Summary report on the Enhancement-led institutional review

University of Glasgow

APRIL 2010
ELIR report preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To do this, QAA carries out institutional reviews of higher education institutions. In Scotland, this process is known as Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR). QAA operates equivalent but separate processes in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

The enhancement-led approach

ELIR is one element of the Quality Enhancement Framework which was developed and is implemented on a partnership basis in Scotland with the Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland and representatives of the student body. The five elements of the Framework are:

- a comprehensive programme of review at the subject level, managed by the institutions, known as institution-led quality review
- an agreed set of public information about quality
- a greater voice for students in institutional quality systems, supported by a national development service (known as student participation in quality Scotland, sparqs)
- a national programme of enhancement themes aimed at developing and sharing good practice in learning and teaching
- a programme of Enhancement-led institutional review involving all Scottish higher education institutions being reviewed over a four-year period.

Conclusions and judgement within ELIR

ELIR is an evidence-based method of peer review. Each ELIR team makes a judgement about the institution's management of academic standards and of the assurance and enhancement of the student learning experience. This judgement is expressed in the form of the level of confidence that can be placed in the institution's current, and likely future, management of these activities. Each ELIR team also provides a commentary on:

i the effectiveness of the institution's management of the student learning experience

ii the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for institution-led monitoring and review of quality and academic standards of awards, however and wherever delivered

iii the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategic approach to quality enhancement.

ELIR reports

From 2008-09, full and summary ELIR reports are produced and made available on the QAA website at www.qaa.ac.uk. The summary reports are aimed at an informed lay audience and are intended to promote wider engagement with ELIR outcomes.
Enhancement-led institutional review

Summary report

The University of Glasgow

Introduction

1 This is the summary report of an Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) of the University of Glasgow (the University) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). This summary is intended to promote the accessibility of the ELIR outcomes among a wider audience. The formal outcomes of ELIR are detailed within the full report which is produced in electronic format and is available on the QAA website at www.qaa.ac.uk.

ELIR method

2 The ELIR method was revised during 2007-08 following extensive consultation with the Scottish higher education sector, including engagement with student representative bodies, the Scottish Funding Council and the institutions themselves. Full detail on the method, which is intended to operate between 2008-09 and 2011-12, is set out in the Enhancement-led institutional review handbook: Scotland (second edition) 2008 which is available on the QAA website.

3 The ELIR method focuses on three main areas: the management of the student learning experience; institution-led quality monitoring and review; and the strategic management of quality enhancement. Each ELIR begins with the institution’s submission of a self-evaluative document (the Reflective Analysis) which provides the focus for the review. ELIR reports include an overarching judgement on the level of confidence which can be placed in the institution’s management of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

ELIR team and visits

4 In line with the review method, the ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 20 and 21 October 2009 and the Part 2 visit took place in the week beginning 23 November 2009. The team comprised a group of peers: a student reviewer from a Scottish university; three senior academic reviewers drawn from across the United Kingdom; a senior academic international reviewer; and a coordinating reviewer with senior administrative experience from a Scottish university. The review was managed by an Assistant Director from QAA Scotland.

Background information about the institution

5 The University of Glasgow is a large institution, and one of the oldest universities in the UK, having been established in 1451. The University’s ambition is to be ‘one of the best universities in the world, by being an outstanding place for research, teaching and learning’. In 2008-09, the University has approximately 21,000 students, of whom some 16,000 are undergraduates and 5,000 postgraduates.

6 The University is currently organised into nine faculties, within each of which are located academic departments. At the time of the ELIR, the University had recently announced its intention to reorganise its academic structure, with the aim of replacing faculties and departments with a structure of four colleges, with each college comprising a small number of academic schools.

7 The University offers collaborative provision in partnership with a relatively small number of institutions. At the time of the ELIR, the University offered some 35 degree programmes in collaboration with five UK universities, the majority being with the University of Strathclyde. The University validates provision in four institutions that do not have degree-awarding powers: Christie’s Education, London; the Free Church College of Scotland; The Glasgow School of Art;
and the Scottish Agricultural College. In addition, the University has 22 joint collaborations with overseas institutions, ranging from articulation arrangements to joint or dual awards.

Outcomes of the review

8 ELIR reports highlight areas of good practice and identify areas in which institutions are encouraged to undertake further development activity; in many cases the developments have been identified by institutions during their preparations for ELIR. Key outcomes from the University's ELIR report are set out here.

9 The ELIR report confirms that the University has processes in place which enable it to secure academic standards and to assure the quality of the student experience.

Areas of positive practice

- **Student Lifecycle Project** - The University is undertaking a significant project to improve its student records system. This will not only improve the University's use of information about students to help it achieve its goals in relation to enhancing the student experience, but will significantly enhance the information, advice and support it provides to students.

- **Partnership with the Students' Representative Council (SRC)** - Over recent years, the University and the SRC have developed a strong and effective partnership. This partnership has delivered significant developments in policies and provision, all of which contribute positively to the student learning experience.

- **Student representation** - A number of enhancements have been made to the student representative system, including more widespread opportunities for students to undertake a representative role; effective training and support for student representatives; and the University's recognition of student representative activity on students' transcripts.

- **Student participation in institution-led quality reviews** - The participation of student reviewers in the periodic reviews of academic departments is a recognised success. Student reviewers have more recently also been included in the review of the University's student-facing services, and this is a positive development.

- **Student feedback** - The University has well-established mechanisms for gathering student feedback, and has continued to enhance these arrangements, including through the extensive use of a number of different student surveys which seek to gather feedback from different groups of the student population.

- **Graduate attributes and employability** - The University has continued to develop its strategic approach to promoting graduate attributes and employability, and has identified a significant programme of activity to embed these priorities in its programmes of study.

- **Learning environment** - The University has made significant enhancements to the learning environment, including the main Library, the Fraser Building (which provides the first point of contact for all Student Services, and houses a number of key student services), and to the virtual learning environment. On the whole, students are very positive about these developments.

- **Staff development** - The University's Learning and Teaching Centre plays a very positive role in providing development activities and support for staff, in order to promote effective learning for students. There has also been clear progress made in the promotion of staff to professorial level, based significantly on strengths in teaching and learning.

- **Quality Framework** - The University's quality assurance arrangements for programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review are well-grounded, robust and promote reflection and a focus on the ongoing enhancement of provision. Aspects of these arrangements represent excellent practice.
• Collaborative provision - The University has effective arrangements for the approval of new programmes delivered in partner institutions, and for the annual monitoring of those programmes.

• Learning and Teaching Strategy (2006-10) - In developing its Learning and Teaching Strategy, the University has consulted widely across the institution, resulting in a wide-spread commitment of staff and the Students' Representative Council to the Strategy and its objectives. The University has also identified an effective and robust set of key performance indicators for measuring the successful implementation of its Strategy.

• National enhancement themes - The University has engaged productively with the national Enhancement Themes, and is using the outcomes from the themes to inform strategic developments.

• Quality enhancement - The University has taken effective 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' approaches to identifying, disseminating and implementing good practice in learning and teaching. These approaches include: making good use of the outcomes from its quality assurance activities; the important activities of the Learning and Teaching Centre; and initiatives such as the University's Teaching Excellence Awards.

Areas for development

The University is encouraged to further develop the areas summarised below:

• Student Voice website - To continue in its ongoing reflection and activities to promote to students the website, which is an innovative and potentially powerful tool for communicating to students on how their feedback leads to actions aimed at improving the student learning experience.

• Graduate attributes and employability - To consider how to develop further a number of elements of the University's approach to developing graduate attributes and employability, including: raising students' awareness of how such attributes are developed in their academic programmes; developing a more systematic approach to the provision of work experience opportunities for students; and promoting the purpose and benefits of personal development planning to students, as part of the work on promoting the development of graduate attributes.

• Student equality and diversity - To continue to embed practices across a range of equality and diversity areas, in line with the University's Equality and Diversity Strategy and policies.

• Staff development - To develop a greater oversight of how staff development provision meets the University's strategic goals; to continue to monitor the extent of participation by experienced staff in development activity; and to undertake the planned review of training and support for graduate teaching assistants.

• Programme approval - To review the University's guidance provided to faculties on the use of external views in programme approval.

• Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (DPTLA) reviews - To ensure that the DPTLA reviews give sufficient prominence to the continuing validity and relevance of the programmes under review.

• The University's Code of Assessment - To provide clear guidance to faculties on how their boards of examiners may exercise discretion when classifying honours awards, in order to ensure the consistent application of good practice.
● **Collaborative provision** - To strengthen some elements of the University's quality assurance arrangements for collaborative provision: inclusion of an external expert on all partnership approval panels; introducing a formal partnership renewal process; and reviewing the use of the University's logo on partner institutions' academic certificates.

● **University restructuring** - to exploit the opportunities offered by the planned academic restructuring to promote greater consistency of practice across the institution, while recognising and retaining the many aspects of good practice evident in the existing structure.

**Overarching confidence judgement**

11 The overarching judgement is set out in the full report as follows:

>'The findings of the ELIR indicate that there can be confidence in the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards, and the quality of the student learning experience it provides.'

12 This is a positive judgement, indicating that the University has secure arrangements for managing academic standards and for assuring and enhancing the quality of the student experience.