



**University of Aberdeen**

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

**March 2020**

**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.

## Year-on Response to the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR)

March 2020

### 1. Introduction

#### Purpose of the report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an overview on the actions that the University of Aberdeen has taken 'one year on' from its 2018 Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR). The University found the process to be helpful in identifying areas of good practice, and areas in which further enhancements could be made. The recommendations made through the ELIR process have been taken forward, and the actions associated with those recommendations are described. In addition, reflection on the commendations has been provided. In section 2, a brief contextual overview highlights recent developments at the University.

#### ELIR 2018 Outcome

1.2 The University of Aberdeen ELIR 4 was undertaken in Autumn 2018. The ELIR Outcome Report confirms that the University has 'effective arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience' and notes that 'there can be public confidence in the University's awards and in the quality of the learning experience it provides for its students'.

1.3 The University was commended for several of areas of good practice: the support given proactively to an increasingly diverse student population; the focus on widening access and the pre- and post-entry support given to such students; the targeted communications policy; the University's engagement with Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) resulting in the development of the Student Partnership Agreement; and the University's quality processes and arrangements for self-evaluation and enhancement.

1.4 The ELIR Report asked the University to consider seven areas for development:

- (i) The balance between institutional and school responsibilities
- (ii) Monitoring and expansion of personal tutoring
- (iii) Relationship between Postgraduate Research School and Schools and training of PhD supervisors
- (iv) Preparation for teaching
- (v) Review of Professional Services
- (vi) Monitoring, training and induction of External Examiners
- (vii) Review processes for Collaborative Provision to ensure accuracy of Register of Partnerships

1.5 Section 2 provides an update on some recent institutional developments, Section 3 provides an update on: the University's progress with meeting these recommendations and Section 4 provides progress in the areas of commendation.

#### Approach to following-up outcomes from the ELIR

1.6 The ELIR report was considered by the University Management Group, Senior Management Team, presented to Senate and was actively reviewed by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL). Students and staff were involved in the action planning and implementation for the ELIR outcomes through the committee structure and wider discussions. The outcome was also proactively communicated to all staff and students.

1.7 The UCTL, chaired by the Vice-Principal (Education), has formal responsibility for the oversight of ELIR follow-up actions. This committee brings together those with senior academic responsibility for education matters with senior staff from relevant Professional Service area and student representatives and is therefore the appropriate

body to lead the follow-up activity arising from ELIR. The UCTL will have ongoing responsibility for monitoring the implementation and evaluation of actions arising from ELIR.

- 1.8 The Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) is actively involved in all discussions relating to education and the student experience. There is strong AUSA involvement in UCTL, and its sub-committees. AUSA Officers meet informally with the Vice-Principal (Education) and with key members of Professional Services on a regular basis. Additionally, there is a strong student voice at Senate with the membership including all AUSA School Conveners, the Student President and the AUSA Education Officer. Furthermore, a recently established Education Team led by the Vice-Principal (Education) (see section 2), ensures there is regular opportunity for informal debate, prioritisation and monitoring of education matters. The AUSA Education Officer is a member of this group. Through this comprehensive engagement, AUSA have been able to actively contribute to the development of the actions being undertaken as detailed in this follow-up report.
- 1.9 This report was endorsed by Senate at its meeting on 5 February 2020 and by the Policy and Resources Committee, on behalf of the University Court at its meeting on 3 March 2020. The University Court will be then invited to formally approve the report at its meeting on 24 March 2020.

## **2. Recent Developments at the University**

- 2.1 Relevant institutional developments are highlighted to provide context for the remaining report.
  - (i) On Founders' Day (10 February 2020) in our 525<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year, we were delighted to launch our new strategic plan, Aberdeen 2040. The strategy is built around the key themes of inclusivity, interdisciplinarity, internationalisation and sustainability with these themes transcending the core objectives of educational excellence and research. Its development was taken forward in line with the principles of openness, transparency and inclusion and was highly consultative and participative in nature involving staff, students and a wide range of stakeholders. Key elements for Education within the strategy include focus on employability, partnership working with students, sustainability and climate change, and interdisciplinarity.
  - (ii) A number of senior appointments have been made since November 2019: Vice-Principal (Education) and there are now four Education Deans covering the areas of (i) Educational Innovation, (ii) Student Support, and (iii) Employability and Entrepreneurship, (iv) Quality Assurance and Enhancement. With these appointments, a new Education Team has been established and is led by the Vice-Principal (Education), involving the four Deans, senior staff from relevant Professional Services and the AUSA Education Officer. There are a number of additional Dean roles that link into the Education portfolio through the committee structure and other means: Deans for International Student Pathways and Progression, Portfolio Development and Programme Promotion, and Widening Access, Articulation and Outreach.
  - (iii) The University has initiated plans to undertake transformational enhancements to the King's College campus to ensure continued delivery of a world class learning experience for the growing student population. This £50M project which was approved by the University Court in December 2019 will include a new home for the University of Aberdeen Business School together with sweeping improvements to the University's historic core to deliver new education space whilst maintaining and drawing upon its unique heritage. The new spaces will be contemporary, flexible and technology-rich facilities ensuring our student learning experience remains in line with the expectations of the student body, now and in the future.

## **3. Response to ELIR 2018 recommendations**

- 3.1 ***The balance between Institutional and School responsibilities:*** *Reflect on the balance between institutional and School responsibilities for establishing and implementing policy and practice to assure itself that all those studying for a University of Aberdeen award have parity of experience.*
  - 3.1.1 The University committee structure ensures that the approval, implementation and monitoring of all policies is managed across the University so that all Schools and Professional Services are properly engaged in all aspects of policy implementation. The education committee structure reflects this consultative approach and, as was detailed in the Reflective Analysis, through the University Committee on Teaching & Learning (UCTL) sub-committee structure there is robust involvement of all Schools ensuring institutional policy development is informed and takes account of the differing disciplinary requirements. The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) plays a central monitoring role in ensuring all Schools adhere to institutional policies and practice. Additionally,

the Undergraduate Committee and the Postgraduate (PGT) Committee, as well as QAC, provide fora ahead of formal policy approval to enable discussion and debate of policy and practice (both proposed policy change and its impact), with recommendations being made to UCTL. The School members of these sub-committees are members of their School Teaching and Learning Committees. What this model enables is threefold:

- (i) Discussion, debate, agreement and approval of institutional policy and practice
- (ii) Identification of areas for enhancement across the University
- (iii) Assurance of the implementation of institutional policy and practice

3.1.2 A few examples are now provided of areas which the University has taken forward since the ELIR 2018 report. Their implementation will be monitored by UCTL.

- (i) Senate approved, in May 2018, a move to a Grade Point Average System for classifying Honours degrees with further consistency in the weighting adopted for years 3 and 4 being approved in May 2019. This change seeks to address issues of transparency and introduce greater consistency across the institution. Under the previous system, there were at least six different honours weighting systems in use across the University. From 2019/20, one of two weighting systems will be used for all students: either equal weighting of honours years or a consistent exit velocity model. Central oversight of this is the responsibility of QAC with Schools informing the committee of their chosen method and the justification for their selection.
- (ii) Senate commenced consideration of the development of a policy on the Late Submission of coursework in December 2019 which will ensure that all Schools take a consistent approach in the management of late submissions and the penalties applied. The proposals will be developed and discussed by School representatives on the Undergraduate and Postgraduate (Taught) Committees before being returned to Senate via UCTL in March 2020. In order to ensure sufficient time for effective communication to all staff, the policy is scheduled for introduction from 2020/21, subject to its approval. Student involvement is embedded within the policy development through the committee structure and wider consultation through AUSA (Aberdeen University Students Association). A communications strategy for policy implementation will be in place to ensure consistent application of the policy.
- (iii) The University has undertaken an extensive piece of work on consistency for Examinations. Mandatory training has been introduced for all School Examination Officers to ensure that they are appraised of any regulatory or policy changes. Attendance at training is monitored and Schools required to ensure that any non-attendance is followed up and managed. Further ongoing discussion is taking place at QAC and in the sub-committees around the management of Examiners' meetings and the potential for continued enhancements to the consistency of practice across the University. For example, it has been proposed that a Registry Officer from Academic Services or a QAC representative from a different School is part of all School Examiners' meetings.

**3.2 *Personal tutoring:*** *Continue to monitor its personal tutoring arrangements to ensure they remain fit for purpose, in the context of the University's changing student population. The University should progress its intention to introduce personal tutoring for postgraduate taught students, including those studying online.*

3.2.1 In May 2019, the Postgraduate (PGT) Committee approved the introduction of personal tutors for PGT students. The principles of this proposal were supported by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) and Senate. In practice, some Schools operate a system where the PGT programme leader is personal tutor for the students on their programme as this is the most appropriate form of support for the students in that context although, in some cases, programme size will mean this is less feasible. A review of the effectiveness of School-based personal tutor systems for PGT students will be undertaken by the newly appointed Dean for Student Support in 2019/2020 with the aim of identifying good practice, areas for improvement, and proposals for overall enhancement of the support for PGT students.

3.2.2 The personal tutor system for undergraduate students was implemented in September 2013. While the most recent internal Student Experience survey indicated that the majority of students were positive about the personal tutor system, it is timely that the approach is reviewed so that enhancements can be implemented as needed. The newly appointed Dean for Student Support will undertake a holistic review of student support, including personal tutoring, for undergraduate students during 2019/2020, again with a view to identify good practice across the University and make recommendations for enhancements. The review will be undertaken in partnership with students, including the use of focus groups to engage and gain feedback on the experience of personal tutoring. The reviews for both undergraduate and postgraduate students will be managed coherently so that appropriate

consistency emerges across the University. This review process will also take cognisance of the needs of students studying elsewhere whether online or those studying at our campus in Qatar.

- 3.3 Postgraduate Research School:** *Continue work defining the role of the Postgraduate Research School and its relationship to the academic Schools, enabling the University to ensure that all research students have an equivalent experience. The University is also asked to ensure that new postgraduate research supervisors undertake the training provided by the University.*

#### Harmonising processes

- 3.3.1 In the past 12 months, the Postgraduate Research (PGR) School has made significant progress in harmonising processes across the University and in doing so has made improvements to recruitment processes, induction and online training and the processes for reviewing progression of PGR students. Other improvements include: 1) re-building the PGR School website, 2) re-vamping *PGR Study Here* pages with streamlined research area information, and 3) developing a researcher roadmap to help researchers understand and plan their personal development journey with links to the researcher development programme offered by the PGR School. These improvements are helping to ensure that all new PGR students have an equivalent experience.

#### Doctoral Researchers Group

- 3.3.2 A Doctoral Researchers Group (DRG) has been established to help improve communication within and across Schools and to ensure that the needs and views of our PGR students are heard and can be addressed. This group comprises of a PGR student representative from each academic School, the elected PGR AUSA representative and the Manager of the PGR School. The DRG provides a forum for student-led discussion to raise important common needs and issues facing PGR students from across the University, to enable these to be raised at appropriate committees and to ensure PGRs are involved in decision making on matters directly related to them. Members of the DRG sit on the PGR committee and other institution-wide committees and working groups.
- 3.3.3 The DRG has led to the creation of a Doctoral Society or 'Doc Soc'. The Doctoral Society is the first completely PGR student-led society incorporated within AUSA. It brings together PGR students from all Schools to hold social, career development and wellbeing events throughout the year. The purpose of the society is to create a warm and inclusive environment for all PGR students at Aberdeen to socialise, network and share experiences. As many of our PGR students travel from across the world to study here these opportunities are vital to allow them to succeed during their time here.

#### PhD Supervisor training

- 3.3.4 Details of our comprehensive four-stage professional development programme for PGR supervisors, implemented in AY 2019/20 are detailed below. From October 2019, the PGR School keeps an active record of supervisors who have attended training courses (either new or refresher) and this will form the benchmark for ongoing reporting. Supervisors will be invited after 5 years to attend refresher sessions. The PGR School receives a monthly report from HR with information on new members of academic staff who have joined the University. New members of staff are contacted by email and invited to attend a training session. If individuals have not attended within 12 months, the PGR Coordinator and /or Head of School will be contacted to ensure attendance prior to PGR student supervision.

(i) Online Supervisor handbook

An interactive online supervisor handbook has been developed to provide information about the Code of Practice, policies and processes encountered during PGR study from registration to assessment and submission. It also includes information about the help and support that is available if students encounter difficulties during their studies, both within the PGR School and across the University. The handbook is available to both staff and students online.

(ii) New supervisor workshop (mandatory)

All new supervisors (new to supervising and new to the University of Aberdeen) are required to attend an introduction to PGR supervision workshop. This workshop covers the philosophy of PhD study at Aberdeen and includes research culture and integrity, the role of supervisors as well as the processes/systems which guide and support supervisors to induct, supervise, develop and ensure progress for postgraduate researchers. It signposts policies, regulations, resources and guides that are required when working with students. Attendance is monitored by the PGR School who follow-up with non-attendees to offer alternative dates. Reports on attendance are sent to Heads of School annually in September. A detailed record is held by the PGR School with dates of attendance and expected refresher training date.

- (iii) **Supervisor updates (mandatory)**  
Experienced supervisors are required to attend a regular update session to ensure they are kept up to date on policies/processes/activities related to supervising PGR students at the University of Aberdeen. These sessions also provide an opportunity to showcase best practice. As noted for (ii) above, the PGR School monitors attendance, reports annual to Heads of School and retains a record including dates of attendance and expected refresher training date.
- (iv) **PGR Supervision Masterclasses**  
Masterclasses are planned and coordinated by the PGR School in consultation with PGR Coordinators (via bi-annual meetings) and the wider community (via interactions at supervisor training, supervisor breakfasts, ad hoc meetings). Supervisors are informed via email newsletters and dates/sessions are hosted on the PGR School website.

This series explores topics related to doctoral supervision, supervision relationships, tensions, worries, and pitfalls on PGR progression, development and career. Sessions provide a platform to discuss issues, share good practice and use case studies to inform practice. Example topics include:

- Improving communication with your PGR student
- Examining research doctorates
- Supporting distance/online doctorates
- PGR transitions – into and out of the PhD

**3.4 Preparation for teaching:** *Ensure all new staff and postgraduate students who teach and assess complete, as a minimum, the University's 'Learning and Teaching in HE' course before taking up teaching responsibilities.*

Preparation for Teaching: Staff

3.4.1 In April 2019, the UCTL approved a proposal from the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) to enhance the current provision by providing all new teaching staff with support from their first day in post by:

- (i) Ensuring that completion of the Learning and Teaching in Higher Education at the University of Aberdeen two-day course be compulsory *within the first year* of arrival at the University of Aberdeen. The Course runs every September and January however this has been enhanced with the addition of a run in April to provide further capacity and opportunity for engagement. CAD monitors and records course attendance to ensure that all staff requiring to complete this training within their first year of appointment have done so.
- (ii) Developing a *short welcome video* which will explain how the Centre can support new staff from the outset and encourage them get in touch directly if they have any specific academic development needs. The video was made available, along with a suite of online resources which address aspects of teaching practice such as course design and planning at the University of Aberdeen, from a 'New Staff' webpage on StaffNet at the end of January 2020. We will monitor use and seek feedback to ensure that it is a useful resource.
- (iii) Through liaison with academic Schools and disciplines, an *email from the Centre is sent to new staff on arrival* with links to the video and the online resources and includes the Centre's contact details. The online induction pack provided by Human Resources to new staff includes links to the welcome video and staff development resources provided by CAD.

Preparation for Teaching: Postgraduate Research Students

3.4.2 A comprehensive four-stage professional development programme for learning and teaching for Postgraduate Research Students has been developed by CAD. This programme includes:

- (i) *The development of an online introduction to teaching course:* A new, bespoke online course in MyAberdeen which covers basic principles of teaching and learning is available for all PGR students, with those engaged in teaching activities being required to take the course before doing any teaching. The course has been developed by CAD in collaboration with the PGR School and was made available at the end of January 2020. The PGR School will publicise the learning opportunity, and monitor completion of the course which will include an assessment. Materials provided through this course will continue to be available to the student throughout the duration of their PhD. All PGRs will be auto-enrolled into the course which will include school affiliation. In summer, Schools will be provided with a report so that they can cross-reference to ensure that those students who will be teaching in the autumn, have completed the online course. Reports will also be provided on request to Schools, if needed, more frequently.

- (ii) *Mandatory training by Schools:* In the early part of the first half session 2019/20, ten out of twelve schools provided mandatory training for PGRs before they undertook any tutoring, demonstrating or field work supervision. CAD delivered the majority of this training and also provides guidance to Schools who wish to provide their own training so as to ensure an institution-wide consistency of approach. Work is ongoing, led by CAD, to ensure that there is comprehensive provision across all Schools. CAD is working with Schools and the Postgraduate Research School to ensure that all PGR students who are involved in teaching undertake this training. Discussions are also ongoing to explore how this monitoring process might be streamlined to provide a more efficient way to allow student engagement to be tracked.
- (iii) *Peer observation:* The Schools of Psychology and Biological Sciences will pilot a peer observation process developed by the CAD in the second half-session of 2019/20. Ultimately, all Schools will be required to undertake one peer observation for each PGR student in the first year during which they have teaching responsibilities. Schools will be provided with a template developed by the CAD and will be required to keep a record of this information alongside training attendance. Schools are also required to provide students with a named contact for advice and support should it be required.
- (iv) *Principles of Learning & Teaching in HE:* This popular course which has consistently high attendance, accredited by the Higher Education Academy (now Advance HE) since 2010, will continue to be offered to PGR students who are actively involved in teaching and have a role in supporting the learning of others through activities such as lecturing, running tutorials, demonstrating in laboratory sessions and supervising students. The course runs in November and May and is also offered online in August.

**3.5 *Review of Professional Services:*** *Continue with its plans to develop processes for the routine review of student-facing professional services. The University should ensure that the new processes link effectively to the existing Internal Teaching Review (ITR) process for academic areas, allow for institutional oversight, fully engage students, and incorporate appropriate externality.*

- 3.5.1 As detailed in the Reflective Analysis, all Schools undertake an annual planning process which includes preparation of an annual plan including reflection on successes and challenges from the previous year. This plan is discussed with Schools at a meeting involving members of the University Senior Management Team (SMT) including the Principal, Senior Vice-Principal, Vice-Principals and key members of Professional Services. As part of the preparation for these meetings, Schools are asked to highlight areas requiring support from Professional Services. With effect from AY2019/20, this annual planning process has been strengthened and each Professional Services Directorate will now take part in their own Annual Planning process which will bring in outcomes and issues from the School Planning process. These meetings are taking place in the first quarter of 2020. Each Directorate has been asked to prepare a planning document focusing on successes and the anticipated for the year. Importantly, preparation of these documents is being informed by School plans and minutes from the meetings held to discuss these plans. This enhancement to the planning process will strengthen the linkage between School and Professional Services priorities, enable reflection and review of services with institutional oversight from the SMT as part of this process, and thereby enable the alignment and prioritisation of services. Ongoing enhancement of the student experience will be a key driver of this prioritisation.
- 3.5.2 In addition to this enhancement to the institutional planning process, the involvement of student-facing Professional Services in teaching and learning within the Internal Teaching Review (ITR) process is now an explicit part of the process. In the most recent ITR for the School of Engineering, one session involved support staff from the School and staff from relevant Professional Services, including the Registry, the Careers & Employability Service and Student Support. The extent and high quality of their interactions with the School and its students was noted. This model will be adopted for all subsequent ITRs to ensure that we capture the strengths (and weaknesses, if any) of our Professional Services in education-related matters.
- 3.5.3 As noted in the ELIR Report, the University Secretary, at the time of the ELIR, had instigated a review of Marketing and Student Recruitment and was planning a review of School Administrative Structures. Both these reviews were externally conducted by a third-party agency. Both reviews provided a range of recommendations which have been implemented. These recommendations included: a restructure of Marketing and Student Recruitment so as to refocus activity and ensure resources are appropriately aligned with service needs: a realignment of School Administrative structures resulting in increased involvement of School Administrative staff in institutional committees and discussions, together with the creation of a Lead School Administrative Officer (SAO) role to provide a voice for SAOs at senior meetings.
- 3.5.4 As noted in section 2 above, the newly established Education Team led by the Vice-Principal (Education) provides an informal forum where key senior academic leads with responsibility for the Education agenda meet with key

Professional Service leads and a representative from AUSA. While early days, this will provide a further route to facilitate the discussion of important matters relating to the student experience involving Professional Services.

**3.6 External Examiners:** *The University is encouraged to reflect on the effectiveness of its current arrangements for monitoring the training and induction provided for external examiners at School level. In addition, it should ensure that all students have easy access to the external examiners' reports for their programme.*

3.6.1 All External Examiners (EEs) are provided with detailed information relating to their role in the University as part of their formal appointment offers. This information includes links to various teaching policies and regulations and advice on how to access the virtual learning environment, MyAberdeen. Individual Schools also provide additional induction. In addressing this recommendation, a review of the training and induction provided to EEs was undertaken. This review identified a number of enhancements to improve the efficiency of delivery and user-friendliness of the information provided to EEs. A new EE website is being developed which will provide the required information for Schools and EEs in a single location hence improving accessibility and ease of maintenance. The initial phase of this work is planned to be live in March 2020. The website will be structured around a timeline of an EE's activities so the information is easily accessible in a "just in time" fashion. The website will contain short videos on general processes and policies with links to relevant information on the Learners' Toolkit. It is anticipated that these enhancements to institutionally-delivered induction and training of EEs will allow the School-based induction to focus more on discipline-specific information. In the future, effectiveness of training will be monitored as part of the annual School-QAC forum meetings and during mandatory exams officer training.

3.6.2 Making external examiner reports accessible to students is an action that is in progress. As a result of this recommendation, we have redesigned our external examiner reports to include two sections: one that gives assurance of the quality of the programme, comparability with other institutions and an overarching statement of satisfaction (or not) from the external examiner, and the other which allows confidential information to be shared with the School. This approach will allow us to ensure accessibility of reports by students whilst also providing facility for EEs to raise confidential matters thereby maintaining the robustness of the feedback process. Discussions are underway with IT Services and the e-learning team to determine the best repository for these to enable access by all students. It is planned that this will be available for the EE reports for 2019-20. In line with arranging a repository for reports on the web, guidance is being developed to assist External Examiners in completing the forms, including guidance on the use of the confidential section of the form.

**3.7 Collaborative Provision** – *review its processes for maintaining the Register of Partnerships and Collaborative Provision, to ensure its ongoing currency and completeness.*

3.7.1 This recommendation stemmed from the omission of a small number of partnerships from the public partnerships register. Whilst not a critical failure, it did highlight an issue in our processes for the public recording of partnerships. Following an initial review, the issue was identified as being a division of responsibility that led to the Register of Partnerships not being completely accurate. This has now been resolved.

3.7.2 With the appointment of a new member of Registry staff, we are undertaking a more extensive review and realignment to ensure the most appropriate areas of the University are involved at the different stages. The partnerships tracker is now being managed by the Clerk to the QAC who will ensure actions for partnerships as appropriate and will liaise with QA contacts, the Contracts Coordinator in Research & Innovation and with the International Strategy Officer as necessary.

3.7.3 A new Dean for International Student Pathways and Progression has recently been appointed and the Clerk to the QAC has met with him to discuss the tracking of current partnerships and collaborations and to discuss potential new overseas partnerships. Responsibility for updating the Register of Partnerships will remain with Registry but lines of communication are now stronger, so we are confident that the Register of Partnerships will be accurate from now on.

## **4. Update on Areas of Commendation**

### **4.1 Student Support**

4.1.1 The University continues to place emphasis on enhancing the support we provide to our student body. Our mental health provision has been enhanced with the introduction of additional resources in the Mental Health Mentoring Team and a change to staff structures in the wider University to place greater emphasis on wellbeing across our staff and student body. Progress has also been made in the University's commitment to tackling Sexual Misconduct and Gender-based Violence through strong engagement with Equally Safe in Higher Education (ESHE) and other national commitments to tackling misconduct, becoming a Pilot University for the ESHE Research and Training projects and a first Pilot institution for #combatmisconduct.

### **4.2 Widening Access**

4.2.1 The University's strategic focus on Widening Access continues. A new Dean with responsibility for Widening Access, Articulation and Outreach was appointed in November 2019 and this role is supported by a focused Access and Articulation team within the Directorate of External Affairs and Marketing. Oversight of the work in this area is now managed through a new overarching Access and Articulation Committee which was established in November 2019.

4.2.2 To support the recruitment of students from widening access background and through articulation routes, a new student ambassador role has been established. In addition, the provision of one year of free accommodation for new SIMD20 entrants will be continued to ensure these students can be supported in their transition to the University.

4.2.3 Entry qualification information has been strengthened regarding widening access. The Undergraduate Prospectus and website have been enhanced to include more transparent information about how widening access impacts on entry thresholds. In addition, contextualised admissions information has been enhanced. This information will be kept under review in line with current guidance and user feedback.

4.2.4 With effect from summer 2019, new bridging / orientation events have been introduced for widening access and articulation students. The cohort was offered a mini summer school consisting of a series of bespoke information sessions.

4.2.5 The University was delighted to receive a "Going Higher" Award from the Carers Trust Scotland for the support provided to student carers and continues to work closely with the Carers Trust to ensure ongoing retention of the award status. The University has also taken the Stand-Alone Pledge and is actively working to increase understanding of the needs of our estranged student population.

4.2.6 A Pathways booklet has also been developed. This booklet details all pathways into the University and associated entry requirements and was produced following a major review of articulation pathways. The booklet was created with the support of some current articulating students and aims to demystify articulation. It has been designed to be applicable to any College student in Scotland rather than specific to partners only. Feedback from its debut at the recent round of College HE Fairs was very positive and it is hoped that this will help increase applications, particularly full credit applications going forward.

### **4.3 Communication Policy**

4.3.1 The ELIR panel acknowledged the positive work with the introduction of a Student Communication Policy. It is encouraging to report that the Policy has reduced the volume of emails sent to students, thus enabling the important messages to become more prominent and ensuring students have the best opportunity to remain informed on essential topics of interest to them. This year's Student Experience Survey outcome demonstrated that the majority of students now actively disagree with the statement 'I receive too many emails from the University on non-academic matters'.

#### **4.4 Student Engagement**

- 4.4.1 The strong partnership working with AUSA continues. The updated Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) was signed in early January 2020 and both the University and AUSA continue to work in partnership to deliver the key aspects of the agreement. In addition, a range of other activities are being undertaken in partnership including:
- (i) Launch of the BeWell campaign which focuses on student and staff health and wellbeing. This campaign includes events such as a Movement Challenge, BeWell Fairs and a free cookbook created by students and staff.
  - (ii) Launch of a Student Channel (dedicated website) which hosts a range of student-created content covering a variety of different topics designed to engage with all students. This initiative aims to enhance student experience by sharing information and advice drawn from current students.

#### **4.5 Quality Processes and Arrangements for self-evaluation and enhancement**

- 4.5.1 The revised ITR process is now well embedded with four reviews having been conducted using the new process. These have all been very positive with external subject specialists commenting favourably on the process. Experience from each review has informed minor enhancements to the process such as extending the time for discussion with students and providing time for the panel to consolidate their thoughts ahead of the final Pedagogic Partnership Session (PPS). Additionally, the panel is more prescriptive about who attends the PPS sessions to ensure diverse involvement from the School. In the most recent PPS, the open question nature of the session was enhanced to seek comment not only on areas of good practice and areas for enhancement but also on 'what should we stop doing?'. The format of the final part of the PPS sessions has also been varied with the most positive approach being to stimulate discussion between staff and students on the findings from part one of the PPS. During these discussions, the chair of the panel can formulate an action plan for the School. Staff and students are then able to see where these action points are coming from which enhances ownership.
- 4.5.2 The annual meetings between QAC and the School have continued to be valuable for open discussion regarding annual programme and course reviews and external examiner reports. These have been valuable discussions for both QAC and the Schools, increasing QAC's understanding of the constraints under which some Schools may be working and allowing QAC to hear in more detail than is possible in a written report about the good practice being carried out. These sessions also offer a way to share good practice as the QAC members are from different Schools, so they hear what is working well in a different School and they bring to the meetings ideas from their own Schools for tackling common problems. Recent meetings have discussed ways to close the feedback loop, alternative means of assessment, School External Examiner induction processes and support for students whose native language is not English.

#### **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 The University is very grateful for the guidance of the ELIR Panel and the constructive commentary provided in the Technical and Outcome Reports. As this report highlights, since ELIR 2018, the University has continued to actively engage in a significant number of initiatives aimed at continually enhancing the student experience and maintaining the high quality of our education provision. The recent launch of the ambitious new Strategic Plan will provide a focus and momentum for activity going forward and will ensure that the University continues to be true to its foundational purpose whilst also providing a 21<sup>st</sup> century educational experience for all.

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