

Enhancement-led Institutional Review of Robert Gordon University

Outcome Report

April 2021



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About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method

The QAA website explains the method for [Enhancement-led Institutional Review \(ELIR\)](#) and has links to the ELIR handbook and other informative documents.¹ You can also find out more about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\)](#).²

Further details about ELIR can be found in an accompanying [brief guide](#),³ including an overview of the review method, information about review teams, and explanations of follow-up action.

About this review

This is the Outcome Report of the ELIR conducted by QAA at Robert Gordon University. The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 16 and 17 February 2021 and Review Visit on 26-30 April 2021. The review was conducted by a team of five reviewers:

- Ms Karen Barton (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Alexander Hedlund (Student Reviewer)
- Professor David Lamburn (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Tony Platt (Coordinating Reviewer)
- Professor Valerie Webster (Academic Reviewer).

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

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

The threshold judgement for this report can be found on page 3, followed by commendations and recommendations.

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

The impact of COVID-19

QAA made some amendments to the ELIR process to accommodate the ongoing pandemic, most notable of which was that the ELIR was conducted entirely online. The ELIR was undertaken while the pandemic, and the institution's response to it, was a key part of the context. Although this was part of the context of the review, the team considered the institution's approach to quality and standards from the time of the last ELIR in 2016. It is acknowledged that the review took place at what was a very challenging time, and the ELIR team and QAA Scotland are grateful to staff and students for their engagement in the review.

¹ About ELIR:

www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review

² About QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland

³ Brief Guide to ELIR: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/brief-guide-to-elir-method.pdf

⁴ Technical Report:

www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/The-Robert-Gordon-University

About Robert Gordon University

Robert Gordon University can trace its roots back over 250 years and was established as a university in 1992 when the Robert Gordon Institute of Technology was awarded university status. The University has a clear mission to transform people and communities by providing teaching and research which is demand-led, contributing to economic, social and cultural development - not only regionally, but also nationally and internationally. Through its relationships with professional bodies and employers, it develops a curriculum that addresses specific skills needs and, through its provision, seeks to drive employability and to support individuals throughout their professional careers.

The University states its purpose, through its Strategy Map, to be an innovative, inclusive, impactful, professionally-focused institution. It aims to ensure a high-quality student experience through active engagement with students in the design and delivery of the curriculum. The University creates an inclusive environment through a student-centred approach to the learning experience.

The University, as of October 2020, had a total of 15,779 students (headcount) of whom 10,965 were full-time students and 4,814 were studying part-time. Of these students, 9,946 were undergraduate students, 5,502 were postgraduate taught students and 331 were postgraduate research students. The 2018-19 HESA figures showed the University to be the 3rd largest UK provider of online learning master's courses where over 30 online degree options are offered.

Threshold judgement about Robert Gordon University

Robert Gordon University has **effective** arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience.

This is a positive judgement, which means that the University meets sector expectations in securing the academic standards of its awards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience it provides, currently and into the future. This judgement confirms there can be public confidence in the University's awards and in the quality of the learning experience it provides for its students.

Commendations

- 1 The University is commended for the following areas of good practice.
- 2 **Employability and entrepreneurship** - the University has taken deliberate steps to further enhance the development of employability and entrepreneurship skills across the student population through the use of curricular and extra-curricular activities which are integral to the RGU graduate attribute 'Whole Person' educational approach.
- 3 **Strategic approach to working with industry and key stakeholders** - the University has developed an effective strategic approach to developing and working with partner organisations that spans business, industry, services and government bodies - nationally and internationally - which has a clear focus on economic, social and educational impact. This further informs and enhances the University's approach to work-based learning, including its Graduate Apprenticeships.
- 4 **Partnership working and the student voice** - the University and the student body have developed a genuine culture of effective collaboration which is embedded through both formal and informal mechanisms at all levels of the institution. The student voice is actively sought, valued and acted upon across the University.
- 5 **Institutional approach to gathering and using data** - the University has an effective approach to the use of data which is easily accessible to academic and professional services staff and which informs evaluation, action planning and decision-making. The approach has continued to evolve to ensure that key aspects of the student experience are captured, analysed and used to drive enhancement.

Recommendations

- 6 The University is asked to consider the following recommendations.
- 7 **Implementation of policy and practice** - reflect on the way in which institutional policies and practice are implemented at school level to ensure parity of student experience across the institution. In particular, the University is asked to consider the Personal Tutor system to ensure all taught students have access to and receive comparable student support.
- 8 **Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion** - continue to develop and embed equality, diversity and inclusion strategy, actions and practices throughout all aspects of university activity and monitor the impact, ensuring that there is ownership and understanding among staff and students.

9 **Criterion-referenced grading scheme** - consider and resolve the institutional approach to the grading system to ensure consistency and understanding for students by the start of the academic year 2022.

10 **Training for postgraduate students who teach** - by the start of academic session 2021-22, develop an effective oversight mechanism to ensure that all postgraduate students receive formal training before commencing teaching and assessment.

What happens next?

11 QAA Scotland will continue to engage with the institution through the annual discussion visits which, among other matters, consider the ways in which institutions respond to the ELIR outcomes.

12 One year after publication of the ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to provide a Follow-up Report to indicate how they are responding to the outcomes of ELIR. The final version of the institution's Follow-up Report is published on the QAA website. Institutions also engage in a range of enhancement and development activities including Focus On projects where institutions work collaboratively to improve policy and practice relating to topics that are frequently occurring in ELIR outcomes.

Further information

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

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

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

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

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

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