institution's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards. In addition, the University submitted a case study on their Learning and Teaching Strategy 2013-18.

## About this report

In this report, the ELIR team:

- delivers an overarching judgement 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.

The overarching judgement can be found on page 3, followed by the detailed findings of the review given in numbered paragraphs.

ELIR Technical Reports are intended primarily for the institution which hosted the review, and to provide an information base for the production of thematic reports which identify findings across several institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information about the ELIR method:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/enhancement-led-institutional-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/enhancement-led-institutional-review).

<sup>2</sup> Further information about QAA: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus).

<sup>3</sup> ELIR information document: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=61](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=61).

Technical Reports set out the ELIR team's view under each of the report headings. Shorter Outcome Reports are provided which set out the main findings of the ELIR for a wider audience. The [Outcome Report](#) for this review is on the QAA website.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Outcome Report: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10007764](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10007764).

## Overarching judgement about Heriot-Watt University

Heriot-Watt 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 Heriot-Watt University has robust arrangements for securing academic standards and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

### 1 Institutional context and strategic framework

#### 1.1 Key features of the institution's context and mission

1 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.

2 A distinctive feature of the University's provision is the large number of students enrolled on programmes through the University's Approved Learning Partners (ALPs) and through distance learning. ALPs, of which the University has approximately 50, are partnerships in which the University retains responsibility for curricula, learning outcomes, assessment, awards and all quality assurance matters, with the partner being responsible for providing local support and teaching for specific Heriot-Watt University programmes of study. In 2013-14 the total number of University students studying with ALPs 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'.

3 The establishment of the Malaysia campus since the last ELIR is a significant development. In 2013-14, 106 students registered for postgraduate programmes and 172 enrolled on the foundation programme. The opening of a purpose-built campus building in September 2014 coincided with the launch of undergraduate programmes.

4 The University's academic structure is based around seven schools: the School of Life Sciences; the School of Engineering and Physical Sciences; the School of Management and Languages; the School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society; the School of Textiles and Design; the School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences; and Edinburgh Business School (EBS). Apart from EBS, which has postgraduate provision only, the schools offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The school structure has undergone a recent change, when the School of the Built Environment and the Institute of Petroleum Engineering merged to become the School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society.

5 The University has considered in depth its approach to the breadth of study options and locations it offers, resulting in articulation of the underlying principle: 'identical academic standards; diversity of learning experiences' and the development of a Code of Practice for the Management of Multi-Location, Multi-Mode Programmes (the Multi-Code) (see paragraphs 6, 7, 15, 29, 85, 96, 111, 114 and 120). Implementation of the Multi-Code

allows for greater accessibility to University programmes and flexibility in the provision of learning opportunities, allowing students to switch easily between different modes of study and location depending on their programme and their needs and circumstances.

6 The key tenets of the Multi-Code are: that programmes must have identical learning outcomes and award/programme titles across all locations and modes of study; that, in addition, undergraduate programmes must have, at each stage, identical outcomes, core knowledge, skills and competencies; that programmes must contain the same mandatory courses; and that optional courses can be contextualised for local requirements. The Multi-Code provides operational guidance to support the University's strategic aims.

7 In 2014, the University introduced a common academic management structure for schools across all UK and overseas campuses, with a view to creating better alignment across campuses and to facilitate more effective management of committee business. The structure integrates the management of activities by schools across all locations. The University had recognised that operating location-based committees, systems and processes was not sustainable in terms of managing the academic aspects of multi-campus provision, for example, in managing the delivery of programmes in different locations and time-zones, and this was a key driver for change. The new multi-campus academic management structure is intended to underpin the Multi-Code, support quality assurance and enhancement, and facilitate academic alignment across campuses. Although this is a relatively new development, the ELIR team heard positive comments from staff about benefits that were already being realised, for example, better communication between staff across campus locations.

8 In the Reflective Analysis, the University identified the following themes that it asked the ELIR team to comment on: progress towards strategic alignment at institutional and school/service levels regarding the Learning and Teaching Strategy (see paragraphs 36, 52, 53, 63, 67 and 72); and implementation of the academic management structure across all schools (see also paragraphs 7, 13, 14, 57, 58, 64, 72 and 78) including use of the Multi-Code (see paragraphs 6, 7, 15, 29, 85, 96, 111, 114 and 120).

## **1.2 Strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching**

9 The strategic objectives of the University are outlined in the 2013-18 Strategic Plan: Global Thinking, Worldwide Influence. This plan is underpinned by three key integrated strategies encompassing research intensification; learning, teaching and the student experience; and internationalisation.

10 The University's strategic approach to learning and teaching is clearly articulated in its Learning and Teaching Strategy 2013-18. The strategy contains four strategic objectives: Growing and Diversifying the Student Population; Enhancing Student Learning; Reshaping the Learning Environment; and Developing Staff. It also contains four 'organisational enablers': Integration of Research, Teaching and Internationalisation; Development of an Academic Planning Process; Alignment of Service and School Strategies; and Strengthening the Enhancement Culture.

11 The Learning and Teaching Strategy is supported by an Operational Plan and an associated timeline, and was developed in close consultation and collaboration with students, academic staff and those in relevant professional services. The University aims to undertake annual evaluation of the implementation of the overall Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the associated local learning and teaching strategies and goals. Although this process had begun at the time of the current ELIR, it was at an early stage with only a small number of schools having undertaken the evaluation.

12 The University has also developed a set of briefing papers for staff, which outlines its key policies and principles in relation to learning and teaching, and quality assurance and enhancement. These one-page summaries provide a concise and consistent framework for internal and external use that helps staff to engage with institutional policy frameworks, and are clearly a positive development.

### **1.3 Effectiveness of the approach to implementing strategies**

13 The ELIR team considered that the University is effectively 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.

14 The use of key performance indicators (KPIs) provides timely data to inform management and monitor progress of strategic objectives. The new academic management structure, although very recent, is working effectively to develop and monitor the implementation of institutional strategies. Staff who met the ELIR team were clear about the strategic direction of the University and were able to speak positively about the implementation and impact of the objectives.

15 The ELIR team learned that the Multi-Code is being implemented across all schools and campuses to support the principle of 'identical academic standards; diversity of learning experiences'. The principle is widely understood by staff and students, who consider themselves to be part of an international university.

16 The University's global ethos is embedded in the institutional culture and operational processes; it is therefore 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. Both the culture of internationalisation and the management of academic standards across delivery modes and locations were considered to be areas of positive practice by the ELIR team.

17 The Learning and Teaching Strategy is effectively promoted throughout the University. The ELIR team found evidence in meetings with staff from academic and professional services areas, and in operational learning and teaching plans, that staff understand the objectives of the Strategy and its enablers, and have taken ownership for its implementation (see paragraphs 36, 52, 53, 63, 67 and 72). There was evidence from the ELIR case study, and from meetings during the ELIR, that development of the Strategy had been a consultative and collaborative process, and that the University had taken a considered approach to ensure staff and student engagement with, and ownership of, the strategy. This approach was viewed as being an area of positive practice by the ELIR team.

18 The pace and extent of the implementation of the strategies was a matter of discussion throughout the ELIR. The ELIR team's initial view was that the pace of implementation had been relatively slow. However, given the complexity of the institution, it could be seen that the time taken had enabled the University to engender staff and student engagement, and, therefore, the overall pace had supported detailed and thorough implementation of strategy and policy across all campuses.

## 2 Enhancing the student learning experience

### 2.1 Composition and key trends in the student population, including typical routes into and through the institution

19 In 2013-14 the University had a total student population of around 32,000, of whom around 12,700 were undergraduates, 17,500 were taught postgraduates, 1,260 were postgraduate research students and 540 were foundation students.

20 The majority of the University's students, almost two thirds, study outside the UK. 40 per cent of the student population is based on one of the University campuses located in: Edinburgh, the Scottish Borders, Orkney, Dubai and Malaysia; or on the Associate Campus at West London College. In 2013-14, 8,775 students were studying in Scotland; the majority (around 8,100) were based on the Edinburgh campus, where there were around 5,650 undergraduates and around 2,500 postgraduates (just over a third of whom were postgraduate research students). In the same year, the Scottish Borders campus had a total of 637 students and the Orkney campus had 34.

21 Dubai is the more developed international campus, having been established since 2005. In 2013-14 there were 3,758 students studying on the campus, most of whom were undergraduates (2,085). There were also 368 foundation students, 1,304 postgraduate taught students and 1 postgraduate research student. 70 per cent of these students were United Arab Emirates residents. The Malaysia campus was established more recently, with the first undergraduate programmes running in 2014-15, with 96 students. In 2013-14, there were 172 students studying on foundation programmes and 106 on postgraduate taught programmes. 90 per cent of these students were from Malaysia.

22 Approximately 11,200 students study with one of the University's ALPs worldwide. Approximately 60 per cent of the ALP student population are postgraduate taught students and 40 per cent are undergraduates. The most significant number of these students study in the EBS, which is comprised of around 50 per cent ALP students.

23 The University has a significant number of independent distance learning students. Of the 7,900 students enrolled as independent distance learners in 2013-14, 95 per cent were postgraduate taught students. The majority of these students study through the EBS; 46 per cent of the School's students are independent distance learners. Discussion during the ELIR also highlighted circumstances within the EBS where independent distance learners could purchase additional value-added tuition support from an ALP.

24 The University's International Strategy sets out plans to double the scale of its international activities by 2018 and grow the international student population by around 40 per cent, by increasing student numbers in Dubai and Malaysia; expanding existing successful collaborative partnerships; and developing multi-programme partnerships.

#### Student entry and progression

25 In 2013-14 around three quarters of undergraduate entrants to the Edinburgh and Scottish Borders campuses came directly from secondary schools, and one quarter from further education colleges. 63 per cent of entrants were from Scottish domicile. The University also has a new associate student programme that guarantees a place for students completing courses in partner colleges. The new programme and existing articulation routes will increase the number of articulating students from around 55 in 2011-12 to approximately 160 in 2015-16.

26 Within Scotland, a range of articulation structures and support mechanisms have been developed to promote widening participation and social inclusion, reflecting national

policy and the University's Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council. These include the University's involvement in: the Lothian's Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS); Go4Set, which aims to stimulate young people's interest in science, engineering and technology; and Brightest Watts, a week-long summer school to introduce Scottish students to the subject areas available at the University. Other activities undertaken by the University to widen participation are the development of a formal contextualised admissions process. The University aims to increase numbers of SIMD40 (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) students from less than 20 per cent to at least 30 per cent by 2017-18.

27 The University has plans to introduce an institutional Retention Strategy and incorporate this into the Learning and Teaching Strategy, having identified retention, through benchmarking data and institutional KPIs, to be a key priority area for the Learning and Teaching Board.

## **2.2 Supporting equality and diversity in the student population**

28 A distinctive and significant feature of the University's approach is the wide range of opportunities to suit the needs of a diverse student population. The University has developed strategy, structures and policies to manage this complexity, in particular the new academic management structure (see paragraph 7) and the Multi-Code. The flexible provision of learning opportunities and the management of academic standards across delivery modes and locations represent positive practice.

### **Student mobility**

29 The University recognises and supports the diversity of its student body. There is a well-developed internationalisation mission outlined in the University's Strategic Plan and International Strategy. The University has targets to increase international student numbers (see paragraph 24), strengthen the ALP network, and facilitate student and staff mobility opportunities. As part of these ambitions, it has developed a policy on inter-campus exchange that demonstrates its commitment to facilitating exchange between campuses through the alignment of curricula and learning outcomes. The policy is further underpinned by the principles set out in the Multi-Code; because programmes are run in multiple locations through multiple modes of study, this can facilitate easy switching between different modes of study and location depending on the programme, and on students' needs and circumstances. In 2013-14 there were 179 student transfers (the majority from Dubai to Edinburgh), as well as students moving from independent learning to a campus location, or to a partner of the University. Transfers also occur within the UK, for example, from the Scottish Borders campus to Edinburgh (104 transfers in 2013-14).

30 Students who met the ELIR team were aware of plans to increase opportunities for inter-campus mobility and were enthusiastic about the resultant possibilities. The University is considering how to improve information and advice to students to promote what it describes as, 'the Heriot-Watt Global Student Programme' covering all aspects of mobility, including ERASMUS (the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students). There have been challenges identified with the communication of mobility opportunities and in encouraging students based in Scotland to undertake transfers and placements. However, the University is progressing with plans to address these issues. As it does, there would be benefit in ensuring that communication reaches all students regardless of location of study.

31 During the ELIR visit, students from the Dubai and Malaysia campuses confirmed to the ELIR team that they felt part of the University and were positive about the opportunities provided for mobility between campuses.

## **Learning environment and resources**

32 Students on the Dubai and Malaysia campuses had concerns about the adequacy and accessibility of library resources. Exploration during the ELIR visit confirmed that the University was aware of some of the issues raised by students, including those around licensing in international contexts. In addition, the University informed the team that students on the Dubai campus had raised concerns about physical space, in particular in the library. The University should review the availability of, 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 also asked to ensure that there is alignment between the demands of curricula and the resources available to support students to achieve learning outcomes. In respect of the Dubai campus, the University should make progress to improve the learning environment and availability of learning support, giving appropriate consideration to student views.

33 The ELIR team also considered the resources and support available to students studying with the EBS, the majority of whom study away from a University campus. In 2013-14, over 50 per cent studied with an ALP and around 46 per cent were independent distance learners. The School has designed its curricula, delivery and support so that students are able to access all the resources they need through EBS, primarily through the EBS virtual learning environment (VLE), which is separate from the main University VLE (VISION). The team learned that EBS students could have access to University support services and resources, including VISION, on request. It was clear that EBS students have appropriate access to the resources they are likely to need.

## **2.3 Engaging and supporting students in their learning**

### **Student representation and gathering student feedback**

34 There is a well-developed student representative system in the Scottish campuses, which incorporates school and class level representation. This includes school officers: elected, non-sabbatical students who represent the collective student body at the individual discipline level (and at the school-level at the Dubai campus). School officers provide a link between Student Union Sabbatical Officers and class representatives. During the ELIR, students and staff commented positively on the existing system. Students sit on the majority of University and school committees, with the exception of the Undergraduate Studies Committee and Postgraduate Studies Committee, both of which report to the Senate. Students are represented on the Senate and School Studies Committees, which report to the Undergraduate Studies Committee and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

35 There is student representation on the Learning and Teaching Board. A Student Union learning and teaching report, submitted annually, is used to shape the agenda for the business of the Board in the following academic year.

36 The case study submitted by the University for the ELIR confirmed that students had been engaged in the development of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and that this had facilitated a constructive and effective partnership between the University and the Student Union. This partnership is also illustrated by the work the University and the Student Union are carrying out jointly on graduate attributes (see paragraph 49); 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.

37 Arrangements for the representation and engagement of students are effective in the Scottish and Dubai campuses and are in development in the Malaysia campus. The Student Union is working proactively to develop student representation on both the

Dubai and Malaysia campuses in ways that recognise local culture and context, within the overall University culture and ethos.

38 The Student Union does not currently work with students in ALPs or independent distance learners. Given the significant numbers of students in these categories, the University is asked to progress with the plans outlined in its Reflective Analysis to create representative structures for these students, building on the effective representation arrangements evident in the Edinburgh and Dubai campuses and emerging in Malaysia.

39 The University is implementing a Student Survey Framework to manage more effectively the process of gathering, evaluating and responding to student feedback (see also paragraphs 115 and 129). This will be managed centrally through the Student Survey Management Group. The ELIR team noted that the University uses student feedback to inform improvements to learning and teaching and the overall student experience. The team considered that the Student Survey Framework would strengthen these processes and help the University to consider more fully the feedback it gathers from students studying in different locations and through different modes of study.

### **Induction**

40 The University has various mechanisms for induction of new students, including first year students, advanced entry students, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students. The induction arrangements are mostly delivered centrally. The University has recently redeveloped induction for advanced entry students, to address their needs more fully, and created two new posts to support recruitment, transition and induction for students admitted through widening participation routes. During the ELIR, the team heard about postgraduate research students who had missed the University's formal induction programme, having joined the University in the middle of the academic year. The University is asked to ensure that all postgraduate research students receive effective and consistent induction irrespective of when and where they commence their studies.

### **Postgraduate research student training**

41 Schools have responsibility for the quality of the research student learning experience, with central oversight achieved through the Postgraduate Studies Committee. In addition, the University Centre for Academic Leadership and Development, provides a variety of skills and career development activities for research students through the umbrella of its Research Futures Student Workshops Programme. In discussion with the ELIR team, research students indicated that, generally, there is a positive research culture within the schools, and spoke positively about the support provided for them to attend external events, including events overseas.

42 Students studying on the Edinburgh campus confirmed that they had good opportunities to teach, and that training to support this was available through the Learning Enhancement and Development Skills (LEADS) programme, which is designed for postgraduate students with teaching responsibility. Research students based on the Borders campus indicated that there are limited teaching opportunities on that campus. The LEADS course is based at the Edinburgh campus and requires students to undertake appropriate teaching in order to participate; as such, it was not readily accessible to students based on the Borders campus. The University is encouraged to work with the students to consider the ways in which those on the Borders campus could access the LEADS course, or an equivalent arrangement to ensure they have the opportunity to gain experience as part of their early career researcher development. 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 are trained and supported appropriately to do so.

## **Borders Campus**

43 The University is aware of some issues at the Borders campus; student feedback has identified challenges regarding access to support and services. The University is addressing the issues through the Student Survey Management Group. Students confirmed to the ELIR team that the student representative arrangements on the campus are very supportive and helpful. The University is encouraged to continue its efforts address the matters raised.

### **Feedback on assessment**

44 The University was open in acknowledging that students have been critical regarding assessment feedback, notably around the frequency, timeliness and quality of feedback provided. Students studying outside the UK campuses were particularly critical. A recent QAA [review of UK transnational education in the United Arab Emirates](#)<sup>5</sup> (February 2014) highlighted the timeliness of feedback as an area to be kept under review, in reference to the University's Dubai campus. The timeliness of feedback received a relatively low score in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2013, with only 54 per cent of students agreeing that they received feedback in time to allow them to improve their next assignment. Feedback on assessment was commonly highlighted as a 'negative aspect' of the student experience in the National Student Survey 2014 open comments, and feedback turnaround times featured in five out of seven Academic Review Report recommendations in 2013-14.

45 During the ELIR, students from the Edinburgh campus reported that they were generally satisfied with assessment feedback. Similarly, students from the Malaysia campus indicated that assessment feedback was generally good, both in terms of quality and timeliness, including supportive supervision and feedback in laboratory teaching sessions. Students from the Dubai campus told the team that feedback was good, but confirmed that timeliness was an issue.

46 The University has measures in place to address these issues around assessment feedback, including: ensuring that feedback is provided prior to summative assessment; enhancing communication to students on what forms feedback might take; and ensuring that, where possible, campus-based students can view their own examination scripts after each diet and receive feedback on their performance.

47 The timeliness of feedback is being progressed by the Student Learning Experience Committee as a priority in 2014-15. The Committee plans to gather information on current school practices and to consider the ways in which school-specific practices can be monitored and good practice shared. School officers will take the lead in investigating practices within schools, reporting through the Student Union to the Student Learning Experience Committee.

## **2.4 Approaches to promoting the development of graduate attributes, including employability**

48 The University has re-developed its graduate attributes following a review undertaken since the previous ELIR. The review identified a lack of awareness among staff and students about University graduate attributes, which the University believes to

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<sup>5</sup> *Review of UK Transnational Education in the United Arab Emirates: Heriot-Watt University Dubai Campus*, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Heriot-Watt-Dubai-TNE-14.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Heriot-Watt-Dubai-TNE-14.pdf).

have been caused by a lack of staff and student engagement at the development stage of the project.

49 The current Learning and Teaching Strategy prioritises the development of a distinctive set of University graduate attributes (Specialist, Creative, Professional, and Global) and the embedding of these within all taught programmes. This work is being overseen by the Curriculum Working Group. School-level learning and teaching strategies and operational, and Enhancement Plans are expected to drive and support the development and implementation of the graduate attributes across all programmes. The Student Union has taken the lead in training school officers on the new graduate attributes in order to engage the student body. The development stage had recently been completed at the time of the current ELIR, and schools had begun the process of mapping their skills provision to the new graduate attributes. The ELIR team considered that the pace of implementation was relatively slow, but recognised that the University was now making progress, and that the time taken to revise the attributes and gain staff and student engagement had the potential to deliver benefits.

50 In discussions during the ELIR, although students were not yet familiar with the revised graduate attributes, they were aware of employability skills that they were gaining from their experience at the University. The students considered that they were being well equipped to begin work and believed they were highly employable. Students commented positively on work-based learning and placement experiences, where these had been available, although it was recognised that in some subject areas and disciplines work-related learning experiences were more difficult to obtain. Students indicated that the industry links developed by the University were effective and beneficial to the academic community, allowing them to gain a better understanding of their field of study.

51 The first destination statistics for the University's UK-based students are very positive. Higher Education Statistics Agency Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) statistics from 2012-13 indicate that 93.4 per cent of graduates were either working or in further study six months after graduation, and that 75.2 per cent of those were in graduate level employment (compared to the UK average of 69.5 per cent and the upper quartile of 74.5 per cent). This data does not include international campuses. However, the University conducts its own survey to track graduate destinations that follows the DLHE format. The current employment rate (January 2014) for Dubai campus graduates is 78.8 per cent, and the University has seen a 6.4 per cent raise from the previous year. The Careers Service is working to develop improved consistency of service to students across all locations, including those studying with ALPs.

## **2.5 Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience**

52 The University has an effective approach to enhancing the student learning experience, which is defined, developed and implemented through the Learning and Teaching Strategy and underpinned by local learning and teaching strategies, and operational and Enhancement Plans at school and support service levels. The Learning and Teaching Strategy is aligned effectively with the Strategic Plan and the International Strategy. In addition, the University has processes and policies that explicitly recognise the complex, global nature of the learning and teaching at the institution, in particular, the new academic management structure (see also paragraphs 7, 13, 14, 57, 58, 64, 72 and 78) and the Multi-Code (see also paragraphs 6, 7, 15, 29, 85, 96, 111, 114 and 120).

53 There is a constructive and effective partnership between the University and the Student Union. There is clear evidence of the effectiveness of formal student representative structures and examples of students contributing to strategic projects,

including work on graduate attributes (see paragraph 49), the development of representational systems in Dubai and Malaysia (see paragraphs 37 and 38), and the development of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The University is enhancing its processes for gathering and responding to student feedback and is working proactively with the Student Union to address issues and take action where necessary.

54 Staff and students are involved in the development of institutional strategy around learning and teaching, and are clear about the international aims of the University. Progress is being made with plans to increase and communicate opportunities for student mobility, and these are underpinned by institutional policies.

55 The University could strengthen its approach to enhancing the student learning experience by: considering the timing of formal induction processes for postgraduate research students; reviewing arrangements for postgraduate students who teach; and progressing with plans for representation for students studying with an APL or through independent distance learning. In addition, the University should ensure appropriate student access to online journals and e-books, and, in respect of the Dubai campus, progress with action on student feedback.

### **3 Enhancement in learning and teaching**

#### **3.1 Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice**

56 The University's systematic mechanisms for identifying and sharing good practice are set out in the Framework of Institutional Approaches to Good Practice, which summarises a range of processes at University, school, professional services, and Student Union levels. The quality assurance processes of school-level Annual Monitoring Review and Academic Review also include recently enhanced mechanisms to identify and share good practice (see paragraph 104).

57 In discussion with staff during the ELIR, the team found that informal sharing of good practice took place primarily within schools, and that the new academic management structure was enhancing this, including opportunities for staff to interact across the campuses. EBS staff outlined a range of internal mechanisms for sharing good practice. However, staff acknowledged that informal sharing of practice across schools was more limited, although the annual staff Learning and Teaching Conference was valued for this purpose. The University Centre for Academic Leadership and Development was also identified as having a key role in supporting the identification and sharing of good practice across the five campuses.

58 School staff commented positively on increasing opportunities for staff to interact and share practice through the new academic management structure with colleagues across the Edinburgh, Dubai and Malaysia campuses, but highlighted some limitations due to communications technology and connectivity issues, which they hoped would be resolved as the new structure becomes more established.

59 The University uses two different VLE platforms: VISION, the main University VLE, and a separate VLE used by EBS. The use of VISION by staff, and resources made available to students via the VLE, are variable across schools and programmes. Schools use VISION Champions to facilitate the sharing of good practice and improvement of e-learning services. Information Services also deliver Power Hour workshops for staff on the use of the University's VLE.

60 The Learning and Teaching Strategy Operational/Enhancement Plan identified effective use of technology as an area for further staff development. The University is

encouraged to continue with its work in this area, including developing definitions of good practice in online and distance learning. Related to this, the University is asked to consider the ways in which the existing enhancement action plans, or other systematic processes, could be used to share good practice, current and emerging, in distance learning provision. Specifically, there would be considerable benefit in EBS sharing with other parts of the University the learning arising from its experience of distance learning provision.

### **3.2 Impact of the national Enhancement Themes and related activity**

61 The University acknowledges that widespread staff engagement with the Enhancement Themes had been a challenge at the time of the last ELIR in 2011, with the majority of activity being undertaken by staff in the professional services and by a small number of academic enthusiasts. The current Student Transitions Theme is being led by the University Centre for Academic Leadership and Development, promoting local development projects, some of which will involve staff from the Dubai and Malaysia campuses.

62 The concepts and ideas from the Enhancement Themes in general are evident and embedded in the Learning and Teaching Strategy, in particular those from Graduates for the 21st Century; Developing and Supporting the Curriculum; and Research-Teaching Linkages. Discussions with staff indicated awareness of these links.

### **3.3 Engaging and supporting staff**

63 The University has a number of effective arrangements for engaging and supporting staff in the enhancement of learning and teaching, which have been well articulated in the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The University's priority actions include providing staff with the skills to teach, assess and support student learning within and across UK and overseas campuses. Allied to this is the aspiration of strengthening the research culture by a number of means, including promoting research informed teaching and making opportunities available for staff to engage in this.

64 The University's Performance and Development Review process recognises and rewards performance in learning and teaching. The University highlighted instances of school Directors of Learning and Teaching within the new academic management structure being promoted based on their leadership roles in learning and teaching, and discussions during the ELIR visit confirmed that staff were aware of, and valued, this recognition.

65 The Student Union also recognises staff performance in learning and teaching through their annual student-led Learning and Teaching Oscars and Graduate Teaching Awards, which are supported and welcomed by the University. The Learning and Teaching Oscars allow all University students to nominate staff who have most inspired or helped them over the academic year, and the Graduate Teaching Awards allow final year students to remember the staff within schools that have had the most impact on their learning experience throughout their time at University.

66 Staff training and development is undertaken in a variety of ways and organised by a number of units. The Human Resources Development Directorate delivers courses related to professional and leadership development and coaching across the University, including providing a number of courses at the Dubai and Malaysia campuses. An online resource has also been developed to support new managers based in all campus locations.

67 The University Centre for Academic Leadership and Development, which is part of the Human Resources Development Directorate, provides a range of academic support services for staff and research students across all campuses. These include the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice, which has been re-designed recently to reflect Learning and Teaching Strategy priorities, and includes consideration of

research-teaching linkages and training for research supervisors. The redesign has also involved greater alignment of the programme with the new academic structure and Multi-Code. However, the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice is not compulsory for all new academic staff.

68 Other services delivered through the University Centre for Academic Leadership and Development include: the LEADS programme for postgraduate research students who teach; the Research Futures Student Workshops Programme; and the Heriot-Watt Crucible, a leadership and development programme. The Crucible programme helps participants to network and develop interdisciplinary collaborations, learn to exploit knowledge exchange and industry links, and enhance the potential for public engagement. The University Centre for Academic Leadership and Development regularly reports on its relevant activities to the University Learning and Teaching Board.

### **Support for staff in Approved Learning Partners**

69 Current support for staff employed in ALPs is primarily school-based, informed by ALP visit reports and quality assurance reporting. The University Centre for Academic Leadership and Development also provides some partner/programme specific development sessions for staff at partner organisations, for example, Baku Higher Oil School. In some cases, ALP Approved Tutors have visited the Scottish campuses to observe teaching or to participate in the programme with a view to teaching aspects of the programme in future cycles.

70 A Professional Development Programme (known as GlobalPD and comprising two core courses) has been piloted for Approved Tutors at the University's ALPs since the time of the 2011 ELIR, when the University was asked to implement a planned staff development programme for all staff in ALPs. The programme has been run as a small scale pilot with particular ALPs and tutors who support independent distance learners. The programme was delivered online via the University VLE. In discussions during the current ELIR, University Centre for Academic Leadership and Development staff, along with school staff, explained that a Phase 3 GlobalPD pilot was about to commence, informed by systematic evaluation of the earlier phases. It was explained that this phase would focus on work with individual ALPs and one school, and that future extension of the programme would be dependent on schools engaging with and rolling-out the programme themselves. The partners would also need to secure additional resources for this to happen. The University is encouraged to monitor and review the progress of the pilot, and the related engagement of school staff, to ensure that the outcomes of the pilot are disseminated to all ALP staff (see also paragraph 132).

71 The University recognises that current staff resources in the University Centre for Academic Leadership and Development are stretched, and that additional resource will be required, including to support development of pedagogy for technologies and global provision of academic staff development.

### **3.4 Effectiveness of the approach to promoting good practice in learning and teaching**

72 The University has an effective approach to promoting good practice in learning and teaching. This is made explicit through the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the supporting school/service strategies and Operational/Enhancement Plans. The University has taken time to develop a comprehensive and explicit approach, which is aligned to the new academic management structure, and institution-level strategies and policies, including the Multi-Code and links with ALPs. The University is encouraged to secure full implementation of this strategic approach, and to promote engagement with it among those staff and students who are based outside the UK.

73 Increased emphasis has been placed on identifying and tracking good practice arising from the Academic Review Reports and the Annual Monitoring Reports, through the inclusion of enhancement meetings and reporting within periodic review processes (see paragraph 104).

74 In the context of the University having a significant volume of distance learning provision, it is encouraged to consider the ways in which existing enhancement action plans, or other systematic processes could be used to share good practice, current and emerging, in distance learning provision.

## **4 Academic standards**

### **4.1 Approach to setting, maintaining and reviewing academic standards**

75 The University's approach to academic standards is effective overall. The Senate has ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of all of the University's programmes and awards, with processes for approval, annual monitoring and periodic review delegated to three key committees: the Undergraduate Studies Committee, the Postgraduate Studies Committee, and the Quality and Standards Committee. The fundamental principle governing the University's multi-mode, multi-location provision is that programmes offered in more than one location, or by more than one mode of study, must have identical academic standards. This, and other mandatory requirements in relation to course and programme design, are managed through the regulatory, procedural and guidance documents identified in the University's quality pages on its website and the Multi-Code.

76 The Academic Approval Process ensures that the University's awards meet the expectations of all external reference points. Assessment criteria are set at the design and development stage, and are considered as part of the Academic Approval Process. Requirements for recognising Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning are defined in a separate University regulation, with an accompanying guidance document. Ordinances and regulations specify the types (and classifications) of awards that may be conferred by the University, and provide minimum threshold criteria for achieving each award. Such requirements are also managed through the University's integrated common assessment and progression system. Additionally, specific progression and award regulations are detailed within individual programme specifications. Examination Board Guidelines and Assessment Procedures are reviewed and revised on an annual basis by the Academic Registry, and distributed to schools, to guide Examination Boards to support consistency in their decision making.

77 The University has developed robust processes to ensure that academic standards are identical across all versions of a programme. This refers both to the level of achievement required for individual awards and to the single assurance framework for ensuring that identical academic standards are maintained across all locations and modes of study. Processes for the approval of disciplines, programmes and courses are in place, which take account of all academic and business aspects relating to the delivery of programmes with external partners. A key part of the approval process is the setting of academic standards. External examiners are required to submit annual reports, which require feedback on specific areas, for example: consistency with Subject Benchmark Statements; assessment criteria, marking schemes and classification; student performance; and comparability with other institutions.

78 To facilitate the management of academic standards across its worldwide provision and study modes, in 2014 the University introduced a common academic management structure, including associated committees and terms of reference across all schools and campuses. The structure establishes responsibilities for programme approval, monitoring

and review at school-level based around School Studies Committees, which are chaired by school Directors of Academic Quality. The structure is intended to support assurance and enhancement and to integrate the management of academic activities by schools across locations. To reinforce this common structure, the University has introduced Academic Councils at the Dubai and Malaysia campuses, and in West London College. Although these arrangements were too recent for the ELIR team to comment on their effectiveness, it was clear that the Councils have the potential to provide a further mechanism whereby campuses can report to the University Senate on institutional academic matters.

79 The Academic Registry supports all quality assurance activity, ensuring that knowledge, understanding and expertise are available to deliver processes in a consistent way across the University, offering continuity of support to senior managers. Summary Briefing Papers developed by the Academic Registry also provide a concise and helpful overview of the key policies for approval, monitoring and review.

## **4.2 Management of assessment**

80 The University has effective arrangements for managing assessment. Assessment processes ensure that the academic standards required to achieve awards are identical across all delivery locations and modes. Courses delivered in a variety of modes and locations may offer different forms of formative and summative assessment, provided that: the same learning outcomes are assessed; the same assessment criteria are used; and moderation is in place to ensure that the assessments are comparable and fair.

81 The University's assessments are managed by a number of regulations, policies, procedures and guidelines that are available on the Academic Registry webpages, including a policy on examinations and other assessment held around the world in different time zones, and guidance for off-campus examinations. The Academic Registry, in collaboration with schools, is responsible for the publication of the examination timetable and for organising all on-campus examinations at all campuses. The International Centre for Examinations operates under a Service Level Agreement with the Academic Registry to organise off-campus examinations for the University.

82 Heads of Schools are responsible for ensuring that assessment activities are undertaken in accordance with the University's requirements. Arrangements for the conduct of assessments are the responsibility of the Academic Registry, in collaboration with schools. Annual reports on assessment arrangements are made to the Quality and Standards Committee.

83 The University operates a University-wide assessment and progression system. Marking of assessed work, including work from students studying with ALPs, is undertaken by Herriot-Watt University staff, augmented by Approved Markers or Approved Teachers, who are not members of staff but are engaged by the University in academic roles. Moderation processes at school-level are approved by the Quality and Standards Committee to ensure equivalence across different forms of assessment in different locations, different markers and, in the EBS, different languages. Assessment methods are outlined within course descriptors and assessment marking criteria are produced for all courses, which are published on the University's VLE.

## **4.3 Use of external reference points in managing academic standards**

84 The University's use of external reference points is in line with sector expectations.

85 All University awards are referenced against the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, are consistent with Subject Benchmark Statements, and adhere to the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code).

Where programmes are accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), their requirements and guidelines are taken into account. The University's Multi-Code encourages schools to seek accreditation by relevant PSRBs. Many of the University's programmes are accredited by PSRBs for all modes and locations of a programme. Programmes delivered internationally must satisfy local quality and regulatory requirements, for example, those of the local quality agency. In this way, the University is using international reference points in evaluating its programmes.

86 Programme specification documents and course descriptors (for which there are standard University templates) clearly define learning outcomes. The University's Academic Approval Process ensures that the University's awards meet the expectations of all external reference points. Where programmes are accredited by PSRBs, their requirements and guidelines are taken into account. These, and other mandatory requirements in relation to course and programme design, are communicated and guided by various policies and procedures.

### **Externality in programme approval and review**

87 In May 2014 the University enhanced externality at the initial programme approval stage through the appointment of external members to the Undergraduate Studies Committee and the Postgraduate Studies Committee. This was in response to QAA's review of UK transnational education at the University's Dubai campus, which recommended that the University 'keep under review policy and practice in relation to the Quality Code, in particular in the use of views external to the institution in programme approval'. Externality is also provided through external membership of periodic Academic Review teams (who are responsible for programme re-approval), accreditation by PSRBs, and external examiner involvement in the development of programmes.

88 While externality is embedded in many of the key quality assurance processes, the ELIR team did not find systematic evidence of the University being able to assure itself of the extent, or the exact nature, of externality at the programme development stage. In discussions during the current ELIR visit, some academic staff indicated that externality would be considered and recorded on the programme approval form, although they acknowledged that this was not a requirement. The University is encouraged to provide additional assurance about externality, for example, by revising the programme approval form.

### **External examining**

89 Handbooks on External Examining for Taught Courses and External Examining for Research Students provide detailed information for all stakeholders about the key elements of the external examiner system and its operation. The handbooks are informed by an appropriate range of external benchmarks, including the Quality Code.

90 The University has a robust process in place for the nomination, approval and appointment of external examiners (including Chief External Examiners), and information, including handbooks, templates and forms, is easily accessible on the external examiner website. As most of the University's disciplines are accredited by PSRBs, the handbook on External Examining for Taught Courses states that external examiners should meet applicable criteria set by the PSRB. In relation to research degrees, the process of appointment (including criteria) and the role of the external examiner are included within the handbook on External Examining for Research Students.

91 The external examiner system, which includes the role of Chief External Examiner, is designed to provide an overview of academic standards across multiple locations and modes. The role of the Chief External Examiner includes: commenting on different versions

of a programme; overseeing the school's moderation procedure; reviewing minutes of awards boards; commenting on the effectiveness of the external examining team; reviewing samples of students work; identifying areas for concern or good practice; and providing an annual summary report. Schools have discretion to determine whether to appoint external examiners who are responsible for one or more programmes. However, where programmes are delivered in more than one location or by more than one mode of study, a Chief External Examiner must be appointed to provide oversight of the entire provision across the various modes and locations (see also paragraphs 90 and 96).

92 Arrangements for considering external examiner reports are clear, and include consideration by: the Chief External Examiner; school staff; the Head of Academic Quality; Deans of the University; and the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching). An annual summary report is submitted to the Learning and Teaching Board, and the Quality and Standards Committee, to highlight common themes or issues for consideration at the institutional level. The annual report also informs any areas for policy development, and supports the identification and dissemination of good practice across schools.

93 In May 2014, following detailed consideration of the relevant indicator in the Quality Code, the Learning and Teaching Board agreed that external examiner reports should not be sent to all students, as it believed there would be no active engagement through this type of process. Instead, it was agreed that there would be two formal routes through which students could access the reports: through School Studies Committees, which include student representatives and receive summaries of comments from the Chief External Examiner, and external examiner reports and recommendations for action; and through student involvement in Annual Monitoring Review processes. It was also agreed that schools could use additional communication arrangements if they wished, for example, by using Student-Staff Liaison Committees or posting reports on the University VLE for all students to see. The Learning and Teaching Board also agreed that guidelines to students should clarify that schools were not required to accept all recommendations made by external examiners, rather that their comments were one of a number of sources of information used by schools in their annual review processes. The ELIR team recognised the measures the University has put in place to make external examiner reports more accessible. However, additional benefit could be derived by publishing these reports, including making assessment processes more transparent to all students and providing the opportunity for students to engage more widely in quality management processes.

### **Recording of location of study on degree certificates and transcripts**

94 The 2011 ELIR report asked the University to consider identifying the location of study in the certificates and transcripts awarded to students studying with ALPs. The University has debated this issue at length, particularly in view of the Quality Code indicator that states that such information should be identified on certificates and transcripts. In the most recent discussion of the issue at the Quality and Standards Committee it was recommended that location of study was included, but this proposal was not approved by the Senate. The Senate has determined that degree awards should not be differentiated by location or mode of study, and, as a result, this information is not recorded on the degree award certificates or student transcripts. During the ELIR visit, the University emphasised that, because processes are in place to ensure that academic standards are identical across all variants of a programme, the location and mode of study are not relevant to understanding the level and nature of the knowledge and skills acquired by students. Additionally, senior staff considered that inclusion of this information could be seen to undermine the University's principle of making the same award for successful completion of a programme, irrespective of mode or location of study. The ELIR team noted that EBS transcripts do record the language of study, as these are the only programmes that are

delivered and assessed in languages other than English, but this information is not recorded on the degree certificates.

95 While the ELIR team recognised that this has been debated previously, the University is asked to reconsider its decision so that the name of partner organisations and location of study are recorded on student award certificates or transcripts for those students studying with an ALP. In particular, the University is encouraged to consider the impact of its current policy on the clarity and transparency of information provided to stakeholders (see also paragraphs 127 and 134).

#### **4.4 Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards**

96 The University has effective arrangements for securing academic standards. The University's principle of identical academic standards being secured across all variants of a programme is underpinned by the Multi-Code and through its Chief External Examiner system. The ELIR team considered that these arrangements represent positive practice.

97 There are areas where arrangements could be further enhanced, including: strengthening arrangements for externality in the programme design and approval processes; taking further steps to make external examiner reports more accessible to students; and including the location of study on degree award certificates or transcripts for students studying with ALPs.

## **5 Self-evaluation and management of information**

### **5.1 Key features of the institution's approach**

98 The University reviews its provision annually through School Annual Monitoring and Review (SAMR) and Partner Annual Monitoring and Review (PAMR), and periodically through Academic Review, Academic-Related Review and Internal Audit, all of which are informed by the outcomes of annual monitoring.

#### **Annual monitoring**

99 The University revised its annual monitoring process in 2012, with the intention of: integrating assurance and enhancement; increasing interactivity by introducing discussion sessions; incorporating review of academic performance data (including retention, progression, student success, student feedback and employability data); and enabling ALPs to engage effectively. SAMR includes taught and research programmes at all campuses, and programmes delivered in conjunction with partners or as independent distance learning. SAMR involves the consideration of feedback received from external examiners, which provides an external reference point for assuring the standard, level and currency of the curriculum. Feedback from other stakeholders such as employers and PSRBs is also considered as part of the process, alongside academic performance data. Students are fully involved in the monitoring and review processes, and the Student Union provides training and support to those participating.

100 PAMR is undertaken as a discrete process, which reports to SAMR. PAMR reports are produced collaboratively between the School and the partner institution. The process involves the consideration of feedback received from students and staff located at the partner institution. The reports submitted by schools and partners include an enhancement section, which provides an opportunity for the exploration and consideration of enhancement opportunities.

101 Following the submission of SAMR and PAMR reports and completion of annual discussion meetings, a summary report and action plan is submitted by schools for approval

to the Quality and Standards Committee, which considers quality assurance, and to the Learning and Teaching Board, which considers enhancement activity and progress made by schools and partners towards meeting the objectives of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Progress on actions undertaken is reviewed as part of the following year's Annual Monitoring Review process.

### **Periodic Review**

102 Academic Review and Professional Services Academic-Related Review of all programmes are undertaken on a five-year cycle, at all campuses, with the exception of the new Malaysia campus. The Malaysia campus is reviewed using a bespoke process, considered by the University to be relevant to the scale and size of the activity until the scale of provision merits review under the University's standard Academic Review process. There would be benefit in the University introducing externality to this bespoke process, as to date there have been no external members on the review team for the Malaysia campus.

103 Since the 2011 ELIR, the University has enhanced its Academic Review process by seeking feedback from graduates on the programme under review, and by including the requirement for schools to report on their engagement with and reflection on activities relating to the implementation of the objectives of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, with specific reference to the school's Learning and Teaching Strategy and Enhancement Plan. In addition, a session has been introduced during the review schedule that focusses specifically on quality enhancement, where schools are invited to select their own enhancement topics for exploration and discussion during the session and to share good practice.

104 From 2013-14, summary reports, produced from Academic Review Reports and School Annual Monitoring and Review reports, known as School-level Review and Enhancement Reports, contain enhancement and good practice sections for consideration by the Learning and Teaching Board. The Learning and Teaching Board then identifies initiatives that should be progressed as institutional projects or adopted by all schools. The University gave examples of action taken as a result of this new process where summary reports identified concerns around assessment feedback turnaround times, which will be progressed as a priority for action by the Student Learning Experience Committee in 2014-15.

105 Additional periodic review processes include Internal Audit, which focuses specifically on assurance. It operates within schools on a three-year cycle and covers all activity that the University considers to be high risk, including academic and industrial partnerships, and independent distance learning programmes. A separate thematic review method is used following the implementation of a major project.

106 Action plans and one-year progress reports are produced following all Academic and Academic-Related Reviews, and Internal Audits. Good practice highlighted through Academic Review is reported through the Quality and Standards Committee and the Learning and Teaching Board.

### **Management of data**

107 During the 2011 ELIR, the University was asked to undertake more detailed monitoring of students' learning experiences across different modes of study, through greater use of its new student management system. The University acknowledged that development of KPIs associated with the student population had focused primarily on UK undergraduate students to date, and that it plans to extend systematic management of data to all student groups. Learning and teaching KPIs are used to monitor student population data and academic performance at institutional, school and discipline levels. They are

produced centrally to ensure consistency in data preparation and to facilitate early identification of issues, and are reviewed by both the University Executive and the Learning and Teaching Board. Decisions relating to action required are benchmarked nationally, enabling the University to evaluate its performance within a wider UK context.

## **5.2 Commentary on the advance information set**

108 The advance information set contained a comprehensive set of evidence to support the ELIR team's understanding of the University's processes and the ways in which they are considered and overseen by institutional committees. The advance information set demonstrated that the University has systematic and robust processes for addressing the quality of the student learning experience and assuring academic standards.

## **5.3 Use of external reference points in self-evaluation**

109 The University uses standard sector reference points in its self-evaluation processes. These include the Quality Code, Subject Benchmark Statements, external examiner reports, PSRB reports and overseas accreditation reports. In addition, a wide range of national and international practice was used to inform the preparation of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

110 The University has enhanced processes relating to statistical information, particularly around institutional KPIs (see also paragraph 107). The data is benchmarked against UK and Scottish higher education institutions, as well as a specific set of benchmark higher education institutions. The University uses the KPIs, and benchmark Higher Education Statistics Agency and Scottish Funding Council data, to determine and enhance its institutional priorities.

## **5.4 Management of public information**

111 Arrangements for the management of public information are effective. The Directorate of Marketing and Communications and the Directorate of Governance and Legal Services oversee the University's approach to the management of public information. Effective arrangements are in place to ensure the accuracy of information provided in the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses. The Directorate of Marketing and Communications is responsible for the prospectuses and associate information, and for the University's website. The Marketing Team collaborate with equivalent offices on the Dubai and Malaysia campuses, and the Multi-Code provides advice on the management of public information to be used by all stakeholders, including ALPs.

112 Prospective students, and other stakeholders, can access information on the University's programmes of study (at all locations and by all modes of study) from the University's web pages. Information includes: a programme overview, programme content, entry requirements, fees and scholarships. Additional entry information, such as English language requirements, is provided for international students. Opportunities available to prospective students are communicated through a variety of methods, for example: admission and enrolment processes, open days and the University's website.

113 Programme learning outcomes are detailed within programme specification documents, which are made available to prospective students via the web. As required by part 1 of the Multi-Code, programme specifications are provided to applicants and registered students, published on the web and provided to external examiners. Where programmes are professionally accredited, the programme specification documents include details of the accreditation body. Where programmes include an element of work-based learning, the information will be provided within the programme specification documents.

## **5.5 Effectiveness of the approach to self-evaluation and management of information**

114 The University has a culture of self-reflection and action planning based on systematic review and monitoring of academic programmes and support services. The University is taking steps to ensure that processes and procedures established in the UK can work across campuses and with partner institutions, and has developed policies, including the Multi-Code, to facilitate this work.

115 The University has identified and begun to work on areas that will strengthen its self-evaluative processes, for example, the creation of the Student Survey Framework (see also paragraph 39) and the commissioning of work to improve access to management information on students studying outside the UK.

116 The Reflective Analysis submitted for the current ELIR exemplified the University's self-evaluative approach, including identifying areas for development that the University had identified around effecting closer alignment between strategies for research, teaching and internationalisation, and effective engagement of colleagues across campuses and institutional levels in decision-making processes.

## **6 Collaborative activity**

### **6.1 Key features of the institution's strategic approach**

117 The University has an effective strategic approach to managing its collaborative activity.

118 The University has a large number of students enrolled via collaborative activities, the most extensive of these being through ALPs, with approximately 11,200 students enrolled in 2013-14 with around 50 partner institutions.

119 As well as depth (in terms of student numbers), the University has a breadth of collaborative activity, namely: articulation partnerships with 20 local and overseas further education colleges; ALPs; an Associate Campus (West London College); and around 30 collaborative partnerships with UK, European and international higher education institutions to offer joint and dual awards. This depth and breadth of provision provides opportunities for students to access a range of learning opportunities in terms of location and mode of study. This includes the opportunity for students to change mode and location of study (see also paragraphs 5 and 29).

120 The University's International Strategy sets out its plans for the development of collaborative activity. Implementation of the Strategy is overseen by the International Strategy Board, which approves new collaborative activities in schools. The development and implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the Multi-Code, support the University's collaborative activities. There is clear evidence of the Strategy and the Multi-Code being embedded in the University's quality arrangements and supporting the development of institutional culture.

121 University policies relating to learning and teaching also apply to ALPs, except policies relating to staff management, which do not apply as there is local management of staff in the ALPs. The University remains responsible for the academic programme delivered by ALPs, including academic content, assessment and standards. The ALP is responsible for providing local facilities and learning resources, which can include teaching staff and administrative functions. Students enrolled via ALPs (and the Associate Campus, West London College) are designated as Heriot-Watt University

students and, depending on individual partnership agreements, are usually able to access the majority of Heriot-Watt University learning and support resources (for example the VLE) that are available to on-campus students.

122 The ELIR team met senior management and academic staff who were enthusiastic about the benefits that existing and proposed collaborative partnerships had for the University. The Student Union also considered collaborative partnerships to be beneficial, but it was not clear that all students were able to articulate the benefits and, in some cases, students believed partnerships had a negative impact on campus-based activities, for example, the timing of exams being altered to accommodate a partner. There would be value in the University considering how it could promote better understanding amongst campus-based students of the benefits brought by partnership arrangements.

## **6.2 Securing academic standards of collaborative provision**

123 The University has effective arrangements in place to secure the academic standards of collaborative provision. The University maintains responsibility for the academic standards of all awards and qualifications granted, irrespective of mode or location.

124 There are clearly defined mechanisms for approving partnership arrangements. The processes involved take appropriate account of risk and include both academic approval and business approval procedures. The International Strategy Board ensures that new partnership arrangements are in accordance with the University's strategic objectives.

125 The monitoring of quality and academic standards provided by ALPs and at the University's Associate Campus is effective. The University employs a diverse set of review and audit arrangements to ensure quality and review risks (see paragraphs 99-106, which set these out at length). The University also has appropriate arrangements to ensure that feedback obtained is duly considered and acted upon as appropriate. Monitoring of academic standards and the quality of experience provided in articulation agreements and with joint collaborative partners is effective. Monitoring of this activity is managed through the Partner Annual Monitoring and Review, and School-level Review and Enhancement Report processes (see paragraphs 100, 101 and 104).

126 The ELIR team noted strong evidence of active engagement of University staff with partner institutions. Engagement was evident at a number of different staff levels and, in particular, through school Directors of Learning and Teaching, and Directors of Academic Quality, whose complementary roles ensure the maintenance of academic standards and the enhancement of learning and teaching.

127 As outlined in paragraphs 94-95, the ELIR team identified an area for development around the recording of location of study on degree certificates and transcripts for students studying with ALPs.

## **6.3 Enhancing the student learning experience on collaborative programmes**

128 The University has effective arrangements for enhancing the student learning experience on its collaborative programmes.

129 Student feedback is routinely obtained from ALPs and collaborative partners in the same way as for all registered students using the University's standard academic feedback mechanisms. The data as collected can be disaggregated to indicate views from ALP and collaborative partnership students. In addition, the views of students engaged in collaborative activities are also explicitly sought. Student feedback is adequately managed

and considered through school and University level processes, including the new Student Survey Framework (see paragraphs 39 and 115).

130 The University operates a highly effective student representative network on its physical campus locations. This network has yet to be replicated for students registered via collaborative programmes or independent distance learners (see also paragraphs 38 and 55).

131 The University ensures that all students, including those studying through collaborative provision, have access to research-informed teaching and academic staff. Research-led teaching is made available through ensuring that: curriculum design and development is undertaken by research active staff; most course leaders are research active; and, where possible, ALP students have some level of interaction with a course leader or other staff member. Where there are variations in provision between collaborative partnership delivery and other modes of delivery, these are clearly documented and periodically reviewed.

132 Current support for staff employed in ALPs is primarily school-based, informed by ALP visit reports and quality assurance reporting, and in some instances provided by the University Centre for Academic Leadership and Development (see paragraph 69). Training for staff within the ALPs is also provided through the pilot programme, GlobalPD (see paragraph 70). The ELIR team considered the pilot programme to be a positive initiative and would encourage the University when reviewing the pilot outcomes to consider how the programme could have the greatest impact on the student experience in ALPs and across all schools.

#### **6.4 Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative activity**

133 The University has effective policies, processes and procedures in place to ensure that the academic standards are secured and the student experience is enhanced in its collaborative activities. The University has effective approaches for the approval and monitoring of collaborative activity, particularly in terms of the ALP partnership network.

134 The University could strengthen its approach to the management of collaborative activity by: establishing a student representation system for students studying with ALPs and for independent distance learners; ensuring appropriate access to learning resources where there is disparity of provision due to location; recording the location of study on degree certificates and transcripts for students studying with ALPs; and considering how to gain the most value for staff in ALPs from the outcomes of Phase 3 of the GlobalPD pilot.

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