



## **Queen Margaret University**

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

**August 2014**

## **Preface**

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

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

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



Queen Margaret University  
EDINBURGH

## QUEEN MARGARET UNIVERSITY: FOLLOW-UP TO ELIR (August 2014)

### 1 Introduction

Queen Margaret University (QMU) participated in the third cycle of Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) between February and April 2013. Staff and students welcomed the opportunity to engage in discussion with the reviewers appointed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and were delighted to achieve the highest of three possible outcomes, i.e. a judgement of 'effectiveness'. The identification, within the ELIR reviewers' report, of the following areas of positive practice was particularly appreciated as endorsement of the effectiveness of current approaches to assurance and enhancement:

Coherent strategic framework	Institutional context and culture
Enhancing the student learning experience	Employability
Enhancement in learning and teaching	Collaborations
Self-evaluation and information about quality	

This report details action that the University has taken since publication of the confirmed ELIR report in August 2013 to address the outcomes set out therein. The report is structured as follows, taking account of QAA Guidance on key points to be covered:

- Report preparation;
- Action to address identified areas for development;
- Update on areas of positive practice;
- Future plans and evaluation.

### 2 Report preparation

This report has been developed under the auspices of the University's Student Experience Committee (SEC), which has a remit to assure academic standards and enhance the quality of the student learning experience. Key contributors to the report have been the members of the University's ELIR Steering Group<sup>1</sup>, all but one of whom are also members of SEC. The Steering Group was established originally in summer 2012 to oversee the University's detailed preparations for the ELIR process, including the drafting of the Reflective Analysis. Given the timing of the final submission of this follow-up report, i.e. over the summer period, it has been more difficult to involve students in the final document preparation than would be the case during the academic session. However, the current Student President and Vice-President have contributed fully. Other students have been involved throughout the year via their contribution to the work of SEC and other

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<sup>1</sup> Membership of the Steering Group is as follows: Deputy Principal (Chair); Student President; University Secretary; Deans of the University's two Schools; Director, Centre for Academic Practice; Assistant Secretary, Governance and Quality Enhancement; Partnership Development Manager.

senior committees, including the School Academic Boards and Research Strategy Committee.

The Chair of Court has exercised Convener's Action to approve the report on behalf of the University Court. This approval will be subject to endorsement at the meeting of the Court being held on 8 October 2014.

### **3 Action to address identified areas for development**

The University was asked in the ELIR Outcome Report to consider seven areas for development. At its meeting of 7 October 2013, SEC approved a detailed action plan to address each of these areas. The action plan identified responsible individuals or groups, as well as time scales. Throughout the 2013-14 Session, this programme of work has progressed, with regular reports being submitted to SEC and also to the University Senate. The following paragraphs provide an overview of progress thus far.

#### **3.1 Area for development 1 - Institutional committees: Continue to actively manage the business and operation of the Student Experience Committee to ensure that it remains focused on strategic matters and institutional self-evaluation.**

A Working Group was established in semester one of Session 2013-14 with a remit to review the effectiveness of the management of the Committee's business and to report its findings to SEC. Overall, the Group considered that arrangements remained effective. Recommendations to further enhance the existing approach were approved by SEC as follows, i.e. that there should be:

- 1) *Annual consideration of the extent to which SEC has focused on strategic matters and institutional self-evaluation during the session.* The first such consideration took place at the final meeting of SEC for Session 2013-14. Approaches to self-evaluation were benchmarked against the outcomes of the QAA report on Institutional Approaches to Self-Evaluation (IASE). On the basis of that benchmarking, members were reassured that the work of SEC was conducted in line with the IASE principles and that the Committee was proactive in identifying where there might be scope for improvement. It was further agreed that SEC had retained a focus on strategic matters, in line with the Student Experience Strategy. An annual summary was requested of decisions and the flow of business between SEC and other senior committees, and this will come to the SEC first meeting of 2014-15.
- 2) *Introduction of a more structured approach to recruitment of students to SEC sub-groups, and indeed other quality enhancement activities, through the Students' Union-led Academic Council.* SEC considered that this would provide opportunity for wider student involvement and also that students could be briefed more effectively on their remit through this forum. At the time of submitting this follow-up report (August 2014), it is too early to evaluate the impact of this approach to recruiting students, which will be subject to formal review through the annual consideration of the effectiveness of the management of SEC business (see above for details).

**3.2 Area for development 2 - Scope and analysis of student surveys:**  
**Continue to review the University's strategic approach to the management and use of student surveys. The University is asked to review the number and scope of the surveys that it uses. It is also asked to develop an effective system for analysing the survey outcomes, linking the outcomes to action plans.**

The University's Retention and Surveys Team prepared a response to this area for development. The number and scope of surveys was re-visited, building on a previous such exercise undertaken in 2010. This review concluded that many of the existing surveys targeted different groups of students, suggesting that 'survey fatigue' was perhaps less of a concern than might otherwise be the case. Current approaches to action planning in response to survey outcomes were also considered and judged to be largely effective, although these will be discussed further with the Head of Planning.

In line with the above, the four actions set out below were approved by SEC for implementation from 2014-15, i.e. that there should be:

- 1) development of a surveys calendar and checklist to assist staff with the development and timing of surveys, this being critical to avoid overload and maximise response rates;
- 2) development of relevant sections of the QMU website, including 'You said, we are listening', to improve communication of survey outcomes and resulting action;
- 3) development of a policy on 'Learning from and responding to the student voice/feedback', taking account of good practice from other HEIs;
- 4) continued embedding of co-ordinated responses to feedback through existing channels of Annual Monitoring and Operational Planning.

In the main, the actions set out above focus on enhancement of existing mechanisms through additional support for staff involved in survey administration and analysis. It is considered that these recommendations also address the specific point in the Technical Report about consistency of approach to external surveys.

Survey management and resources to support such activity will be kept under close review, in light of changes to the external environment (for example review of the NSS) and also the actual and planned launch of major surveys (PRES and ISB) at QMU since ELIR 2013.

**3.3 Area for development 3 - Assessment feedback:**  
**Ensure that the University's requirements for the timely return of feedback to students on their assessed work are implemented consistently.**

This has been an on-going priority during the 2013-14 Session, building on work in previous academic years. NSS enhancement activities have continued the focus on various aspects of assessment and feedback, including timely return. In particular, the respective responsibilities of staff and students in assessment continue to be highlighted through a range of channels. This means that students are well informed of the schedule for return of work and feedback. The coordination of NSS activities through School and Programme level action plans enables systematic impact evaluation and oversight. Such plans are also linked to Annual Monitoring.

During semester one of 2013-14, a semi-automated assessment and feedback tracking system was implemented, key functions of which were to record stages of the assessment process; to issue automated email reminders to academic staff of approaching deadlines; and to generate management information, including instances of feedback not returned on time. The provision of this information enabled Deans and Heads of Division to identify potential breach of deadline, in time to take appropriate action to address this. SEC received a report on the effectiveness of the system early in semester two. This indicated that useful data had been generated, but that further refinements are necessary to improve functionality. A full evaluation will take place in due course to inform developments for subsequent years.

The recently released 2014 NSS results indicate significant progress over the last year under this area for development, with a 16% increase in student satisfaction with promptness of feedback compared to the 2013 NSS results. This improvement mirrors that in the University's Internal Survey (QSS) for 2014, which also demonstrated an increased level of satisfaction under this category. QSS is open to taught students, other than those eligible to participate in the NSS, and emulates the format of the NSS.

**3.4 Area for development 4 - Personal tutor system:  
Evaluate the revised Personal Academic Tutor system as a mechanism for delivering personal development planning, in line with the University's intentions.**

Following the introduction of the revised Personal Academic (PAT) system in 2012-13, a survey was made available in April 2013 to staff and students to evaluate the effects of modifications to guidance and the introduction of meeting templates. The results of this survey were reported to SEC in semester one of 2013-14. Findings suggesting that the system had impacted positively on Personal Development Planning (PDP) included increased uptake and better staff understanding of the purpose and conduct of PDP. Disappointingly, student satisfaction was lower than in the previous year. However, this might be attributed to greater engagement and awareness of the aims of the system, meaning that perceived inadequacies are more likely to come to the fore. Discussions are progressing within the Divisions, allowing for local consideration of the system overall and specific aspects thereof, including PDP.

A key development in 2014-15, linking the PAT System to PDP was the preparation of an Employability Strategy for launch early in 2014-15. The Strategy includes the following objective: *To increase incorporation of employability into all academic programmes, for example, through the appropriate use of work-based and work-related learning, encouraging self-reflection and personal development planning at all levels.* The related action within the Strategy is as follows: *Incorporate structured employability conversations into annual meetings between Personal Academic Tutors and students.* Support for this will be available to academic staff from the Careers Service and Centre for Academic Practice.

The 2014 NSS results, whilst not explicitly linked to Personal Academic Tutoring, indicate 86% overall student satisfaction under the Personal Development category. This represents an increase of 2% on the previous year, with scores for all questions above both the Scottish and UK averages.

**3.5 Area for development 5 - Virtual learning environment:  
Address student concerns about the accessibility and extent of module information on the University's virtual learning environment (VLE), the Hub.**

SEC received a report on this area for development from the Centre for Academic Practice. The report included points arising through a small-scale postgraduate student project on use and levels of engagement with the University's VLE (the Hub). It also highlighted solutions adopted by other HEIs to address inconsistency across VLE areas. Recommendations contained in the report were to develop a new QMU rubric and VLE module template for implementation from summer 2015, and to consider further the type and extent of staff development and resource implications. SEC agreed to refer the recommendations to the recently established Technology Enhanced Learning Group (TELG) for consideration on a strategic level, after which CAP will assume operational responsibility for implementation. SEC members were highly supportive of any steps that might be taken to improve consistency of the VLE for student and indeed staff users. However, it was observed that some variation across subjects will remain inevitable and that there are certain circumstances under which this is both appropriate and desirable.

**3.6 Area for development 6 - Support for teaching role:  
Ensure that all postgraduate research students involved in teaching access appropriate training and support for this role.**

During 2013-14, a leaflet was developed by the Centre for Academic Practice, with input from the Doctoral Students' Association, detailing support opportunities within and external to QMU. These are aligned with the Vitae Researcher Professional Development Framework and the UK Professional Standards Framework. The leaflet complements the Training Needs Analysis currently published in the Doctoral Supervisors' Handbook and due to be included in the forthcoming Doctoral Students' Handbook. Consideration of support for teaching has also been a focus of Doctoral Supervisor Workshops throughout the year.

SEC discussed responsibility for the oversight of postgraduate research students accessing support opportunities, and it was agreed that this matter should be referred to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) Working Group. This Group will consider some of the key areas for development from the PRES 2013 results for QMU, which include research culture and supervision. Discussions around support for teaching will be informed by the content of Chapter B11 of the Quality Code, in line with the recommendation in the Technical Report.

**3.7 Area for development 7 - Annual monitoring:  
Clarify the purpose and benefits of the proposed online continuous monitoring arrangements, and consider how the new system will complement the current, effective, Annual Monitoring and Review process.**

This recommended area for development provided the University with a helpful steer to revisit the original aims of the online continuous monitoring system. The Working Group that originally proposed the system was reconvened (albeit with some new members to reflect staff changes at the University) and asked to report to SEC on this area. The Group remained strongly in favour of the proposed system.

The following main benefits were anticipated: improved engagement through easier access to data; possible earlier completion of some actions, if data could be automatically uploaded from ISIS; and easier generation of reports for enhancement purposes.

Taking account of these recommendations, SEC discussed the potential impact of the system, i.e. added value for staff users and the student experience. Consideration was given to the resource implications, which may prove less of a barrier than previously suggested in light of advances in technology at QMU in the interim. As an outcome, it was agreed that further discussion would be necessary to assess the balance of effort and impact. Accordingly, the report submitted to SEC by the Working Group will be referred to the Technology Enhanced Learning Group for further consideration.

#### **4 Update on areas of positive practice**

The University welcomed the identification of a number of areas of positive practice within the ELIR report. Developments in response to these that may be of interest are detailed below:

##### **4.1 Strategic framework**

At the time of the 2013 ELIR visits, the University had recently embarked on QM150, a long term strategic planning project, focusing on institutional priorities, planning new investment, and preparation for long-term success. The Vision for the extended period up to 2025 (the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the institution that is now QMU) is currently being developed, after which the new overarching QMU Strategic Plan will be launched. The Student Experience and Quality Enhancement in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (QELTA) Strategies will subsequently be refreshed to align with these higher level reference points.

##### **4.2 Institutional context and culture**

The ELIR report highlights the culture of reflection and continuous improvement, which the reviewers considered could be seen by the engagement of staff and students in strategic development, the sharing of good practice, and support for enhancement activities at all levels. The QM150 Project provides further opportunity for involvement in the on-going development of the University. Staff and students are represented on each of the Sub-Groups reporting to the overarching Project Board. Other opportunities to feed into the Project and its various strands include open speed networking and lunch with the senior management discussions, which have been well attended, stimulating wide ranging discussion.

##### **4.3 Enhancing the student learning experience**

The University continues to adopt a coordinated approach to the student learning experience with effective links between academic and professional services. The forthcoming planned review of the student experience, which is to be aligned with the newly launched Enhancement Theme of 'Transitions', will provide further opportunity for reflection and identification of areas for enhancement. This Theme is chaired by the Director of the University's Centre for Academic Practice.

#### **4.4 Employability**

As indicated above (paragraph 3.4 refers), the University has recently finalised its Employability Strategy. The Strategy, which has been developed with input from staff, students, employers and other stakeholders, is split broadly into two parts as follows: a higher level introductory section, setting the context and linking to QMU and external strategy and policy documents; and an implementation plan, detailing actions and responsibilities. Employability is also identified within the recently developed Student Partnership Agreement for Session 2014-15 as one of four partnership projects between the University and Students' Union.

#### **4.5 Enhancement in learning and teaching**

External initiatives continue to inform learning and teaching activities within the overall programme of activities managed by the Centre for Academic Practice (CAP). Examples include work on curriculum review support linked to the Developing and Supporting the Curriculum Enhancement Theme, and dissemination of the findings of internal research based on the Learning from International Practice project. Since the ELIR visits, an application for an institution-wide CPD scheme has been submitted to the Higher Education Academy. If successful, this will allow the University to recognise Associate Fellows, Fellows and Senior Fellows. During 2013-14, CAP has also piloted a series of new workshops on campus (for example, a forum to share good practice in External Examining), as well as webinars to facilitate flexible staff attendance.

#### **4.6 Self-evaluation and information about quality**

The Student Experience Committee continues to take an evaluative overview of outcomes from key processes. As in previous years, the Learning and Teaching Panel has submitted annual feedback on the operation of subject review at the University. This will be considered at the first SEC meeting of the 2014-15 Session, taking account also of the analysis of feedback from staff and student participants in events. The University is investing currently in a significant review and re-development of its website, the outcome of which will influence future development of the 'Quality at QMU' pages.

#### **4.7 Collaborative provision**

In 2013-14 the University instituted a new committee structure in relation to collaborative provision, with key operational staff being brought together in a Collaborations Operations Group. This Group meets regularly and considers issues relating to processes, regulations and infrastructure to support collaborative provision. Initiatives being progressed as a result of the Group's work include a centralisation of information keeping and sharing of generic resources for staff development. The University also plans to develop enhanced procedures for the periodic review of partnerships and refreshing of due diligence.

### **5 Future plans and evaluation**

SEC will continue to implement and monitor progress against the ELIR action plan through periodic reports submitted during 2014-15. Updates will also be provided to Senate and Court. The precise mechanism for evaluating specific initiatives will be determined on an individual basis. In all cases, it will be important to take account of the views of students and staff, and other stakeholders will be consulted, as appropriate. As indicated above (paragraph 4.1 refers), the outcomes of the QM150 Project will inform the overall strategic

direction of the University, including the arrangements for managing academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. The University will also continue to benchmark against sector practice, learning through dialogue with other HEIs and agencies.

## **6 Further information**

Further information is available from Dawn Martin, Assistant Secretary, Governance and Quality Enhancement: [dmartin1@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:dmartin1@qmu.ac.uk) or Irene Hynd, University Secretary: [ihynd@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:ihynd@qmu.ac.uk).

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