



Enhancement-led Institutional Review of the University of Edinburgh

Technical 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 Technical 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).

In advance of the review visits, the University submitted a self-evaluative document (the Reflective Analysis) and an advance information set, comprising a range of materials about the institution's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards. In addition, the University submitted case studies on Enhancing Student Support and the Edinburgh Award.

About this report

In this report, the ELIR team:

- delivers an overarching judgement 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.

The overarching judgement can be found on page 3, followed by the detailed findings of the review given in numbered paragraphs.

ELIR Technical Reports are intended primarily for the institution that hosted the review, and to provide an information base for the production of thematic reports that identify findings across several institutions.

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/aboutus.

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

Technical Reports set out the ELIR team's view under each of the report headings. Shorter Outcome Reports are provided that set out the main findings of the ELIR for a wider audience. The [Outcome Report](#) for this review is on the QAA website.⁴

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

Overarching judgement about the 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.

1 Institutional context and strategic framework

1.1 Key features of the institution's context and mission

1 The University of Edinburgh is one of Scotland's ancient, research-intensive universities and is the largest higher education institution 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.

2 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 is divided into schools. The University has 22 schools in total. Colleges and schools have devolved powers to manage teaching and research, but operate within the overarching framework of institutional regulations, policy and procedure set at University level. Heads of school provide the interface between the University's central strategy, systems and activity, and operational learning, teaching and research activities. Within each school, oversight and coordination of learning and teaching is also facilitated through the directors of learning and teaching, whose roles, together with directors of quality, balance quality assurance and enhancement.

3 The University's current Strategic Plan covers the period from 2012-16. It contains three strategic goals: excellence in education, excellence in research, and excellence in innovation, each supported by a number of strategic themes. The goal of excellence in education is supported by the following themes: delivering an outstanding student experience; equality and widening participation; and increasing global impact and partnerships.

4 The University published its new Strategic Vision 2025 in April 2014. The Strategic Vision 2025 outlines 'a unique offer for University of Edinburgh students': all undergraduates will be developed as student researchers with clear, supported pathways through to master's and doctoral degrees; all students will be offered the opportunity to draw on expertise outside their core discipline; and all students will be part of a highly satisfied student body with a strong sense of community.

5 The current Strategic Plan 2012-16 identifies ambitious growth targets for the University's student population at all levels (see paragraphs 20 to 22); including increasing the headcount of non-EU students by at least 2,000; increasing the number of master's students on programmes established through the University's Global Academies by at least 500; increasing the average number of postgraduate research students to academic staff to

at least 2.5:1 by the end of 2016; and increasing the number of postgraduate research students on programmes jointly awarded with international partners by at least 50 per cent. The infrastructure implications of this growth in student numbers are acknowledged and incorporated into an estates vision, combining new build, refurbishment and upgrading with phased spending of £1.5bn by 2025. In addition, the Strategic Plan sets out targets for growth in online distance learning.

6 In preparing for the current ELIR, the University identified two areas it wished the ELIR team to focus on: effectiveness of the developing personal tutoring project (see paragraphs 14, 40 to 44, and 74); and the effectiveness of the approach to enabling and promoting student engagement in the curriculum/co-curriculum and learning, with a particular emphasis on links to future strategy for learning and teaching (see paragraphs 14 to 17, 34 to 39, and 68 to 72). The University outlined its approach to these areas in the Reflective Analysis and the case studies submitted in preparation for the ELIR. The ELIR team's view of activity in these areas is identified throughout this report.

1.2 Strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching

7 Since the 2011 ELIR, the University has engaged in a systematic programme of enhancement activity, accompanied by reshaping the senior management team, to prioritise strategic development in learning and teaching. The University engaged in three overarching transformational projects in relation to learning and teaching: the Student Experience Project, the Enhancing Student Support Project (where one key part is a Personal Tutor system for all students on undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes), and a programme of coordinated work to address a number of matters highlighted in the National Student Survey (NSS), including lower scores than the University wishes in relation to assessment and feedback practices. Evaluation of the projects has led to successful elements of the work, such as the Personal Tutor arrangements, being adopted as 'mainstream' practice and being reported through the relevant committee structures at school, college and University levels.

8 At the time of the current ELIR, the Senior Vice-Principal, who has responsibility for learning and teaching, was leading an institution-wide consultation on the University's ambition for learning and teaching, as part of the Strategic Vision 2025, to replace the current Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy 2012-16. The principal aim of the ambition is to ensure that learning and teaching is recognised across the University as an 'unambiguous priority', and supported and rewarded appropriately. Staff at all levels have been invited to reflect on two key themes to shape this ambition: how to strengthen expectations around high performance in learning and teaching, and how to develop a clearer understanding of the value of learning and teaching. This consultative approach is intended to engender engagement and support among staff in the schools.

9 The Senior Vice-Principal is supported by a reshaped team of vice-principals and assistant principals whose respective portfolios are reflective of, and mapped to, strategic priorities (including assessment and feedback, academic support and researcher development). This team forms the core of the Learning and Teaching Policy Group, which reports directly to the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee and, through the Senior Vice-Principal, reports into the Principal's Strategy Group - as well as communicating with the key Learning and Teaching Committees. The Group monitors progress on learning and teaching issues, and discusses the embedding of learning and teaching project outcomes into 'mainstream' policy and practice prior to committee approval. An important function of this Group is to ensure that there is alignment between activity in the colleges and schools with the work of the Senate committees.

10 The colleges operate in the context of the University strategies and procedures, with delegated authority to reflect the nature of their disciplines. Schools operate within the parameters defined by their respective college. The ELIR team considered this devolved structure operating in relation to the course approvals, monitoring and review arrangements (see sections 4 and 5). The team formed the view that, in the context of the University's size, the delegated model was appropriate, understood by staff and generally worked well.

11 The heads of school, working closely with school directors of learning and teaching, fulfil a key role in the effective operation of the delegated arrangements as academic leaders in the schools and at college level, particularly as members of the Academic Strategy Group, convened by the Principal. Professional support staff also fulfil an important role in ensuring the effective operation of the devolved model. Staff in the University Secretary's Group, notably the Deputy Secretary (Student Experience), and staff in Academic Services advise and interact with academic and other colleagues on academic procedures and regulation at all levels. The University acknowledged that a remaining challenge was ensuring that strategic objectives, which are agreed and shared at University, college and school levels, are reflected in the management structures, processes and practices in order to ensure that they are delivered.

12 The University has made progress in developing clear reward and recognition processes for excellence in teaching to underpin its aim of creating parity of esteem between teaching and research. These include the development of a Continuing Professional Development Framework for learning and teaching, mapped against the UK Professional Standards Framework, and a set of Exemplars of Excellence in Student Education, which provide an agreed reference point for recognising good teaching practice, used in annual performance management and promotion processes (see paragraphs 86, 87 and 91).

13 The ELIR team learned about plans the University has to develop existing staff workload allocation models to recognise in a consistent way contribution to priority areas, such as personal tutoring, assessment and feedback, and contribution to other enhancement activity. This is likely to promote greater transparency, consistency and understanding of workload allocation among staff, as well as ensuring that academic staff are able to support the University's strategic priorities for learning and teaching. The University is encouraged to progress this work (see paragraph 14).

1.3 Effectiveness of the approach to implementing strategies

14 Overall, the ELIR team formed the view that the University has a reflective and inclusive approach to developing strategy, and that communication and consultation with staff about strategic developments is effective. The University's approach to implementing strategies relating to learning and teaching is effective, with some challenges remaining around ensuring alignment between institutional priorities and operational structures, which the institution is open in recognising. In order to further support implementation of institutional strategies, the University is encouraged to progress its plans to develop existing staff workload allocation models to recognise consistently staff contributions to key aspects of learning and teaching across the University.

15 The University's devolved structure is appropriate to its size and is understood by staff. Institutional frameworks provide structured guidance within which colleges and schools have flexibility to allow a variety of good practice approaches to flourish, supported by monitoring and reporting arrangements. Staff who met the ELIR team indicated that they welcomed the flexibility they have to implement institutional strategy in a manner appropriate to specific disciplinary needs. They also indicated this gave them a greater sense of ownership of strategies formed at institutional level. In discussion with the team, staff were

able to distinguish clearly between activity that was mandatory and that which could be tailored to individual school contexts.

16 The University has progressed several of its strategic priorities in relation to learning and teaching through a suite of high profile projects. In order to ensure their sustainability, the key outcomes are being adopted into established institutional practice. The ELIR team saw positive examples of this taking place, for example in relation to the outcomes from the Student Experience Project and the Enhancing Student Support Project.

17 Staff who met the ELIR team were clear about the University's 'unambiguous priority' and focus on excellence in learning and teaching. It was evident that recognition and reward processes had been communicated and used by staff, and that additional work was underway to embed these developments further. The ELIR team found a culture of effective networks across the University, with academic and professional colleagues working in partnership at all levels.

2 Enhancing the student learning experience

2.1 Composition and key trends in the student population, including typical routes into and through the institution

18 The University has a clear, strategic aim to increase both overall student numbers and to diversify the student population by increasing the proportion of international, postgraduate and online distance learning (ODL) students.

19 In 2013-14 the University had 33,110 students, of whom 21,773 were undergraduates (66 per cent) and 11,337 were postgraduates (34 per cent). Of the postgraduate students, 6,530 were taught postgraduates (58 per cent) and 4,807 were postgraduate research students (42 per cent).

20 Since 2010-11, the overall student population has grown by 14 per cent (from 28,974 students). The merger with Edinburgh College of Art increased student numbers by just over 1,600, accounting for one third of the overall growth in student numbers since the 2011 ELIR.

21 The main increase in student numbers since 2011 is accounted for by overseas and EU students, with rises in numbers of overseas students particularly apparent at undergraduate (56 per cent) and taught postgraduate (44 per cent) levels. In comparison, the number of overseas postgraduate research students has risen by 16 per cent. There has been a slight increase in Scottish domiciled students of four per cent at undergraduate level and three per cent growth in the postgraduate research student numbers. The proportion of other UK-domiciled students has also grown at postgraduate level, the number of taught postgraduate students having risen by 25 per cent and postgraduate research students by 24 per cent. Other UK-domiciled undergraduate numbers have fallen by two per cent.

22 The University's ambitious targets and plans for increasing postgraduate student numbers include: increasing the ratio of postgraduate research students to staff to at least 2.5:1 by the end of the Strategic Plan period in 2016 (from 1.5:1 in 2013-14); developing new master's programmes in areas where there is high demand, to be delivered both in Edinburgh and at a distance; developing new scholarship schemes to help increase applications; providing more sources of employment for postgraduate research students on campus, and bidding for more external funding to support and encourage postgraduate students to study at the University.

23 In 2013-14 the University had 1,716 students registered on online distance master's programmes, an increase of 54 per cent since 2011-12, with online distance

master's students accounting for 26 per cent of the total taught postgraduate population. The University intends to continue growing these numbers significantly. Seventeen out of 22 schools offer some form of distance learning programme and 60 programmes are currently available, with approximately 2,000 students currently registered on fully online programmes. Around half of the University's ODL programmes are provided by the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine and are aimed at practicing professionals. Remaining programmes are split between the College of Science and Engineering and the College of Humanities and Social Science. The University's approach has been informed by the Distance Education Initiative, which provided resources to over 30 academic projects across 17 of the University's 22 schools, to develop programmes and support services. In 2014, the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee established a task group to support and oversee the mainstreaming of distance education within the University, distance learning initiatives having previously been funded through Distance Education Initiative funding (see paragraphs 47-50).

Widening participation

24 The University has an effective approach to widening participation that encompasses a range of activities, including innovative outreach; contextualised admissions; bursary provision; and flexible entry and exit routes into and through the University's degree programmes. The University highlighted that it had exceeded its Scottish Funding Council Outcome Agreement target on widening participation for 2014-15.

25 In 2013-14 the University had 1,469 entrants from a widening participation background (including those from the rest of the UK and Scotland-domiciled, based on a basket of measures), an increase of 18 per cent since 2012-13. In 2013-14, 69 per cent of these entrants were Scottish domiciled and 371 students came from Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 40 data zones. A further 367 students were entrants from Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS). In 2014-15, the University admitted 446 students from LEAPS, twice as many as the other participating institutions. Other University-led projects to support widening participation include: Pathways to Professions, which provides advice and guidance to state school pupils interested in studying Medicine, Law, Veterinary Medicine and Architecture; and Educated Pass, which targets boys from under-represented groups through their local football club.

26 The University has been developing approaches to contextualised admissions and these were refined during 2015 to help identify those who have faced educational and socio-economic disadvantage, and to take into consideration the socio-economic context in which examination results have been achieved. The University emphasised that, since it had begun to use contextual data in 2004, retention rates and the proportion of students achieving First and 2:1 degrees had improved, reinforcing the institution's firm belief that use of contextual data alongside other information contained within the UCAS application had enabled it to identify those students who best demonstrate the academic ability, resilience and commitment to succeed at Edinburgh. The University's retention rate for widening participation students is the same as for the student cohort as a whole, and analysis of the data by the institution indicates that the University outperformed the Higher Education Statistics Agency Indicator, the Scottish sector average and the UK sector average on this measure.

2.2 Supporting equality and diversity in the student population

27 The University has an effective approach to supporting equality and diversity, and has been progressing with the mainstreaming of this activity to be inclusive of all students, rather than being restricted to protected groups defined in legislation. There is a well-established Equality and Diversity Strategy underpinned by a set of Equality Outcomes

and associated actions for the period 2013-17. In January 2013 the University also approved the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy, which formalises the University's commitment to promoting equality and diversity in learning and teaching and to implementing a set of common adjustments for all students, with operational guidance on implementation of the Policy being developed by the Institute for Academic Development.

28 In 2007, the University was the first in Scotland to appoint a Vice-Principal Equality and Diversity. In 2015 the post was renamed Vice-Principal People and Culture; the post holder has responsibility for leading the implementation of University strategy and performance in relation to equality and diversity for both staff and students. Equality and diversity monitoring occurs at school level (through annual quality assurance reports), and institutional level (through the Equality and Diversity Monitoring and Research Committee).

29 The University highlighted that the effectiveness of its strategy from a student perspective is evidenced through positive feedback from students regarding fair and equal treatment, with 92 per cent of respondents in the 2014 Edinburgh Student Experience Survey, which is completed by pre-final year students, agreeing that they had received fair and equal treatment by the University (regardless of a range of characteristics including age, caring responsibilities or disability) and 94 per cent of respondents agreeing that they had been treated with dignity and respect. Students who met the ELIR team commented that the level of diversity within the student population was one of the best things about studying at the University.

30 Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) are carried out on new or revised policies and practice, and those assessments are published on the University website. The University's Student Recruitment and Admissions service introduced overarching EqIAs of the policies, processes and activities that relate to the student applicant experience, and this was commended as a model of good practice by the Equality Challenge Unit and Supporting Professionalism in Admissions.

31 The University provides online training in equality and diversity and EqIAs for staff. In meetings with the ELIR team, staff described the training as useful and comprehensive, but also indicated that they would welcome the option of more face-to-face training or workshops.

32 Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) is engaged with a variety of institutional teams making applications for equality and diversity awards, including the Race Equality Charter Mark and Athena Swan Institutional Silver Award (the Bronze award being achieved in 2006 and renewed in 2009 and 2012), and the University is progressing with student-focused activity to support this work. EUSA representatives work with the University and students to highlight issues raised through four student Liberation Groups (LGBT+, Black and Minority Ethnic, Women Students, Disability and Mental Wellbeing), and the international, postgraduate, and mature and part-time students groups. This work is regarded positively by both staff and students, but EUSA acknowledges that more could always be done for hard-to-reach students, demonstrating EUSA's recognition of the importance of continuing to work proactively on equality and diversity issues.

33 The University provides specific support for students with disabilities through its Student Disability Service and has noted that satisfaction with the service has increased by 14 per cent since 2012-13, according to the Edinburgh Student Experience Survey 2013-14. Adjustments for students with specific learning needs have been mainstreamed where possible into the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy (see paragraph 26).

2.3 Engaging and supporting students in their learning

Student representation

34 The University is committed to student engagement and has a positive and constructive relationship with EUSA. This is evident in the variety of projects and initiatives where the University works in partnership with EUSA and the wider student body. It was also evident from the ELIR team's discussions with student representatives.

35 Student representation structures are devolved to schools but supported centrally by EUSA, which provides training and support for student representatives throughout the academic year in partnership with Student Partnership in Quality Scotland (sparqs) and the National Union of Students. A joint EUSA/University student engagement statement recognises students as active partners and co-creators of their learning. There is student representation at all levels of the University and students are represented on all student-related institutional committees by EUSA Sabbatical Officers.

36 Since the 2011 ELIR there have been a number of developments aimed at strengthening student representation, including the creation of a single Student Council to allow EUSA Sabbatical Officers and student representatives to discuss all academic matters. The University has also taken steps to enhance representation at college level, including developing a Student Quality Forum in the College of Humanities and Social Science. Since 2012-13, five forums have been held and a College representative forum has taken place in the College of Science and Engineering. The University recognises that student representation at the college level could be strengthened further, for example the time and volume of committee meetings in one college were identified by students as barriers to engagement; a flexible model designed to allow a group of representatives to share the load of committee attendance had, to date, achieved mixed success. The devolved structure gives considerable decision-making power to the colleges, making it all the more important to have effective student representation at that level. The University is, therefore, encouraged to progress with work to promote and implement more effective representation at the college level.

37 The 2011 ELIR highlighted variation in the operation of class representative systems, which presented challenges for the University in resolving matters raised across programmes and schools. As a result, in 2012-13, EUSA implemented new guidelines for class representatives with the aim of ensuring greater consistency. In 2013-14, a set of Student-Staff Liaison Committee principles were implemented, which had been developed in partnership with the University's Academic Services. In 2014-15, building on these positive developments, EUSA worked with the University's Quality Assurance Committee to review the effectiveness of the current student engagement frameworks in schools, and has undertaken work to identify variations in experiences across schools with the aim of using the outcomes to develop school-specific guidance for class representatives during 2015-16.

38 During the current ELIR students highlighted a number of areas where representation at school and college level could be strengthened further. Students identified a lack of clarity among some academic and support staff regarding the role of student representatives on committees. They also confirmed there is variation in the ways in which class representatives are elected and in the mechanisms through which they engage with course organisers and fellow students, reflecting the variety of structures, courses and programmes across the University. The ELIR team noted that students identified instances where representatives were not automatically members of, or systematically invited to, school and college committee meetings. In some cases, this led students to believe their involvement was not valued and that the student views were not always being considered. Students who met the team emphasised that strengthening the representative structures at

college and school level would ensure the 'student voice' reflected the student body more widely, placing less reliance on the views of EUSA Sabbatical Officers.

39 The University is encouraged to continue building on the existing constructive relationship with EUSA to ensure there is more effective student representation at college and school level. The University should review the processes for appointing students to school committees and 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. 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.

Personal Tutor system

40 The University prioritised the implementation of its Personal Tutor system following the 2011 ELIR, and it was developed as part of the Enhancing Student Support Project, a major strategic initiative aimed at improving the student learning experience through guidance and support. At the time of the current ELIR, the University was undertaking a scoping exercise to ascertain the support needs of postgraduate research students, and early indications suggested that development in this area would require a different approach from that offered by the Personal Tutor system for undergraduates and postgraduate taught students.

41 The Personal Tutor system has been in place since 2012-13 and now offers all campus-based undergraduate and taught postgraduate students (around 22,000 students) access to a Personal Tutor. The project, into which the University has invested £4.3 million, included: appointing a dean of students in each college; appointing at least one senior Personal Tutor in each school; creating student support teams in each school; developing role profiles and responsibilities for staff and students taking part in the scheme; creating a Senior Tutors' Network and Student Support Teams' Network; and providing online tools to support scheduling and recording of meetings and training resources to support Personal Tutors. A key feature in the development of the Personal Tutor system, and one that the ELIR team recognised as particularly beneficial, has been the partnership working between the University and EUSA, and between academic schools and professional support services.

42 In 2015-16 responsibility for oversight and further development of the Personal Tutor system passed to the Personal Tutor sub-group, a newly constituted group reporting to the Senate Quality Assurance Committee. There is an expectation that all schools establish effective systems for personal tutoring. The University confirmed that briefing and training for Personal Tutors is a shared responsibility between schools, colleges, the Institute for Academic Development, other support services and EUSA. Schools and colleges must ensure that adequate opportunities are in place for briefing, training and updating, and that these are taken up by the various members of staff concerned.

43 Students who met the ELIR team indicated that they had a variety of experiences of the Personal Tutor system. Some students valued meetings as a lifeline and a vital source of support while others reported challenges with the accessibility of Personal Tutors, lack of engagement from both staff and students, and limited value in the discussions held with their Personal Tutor. Staff also reported variation in the operation of the Personal Tutor system, for example in the provision of training and in the support available from senior Personal Tutors. The number of students allocated to each Personal Tutor varies; school averages of undergraduate students per tutor range from six to 45, the average across the University being 17 at undergraduate level and 16.5 at postgraduate taught level. The team recognised there were areas where the system was working effectively and was highly valued by staff and students. However, staff also confirmed that the extent of variation between schools in

the implementation and operation of the Personal Tutor scheme meant it was challenging to assess the effectiveness of the system overall.

44 The ELIR team recognised the highly devolved nature of the University and the potential benefits of tailoring the Personal Tutor system to the needs of particular student groups and disciplines. Nonetheless, it was evident that the system was not working effectively for all student groups and there would be considerable benefit in the University revisiting the way in which schools are implementing the system to ensure all students are able to benefit from the arrangements 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, in order to align the expectations of students and staff undertaking the Personal Tutor role.

Peer support

45 The introduction of peer support was a key aim of the Student Experience Project (see paragraph 7) with the aspiration of making peer support available to all students. All schools have peer support in place for at least one undergraduate year group; at the time of the current ELIR peer support initiatives were beginning to be implemented for taught postgraduate students. The University currently has around 40 peer support projects operating across its 22 schools, including: peer-assisted learning schemes; academic families; befriending initiatives; and mentoring and house systems. Training is provided by EUSA and the University for those involved in developing and leading peer support. Students who met the ELIR team commented positively about the benefits of peer support schemes, including the skills and graduate attributes developed by mentors through their involvement in the schemes and staff commitment to them. Mentors involved in the schemes were able to use their experience to fulfil the requirements of the Edinburgh Award (see paragraph 72). It was evident to the team that the University's promotion of peer-assisted schemes represents positive practice (see paragraph 77). The team would encourage the University to continue supporting staff and students in the embedding of peer-assisted learning and to continue working with EUSA to deliver appropriate training for peers.

Supporting mental health

46 The University has increased its strategic focus on mental health support, and recognises the requirement for further developments in policy, communication, training and governance, including how to provide support for ODL students. The University has established a Mental Health Strategy Group and is further analysing the support it provides to students for mental health and wellbeing through a thematic periodic review of support services in 2015-16. This review not only incorporates the support provided by the Student Counselling Service, but aims to look holistically at the support provided to students via a range of other University services - such as the Advice Place, Residence Life, Student Disability Service, Academic Support and the Centre for Sport and Exercise among others.

Online distance learning

47 The University is recognised as a world leader in digital education, and it has adopted an embedded approach to technology. It aims for all of its programmes to provide students with an opportunity to take at least one online course as part of their degree. Staff considered that the University focus on online distance learning (ODL) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) was driving change in on-campus provision, and spoke positively about training opportunities available. At the time of the current ELIR the College of Science and Engineering had created seven Chairs in Technology Enhanced Science Education to facilitate and promote the development of online and blended learning approaches across the sciences. Staff who met the ELIR team confirmed that recent professorial promotions had been in teaching, particularly around the use of technology.

The University has been an early developer of MOOCs, and, at the time of the ELIR, had over one million learners enrolled on its current offering of MOOCs.

48 The University aims to provide an experience for ODL students that is at least equivalent to that of on-campus students. ODL students have access to the majority of the support services available to students studying on campus, including access to Personal Tutors and student representation. The University's case study submitted for the ELIR indicates that ODL students are already very satisfied with the levels of academic support and personalised access to their academic tutors. Many of the University's ODL programmes are aimed at clinical and other professionals who require a particular type of support, mainly around access to materials rather than pastoral support, and the institution continues to consider what additional value might be added through the Personal Tutor system for this category of student.

49 ODL students who met the ELIR team described their experiences as equivalent to that of on-campus students. Students are encouraged to work together and establish a sense of community through a network of discussion boards, blogs, online tutorials and joint assignments. The students commented positively on: the level of personal and academic support provided to them; their online social community; the quality and timeliness of feedback on assessments; and the extent to which their views were taken into account. Overall, they confirmed that they felt part of their school community.

50 In 2014-15, to further support enhancements in ODL provision, the University undertook a thematic review of online/distance taught postgraduate provision in the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, with one aim being to explore student representation for ODL students. There would be benefit in the University disseminating the outcomes of the review to all staff involved in ODL provision across the institution.

Student mobility

51 The University has an effective approach to growing, promoting and enhancing student mobility. The University Strategic Plan 2012-16 has set a target to create at least 800 new opportunities for students to gain an international experience, and Vision 2025 sets out an ambition for every student to have an international experience. Senior staff confirmed that the University was exploring new models of supporting student mobility and that its strategy was to develop more substantial relationships with a small number of strategic partners.

52 The University is investing in scholarships to support students from a widening participation background to go abroad. The Principal's Go Abroad Fund gives students the opportunity to study abroad for short periods as part of their degree programmes; the Widening Horizons Programme provides funding to give widening participation students an immersive study abroad experience in their first year.

53 The University supports opportunities for students to undertake a voluntary study abroad period in their third year of study. The University has 288 Erasmus agreements in place in 41 countries, and the International Office's International Programme supports an additional 40 partner institutions across North and South America and Asia. In 2013-14, 667 students spent a year abroad at a partner University; 379 of these were on Erasmus programmes; 195 on an international programme; and 93 undertook an international departmental exchange.

54 Students are supported before and during their experiences abroad by an Exchange Coordinator, an academic member of staff, who, together with the student's Personal Tutor, supports students before and during their time abroad. Exchange coordinators also provide a contact point between the University and the

partner institution. On their return, students are encouraged to reflect on and share their experiences. The International Office's annual quality assurance report includes a survey of students' experiences while studying abroad and this is reported through a subcommittee of the Senate Quality Assurance Committee. Student feedback on the academic experience is routinely collected from students on exchange returning from study abroad.

Feedback on assessment

55 The University has invested significant time and effort in initiatives aimed at improving students' experiences of feedback on assessment, and has expressed disappointment that this work has not yet had a significant impact on the NSS scores, although small positive changes were seen in the 2014 NSS results. Outcomes from the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) have improved since 2012, and the University now scores above the Russell Group average in relation to the provision of feedback to students.

56 The 2011 ELIR noted that action taken by the University aimed at improving feedback on assessment was taking a long time to have a meaningful impact across the institution. In 2012 the University undertook a project to look systematically at the issue, using the Student Surveys Unit to analyse findings from the NSS, PTES, Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, Edinburgh Student Experience Survey, outcomes from externally commissioned research and benchmarking activity. Key recommendations from the project included: providing prompt and useful feedback; listening to students; engaging students as part of a learning community; raising the profile of learning and teaching; and supporting tutors and demonstrators in improving feedback provision. In addition, the University has been involved in the Leading Enhancement in Assessment and Feedback (LEAF) Project, a joint initiative running between 2013-16 with Birmingham, Glasgow and Nottingham universities, which uses the Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment audit methodology to look at students' experiences of assessment and feedback at a programme level. At the time of the current ELIR, the project was in Phase 2, after which the University expects to have completed audits of assessment and feedback in 20 programmes.

57 The University has also continued to review its Taught Assessment Regulations with the aim of providing clear and consistent guidelines to both staff and students on the provision of feedback on assessment. The University has moved to online submission of coursework and, building on the positive practice of some of its schools, has taken the decision to extend the provision of online feedback transmission across the University with the aim of enhancing feedback quality. The Regulations stipulate that feedback should be provided within 15 working days of submission, or in time to be of use in subsequent assessments, whichever is sooner. In addition, the Regulations outline the expectation that students will receive at least one 'formative feedback or feedforward event' in time to be useful in the completion of summative work on the course. In addition, following the 2011 ELIR, students have access to feedback on examination scripts and a project is currently underway to pilot the return of exam scripts to students in first and second years.

58 It was evident from discussions with students during the current ELIR that there remains considerable inconsistency between schools in the amount and quality of feedback provided to students, and in the time taken to provide it, which did not always fulfil University regulations. ODL students who met the ELIR team were positive about the assistance they received from their course director, particularly in preparing for assessment. Core support material is made available online with support services provided by the Institute for Academic Development. The ODL provision in this review displayed good attention to detail in considering the specific needs of distance learning in the design of the curriculum, the pedagogical approaches to learning, and the use of online platforms. Other students

reported wide variation in the methods and quality of feedback provided on assessments, ranging from minimal written comments to tailored face-to-face discussions. However, it was clear from the meetings with students that no single method of feedback is preferred. Students emphasised that they wanted staff to engage more with them at the level of individual courses and programmes to collectively agree the best method of providing tailored and relevant feedback for specific groups.

59 Subject-level staff who met the ELIR team indicated that discussions have been held at school level about approaches to providing feedback, and that there continued to be frustration around the comparatively low scores in a number of schools. The University is encouraged to progress with its plans to engage in further analyses of NSS free text answers at school level, in addition to working with students in the schools concerned to address the matters raised.

60 The University should ensure it is able to implement feedback policy and practice 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. Particular attention should be paid to the provision of formative feedback opportunities that help students progress. 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 ODL students.

Postgraduate research student experience

61 Postgraduate research students who met the ELIR team described a range of learning experiences at the University. They commented positively on their induction and indicated that they considered themselves part of a wider research community, being treated as colleagues by academic staff. Heads of school also noted the strength of induction processes and Graduate School events in facilitating the transition for students into the research community environment. The students were able to describe a range of ways in which they could share their work.

62 All postgraduate research students, regardless of how they are funded, have access to academic and professional development support delivered through the schools and the Institute for Academic Development (IAD). The IAD provides a number of courses to support the development of students' future careers including: Effective Tutoring; Introduction to Academic Practice; Internships and Career Planning; and Teambuilding and Leadership. The ELIR team learned that the students who were aware of these courses found them very useful but that others were not aware of the opportunities available.

63 The University has a Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students. Students indicated that they were made aware of the Code of Practice upon arrival. Both staff and students agreed that the Code is an appropriate safety net and point of information throughout the year. Supervisor training is currently provided through a three-hour compulsory briefing every five years. Attendance records are kept by the IAD, which reports back to schools. In addition, the IAD delivers tailored training to schools to ensure that all supervisors have optional access to subject-specific training once a year, and there are also self-study resources available on the IAD website. All new supervisors are required to co-supervise for at least one academic year before becoming responsible for students independently.

64 The majority of students who met the ELIR team had positive experiences with their supervisors, indicating that they felt supported and encouraged to engage with development and educational opportunities, including attendance at events and conferences. However, a

small number of students did not feel that this was the case and they were not aware of what to do or where to go if they required further support. Not all of the students considered that the Code of Practice was implemented consistently. Heads of school outlined the roles of the co-supervisors in cases where students did not consider that their needs were being met, and acknowledged that further training for some research supervisors could be beneficial. The team encourages the University to review the effectiveness and regularity of research supervisor training.

65 The training and development for tutors and demonstrators has developed since the 2011 ELIR with better oversight of tutors through guaranteed contracts and the appointment of a staff member in the IAD, who works specifically with this group. Nonetheless, during the current ELIR, undergraduate students expressed a level of dissatisfaction with teaching delivered by postgraduate research students; the research students who taught indicated to the ELIR team that they did not always feel sufficiently trained or prepared to do so.

66 The University should continue to analyse the needs and experience of postgraduate research students at school, college and institutional level to ensure that they are effectively supported, particularly in the context of the University's plans to increase the 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 and implemented effectively. The University should also make certain that postgraduate research students who teach are properly trained and supported for the role (including in the provision of assessment and feedback) and are made aware of the career development resources available through the IAD.

2.4 Approaches to promoting the development of graduate attributes, including employability

67 The University has an effective approach to promoting the development of graduate attributes and employability skills. The 2011 ELIR report noted that the University had made good progress in this area and that continues to be the case. The University's Graduate Attributes Framework provides a key reference point for supporting students in the development of their graduate attributes through curricular and co-curricular opportunities. The work on graduate attributes is overseen by the Employability Strategy Group and guided by two sources: the internal Employability Consultancy and the external Employer Advisory Group, which comprises senior employers from a range of backgrounds who advise on the capabilities the University's graduates will need to enter the careers they wish to pursue.

68 The University has implemented the Higher Education Achievement Record, which it highlights as expanding the institution's capacity for recognising graduate attributes. All students (other than MBChB and research postgraduates) who have graduated from summer 2012 onwards receive an achievement report identifying a wide range of their activities while at the University.

69 Embedding graduate attributes in the curriculum is systematically considered through the course development and approval, annual monitoring and periodic review processes. In addition, the University has an expanding variety of ways for promoting, and supporting, the development of graduate attributes in the co-curriculum, including through the Edinburgh Award (see paragraph 72) and through a programme of pilot work aimed at exploring the potential of a University experience to allow the development of graduate attributes. The pilot work includes the University's support service for student entrepreneurs (LAUNCH.ed), the development of on-campus internships, and the appointment of a Community Engagement Officer to develop outreach opportunities at scale for the students. The ELIR team learned that the LAUNCH.ed service engaged with

1,300 students during 2013-14, providing one-to-one advice for around 600 students, running 40 events and engaging in start-up support for 28 new companies.

70 The University has also been successful in embedding graduate attributes for taught postgraduate students. The Making the Most of Masters scheme, which runs in partnership with Aberdeen and Stirling universities, allows students to choose to engage with employers for a work-based project in place of a more traditional master's dissertation. At the end of 2013-14, more than 700 work-based projects had been offered in the three universities (around 400 of those based in Edinburgh). During the current ELIR, it was evident that taught postgraduate students considered these work-based placements beneficial in developing their employability. The students who met the team also spoke positively about the extent to which graduate attributes were embedded in their curricula.

71 The ELIR team considered the Edinburgh Award to be a particularly positive approach for promoting graduate attributes and employability. By the end of 2013-14, more than 500 students had received an Edinburgh Award, exceeding the target set in the 2012-16 Strategic Plan for the end of the planning cycle. Students who met the team were unanimous in their praise for the range of ways they could engage with the Award process, and the support they received from Personal Tutors, award leaders and other staff in order to attain it. The Award recognises achievement in both curricular and co-curricular activities, and is flexible enough to allow new Award types to be created in the future for more areas of student activity. It already recognises activity in a wide range of arenas, including volunteering, Sports Union Club Management, part-time work experience, representing students, peer support and student media. The team learned that the Employability Consultancy and IAD planned to work together with individual course and programme leaders to develop further opportunities for students to gain an Edinburgh Award, and to develop the confidence of staff in embedding graduate attributes and employability skills more generally in all aspects of their teaching. Achievement of the Edinburgh Award appears on the Higher Education Achievement Report and is clearly held in high regard by staff and students.

2.5 Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience

72 The University has taken a self-evaluative, proactive, systematic and strategic approach to enhancing the student learning experience. It was evident to the ELIR team that senior colleagues at the University recognised the development areas highlighted by the team during the current review and, in the majority of cases, were already taking action to enhance them. The University also recognises that further value could be achieved by progressing its plans to move key strategic priorities from a series of projects to inclusion in mainstream activity to ensure they become embedded in the institution's policies and processes.

73 Senior staff are aware of the challenges associated with ensuring the consistent application of the Personal Tutor system across a large, highly devolved institution. There would be considerable benefit in the University revisiting the way in which schools are implementing the system to ensure all students are able to benefit from the arrangements as intended. The University should provide additional clarification for students around the aims of the system, and provide information about alternative avenues of student support.

74 The University has made improving feedback on assessment an institutional priority and progress is evident. Nonetheless, further work remains to ensure the University is able to implement its feedback policy and practice in a clear and consistent manner across the institution so that all students receive timely, relevant and high quality feedback at key points during their programmes. There would be benefit in working in partnership with students at

the school level to understand specific issues and to tailor feedback provision more closely to the needs of students (see also paragraph 105). It is evident that ODL students have a very positive view of their experience, including their engagement with assessment and the feedback they receive. There would be value in the University reflecting on the positive experiences reported by ODL students with a view to replicating them across the student body.

75 The University has a positive and constructive relationship with EUSA and it is encouraged to continue working in partnership to ensure there is more effective student representation at college and school level. The University should review the processes for appointing students to school committees and 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. 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.

76 There are many positive aspects of the student experience at the University and, in particular, the ELIR team highlighted the promotion of peer-assisted schemes, which are valued by those who use them and also provide mentors with effective opportunities to develop transferable skills. The University has a creative and dynamic approach to promoting and embedding graduate attributes in the curriculum and co-curriculum. The Edinburgh Award is recognised as particularly positive practice for its ability to promote student engagement in developing graduate attributes across a wide and expanding range of activities. In addition, related to efforts aimed at internationalising the student experience, the University has a positive approach to growing, promoting and enhancing student mobility.

77 The University has a progressive and effective approach to promoting and providing ODL. There has been planned, significant growth in ODL, supported by the Distance Education Initiative, which provided resources to the majority of schools prior to the activity being implemented as part of the mainstream University business. ODL students are very positive about their whole experience, emphasising they considered it was equivalent to that of on-campus students.

78 In the context of the University's ambitions to increase the postgraduate research student population, there would be considerable benefit in the institution continuing to analyse the needs and experience of postgraduate research students at school, college and institutional level to ensure that they are effectively supported. The University should review the effectiveness and regularity of supervisor training and ensure that the University's Code of Practice is communicated and implemented effectively. The University should also make certain that postgraduate research students who teach are properly trained and supported for the role (including in the provision of assessment and feedback) and are made aware of the career development resources available through the Institute for Academic Development.

3 Enhancement in learning and teaching

3.1 Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice

79 The University has an effective approach to identifying and sharing good practice, with a number of mechanisms in place to disseminate information and encourage staff to become involved in conversations about enhancement in learning and teaching. These include: workshops; local conferences on specific themes; symposia for staff in specific roles; and a variety of staff networks. Schools each produce an annual Quality

Assurance and Enhancement Report, which are reviewed at the relevant college quality committee, which, in turn, produces an Annual College Quality Assurance Report for consideration by the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (see paragraph 109). The University also has a Senate Committees' Symposium, where staff have the opportunity to listen to external speakers on learning and teaching themes.

80 The Institute for Academic Development (IAD) has a positive impact in the University, which was evident throughout the ELIR. It takes a leading role in identifying and sharing good practice and in providing staff development to support the strategic aims of the institution. It has established a staff development network that includes regular lunchtime discussion sessions. Around half of the teaching staff that the ELIR team met were members of this network, regularly attending these lunchtime sessions that they viewed as useful and relevant to their needs. The IAD has also introduced a case study wiki, which contains around 100 case studies of good practice from across the University. In meetings with the team, heads of school and teaching staff discussed wiki case studies that they had created, emphasising the benefits they had experienced from having done so, for example by presenting these in their schools through seminars and sharing practice more widely with a larger range of colleagues as a result.

81 Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) also facilitates the identification of good practice through the EUSA Teaching Awards Scheme, which, in 2008-9, was the first student-led teaching award scheme in the UK. Students can nominate teaching staff, support staff, courses, and learning communities for awards, which are assessed by a student judging panel. EUSA has developed the criteria for judging these Awards, which are now divided into eight different categories: Best Feedback, Best Personal Tutor, Best Student Tutor, Best Research and Dissertation Supervisor, Supporting Students' Learning, Best Overall Teacher, Best Course, and Best Learning Community Award. EUSA has been working to strengthen the quality of the nominations by encouraging students to elaborate on why they are nominating particular individuals, courses, or programmes. Feedback given by students is shared anonymously with University staff to highlight what students value most, with the aim of improving the students' academic experiences. The number of nominations has been rising steadily over the years. For the 2014-15 Awards, 3,000 nominations were received and were accessible on the EUSA Teaching Awards website.

3.2 Impact of the national Enhancement Themes and related activity

82 The 2011 ELIR report recognised that the University has been a significant contributor to the national Enhancement Themes, highlighting that there was considerable evidence of the institution using the outcomes of the Themes to inform its own policies and practice. The University continues to be fully engaged in the national Themes and there is much evidence of the current Theme, as well as previous Themes, being used to influence institutional activity, for example in the development of the University's graduate attributes.

83 The University is using the current Theme, Student Transitions, to continue a focus on induction for new students and continuing induction for existing students, an activity which has been significantly enhanced by the work of the Student Experience Project. In particular, the University is widening the focus of its annual Gearing Up for Induction event, which enables academic and support staff from across the institution and EUSA to come together to focus on student induction. The intention is to align the event with the Student Transitions Theme to include a focus on transitions through and out of the University. In discussions with the ELIR team it was evident that academic staff regarded the Gearing Up for Induction event as useful and that there was positive engagement with the Theme more generally.

3.3 Engaging and supporting staff

84 The University's ambition for learning and teaching (see paragraph 8) seeks to ensure that learning and teaching is recognised across the University as an 'unambiguous priority' and supported and rewarded appropriately. A number of areas of focus for engaging and supporting staff in this ambition are identified: providing a wide variety of training opportunities for staff; recognising and rewarding contributions both to leadership and best practice in learning and teaching; and ensuring that learning and teaching is embedded in the way the institution recruits, mentors and develops staff. The University aims to implement a framework of recruitment, annual review and promotion that describes learning/teaching, research and leadership/management as areas of equal esteem.

85 To support the University's ambition for learning and teaching, and to provide clear metrics and indicators of excellence in teaching performance for use in promotion processes, the University has developed a set of Exemplars of Excellence in Student Education. The Exemplars aim to ensure that rewards for excellence in student education are equal in status to those for excellence in research. The University intends that, as the Exemplars become more widely used, they will prompt a culture change towards an ethos where teaching and research are seen by all as equally valuable contributions. The University described this as the single most important long-term strategic move that it could make to improve the student experience in a sustainable and systematic way.

86 The Exemplars were available for the first time in 2013 for use as part of all academic promotions processes. At the time of the current ELIR, the Exemplars had been used by individuals applying for promotion and, in some cases, by external reviewers of promotion cases. During the ELIR the Exemplars were mentioned positively by staff in a variety of roles, who regarded them as a good tool both for individual teachers to assess their own teaching competencies, and for use in helping to describe their abilities and areas for development in promotion processes. The ELIR team learned that the Exemplars had been sufficiently well-received across the University that similar documents were already being created for knowledge exchange and academic leadership.

87 The IAD is responsible for supporting academic staff development in learning, teaching and assessment. It was evident during the ELIR visit that the activities of the IAD reached into colleges and schools, and its flexibility in tailoring activities to individual school needs was highlighted by staff as an effective way to help promote and support strategic priorities and contribute to a culture of continuous enhancement. During the ELIR, staff at all levels repeatedly expressed the value they placed on the support offered by the IAD. The opportunity for staff to undertake secondments to the IAD also promotes the exploration and exchange of good practice.

88 The IAD has developed an overarching Continuing Professional Development Framework for learning and teaching, which is mapped against the UK Professional Standards Framework and accredited by the Higher Education Academy. It incorporates existing accredited programmes such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice as well as a range of alternative pathways for development. The Framework includes the Edinburgh Teaching Award, which is designed to allow staff opportunities to reflect on teaching and assessment practice in ways relevant to their role and career stage. Activities that count towards the Edinburgh Teaching Award include: writing up aspects of learning and teaching practice; participating in IAD events and networks, and developmental events from elsewhere in the sector; and participating in courses from certain University programmes. The ELIR team regarded the IAD's development of the Framework as an effective, practical and flexible approach to supporting staff in enhancing their practice in learning and teaching.

3.4 Effectiveness of the approach to promoting good practice in learning and teaching

89 The University has an effective approach to promoting good practice in learning and teaching and is making good progress with its ambition to establish parity of esteem between research and teaching excellence. There is an integrated approach to staff development with clear linkages between institutional strategy, promotion processes and the range of flexible staff development opportunities provided by the IAD.

90 The development and use of the Exemplars of Excellence in Student Education demonstrate the University's commitment to help teaching staff articulate their contribution to the student learning experience. During the current ELIR it was evident that reward and recognition for teaching practice were embedded in promotional processes and supported by the work of the IAD, with staff commenting positively on the change in parity of esteem between teaching and research that they had seen since the 2011 ELIR.

4 Academic standards

4.1 Approach to setting, maintaining and reviewing academic standards

91 The University's approach to setting, maintaining and reviewing academic standards is effective. The University's Statement on Quality Arrangements cites its academic regulations, the curriculum framework, the procedures for taught programme and course approval, annual monitoring of both taught and research degree programmes, and the periodic review of taught programmes, together with the role of external examiners, as its main arrangements for setting and maintaining academic standards. The Senatus Academicus (Senate) has ultimate responsibility for quality assurance, including the academic standards of the University's programmes. Of its four committees established in 2009-10, the Senate Quality Assurance Committee, convened by the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance, has oversight of the delivery of the University's quality assurance framework and, through reports from relevant school and college committees, is responsible for advising the Senate on the standards of its programmes. The Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee, convened by an Assistant Principal with appropriate responsibility, has oversight of the academic regulatory framework relating to assessment, degree classifications, the operation of examination boards and external examiners. Consistent with the University's devolved structure, the operation of the majority of its quality assurance arrangements is devolved to the three colleges, which are required to have in place appropriate systems for the setting and monitoring of standards that reflect University guidelines and frameworks for these activities, supported with committee structures and roles mirroring those of the Senate. The colleges, in turn, devolve the day-to-day operation and monitoring of programmes to their constituent schools.

92 Procedures for assuring the academic standards of postgraduate research programmes are clearly explained in the University's Quality Assurance Monitoring and Reporting of Postgraduate Research Provision, summarised in the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students, and reinforced through the University's General Regulations for Higher Degree Programmes, incorporating arrangements for eligibility and application processes, forms of submission and examination arrangements.

4.2 Management of assessment

93 Assessment is managed through the University's assessment regulations for taught and research programmes, degree classification procedures, the operation of examination boards, misconduct policies, and external examiners. Assessment practice is underpinned by key principles established by the Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee

to ensure assessment is beneficial, fair, reliable and valid; varied and representative; and transparent, effective, practical and secure. The assessment regulations are reviewed and approved annually by the Committee and are applied to all taught programmes at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework levels 7-12. Assessment strategies are determined at the course and programme-approval stage and may be changed for courses following approval by the relevant school board.

94 The University uses a number of common marking schemes to ensure the consistent application of grades and grade descriptors within degree programmes, with the aim of achieving parity of assessment across programmes. The ELIR team noted there are currently five such marking schemes: one for all undergraduate degrees excepting those in the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, which has two schemes; one for certain programmes in the Edinburgh College of Art; and one adopted for marking at postgraduate level. Schools often provide supplementary guidance about the marking scheme they use, which is intended to describe how students can achieve assignment grades at each level within the marking scheme they are using. Both students and staff welcomed this additional guidance, but noted that the quality of the guidance varied between schools. There would be value in the University reviewing the information provided to students about marking schemes, building on good practice developed within some schools of expanding the descriptors of grade schemes and considering the possible benefit of developing grade descriptors at institutional level.

4.3 Use of external reference points in managing academic standards

95 The University has engaged with mapping its policies and practices against the various chapters of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) since 2010, and has ongoing and systematic arrangements for their review. Of particular note is the 2014-15 project to review and refresh existing policies, guidance and structures for the management of collaborative provision in the light of the Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*, and a number of initiatives resulting from the review of *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*, especially the introduction of a handbook for external examining of research degrees, and a comprehensive revision of the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students. The ELIR team noted that each Indicator within the Quality Code was carefully mapped. The University is using the Quality Code to build on a project in the College of Humanities and Social Science to identify enhanced ways of conducting annual programme monitoring (Chapter B8), and to undertake further work on the postgraduate research student lifecycle (Chapter B11).

96 Mappings of alignment are considered by the Senate Quality Assurance Committee. The various Chapters of the Quality Code are loaded on the Quality website, with the detailed mapping placed adjacently for ease of reference. The mapping of new programmes against the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, and relevant Subject Benchmarks Statements; the extensive use of external examiners and external advisers involved with programme approval and review processes; and the professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) accreditation of 134 of the University's degree programmes confirm the alignment of the University's arrangements with the Quality Code, Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards. While not all staff are necessarily aware of this Part of the Quality Code, the University policies and procedures they use are closely aligned with all Chapters of Part A.

Use of external examiners

97 The University employs around 550 external examiners, whose roles are embedded in the academic regulations and outlined in the External Examiner Policy, which includes a revised External Examiners' Handbook approved by the Senate Quality

Assurance Committee. External examiners are appointed at college level following scrutiny of nomination forms prepared by the schools. Following a review of the External Examiner Policy and the related External Examiner Project, the University has, from 2015-16, clarified and separated the roles of course and programme examiners, with the latter commenting specifically on the programme as a whole.

98 The University publishes the names of external examiners in programme and course handbooks, which detail students' right to access the reports. External examiner reports are discussed routinely in school Staff-Student Liaison Committees, and each student has a right of access, arranged by schools, to the reports. Few of the students who met the ELIR team were aware of the reports, although some had discussed these within their school.

99 The University's External Examiner Project was established to enhance the value derived from the external examiner reports. Among the key elements of the project are the introduction of online reporting by external examiners in a format that facilitates a faster and more consistent reflection at school, college and University levels on matters arising from the reports. The application of software enables the direct extraction of common themes from the reports, including areas for further development and good practice. The ELIR team received a detailed presentation of the project, which has been positively received by staff involved in internal review. The project was piloted throughout 2014-15 and implemented fully during 2015-16. The team considered the project to represent positive practice that will enhance the University's analysis of its external examiner reports.

Programme approval and review

100 The University has a devolved approach to course and programme approval within an overall policy framework, with 'opt-outs' from relevant University curricula frameworks having to be agreed by the Curriculum and Student Progression Committee. Examples of 'opt-outs' are rare, and result usually from amendments to meet the requirements of a professional or statutory body.

101 New programmes must be approved in the first instance by the relevant school board of studies through arrangements determined by the relevant college, which has formal authority for approval. Colleges have detailed procedures for approval arrangements for programmes within their jurisdiction. School boards ensure that proposals conform in particular to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, the requirements of relevant PSRBs, and meet the requirements of relevant employers and industry bodies. Programme specifications are prepared as part of the approval process, using a standard template, and describe concisely the aims, structures and key features of the programme; the learning, teaching and assessment strategies and methods; the programme outcomes in terms of knowledge and understanding, graduate attributes, and technical skills; and career opportunities. Programme proposals are accompanied by detailed comments from external experts and internal colleagues not directly associated with the preparation of the proposal. The ELIR team met staff with institutional level roles as well as staff based in schools, all of whom were clear about these arrangements. School boards of study, or the relevant Learning and Teaching Committee, have authority to agree revised/new courses for report to the relevant college committee according to college approval mechanisms, and the definitive record of all courses is held in the online Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study. The team reviewed detailed examples of the programme approval process from the College of Science and Engineering and the College of Humanities and Social Science, and concluded that the University's arrangements for programme and course approval are effective.

102 Periodic review of modules and programmes, known as Teaching Programme Reviews and Postgraduate Programme Reviews, includes consideration of external reference points such as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and the Quality Code (see paragraph 123).

4.4 Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards

103 The University has robust processes that have been systematically reviewed and refreshed since the 2011 ELIR. The University's arrangements for setting and maintaining academic standards through its wide adoption of the curriculum frameworks and academic regulations, the robust processes for the approval and review of programmes, clear arrangements for the management of assessment, the scrupulous use of external examiner reports and the appropriate use of external reference points all ensure that the academic standard of awards are appropriate and are likely to remain so in the future.

104 The introduction of electronic online reporting for external examiners represents positive practice and will facilitate a faster and more consistent reflection at school, college and University levels on matters arising from the reports. There would be benefit in the University reviewing the information provided to students on the grade descriptors for the common marking schemes in use and to consider this as part of the wider area for development around implementing feedback policy and practice in a clear and consistent manner across the University (see paragraphs 61 and 75).

5 Self-evaluation and management of information

5.1 Key features of the institution's approach

105 The University reports that, as a research-intensive institution, a scholarly and evidence-based approach is central to its self-evaluation. The University demonstrates this approach through: the high level monitoring of its Strategic Plan and cross-institutional initiatives; evaluative practice apparent in annual monitoring and periodic review of programmes and student services; and the analysis of feedback from students. Enhancement of the University's self-evaluative arrangements is evident through an increasingly integrated approach to the collection of data and the use of management information, linked to the development of strategic projects aimed at enhancing the student learning experience (see paragraphs 119-121).

106 The University took a collaborative approach to producing the Reflective Analysis for the current ELIR, inviting engagement from colleagues across the institution and working in partnership with Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA). The work was overseen by an ELIR Steering Group, with EUSA being involved and making active contributions at all stages.

Annual course and programme monitoring

107 Annual course and programme monitoring contributes to the continuous oversight of academic standards and the student learning experiences. This function is devolved to schools, who have some flexibility in their arrangements but are expected to work within the University's annual monitoring expectations, which include programme oversight, external (to the programme) comment, arrangements for action and onward reporting of appropriate matters. Schools and discipline areas determine, with the agreement of the relevant college Quality Assurance Committee, the appropriate mechanisms for the regular monitoring of their courses and programmes using information sources such as feedback from students, course evaluation by staff, external examiner reports, PSRB reports, and data on student performance and achievement. Schools are expected to take appropriate action based on

internal subject and external accreditation reviews, feedback from external examiners, and data on student performance and trends. Teaching staff who met the ELIR team confirmed their understanding of, and involvement in, the processes of course monitoring and their contribution to annual programme monitoring. Teaching staff, directors of learning and teaching and heads of school confirmed the value to the process of the report templates, pre-populated with relevant data on student performance.

108 Schools are required to produce an annual Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) Report, which is considered by the college's Quality Assurance Committee. The purpose of the QAE Report is to provide a consistent framework for school-level reflection about the quality of the student experience, including that of postgraduate research students, and to identify and promote enhancement. Each college then produces an Annual College Quality Assurance Report in template form, which includes summaries of the key points emerging from the school reports, college data on student progression, progress updates on actions required from the previous annual report and most recent internal reports, themes and actions consequent on external examiner reports and a report on student engagement activities. These are considered at the Senate Quality Assurance Committee, which makes recommendations to the colleges.

109 Since 2004 the University has included support services in annual monitoring processes to improve alignment between learning and teaching and support service provision. This received positive comment in the 2011 ELIR and, since that time, there has been some minor modification of the reporting template to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the process; the University is considering further modification based on the Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE) value and impact framework, to increase efficiency and effectiveness further. A particularly effective enhancement to the process is that services are now encouraged to include case studies demonstrating effective practice or enhancement with the wider group of student support services, and give consideration to any issues from outside the service area or that have a significant impact or carry a significant risk for the service.

110 Oversight of student services annual monitoring is provided through the Student Support Services Quality Assurance Framework subcommittee of the Senate Quality Assurance Committee, which produces reports for wider dissemination highlighting recommendations, commendations and key learning points from the student services reviews. Sample documentation confirmed the explicit consideration of these reports by the subcommittee, which appoints three member reviewers to each prepare a detailed critique for discussion at the full subcommittee. The effectiveness of the approach is also illustrated by the increase in the number of support services included in the quality assurance framework from seven to 15, with some services, including student finance, asking to be involved in the process. These developments were viewed positively by the ELIR team.

Institution-led quality review

111 The University's institution-led quality review processes are Teaching Programme Review and Postgraduate Programme Review. Schools and colleges are responsible for deciding which process includes the review of taught postgraduate provision. Both Teaching Programme Reviews and Postgraduate Programme Reviews aim to ensure linkages between quality assurance and enhancement processes. Review panels are chaired by a senior staff member from outside the college and include normally at least two members external to the University, internal members from different subject areas/schools to that under review and student members, who are jointly selected by the University and EUSA. The standard review remit is tailored for each review according to key University, college, school/subject areas and student priorities agreed at a formal remit meeting of the review panel members (including students) with key college/school staff. The outcome reports are

published on the University website. Review panels and subject areas are supported by an annual review briefing meeting for all staff involved in review activity and by detailed guidance material on the quality webpages. During the current ELIR, staff who had attended commented positively on the value of these briefings. Sample documentation demonstrated a comprehensive, robust and professional approach to internal periodic review, and confirmed the application of the University's terms of reference and composition of review panels. Since the 2011 ELIR, the University has reduced the number of meetings in the internal review process related to academic standards and quality, placing greater reliance on documentary evidence for assurance to allow greater emphasis during the discussions on enhancement.

112 In 2014-15 the University conducted a pilot Postgraduate Programme Review of online distance learning (ODL) in the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine. The University concluded that the review was helpful in identifying how students might be engaged more fully in review processes and in confirming that the review method was appropriate for reviewing ODL programmes.

113 In 2014 the University introduced periodic reviews of student services, starting with Information Services. The reports of the review team, which includes a specialist external to the University, include observations on good practice and recommendations for action and are published on the website. In 2014-15 the second periodic review of student services took place and focused on support for disabled students provided by the Student Disability Service, in partnership with the University's schools and colleges. As such, the exercise was a holistic review of support for disabled students rather than a review only of the Student Disability Service. The University considered that this model worked well and the Senate Quality Assurance Committee has agreed that further periodic reviews will only be conducted on a thematic basis to take into account a range of services and academic areas. The University does not have a forward schedule for student support service periodic review, preferring to adopt an approach whereby themes emerge through the annual monitoring process. The 2015-16 review focuses on student mental health support (see also paragraph 46).

Internal audit

114 The University's Internal Audit Department, reporting to the University Secretary, is responsible for reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of the institution's internal control systems. The ELIR team noted that the remit of Internal Audit includes learning and teaching activities and its main purpose is to provide independent assurance to the University Court, the Audit and Risk Committee, and senior management on the operation of the University's key processes and controls. For example, in 2012-13, Internal Audit focused on the project governance of the Personal Tutor system in its contribution to the 'Excellence in Education' goal of the Strategic Plan. Admissions and recruitment, student assessment and feedback, and practice placements were scrutinised in 2014-15, as was the University's approach to collaborative provision, the outcomes of which have contributed to evaluation of processes and practice in this area (see paragraph 140). The team concluded that the use of the Internal Audit service as an additional feature of the University's already extensive suite of self-evaluation arrangements represents positive practice.

Feedback from students

115 Since the 2011 ELIR the University has been proactive in promoting greater consistency in gathering and reporting feedback information at course level. The University has been piloting the use of electronic course evaluation software to provide a standardised approach to gathering and reporting course-level student feedback. The University acknowledges that the full benefits of using the software in delivering transparent and

comparable course data at institutional level can only be delivered when the software is adopted by all schools. At the time of the current ELIR, the software was being used in 15 of the 22 schools, with the University estimating that the roll-out of the system would be complete by 2016-17. Discussion was ongoing about the merits of schools being able to introduce optional or alternative questions.

116 The Student Surveys Unit, now part of the Student Experience Services group led by the Deputy Secretary (Student Experience), was established in 2013 by the Senate Quality Assurance Committee, following a recommendation from its task group on Assuring the Quality of the Student Experience, with the intention of developing a comprehensive and coordinated approach to surveying the student experience. The Unit is responsible for analysing results from the NSS, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the International Student Barometer (ISB), as well as running and analysing the University's own Edinburgh Student Experience Survey (ESES). The NSS analysis, for example, compared outcomes to those from previous years in respect of answers to the six main areas of the questionnaire and the overall satisfaction question, and against performance by the Russell Group and upper quartile responses from Universities UK institutions. Staff viewed the role of the Unit very positively and acknowledged its support in the course and programme monitoring processes and in staff analysis of the outcomes to the external surveys.

117 A mid-term evaluation of the Student Experience Project confirmed that 92 per cent of respondents to a staff survey said they knew who to contact for queries about survey data; 79 per cent said it was easier to access information; and 83 per cent confirmed that the results had helped them to be informed about factors affecting the student experience. Actions identified in relation to the survey results are discussed in a series of annual meetings between the Senior Vice-Principal Learning and Teaching and each head of school. Particular attention is focused on the schools with the lowest overall scores. In 2014-15 two schools in particular were visited by the Principal and a group of senior staff to discuss priority actions. Ongoing support is also provided to all schools that are below the Russell Group Upper Quartile benchmark. The Senior Vice-Principal, together with the relevant Head of College and College Dean, have in-depth discussions with schools to discuss the challenges and formulate an effective response.

Use of data to enhance the student experience

118 A key recent development to support the University's self-evaluative processes has been the development, initiated by the University's Knowledge Strategy Committee, to improve and widen access to core data and information for a range of Business Intelligence/Management Information (BI/MI) purposes that support the student learning experience. Student data is a key element of the BI/MI data sets, which also include data sets on finance, estates, research and human resources. The University plans to make Key Information Sets data from all institutions available through the BI/MI scheme to support subject benchmarking and PSRB accreditation.

119 2013 saw the introduction of the first phase of the Student Systems Road Map project, a strand of the BI/MI initiative, focusing on the accessibility of data, including: admissions; assessment; Personal Tutor system statistics; and course and programme information. The aim of the Student Systems Road Map is to provide decision makers and external bodies with 'timely, accurate, joined-up and trusted information', focusing on data enhancement rather than merely data collection. The ELIR team would encourage the University to progress with this work, in particular developing the staff-facing 'Dashboard' project, which will be a key feature of the second phase of the Student Systems Road Map project to take place in the 2016-21 period. Sample documentation provided to the team included a screenshot of a prototype view of the range of data that would be accessible to

staff involved with the various stages of the student journey, interactively displayed and presented flexibly for use at course, programme, school or college level. The prototype displayed data sets on applications and admissions, NSS outcomes, completion rates and exit awards. The team noted that some of the information displayed was subdivided to allow further interrogation by student group. Staff familiar with the work welcomed the initiative and expressed the clear benefits that could be gained by increasing the operational effectiveness of their course and programme monitoring, and confirmed that the Dashboard prototypes were being discussed in a wide range of fora to seek staff comment, and promote engagement.

120 An example of the effective use of data for decision making is evident in the student-designed and developed PATH project. PATH is a user-friendly interface to which staff and students can contribute. It draws on existing information from the University's Programme and Course Information Management (PCIM) system to provide students with the information and tools needed to make informed course selections within the context of an increasing breadth of course choice. Changes to courses or programmes made within the PCIM are automatically reflected in PATH. PATH also: allows students to hold informed discussions with Personal Tutors on course choices; allows easy generation of possible timetables; enables students to see the impact of potential choices on later years of their programme; and automatically validates choices against programme rules. The University intends to implement PATH across all courses and to make it available to students pre-registration as an aid to early course planning. The ELIR team viewed PATH positively, as an example of the integrated way that the University is making progress in using data to identify and implement enhancements to the student learning experience.

5.2 Commentary on the advance information set

121 The University provided a considerable volume of advance material, as well as various sets of additional information, that allowed the ELIR team to develop a good understanding of the arrangements in place for quality assurance and enhancement, and provided reassurance that the institution is meeting sector expectations. In particular, the Advance Information Set provided detail on the balance between institution-wide guidelines and the devolved structures of the University. The information contained within the Advance Information Set demonstrated the University's reflective approach to self-evaluation, and its commitment to producing quantitative and qualitative data to enable enhancement to be a direct outcome of the various monitoring processes.

5.3 Use of external reference points in self-evaluation

122 The University makes use of a wide range of external reference points to inform its self-evaluation processes. Monitoring and review processes at the programme level refer to the Quality Code (including Subject Benchmark Statements), the Scottish Funding Council Guidance on Quality, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, the results of external surveys, and comparative benchmarking data available through the Higher Education Statistics Agency. The University has been actively involved in past and present national Enhancement Themes, and has used the Theme to support developments in various aspects of the student experience, including assessment, graduate attributes and student transitions (see paragraphs 83 and 84).

5.4 Management of public information

123 The University has a transparent policy for the management of public information and generally gives public access to all documents, guided by its Model Publication Scheme, which sets out guidance on the types of information available and protocols for records management. The University's public facing website has numerous links to University

Court and Senate papers, and provides supportive and comprehensive information to assist students, staff, and the general public. The ELIR team noted that the University's Website Programme has been developed further to make information more accessible to users of smartphones and tablets.

124 Communications and Marketing oversee the production of undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses, with the involvement of Student Recruitment and Admissions, the International Office and various service offices. Communications and Marketing confirms the accuracy of course and programme material with schools, and heads of school confirmed robust arrangements are in place to ensure that all changes to courses and programmes are recorded in the online Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study.

125 Undergraduate and postgraduate students who met the ELIR team confirmed the comprehensiveness, accuracy and accessibility of pre and post-arrival information, as well as the information supplied by the various support services. They indicated that both web and paper-based information had been helpful in their choice of programme. They indicated that the programme and course handbooks provided relevant, detailed and regularly updated guidance. ODL students cited the comprehensive and extensive information available to them and advised that this had become more focused on the needs of off-campus students during the past two years.

5.5 Effectiveness of the approach to self-evaluation and management of information

126 The University's approach is both effective and forward-looking. It pays particular attention to the monitoring of student, programme and student services performance, it systematically reviews progress against its strategic and related plans, and, through the work of the Senate Quality Assurance Committee and the colleges, monitors the implementation of school and college action plans. The University makes effective use of the rich and increasing data sources it has available and aims not only to extend the amount of relevant data it gathers, but to make these and existing data available in a more useful way to staff. The University's approach to self-evaluation and reflection, its comprehensive quality monitoring and review arrangements, and its use of data to enhance the student learning experience all represent positive practice.

6 Collaborative activity

6.1 Key features of the institution's strategic approach

127 The University's strategic goals with respect to internationalisation, global impact and partnership are set out in the University Strategic Plan 2012-16. The University aims to attract the most able minds from anywhere in the world, provide students and staff with a world-class experience, and ensure that teaching and research deliver global benefits. The University's overarching objective is to become a first choice place of study, with priority being placed on enhancing the institution's global presence in learning, research and knowledge transfer. This activity is led by a Vice-Principal (International), who is supported by senior staff in each of the colleges, new deans of international for each of the priority countries or regions, and internationalisation groups at school level.

128 The Strategic Plan 2012-16 includes a target to create at least 800 new opportunities to gain an international experience as part of the Edinburgh degree. A number of initiatives support this ambition, including: Go Abroad, which provides all students with an international educational experience of between one and eight weeks (see paragraph 52). The key metrics in the University Strategy Plan relating to internationalisation include increasing the headcount of non-EU international students by at least 2,000; and to increase

the number of postgraduate research students on programmes jointly awarded with international partners by 50 per cent. Staff who met the ELIR team confirmed that the aim for growth was ambitious and would require a concerted effort and commitment at all levels. Staff confirmed that the University was on target to meet the 50 per cent increase in international postgraduate research student numbers because the total numbers across the institution remained relatively small.

129 In September 2014 the University had collaborative agreements with 64 international institutions and 20 UK institutions. Although the number of agreements has increased since the 2011 ELIR, the number of students studying with the University through collaborative arrangements has not increased significantly. The University's current collaborative, partnership and exchange activity includes jointly awarded postgraduate research degree programmes, which enable doctoral students to embark on jointly supervised research degrees aimed at enhancing their research experience and employment opportunities internationally. The benefits for students on these programmes include access to two research environments and cultures, as well as access to the training and facilities of two research-intensive universities.

130 The University offers a range of partnerships for the purpose of offering students study abroad opportunities. Two-plus-two agreements are in place with eight Chinese universities to admit students to the third year of an Edinburgh engineering degree following the successful completion of two years of approved study at the respective Chinese institution. Five similar agreements are in place with the schools of Chemistry and Geosciences. The College of Humanities and Social Science has recently developed a two-plus-two agreement with Donghua University in China. Edinburgh College of Art has been delivering the programme in China for two years, with the first students due to arrive at the University of Edinburgh at the start of 2016-17.

131 The University has one accreditation agreement with Scotland's Rural College. The University's collaboration with Scotland's Rural College is managed through the College of Science and Engineering; three BSc degree programmes are currently accredited, in addition to a number of research degree student registrations.

132 The University is committed to maintaining and developing partnerships with both Scottish and other UK higher education institutions. Its ambition is to introduce further flexibility into its degree pathways through closer working with strategic partners and through direct entry to year two for undergraduate students. Senior staff confirmed that there was a political imperative to provide flexibility in the learner journey, and the University curriculum structure is designed to facilitate this flexibility. There are no formal articulation agreements in place with further education colleges. Articulation exists with further education colleges where students can gain direct entry to later years of a University degree programme, but no formal agreements are in place.

133 In 2013-14 the University had 1,716 students registered on online distance master's programmes, with ambitions to increase these numbers significantly (see paragraphs 47-50) The University has two collaborative online distance learning programmes: one international with the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, and one with the Royal College of Surgeons.

134 At the time of the current ELIR the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine was at an advanced stage of discussion with Zhejiang University in China regarding a dual award model of collaboration, introducing an undergraduate programme in Biomedical Sciences. In order to support this development the University developed a formal policy on dual, double and multiple awards. The proposal is with the Chinese authorities for approval.

6.2 Securing academic standards of collaborative provision

135 The University has a clear focus on academic standards and academic governance, which is set out in its collaborative provision policies. The policies and procedures are aligned to the Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*. The University considers that it has clear collaborative procedures, which staff understand fully, including: clear memorandum agreements; transparent due diligence processes; and clear guidelines on the types of agreements that the University will consider.

136 The University ensures that appropriate scrutiny, review, approval and risk assessment is undertaken for all collaborative proposals. Partnership proposals originate in schools, with advice from college and specialist teams from across the University. All proposals comprise a business case, risk assessment and resource review. The University considers new collaborative proposals on a case-by-case basis. Advice on setting up collaborative programmes is provided by a number of areas, including: Governance and Strategic Planning; International Office, including Edinburgh Global and its dedicated team supporting schools; Academic Services, providing guidance on academic standards and quality assurance and enhancement; and the Director of Legal Services.

137 In discussions with the ELIR team staff confirmed that all external collaborations are initiated at school level. Support is provided at both University and college level, including advice from the International Office. Due diligence is scrutinised by college and school-level committees, including by the College Registrar. No new collaboration is developed unless supported and promoted by the relevant head of school. A detailed and robust business case is produced at school level, which outlines the academic rationale for the collaboration and confirms its financial sustainability. Any new collaboration must also be agreed at college level and must have a Memorandum of Agreement, which requires University-level approval, in place before any activity commences. Boards of studies are responsible for curriculum development and approval within a school and must ensure that new proposals are academically appropriate and supported by evidence. The University retains responsibility for the quality and standards of any award made in its name and ensures that awards meet and align with the expectations of the Quality Code. This includes the University having comprehensive arrangements for the approval of Collaborative, study abroad and joint PhD programmes. The ELIR team noted the clarity and comprehensiveness of the Memoranda of Agreement, which make clear the responsibilities of each party (University and partner).

138 Collaborative programmes are subject to annual monitoring and review in the same way as other University programmes and are included in standard internal review processes. Programme monitoring is undertaken at school level, with reporting upwards to colleges who in turn report to the Senate Quality Assurance Committee. The Senate Quality Assurance Committee has oversight of collaborative programmes through both internal review reporting and annual college Quality Assurance and Enhancement Reports.

139 In 2013 the University conducted an Internal Audit of its collaborative activity, including teaching and research. In 2014 the University started work on a project to address the recommendations arising from the Internal Audit report. The report confirmed that the University's approach was robust, however, it noted that there were opportunities to clarify roles and responsibilities in schools, colleges and University departments in the approval of collaborative programmes, in order to reduce duplication and provide clearer guidance and support. Outcomes from the exercise included: the University producing a revised suite of standard Memoranda of Understanding and Agreement for collaborative activities; defining categories of collaboration, and preparing guidance for academic and non-academic approval processes for new collaborative programmes; and holding an enhanced digital repository and making improvements to the existing student record system.

6.3 Enhancing the student learning experience on collaborative programmes

140 The University aims to provide students on collaborative programmes with a learning experience equivalent to students on campus in Edinburgh. The partnership approval process ensures that mechanisms are in place to support the student learning experience, for example ensuring that students are able to comment on their experience and engage in decision-making through student representation. All students on collaborative programmes are given access to pastoral and academic support.

141 The effectiveness of partner arrangements are reviewed as part of the routine quality review processes. The University also monitors collaborative arrangements through site visits.

142 For the College of Humanities and Social Science two-plus-two agreement with Donghua university in China, staff confirmed that the due diligence process ensures that a comparable learning experience is being delivered. This, coupled with a one-month pre-sessional process to fill curriculum gaps and provide support for English language, ensures that students are adequately prepared for the interview process to attend the final two years at Edinburgh. The process is selective and not automatic; students apply via UCAS. The launch of the Shanghai International College of Fashion and Creative Studies at Donghua introduced courses in Fashion Innovation and Fashion Interior Design, which are delivered and assessed in English by Edinburgh College of Art academic staff. In 2016-17 the first international students could begin studying in Edinburgh through the '2+2 Fashion Innovation Degree'. It was confirmed that the programmes already have a diverse profile of students, for example students from Australia, Hong Kong and China, although the cohorts at Donghua are small. The challenge for Edinburgh College of Art is to encourage Edinburgh students to go to China and benefit from the collaboration.

143 Since the 2011 ELIR a revised Code of Practice on Study Abroad has been put in place to aid student mobility. The Code sets out responsibilities and expectations of staff and students to ensure appropriate support for students who are at a partner university. Students who met the ELIR team indicated that, generally, support was good, but it was dependent on the year abroad coordinator. While abroad, students felt connected to the University but confirmed that they needed to be proactive. Engineering students in particular confirmed that they were well prepared with respect to risk, culture and the political situation of the country they were going to.

144 Scotland's Rural College is responsible for gathering and responding to student feedback on their experience while studying at the College. Matters arising from the feedback are included in an annual report to the University, which is considered by the Accreditation Board.

6.4 Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative activity

145 The University has an effective approach to managing its collaborative activity. All arrangements are managed in accordance with the approved University policies and procedures, and a business case is conducted at school level separately from approval of the academic proposal. The risks of each arrangement to deliver learning opportunities with partners is assessed at the outset and reviewed subsequently on a periodic basis. Appropriate and proportionate safeguards to manage the risks of the various arrangements are determined and put in place.

146 The ELIR team found that the University had a strong commitment to internationalising the student experience, and has developed effective approaches to:

study abroad, online distance learning and collaboration with international partners. It has a proactive approach to the development of joint PhD programmes, and has implemented robust arrangements for their approval.

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