



## **Queen Margaret University**

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

**November 2019**

#### **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.



# Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

## QUEEN MARGARET UNIVERSITY: YEAR-ON RESPONSE TO ELIR

### 1 Introduction

Queen Margaret University participated in the first year of the ELIR 4 methodology during 2017-18. The Outcome and Technical reports were published on 9 August 2018. This year-on report sets out the actions taken by the University in response to the ELIR recommendations. An update is also provided on commendations identified by the ELIR reviewers.

Primary responsibility for the University's ELIR preparations and subsequent follow-up activity resides with the Student Experience Committee (SEC). The ELIR Steering Group (ESG)<sup>1</sup>, which reported to SEC and to the University Senate, was established both to prepare the Reflective Analysis and to co-ordinate arrangements for the ELIR visits. The majority of ESG members, including the Student President, are also SEC members, providing for continuity in oversight of ELIR activity.

Following the publication of the ELIR reports in August 2018, SEC considered and approved (in September 2018) an action plan for responding to the recommendations. Periodic updates have been provided to SEC over the academic session 2018-19, with input from other committees and groups, as appropriate. At the final meeting of the session (May 2019), SEC received an update on preparation of this report, and considered and approved a number of updates for inclusion, as detailed below. The report has also been reviewed and approved by the Senate Convener and the Chair of University Court. The Court and Senate homologated these decisions at the first meetings of the academic session on 2 October and 30 October 2019 respectively.

### 2 Response to recommendations

The following paragraphs provide an update on actions taken in response to each of the ELIR recommendations.

#### 2.1 **Personal Tutor system** - *The University should progress its plans to review and revise the Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) system, working with students to agree the minimum, or core, expectations that will be offered to all students irrespective of other*

---

<sup>1</sup> ESG membership in alphabetical order: Sheila Adamson, Partnership Development Manager; Professor Roni Bamber, Director of the Centre for Academic Practice; Dr Richard Butt, Deputy Principal; Professor Fiona Coutts, Dean of Health Sciences; Professor Brigid Daniel, Dean of Arts, Social Sciences and Management; Sacha Forbes, Student Representation and Support Co-ordinator; Irene Hynd, University Secretary (Convener); Jill Kelly, ELIR Project Assistant; Dawn Martin, Assistant Secretary, Governance and Quality Enhancement (Secretary); Stewart Sands, Student President.

*variations in approach that might be desirable, for example, to meet particular programme or discipline requirements.*

At the time of the ELIR visits, we were partway through a review of the PAT system. It was helpful to receive the ELIR feedback to inform the final stages of that process. Since publication of the ELIR reports, the review has concluded, with a set of recommendations agreed by SEC in May 2019. These recommendations were informed by extensive consultation with students and staff, and review of institutional NSS and internal (QSS) survey results. The agreed recommendations, which will be implemented from September 2019, are listed below:

**Action 1:** There will be an enhanced focus on induction to the PAT role and ongoing support for PATs so as to ensure the workload (number of assigned Tutees) remains manageable, and staff have access to any skills development necessary to meet the requirements of the role. There will be an increased focus on PAT responsibilities within our Performance Enhancement Review (PER) process. This will allow staff to discuss any development needs and workload management with their line manager, typically the Head of Division.

**Action 2:** Staff and students will be reminded of the functions and benefits of the PAT role, and their respective responsibilities in the process. SEC agreed that the current expectations remain valid. As such, these will be communicated as stated in the current PAT materials.

In reviewing the expectations, SEC considered, in particular, the number of PAT meetings and the process for recording meeting outcomes and actions, as these points had shown the greatest divergence of opinion in the online survey that formed part of the review methodology. It was agreed that all PATs should continue to offer one meeting per semester to each of their students at each level. SEC agreed further that PATs (rather than students) are responsible for capturing the outcomes of meetings and ideally securing student agreement on the accuracy of such records. Actions should be captured electronically (for example in an email) and, in the interests of confidentiality, need not be documented extensively. Consideration will be given, during session 2019-20, to the possible development of an online reporting system. The development of an online system could be used to good effect to evaluate uptake of the PAT system, in addition to the benefits of improved access to records and increased efficiency.

**Action 3:** All new and continuing PATs will undergo training on referring students to QMU professional services and, where appropriate, to relevant external services. Student Services will lead on the training with input from the Library and other professional services. Ideally, all PATs will access the training before the beginning of academic session 2019-20, and no later than the beginning of academic session 2020-21.

## **2.2 Recognising and recording student skills and achievement** - *Continue reflecting on the ways the University can recognise and record the skills and activities students gain outside the formal curriculum.*

SEC considered and approved a pilot of UniHub as a mechanism for the University to recognise and record the skills and attributes gained by students outside the formal curriculum. UniHub is an online mobile friendly system which captures educational data

(drawn from the Student Records System) and has the facility for users (students and administrators) to record additional information such as participation in co- and extra-curricular activities. A particular benefit for students is that they have access to a CV builder tool. This generates a basic CV, which users can adapt to suit their individual needs. The CV can help students link their experiences to the competencies required for graduate level employment. It can also be useful to inform discussions with QMU Careers Advisers.

Activities that students might wish to record include, but are not limited to: voluntary work; professional work; industry placement; class representation; involvement in other QMU quality assurance and enhancement activities; and contribution to sports and societies. Sample verification of the recorded activities will be undertaken by the Careers and Employability Team. Whilst this can be resourced in the short term, consideration will need to be given to the administration costs, if it is agreed to extend the approach following the pilot. Activities and skills identified through the UniHub reporting mechanism will not be recorded on student transcripts. However, it is planned to issue a record of achievement, the format of which remains subject to further discussion.

**2.3 Feedback on assessment** - *While recognising the University has made a range of improvements in its policy and practice relating to feedback on assessment, it is asked to continue working with students to address the improvements they would like to see around consistency in the quality of the feedback provided.*

SEC established a Working Group to progress this recommendation. Membership of the Working Group included academic and professional services staff, as well as the Student President and SEC undergraduate student representative.

The Working Group undertook the following activities over the academic session 2018-19: review of relevant literature; evaluation of NSS and internal (QSS) survey data; analysis of current QMU assessment and feedback rubrics; and a focus group meeting with students. The outcomes from the review were approved by SEC in May 2019.

The recommendations below will be implemented from September 2019. It is important to emphasise that many of these recommendations are not new, but that they reinforce and build on existing good practice.

- **Recommendation 1:** To include a preparatory session (workshop or equivalent) for summative assessment within each module.
- **Recommendation 2:** To include 'feedback and feedforward' as a regular item on all Student-Staff Consultative Committee agendas with effect from 2019-20.
- **Recommendation 3:** To explore the extension of the Widening Access and Retention Funding (WARF) supported Peer Assisted Learning System (PALS) beyond those Divisions where it is currently in operation, or consider alternative peer support mechanisms that might serve a similar function in supporting students to engage with assessment and feedback.
- **Recommendation 4:** To continue to provide clear communication to students about the timeframe for receipt of feedback. The timescale for return of feedback will remain at 15 or 20 working days, in line with the Assessment Regulations. However, it is recognised that, exceptionally, staff may not be in a position to meet the agreed

- deadlines due to unforeseen circumstances. In such circumstances, it is essential that students are kept informed of any delay and of the expected timescale for return.
- **Recommendation 5:** To encourage students to discuss feedback once a year with their PAT. Guidance will be built into the PAT communications that are currently in development (paragraph 2.1 refers).
  - **Recommendation 6:** To ensure that feedback is as consistent as possible across modules with respect to expectations, the support offered and timing of assessment. Standardised approaches to feedback should only be used where it is possible to ensure that the feedback remains individualised to the student and specific to the assessment.
  - **Recommendation 7:** To initiate a further work stream to consider how a culture of feedforward and feedback can be fostered across Schools and Divisions. This will be progressed by SEC during 2019-20.

The impact of the above interventions will be monitored through established mechanisms. The NSS Results Working Group undertakes detailed evaluation of institution-level survey results (including evaluation of assessment and feedback) on behalf of SEC. As such, the Group is well placed to consider the extent to which the actions arising from this project have made a positive difference. Locally, Teams evaluate student feedback on all aspects of their experience (including assessment and feedback) through the datasets that inform Annual Monitoring. Good practice and challenges identified through Programme Annual Monitoring are captured in the School Annual Monitoring Reports. SEC has a remit to consider any matters arising through Annual Monitoring that are for the attention of the institution and to identify and implement further actions to support enhancement, where appropriate.

**2.4 Support for Graduate Teaching Assistants** - *Consider the benefit of implementing a centralised system for monitoring Graduate Teaching Assistants' completion of the skills development course provided to support them in their teaching.*

Following the ELIR visits, a centralised system was agreed to improve tracking and communication between the Graduate School and Heads of Division, with the primary aim of ensuring doctoral candidate preparedness for the role. We are currently reviewing and restructuring the GTA skills development programme to ensure this remains fit for purpose and accessible to all candidates, including the part-time doctoral population. The principles of monitoring completion of skills development will remain in place for the refreshed provision, which is due to be implemented from September 2019.

**2.5 Use of evidence to enhance the student experience** - *The University has made significant progress in the availability and use of data to support decision-making. As it continues to make more data available at the subject level, it is encouraged to support staff in using that evidence to understand the extent to which there is potential variation in the student experience across disciplines.*

In our Reflective Analysis we reported on the Staff Portal, through which staff can access data on student attendance to highlight possible issues in retention and attainment. At that time we indicated our aspiration to develop the Portal further. That work has progressed under the auspices of our Institutional Team for the current Enhancement Theme: Evidence for Enhancement - Improving the Student Experience.

One of the Team's priorities for the 2018-19 session has been the 'Five Things' project. This project has a focus on the data that a lecturer might find useful to address the following questions: Who are my students? How do they engage? How are they doing? What do they find most useful? How does this compare with other institutional and national information? The project aims to provide staff with advice and links to the range of information we already gather at QMU that is specific to their particular local context. In parallel, we are exploring the possibility of making available an aggregated version of some of the data to allow staff to benchmark. Guidance on those internal and external benchmarks is being developed by our Head of Planning to support interventions that are appropriate for the discipline.

A further important priority for the Team, which will extend into the third year of the Theme, is to increase support and guidance for staff undertaking module evaluation across the full range of campus based and online provision. This work will build on an earlier module evaluation project, the outcomes from which included an updated module evaluation template and a leaflet, which incorporated suggestions gathered by the Student Experience Committee for capturing students' module experiences to inform module development and enhance the learning experience. Through Annual Monitoring and discussions at Student-Staff Consultative and Programme Committees, staff and students will have the opportunity to discuss the effectiveness of enhancements to the module evaluation process, as well as the evaluation of individual modules.

**2.6 Link between language entry requirements and availability of learning resources -**  
*Where programmes are delivered in Greek, ensure students are able to make effective use of academic literature throughout their programme of study, for example by revising the English language entry requirements or by increasing the availability of learning resources in Greek.*

It has been agreed with our Greek partner that a review will take place at the end of academic year 2018-19, which will be the first year that SCQF Level 9 of many health programmes has been delivered in Greek. This will allow for comparison of student performance between the two languages of delivery. The partner has also agreed to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of non-credit-bearing English language support in order to ensure that students are facilitated to develop the level of English comprehension skills required to make use of literature in English. The partner is investigating whether some members of staff can be supported financially to translate key academic resources into Greek. The Portfolio Development Group will receive a report on the outcomes from the above activities in semester one of academic session 2019-20. Any recommendations arising from the Group's consideration of that report will be subject to further discussion and approval by the School Academic Board, Student Experience Committee and Senate, as appropriate.

**2.7 Collaborative Partner Review -** *Extend the use of periodic review across all collaborative partners, recognising proportionality in the approach adopted. This would ensure that the quality of the student learning experience is included as part of the University's ongoing approach to due diligence*

In response to this recommendation, we have updated our regulations for risk monitoring to include a review of the risk status of each partnership before the University agrees to renew a collaborative agreement. The risk status review includes a due diligence refresh, an updated costing, and an evaluation of risk assessments of all programmes in

the partnership. The evaluation of the risk assessments has a particular focus on the partner's continued ability to provide an appropriate learning environment for all of its provision. The Portfolio Development Group (PDG), which oversees the development of new programmes and risk status of collaborative provision, has responsibility for considering the evidence from the risk status review. On the basis of that consideration, PDG determines whether or not the partnership should be renewed, and specifically whether renewal is contingent on the outcome of a partnership review. PDG also decides on the format of partner review, taking account of the scale and location of the partnership and the identified level of risk to ensure an approach that is both robust and proportionate. The first partnership review arising from recurring high-risk assessment reports took place in March 2019 and resulted in an action plan with a number of conditions to be addressed before the continuation of the partnership can be confirmed. Two further overseas reviews are planned for 2019-20 before renewal of collaborative agreements.

### **3 Updates on areas of commendation**

#### **3.1 Institutional strategy and student partnership** - *The University has developed and implemented a strategy which is dynamic, iterative and embedded in the student experience. The way in which the University has engaged in a partnership with its student body to continue developing the strategic approach is particularly positive.*

We continue to work, in partnership with our students, towards implementation of our institutional strategies. The Student Experience Strategy was subject to review at the most recent SEC meeting (May 2019), at which point it was determined that the Strategy remains fit for purpose and that we have made good progress against agreed actions. The Strategy is due for review in 2019-20, following which the updated version will be in place for the period 2020-25

#### **3.2 Widening participation** - *The University's holistic and student-centred approach to widening participation represents excellent practice. Students are supported at each stage of their learner journey and the University's commitment both to widening participation and ensuring students succeed is demonstrated through the broad range of outreach activities it has in place. These include hosting the Children's University and working with schools, colleges, community groups, the third sector and voluntary agencies.*

As QMUs approach to widening participation has broadened, we have been concerned also to deepen our engagement with our communities with a view to raising aspirations at an early age amongst some of the most under-represented groups in society. In 2018-19 we re-focused our partnership with the Children's University Scotland and established a virtual school with East Lothian Council to support ongoing delivery of the programme for all care experienced primary-aged pupils in East Lothian. In addition, we have recently developed and hosted a large-scale outreach project, Job Kingdom Live, whereby every Primary 5 pupil (1400+) in East Lothian visited the campus to take part in a range of subject/career taster workshops. The project, which was delivered in partnership with East Lothian Council, Developing the Young Workforce Edinburgh, Midlothian & East Lothian Regional Group and Edinburgh College, was a huge success and we look forward to hosting again in 2020.

**3.3 Employability** - *The extent to which programmes and staff are focused on preparing students for employment including providing work-related learning experiences such as placements, live projects and community engagement, as well as staff helping students to reflect and describe the personal and professional skills they are developing.*

We continue to support our students through an extensive and growing range of placements within our programmes. Modules across programmes also provide the opportunity for students to reflect upon the employability skills they have developed, whether that is through placements, volunteering, assignments or group work. Increasingly, students are required to create Personal Development Plans that link to potential career goals. These encourage students to reflect upon their current skills, identify gaps and plan for development opportunities to fill these gaps. There is also an increasing emphasis on entrepreneurialism. Students are given the opportunity to develop Business Development Plans, and we facilitate professional support through our Business Development team working alongside Business Gateway.

An important development during 2018-19 was the launch of our Student Central portal (referred to earlier as UniHub). The portal, which covers a number of services, including Careers and Employability, gives students access to a wide range of resources and support, as well as appointments and the ability to ask questions online. There are also plans to introduce a Personal Development Recognition Award, using the system to record employability skills development (paragraph 2.2 refers).

**3.4 Graduate School** - *The University has made significant enhancements to the role and operation of its Graduate School since the previous ELIR, including strengthening the research environment and attracting positive student feedback.*

We continue to systematically make progress in this area. In December 2018, we appointed a new Head of Graduate School and two new Postgraduate School Research Co-ordinators (PSRCs), following the completion of the previous post-holders' three year period of tenure. The PSRC role has been developed to offer more direct support to candidates and supervisors. Other enhancement activities progressed since the ELIR visits include: initiatives to further improve parity of experience for PhD and Professional Doctorate candidates; a review of our PhD by Publication regulations/regulations governing PhDs undertaken by creative practice; review of our doctoral study weeks; and the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to review current provision for supervisory development. We continue to work closely with the Doctoral Candidates' Association (DCA) and collaborated most recently with the DCA on the Doctoral Conference in May 2019. Our Graduate School Strategy includes, as an important priority for 2019-20, the development of approaches to collecting and engaging with candidate feedback. This work will also be progressed in partnership with the DCA.

**3.5 Enhancement in learning and teaching** - *The Centre for Academic Practice (CAP) provides a leadership role in the enhancement of learning and teaching policy and practice, providing a wide range of staff development opportunities which are responsive to the needs of staff and the University's strategic direction.*

The University is currently considering proposals that would bring the delivery of all student academic skills development within one location and provide the strategic leadership of institutional quality enhancement activities, including the continuing professional development of its academic and teaching related staff and the leadership

and enabling of teaching and learning innovation. The proposal draws on best practice elsewhere in the sector. We expect that the revised arrangements will be in place by semester two of session 2019-20. Importantly, this timeline allows for discussion with our incoming Principal, who takes up post on 1 October 2019. In the meantime, our approaches to staff development continue to evolve to support the implementation of our Strategic Plan. We recently established a new Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) User Group to enable key stakeholders to engage in directing future requirements for TEL systems.

**3.6 Engagement with the Enhancement Themes** - *The University has successfully embedded learning from the national Enhancement Themes, enabling Theme priorities to be realised in a wide range of institutional policy and practice*

This year our Five Things Project has been an important focus of the work of our Institutional Team, and we expect to be able to further embed the learning from that Project over the coming year. We are also looking at approaches to module evaluation and how best to support staff with the resulting data, building on previous work undertaken by SEC. Further detail on these initiatives is provided earlier in this report (paragraph 2.5 refers). Nationally, Queen Margaret University was represented on each of the collaborative clusters, and we will seek to use the learning from those projects to inform institutional policy and practice. Our Enhancement Themes Newsletter provides information to the wider University community on University and sector-wide activities, as well as links to resources and details of upcoming events and webinars.

**3.7 Training and support for staff and students on validation and review panels** - *The training and support provided to students and staff who have less experience of validation or review is excellent. The training is compulsory for students and is evaluated, with results being used to further enhance future practice.*

We recruited a new cohort of student reviewers in February 2019, at which point we ran our training session again in the same format as the previous year. Feedback from attendees was entirely positive. We also continue to support staff members who are participating as panel members for the first time. During 2018-19, we have seen an increase in uptake of the opportunity for staff to observe before committing to the full Panel role. This has proved especially popular with staff members who are new to Higher Education. We also take care to support new Conveners, typically by appointing a more experienced academic colleague as an informal mentor and member of the Panel.

**3.8 Responsive annual monitoring arrangements** - *Following a period of reflection and the operation of a successful pilot, the University has implemented a two-stage annual monitoring process across its taught provision. The process makes effective and detailed use of a range of data, enabling programme teams to implement enhancements for the start of the next academic year.*

We recently undertook an online survey to gather feedback on the effectiveness of the revised Annual Monitoring arrangements. All survey respondents stated that they prefer the revised templates, and the majority expressed a preference for the revised timescale. In February 2019, SEC considered the first composite School reports submitted under the new process. Members welcomed the reports as accurate,

informative and balanced representations of the activity undertaken in the previous cycle and actions planned for the current year for each of the Schools. The next cycle of reporting will include space for Schools to record progress against each of the identified priorities.

**3.9 Oversight of collaborative provision** - *The University has effective oversight of its collaborative provision through the operation of Joint Boards of Study, which provide a holistic overview of programme operation and support a shared sense of community. In addition, the University uses its Partner Organisation Student Survey (POSS) systematically as a tool to gather independent feedback from students studying with each of its collaborative partners.*

This year we encouraged partners to promote the survey more actively to students by identifying examples of enhancements that had resulted from student feedback. We achieved improved response rates of 23% for the 2019 POSS (compared to 15% in 2018) and 28% for the 2019 Greek POSS (up from 18% in 2018).

**4 The next steps**

We will continue with the implementation of agreed activities over the course of 2019-20 and beyond. Most immediately, we are working on our PAT communications and training sessions (paragraph 2.1 refers) and communication of the outcomes arising from the quality of assessment feedback project (paragraph 2.3 refers). SEC will continue to have primary responsibility for overseeing the ELIR action plan and evaluating the impact of agreed actions. SEC will report regularly to Senate and to the wider University community to keep staff and students informed of enhancements. This oversight will support the preparation of our next Reflective Analysis and engagement with our reviewers for the fifth ELIR cycle.

**5 Further information**

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

QAA2466 - Oct 19

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2019  
18 Bothwell Street, Glasgow G2 6NU  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 0141 572 3420

Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)