University of Edinburgh

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

April 2013

Preface

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

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

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

Enhancement-led Institutional Review 2011-12

Year-on Response

Introduction

The University of Edinburgh welcomes the ELIR Report and the positive comments. The ELIR Report has provided us with an opportunity to consolidate enhancement plans and make significant progress in a number of key areas identified in the Report. The Report has been helpful in structuring and providing a focus to those activities.

Immediately following receipt of the ELIR Report the document was analysed by Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance in conjunction with the Senate Committee Conveners and Academic Services to identify the key recommendations and actions. These 34 separate actions were developed into a three-year planning document\(^1\) to ensure that significant action is taken before the next ELIR. Priorities were attached to each action taking into account the strength of the recommendation made in the ELIR Report, ongoing University priorities and existing resources. The highest priority actions are receiving immediate attention in 2012/13, whereas the lower priority actions may not begin to be addressed until 2013/14, depending on resources, and the time taken to complete them may extend over a longer period. Regardless of the priority, we expect to have made significant progress against all actions over the three year period from 2012/13 to 2014/15.

In assigning priorities to actions we were mindful of the comment made in the ELIR Report [paragraph 88] that notes: “The University has been slow to fully address a number of the matters contained within the 2006 ELIR report, particularly those relating to the management of the student experience [e.g. pastoral and academic support and feedback]... The University is asked to ensure that it addresses all of the outcomes from the current ELIR in a timely manner”. As a result, all actions relating to the student experience, student support and feedback have been prioritised as a matter of urgency and immediate action is being taken in this year followed by a programme of action over the next two years.

\(^1\) [http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/quality-unit/institutional-review-elir/2011](http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/quality-unit/institutional-review-elir/2011)
In order to address the recommendations in a meaningful and manageable way, a themed approach is being taken to ensure the alignment of ELIR themes with key themes in the University’s Strategic Plan and with core enhancement activities supported by Academic Services, thus ensuring that the ELIR recommendations are addressed as part of an integrated planning process. The purpose of integrating the ELIR recommendations with University objectives and priorities is to align activities in a way that maximises the meaningfulness of the ELIR to the institution, promotes ownership of ELIR outcomes and subsequent progress, and helps enhance the impact of the actions taken. Both Academic Services and EUSA are key partners in this process.

The 34 separate actions have been grouped into six key substantive themes, approved by Senate Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) at its meeting on 24th May 2012 and at the 6th June 2012 meeting of Senate: Curriculum Development, Enhancing the Student Experience, Student Engagement in Quality, Collaborative Provision, Quality Assurance Framework and Continuing Professional Development, and a final overarching theme of Institutional Oversight and Consistency that cuts across the other themes.

Each substantive theme constitutes a specific work package with an identifiable lead from the Senior team and, in some cases co- and sub-leads. The theme lead is responsible for the development of the project plan, timelines and deliverables and for providing regular progress updates to QAC for monitoring and reporting purposes. Management of the overall process is being undertaken by Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance and Senate Quality Assurance Committee will have responsibility for monitoring and reporting. In compiling this year-on response, Theme Leads were requested to provide a report on progress by completing a table for each action indicating the work accomplished to date, a forward plan and timetable of further action, the effectiveness of action taken to date or plans to evaluate the effectiveness. The following paragraphs provide an overview of this information.

**Enhancing the Student Experience**

The majority of recommendations from the ELIR Report were made in this area and relate primarily to: implementation and ongoing strategic oversight of the Enhancing Student Support Project; provision of feedback to students; Learning and Teaching Strategies, and postgraduate study space.

The ELIR Report strongly encouraged the University to prioritise the implementation of the revised arrangements for pastoral and academic support that were in the early stages of development at the time of the review. This work is being undertaken

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3 [http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Committees/Senate/2011-12/20120606AgendaAndPapers.pdf](http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Committees/Senate/2011-12/20120606AgendaAndPapers.pdf)
under the remit of the Enhancing Student Support (ESS) project (led by Assistant Principal, Learning Developments). The project aims to ensure that students have access to a framework of guidance and support that builds on the best of current practices, meets contemporary needs, and is of a quality and consistency appropriate to a university of high global standing. The University has committed a total new investment of around £7.5 million to the project across two key areas: development of a Personal Tutor System supported by a range of IT tools (approx. £4m) and enhancement of a range of centrally provided student support (approx. £3.5m).

Developments are being phased in from academic year 2012/13 and delivered over a period of four years. Since the ELIR significant progress has been made including, but not limited to, the following key actions.

The Personal Tutor System has been fully implemented since the start of academic year 2012/13 for all undergraduate campus-based students, providing all students at School level with a dedicated Personal Tutor from the academic staff and Student Support Teams providing administrative support. Students and Personal Tutors are supported by a network of Senior Tutors across Schools and overseen by a Dean of Students in each College. Interim IT tools to support the Personal Tutor system were introduced in August 2012 ahead of the start of the semester, with small-scale enhancements being implemented during 2012/13. IT tools will continue to evolve with the phases of the project.

The University’s Standards and Guiding Principles for Academic and Pastoral Support were revised in May 2012 and fully detailed roles and responsibilities for all key roles and for students have been developed and implemented. Each School has also developed its own statement of student support arrangements.

Building on the existing good practice within a number of Schools, peer support systems are currently being piloted in 2012/13, with the aim that every undergraduate student will have access to peer support for AY 2013/14. Pilot systems are being implemented in 2012/13 earlier than anticipated.

A review of central student services was completed in June 2012 resulting in a range of actions related to enhancing centrally provided student support. This has led to a number of project strands to support the entire student journey and responds to the needs of the changing student population. The project covers five key strands: enhanced selection before and after application; pre-arrival and induction support; the introduction of student information points (to provide a single front-line point of information to students); improved online services for students; enhanced student communications.

Student information points and officers have been in place since the start of academic year 2012/13. New appointments have also been made for an Induction

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4 https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Home
Development Planner and a Student Communications Officer to oversee respective strands of work, and appointment of a Student Support Manager to oversee the entire project.

The ESS project is being led by Assistant Principal, Learning Developments and implemented via the Student Support Implementation Group that comprises representatives and stakeholders across the University. The project is managed by a project manager, working with an implementation timeline and prioritised deliverables, all of which have been met to date. Phase 2 of the project, currently in development, will ensure the roll out of the Personal Tutor System to all PG students from the start of AY 2013/14.

It has not been possible to conduct a detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of the ESS project at this early stage of implementation, but a monitoring, evaluation and enhancement process is under development to be finalised by Spring 2013 for implementation in Semester 1 of academic year 2013/14. In the meantime, feedback has been sought from staff and students through various committees and networks (including the Senior Tutor Network and the Student Support Team Network). Management information has also been available from the IT tools. Early indications suggest that the new Personal Tutor system is working well and has been well received by students. An early ‘high-level’ evaluation of the impact of the Personal Tutor system will be possible from the undergraduate student experience survey (reported later) that is due to close in March 2013, and from the NSS data; although this is expected to provide initial base-line data at this early stage. The Enhancing Student Support project addresses all recommendations arising from the ELIR Report in relation to pastoral and academic support.

In relation to feedback to students a number of actions have been taken led by Vice Principal Learning and Teaching. The University Court endorsed in September 2012 a package of work strands to address feedback and the wider student experience. To better understand feedback as part of the student experience, we are implementing a university-wide survey of all non-final year undergraduates to complement the NSS, PTES and PRES surveys. The survey is running from January-March 2013 and will provide data on feedback and the new Personal Tutor System alongside the wider student experience. A separate strand of qualitative research, based on focus groups, is being undertaken in an effort to understand what students understand by feedback and how to improve it. The creation of the post VP Assessment and Feedback since the start of the academic year 2012/13 is providing a dedicated focus on enhancement and sharing good practice in feedback, along with the development of award recognition with EUSA.

To address the ambiguity and inconsistency of feedback on examinations, the Feedback Standards and Guiding Principles were revised in semester 1 2012/13 to make explicit reference to the provision of feedback on examinations and to set out what students can expect in this regard. As part of the annual school quality

5 http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Committees/QAC/2012-13/20120906AgendaandPapers.pdf
assurance cycle, a feedback monitoring survey was issued to all schools throughout semester 1 to audit feedback practice against the Feedback Standards and Guiding Principles. A report on this will be available at the April meeting of the Senate Quality Assurance Committee.

In relation to Learning and Teaching Strategies, a revised version of the University Learning-Teaching Enhancement Strategy was approved by Senate Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) at its 21st November 2012 meeting to include reference to research-teaching linkages. At the same meeting the committee agreed that the review schedules of the University and College Strategies should be harmonised, but will be considered further following the development of School level Learning and Teaching Strategies. A working group was established in Semester 1 2012/13 to develop a template for School level strategies which reported to the 21st November LTC meeting. The template is currently being piloted in a small number of schools, following which it will be evaluated and, where appropriate, modified before rolling out to all schools.

In relation to postgraduate study space, the ELIR report noted variation in the provision of study and office space for postgraduate students across schools and colleges. A Task Group was set up under the remit of the Senate Researcher Experience Committee (REC) to explore the variation in provision. The Task Group reported to REC in October 2012 and concluded that most postgraduate research space design corresponds to discipline conventions; the most sociable spaces were found in disciplines that cultivate sociable ways of working. There is no desire for a centralised postgraduate research study facility. The task group found that postgraduate research students are increasingly being encouraged to think and work collaboratively, and that this is well represented in many areas.

The Task Group made a number of recommendations to enhance postgraduate study space and share best practice including holding three one-day workshops for academic staff and postgraduate research students during 2012/13, so that students from one College experience the working culture in another College. Reports from the workshop will be made to the Learning and Teaching Spaces Advisory Group (LTSAG) to take into consideration in the design of spaces. 2-3 short life experiments will be tried whereby staff and students will be co-located for a limited period of time. The effectiveness will be evaluated via a survey on postgraduate research space usage and run in 2012/13 by Estates and Buildings in collaboration with LTSAG and will report to LTSAG and REC for further action as appropriate. The recommendation that access to the wireless network, Eduroam, should be extended beyond the University boundary will be coordinated by Information Services (IS) and reported to REC. The Code of Practice for research students and supervisors will be reviewed and updated by Academic Services to reflect the diversity of study space available to students across the University. This will be undertaken as part of a wider review and update of the Code of Practice during the next academic year.
Student Engagement in Quality

Under this theme, the ELIR report asked us to focus on three key areas: to continue working in partnership with EUSA to enhance student representation, particularly at the College and School level; to consider the consistency of approach to the class rep system; to consider the consistency of approach to feedback from students. The theme lead is Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance.

Recent developments by EUSA will assist in strengthening the student rep system and the student voice. The single Student Council has been replaced by three separate councils: Academic Council, Welfare Council and External Council. This structure now provides a dedicated space through the Academic Council where student reps can meet with Sabbatical Officers to discuss academic matters. Specifically at the College level, colleges have been exploring ways of improving student engagement in 2012/13. The College of Humanities and Social Science (HSS) has established a Student Innovation Forum, in conjunction with EUSA, which reports directly to the College Quality Assurance Committee. It has also established a cross committee working group to focus on coordinating student engagement and communication work. The College of Science and Engineering (CSE) is also developing a similar forum building, building on the good practice in HSS.

In order to address inconsistency in the class rep system new guidelines for class reps have been implemented. Additionally, a set of Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) Principles are being developed throughout 2012/13 for implementation at the start of Academic year 2013/14. These key principles will set out the key roles and responsibilities of SSLCs and student reps and will ensure a degree of consistency in operation and reporting whilst also allowing for necessary flexibility to account for school-level issues.

A mapping of UoE policy and practice to the UK Quality Code Chapter on Student Engagement has been completed and identified an opportunity to develop a joint EUSA-University Student Engagement Statement. This statement was approved at the December 2012 meeting of QAC and was launched on 14th March 2013.

In relation to the promotion of a consistent approach to gathering and analysing student views and feedback across the institution, a new student survey project has been established and a Student Surveys Co-ordinator appointed to oversee the development of the work on a phased basis over the next three years. A priority in 2012/13 has been the development of a new survey of all non-final year undergraduates to provide an overview of the student experience primarily in years 1, 2 and 3 of the degrees. The survey will provide valuable data to evaluate the effectiveness of a number of the new initiatives, including student support, feedback and student engagement. During 2013/14 the project will focus on bringing together the data from all relevant external and internal surveys including the analysis of the

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6 http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/representation/classreps/info/responsibilities/
surveys and key insights generated from them in order to provide a holistic overview of the student experience. In the final year of the project (2014/15) the focus will be on developing a mechanism for the standardisation of course-evaluation surveys to allow for benchmarking and aggregation of data from the course level, to understand the contribution of courses to both the overall student experience and University KPIs. Some early work on this has already started in 2012/13. An evaluation of the new survey will be conducted towards the end of 2012/13 to assess the effectiveness of the approach and whether changes need to be made before implementation in 2013/14.

**Quality Assurance Framework**

This includes a package of work that builds on the developments over the last two years in the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) to develop QA systems to provide improved quality intelligence and institutional ownership of trends in key data, and to create stronger links with quality enhancement. This includes: improving consistency in information used for annual monitoring (part of the ongoing work with Governance and Strategic Planning (GaSP) to produce statistical reports); mapping of internal practice to the external QAA UK Quality Code in order to identify gaps for the development of new policy/practice and to identify opportunities to exceed external expectation; increased university oversight of internal review outcomes (now under QAC oversight); oversight of external examiner report feedback; oversight of feedback from students. The QAF lead is Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance.

The enhancements to the internal review (TPR and PPR) monitoring have been implemented and are working well. All internal review reports, the 14 week response and the year-on report come to QAC for approval. In addition, QAC has oversight of an annual thematic paper that highlights key issues arising from the reviews and areas of good practice. These feed into an annual event organised by the IAD. The first of these to take place in April 2013 will focus on sharing good practice and building capacity in two key areas: graduate attributes/employability and student engagement.

We are continuing with the mapping of UoE policies and practice to the chapters of the UK Quality Code as they emerge. All published chapters have been mapped. This is proving to be a useful exercise in highlighting areas for enhancement.

**Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**

The ELIR Report asked us to consider a number of areas around staff training and development, the University’s expectations, compliance with the expectation and the effectiveness through the appraisal system. Specific items include: staff induction, supervisor briefing, tutor training and development, peer observation of teaching. This theme is led by Vice Principal Learning and Teaching with the Director of Human Resources (HR) and the Director of the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) as co-leads.
A number of actions have been taken already to address the points raised in the ELIR Report. In particular a new set of supervisor briefings was introduced for 2012/13 aimed at being more attractive to staff who have already attended one briefing. In relation to recording and monitoring compliance with expectations, HR has initiated a project through IS to look at the recording of CPD activity in 2012/13.

The ELIR recommendation has provided an opportunity to consider the role and format of continuing academic professional development at Edinburgh. On this theme, a discussion at a special meeting of the University Staff Committee on 19th November 2012, led by the Director of HR and the Director of IAD, considered how best to support academics in the 21st Century at the University of Edinburgh and indicated a proposal for taking a long term (3-5 year) project-based approach to shaping and implementing new academic development arrangements. Central to the proposed approach is that it should consider all dimensions of an academic career and role. A key requirement for the success of this approach is that the development opportunities provided are fully integrated with other University systems, policies and processes (from recording and reporting, to grade profiles and promotion, and local arrangements for orientation, annual review and academic career paths), as well as links to University strategic plans and priorities (including major enhancement projects). A formal project proposal and initial work plan is being developed for consideration and endorsement by Staff Committee in early 2013.

In the meantime, the Chancellor’s Fellows project\(^7\) is being used to investigate and document current variations in practice, understand (new) staff requirements, propose and pilot new CPD and review arrangements. In 2013/14 we will take lessons from the Chancellors Fellows project and begin the next stage of implementation for all staff (including monitoring of effectiveness and impact of changes made - one of the KPIs would be evidence of more consistent practice across the University that is tailored to local/individual requirements). During the second half of 2012/13 we will begin work on designing and developing an overall CPD framework for staff involved in teaching and learning. We plan to apply for HEA accreditation for this framework in the second half of 2013.

**Collaborative Provision**

Specifically under this theme the University was asked to address three key areas: ensure the consistent implementation of the Code of Practice for University of Edinburgh Students Studying Abroad; monitor the student experience to ensure all students receive support as intended; and give consideration to the introduction of a consistent approach to the arrangements for recognising grades and awarding academic credit for study abroad opportunities.

The Code of Practice was introduced in revised form in 2011/2012 and was therefore relatively new at the time of the ELIR. At the start of this academic year further

\(^7\) [http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/institute-academic-development/research-roles/fellows/about](http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/institute-academic-development/research-roles/fellows/about)
communication of the Code to Schools and relevant roles has been undertaken, including at the annual Directors of Quality induction. Early indication from the Year Abroad Progression Committee, held in September 2012, suggests that the Code is being implemented widely as evidenced by the very small number of issues arising from the year abroad compared with previous years. A review of the Code is due to take place early 2014/15, following three full years of implementation to ensure its ongoing fitness for purpose. In the interim feedback from returning year abroad students (the second key area) will provide an ongoing evaluation of the Code in practice. The International Office gathers feedback from returning year abroad students to monitor their experiences. This feedback will be reported to QAC annually to draw out key trends, evaluate the Code and inform actions to enhance the year abroad experience and support of students.

The final area, relating to the arrangements for recognising grades and awarding academic credit, will be the focus of a Task Group of LTC throughout AY 2013/14. A scoping paper was discussed at the December 2012 meeting of QAC. For the most part the University recognises credit and not grades from the year abroad. This is achieved via a University-wide Year Abroad Progression Committee that ensures a consistent approach across all programmes involving a year abroad. There are a small number of exceptions to this approach that relate specifically to language degrees where the year abroad is managed via the relevant School examination board. This approach has worked very well in the past, but we are aware that other Universities take a different approach and we wish to take time to reflect on our approach with a view to learning from the best practice across the sector. We are also keen to introduce single semester study abroad opportunities where possible to increase the appeal and opportunity for students to study abroad. This will require us to revisit the structure of our degrees and the relationship to the degree regulations. This also needs to be considered alongside the broader curriculum developments that are planned to occur.

**Curriculum Development**

This package of work, led by Vice Principal Learning and Teaching, will take a strategic and planned approach to the associated curricular developments and adjustments to the academic environment to meet the needs of a changing student population. At the same time, it will also rely on external enhancements and directions, for example from the SHEEC focus on internationalisation, the Scottish Government focus on flexible curricula, and the effect of Curriculum for Excellence on the nature of our first year experience. Due to on-going external developments in this area, this theme represents a forward-look to the major areas where development at Edinburgh will occur, and the agencies by which this will be achieved.

Our main developments in this area will focus on:
- Developing enhanced support for students pre-arrival and at induction, to ensure that students from non-typical backgrounds are prepared for study and that our expectations of students are clear and can be met. Finances have been allocated
for this as part of the Enhancing Student Support project and individuals have been appointed.

- Developing flexible entry and exit points to the curriculum, as required by the Scottish Government, and associated preparation for Curriculum for Excellence. Discussions are being channelled through LTC from January 2013.
- The development of the curriculum to reflect a more global outlook, through the agency of our ‘Global Citizen’ initiative and the expansion of ‘Our Changing World’ course into an online mode to permit blended learning on campus. Developments will take place at the course level, but channelled through LTC.
- Enhanced language support for international students and an enhanced focus on staff training to ensure we make the most of our diverse student body. The English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC) and the IAD will lead on this under the auspices of LTC.
- An on-going focus on assessment and feedback, including evaluation of existing initiatives and engagement with new ones, for example the HEA ‘Marking time’ development. IS and VP Assessment and Feedback will lead on this under the auspices of LTC.
- Bringing pedagogical learning from MOOCs into our main curriculum and rethinking the use of e-learning on campus. A subcommittee of LTC will be set up in early 2013 to engage with this issue.

Various modes of evaluation will be set up to assess the effectiveness of the above initiatives and will be reported through LTC.

**Summary**

This Year-on response outlines the actions taken by the University of Edinburgh to address the recommendations in the ELIR Report. We have taken a three-year project-based approach according to themes. Within the last 12 months we have made significant progress in the priority areas addressed in the ELIR Report in relation to the Personal Tutor System, feedback and the student experience. We have also engaged in significant planning in the other areas that are still to be addressed. We are confident that our phased approach over the next three years will deliver enhancements to the student experience and that we will be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of these actions by the time of the next ELIR.