



**University of Edinburgh**

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

**July 2022**

**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.



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## **The University of Edinburgh Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) 2020/21 Follow-up Report (July 2022)**

### **Introduction**

The University of Edinburgh welcomed the ELIR reports and communicated the successful outcome and the recommendations widely to staff and students. Earlier drafts of this report and the progress against the recommendations have been presented and discussed at meetings of the University Executive and the University Court in May and June. This final version requires endorsement by Court at its next meeting in October 2022.

The Action Plan, setting out the University's response to the ELIR recommendations, was approved by Senate in October 2021 and an ELIR Oversight Group established to provide direction and oversight of the actions. The ELIR Oversight Group is convened by the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance and the membership comprised of: Vice Principal Students; Edinburgh Students Association Vice President Education; Deputy Secretary Student Experience; Director of the Institute of Academic Development; Director of Strategic Change; and Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Academic Services. The ELIR Oversight Group formally reports to the University Executive, advising on progress and any concerns, and also provides regular updates to Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC).

The Action Plan takes a themed approach to the implementation of the ELIR recommendations in order to ensure alignment with existing learning and teaching priorities and senior leadership responsibility. Actions are grouped as follows:

- assessment and feedback;
- student support (the personal tutor system);
- strategy, growth and planning (encompassing the oversight and planning for growth of student numbers, and the strategic approach to the enhancement of learning and teaching);
- change management (and the pace of change);
- monitoring consistency of implementation of strategy, policy and practice (encompassing specifically oversight and implementation of policy and practice, and training for postgraduate research (PGR) students who teach);
- developing and promoting teaching excellence (encompassing the recognition and support for academic staff development, and promotion of academic staff based on teaching); and,
- attainment gap monitoring.

The Vice Principal Students and the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance held a series of meetings with each School/Deanery (between November 2021 and March 2022) to discuss the recommendations and implications for Schools. During the meetings, the School/Deanery Heads and key learning and teaching staff were invited to discuss the ELIR recommendations and the Action Plan, and discuss School level actions.

This report provides an update on progress to date against each of the themed recommendations. Two of the recommendations (relating to assessment and feedback and student support) were prioritised for action over the course of the academic year. We have made significant progress in relation to these two areas in terms of establishing an agreed approach that will take effect from the start of the coming academic year (2022/23).

## Assessment and feedback

The ELIR panel recommended that the University “*make demonstrable progress, within the next academic year, in prioritising the development of a holistic and strategic approach to the design and management of assessment and feedback.*” In response an Assessment & Feedback Task Group (co-convened by Professor Tina Harrison, Assistant Principal, and Dr Sabine Rolle, Dean for Learning and Teaching CAHSS, and reporting to the Curriculum Transformation Board) was established to take forward this work.

Following extensive research, external benchmarking and internal consultation throughout semester 1, the Task Group proposed a “*holistic and strategic approach to the design and management of assessment and feedback*” which was initially discussed at the 10<sup>th</sup> March 2022 Senate Education Committee and subsequently approved at the 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022 Senate Education Committee meeting. The overall approach (effective from the start of academic year 2022/23) comprises four key aspects:

- **Assessment and feedback principles.** The principles set out the baseline expectations for quality, ensuring a degree of consistency in assessment and feedback practice. The principles also signal to students what they can expect to experience with regards to assessment and feedback practice. The principles and priorities form a new assessment and feedback policy linked to the taught assessment regulations. Schools will be asked throughout academic year 2022/23 to map their practice against the principles, identify gaps and actions to address them. The principles are that, assessment and feedback should be:
  - i. Fit for purpose
  - ii. Inclusive, equitable and fair
  - iii. Reliable, robust and transparent
  - iv. Proportionate to amount and level of credit
  - v. Constructive, developmental and timely
  - vi. Make appropriate use of learning technologies
  - vii. Developed and implemented in conversation with students
  - viii. Overseen at programme level (to ensure adherence to the above)
- **Assessment and Feedback Priorities.** The principles set the baseline expectations, and the priorities set the strategic direction for enhancement, aligning with our Curriculum Transformation Programme. The priorities are forward-looking and aspirational, encouraging greater creativity in assessment practice. A recent Teaching Matters Blog, provides an overview of the principles and priorities: [Welcome to July & August L&T Enhancement Theme: Assessment and Feedback – Principles and Priorities – Teaching Matters blog](#)
- **Support/guidance for staff.** To support colleagues in implementing the assessment and feedback principles, and strategic priorities, we have launched a series of eight weekly Teaching Matters blogs that started early July. These address each of the core principles and priority themes, drawing on insight and best practice from within the university and further afield. We are in the process of establishing an Assessment and Feedback network to share and enhance practice, and will continue to make use

of the existing Directors of Teaching Network to provide ongoing guidance and support to colleagues.

- **Guidance for students.** To help students make the most of assessment and feedback, a student-facing guide will be produced explaining the assessment and feedback principles from a students' perspective and helping students to understand the assessment and feedback process and their role in it. The student guide will be co-created with the student interns that are working with the Curriculum Transformation Programme.

In relation to the subsequent recommendation about ensuring consistency in implementation of policy and practice, we are in the process of identifying agreed baseline indicators from which we can track implementation and success, which will be embedded in the School Quality Assurance reporting.

The ELIR Panel also recommended that *'The University should also progress with proposals for the establishment of a common marking scheme to ensure comparability of student assessment processes across Schools.'* Work is progressing on this recommendation for a single Common Marking Scheme with a preferred approach identified. However, further scoping work is required to explore the implications of a revised marking schema on the University's Assessment and Progression Tool (APT). Further consultation with staff is required to agree a new marking schema, but implementation will depend on any system changes required. Given the broader changes planned to the curriculum as part of the Curriculum Transformation Programme, it makes sense to align any marking schema changes with the timeline for the new curriculum. In the interim, the new assessment and feedback principles are aimed at ensuring that marking schema and criteria for assessment are made clearer to students.

## **Student Support**

Another key area highlighted by the ELIR Panel was student support, with the recommendation that *"The University should make demonstrable progress within the next academic year in respect of ensuring parity of experience for students and effective signposting to support services and delivery of an agreed and consistent baseline level of provision. As part of its approach, the University is asked to develop an effective mechanism to monitor consistency of implementation and allow it to evaluate the impact of these changes on the student experience."*

At the time of the ELIR review, the timeline for the implementation of the new student support approach was planned for academic year 2023/24. We were asked *"to reflect on whether the current timescale for implementation .... is sufficiently ambitious."* We did reflect on this and accelerated the timeline, which is on target for phased implementation across the University for new incoming students from September 2022, one year earlier. A Student Support Project Board has been established and there has been a commitment that the Board will continue for an agreed period beyond September 2023 in order to monitor consistency of implementation and evaluate the impact of these changes on the student experience.

The current Personal Tutor (PT) system will remain in the short-term for continuing students and student experience of the PT system will continue to be monitored until it is fully phased out at the end of academic year 2022/23. In February 2022, the Student Pulse Survey asked a series of questions about students' experience of the PT system, a repeat of the questions from April 2021. The findings of these surveys were discussed at a meeting of the Senior Tutor Network (led by the Vice Principal Students and Assistant Principal Student Support),

along with the plans for the transition to the new system of student support and the need to ensure parity of support for all students.

Over the course of academic year 2021/22, considerable progress has been made in agreeing roles and responsibilities and in appointing a new layer of professionalised support, including 35 Student Advisers and 20 Wellbeing Advisers. These staff will join us during July and August to complete initial training and induction ahead of the new academic year. Staff will be trained to work across Schools ensuring students always have a point of contact and parity of experience. Our Wellbeing Advisers will be managed centrally (through a hub and spoke model) and will provide a layer of support between the School-based Student Advisers and the central specialist counselling and disability services. This is a transformational investment in mental health services for our students and will provide proactive and reactive wellbeing support. The completion of this recruitment has mitigated the highest risk within the project.

The academic support will be provided via a new Cohort Lead role. This replaces the PT role as the single point of individualised support and forms part of an eco-system of support where the Cohort Lead provides an exciting opportunity through the oversight of a group of students to build community. A Cohort Lead design document has been developed to provide clarification on the role within Schools. The operation of Cohort Lead roles will be tailored to the specific academic needs of students within their programmes and disciplines.

Student Journey maps are being developed to provide an overview of the expected experience, touch points and the likely forks in the road where students will take different pathways. For example, there will be additional pre-arrival and settling in tasks for international students, there will be students who join us with complex needs, there will be students who need help being ready to study, there are students who don't think they need any help but with a bit of support could achieve more. These Student Journey maps can then be developed into a Support Timeline to help students visually understand how they interact with the ecosystem of support and exactly where they can access support. The roles within the model should be seamless to students, which is the fault of the current model, where students need to know how the University works to get help from the right service or individual. For staff delivering within the new model, an organisational explainer is being developed as an interactive/animated tool, which can be included in general communications and staff induction materials, to explain where new roles fit within the wider support ecosystem.

To ensure a baseline level of provision we have developed functional specifications in the form of a series of statements on what students can expect from both academic guidance and support and personal and wellbeing support. Schools implementing the new approach with incoming students from September 2022 are submitting School plans using these specifications to clarify their baseline provision. A sub-group of Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) will review the plans to ensure that each area is aligned to the new model of support. An approach to scaling up is being developed recognising the commitment to rolling out the full model by September 2023 as well as embedding in Schools adopting the model through 2022-23. The approach involves consideration to resources, governance and continued working with College implementation groups.

### **Oversight and planning for growth of student numbers**

The ELIR report asked us to “... *implement an approach to facilitate institutional oversight and the effective planning and monitoring of student numbers, in order to ensure that appropriate and timely actions can be taken where increases in student numbers impact on arrangements for learning and teaching and student support.*”

The need for *“institutional oversight and the effective planning and monitoring of student numbers”* is fully recognised and aligned with the University’s own intentions. A range of actions have been taken over the course of the year, and continue to be taken.

Work to ‘re-set’ the previous ‘Size and Shape’ initiative is in progress and the Planning Round approach has been re-set to focus on a 5 year timeframe. A Strategic Performance Framework has been approved, including two key performance indicators (KPIs) focused on student population: (1) Widening participation: Number (and proportion) of undergraduate entrants from an SIMD0-20 area; International student diversity: Ratio of largest overseas market to 5th and 10th largest overseas markets. The University maintains close engagement with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Scottish Government on controlled subject expectations and non-controlled undergraduate places expectations, as well as upskilling.

There is a weekly review of UCAS data on applications, offers for Edinburgh vs our peer group, and embedded planning for annual Clearing Operation. Clearing provides an important mechanism to mitigate the risk of potential under-recruitment, particularly in RUK and OVS intakes. This is particularly relevant in the context of continued uncertainty about the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on international travel, which might otherwise suppress intakes at a late stage in the recruitment cycle.

For 2022 entry, intake targets were set within the context of cross-University ‘parameters’ for key intake groups, agreed by the Colleges and University Executive (with a ‘Side target’ proposed for SIMD0-20). Strategic Planning reviewed the intake targets submitted by the Colleges for 2022 against the agreed parameters, with some follow-on discussions to understand divergences. Update provided to Student Recruitment and Fees Strategy Group, aligned with discussion on fees strategy and agreement of Strategic Enrolment Plan (six key objectives, which encompass enhanced use of data and collaborative working around recruitment). A briefing session on recruitment and admissions was then held with College office staff, Heads of School and Directors of Professional Services. Working within constraints of current systems, processes and resourcing, the continuing high demand in terms of application numbers, set against priority given to managing the intake to target, has resulted in greater caution in offer-making, and some delays to admissions decision-making until relatively late in the cycle. There is evidence this is impacting on applicant experience. All options are under consideration to improve the process and timeliness of offer-making.

In terms of ensuring *“that appropriate and timely actions can be taken where increases in student numbers impact on arrangements for learning and teaching and student support”*, over the course of 2021/22 to date, in addition to previously agreed budget allocations, the University has deployed additional resources in-year. This has included investments totalling £5.5m to support the increase in teaching (appointment of new staff in areas experiencing higher student numbers) and professional services costs associated with our additional students in 2021/22, as well as up to £4.7m investment across a range of areas, including: Curriculum Transformation; managed isolation; and other initiatives to support the student experience, including appointment of 35 Student Advisers and 20 Wellbeing Advisers as part of the new Student Support approach.

## **Learning and Teaching Strategy**

The ELIR report recommended that *“... in view of the current transition between the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2017 and future plans, the University should provide institutional oversight, and ensure clarity for staff, on the strategic direction underpinning current learning and teaching developments.”*

The current “*strategic direction underpinning current learning and teaching developments*” is being driven through the Curriculum Transformation Programme (CTP). The present stage of the CTP is setting the vision for the Edinburgh Student and the principles and architecture for the curriculum. When finalised, following a number of co-design workshops with staff and students, it is envisaged that a new Learning and Teaching Strategy will be developed to drive the implementation of the curriculum. A task group of Senate Education Committee (SEC) will take forward the development of a new Learning and Teaching Strategy during the first half of academic year 2022/23.

## **Change management**

The ELIR report recommended that we “... *develop an effective approach to the strategic leadership and management of change that will ensure more immediate and timely implementation of identified solutions in order to support staff and enhance the student experience.*”

Some immediate steps are being taken to “*develop an effective approach to the strategic leadership and management of change*” that will ensure more immediate and timely implementation of identified solutions in order to support staff and enhance the student experience.

Improving visibility and coordination of current ‘change’ initiatives and projects is key (i.e. purpose, ownership, governance, key timeline) and working with the leadership of current initiatives and business areas will enhance the University’s chances of successful implementation. The University will utilise the move to a five-year planning horizon to develop to a clearer pipeline of strategic initiatives/projects (a small, clear, prioritised list) and building this into resource planning. The University will ensure greater co-ordination in the scheduling of these activities, the impact on operational areas, and understanding of the period to embed and refine initiatives. The University will also review and enhance how to best structure strategic change capacity and capability in the longer term and areas such as developing compelling narrative; project capabilities; and lessons learned.

The University has engaged an external consultant on a brief piece of work to help establish a strategic framework to manage enhancements to the student experience and deliver these in a more effective manner. Common attributes of successful change that the University will seek to enhance/embed in practice were identified as: clear objectives, measured as projects progress; visible and engaged leaders; listen and communicate (in that order); and maintaining momentum and not taking too long. Leadership behaviours that will drive success were identified as follows: prioritise experience of students in design of policies, operations, procedures and ways of working; drive accountability; empower staff to commit to strategic improvements; acknowledge that strategic trade-offs may need to be made; and embed a commitment to continuous improvement.

The University is already seeing some of this change of approach in action. In particular, the implementation of the student support model is specifically driving accountability for the delivery from the Board, through the Colleges and the Professional Service Group that will implement and own the changes. Also, the implementation schedule of the new model has been adjusted in response to stakeholder feedback, specifically requests from Schools and Colleges to take a more phased approach according to student cohorts.

## **Oversight and implementation of policy and practice**

The ELIR report recommended that the we “*should establish a systematic approach to enable effective institutional oversight and evaluation of the implementation of policy and practice*” and as part of this “*increase the range and use of institutionally determined*

*baseline requirements to ensure consistency and accountability ... [and] ensure that mechanisms are put in place to adequately evaluate the consistency of implementation of strategic objectives across the institution and act when Schools deviate from institutional expectations.”*

This approach is being taken forward and embedded within the main projects, policies and strategies that also form many of the other ELIR recommendations. Hence, baseline requirements, reporting and monitoring are a key feature of the new Student Support approach and are inherent to the Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities (reported under those items).

Some of our policies have a more direct impact on learning and teaching and the student experience than others. Further work is still to be done to focus on those priority areas (and associated policies and practices) not already identified, to ensure consistent implementation, develop a set of associated indicators from which to measure and evaluate, and establish a clear approach for monitoring consistency of implementation. Immediate priority areas of work include student support, assessment and feedback, training and support for PGR tutors and academic staff development. Stakeholder discussions have taken place, facilitated by Nous Consulting, and will help refine institutional planning.

### **Training for postgraduate research (PGR) students who teach**

The ELIR report encouraged the University to “... *ensure effective implementation of its policy for the training and support of postgraduates who teach and ensure all PGR students are trained before engaging in teaching activities.*”

A working group has been established, led by the Institute for Academic Development (IAD), to map training across the University and examine options for an effective mechanism to record and monitor training. The working group will consult with a newly established Tutors and Demonstrators (T&D) Network and then make recommendations to a new T&D Oversight Group.

The T&D Network has been formed with representatives from all Schools and Human Resources (HR). It will be expanded to include other services as well as University and College Union (UCU) representation. So far it has 94 members from all Schools and Deaneries, including School managers and academic leaders as well as the trainers and those involved with administration of T&D. This forum will act as a sounding board for policies, enable exchange of good practice, share problems and liaise better with the services.

The T&D Oversight Group has also been convened to act as a governance body for the T&D Network and to report to the ELIR Oversight Group and Senate Quality Assurance Committee. The Group includes representatives from across the three Colleges, the Doctoral College, IAD, HR, and Academic Services. Tutor and Demonstrator representatives will join the group once identified.

### **Developing and promoting teaching excellence**

The University is addressing two of the areas for further development from the ELIR report. We were asked to “*take action to remove barriers which exist that prevent some academic staff from fully engaging with its existing suite of development opportunities for the professionalisation of teaching*” and to “*progress with work to improve the recognition of teaching excellence across all aspects of the University.*”



Work is underway to address these recommendations, aligned with the Curriculum Transformation Programme (CTP) and the desire across Schools to enhance support for the professional development in teaching. The University recently appointed its first ever Provost to provide leadership, direction and strategic evaluation of academic and research matters. This is an area that the Provost, together with the Vice Principal Students, will drive thinking and planning.

In preparation, we have already made changes to the Exemplars of Excellence (extending to grade 8 and updating) and to policies and procedures (including developments this year focussed on those in hybrid roles). We are currently exploring the potential benefit of commissioning an external evaluation of the policies and procedures introduced over the last 5 years relevant to this topic. This includes the introduction and updating of the Exemplars of Excellence, introduction of the requirement to assess teaching when recruiting new academic staff, outcomes and experience of promotion system for individual staff, changes in policy and procedure around academic promotions. The outcome of this work will be embedded into the annual quality reports, with Schools required to report on progress on an annual basis. However, a final decision on how and when to progress this is still to be determined as the new Provost only just join within the last month.

### **Attainment Gaps**

The ELIR report asked us to *“consider how to address attainment gaps in student performance through the oversight, coordination and monitoring at an institutional level of school-level actions.”* Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) has driven work to identify awarding gaps across the University via the Thematic Review process (and the Data Task Group established to progress the recommendations of recent reviews) and the annual quality assurance (QA) processes. Schools and Deaneries have increasingly engaged with widening participation (WP) and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) data to identify any gaps in attainment for different groups of students. However, they have struggled to understand the underlying causes of these gaps or what good practice should be encouraged and cultivated to address them.

The University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) is now undertaking work to determine the underlying causes of awarding gaps and share good practice with Schools to help them address these gaps. The University will establish a set of expectations or baselines in relation to WP and EDI data (based on the findings of the work to understand the causes of gaps and good practice) to allow Schools to gauge their relative performance. These expectations/baselines will in turn be monitored by the University as part of the School annual reporting process.

### **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.

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