University of Stirling

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

February 2017

Preface

One year after publication of their ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to submit a Follow-up Report to QAA Scotland. These reports are also submitted to the Scottish Funding Council. Follow-up Reports are written in the institution's own words and require to be endorsed by the institution's Governing Body prior to publication on the QAA website. Guidance on the content and structure is provided by QAA Scotland.

Institutions are asked to focus on the action they have taken since the review and to include an indication of the effectiveness of that action. ELIR reports highlight positive practice as well as areas for development, and institutions are encouraged to comment on key areas of activity relating to good practice that they have prioritised since the ELIR.

Follow-up Reports are discussed with institutions as part of the ELIR annual discussion meetings. They also form the basis of a follow-up event which involves institutions that were reviewed around the same time coming together to explore the ways they have responded to their ELIR outcomes. This activity is intended to emphasise the enhancement-led nature of the review method.

Follow-Up Report to the 2015 Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR)

February 2017

1. Introduction

The University of Stirling was delighted to achieve the successful outcome of the ELIR in autumn 2015, and receive the judgement of effectiveness as an endorsement of its arrangements for assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience and securing the academic standards of its awards.

Since 2015, the University has reflected on both the areas of positive practice and the areas for development noted in the outcome report and has undertaken structured planning and activity in terms of addressing the points of the reports. The University is now pleased to provide this report which details this activity and the progress made. The report was prepared on a collaborative basis through Academic Registry working with relevant internal stakeholders and groups, and in partnership with the Students' Union through the Vice President (Education).

2. Endorsement of report

This follow-up report provides the formal response of the University of Stirling to the Outcome and Technical reports of its 2015 ELIR. The report was endorsed by University Court on 27th March 2017.

3. Context

In the period between the 2015 ELIR and the preparation of this report, the University Court approved the recommendation to move to a revised internal structure comprising five faculties and a Graduate School. The structure created an opportunity to adopt titles which better reflect the University's organisation and support the strategic objectives of the institution in terms of managing research and teaching activities. As part of the restructure a number of role titles were revised, including that of Director of Learning and Teaching (DLT) which became Associate Dean of Learning and Teaching (ADLT). The previous DLT role had enabled positive impact on the University's learning and teaching activity, at the institutional level. Consequently, the University sought to build further upon this and the DLT role was formally consolidated within the new structure through the establishment of the role of ADLT.

The University has also prepared and published its Strategic Plan for the period 2016-21, which sets out strategic ambitions and objectives over the next five years. The plan can be downloaded from the University's website at: http://www.stir.ac.uk/about/our-strategy/.

4. ELIR outcomes

The ELIR of the University of Stirling was undertaken in September and November 2015. The Outcome and Technical reports were published in February 2016.

The University was pleased with the outcomes of ELIR, particularly since areas of positive practice highlighted by the review team are fundamental to the University enhancing the student experience:

- **Student engagement and partnership** – It is evident that the University and the Students' Union have established a productive partnership to ensure that the student voice is heard.
- **Student representation** – the School Officer student representative role has been extended successfully to a whole University partnership approach. The role also promotes the effectiveness of student representation more widely through providing support for class representatives.
- **Effective Personal Tutor arrangements** – the University has successfully implemented a personal tutor system which is positively regarded by students and staff.

- **Student teaching award** – the Recognising Achievement in Teaching Excellence (RATE) award, which is run by Stirling Students' Union. The awards are also linked to the annual learning and teaching conference which provides an opportunity to celebrate and share good practice.
- **Directors of Learning and Teaching** – the directors of learning and teaching play a pivotal role in the quality assurance and enhancement arrangements of the University, they are agents of change, provide a positive network for identifying challenges and sharing good practice.

The outcomes of the ELIR were disseminated throughout the University through direct communication with faculties and professional service areas and via the University committee structure. The University undertook reflection and detailed consideration of each area for development identified in the ELIR reports involving a wide range of internal teams and stakeholders. Through this process an action plan was drafted setting out the identified areas for development and associated actions. Ongoing oversight of progress and the action plan is undertaken by the Education and Student Experience Committee.

The ELIR reports invited the University to consider a number of areas for development which are noted below along with details of the activity that has been progressed in relation to each.

4.1   Critical academic dialogue in the committee structure

Give early attention to revising the streamlined committee structure to include greater opportunity for critical academic dialogue at the institutional level and avoid over-reliance on progressing business through chair's action, which increases risk and denies the University a valuable opportunity to share ideas and engage in debate about key academic principles.

The University took immediate action in response to this area for development. This was progressed at a senior level by the Senior Deputy Principal and Academic Registrar. Consideration of the previous Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) arrangements was undertaken in early 2016 and significant change to the committee structure was implemented after institution-wide consultation and in advance of the 2016/17 session. A revised structure has been operational since autumn 2016.

The revised committee structure retains ESEC as the point of strategic oversight and leadership of academic quality and enhancement in respect to education, learning and teaching and the student experience. However two new, additional sub-committees of ESEC have been established:

(i)   University Academic Quality Standards Committee (UAQSC): to oversee the University's responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring the quality of learning opportunities.

(ii)   University Learning and Teaching Committee (ULTC): to oversee and direct the University's learning and teaching arrangements and performance; monitor the nature and efficacy of learning opportunities and teaching practices; lead the implementation of the strategic approach to learning and teaching; and promote a shared understanding of this approach among staff, students and other internal and external stakeholders and encourage innovation and development.

Additionally a University Faculty Chief Examiners' Committee was established (reporting to the UAQSC) to undertake detailed scrutiny of the outcomes and outputs of the University's assessment arrangements. This includes the arrangements for boards of examiners, and making recommendations to the University Academic Quality Standards Committee regarding the development of relevant policy and practice. Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees were also established, which formalised previous arrangements at school level, to coordinate and oversee learning and teaching at faculty level.

The University reflected on this new ESEC committee structure at the end of its first semester of operation, in December 2016, and will continue to reflect throughout the spring 2017 semester. This will facilitate further refinement of committee membership and remit ahead of 2017/18 and ensure the committees are operating as effectively and meaningfully as possible.

4.2 Defining flexibility in institutional policy and regulations
Following the positive work that has been carried out to achieve a more consistent regulatory framework across the University, give attention to defining where flexibility can and cannot be permitted when institutional policy is implemented in different disciplines and contexts.

Following the implementation of the revised ESEC committee structure, further related activity is now planned to consider the role and remit of the ESEC Academic Panels. This consideration will be an opportunity to review current arrangements for exceptions and variations being applied to aspects of academic policy or regulation and will be used as a basis from which to clearly define where flexibility can and cannot be permitted. The outcomes of this work will be incorporated into the University's academic regulations and policy as appropriate and it is anticipated that this will completed during 2017.

4.3 Management of collaborative activity
Progress with the University's plans to implement a revised approach to managing collaborative activity, including introducing formal, systematic arrangements for approving and reapproving collaborative provision. These arrangements should include explicit institutional oversight of this activity within the institution-level committee structure to enable cross-institutional scrutiny of the academic dimensions of this activity.

A revised policy for the approval of International Collaborative Teaching was approved by ESEC in 2015/16. Since then, the University has maintained focus on this policy and its efficacy in supporting the development and ongoing progress of collaborative partnerships. The Education and Student Experience Committee retains a strategic role in the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities provided collaboratively, and receives a range of reports and information to facilitate this. As discussed during the 2015 ELIR, the University's process for the development of collaborative partnerships facilitates the academic proposal being considered separately to the business case.

In line with the University's strategic direction in relation to internationalisation, the internationalisation strategy is being reviewed and the relevant governance arrangements considered. This work will further inform the formal arrangements in place for collaborative provision development and approval going forward.

4.4 Externality in programme approval
Involve academic expertise from outside the institution in the programme approval arrangements, and make explicit where and how external reference points have been used in the programme development process, in line with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

A LEAN review of the programme approval process was undertaken in 2016 and involved internal stakeholders from faculties and professional services, and was facilitated by an external LEAN practitioner. The review sought to consider and redevelop the process by which programmes at the University are developed and approved. Externality and the inclusion of external academic expertise within the process were considered as a specific strand, with reflection on the existing approaches to involving external expertise in programme development and approval at the University. A range of issues and opportunities were identified as an outcome of this process.

Recommendations for a revised programme approval process are being finalised and benchmarked against the Quality Code, Chapter B1 *Programme Design, Development and Approval*. The proposed new process, which includes specific, cross-institution requirements regarding engagement of external academic and employer stakeholders in programme development, will be consulted upon in spring semester 2017 for implementation in session 2017/18.

4.5 Annual periodic evaluative processes

The University's annual monitoring and periodic review processes, which include module review, annual programme review and periodic learning and teaching review, provide opportunities for self-reflection. There have been enhancements to these processes since the 2011 ELIR, including the reporting of data for monitoring and review purposes. In discussions with the ELIR team staff confirmed that data is now easier to access, with large data sets produced centrally allowing school-specific data to be accessed, although the University also described the extraction of data for monitoring and review purposes as work in progress. The University is encouraged to continue enhancing this aspect of its activity.

The University continues to enhance annual periodic evaluative processes, including the reporting of data for monitoring and review purposes.

A consistent, cross-University approach to module evaluation has been fully implemented following an initial pilot project in 2015, supported by the EvaSys software tool. Module evaluation data is collected each semester and made available to stakeholders through the University's business intelligence (BI) tool. This data in combination with award, module and cohort level data, provides a base for monitoring and review purposes and the range and availability of data will be further enhanced on an ongoing basis as a result of reflection, monitoring and feedback from stakeholders.

EvaSys has also been used to support a pilot 'Stirling Experience Survey' (SES), an internal student satisfaction survey. This survey seeks responses at a programme level from all undergraduate students who are not in their final year of study. The aims of the SES are to afford students an opportunity to provide feedback on their overall experience in each year of their studies, and provide the University with additional feedback which can be used to inform the ongoing enhancement of the student experience.

4.6 Postgraduate research student experience

Develop aspects of the research student experience and progress with plans to further develop the research student community across schools. This should include ensuring an equivalent experience is provided across all schools and clarifying the role of the Graduate School, which has made positive progress in articulating an institution-wide set of regulations.

The postgraduate student experience is a key strategic priority for the University and a range of activity is taking place across the University in relation to its enhancement. Since the 2015 ELIR, the new role of Deputy Principal (Internationalisation and Graduate Studies), has been established as part of the University's senior management team, and a Dean of Graduate Studies has been established, incorporating the role of Head of Stirling Graduate School.

4.6.1 In response to the ELIR outcome, Stirling Graduate School (SGS) has led work in the following areas:
a) Further reflection on positive student feedback obtained through the 2015 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and the internal 'A-PRES' which ran in 2016.

The University of Stirling runs an internal survey in alternate years to the PRES – the A-PRES. The results of the 2016 A-PRES highlighted improved results from the 2015 PRES in relation to resources, progress and assessment and responsibilities. The overall student satisfaction was 83% with the highest levels of satisfaction relating to supervision – 93% of respondents reported satisfaction with their supervisors' skills and knowledge to support them. This outcome reflects the University's commitment to quality supervision. With a new 'Supervising Doctoral Students' training programme launched in November 2016 for supervisors across the University (see section 4.7), we anticipate that high levels of student satisfaction can be sustained in this area. Another area where students reported high levels of satisfaction (85%) was in research skills.

The revised research postgraduate (RPG) induction programme was launched in October 2016 and included the introduction of SGS and its staff to the new cohort of students. A key focus of the induction event was on skills analysis and development needs.

A Postgraduate (PG) Skills Week began within the University as an initiative within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and from 2016 this was successfully opened up to be a week-long programme for all postgraduate students, across the University. The programme offers a range of lectures and workshops on research skills and career development and the University-wide PG Skills Week will run annually in December 2016. It is anticipated that this, along with the SGS induction and the Three Minute Thesis (3MT) event, will support the enhancement of both student skills and the student experience.

Some areas have been identified by 2015 PRES and 2016 A-PRES as areas to consolidate or improve: for example, enhancing the postgraduate research culture and embedding doctoral students into the University's wider research environment. Faculties have already begun to take steps to address this by routinely including the postgraduate community in more events such as research seminars and divisional meetings.

To support the development of the 'research culture', SGS has established a discretionary fund to enable Graduate Faculty Officers to propose and lead student-led research events e.g. seminars, workshops and lectures from external speakers.

b) Progression of plans to consider appropriate Graduate School / postgraduate student space within the University.

There is a longer-term aspiration to develop dedicated spaces on campus for postgraduate students, and the postgraduate community. This would also incorporate space for SGS staff, training, learning and social activities. Currently, SGS works closely with the Students' Union and space is provided within the Union complex for SGS events and activities led by Graduate Faculty Officers.

4.6.2

In order to support an equivalency of experience across faculties, SGS has undertaken an initial audit of experiences via a feedback survey of RPG students, RPG directors and supervisors to assess the experience of staff and students in receiving, engaging in or delivering graduate education. Feedback from the survey will be analysed during the spring 2017 semester and will be used to inform further planning and development in respect to both institutional and faculty level activity. It has also encouraged a more collaborative approach to development across SGS, faculties and graduate faculty officers, ensuring equivalence and/or consistency across faculties including through: the establishment of an RPG Directors Forum; the revised approach to supervisor training; and supporting a TPG Portfolio Review. These ongoing activities provide opportunities for colleagues across the University to reflect on their practice and share in identifying solutions.

4.6.3 Student feedback
The University should ensure that all research students have, and are made aware of, the facility to raise issues about their supervision, or wider experience, outside their home school.

SGS has undertaken a review of the information provided to students in the *University Code of Practice: Research degrees*. Information on how students can raise any issues regarding their supervision is now specifically highlighted to students through RPG induction sessions and through a wide-range of communication methods. Further enhancements to information provision and student communications are planned during 2017 as an additional platform to increase the opportunities for students to engage directly with SGS, as well as with their faculty in relation to their studies, ongoing progress and to raise any issues or concerns they might have.

4.6.4   Student representation
The planned introduction of Graduate Faculty Officers is likely to give the research student population a stronger voice and enable them to enjoy a productive partnership with the University.

From 2016/17, SGS and the Students' Union has introduced a partnership approach to student representation. There are clear delineations of responsibility for each party with the Students' Union leading on the recruitment and selection of Graduate Faculty Officers and SGS providing a supporting structure to enable the Officers to set targets and deliver against promised aims and goals.

The Students' Union VP (Education) and SGS meet at least once per semester with Graduate Faculty Officers to discuss projects and to monitor or support progress. This development has been fundamental to an increasingly productive partnership between the SGS and the Students' Union.

The Students' Union has recruited six Graduate Faculty (Research) Officers in session 2016/17. Five represent their respective faculty and one supports SGS and the University's internationalisation agenda cross-institutionally. These Officers work with the Students' Union and Stirling Graduate School to develop the wider postgraduate student experience across the University. Each Officer is leading on an SGS project as well as organising a postgraduate student-led event for spring 2017. The Officers will be key to the establishment of a 'Postgraduate Society' in spring 2017 which is intended to respond to feedback from postgraduate students through experience surveys and other mechanisms, and support the 'postgraduate community' on campus, particularly supporting social activities . It is anticipated that this society will host events aimed at bringing together groups of PG students to discuss their experiences and explore areas of positive practice and those for development.

The Students' Union is also leading on the recruitment of Graduate Faculty (Taught PR) Officers. Applications for Graduate Faculty Officer positions were not received from taught postgraduate students in 2016/17 and the Students' Union and the University are reflecting on the potential reasons for this. This may be linked to the shorter duration of study for taught postgraduate students and limited time to undertake other roles. However, the Students' Union and SGS will review the timing of recruitment for these roles and consider alternative ways of gauging feedback.

Ways in which both taught and research postgraduate training and social opportunities can be brought together are also under consideration.

4.7 Research supervisor training
Pursue the intention to reintroduce research supervisor training at institutional level and put in place a mechanism for identifying and monitoring supervisor training and support needs across the University, including ensuring that all existing supervisors are updated.

An institution-wide 'Supervising Doctoral Studies' (SDS) programme was launched in November 2016 to cover different aspects of supervision with up to date perspectives and information on the current doctoral landscape.   This blended approach includes eight face-to-face training sessions and eight online modules to be delivered annually starting in the autumn 2016 and spring 2017 semesters. Online sessions will be available all year round. This has been organised in partnership by SGS, the Research and Enterprise Office and the Academic Development team. It is intended for both new supervisors and more experienced supervisors as a refresher course.

The first session of the programme, on recruitment and selection, was delivered in November 2016 by an Associate Dean of Research. Initial feedback suggests that the session was positively received and highlighted an interest and need for further, more specific training around the detailed requirements and considerations of recruitment and addressing complex issues. Since then another four sessions have been well received on the topics of: determining your supervisory style; monitoring progress; communicating feedback; and sharing good practice. Feedback will be gathered and analysed by the Research and Enterprise Office and recommendations for improvement will be fed back to SGS. In addition, the Dean of Graduate Studies will meet with research postgraduate directors in March 2017 to review existing provision and to facilitate faculty feedback on what supervisor training is working well and what needs to be improved.

4.8 Teaching Assistant training and support.
Ensure all students and staff who teach receive adequate training in advance and are supported to carry out the role.

A mandatory six-hour teaching assistant training programme was designed and delivered for the first time, by the Academic Development team, in autumn 2016. Faculties identified teaching assistants to attend and their attendance was recorded. Four sessions were delivered in autumn 2016 and additional sessions are currently scheduled in March and April 2017.

Going forward it is proposed to annually deliver two training sessions in the autumn semester and one in the spring semester. To date, 107 teaching assistants have participated in the training programme delivered on a face to face basis. An online version is being developed for delivery in autumn semester 2017.

The programme 'Developing as a Teacher in Higher Education (DTHE)' was run for the first time in spring and autumn 2016 and aimed at postgraduate students involved in teaching. A number of participants in the teaching assistant and DTHE training programmes are pursuing professional recognition through HEA Associate Fellow status and are being supported by the Academic Development team through the University's HEA-accredited CPD framework.

In addition, the University continues to develop and expand the workshops available to offer academic colleagues meaningful and relevant support in learning and teaching. These focus on a variety of themes and reflective practice including teaching bites and SFELTE sessions (SFELTE is the Stirling University Framework for Leaning and Teaching, which is an HEA accredited CPD framework) in reflective writing and pedagogic research as well as a digital forum and the beginning of a programme leader network. Two sessions on teaching practice specifically aimed at research postgraduates who teach are also provided during the annual Postgraduate Skills Week.

Colleagues are encouraged to apply for professional recognition through our fellowship scheme. As of January 2017, 52 applicants have registered for 2017 submission. SFELTE was piloted in spring 2016 and its process and systems were evaluated in summer 2016. A SFELTE mentoring scheme was established as a result and feedback from academic colleagues and an internal recognition group is being used to continue to make the framework relevant, useful and aligned with staff development requirements.

4.9 Coordinated approach to staff development

Ensure there is a coordinated approach for identifying and addressing the developmental needs of staff across the University in order to support implementation of institutional strategy, as well as promoting staff engagement with advances in learning and teaching practice. There would be benefit in the University determining the core staff development offer which staff across the institution are expected to undertake for their various roles, as well as identifying where there can be flexibility in order to meet the particular needs of different disciplines and/or school approaches.

The University has prepared a draft People Strategy as an enabling strategy of the Strategic Plan 2016 -21. The People Strategy sets out objectives in respect to the University's staff resource relevant to recruitment, development and performance monitoring. The Strategy will facilitate and support a range of activity which will progress the University's approach to staff development such as: *develop and invest in a strategic educational and services skill development plan; and, review leadership and management development needs, academic staff development needs and the development needs of professional services staff.*

Staff development provision is coordinated within the Human Resources & Organisational Development (OD) Directorate which encompasses the Academic Development (AD) area. OD and AD staff work in close collaboration both through monthly joint development meetings and more informally, and joint OD and AD reporting is undertaken on a fortnightly basis to the HR&OD senior management team. Moreover, strategic planning takes place on a joint OD and AD basis.

The Academic Development area is represented on both the Education and Student Experience Committee and the University Learning and Teaching Committee which facilitates academic development planning being informed by institutional-level discussions on learning and teaching. In addition to this, individual staff contacts within each faculty provide a structured communication channel to support the identification and discussion of staff development needs in line with University strategic priorities. The Academic Development Advisory Board continues to operate within the University on a cross-institutional basis to guide and inform the ongoing planning and activity of the Academic Development team.

Feedback from key stakeholders on staff development, including that determined through the University's biennial staff survey, is used by HR & OD in a cycle of ongoing evaluation and reflection, with results shaping development activity.

4.10 Collaboration with the Students' Union

The University does not currently have a student partnership agreement in place but indicated that it recognised the potential benefit of establishing one to further strengthen the collaborative and partnership working between staff and students. The ELIR team would support that view.

A Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) was prepared through collaborative working between the University and Students' Union with external input from sparqs. The finalised agreement was published in February 2017 and spans the period 2017 – 2019.

4.11 Student support

The University recognised that STEER is currently operating at a relatively small scale, and the intention is to monitor and evaluate it along with the other developments in student support. Students who had experienced receiving and providing support through STEER spoke positively about the scheme to the ELIR team; the team would encourage the University to continue developing this approach.

Student support and the student experience as a whole remains a key priority for the University. A new integrated student services hub was launched in September 2016, establishing a single point of contact through which all students can access support for: careers and employability guidance; student administration; counselling and wellbeing; disability; and general guidance or advice.

Within its overall consideration of student support provision, the University remains positive about the potential benefits of peer mentoring and STEER (a University-wide student peer support scheme) continues to operate, providing mentors for undergraduate students and buddies for taught postgraduate students in their first year of study at the University.

The University's planning processes will provide opportunities for further consideration of how it might be possible to expand STEER provision in the future.

4.12 Addressing the outcomes of external review

In the context of the University having implemented an ambitious programme of change, ensure the outcomes of the current ELIR are able to be addressed in a timely and coherent manner.

The University's Strategic Plan 2016 – 2021 details the institutional objectives in the period until 2021 and indicates clearly the ongoing ambitions the University has to develop and grow. Activity across the University is being progressed in line with the Strategy and within this context, the University welcomed the outcomes of the 2015 ELIR. In response to the outcomes, detailed discussions took place involving a wide range of internal stakeholders and various University committees, and a structured approach to addressing them has enabled expeditious progress to be achieved. This approach has been underpinned by the comprehensive work-plan that was developed following receipt of the ELIR reports. This work-plan remains in place, and continued focus and activity is planned within the University in respect to the 2015 ELIR outcomes, to support ongoing progress.

The significant progress that has been made to date across the 2015 ELIR outcomes is set out in the previous sections of this report. The continued achievement of such progress sits within the broader context of ongoing development and enhancement of the student learning experience and therefore alongside further relevant activity such as; the implementation of a framework for graduate attributes; and the development of a new Employability Strategy, both of which are being progressed during 2016/17.