

University of Abertay Dundee

Year-on response to the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)

October 2013

Preface

One year after publication of their ELIR report, QAA Scotland asks institutions to provide a year-on response to ELIR. These year-on responses are written in the institution's own words and are published on the QAA website. Guidance on the content and structure of the response is provided by QAA Scotland.

The responses should focus on the action the institution has taken following the review and should include consideration of the effectiveness of that action. It is also recognised that ELIR reports highlight good practice and institutions are encouraged to comment on key areas of activity relating to good practice that they have prioritised since the ELIR.

The year-on response provides a focus for the annual ELIR discussion that is held closest to the anniversary of the publication of the ELIR report. The responses also provide a key source of information to inform regular reporting to the Scottish Funding Council.

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YEAR-ON RESPONSE TO THE ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

1 Introduction

The University of Abertay-Dundee took part in ELIR in February and March 2012. The final full and summary reports were published by the QAA in August 2012 and contained the overall recommendation that there could be confidence in the University's current and likely future management of academic standards of its awards and the quality of the student learning experience it provides.

The Summary report on the University's Enhancement-Led Institutional Review identified eleven 'Areas for Development' (paragraphs 19-29 of the summary report refer). The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) received the full and summary ELIR reports for consideration in early 2012/2013, and agreed that the areas for development identified in paragraphs 26

(programme changes) & 27 (partnership review) of the summary report would be directly progressed as QA issues under its remit, whilst the other development areas would be progressed as QE issues under the remit of the Quality Enhance Committee (QEC).

The QA Committee established a Working Group to consider the issue of changes to programmes, and remitted the issue of partnership review to its Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee. The QE Committee established a number of Working Groups to discuss student partnership and representation issues, and the periodic review of support services.

A Progress report on these issues was received by the University Senate and was endorsed as the basis for this ELIR year-on report on 3rd July 2013. Some revisions were made subsequently to reflect comments received on the draft report and the final version will be considered and endorsed by the University Senate on 9th October and by Court on 16th October 2013 as agreed with the Scottish Funding Council.

Note: During a review of Senate committees during the current session, and drawing on the results of internal debates informed by a number of factors including the ELIR, the decision was taken during 2012/2013 to form a new Teaching & Learning Committee of Senate that will incorporate the work of both the existing QA and QE Committees of Senate from 2013/2014.

2 Response to ELIR 2012

The following sections identify the main areas for development and relevant paragraph in the ELIR Summary report and provides a report on progress in the year following the publication of the full ELIR report.

2.1 Partnership with the Students' Association

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

The Head of Student Services and the President of the Students' Association worked together to provide input to the national debate on the development of the sparqs Student Partnership Agreement and its recommendations. Discussions have taken place on the development of a local SPA, and these involved senior staff and student representatives (the outgoing and newly elected student Presidents and Vice-President – the latter is continuing in post).

At the time of writing a draft agreement is undergoing formal consideration by the Student Representative Council of the Students' Association. The University and Students' Association Representatives identified academic feedback, student representation, employability and the HEAR, student

experience, and academic resources as the key areas for partnership working. After the student consultation on the detail of the draft agreement is complete, Senate will be invited to endorse the SPA early in session 2013/2014.

2.2 Student Engagement with the representative system

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

The Student Partnership Agreement discussions have also joined up with those on the operation of the student representation system at the University. Both the University and the Students' Association are keen to move away from a representative system that is primarily engaged with non-academic matters towards a partnership engaged with teaching and learning issues.

At its meeting in May, the Quality Enhancement Committee of the University discussed a paper put forward by the Students' Association's President on the student representative system. The proposal included a number of recommendations which were accepted in principle as encapsulating the desired direction of travel for the development of the student representative system. Subsequent discussion between the University and the Students' Association have developed to the extent that an additional post (the Democratic Support and Coordination Officer) has been funded and it is expected that each School will appoint a student 'super-Rep' with a clear responsibility to meet with Class Reps in his or her School in order to take forward their views to both the School Board and the Students' Association's Student Representative Council. The 'super-Rep' will receive appropriate training and a stipend. The Students' Association will also establish a number of Committees and the 'super-Reps' will be expected to play a leading role in helping to shape the student-voice on educational, welfare, and community issues. When the Student Representative Council and Senate have endorsed the final proposals, it is anticipated that new structures will be put in place for Academic Year 2014/2015.

2.3 Student Services capacity

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

At the time of the ELIR the University was experiencing a period of rapid expansion in numbers which led to the key strategic consideration for the University being the considerable pressures that this placed on staff supporting students. One year on, these pressures are diminishing, whilst future strategic issues and plans are focused more on supporting the

diversification of the student body and the challenges and pressures which this will bring.

Other areas of strategic priority include the support needs of disabled students. The University's strategic approach to assessment and the academic calendar had the intended consequence of leading to an increase in the number of formal examinations, which in turn had an unintended impact on those students with special needs and those staff tasked to provide support for them during examinations. A review of the Assessment strategy will be led by the Director of Teaching & Learning Enhancement through the Teaching & Learning Committee during 2013/2014.

The annual review of student services (see the response under issue 24 below) will provide the opportunity for strategic issues to do with capacity to be highlighted and proposed solutions to be considered. Further, the Head of Student Services is in discussion with the Vice-Principal (Academic) about a new model for student pastoral and academic support. This review will be completed early in 2013/2014 at which point firm proposals will be made to the University Executive on any capacity issues identified, clearly linked to strategic priorities.

2.4 Staff Development and Training framework

Paragraph 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.

The main ELIR report identified that the Staff Development and Training Framework had a target approval date of January 2012. This date was not met and the ELIR team was assured that this was being given a high degree of priority by the University. Following the ELIR the University has continued to make progress. The University Executive have accepted, in principle, a proposal to develop a comprehensive CPD Framework for teaching and learning during 2013/2014 which would incorporate a revised Pg Cert in Higher Education Teaching. The CPD framework would be aligned with all four descriptors of the UKPSF and HEA accreditation would be sought. It is timely that the current Pg Cert in HE Teaching is scheduled for re-accreditation by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in August 2014 thus providing a helpful deadline for the development of a new CPD Framework at the end of 2013/2014.

The University recognises the ELIR team's concern around the lack of a formal MoA with Dundee University to guarantee the provision of certain modules enabling staff to complete a Pg Cert Higher Education Teaching

award at the University. The two universities in Dundee have an excellent working relationship, and regular meetings take place with regard to the Pg Cert provision. The universities have agreed a selection of modules that will be available to students studying the Pg Cert during the current session 2013/2014, however, the University's intention has always been that these modules formed part of a flexible CPD package for staff that might be subject to change, particularly in light of the ongoing development of a CPD Framework reported above, so that the University would also wish to retain flexibility of potentially offering provision in collaboration with other HEIs. For these reasons, the Universities would rather not enter into a longer term formal and potentially limiting relationship at this point in time.

2.5 Support Services periodic review arrangements

Paragraph 24 Periodic review of support services - ensure there are appropriate mechanisms in place to review student and related central services on a regular basis.

The Chairs of the Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement Committees formed a Working Group to develop a response to this issue. The Working Group met on 21st January 2013, and agreed that work should be undertaken to consider the existing support service annual reports, to reflect on their format and content and any guidance that might be required in order to ensure that these would provide a basis for a periodic Support Services Review before the next ELIR in 2015/2016.

A template for support services annual reporting has been developed and discussed with the Heads (or their representative) of the key student-facing services (Estates & Campuses, Information Services, and Student Services). In principle, it has been agreed that Annual Reports will be provided by 30th June each year to form an evidence base for a first periodic review of Support Services in AY 2015/2016.

Monitoring Support Services Periodic Review will be incorporated into the work of the existing Quality Review Task Group; the outcome of annual review will be reported to the Funding Council through the annual statement on internal-led Review prepared for the Funding Council.

2.6 Management information for applications, progression and achievement of different student groups

Paragraph 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.

At the time of the ELIR the University recognized that the development of an

enhanced Management Information System would enable it to be more sophisticated in the analysis of the progression and attainment of its diverse student populations. A Working Group on this issue was in abeyance at the time of the ELIR, and the ELIR report identified this issue as a matter of priority for the University.

The Working Group has now been re-established, under the leadership of the newly appointed (October 2013) Director of Strategic Planning, and tasked with determining, by early 2014, whether or not the existing staff expertise and resource can deliver differential cohort analysis¹. The University will ensure that its Management Information system is providing data that is fit for purpose in this regard by the end of 2013/2014.

Complementary developments are also underway as the new EvaSys software supports the collection and immediate differential analysis of student feedback. It is hoped this will provide a rich seam for annual report authors to draw on alongside data on student performance and achievement. School Teaching and Learning Committees are considering how the data it provides could be used.

The Director of Strategic Planning will have a key role in developing the University's strategic use of management Information over 2013/2014.

2.7 Programme changes and the provision of guidance on major and minor changes

Paragraph 26 Changes to programmes - produce guidance on the definitions of what constitutes a major and a minor change.

A Working Group to develop a response to this issue met and reported to an early meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee in 2012/2013. The Committee agreed a definition of major change as

one where the impact of a change by itself, or cumulatively with other changes, impact on stage or programme outcomes such that a revision to these (programme outcomes) is required to ensure that they accurately reflect the curriculum content.

and also approved outline pro formas for use by School Teaching and Learning Committees when considering module and programme changes.

These pro formas for module and programme changes were submitted to and agreed by the Committee for implementation by School Boards during 2012/2013.

¹ Both by year of entry and those characteristics that best represent the diversity of the student population

In a parallel development, the Committee also reviewed the UAD Programme Specification with a view to providing reassurance that the primary programme descriptor for the University was fit for purpose. The revised UAD Programme Specification has also been approved for implementation by School Boards, and it has been agreed that these specifications would be renewed on an annual basis in future to ensure their currency, rather than on a periodic basis through the Quality Review periodic review process as had previously been the case.

2.8 Collaborative Partnership periodic review arrangements

Paragraph 27 Collaborative provision - consider applying the successful review model used for the recent review of Adam Smith College across all collaborative partnerships.

The Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee remitted this issue for discussion between the Director of Partnerships, the Quality Review Task Group leader, and the Directors of Academic Programmes, to agree a cycle for reviews. After discussion, it was noted that the Adam Smith College Partnership Review had two distinct parts: (i) a Strategic Partnership Review (SPR), which had considered the strategic alignment of the relationship between the two institutions, and established the desire to continue with the institutional relationship, and the nature of revisions required to the Memorandum of Agreement between the partners; and (ii) a Partnership Quality Review (PQR) that had considered the student experience and the quality management of the delivery of the University's awards in partnership with the College. It was agreed that this model had worked well and that a full-cycle of SPR and PQR for all collaborative partners should be put in place.

A proposed schedule of reviews was endorsed by the Quality Assurance Committee during 2012/2013. Following the re-organization of the College Sector in Scotland, and the creation of new Regional Colleges, existing agreements will need to be updated, and it is expected that the review process will facilitate this over the cycle leading to the next ELIR.

2.9 Supporting staff to interpret broad Strategic Planning objectives

Paragraph 28 Strategic Plan - ensure staff are provided with support to be able to interpret and operationalize at the school level the strategic objectives which are expressed as broad statements within the Strategic Plan.

Following the ELIR, the University recognizes that there is more work to be done, particularly in supporting staff to interpret and operationalize strategic objectives at the School level. A number of Seminars around key themes in the Strategic Plan will be open to staff through, for example, the regular QE Seminar Series during 2013/2014. These will provide staff with the

opportunity to explore links and develop their own understanding of them. However, the roles of Heads of Schools and Services continue to be key in this regard. These senior staff report regularly on progress towards strategic objectives to both the University Court and Senate and are a key means by which these bodies are reassured that staff are receiving the necessary level of support to enable the strategic mission and vision to be understood at all levels .

The process by which the University's Strategic Plan is implemented is well understood having been in use for a number of years now. The Strategic Plan is approved by Court and Schools and Services are tasked to respond to the strategic imperatives identified in it and to develop operational plans reflecting these. Schools of the University have developed operational plans, derived from the Strategic Plan, and these are intended to provide a more detailed elaboration of the Strategic Plan. Heads of School and Services are responsible for ensuring that these operational plans are disseminated to staff. Court receives regular updates on progress against these plans. Individual staff members, through the University's Pathways career review scheme, are set objectives by managers who are tasked ensure that these are aligned with the School's operational plans so that this affords another forum for managers to make explicit the links that exist between strategy, operational planning, and individual objectives.

Following several key appointments in 2012/2013, a new Leadership Team is now in place. Communicating and renewing the strategic vision and mission of the University to staff now has been given a high priority. In 2013/2014, the University has appointed a Director of Strategic Planning and this will further enhance the existing capacity in this regard. Senior staff have a collective responsibility to ensure that operational plans are clearly linked to the strategic plans of the University, and that these are properly explained to middle-management. Senior Management away-days, extended management Conferences, and middle-management briefings will be part of a general package supporting senior and middle-management to operationalize the Strategic Plan. Line-managers of staff across the University have the responsibility to ensure that these links are articulated during the Pathways objective setting process and that understanding is supported through appropriate development opportunities, including those provided by the internal QE Seminar Series, for example.

2.10 Mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of operational plans in delivering the University's strategic plans for teaching and learning

Paragraph 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.

Annual reporting mechanisms are in place to ensure that progress in implementing operational plans is measured, and Court receives periodic updates on these. Key Performance Indicators are reported to both the Finance and Corporate Performance Committee of Court and Court itself on two separate occasions each year. The University recognizes that evaluating the progress that has been made is a challenging task, but believes that the University is learning to be more self-critical and reflective, making more effective use of KPIs.

3 Good practice

The University welcomes, and is committed to supporting, the areas of good practice identified in the ELIR report. These included:

Student representation – and the working relationship between the Students' Association and the University

Induction arrangements – including the role of transition support officer to support students making the transition from local FE Colleges to the University

Abertay Graduate Attributes – and the provision of planned opportunities across the curriculum for students to develop graduate attributes including employability skills

Student Support Services – the increased visibility and accessibility of the service following its re-location to a one-stop shop in the University library

The Learning Environment – the University has a coherent approach to developing the learning environment and students are positive about the learning spaces and facilities including the VLE

The Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching – the re-launch of the Pg Cert and its accreditation by the HEA was seen as a positive development

Quality Review processes – the processes were seen as effective and in particular the range of activities to support staff engagement in and understanding of the purpose of Quality Review

Collaborative provision partnership review mode – a successful partnership review model had been developed which the University was encouraged to roll out

Strategic Plan 2011-2015: the new approach to Teaching and Learning enhancement set out in the plan was seen as a positive development

National Enhancement Themes – the University’s positive engagement with enhancement themes was noted as helping the University to embed graduate attributes and to develop more innovative forms of assessment

The University will endeavour to retain and build on then areas of good practice identified whilst keeping the issues raised by the report under review. The University will continue to engage positively with the work of QAA Scotland and with the national Enhancement Themes.

4 Conclusion

The Teaching & Learning Committee, under the leadership of the Vice-Principal (Academic) will continue to monitor the progress and effectiveness of actions in responding to ELIR. Progress will be shared as necessary with the Teaching & Learning Committee and with the QAA Scotland at annual discussion meetings.

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