



University of Edinburgh

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

March 2017

Preface

One year after publication of their ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to submit a Follow-up Report to QAA Scotland. These reports are also submitted to the Scottish Funding Council. Follow-up Reports are written in the institution's own words and require to be endorsed by the institution's Governing Body prior to publication on the QAA website. Guidance on the content and structure is provided by QAA Scotland.

Institutions are asked to focus on the action they have taken since the review and to include an indication of the effectiveness of that action. ELIR reports highlight positive practice as well as areas for development, and institutions are encouraged to comment on key areas of activity relating to good practice that they have prioritised since the ELIR.

Follow-up Reports are discussed with institutions as part of the ELIR annual discussion meetings. They also form the basis of a follow-up event which involves institutions that were reviewed around the same time coming together to explore the ways they have responded to their ELIR outcomes. This activity is intended to emphasise the enhancement-led nature of the review method.



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

The University of Edinburgh Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) 2015/16 Follow-up Report – 3 March 2017

Introduction

The University of Edinburgh welcomed the ELIR reports and the successful outcome was communicated widely to staff and students, including through the University's website¹. A themed approach is being taken to implementation as part of an integrated planning process in order to ensure alignment with existing learning and teaching priorities and Assistant/Vice Principal roles and responsibilities. Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) is responsible for overseeing actions in response to the ELIR reports. Learning and Teaching Policy Group also receives regular reports on actions and discusses and advises on matters in line with its strategic remit. Management of the overall response process is being undertaken by the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance. Reports on progress to SQAC have been made every three months during the first year following the ELIR outcome, and will continue to be made every six months thereafter. The aims are to make substantial progress during the first year, to ensure all actions are completed by the end of year three and that, as far as possible, there is evaluation of their impact.

The five themes and their leads are: (1) assessment and feedback (Assistant Principal Assessment and Feedback, Professor Susan Rhind); (2) personal tutor system (Assistant Principal Academic Support, Professor Alan Murray); (3) postgraduate research student experience (Assistant Principal Researcher Development, Professor Jeremy Bradshaw); (4) staff engagement in learning and teaching – workload allocation models (Vice-Principal People and Culture, Professor Jane Norman); and (5) student representation – college and school level (Tanya Lubicz-Nawrocka, Edinburgh University Students' Association, hereafter referred to as the Students' Association, and the College Deans of Quality, Professor Robert Mason, Dr Gordon McDougall and Professor Jeremy Bradshaw). The University was also encouraged to progress existing work on student data dashboards and this is being led by Barry Neilson (Director of Student Systems).

Theme leads are responsible for developing and implementing a plan of work to address areas for development and for providing progress reports to SQAC. The following paragraphs are an overview of the information gathered from these reports.

The Students' Association Vice President Academic Affairs is a member of SQAC and has the opportunity to comment on progress reports and was sent a draft version of this report. The Students' Association have been involved in follow-up activity and are leading one of the themes.

Assessment and Feedback

A broad and balanced approach has been taken to addressing the areas for further development relating to assessment and feedback identified in the ELIR reports, recognising that the National

¹ <http://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/quality/elir> and <http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff/teaching-matters/features/institutional-review>

Student Survey (NSS) is an important indicator of success but not the only one that should be considered.

The ELIR reports encouraged progressing with planned further analysis of NSS free text answers. In order to do this, a methodology for thematic qualitative analysis of NSS data was developed, initially using three schools as pilots. This has been expanded with half of all Schools now complete and the remaining due by the end of March. The Student Surveys Unit also made available to staff via an internal wiki a more quantitative analysis of free text comments in October 2016. Key findings from these analyses specific to assessment and feedback, highlight issues of perceived fairness, lack of transparency and a need to better manage expectations. These themes are now forming the basis of discussion and prompting action among the Directors of Teaching Network and through individual discussions with Schools, the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) and the Assistant Principal (Assessment and Feedback). IAD carried out a project exploring student perceptions of the NSS question set which has informed the development of our NSS processes. In addition, the September 2016 meeting of the Directors of Teaching Network, led by an external consultant, focussed on NSS results and prompted attendees to consider and review their action plan. As an alternative source of information, an analysis of the 2014/15 and 2015/16 External Examiners' reports was carried out which revealed many more commendations than suggestions or issues for the topics 'student feedback' and 'assessment methods'. Text analysis highlighted the constructive nature of much of the feedback and the clear efforts being made to improve, whilst amongst the small number of issues raised, the theme of inconsistency was highlighted. This mirrors the theme of inconsistency highlighted by students in NSS free text comments previously identified that is being discussed with Schools through the mechanisms described above.

The ELIR reports asked the University to work with students in Schools to address matters raised and to understand specific issues and needs. This is being undertaken at a School level, using both local information and information provided through University-level initiatives. A University-wide approach to course enhancement questionnaires was implemented in 2016/17 and the core question set includes the question 'Feedback so far has been helpful and informative'. It is anticipated that a reasonably complete picture of semester 1 performance in relation to this metric across Schools will be available by mid-semester 2. This will then inform further conversations between individual Schools and the Assistant Principal (Assessment and Feedback). During semester 1 2016/17 mid-course feedback was introduced, giving students the opportunity to give early feedback on courses and for immediate issues to be addressed. An evaluation of this exercise revealed positive feedback in general and no immediate concerns with assessment and feedback.

The Leading Enhancement in Assessment and Feedback (LEAF) project continues to work closely with Schools to explore students' experiences of assessment and feedback. To date, 24 programmes across 20 Schools (spanning all three Colleges) have been audited and a further three audits are planned for 2016/17. Follow up action continues with several Schools and key themes emerging from audits have been reported to the Senatus Learning and Teaching Committee² (LTC). The key themes informing ongoing practice are: over-assessment and deadline log-jams; inconsistency in assessment and teaching; agency/assessment literacy; and the importance of aligned authentic assessment and a sense of place and belonging. As the LEAF project progresses, we are learning more about the experiences of Edinburgh students and the issues that affect them. Solutions that help LEAF programmes develop are likely to be adaptable to other programmes and can help develop support that is local and discipline-based and therefore more likely to have longer-term 'ownership' at programme and discipline level. Furthermore, both good practice that is identified and the solutions themselves can be shared to the benefit of the wider University community.

² <http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/agendapapers20160921.pdf> (Paper Q)

In relation to the ELIR recommendation to implement feedback policy and practice in a clear and consistent manner, the Assessment and Feedback Enhancement Group has been formalised as a Task Group of LTC³ with responsibility for reviewing the Feedback Standards and Guiding Principles⁴ to support the consistent implementation of assessment and feedback policy (as prominently outlined in the Learning and Teaching Strategy⁵ published in January 2017) and practice (as outlined in the Assessment regulations). It is anticipated that this exercise will be completed by September 2017 and will result in the creation of an interactive resource with case studies. In relation to Taught Assessment Regulation 16⁶ and the 15 day feedback turnaround deadline, in January 2017 LTC agreed that, from semester 2 2016/17, Schools would no longer be required to report on turnaround times at an institutional level, but increased emphasis would be placed on local oversight, monitoring of turnaround times and ownership. Heads of School must ensure that arrangements are in place to monitor and address any problems regarding feedback turnaround times.

In order to promote the importance of the provision of formative feedback opportunities that help student progress and consistent with Taught Assessment Regulation 15, a series of presentations at College and School level continue to highlight the importance of formative feedback experiences and provision of opportunities for students to gain skills in assessment literacy. The balance of formative and summative feedback is also explored through the LEAF project audits.

With reference to reflecting on the positive experiences of assessment and feedback reported by Online Distance Learning (ODL) students, a high level agreement has been made to move towards the increased usage of online submission of assessment and return of feedback and marks where appropriate and the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CAHSS) implemented it at the start of 2016/17 through its electronic submission of assessment and return of feedback project. Additionally, the Learning and Teaching Strategy outlines a commitment "... to the creative use of digital technologies in our teaching and assessment where appropriate whether online, blended or on-campus". The Assessment and Feedback Enhancement Group continues to receive updates on the CAHSS project. Furthermore, opportunities to share practice will continue through the Directors of Teaching Network and the Assessment and Feedback Enhancement Working Group.

The University's Assessment and Feedback Enhancement Group has discussed how to approach the actions identified in the ELIR reports relating to information provided to students about marking schemes and grade descriptors. An initial stage of action is underway involving gathering examples from across the Colleges and analysing available sources of student feedback for relevant responses.

The work undertaken as part of this theme aims to result in: students and staff having a sound mutual understanding of standards and expectations in assessment and feedback; increased understanding at School-level of students' issues and needs in relation to assessment and feedback; a continued small percentage year on year increase in NSS and course enhancement questionnaire assessment and feedback question scores; and continued positive comments on assessment and feedback from External Examiners.

Personal Tutor System

A holistic approach has been taken to addressing the areas for further development of the Personal Tutor (PT) system identified in the ELIR reports, with feedback from a wide variety of sources being considered. Results from the Edinburgh Student Experience Survey, NSS and the Postgraduate

³ http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/16_november_2016_-_agenda_and_papers_final.pdf (Paper I)

⁴ http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/feedback_standards_guiding_principles.pdf

⁵ http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/learning_teaching_strategy.pdf

⁶ <http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/taughtassessmentregulations.pdf>

Taught Experience Survey have been considered along with the PT-related results of the Teaching Award nomination analysis⁷ and an external benchmarking exercise. Additionally, consultative meetings on the measures that have been taken to encourage excellence in teaching and student support have been held with every School. The PT system was one of the less frequently raised issues by staff at these meetings, however, staff noted that the University could do more to understand and manage students' expectations regarding the PT system.

A number of actions have been taken to revisit the way in which Schools are implementing the PT system. The PT Oversight Group (a sub-committee of SQAC) have agreed actions in relation to: minimising and effectively managing the changing of PTs; sharing good practice examples identified through the Teaching Award nomination analysis; and monitoring of free text comments relating to PT/tutee contact. The Group have concluded that more robust and granular internal survey data is required if meaningful conclusions are to be drawn and/or judgements made in regard to the relative performance of both Schools and individual PTs.

The Learning and Teaching Policy Group have agreed to: (1) consider how Schools/Colleges/University can communicate to students regarding what to expect from their PT, and how the PT role relates to the broader academic and pastoral support arrangements; and (2) to explore the models of student support teams operating in different Schools, and the way that they interact with the PT systems in the Schools, and assess whether some models are more effective than others. An agreed set of activities is planned in order to progress these actions, including a review of website information and consultation with a virtual student panel. Three non-mandatory proposed enhancements to the PT system to help support staff in their roles as PTs have been discussed and broadly supported by the PT Oversight Group and the Senior Tutor Network: guidance on holding meaningful meetings; pre-arrival questionnaires; and PTs working in a supportive group (PT group practices).

In response to consistent feedback from staff about the different needs of ODL students and the extensive existing support provided, the PT Oversight Group approved a pilot approach in the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine for postgraduate taught students. In December 2016 the Senior Tutor Network was asked to consider appropriate ways of supporting ODL students within the PT system framework and it was agreed that the Assistant Principal (Academic Support) would consult further in order to establish the needs of ODL students in relation to the PT system to inform any developments and a meeting of key stakeholders has been organised for March 2017.

The ELIR reports outlined the value of the University providing additional clarification for students around the aims of the system and providing students with information on alternative avenues of support in order to align expectations of students and staff. A review of the Academic and Pastoral Support Policy⁸ and the School Personal Tutoring Statement template⁹ took place in advance of academic session 2016/17 in order to provide greater clarity on expectations of both staff and students. The School Personal Tutoring Statement and the My Personal Tutor webpage¹⁰ now include a prominently placed standard paragraph on the aims of the PT system. Students are provided with information on alternative avenues of student support through many different mechanisms, for example, the student website¹¹ and programme and course handbooks¹². The

⁷ https://issuu.com/eusa/docs/teaching_awards_report_2015_16_issu

⁸ http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/academic_pastoral_support.pdf

⁹ <http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/schoolpersonaltutoringstatementtemplate.docx>

¹⁰ <http://www.ed.ac.uk/students/academic-life/personal-tutor>

¹¹ <http://www.ed.ac.uk/students>

¹² <http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/progcoursehandbooks.pdf>

Personal Tutor staff website¹³ was extensively redeveloped for September 2016. This website aims to support staff in their PT system roles and was redeveloped using staff feedback. The Academic and Pastoral Support Policy contains information on briefing, training and development and notes: "All Schools will offer a training session for Personal Tutors and Student Support Teams at the start of each academic session". Since the roll out of the Student Mental Health training programme this academic year, 127 staff have attended training. There are another eight sessions planned for this semester, and the programme will continue in 2017/18.

In the ELIR reports, the University was encouraged to continue to support staff and students to embed peer learning and support and to continue working with the Students' Association to deliver appropriate training for peers. There is growing engagement with Peer Learning and Support activities and the commitment for development is outlined in the Edinburgh University Students' Association and University Student Engagement Statement and the Learning and Teaching Strategy. LTC discussed peer learning and support at its January 2017 meeting and identified a number of practical issues to take forward. The Spring 2017 meeting of the Senior Tutor Network will take the form of a show and tell, highlighting the successes and challenges with peer learning and support systems across the University.

Work on the enhancement of the Personal Tutor system aims to ensure that staff and students are clear on the aims of the system, their respective roles and that expectations are met. Progress will continue to be monitored through student survey feedback and opportunities to develop further sources of feedback will be explored.

Postgraduate Research Student Experience

The University is addressing two of the areas for further development from the ELIR reports relating to the postgraduate research (PGR) student experience through the creation of a programme of work titled the Excellence in Doctoral Research and Career Development programme.

Aligning with the ELIR reports' findings that the University should review the effectiveness and regularity of research supervisor training, one of the strands of the programme is Supervisor Training and Support which aims to:

- Enhance the content of compulsory supervisor briefings by sharing practice across Colleges and ensuring updated database of resources;
- Identify, design and pilot additional optional training for supervisors, including facilitation guides for Schools to use;
- Consult with Schools and Colleges to design an online toolkit to support supervising at a distance;
- Explore ways in which to ensure accurate, central recording of supervision training; and
- Identify ways to recognise and share practice of excellence in supervision.

The ELIR reports also asked the University to analyse the needs and experience of PGR students (School, College and University) to ensure effective support (particularly in the context of increasing numbers) and clarify where students go for further support. Another one of the strands of the programme, Mentorship and Wellbeing, aims to:

- Explore the PGR mentor function across the University and identify a number of possible models. This involves benchmarking current practice, scoping and defining different models.

¹³ <http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff/student-support/student-support-website>

- Benchmark and carry out a gap analysis of support for PGR wellbeing across the University.

In line with the ELIR reports' recommendation to ensure that PGR students who teach are properly trained and supported, the Senatus Researcher Experience Committee has set up a Task Group to review the Code of Practice on Tutoring and Demonstrating, which sets out the University's training and support arrangements for tutors and demonstrators. The Group has produced a new draft document to replace the Code¹⁴, on which it is seeking views from stakeholders in February/March 2017.

In relation to the recommendation that PGR students who teach should be made aware of career development resources available through the IAD, PGR students who teach can consult the IAD webpages for Tutors and Demonstrators for information on workshops, routes to Higher Education Academy accreditation and relevant resources¹⁵. IAD also launched a new brochure¹⁶ for PGR students in 2016/17 which gives a comprehensive overview of professional and personal development opportunities available.

The ELIR reports encourage the University to effectively communicate and consistently implement the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students. Including a reference to the Code is now a requirement of the Programme and Course Handbook Policy. The Code is currently undergoing a review to ensure that its purpose is clear, that information is contained within the appropriate place and to minimise duplication of information. Two focus groups with students and staff have been held to guide the development of the Code. Consideration will then be given to communicating and implementing the updated version of the Code.

Methods for monitoring progress with the recommendations relating to the postgraduate research student experience will be determined as implementation and evaluation plans develop for the programme and Task Group.

Staff Engagement in Learning and Teaching – Workload Allocation Models

The ELIR reports encouraged the University to progress with plans to develop existing workload allocation models to recognise in a consistent way contribution to priority learning and teaching areas and the Academic Work Allocation Models – Development Principles and Operational Guidance has since been agreed and published¹⁷. In terms of implementation, Heads of College were contacted in early January 2017 to alert them to the publication of the Guidance. They were asked to encourage individual Heads of School to take this forward, and were reminded of the responsibility Heads of School have for developing and maintaining appropriate models for their respective Schools which are in line with the principles set out in the Guidance and that reflect the work undertaken by the School. Heads of College were also asked to cascade to Heads of School a reminder of the need to consult with affected staff as part of the process of introducing a new work allocation model or revising an existing one. Feedback on the Guidance will be sought from Schools.

Related developments which demonstrate the University's holistic commitment to enhancing the student experience include work on: annual review; continuing professional development; reward and recognition; recruitment; and capability.

¹⁴ <http://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/projects/reviewing-the-code-of-practice-for-tutoring-and-de>

¹⁵ <http://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/learning-teaching/staff/tutors-demonstrators>

¹⁶ http://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/iad/Postgraduate/PhD_researchers/PGR_Researcher_IAD_Brochure_onlinev2_01617.pdf

¹⁷ http://www.docs.csg.ed.ac.uk/HumanResources/Policies/Academic_Work_Allocation_Models_Development_Principles_and_Operational_Guidance.pdf

Student Representation – College and School Level

A number of recommendations were made in relation to enhancing student representation at College and School level and these have been taken forward through joint working between the Students' Association and the University, namely the College Deans of Quality. The ELIR reports encouraged the University and the Students' Association to continue working in partnership to ensure that there is more effective student representation at College and School level.

In relation to progressing work to promote and implement more effective representation at College level, since January 2016 the Students' Association has worked with the three Colleges to clarify their committee structures and which College level committees need student representation. The Students' Association effectively recruited student representatives for each of these College level committees for 2016/17 and produced a College Committee Student Member Handbook¹⁸ in partnership with the Colleges to prepare these student representatives for their role. A meeting was scheduled for mid-February 2017 to check in with College committee student members to assess the effectiveness of these new processes and support mechanisms. Additionally, the Students' Association and College Deans of Quality have been exploring new roles for one elected student College Rep per College to be implemented in the future. The Students' Association has drafted a general role description for the position. In response to various communications with the Colleges, the Students' Association has revised the timetable for implementing the College Rep positions to allow time to be taken to ensure that all stakeholders have had an opportunity to consider how these new positions can be tailored to support the needs and expectations of the Colleges and Students' Association. Furthermore, the payment rate (which would be paid by the Students' Association) also needs to be confirmed. Therefore, the roles will not be included during the March 2017 Students' Association elections, but the aim is to resolve issues for subsequent years so that the new College Rep role is as effective as possible.

The ELIR reports asked the University to review the processes for appointing students to School committees and to provide more effective training and preparation for the roles, ensuring that staff in Schools understand the student roles and are able to support students to contribute effectively. In 2015/16, the Students' Association received responses from School Directors of Quality to establish which School level committees include student representation and how they are chosen and supported by the School. The information gathered shows wide variation in the recruitment processes and committees which include student representation. In many cases, elected School Convenors or Class Reps become the student representatives on School-level committees. In 2016/17, the Students' Association produced a Student Representative Handbook¹⁹ and provided training to student representatives. 100% of all elected School Convenors (a total of 55 individuals) participated in the Students' Association's in-person training for their role. 73% of Class Reps (a total of 1,306 individuals) successfully completed the Students' Association's online basic training for their role, an increase on last year's high engagement after the move to online training. This year, a record number of Class Reps and School Reps have also written a blog post (totalling over 600 thus far) to share their work as a student representative, and copies of these anonymised blog posts are shared with the wider student body via the Students' Association's School pages²⁰. In addition, the Students' Association has been working with administrative and support staff to hone and improve the processes of recruitment and registration for Class Reps and has produced guidance for administrative and support staff²¹ and guidance for academic staff²² on these processes. The

¹⁸ https://issuu.com/eusa/docs/college_committee_student_member_ha

¹⁹ https://issuu.com/eusa/docs/student_representative_handbook_201

²⁰ https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/representation/your_school/

²¹ <https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/representation/studentrepresentation/staffinformation/supportstaff/>

²² <https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/representation/studentrepresentation/staffinformation/academicstaff/>

Students' Association held meetings in August 2016 and January 2017 to work in partnership with support staff to share the new guidance and best practices. The Students' Association will continue to work to train and support large numbers of student representatives to be effective in their role within each School.

The ELIR reports noted that there would be benefit in the University disseminating the outcomes of the 2014/15 Postgraduate Programme Review of Online Distance Learning Postgraduate Taught Programmes in the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine. The recommendation relating to student representation from this review and the work of the 2015/16 SQAC Task Group on Student Representation for Distance Learners have been disseminated and have led to revised guidance for Student-Staff Liaison Committees²³ as well as all-student and all-staff emails about the purpose and mechanisms of student representation. The recommendations from this Task Group will continue to be communicated and implemented. In addition, the Students' Association will continue to review how well it supports and engages ODL student representatives.

Student Data Dashboard

The ELIR reports encouraged the University to progress with the work of the Student Systems Roadmap and, in particular, the student data dashboard. The first phase of the staff-facing dashboard (undergraduate) has been delivered successfully²⁴ and the project has closed. Positive feedback has been received from stakeholders, particularly with reference to the ability to provide a detailed level of information to a large proportion of both academic and administrative staff. Feedback is being collated and analysed, and analytics on the use of the dashboards is being collected. The development was commended in the recent annual review of student support services and is being used to support quality assurance and enhancement processes. Further iterations of the dashboard are planned dependent on funding.

Summary

This follow-up report outlines the actions taken by the University of Edinburgh to address the areas for development identified in the ELIR reports. The significant progress made is detailed and planning for areas still to be addressed is outlined. We are confident that our approach over the next three years will deliver enhancements to the student experience and that we will be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of these actions by the time of the next ELIR.

²³ http://www.edinburgh.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/student_staff_liaison_committees_principles.pdf

²⁴ <http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff/data-matters/student-dashboard>

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