



Enhancement-led Institutional Review of University of Edinburgh

Outcome Report

November 2015

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About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method

A dedicated page of the QAA website explains the method for [Enhancement-led Institutional Review](#) of higher education institutions in Scotland and has links to the ELIR handbook and other informative documents.¹ You can also find more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.²

Further details about the enhancement-led approach can be found in an accompanying [ELIR information document](#),³ including an overview of the review method, definitions of the judgement categories, and explanations of follow-up action. It also contains information on the Scottish Funding Council's response to ELIR judgements.

About this review

This is the Outcome Report of the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Edinburgh. The review took place as follows: Part 1 visit on 5 to 7 October 2015 and Part 2 visit on 9 to 13 November 2015. The review was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Professor Peter Bush (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Brian Green (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor Mark Hunt (Academic Reviewer)
- Associate Professor Lena Adamson (International Reviewer)
- Mr David Walker (Student Reviewer)
- Mr Paul Probyn (Coordinating Reviewer).

This report sets out the overarching judgement formed by the ELIR team on:

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

It is possible for the overarching judgement to be expressed in three levels which indicate that the institution's arrangements are: effective; have limited effectiveness; or are not effective. More detail on these categories is provided in the ELIR information document.

The overarching judgement for this report can be found on page 3, followed by the areas of positive practice and the areas for development.

A more detailed [Technical Report](#) is also available for this review.⁴ The Technical Report sets out the ELIR team's findings under each of the headings in the ELIR 3 method.

¹ Further information about the ELIR method:

www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/enhancement-led-institutional-review.

² Further information about QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

³ ELIR information document: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=61.

⁴ Technical report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10007790.

About the University of Edinburgh

The University of Edinburgh is one of Scotland's ancient, research-intensive universities and is the largest higher education provider in Scotland. In 2013-14 it had a total of 33,110 students, of whom 21,773 were undergraduate, 6,530 taught postgraduate and 4,807 postgraduate research students. The University has a large and diverse international student body, with over 30 per cent of the student population in 2013-14 coming from around 120 different countries. Its academic portfolio offers 104 of the 164 principal subjects defined by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, which the University emphasised is the largest breadth of subject provision of any Scottish university. The University describes itself as having strong global partnerships and reach, and a clear commitment to provide a distinctive research-led educational experience, characterised by excellence in learning and teaching.

The academic structure is based on three colleges: the College of Humanities and Social Science, the College of Science and Engineering, and the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine. Each college is led by a Vice-Principal and divided into schools. The University has 22 schools in total.

Overarching judgement about University of Edinburgh

The University of Edinburgh has **effective** arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience. These arrangements are likely to continue to be effective in the future.

This is a positive judgement, which means the University has robust arrangements for securing academic standards and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

Areas of positive practice

1 The ELIR has identified a number of areas of positive practice and these are summarised below.

2 **Strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching** - the strategic intention to prioritise learning and teaching has been implemented across the University and communicated effectively to staff. The University has targeted strategic priority areas, including: assessment and feedback, academic support and researcher development. The clear focus on learning and teaching is supported by the development of a flexible continuing professional development framework for academic staff and a set of Exemplars of Excellence in Student Education, which academic staff can use to reflect on their approaches to teaching.

3 **Online distance learning** - the University has a progressive and effective approach to online distance learning development and delivery. Students report high levels of satisfaction with their experience, indicating that they feel part of an academic community.

4 **Internationalising the student experience and promoting student mobility** - the University has a strong commitment to internationalising the student experience and promoting student mobility. Students described themselves as members of an international community where opportunities to have an international experience were available both on campus and through a variety of flexible study abroad opportunities. In a particularly positive development, the University is able to provide supported opportunities for students from widening participation backgrounds to study abroad.

5 **Peer-assisted learning support** - the University has an extensive and growing number of peer learning support arrangements whereby students provide support to other students. The schemes are both a valued source of support and an effective opportunity for those providing support to develop their transferable skills.

6 **Systematic approach to promoting and embedding graduate attributes** - the University has systematically embedded graduate attributes throughout the undergraduate and taught postgraduate curricula and has a proactive approach to providing imaginative opportunities for students to develop graduate attributes through the co-curriculum. In particular, the Edinburgh Award provides a flexible framework for all students to gain recognition for their achievements in a wide range of areas, including academic, sporting, volunteering and work-based activities. The Edinburgh Award is highly regarded by staff and students and is being taken up by increasing numbers of students.

7 **Institute for Academic Development** - the Institute for Academic Development provides a key role in helping the University to fulfil its strategic ambition to prioritise learning and teaching. The Institute provides varied, flexible and tailored support to staff and students, contributing to a culture in which the student learning experience is evaluated and enhanced.

8 **Online external examiner reporting** - although in the early stages of implementation at the time of the current ELIR, the External Examiner Project has great potential. External examiners provide their reports online, which supports more consistent reflection on their comments across the school, college and institutional levels. Themes arising across several reports can be extracted and considered, and staff at all levels can be provided with access to the reports and the analysis.

9 **Quality monitoring and review for academic and support services** - the University has comprehensive and detailed arrangements for monitoring and reviewing its courses and programmes. Academic and support staff are committed to the effective implementation of these arrangements. Thematic reviews help to ensure that the academic and support areas make a coherent contribution to enhancing the student learning experience.

10 **Using data to enhance the student learning experience** - the University is making good progress towards introducing an integrated approach to the use of data in decision making and performance monitoring in order to identify and implement enhancements to the student learning experience. Key examples include the student-initiated PATH Project, which is an effective tool for assisting students and Personal Tutors in planning programmes of study.

11 **Effective approach to self-evaluation** - the University makes effective use of a variety of evaluative methods, involving those inside and outside the institution to reflect on institutional policy and practice. Using the University Internal Audit team to review academic areas - such as personal tutoring, assessment and feedback, and academic collaboration - has provided additional independent insight for senior staff into the effectiveness of these areas.

Areas for development

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

13 **Postgraduate research student experience** - analyse the needs and experience of postgraduate research students at school, college and University level to ensure that they are effectively supported, particularly given plans to increase research student numbers. The University should review the effectiveness and regularity of supervisor training and ensure that the University's Code of Practice is communicated effectively to all staff and research students and implemented consistently. The University should also make certain that postgraduate research students who teach are appropriately trained and supported for the role.

14 **Personal Tutor system** - build on the positive progress made in the implementation of the Personal Tutor system by reviewing the way it is implemented in schools, ensuring that all students are able to benefit from engaging with a Personal Tutor as intended. There would be value in the University providing additional clarification for students around the aims of the system, and signposting alternative avenues of student support.

15 **Student representation at school and college levels** - building on the existing constructive relationship with Edinburgh University Students' Association, ensure there is more effective coordination of student representation at college and school level. The University should review the processes for appointing students to college and school committees and provide more effective training and preparation for the roles, ensuring that staff also understand the role of student representatives and are able to support students to contribute effectively. There would also be benefit in the University considering the best

ways of providing feedback to the wider student body about the action that is taken in response to matters raised through school and college-level committees.

16 **Assessment and feedback** - implement feedback policy in a clear and consistent manner across the University to ensure that all students receive timely, relevant and high quality feedback at key points during their programmes. There would be benefit in working closely with students at school level to understand their specific issues and needs, and to consider whether students in particular disciplines, locations or modes of study would benefit from contextualised approaches. In carrying out this work, there would be value in the University reflecting on the positive experiences of assessment and feedback reported by online distance learning students.

What happens next?

17 QAA Scotland will continue to engage with the institution through the annual discussion visits, which, among other matters, consider the ways in which the institution is responding to the ELIR outcomes.

18 One year after publication of the ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to provide a follow-up report to indicate how they are responding to the outcomes of ELIR. Institutions also engage in a follow-up event with colleagues from other institutions to explore the ways in which the ELIR outcomes are being implemented. The final version of the institution's follow-up report is published on the QAA website.

Further information

19 A more detailed [Technical Report](#) is also available for this review. The Technical Report sets out the ELIR team's findings under each of the headings in the ELIR 3 method.

20 This review and its findings relate to the institution as a whole and do not provide information about individual programmes of study or subjects. For further information about those, contact the institution or visit its [website](#).

21 University sector institutions in Scotland also engage in systematic Enhancement Theme activity. Further information about that work, which has a sector-wide and institutional focus, can be found on the [Enhancement Themes website](#).

22 Further information about QAA Scotland and the enhancement-led approach, including the ELIR method, can be found on the [QAA website](#).

23 For further information about the Scottish Funding Council see www.sfc.ac.uk.

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