



# Enhancement-led Institutional Review of University of Aberdeen

## Technical Report

November 2018

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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.<sup>1</sup> You can also find out more about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\)](#).<sup>2</sup>

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

## About this review

This is the Technical Report of the ELIR conducted by QAA at the University of Aberdeen. The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 10 October 2018 and Review Visit on 19-23 November 2018. The review was conducted by a team of five reviewers:

- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw (Academic Reviewer)
- Ms Ruth Brown (Student Reviewer)
- Mr Paul Probyn (Coordinating Reviewer)
- Ms Linda Smith (Academic Reviewer)
- Dr Gillian Thomson (Academic Reviewer)

In advance of the review visits, the University submitted a self-evaluative document (the Reflective Analysis) and an advance information set, comprising a range of materials about the institution's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards.

## About this report

In this report, the ELIR team:

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

The threshold judgement can be found on page 2, followed by the detailed findings of the review given in numbered paragraphs.

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> About ELIR:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review)

<sup>2</sup> About QAA: [www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland)

<sup>3</sup> Brief Guide to ELIR: [www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/brief-guide-to-elir-method.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/brief-guide-to-elir-method.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Outcome Report: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/University-of-Aberdeen](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/University-of-Aberdeen)

## Threshold judgement about the University of Aberdeen

The University of Aberdeen 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.

### 1 Contextual information about the institution, student population and the review

#### 1.1 Summary information about the institution

1 Founded in 1495, the University of Aberdeen is one of Scotland's four ancient universities. The University describes itself as a 'broad spectrum' institution, offering 590 undergraduate and 140 taught postgraduate degree programmes, many of which are professionally accredited, across a wide range of disciplines. Its main campus is at King's College in Old Aberdeen. A second campus, accommodating Medicine, Dentistry, Medical Science and Nutrition, is located adjacent to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. The University established its first overseas campus in Doha, Qatar, in 2017.

2 The University's Vision is 'Transforming the world with greater knowledge and learning' and it defines itself as a 'distinctively Scottish' university, with 'reach, impact, and aspirations that are global'. The University describes its ethos as embracing student choice, research-enriched teaching and individual responsibility.

3 The University's Strategic Plan runs from 2015 to 2020 and has three core themes: providing an environment and a culture which enriches the lives of students, alumni and staff, enabling them to realise their potential; providing an outstanding educational environment; and demonstrating excellence in research and innovation. These themes are underpinned by nine strategic goals, progress against which is monitored by the University Senior Management Team (SMT) through quarterly scrutiny. The primary focus for the delivery of the Strategic Plan is the strategic and operational plans of the University's 12 constituent academic schools. Each school plan covers a five-year period, is updated annually and includes the strategy for enhancing the student learning experience (paragraph 84).

4 The current Principal assumed their role in August 2018 and, following this appointment, the University's senior management was re-structured. The Principal is now supported by a Senior Vice-Principal, four vice-principals, the University Secretary, and the Directors of Finance and People. The 12 heads of school report to the Senior Vice-Principal, while the nine directors of professional services report to the University Secretary. The Vice-Principal for Education works closely with the deans for undergraduate teaching, postgraduate teaching, the Dean of the Postgraduate Research School (PGRS), and the Dean of Quality Enhancement and Quality Assurance, who support the schools in their activities to enhance learning and teaching. At the time of the ELIR, the University was considering re-defining the roles of the deans for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching to align them more closely with the University's enhancement priorities, a development that the ELIR team would encourage.

5 During the 2013 ELIR, the University's academic structure comprised three colleges, each with several constituent schools. In 2015-16, the University moved to a school-based planning and budgetary model and, following a transitional phase, the role of colleges ceased from 2017-18. There are now 12 academic schools, each encompassing a broad range of cognate disciplines, plus a Postgraduate Research School (PGRS), launched in 2016-17, which has oversight of postgraduate research provision. Schools have significant autonomy to develop their own practices within overarching strategy and policies agreed at University level (paragraphs 90 and 91).

## 1.2 Composition and key trends in the student population

6 Based on 2017-18 figures, the University has a population of 13,237 full-time equivalent (FTE) students, of whom 10,214 are undergraduate, 2,018 are postgraduate taught (PGT) and 1,005 are postgraduate research (PGR). Of these, 9,569 FTE students are categorised as Home/EU, including 2,928 non-UK EU; 1,505 categorised as Rest-of-UK; and 2,163 as overseas students. Five per cent of the current student population are studying part-time, and four per cent are classified as distance learners. One hundred and thirty-two FTEs are studying at the University's campus in Doha, and a further 332 students are studying with the University's collaborative partners. Thirty-six per cent of the overall student population comes from outside the UK.

7 The University has increased its undergraduate population by seven per cent since 2014-15, thus exceeding its target of a three per cent increase over the lifetime of the current Strategic Plan. The PGT and PGR populations have increased by 12 per cent and eight per cent respectively over the same period. The University has what it describes as an 'ambitious' target to double its PGT population by 2020, anticipating this growth will come primarily from overseas markets and through the expansion of online provision. Since the launch of the Strategic Plan in 2015, the University's cohort of overseas students at all levels of study has increased by 33 per cent.

8 Following a strategic decision in 2016 to grow its online student population through developing a range of new provision, the University launched 13 new online PGT degree programmes in 2017-18, together with over 50 standalone short courses, attracting an additional 27 per cent of online learners.

9 The University's aim, set out in its Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), is to increase the proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate students from the 20 per cent and 40 per cent most deprived postcodes, as defined in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), by one percentage point each year to 2020. Since the 2013 ELIR, the numbers of these entrants have increased by 37 per cent and 24 per cent respectively.

10 The University offers a number of disciplines that do not currently meet the SFC target that, by 2030, no discipline in a Scottish university should have an overall gender imbalance greater than 75:25. The University has agreed a Gender Action Plan with the goal of achieving a better balance in these disciplines (paragraph 31).

11 The University's overall undergraduate student non-continuation rate has improved significantly since the 2013 ELIR, falling to 4.3 per cent in 2016-17, the lowest figure for 11 years. The University's figures also show a year-on-year reduction in the numbers of students failing to continue to a second year of study, to a low of 7.7 per cent. The University recognises that currently it does not have comparably robust retention data for PGT students because of the variety of modes of study and potential exit points available, but confirmed that work to address this was under way.

12 The University is effective in planning and managing its student population. It analyses the composition and key trends in the population against a variety of criteria and makes extensive use of this data in developing student-related strategies and policies. This effective use of data is reflected in the University's identification of the changing characteristics of its student population as the key element of the institutional context informing this ELIR.

### **1.3 Commentary on the preparation for the ELIR, including contextualisation**

13 Preparations for ELIR were led by a steering group chaired by the VP Education, which comprised senior staff responsible for learning and teaching, and the Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) Education Officer. Each school also established an ELIR team whose membership was drawn from the school's Learning and Teaching Committee to support preparations and gather school-level data and examples of practice. The Reflective Analysis (RA) was written in consultation with colleagues from across the University and three workshops were held with ELIR school contacts to seek views on contextualisation and to gather content and evidence for the RA.

14 Contextualised topics were identified on the basis of the University's appreciation of the current evolution of its student population, and its analysis of probable future changes in the student demographic, resulting both from external drivers and from the University's own strategic initiatives. The University recognises these changes necessitate developments in the ways in which it teaches and supports students.

15 The actual and prospective changes in the characteristics of the student population that formed the context for the ELIR included:

- significant increases in the number of PGT students, reflecting University strategy
- a growth in student numbers studying online, as the University expands this type of provision
- the development of transnational education (TNE), with particular focus on the Doha campus
- increased numbers of students from SIMD 20 and 40 postcodes, in accordance with the University's commitment to widening access
- the impact of the decline in the energy sector on recruitment to disciplines such as Engineering and Geosciences
- a re-balancing of student numbers to meet the SFC target that no subject should have a gender imbalance greater than 75:25
- the potential impact of Brexit on recruitment of EU students.

16 The rationale for the contextualised topics identified by the University was set out clearly in the RA and, from the review documentation and discussions with staff and students, the ELIR team was able to confirm that the contextualisation of the RA effectively represented the challenges that the University faces as its student population grows and evolves. Within this context, the team was satisfied that the University recognises the importance of planning, managing, monitoring and communicating these changes consistently and effectively across the institution.

### **1.4 Summary of the follow-up to the previous ELIR**

17 The 2013 ELIR identified six areas for development and the RA detailed that the University has made significant progress in the majority of these areas. The University acknowledged that one area, the analysis of non-continuation and progression rates among

postgraduate students, had still to be addressed effectively, but confirmed it was working to improve this (paragraph 11 and 62).

## **1.5 Impact of engaging students in ELIR preparations**

18 The ELIR team considered the University's approach to engaging students in preparation for the ELIR was appropriate and effective. The Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) Education Officer was a member of the steering group that led the University's preparations for the ELIR. Student representatives were members of all groups involved in formal consideration of the RA, including the selection of contextualised topics. Student feedback was coordinated by AUSA and included a workshop with student school conveners to seek their views on the RA. Preparations for ELIR had also been a focus of less formal groups, such as the regular meetings between the VP Education, the AUSA Education Officer, and the school conveners.

19 The development of the RA coincided with the discussions leading to the University's first Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) (paragraph 23). The RA described these two activities as 'mutually supportive', with the ELIR providing a focus for formalisation of the SPA.

## **2 Enhancing the student learning experience**

### **2.1 Student representation and engagement**

#### **Student representation**

20 The University has effective arrangements in place to support the engagement and representation of students, including responding to student feedback. This is demonstrated by a strengthening partnership and a positive working relationship between the University and the Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA). AUSA's mission is to 'support, empower and represent' students and it is led by a President, who is supported by four other sabbatical officers. AUSA officers are involved in decision and policymaking throughout the University and represent students on all key learning and teaching committees and working groups. The AUSA Education Officer participates in agenda setting meetings for institution-level teaching committees, an approach the ELIR team considers represents good practice. Students are also actively involved in the Internal Teaching Review (ITR) process (paragraph 117).

21 Students reported that, while all schools have staff-student liaison committees, representative structures vary between schools, with some having year representatives and some class representatives, depending on cohort size. AUSA recognise there remains a perennial issue of vacant seats for certain representative positions which may result in students in some schools potentially being less well represented. The class representatives who met the ELIR team spoke very enthusiastically about the representative structures in operation in their schools, were clearly engaged with them and stated their feedback was listened to and valued by the University. Students from the wider student body confirmed that overall their representative structures are effective and were aware of who their class representatives are. These students also described specific examples of ways in which student feedback had been considered through representation pathways including revising the timetable to better support students and revising assessments; ensuring student views were included in the creation of the Postgraduate Research School (PGRS); changes in the curriculum and to assessment deadlines; and changes to the curriculum in Doha.

22 The University's Postgraduate Research Committee (PGRC) and postgraduate taught (PGT) committees offer postgraduate students additional opportunities to share their

views. Both the University and AUSA recognised challenges associated with engaging online PGT students and ensuring this group are appropriately represented, with some student feedback indicating they do not feel the need to be collectively represented and are content raising issues directly with their programme team. AUSA is working with sparqs and the University on this matter.

23 The University and AUSA have made considerable progress in developing strong partnership working including establishing an ambitious Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) and implementing a Student Engagement Development Plan, approved by AUSA and Senate in 2018. Although relatively new, the SPA has clear targets set for achieving its aims. Student representatives spoke positively about the development of the SPA, viewing it as a real opportunity to support partnership working with the University and deliver specific outcomes on a range of matters related to enhancing the student experience.

24 The ELIR team commend the changes in student representation structures which continue to evolve across the University in response to the planned changes to the student population, in order to ensure all students are effectively represented. Examples include representatives from AUSA visiting the new campus in Doha and a Doha student representative appointed to the AUSA Education and Sports Committees (paragraph 158).

### **Responding to student feedback**

25 The RA indicated that the University community is built on the 'central pillar' of student engagement. The University's commitment to this is demonstrated through the creation of a Student Engagement Manager role in 2017 and the subsequent development of the Student Engagement Development Plan. A systematic approach to reviewing student communication has resulted in the development and effective implementation of a Student Communications Policy and the establishment of a network of communication champions across the schools and professional services. Students confirmed to the ELIR team that they were aware of and appreciated the University's efforts to improve communication and recognised they are being provided with targeted information on matters of relevance to them.

26 A wide range of formal and informal mechanisms are used to gather student feedback. Approaches may vary depending on student group and academic school and include the following: the operation of an open-door policy; student course evaluation forms (SCEF) - mandatory for each module; the Student Experience Survey; online discussion groups and social media; the piloting of real-time response systems like Bluepulse (in the School of Biological Sciences) and informal lunch groups (in the School of Engineering).

27 In addition, the University has demonstrated a clear commitment to improving its approaches to responding to student feedback, using multiple approaches to improve student awareness of changes made. A Student Feedback Framework describes the feedback methods adopted in responding to students on non-academic issues, and records the actions taken. The 'Inform...' campaign has been developed to raise student and staff awareness of changes resulting from student feedback. The 'You said, we did' campaign communicates changes taking place at institutional and school level with outcomes posted in different ways in each academic area, for example using posters, SSLC minutes and newsletters.

28 Students confirmed they recognised changes in the University's approach to communicating action in response to their feedback, feeling better informed, with actions more visible. The University recognises that there remains further work to be done in this area. The ELIR team would encourage the University to continue with its plans to enhance its approaches to responding to student feedback and use its evaluation of successful feedback initiatives to support institutional sharing of good practice.

## 2.2 Recognising and responding to equality and diversity in the student population

### Equality and diversity

29 The University has made significant progress in promoting inclusion across the institution and has effective arrangements to support this. The Advisory Group on Equality and Diversity (AGED), Equality Networks (supporting disability, LGBT+ and senior women) and University Equality and Diversity Advisor create robust structures for achieving the University's ambition to embed equality into all its processes, with progress monitored against KPIs. Data relating to equality and diversity is considered by AGED. The effectiveness of AGED and the Equality Networks are monitored by the University Management Group (UMG) which advises the Principal on developing and monitoring institutional strategic direction, academic planning, and cross-school and external collaborative development.

30 The ELIR team learned that to support institutional priorities and in response to the increasing diversity of its student population, the University continues to develop its approach to equality and diversity. Recent enhancements include revising the remit of AGED to include intersectionality; plans to create two new Equality Network groups to consider race equality and carers; and the introduction of a range of standalone strategies including a Religion and Belief Policy; a Gender Action Plan; and a Student Carers Policy. The team also understood there are plans to create a new Diversity and Inclusion Policy which will enhance the current Equality and Diversity Policy and Code for Staff and Students.

31 The University recognises a number of disciplines do not currently meet the SFC target that, by 2030, no discipline in a Scottish university should have an overall gender imbalance greater than 75:25 (paragraph 10). The University's Gender Action Plan details the University's goals and activities (including outreach work) to achieve a better balance in priority disciplines, including Physics, Computing Science, Psychology and Education. In addition, all schools and institutes are engaged with supporting the University's goal of achieving an Athena SWAN silver institutional award in 2020. The ELIR team viewed the University's plans in this area very positively.

32 During the ELIR, staff and students confirmed that embedding equality and diversity into the curriculum is achieved through specific consideration at the course design stage and is subsequently monitored through student feedback in the Student Course Evaluation Form (SCEF). The ELIR team learned about positive practice in this area, including using the Athena SWAN audit process to reflect on broader equality and diversity themes within the curriculum, resulting in positive changes to learning and teaching practice. The University has made positive progress in this area and remains committed to its plans to further develop practice in a more formalised manner.

33 The University strives to improve awareness of equality and diversity by making training for all staff and students compulsory. Both the training for staff, and the Professional Skills training for students, have high completion rates (85 per cent and 86 per cent respectively).

### Student involvement in equality and diversity

34 Student representation on the Advisory Group on Equality and Diversity effectively supports student input to the University's work on equality and inclusion. The University has also worked collaboratively with AUSA on student-led initiatives such as the Students Against Sexual Assault (SASA) campaign. Student representatives who met with the ELIR team described their ambition to work with the University to develop staff training on trans-inclusive language and unconscious bias which are equality areas they have identified as a



priority. The RA also stated students were consulted on creating a new policy on supporting transgender students and are involved in Athena SWAN self-assessment teams. The University is undertaking work to enhance student engagement with its Gender Action Plan (paragraphs 30 and 31) by participating in a joint NUS-sparqs project with a specific focus on this area.

35 In discussions with the ELIR team, some student representatives highlighted challenges around implementing all University equality and diversity initiatives at the Doha campus because of different cultural and legal contexts. They went on to confirm they believed that those initiatives which can be implemented by the University were indeed being introduced, for example, additional support for women with children which is offered to Aberdeen-based students was now available to students in Doha. Students at the Doha campus recognised a clear commitment to equality and diversity by the University and confirmed that, in their experience, students from all backgrounds were treated with respect and had equal opportunities with regard to their learning and teaching.

36 The ELIR team's view is that strong institutional commitment has ensured that equality and diversity is embedded across University policies, procedures and activities, and is also underpinned by a comprehensive range of initiatives involving both staff and students.

### **Mental health and student wellbeing**

37 As well as having a Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and action plan, the University has appointed a Mental Health Advisor who, in addition to managing a caseload, provides advice to student support services, academics and those supporting students in halls of residence. The ELIR team learned that the University has increased the resourcing of mental health support including establishing an in-house mentoring scheme where mentors play a role in helping students to prepare to overcome barriers they anticipate as a result of their mental health challenges. The University currently offers training for staff in mental health, including a two-day certified first aid course, and plans to enable more staff to be trained as facilitators to support the delivery of staff development linked to mental health. The University also provides suicide intervention training for all student resident assistants.

38 To support its increasingly diverse student population, the University has developed an award-winning campaign and online resource called 'CluedUp', which offers advice and signposting to health and wellbeing services and resources both within the University and in the wider community (including NHS Scotland and Aberdeen City Council). The resource is actively promoted through social media and student blogs, with evidence of the campaign's impact, resulting in a significant increase in the number of unique views within the first two months of the campaign re-launch.

### **Widening access and articulation**

39 The University's strategic focus on widening access has resulted in the development of a broad range of activities and measures including pre and post-entry support, with student feedback confirming they are positively supported and prepared to succeed in their studies.

40 Since the 2013 ELIR, the University has formalised its approach to contextualised admissions, publishing a contextualised Admissions and Access Threshold Policy and added two new widening participation schemes (Access to Aberdeen and Gateway2Medicine) to its existing offerings developed to support school leavers from SIMD 20 and 40 categories and care leavers backgrounds to enter higher education. Data presented in the RA indicates these initiatives are having a positive impact, with the

proportion of Scottish domiciled undergraduate entrants from SIMD 20 and 40 postcodes increasing by 37 per cent and 24 per cent respectively since 2013 (paragraph 9).

41 To support its strategic commitment to increase the number of students articulating with advanced standing from further education colleges, the University's Articulation Working Group is reviewing existing articulation routes and establishing new routes with existing and new partners. The routes are being developed to support students to progress with full credit transfer and provide opportunities to undertake bridging programmes where discipline-specific mismatches occur. These collaborations have resulted in the publication of University articulation requirements which apply across college courses Scotland-wide and the piloting of a system to support entrants on their most appropriate pathway. Students who met the ELIR team were very complimentary about the broader support for widening access students including support from academic staff and student support services, and within the learning and teaching environment.

### **Online education**

42 To support its ambitions to diversify the student population, the University has a strategic commitment to significantly expand its online provision, particularly linked to PGT programmes and standalone short courses (paragraph 8). The University recognises challenges associated with meeting the needs of online learners and continues to work on identifying the most effective ways to support and engage this population, foster a sense of community among learners, and ensure students feel connected to the University. Support currently available to students includes the development of an Online Education community area in MyAberdeen. The ELIR team learned from staff that work is also underway to further develop online spaces for students including MyCampus (a new virtual campus for students) and that it is now possible for students to join a number of online societies. The University's collaborative work to develop support for online students is recognised in the sparqs Engaging Students in Online Distance Learning resource.

43 Online students who met the ELIR team confirmed that, overall, their learning and teaching needs were being met. They described the value of studying with students from all over the world, indicating it brought a new perspective to learning and significantly enhanced their experience. Students also recognised the opportunities available to them to develop peer relationships, particularly at the beginning of each course. However, students reported that sustaining these relationships was difficult when each course has a different cohort registered on it, resulting in students creating their own networks via social media. Some students who met the ELIR team believed there would be benefit in having access to the support of a Personal Tutor (paragraph 49). The ELIR team would encourage the University to continue with its plans to further develop student support and representation arrangements for students studying online.

## **2.3 Supporting students in their learning at each stage of the learner journey**

44 The University provides a holistic and inclusive approach to supporting students at each stage of their learner journey, providing a comprehensive range of services and activities from enquiry to graduation. Students articulated a good understanding of the support services available, confirming they were well informed and could easily access the services on offer. In response to the needs of its changing student population the University continues to implement plans to develop its support services.

### **Outreach and transition support**

45 Working in collaboration with the Children's University and Aberdeenshire Council, the University offers a range of activities and events for both primary and secondary pupils,

their parents and teachers. These include supporting S6 students with the completion of a range of Advanced Highers, CPD events for secondary teachers, online Maths and English access modules, revision schools, and the Gateway2Medicine programme.

46 The University also offers a range of transitional support activities to incoming undergraduate and postgraduate students including the Engineering Transitional Summer School, workshops during Freshers' Week within Geosciences, and a MOOC in Medical Sciences. The University's evaluation of these initiatives provides evidence of a positive impact on the numbers of students successfully transitioning into degree programmes and also on student progression and attainment. Students with first-hand experience of these initiatives spoke very positively about them.

### **Supporting students' learning**

47 The University provides a programme of induction to support all students to make the transition to University. In addition to talks and events during Freshers' Week, support activities run throughout the year considering all aspects of university life. Students are further supported by a suite of online materials available through the Learner's Toolkit.

48 The University's curriculum is designed to offer students choice and flexibility throughout their studies. In response to student concerns around the course registration process and challenges navigating course options, the University has enhanced its processes including improving its course catalogue and online course choice system (MyCurriculum); offering a personalised timetabling system (MyTimetable) and Webchat facility; issuing clearer email communications; and making enhancements to the registration venue. Feedback captured through the University's Student Course Evaluation Forms (SCEF) indicates students are positive about these changes and students who met the ELIR team were content with the support now in place.

49 The ELIR team understands that all on-campus undergraduate students have access to a Personal Tutor, minimum University expectations for the role are defined and guidance on personal tutoring is available to staff. The University recognises its current arrangements do not extend to support all postgraduate students (paragraph 64). Each school is responsible for allocating students a Personal Tutor and Personal Tutors are trained by Senior Personal Tutors from their school. Class representatives spoke very highly of the personal tutoring system but indicated students' experiences vary between schools. Staff spoke of specific examples where the intervention of a Personal Tutor had prevented students making decisions that could have negatively impacted on their studies. Senior colleagues, staff and students from the wider student body described challenges with the current personal tutoring arrangements arising from variable commitment and buy-in from both staff and students. The ELIR team understands that during 2018-19 the University plans to establish a working group to consider student engagement with personal tutoring and identify areas for enhancement. The ELIR team recommends that the University continues to monitor its personal tutoring arrangements to ensure they remain fit for purpose, in the context of the University's changing student population.

50 Students have access to an extensive range of centralised student support services including wellbeing services, financial advice, disability services, the Student Learning Service, and careers and employability support. The effectiveness of these services is considered by the Student Experience Committee. Recognising its increasingly diverse student population, which brings a more complex set of needs, the University has proactively developed its student services to effectively support the requirements of all students. Examples include enhancements to the Mental Health service (paragraphs 37 and 38) and the online learning environment (paragraphs 75-78). The AUSA Advice Service provides advice and directs students to the various University support services available. AUSA also

has a welfare committee which takes forward issues raised by students. The University also provides a wide range of information to students through MyAberdeen and recognises a need to further develop MyAberdeen to ensure it continues to provide appropriate support for the growing numbers of online students (paragraph 42 and paragraphs 74-79). Students who met with the ELIR team indicated that they were well-supported and were satisfied with the quality and breadth of support services available.

51 A number of learning support policies have been introduced effectively to encourage greater student engagement with their learning. These include a Lecture Attendance Monitoring Policy and a Lecture Capture Policy. Staff spoke positively about the introduction of the Lecture Capture Policy, describing it as mainstreaming accessibility in teaching and having a positive impact on student learning. The introduction of the Lecture Capture Policy was also viewed positively by the students. Following feedback from students, the ELIR team would encourage the University to continue to investigate the implementation of Lecture Capture at its Doha campus (paragraph 154).

### **Assessment and feedback**

52 Improving student satisfaction with assessment and feedback has been an area the University has prioritised. Having evaluated information from a variety of sources, the University identified students were less satisfied with their feedback on assessments than the quality of their teaching. A cross-institutional Assessment and Feedback Task Force was established in 2016 aiming to champion innovation and diversity in assessment methods, increase student satisfaction with feedback, and increase schools' responsiveness to the feedback they receive from students. The Task Force also gathered and shared the breadth of assessment approaches used across the schools. The Task Force identified a need to review and clarify feedback timelines to students, resulting in the development of a toolkit and revisions to the Institutional Framework for the Provision of Feedback on Assessment. Additionally, in 2016-17 the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) asked schools to review assessment arrangements on each undergraduate course and honours programme, to ensure assessment and feedback practices were varied and aligned with learning outcomes, and avoided assessment bunching and the potential overloading of students. The implementation and impact of these changes continues to be monitored as part of University annual monitoring processes.

53 The University's Code of Practice on Assessment sets out the University's expectations for marking, undergraduate degree classification and for the determination of progression and award within postgraduate taught programmes, and this information is available to students via a bespoke website and in course handbooks. Students also have access to the University's Framework for the Provision of Feedback on Assessment via the Infohub and further information on assessment and feedback is provided to them during induction and via course guides, student handbooks, and introductory lectures.

54 In meetings with the ELIR team, students confirmed they were clear about the assessments and feedback arrangements on their courses/programmes and that a variety of mechanisms were used to ensure they were informed including student handbooks, introductory lectures and course guides. They noted the approaches used to inform them of assessment arrangements varied between schools. Students indicated they had seen improvements in both the quality and the timeliness of feedback provided by academic staff, but were not aware of the Institutional Framework for the Provision of Feedback on Assessment.

### **Employability and positive outcomes**

55 The University's approaches to developing graduate attributes, employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship are systematically embedded into its learning and teaching

processes. The University's Employability Development Framework details an institution-wide approach to embedding employability across the student experience and is set out as six strands of work: Aberdeen Graduate Attributes (AGA), Curriculum Development, Employer Engagement, Co-curricular Activities, Career Planning, and Enterprise and Entrepreneurship. The Positive Outcomes (PO) Task Force is responsible for monitoring these strands, reporting to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) on a range of matters including graduate destinations, employability and students' skills development. The Task Force also acts as a conduit for sharing practice. The University's programme and course approval processes require staff to specify how students develop AGAs and employability skills during their studies (paragraph 115).

56 Since the 2013 ELIR, the University has continued to build on the initiatives available to support students to develop their AGAs including introducing a compulsory non-credit bearing level one Online Professional Skills course, optional Professional Skills courses at levels two and three, relaunching its skills development site 'Achieve', and the introduction of the 'Achieve+' site for postgraduate taught students. The University's Students Taking Active Roles (STAR) awards formally recognise students' development of AGAs and students' achievements beyond the academic curriculum are recorded on enhanced transcripts.

57 A comprehensive range of opportunities exist for employers to engage with the University including providing expertise on curriculum content, contributing as guest lecturers, facilitating leadership workshops, acting as career mentors, supporting programme advisory boards, and providing support for work-related learning. The University is taking positive steps to diversify its work-based learning (WBL) provision resulting in an increasing number of programmes offering this as an option to students.

58 Both staff and students talked enthusiastically about the range of ways in which employability skills were embedded within programmes. Staff were aware of the initiatives to support students to better recognise their graduate attributes and employability skills and confirmed that mapping AGAs was a requirement of the programme design and approval process. A number of students who met the ELIR team also had first-hand experience of, and spoke positively about, opportunities to undertake work-based learning such as placements and internships. Students from the University's Doha campus spoke of an Industry Week in support of their employability skills (paragraph 150).

### **Study abroad**

59 The University has appropriate arrangements in place for promoting, managing and supporting students who engage with Erasmus, study abroad and international exchange activities. Students spoke of being supported throughout their study abroad experience, particularly by their Go Abroad tutors and staff in the Study Abroad office.

## **2.4 Postgraduate taught and research student experience**

60 Overall, the ELIR team considers the University's arrangements for managing and enhancing the postgraduate student experience are effective. The University has set ambitious targets to increase its numbers of postgraduate students (paragraph 7), with growth of postgraduate taught students in particular being achieved through the development of collaborative programmes and the expansion of online provision.

### **Postgraduate taught students**

61 The University has recently adjusted its management and reporting structure for postgraduate students. The Postgraduate Committee was subdivided, creating the Postgraduate Taught Committee (PGTC) which is led by the PGT deans. At the time of the

ELIR, the University was reviewing its Postgraduate Taught (PGT) portfolio, with the results being considered by PGTC in January 2019.

62 The University acknowledges that the PGT student experience has not been evaluated to the same extent as the undergraduate student experience and recognises challenges in monitoring the retention and awards of PGT students (paragraph 11). The PGTC has established a working group to develop a set of metrics for evaluating the postgraduate taught experience. A full analysis of the group's findings is expected in Spring 2019. In the interim, work on gathering information on three metrics has begun: Contemporaneous Student Experience Survey; Destination Survey; and Retention (Award) Data. The ELIR team learned that the University Senate will consider and agree the metrics to be used to evaluate the PGT experience in December 2018.

63 The University has decided to stop participating in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), developing a new postgraduate taught version of its internal Student Engagement Survey to evaluate the PGT experience. This decision was driven by a number of factors including to support the benchmarking of the PGT experience against that of undergraduate students, to address challenges of the timing of the PTES on response rates, and difficulties benchmarking the University of Aberdeen's PGT provision with other institutions. The results of the first presentation of the University's internal Student Engagement Survey to PGT students were also scheduled to be discussed at Senate in December 2018. The ELIR team understood that initial analysis of the survey results indicates improvements in survey response rates, with PGT students more satisfied than their undergraduate counterparts with their programme and their teaching, assessment and feedback experience.

64 Overall, the ELIR team considered that teaching and assessment, student support and student representation arrangements for PGT students are comparable to those of undergraduates, the exception being arrangements for personal tutoring (paragraph 49). Responsibility for the learning experience of PGT students lies with each of the academic schools. PGT students spoke positively about their experience and confirmed support services met their needs. They were also clear about how to raise any concerns they might have and were aware of who their student representatives are. Some students raised concerns with the ELIR team regarding the length of waiting times to see a counsellor and the capacity of the counselling service to deal with increasing student demand. Online PGT students stated they were confident in knowing what services were available to them, how to access these and stated their needs were appropriately catered for. They also indicated they could see benefits in being assigned a Personal Tutor. The RA indicates that the University has extended piloting the use of Personal Tutors for PGT students in the School of Psychology. The ELIR team would encourage the University to progress its intention to extend personal tutoring for postgraduate students, including those studying online (paragraph 49).

### **Postgraduate research students**

65 The University established a Postgraduate Research School (PGRS), appointing a new Dean and a new manager in January 2017. At the time of the ELIR, the University was reviewing the development and role of the PGRS. The University Management Group (UMG), following extensive institutional-wide consultation, agreed a two-phase review process, with proposals for the future operating model for the PGRS due in March 2019. One of the considerations of the PGRS review is the balance of centralised support for all schools, and the decentralised support within schools, in order to establish the most effective operating model for the school. The University acknowledges a common theme arising from

the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and PGR SSLCs is improving communications between the schools and PGRS.

66 Since its establishment, the PGRS has focused on reviewing and developing strategy, policy and practice supported by the PGR Committee. It has also been working on harmonising procedures, sharing practice and taking forward work on improving PGR completions rates. The PGR Committee oversees compliance with institutional policies and procedures and oversees supervisor training and support across the schools.

67 During the review the ELIR team heard that, as it becomes more established, the intention is for the PGRS to be a focal point for developing a research community within the PGR student body. The PGRS also delivers the researcher development programme, which provides opportunities for students to develop their professional skills. Students who met the ELIR team recognised the role of the PGRS in delivering training. The RA indicated students have also taken some initiative to develop their own research community including creating an online postgraduate interdisciplinary journal called 'Granite' and organising conferences within their schools.

68 Following detailed analysis, the University identified that completion rates for PGR students varied significantly across schools and years. To improve completion rates, Senate established six work streams each with a working group chaired by a member of the PGR Committee. The streams are: Student-Supervisor Expectations, Monitoring and Progression, Additional Research Costs, Academic Decision Making and Support for PGR Admissions, Research Training and Development, and Generic Skills Training and Development.

69 Recommendations from the first three work streams have already been approved. The Monitoring and Progression working group has developed standardised assessment criteria which were approved by the PGR Committee for implementation in 2018. The PGR Committee also approved a series of recommendations regarding the application for, administration of and contingency arrangements for additional research costs. The Student-Supervisor working group produced the Statement of Expectation for PGR Students and Supervisors which has recently been implemented across the University. The ELIR team recognised that this Statement is a new document but, following discussions with students regarding its existence and content, would encourage the University to continue to ensure that both staff and students are familiar with its requirements.

70 The work of the Student-Supervisor working group also resulted in changes to postgraduate supervisor training, with a two-day residential course replaced with a series of interactive and reflective short courses and a re-focussing of the training to consider student health and wellbeing and academic integrity. This training is delivered by the PGRS. The ELIR team learned that there is no University-wide requirement that staff who supervise PGR students should undertake role-specific training. The responsibility for ensuring training is undertaken by staff rests with each of the academic schools. The team also learned that the expectations associated with training PGR supervisors for the role varies between schools. The University is asked to ensure that all new postgraduate research supervisors undertake the training provided by the University.

71 In discussions with the ELIR team, PGR students indicated their supervisors play a pivotal role in their support needs and, in some schools, students talked about also having mentors available to them. Students went on to describe varying experiences of how their training needs were identified, often dependent on the engagement of their supervisor, who was also seen as having an influencing role in the development undertaken. Students were positive about the plans for the PGRS to offer a social space for PGR students and welcomed events, such as monthly coffee mornings, to support students who may feel isolated from their peers.

72 Schools, supported by the Centre for Academic Development (CAD), are responsible for training demonstrators and PGR students who teach. The ELIR team learned that the expectations vary between schools and there is no University requirement for these students to undertake development to support them in their teaching roles. While some schools require mandatory training (particularly in schools where PGRs are demonstrating) not all take the view that mandatory training should be in place. The training itself is delivered by CAD. The University is strongly encouraged to define its expectations for the training of PGR students who teach and make the requirement for training mandatory across all schools. All new postgraduate students who teach and assess should, as a minimum, complete the University's Learning and Teaching in Higher Education course before taking up teaching responsibilities.

73 The University recognises the need to continue developing support offered to PGR students who study part-time, off campus and at a distance, and for formal accredited or credit-bearing recognition of generic skills. The ELIR team would encourage the University to continue its work defining the role of PGRS and its relationship to the academic schools, enabling the University to use this as an opportunity to ensure that all research students have an equivalent experience.

## **2.5 Learning environment**

74 The University has effective arrangements in place to systematically review and enhance the learning environment offered to students. It recognises that further enhancements will be required to ensure its learning environment and systems, both on campus and online, continue to support current and future changes in its student population. The University also acknowledges that further work is required to improve the accessibility and inclusivity of the materials available via MyAberdeen, with plans in place for 2018-19 to facilitate this process.

75 The University's Digital Strategy, approved in 2016, aims to enhance the student learning environment through the implementation of multiple delivery methods, the development of technology-enhanced learning spaces, optimising the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) (MyAberdeen) and making more effective use of data. The University has undertaken a variety of work to support the implementation of this strategy across all campuses, including the use of video and web conferencing to support learning and teaching, a re-branding of the online portal (Student Hub) and enhancements to the digital learning environment via the introduction of two Digitally-Enhanced Learning Spaces (DELS), created to support collaborative and distributed learning. The University's Learner's Toolkit was viewed as a very positive development by the ELIR team, providing comprehensive support to students and staff in digital skills, University systems and software, and study skills. The Toolkit is widely used by students.

76 A review of MyAberdeen in 2017 has ensured it remains fit for purpose and adaptable to the increasing diversity of students' needs and teaching methods being employed. The ELIR team understands that, while there are currently no requirements on the minimum use of the VLE in the delivery of teaching and learning, CAD intends to develop guidance on the University's expectations to encourage good practice and support parity of student experience.

77 Student feedback, collected through student surveys, focus groups etc, is also used to make improvements to the learning environment. This feedback has resulted in a range of changes including enhancements to MyAberdeen, extended library opening hours, the installation of learning pods to support collaborative learning, and developments to improve the 'social' aspects of the learning environment.



78 Staff are increasingly using a larger range of learning technologies to support different modes of delivery. Staff development around the use of learning technologies and pedagogy is provided by the eLearning team in CAD, who also promote good practice in this area and offer student support. Overall, staff who met the ELIR team were satisfied with the support available to them (see paragraph 105).

79 During meetings with the ELIR team, students spoke very positively about their learning environment and recognised the University had undertaken a range of activities in response to feedback to continue to enhance their experience. In particular they spoke positively about the use of MyAberdeen to support the delivery of their learning and teaching. They also spoke positively about improvements to the relaunched Student Hub in terms of improvements in system accessibility and the fact it is now linked to the Student Record System.

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

80 Overall the University has an effective approach to enhancing the student learning experience. This is evidenced by a robust student representation system which continues to evolve to ensure all students are effectively represented and considerable partnership working between the AUSA and the University in developing an ambitious Student Partnership Agreement and Student Engagement Development Plan. Students are provided with a variety of formal and informal feedback opportunities, with the University successfully reviewing and enhancing its communications policy which ensures students are provided with targeted communications on matters relevant to them.

81 The University continues to work to ensure it understands and meets the complex needs of its increasingly diverse student population, proactively developing its student services to effectively support the requirements of all its students. A strong institutional commitment has ensured that equality and diversity is embedded across University policies, procedures and in a comprehensive range of initiatives involving both staff and students. The University's strategic focus on widening access has resulted in the development of a broad range of activities and measures including pre and post-entry support, with students providing feedback that they are positively supported and prepared to succeed in their studies.

82 The University recognises a number of limitations with its current arrangements for personal tutoring which do not extend to support all postgraduate students. The ELIR team recommends that the University continues to monitor its personal tutoring arrangements to ensure they are fit for purpose, in the context of the University's changing student population. The University should progress its intention to extend personal tutoring for postgraduate students, including those studying online.

83 Overall, the University's arrangements for managing and enhancing the postgraduate student experience are effective. The ELIR team asks the University to continue to work on developing the role of the Postgraduate Research School and its relationship with the academic schools, enabling the University to ensure that all research students have an equivalence of experience. The University is also asked to ensure that new postgraduate research supervisors undertake the training provided by the University. The University is strongly encouraged to define its expectations for the training of PGR students who teach and make the requirement for training mandatory across all schools. All new postgraduate students who teach and assess should, as a minimum, complete the University's Learning and Teaching in Higher Education course before taking up teaching responsibilities.

### 3 Strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching

#### 3.1 Strategic approach to enhancement

84 The University has an effective strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching and the wider student experience, managed through its governance and committee structures and supported by the schools and the Centre for Academic Development (CAD). The learning and teaching section of the University's Strategic Plan sets out four goals providing direction to its work to enhance the experience of its students. Progress against these goals is effectively and systematically monitored at University and school level using a related set of KPIs, with progress reviewed quarterly by the Senior Management Team. The primary focus for the delivery of the Strategic Plan is the strategic and operational plans of the University's academic schools. These plans include details of how the University's approach for enhancing the student learning experience will be delivered. Schools have significant autonomy to develop good practice linked to learning and teaching (paragraphs 3 and 5). Staff who met the ELIR team were familiar with the Strategic Plan, KPIs and school plans, and the overarching aim of providing an outstanding educational environment for students.

85 The University Senate is responsible for all academic matters relating to teaching and research, with routine elements of Senate business managed by the Senate Business Committee, which also informs the Senate agenda. The ELIR team saw evidence from minutes that Senate engages actively with a range of matters related to the quality of the student learning experience and the oversight of academic standards.

86 Senate delegates much of its detailed work to other committees including the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL), the Student Experience Committee (SEC) and the Research Policy Committee (RPC). UCTL is in turn supported by three sub-committees (Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught and Quality Assurance), while the Postgraduate Research Committee reports to RPC. UCTL has oversight of all aspects of learning and teaching and the wider student academic experience. UCTL, SEC and RPC are joint committees of the Senate and the University Court and include representatives of both.

87 The UCTL has membership from the University Court, the deans, the Head of the Graduate School and AUSA, helping to facilitate University-wide sharing of good practice. The ELIR team learned that the enhancement of learning and teaching is encouraged and enabled through cross-membership of University committees and supported by those engaged in strategic task forces which are chaired by members of UCTL.

88 Enhancement and some innovations to teaching and learning are also overseen by school/discipline teaching and learning committees, chaired by a School Director of Teaching who is also a member of the Undergraduate Committee. School staff in meeting the ELIR team cited the importance of the role of school Teaching and Learning Committees in cascading policies and securing engagement from staff and students in supporting their implementation. Parallel structures are operated to support the enhancement of the postgraduate experience (paragraphs 60-73). The schools are supported on teaching and learning and quality assurance and enhancement matters by the Deans of Undergraduate Studies and Postgraduate Studies (collectively known as the 'teaching deans') and by the Dean of the Postgraduate Research School and the Dean of Quality Enhancement and Quality Assurance.

89 One of the recommendations from the 2013 ELIR asked the University to continue to develop more explicit links between its assurance processes and its enhancement activities to capitalise on the benefits of both. The University has progressed this in a range of ways including the appointment of the 'teaching deans' and the Dean of Quality

Enhancement and Assurance, whose roles have a key focus on identifying and sharing good practice in relation to learning and teaching; the Quality Assurance Committee's (QAC) annual digest summarising good practice across the institution; and as part of the annual monitoring processes, the annual meeting between each school and QAC representatives (paragraph 116).

90 While recognising the University's progress in this area, the ELIR team noted that there appears to be a delineation between the focus for quality assurance and quality enhancement matters in terms of where responsibility lies. The team explored this matter with University senior staff and learned that centrally determined strategy and policies set at University-level focus mainly on quality assurance and are implemented by the schools who are expected to comply with them. In terms of quality enhancement matters, high level expectations are established centrally by the University, but it is largely left to each of the schools to decide how best to fulfil these expectations given discipline-specific requirements. The University is clear that each of its academic schools has autonomy to implement its policies linked to aspects of learning and teaching in a manner which works most effectively for that discipline and its students. Staff and students who met the ELIR team spoke positively about this approach, believing that a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate in an institution where there is strong school autonomy. The team also understood that there are some exceptions to this approach where the University takes greater institutional oversight of quality enhancement matters, for example policies linked to lecture capture and the three-week turnaround of assessment feedback to students.

91 However, the ELIR team identified instances where the level of autonomy given to the schools could create variation and inconsistency of student experience, including varying approaches to student representation structures (paragraph 21) and to gathering and responding to student feedback (paragraphs 26 and 27); consistency of arrangements for allocating a personal tutor to all students (paragraph 49); and support for PGR students who teach (paragraph 72). Although there are University-wide expectations in respect of marking, classification, awards and progression, the ELIR team understood in some areas of assessment practice, such as extensions to submission deadlines, Examination Board practice including candidate anonymity, use of plagiarism detection software, and annotation of examination scripts, schools retained a degree of autonomy. The team recommends that the University reflects on the balance between institutional and school responsibilities, to assure itself that all those studying for a University of Aberdeen award have parity of experience.

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

92 The national Enhancement Themes are an important external reference point for the University. The University's work in relation to the Enhancement Themes is overseen by an institutional steering group, chaired by the Dean for Quality Enhancement and Quality Assurance and with student representation. Enhancement Theme work is effectively aligned to institutional strategic priorities and embedded within existing University structures such as the Learning and Teaching Enhancement programme (LTEP) and institutional task forces, supporting the visibility of Themes-related work across the University.

93 During the review, the ELIR team saw evidence that work undertaken by the University linked to the previous Enhancement Theme on Student Transitions had a positive impact on the development of policy and practice that extended beyond the lifetime of that Theme. There had also been good engagement with the Theme by staff from across the institution. Examples of good practice include a broadening of the University's definition of 'transition' which supports the diversification of its student population, the extension of a suite of workshops and online resources originally developed for international students enhanced to support the needs of all students, and a number of student-led initiatives

including the Leadership Academy, Level Up Conference, and Online Professionalism and Employability Guide.

94 Enhancement Themes-related activities and projects are disseminated at the University's annual Academic Symposium, at Learning and Teaching Network events and through the University's Enhancement Themes webpages. A range of staff have participated in Enhancement Themes conferences and the University has also contributed case studies which other colleagues have drawn on to further good practice. The LTEP offers small amounts of funding to support projects linked to innovations in learning and teaching and is also aligned to the Enhancement Themes.

95 Staff spoke positively with the ELIR team about their involvement with institutional task forces and opportunities to share good practice at events such as the Academic Symposia. They also found receiving funding from the LTEP helpful in supporting them to develop innovations in learning and teaching practice.

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

96 The University has systematic mechanisms in place for identifying and sharing good practice, using a comprehensive range of both formal and informal mechanisms to achieve this. The University's governance and committee structures and quality processes support the identification and sharing of good practice.

97 The University's monitoring and review processes, including annual course and programme review, external examiners' reports and Internal Teaching Review (ITR), all specifically support the requirement to reflect on and identify innovative and/or good practice linked to learning and teaching. The ELIR team saw evidence that this approach is becoming increasingly well embedded and would encourage the University to continue with this.

98 An explicit part of the remit of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) is to support the implementation of the University's approach to quality enhancement, with a specific expectation that each of the committee members plays an active role in the identification and sharing of good practice. School members of QAC act as advisors to their school Teaching and Learning Committees and as part of their role on QAC have responsibility for reviewing quality assurance activities in another school. There is a collaborative relationship between QAC and the schools, with each school assigned a QAC member who works with the school on a regular basis. An annual QAC Digest is sent to all staff, to inform them of policy developments and to disseminate examples of good practice. Staff the ELIR team met were aware of the pivotal role of QAC and its members in managing quality and academic standards. The ELIR team would commend the role of QAC and its members, with feedback from staff supporting the team's view that these colleagues play a pivotal role in implementing the University's approach to quality enhancement. These committee members act as effective conduits in sharing good practice at both school and institutional level (paragraph 113).

99 The University's task forces are also used to identify and share good practice, for example the Positive Outcomes Task Force organised a Sharing Effective Practice Event where all schools submitted posters of employability work.

100 The Centre for Academic Development (CAD) plays a key role in the identification and sharing of good learning and teaching practice using a range of approaches including the yearly Academic Symposium (which is aligned to the Enhancement Themes), the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Learning and Teaching, the Good Practice Showcase, an Online Forum, and the Learning and Teaching Networks. Schools also regularly hold team away days and events, with many of them working with CAD to develop tailored approaches to support the priorities of each academic discipline area.

101 Staff in discussion with the ELIR team confirmed that the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Learning and Teaching supported them to identify and share practice, describing how their informal learning continued after their studies were complete and, as their practice improved, so they felt confident to be more innovative in order to enhance the experience for their students. Staff also viewed CAD as playing an important role in supporting the sharing of good practice and clearly valued the range of development activities they were offered. The Teaching Awards and StaffNet E-zine were cited as being particularly useful for reflection and action linked to learning and teaching.

### **3.4 Engaging, developing and supporting staff**

102 The University has appropriate mechanisms in place to support staff in the ongoing development of their learning and teaching practice, with a comprehensive set of formal and informal staff development opportunities available to encourage wider engagement.

103 The University stated in the RA that it values teaching and research equally, with its reward and recognition processes reflecting this. The University's promotions procedures are reviewed annually and academic staff who have achievements in the delivery, development and innovation in learning and teaching can apply to a specific promotion route (teaching and scholarship). The ELIR team understood that staff development needs are identified as part of the annual review system and, at the time of the ELIR, there were plans to revise the system as the University developed its overall reward strategy. Although the University clearly sets out the criteria for gaining promotion through the teaching and scholarship route, there was a lack of clarity about the criteria and associated processes among some of the academic staff who met the team.

104 The University's Workload Policy, Modelling Principles and Parameters have been in place since 2015, with each school having the flexibility to develop their own slightly different models to reflect subject-level requirements. The University recognises this approach has challenges associated with the reporting and transparency of staff workloads between schools. At the time of the ELIR, the University was undertaking work to clarify how its revised Framework of Academic Expectations works, with its workload modelling, annual review and promotions systems. The ELIR team would encourage the University to continue with its plans in this area in order to ensure consistency of workload models, so that activities in support of the student experience are afforded appropriate time allocations across the institution.

105 The Centre for Academic Development (CAD) offers a range of development opportunities which are determined by staff needs as identified by the schools and the University. These include a two-day 'Introduction to Learning and Teaching at the University of Aberdeen' programme which is compulsory for all new academic staff employed on the Teaching and Scholarship and Teaching and Research tracks, an annual programme of workshops, and a range of good practice sharing events. However, the ELIR team learned that the Introduction to Learning and Teaching course is not compulsory for staff appointed on the Research track, or other groups of staff who may be engaged in teaching. The University is recommended to ensure that all new staff who teach and assess complete, as a minimum, the University's 'Learning and Teaching in HE' course before taking up teaching responsibilities. The ELIR team understood that CAD also liaises proactively with each of the schools in order to identify staff development needs and develop bespoke sessions as determined by University and school priorities. A good example of CAD's proactive approach is the development of a five-week course to support staff with online course development, supporting the University strategy in this area. Schools also offer their own discipline-based development activities for staff.

106 Academic staff who met with the ELIR team indicated that they regard CAD as playing an important role in supporting their development and viewed CAD as an agent of change, playing a significant role in the championing of good practice. Staff also indicated they were able to provide feedback to CAD with regard to their development needs and skills requirements. Those staff who had completed the two-day Introduction to Learning and Teaching valued this programme. Staff who participated in development activities spoke very positively about the value of attending, the quality of the networking opportunities provided and the opportunities to share practice.

107 While offering a wide range of opportunities for staff development and sharing practice, the University recognises that staff attendance at events can be variable and that the impact of dissemination activities is not always measured. The ELIR team would therefore encourage the University to continue developing mechanisms for supporting staff participation and for measuring the effectiveness of its dissemination activities.

108 The University offers a CPD Framework for Learning and Teaching that includes the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Academic Practice and the Principles of Learning and Teaching in HE programmes. The CPD Framework was first accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in 2014 and supports staff to apply for three levels of fellowship. CAD offers a range of support options to HEA applicants. The University has an aspiration of ensuring all staff involved in teaching students, including PhD demonstrators, have accredited teaching qualifications by 2020, with progress towards this target monitored by CAD. At the time of the ELIR, the CPD framework had 170 staff professionally recognised.

109 In addition, the University's Human Resources section also offers a suite of staff development activities, workshops and support opportunities for staff including leadership development, mentoring and coaching, and wellbeing and good mental health. In discussion with the ELIR team, staff indicated that they valued the ongoing mental health first aid training to support the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the staff mentoring scheme (paragraph 37).

### **3.5 Effectiveness of the approach to implementing institutional strategies and enhancing learning and teaching**

110 The University has an effective approach to enhancing teaching and learning and the wider student experience managed through its governance and committee structures. This is achieved through a combination of the University's Strategic Plan, a set of University-wide teaching-related KPIs, and the school plans which translate these KPIs into action at discipline level. Academic schools have significant autonomy to take forward enhancements to learning and teaching practice in a manner which works most effectively for the subject discipline and its students. While this can be positive, it can also lead to variation and inconsistency in the student experience. The University is encouraged to reflect on the balance between institutional and school responsibilities to assure itself that all those studying for a University of Aberdeen award have parity of experience.

111 The University has an effective and systematic approach for identifying and sharing good practice, using a comprehensive range of formal and informal mechanisms to achieve this. The role of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) is commended. Its members are pivotal in implementing the University's approach to quality enhancement and act as effective conduits in sharing good practice at both school and institutional level.

112 The University is asked to 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.

## 4 Academic standards and quality processes

### 4.1 Key features of the institution's approach to managing quality and academic standards

113 The University has effective and systematic arrangements in place for managing quality and securing academic standards. The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) plays a key role in the management of quality processes and academic standards and implementing the University's quality enhancement activities. QAC is chaired by the Dean of Quality Enhancement and Quality Assurance, with representation from each school and the student body. Students have appropriate opportunities to engage in the University's quality assurance and enhancement activities through representation on relevant committees and also by participating in the Internal Teaching Review (ITR) process (paragraphs 20-22 and paragraph 117). QAC also develops policy linked to academic standards, which is discussed as appropriate at other committees before approval.

114 The University's procedures for managing quality, and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards, are set out in its Academic Quality Handbook (AQH). Students are made aware of regulations, policies and procedures, and arrangements for assessment and feedback through the University's portals and through student course and programme handbooks which detail any programme-specific information. Students have appropriate access to general University information linked to regulations, policies and procedures, a position which was confirmed in meetings with students.

#### Programme and course approval

115 In 2015, a new Curriculum Management process and supporting web-based collaborative platform was introduced to support the University's processes for the approval, amendment and withdrawal of new courses and programmes. Business cases are approved for new courses/programmes prior to any detailed consideration of quality assurance matters. Proposals are required to align with University/school policies, meet the expectations of the University's programme and course entity guidance (which requires coherence of learning outcomes, the assessment strategy and graduate attributes) and the expectations of all relevant external reference points, including the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and Subject Benchmark Statements.

#### Monitoring and review

116 The University has undertaken significant development of its quality processes to ensure these support self-evaluation and enhancement. The University uses three processes to monitor and review academic standards: Annual Course Review (ACR), Annual Programme Review (APR) and Internal Teaching Review (ITR). This approach meets the expectations of the Quality Code and SFC Guidance to higher education institutions on Quality, and applies to all the University's credit-bearing provision, including collaborative programmes delivered by partners. Given the volume of individual courses delivered across the University, a sample of ACRs is reviewed at QAC. School Directors of Teaching and Learning review all ACRs which are then used to inform Annual Programme Reviews. Annual Programme Reviews are considered at school teaching and learning committees and posted to the University's Quality and Planning site. Annual Course and Programme Reviews considered by the ELIR team indicated that academic standards are being effectively monitored by the University. Staff who met the ELIR team were very familiar with the expectations of these processes and the linkage to quality assurance at University level. Staff spoke positively about their rigour and valued having structured opportunities to reflect on course and programme delivery. Staff also welcomed the support that school

members of QAC can provide to help them successfully engage with these monitoring processes.

117 Since the 2013 ELIR, the University has developed a new ITR process, which is more streamlined, avoids the production of duplicate information and is more enhancement focused. The uploading of a range of quality-related information to the ITR web-based collaborative platform enables panel members to review quality assurance and academic standards matters ahead of the review visit. The revised ITR process places a firm emphasis on enhancement, makes full use of the expertise of external subject experts, and engages students actively in developing a forward-looking action plan. It was clear to the ELIR team that students spoke positively about their involvement in the ITR process, particularly the 'pedagogic partnership session'. This session takes place at the end of the ITR visit and involves staff and students, who consider key matters raised during the review and develop an enhancement-focused action plan to address these.

118 The University has also developed proposals for the periodic review of professional service areas. However, a pilot review planned for 2015-16 did not take place because a wider institutional review of professional services was held in that year. In its annual report on Institution-led review of quality to the SFC in 2016-17, the University stated that the review of professional services would remain an integral part of the school-focused ITR process. However, having considered the guidelines for the new academic ITR process in the AQH, the ELIR team could see no specific mention of how professional services are incorporated into this process. The report of the pilot school ITR process in the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture did not evidence any significant review of professional services areas. The team understood that the introduction of a more structured review of professional service areas was revisited by the directors of professional services in October 2018. The directors agreed that, rather than instigate a process equivalent to ITR for professional services, the University Secretary (in agreement with the Principal) would instigate a series of reviews for individual professional service areas. At the time of the ELIR, a detailed programme for the individual reviews was being developed and a review of Marketing and Student Recruitment had been undertaken but the findings of this pilot and the evaluation of the method employed had not been completed. The team also understood there were plans for a review of school administrative structures and a decision concerning the continued involvement of external representatives or students in subsequent reviews was yet to be taken.

119 The ELIR team therefore asks the University to 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.

### **External examining**

120 The RA states that the University sees external examiners as playing a major role in the monitoring of its academic provision and ensuring standards are maintained on a level comparable with other UK universities. The AQH defines the responsibilities of Academic Services and the heads of school with regard to the induction of external examiners. Academic Services provide induction information to new external examiners, with any further training and induction that may be required being the responsibility of schools (with support provided from Academic Services if requested). The ELIR team learned the University does not monitor the effectiveness of the training provided at school level or maintain a consistent record of those who have undertaken it. The University recognised this position and is encouraged to reflect on the effectiveness of its current arrangements for monitoring the training and induction provided for external examiners at school level.



121 The ELIR team understood that, currently, external examiners' reports are shared with the student body via the student representatives on QAC and via programme annual reports. Some students who met the team understood the role of external examiners but none of the students were able to qualify where they would obtain a copy of the external examiners' reports linked to their course/programme of study. The University should ensure all students are aware of how they can access the external examiners' reports for their programme.

## **Assessment**

122 Overall, the University has effective arrangements in place for the management of assessment. There have been significant changes to these arrangements since the 2013 ELIR, including the introduction of the University's Code of Practice on Assessment in 2014-15, which defines the arrangements for marking, undergraduate degree classifications and award within postgraduate programmes. As part of this work the University has introduced a new Common Grading Scale, a Grade Point Average (GPA) system for determining honours degree classifications and postgraduate awards, and guidance for examiners where the overall GPA grade for the award falls within a borderline zone. Students confirmed that they had good access to information regarding assessment arrangements and feedback which was provided in a range of ways (paragraphs 52-54).

### **4.2 Use of external reference points in quality processes**

123 Overall the University has an effective approach to using external reference points. Programme design and approval ensures programmes are aligned with relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and this is reviewed as part of the University's ITR process where schools submit a curriculum mapping which identifies how programme provision addresses any relevant Statements. A number of disciplines also use a variety of additional reference points for example, Engineering make use of the Society of Petroleum Engineering's matrix for Technical Knowledge of Graduating Engineers. Programmes are expected to meet the requirements of their professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and also align with SCQF levels. The University has fostered close links with industry and the professions, and external members of advisory boards at disciplinary level provide a significant external perspective to programme/course development. The University also pays close attention to national surveys and league tables as important external reference points to support its enhancement activities. As part of its preparations for the ELIR, the University produced a detailed mapping of its policies and procedures against the expectations of the Quality Code 2013-18.

124 Currently the University makes effective use of a range of external stakeholders to inform programme development, including external examiners, external subject experts, employers, programme advisory boards (PABs) and the expectations of PSRBs. However, the ELIR team learned that external stakeholders are not involved in the University's programme approval process. Approval external to the school proposing new programmes is provided by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). There would be merit in the University reviewing its current processes, to involve external experts in programme approval, in line with the indicator of sound practice in the Quality Code 2013-18.

### **4.3 Commentary on action taken since ELIR 3**

125 The 2013 ELIR identified six areas for development and the current ELIR team agreed with the University that it has made significant progress in the majority of these areas and has worked to address them all. With regards to evaluating the success of initiatives for major change projects, the University is now making effective use of a project management methodology to manage and evaluate such work. This ELIR report outlines a large range of

approaches that have been developed by the University to support its increasingly diverse student population, which was also a contextualised theme for the current review.

126 The University was asked to consider its responsiveness to external feedback, particularly linked to intended revisions to the Common Assessment Scale and Annual Programme Review, and a new marking scale has been implemented (paragraph 122). Annual Programme Review changes have been taken forward appropriately as part of a wider piece of work to revise Internal Teaching Review (ITR) (paragraph 117). The ELIR team considered that the range of measures adopted by the University to further develop the links between its assurance processes and its enhancement activities have been particularly successful and have commended the role of the Quality Assurance Committee in supporting this work (paragraphs 88, 89, 98, 113 and 116). The team noted that the University has taken steps to make committee minutes and papers more accessible to staff and student representatives on these committees and available in a timely manner. However, the team understood that, in some instances, this information may not be so readily available to the wider student body. The University is encouraged to continue working to improve student access to committee papers and minutes.

127 The ELIR team fully recognises the work undertaken by the University to ensure that staff explicitly engage with Subject Benchmark Statements and other reference points and believe the changes made to key monitoring and review process support the achievement of this (paragraph 123).

#### **4.4 Approach to using data to inform decision-making and evaluation**

128 The University has an effective approach to using data to inform its decision-making and support its evaluative processes. The University's strategic planning process makes effective use of KPIs and linked metrics to support regular institutional monitoring of progress against targets and supports cross-institutional consideration of performance. Data on all the University's KPIs is reviewed regularly and reported to the University Management Group and the University Court. The integrated nature of this planning process supports the schools in developing their five-year and annual plans, with the same KPIs and metrics being used effectively to monitor progress and identify areas for enhancement and action in the next academic session (paragraphs 3, 5 and 84).

129 The annual Student Experience paper presented to the Senate contains key metrics around student satisfaction, non-continuation, degree awards and positive student outcomes, designed to focus activity and further enhance the student experience. The RA indicated this paper is valued by the University and used as an important discussion document for identifying enhancements to the learning and teaching and broader experience of students, sometimes resulting in the establishment of task or working groups to progress these, for example the establishment of a task force to consider feedback to students.

130 There is evidence in the RA and Advance Information Set (AIS) that the University undertakes careful analysis of student feedback from a variety of sources including focus groups and a range of internal and external surveys. The Centre for Academic Development (CAD) is responsible for analysing the national surveys which the University participates in. Two NSS measures (those for teaching, and for assessment and feedback) feed directly into the University's KPIs.

131 The University's quality processes are evidence based. At course level, the Student Course Evaluation Forms (SCEF) and SSLCs provide data to programme teams and schools which is used in ACR, APR and ITRs. The University's new ITR process is supported by a set of centrally-held quality assurance metrics and analysis which support schools in undertaking the preparation of their reflective analysis. The centrally-held metrics

also allow review panels to consider a number of quality assurance aspects of the review ahead of time, allowing more discussion with the schools on the enhancement work they are undertaking linked to learning and teaching.

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

132 The University has effective and systematic arrangements in place for setting and securing academic standards, making appropriate use of external reference points. In particular, the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) plays a key role ensuring academic standards are met.

133 The University is encouraged to reflect on the effectiveness of its arrangements for overseeing 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 programmes.

#### **4.6 Effectiveness of the institution's approach to self-evaluation, including the effective use of data to inform decision-making**

134 The University has effective arrangements for self-evaluation which are informed by the use of data from a range of sources. The University's revised ITR process for academic schools is commended for its firm emphasis on enhancement, for making full use of the role of external subject experts, and for its strong commitment to engaging students in developing a forward-looking action plan. The University is asked to 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 to the existing ITR processes for academic areas, allow for institutional oversight, and incorporate appropriate externality.

## **5 Collaborative provision**

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

135 The University's Strategic Plan, to 2020, provides limited information on the University's ambitions to develop its collaborative provision. Meetings between University senior staff and the ELIR team revealed there is a clear direction of travel for internationalisation and collaborative provision, moving away from validation agreements to international articulation agreements and collaboration with delivery partners. University leadership of collaborative provision is shared between the Vice-Principals for Education and International Partnerships. The process of realigning the roles of the senior staff (paragraph 4) created a Vice-Principal (International Partnerships) whose remit is focused on international partnerships, particularly considering the resource requirements for managing the projected growth in collaborations.

136 There is also an Internationalisation Strategy document, which the ELIR team considered to focus on implementation rather than strategic direction. Published in 2014, the team believed there would be benefit to the University in refreshing the Internationalisation Strategy document to more accurately reflect the University's ambitions and direction, particularly in relation to transnational education.

137 In anticipation of an expansion in overseas delivery, the University established a Transnational Education Committee. However, of the various transnational initiatives originally planned, only the Doha campus has so far been established. The University therefore decided that quality matters, academic standards and supporting the wider student experience could be managed appropriately through its existing policies and procedures, and committee structures.

138 The University's Register of Partnerships and Collaborative Provision defines a number of types of partnership including accreditations and validations; college articulations; articulations; joint, double and dual degrees; distance and split-site degrees; online delivery partners; transnational education; and undergraduate exchange and study abroad. The University's portfolio of partnerships has been rationalised since the 2013 ELIR, with the removal of inactive agreements and the introduction of a small number of new ones. The Directorate of Research and Innovation oversees the development of the agreement documents and maintains the Register of Partnerships and Collaborative Provision. In considering this register, the ELIR team noted a small number of partnerships were missing and would encourage the University to review its processes for maintaining the Register to ensure its ongoing currency and completeness.

139 The two recent additions to the Register, of particular interest to this ELIR, were the agreements with the Al Faleh Group for Educational Services (AFG) to operate a campus in Doha, Qatar, and with the Interactive Design Institute Ltd (IDI) to deliver online programmes. Both these new projects involve delivery of University of Aberdeen programmes by a third party and are operated through the University's School of Business. The management of each of these partners aligns with the Fundamental Principles section of the University's Delivery Partners Handbook.

140 The University plans to build on its experience in Doha and expand its provision through the partnership with AFG, intending to offer new programmes using the same operating model. The University considers TNE to be a 'core element' of its strategy for internationalisation and sees the establishment of the Doha collaboration as a 'step change' in its approach for proposing, approving and managing collaborative activity. In recognition that future collaborative ventures potentially bring new requirements for the assurance of quality and academic standards, the University plans to increase the number of staff supporting its quality processes, particularly at school level, proactively building capacity and expertise. In the last year some Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) members have been given specific responsibility for TNE provision. As its TNE provision grows the University recognises that it may be necessary to increase the membership of QAC.

141 While the University has been offering online programmes for some time, the agreement with IDI has allowed the University to make significant advances in its online delivery, in terms of the quality and scalability of provision. The partnership currently encompasses two programmes, the MBA (Global) and MSc Finance.

142 The University's policies and procedures for the establishment and oversight of collaborative partnerships are described in the Delivery Partners' Handbook, which refers explicitly to the Quality Code. The Handbook makes it clear that students enrolled on programmes delivered in partnership should not be at a disadvantage to, or have an advantage over, students who are enrolled on the University's non-partnership programmes. All students, irrespective of location of study, are subject to the same rules and regulations and have the same rights and responsibilities as students enrolled on non-partnership programmes. Further, the guidance available on the University's Quality Assurance and Academic Standards website states that, in all collaborative provision, the University remains ultimately responsible for the quality and standards of its partnerships and partnership programmes. The agreement documents signed with AFG and IDI make this clear and refer to the Delivery Partners Handbook, together with the University Regulations and the Quality Code, and make it clear that the University retains responsibility for the academic standards of all awards made in its name.

143 Students from the Doha campus participated, via a survey and discussion forums, in the 2018 QAA report 'Enhancing the UK TNE Student Experience in Dubai and Singapore'.

## **Doha campus - quality arrangements**

144 The campus in Doha is operated as a branch campus and currently offers a small range of business-related undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, admitting its first cohort, of 132 students, in 2017. The Doha campus is jointly managed by the University and AFG. There is a Provost, employed by the University, who reports to the Senior Vice-Principal. Oversight and quality assurance and enhancement of academic provision is the responsibility of the University and delivered through existing University procedures. Operational oversight is the responsibility of the Business School, which reports to QAC through the ITR, APR and ACR processes. There are regular teaching visits to Doha to support and assure quality requirements and academic standards. The course leads make two teaching visits per course delivery to ensure the local AFG-employed teachers are clear about the University's expectations of them.

145 As set out in the Delivery Partners Handbook, entry requirements for admission onto programmes delivered at the Doha campus have been jointly agreed between the University and AFG. An admissions audit takes place annually.

146 The Qatar Assessment and Feedback Handbook provides information for staff based at the Doha campus. The University confirmed that, for levels two to four of the provision, the curriculum and its associated assessments are the same for students studying in Doha and in Aberdeen. The courses share content, teaching materials and assessments. The learning outcomes for courses are the same, but the learning and teaching materials delivered by the AFG staff are contextualised for the Qatar environment. When academic staff from Aberdeen are present in Doha the courses are co-delivered. The RA stated clearly that no courses are offered in Doha that are not also available in Aberdeen. The exception to this position is the delivery of level one provision which includes foundation studies and English language support, as well as subject-specific teaching (paragraph 149).

147 Assessments for level one are set by Doha-based staff in consultation with Aberdeen-based University staff. The same in-course assessments are used for courses delivered in both Aberdeen and Doha at levels two to four. Examinations for level one courses are set in Doha and agreed with the University and the external examiner. Examinations for levels two to four are set by the University and approved by external examiners in consultation with Doha staff. All students studying on a course delivered in both Aberdeen and Doha will sit the same examination paper at the same time. Assessments and examinations are marked and moderated in accordance with University policies and procedures. The assessment marks for students in years two to four are considered by the same examination board, and by the same external examiners, as students studying the corresponding programmes in Aberdeen.

148 Students confirmed to the ELIR team that they understood the assessment criteria for their courses through the information given in their handbooks and lectures, and were clear about how their final degree classification would be determined. They also reported they were satisfied with the quality and timeliness of the feedback they received and knew they could approach teaching staff for further information, if required.

149 The University identified teething problems with the experience of its first cohort of Doha-based students. Issues with the student registration process were identified, resulting in improvements to support easier and quicker student registration and ensure greater accuracy of the student data captured. Early indications are these changes have had a positive impact for year two delivery. Concerns were also raised regarding the content of the level one curriculum which had been designed to be an integrated first year to support students entering their studies with qualifications below the University's standard degree entry requirements. In response the University has re-ordered the delivery of the curriculum.

Students in Doha reported that while level one was very busy, it was manageable from a workload and assessment perspective.

150 To support Doha-based students to develop their employability skills, an Industry Week is held in the middle of each semester where employers come onto campus and provide students with the opportunity to engage in a range of work-related activities outside formal course lessons. Students were very positive about these opportunities, although they did not readily relate to the concept of Aberdeen Graduate Attributes. AFG has also signed an agreement with the National Enterprise Agency to increase the number of employers supporting the Industry Week, and the Entrepreneurs in Qatar society, together with its entrepreneur in residence, organise seminars designed to help students to establish their own businesses.

### **Doha campus - student experience**

151 The RA indicated that currently the Doha campus comprises a series of 'villas' that have been converted and equipped to support educational use, including well-equipped IT facilities. There is also a dedicated 'villa' for postgraduate students. The University has undertaken onsite visits to assure itself that the learning and teaching facilities meet the needs of the current provision. As part of the agreement between the University and AFG, a new campus will be opened in two years' time which will further enhance facilities for students and be required to support the planned expansion and diversification of the programme provision offered in Doha. A suitable location has been identified for the new campus, and a project board established to support the work.

152 Student support in Doha is well-developed and the University has taken steps to ensure that students are as well supported as their Aberdeen counterparts. Each student at Doha has a personal tutor. This was confirmed by the students who met the ELIR team who said they could also contact any faculty member or the student affairs manager if they required support. Students also reported both academics and support staff responded promptly and provided helpful support. On campus there is a Student Hub which provides study skills support and a full-time medical centre. The University's aim has been to embed systems available to Aberdeen-based students into the Doha campus and the Qatar context. Students have access to all online library training courses and to MyAberdeen. Students informed the ELIR team that the library team had responded to requests for guidance on how to use MyAberdeen by providing training.

153 Following a recent visit to the Doha campus by Aberdeen-based student support staff, the University plans to appoint a Careers Adviser to be located on campus. A specialist student mentoring service will be available from January 2019, and work is underway to make the online resource 'Cluedup' available to Doha-based students (paragraph 38). Students can access the Counselling Service in Aberdeen by remote digital connection. Doha teaching staff informed the ELIR team that the campus offers mental health workshops for students.

154 Students stated they enjoyed their educational experience, that the atmosphere on campus was conducive to learning and they felt well respected by their teachers. Both staff and students reported that online library resources were very good. Students informed the ELIR team they had experienced a shortage of printed material in the library and that they found the social and recreational facilities insufficient. Having raised these matters with staff and following feedback from the University, students understood there to be ongoing difficulties in getting the books into the country due to a blockade, rather than a lack of library budget, and were informed that plans are in place to improve facilities as part of the next phase of the campus development. Students also reported to the team that they would like to see Lecture Capture being implemented for them and they don't currently have access to

those lectures recorded in Aberdeen. The team understood that there are challenges with providing access to Lecture Capture recordings for students based in Doha due to contextual and cultural differences and issues of consent. The team would encourage the University to continue to investigate the use of Lecture Capture for students across all of its campuses.

155 The majority of the teaching staff at the Doha campus are employed by AFG, with honorary appointments to the University. The exceptions to this are the Doha Provost and the small number of Aberdeen-based faculty, who are employed by the University. The ELIR team learned that some of the AFG staff are former employees of the University. The academic staff employed by AFG are appointed according to University criteria, with the Provost and Business School staff contributing to the recruitment panels.

156 New AFG academic staff undergo the same induction and training as new Aberdeen-based academic staff. Staff in Doha are able to participate in some of the training and development opportunities the University offers to academic staff in Aberdeen, via online conference tools. While committed to encouraging staff in Doha to engage in activities focused on sharing good practice, the University recognises there remain logistical challenges associated with supporting staff to engage. The range of development materials available for use in Doha is currently being expanded, and there are plans to schedule staff development sessions in Aberdeen so that Doha staff are able to participate by video link. The ELIR team would encourage the University to continue with its plans to support all staff to more effectively engage with the training and development, and sharing practice opportunities it offers. Some Doha staff are in the process of applying for Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA), having been encouraged to do so through their annual review.

157 Training is also provided to University academic staff based in Aberdeen before they teach at the Doha campus. University staff based in Aberdeen opt in to teach parts of the provision delivered in Doha and the Business School's workload model has been updated to reflect in-country teaching. There have also been visits from student support services staff, looking at how the broader student experience can be replicated in Doha.

### **Doha campus - student representation**

158 Establishment of an equivalent student representatives system in Doha is an ongoing development area for the University and AUSA, who are both committed to establishing a system which is comparable to that available for Aberdeen-based students. Doha students reported that student representatives were appointed at the start of session and have received training to support them in their roles. The student representatives who met the ELIR team clearly understood their role and responsibilities and had attended their first Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC). The representatives also confirmed their feedback was listened to and action taken in response. AUSA's Education Officer and Student Representative Officer visited the campus in March 2018, with a further AUSA visit scheduled for November 2018, during which the AUSA Education Officer will train the school student convenor in Doha. A Doha representative has recently been appointed to the AUSA Education and Sports Committees (paragraph 24).

159 Student feedback is mainly received through student representation structures. Low staff to student ratios also facilitate informal feedback between students and staff. Students reported to the ELIR team that they had seen changes to their learning and teaching and wider student support since the first year of operation of the campus as a result of raising issues through student representatives. Currently, feedback mechanisms are very effective, however the University is encouraged to consider how these mechanisms will need to be enhanced as student numbers grow in Doha.

## **Interactive Design Institute Ltd (IDI) collaboration**

160 The collaborative agreement with IDI clearly states the responsibilities of each partner. The University retains all responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards, and for oversight of quality assurance and enhancement matters through its existing policies and processes.

161 Although the agreement document allows IDI to take responsibility for running examination boards in accordance with the University policies and regulations, in practice the Business School examination boards manage all the assessment marks for its students on programmes delivered by IDI. Assessments are jointly designed by IDI tutors and Business School staff. Initial marking is carried out by IDI staff using University marking schemes, followed by moderation completed by Aberdeen staff.

162 Tutors are recruited by IDI and employed on a contract basis. Tutors are required to have a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Learning and Teaching or equivalent and be research active. Tutors receive training in online delivery and student support from IDI and discussions are currently underway regarding the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) providing additional staff training in the University's values, processes and requirements.

163 The University recognises the need to improve the online student representation and is working with AUSA and sparqs to better understand the representation and feedback needs of this student group (paragraph 22). Currently different models are offered in the schools, and there are ongoing debates with students and staff about whether having an online student representative is seen as beneficial. Students studying online who met the ELIR team believed that a single approach to student representation might not work for all online provision (paragraphs 42 and 43).

## **5.2 Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative provision**

164 The University has an effective approach to managing its collaborative activity. Oversight of the Doha campus collaboration with AFG and the joint management arrangements for the IDI collaboration are operating well in practice. Assurance of quality and standards, along with enhancement of the student experience are managed through the Business School, using current University procedures. Institutional oversight is provided by the QAC which scrutinises the school annual monitoring and review reports, and informs Senate of the outcomes.

165 The University is asked to review its processes for maintaining the Register of Partnerships and Collaborative Provision to ensure its ongoing currency and completeness.

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