



**Summary report on the  
Enhancement-led Institutional Review**

**University of Abertay Dundee**

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## **Preface**

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To do this, QAA carries out institutional reviews of higher education institutions. In Scotland, this process is known as Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR). QAA operates equivalent but separate processes in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

### **The enhancement-led approach**

ELIR is one element of the Quality Enhancement Framework which was developed and is implemented on a partnership basis in Scotland with the Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland and representatives of the student body. The five elements of the Framework are:

- a comprehensive programme of review at the subject level, managed by the institutions, known as institution-led quality review
- an agreed set of public information about quality
- a greater voice for students in institutional quality systems, supported by a national development service (known as student participation in quality scotland, sparqs)
- a national programme of Enhancement Themes aimed at developing and sharing good practice in learning and teaching
- a programme of Enhancement-led Institutional Review involving all Scottish higher education institutions being reviewed over a four-year period.

### **Conclusions and judgement within ELIR**

ELIR is an evidence-based method of peer review. Each ELIR team makes a judgement about the institution's management of academic standards and of the assurance and enhancement of the student learning experience. This judgement is expressed in the form of the level of confidence that can be placed in the institution's current and likely future management of these activities. Each ELIR team also provides a commentary on:

- i the effectiveness of the institution's management of the student learning experience
- ii the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for institution-led monitoring and review of quality and academic standards of awards, however and wherever delivered
- iii the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategic approach to quality enhancement.

### **ELIR reports**

From 2008-09, full and summary ELIR reports are produced and made available on the QAA website at [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk). The summary reports are aimed at an informed lay audience and are intended to promote wider engagement with ELIR outcomes.

## Enhancement-led Institutional Review

### University of Abertay Dundee

#### Introduction

1 This is the summary report of an Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) of the University of Abertay Dundee (the University) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). This summary is intended to promote the accessibility of the ELIR outcomes among a wider audience. The formal outcomes of ELIR are detailed within the full report which is produced in electronic format and is available on the QAA website at [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

#### ELIR method

2 The ELIR method was revised during 2007-08 following extensive consultation with the Scottish higher education sector, including engagement with student representative bodies, the Scottish Funding Council and the institutions themselves. Full detail on the method, which is intended to operate between 2008-09 and 2011-12, is set out in the *Enhancement-led institutional review handbook: Scotland (second edition) 2008* which is available on the QAA website.

3 The ELIR method focuses on three main areas: the management of the student learning experience; institution-led quality monitoring and review; and the strategic management of quality enhancement. Each ELIR begins with the institution's submission of a self-evaluative document (the Reflective Analysis) which provides the focus for the review. ELIR reports include an overarching judgement on the level of confidence which can be placed in the institution's management of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

#### ELIR team and visits

4 In line with the review method, the ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 8 and 9 February 2012 and the Part 2 visit took place in the week beginning 12 March 2012. The team comprised a group of peers: a student reviewer from a Scottish university; three senior academic reviewers drawn from across the UK; a senior academic international reviewer; and a coordinating reviewer with senior administrative experience from a Scottish university. The review was managed by an Assistant Director from QAA Scotland.

#### Background information about the institution

5 The University of Abertay Dundee has its origins in the Dundee Technical Institute which opened in 1888. The Dundee Institute of Technology, as it was known from 1988, applied for university title in 1992 and the University of Abertay Dundee was established in 1994. The academic structure of the University comprises the Dundee Business School; the Institute of Arts, Media and Computer Games; the School of Computing and Engineering Systems; the School of Contemporary Sciences; and the School of Social and Health Sciences. The University aims to contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of Scotland and the UK while developing areas of international excellence. The University has a small portfolio of collaborative activity with the majority of the University's collaborative programmes being delivered at local partner colleges. The University's main overseas partnership is with the Systematic Educational Group International (SEGi), Malaysia. In 2011-12 the University had an on-campus population of 5,111 students. 84 per cent of these were full-time undergraduate students, 7 per cent part-time undergraduate students, 7 per cent taught postgraduate students, and 2 per cent postgraduate research students.

#### Outcomes of the review

6 ELIR reports highlight areas of good practice and identify areas in which institutions should take action; in many cases the actions have been identified by institutions during their preparations for ELIR. Key outcomes from the University's ELIR report are set out here.

7 The University's processes for assuring quality and academic standards are robust, meet sector expectations and are applied consistently across the institution.

### **Areas of positive practice**

8 The full report highlights good practice at the University in a range of areas.

9 Student representation - the Students' Association is positive about its working relationship with the University and training for class representatives has been enhanced since the 2007 ELIR.

10 Induction - the University has strengthened its induction arrangements and has recently introduced the role of transition adviser to support students from local further education colleges in making the transition to the University. This is a new initiative which has positive potential.

11 Abertay Graduate Attributes - there are planned opportunities across the curriculum for students to develop graduate attributes and employability skills.

12 Student support - student support services are now co-located in the Library, providing a one-stop-shop facility. This has been beneficial in helping to increase the visibility and accessibility of the services for students.

13 The learning environment - the University has a coherent approach to developing the learning environment, and students are positive about the learning spaces and computing facilities. They are particularly positive about the University's virtual learning environment, which enables them to have easy offsite access to study resources.

14 Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching - the revision and relaunch of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education, which is now accredited by the Higher Education Academy, is a positive development for the University.

15 Quality Review - the University has effective quality assurance processes in place which meet sector expectations and are consistently applied. Of particular note is the range of activities the University provides to support preparation for Quality Review, which reflects good practice in developing staff understanding of and commitment to this process.

16 Collaborative provision - the University has developed a successful partnership review model which was used for the recent review of Adam Smith College.

17 Strategic Plan - the approach to learning and teaching as set out in the Strategic Plan 2011-15 is a positive development, with potential for enhancing the student learning experience and contributing to the development of a culture of quality enhancement.

18 National Enhancement Themes - positive engagement with the national Enhancement Themes has helped the University to embed graduate attributes across the curriculum and to develop more innovative forms of assessment.

### **Areas for development**

19 The University is asked to consider the areas summarised below.

20 Partnership with the Students' Association - work with the Students' Association to develop a more effective strategic partnership.

21 Student representation - find mechanisms to support student engagement with the representative system.

22 Student Services - ensure Student Services has sufficient capacity to cope with the planned growth and diversification of the student body.

- 23 Staff development - progress the development of the University's Staff Development and Training Framework as a matter of priority. The University is also asked to formalise the arrangement with the University of Dundee with regard to the Postgraduate Certificate of Higher Education Teaching.
- 24 Periodic review of support services - ensure there are appropriate mechanisms in place to review student and related central services on a regular basis.
- 25 Management information - progress work to address the difficulties in analysing the applications, progression and achievement of different student groups as a matter of priority.
- 26 Changes to programmes - produce guidance on the definitions of what constitutes a major and a minor change.
- 27 Collaborative provision - consider applying the successful review model used for the recent review of Adam Smith College across all collaborative partnerships.
- 28 Strategic Plan - ensure staff are provided with support to be able to interpret and operationalise at the school level the strategic objectives which are expressed as broad statements within the Strategic Plan.
- 29 Evaluation - ensure that there are mechanisms in place to enable evaluation of the effectiveness of school operational plans in delivering the University's strategic objectives in relation to teaching and learning.

### **Overarching confidence judgement**

- 30 The overarching judgement is set out in the full report as follows:

The findings of the ELIR indicate that there can be **confidence** in the University's current, and likely future, management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of the student learning experience it provides.

- 31 This is a positive judgement, indicating that the University has secure arrangements in place for managing academic standards and for assuring and enhancing the quality of the student experience.

### **Follow-up to the review**

- 32 In the ELIR method, institutions are asked to provide a formal, written response to the review one year after publication of their ELIR report. Institutions' responses are also discussed during annual meetings with senior staff from QAA Scotland. The final version of the institution's response is published on the QAA website.

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