



Enhancement-led Institutional Review of University of Stirling

Outcome Report

November 2015

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About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method

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

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

About this review

This is the Outcome Report of the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Stirling. The review took place as follows: Part 1 visit on 22 to 24 September 2015 and Part 2 visit on 2 to 6 November 2015. The review was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor Diane Meehan (Academic Reviewer)
- Dr Clare Peddie (Academic Reviewer)
- Dr Roy Ferguson (International Reviewer)
- Miss Rowan Berry (Student Reviewer)
- Mr Peter Watson (Coordinating Reviewer).

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

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

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

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

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

¹ Further information about the ELIR method:

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

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

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

⁴ Technical report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10007804.

About the University of Stirling

The University of Stirling was established by Royal Charter in 1967. Its main campus is in the city of Stirling, with additional centres in Inverness, Stornoway and London. In 2014-15, its total student population was just over 9,000 (full-time equivalent), of whom around 7,400 were undergraduate and around 1,600 were postgraduate. One in five of the University's students come from outside the UK, with more than 120 nationalities represented.

Overarching judgement about University of Stirling

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

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

Areas of positive practice

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

2 **Student engagement and partnership** - a commitment to engage with its students is embedded in the University culture. There has been a substantial volume of change, which has provided considerable opportunity for students to influence policy and practice, for example through the Transforming the Student Experience project. It is evident that the University and the Students' Union have established a productive partnership to ensure that the student voice is heard.

3 **Student representation** - the School Officer student representative role, which was piloted at the time of the 2011 ELIR, has been extended successfully to the whole University, with plans in place to appoint Graduate Officers for the research student population. School Officers sit on school learning and teaching committees and are twinned with staff members in the relevant school, reinforcing the student partnership approach. The role also promotes the effectiveness of student representation more widely through providing support for class representatives.

4 **Effective Personal Tutor arrangements** - the University has successfully implemented a Personal Tutor system, which is positively regarded by students and staff. The role was clearly defined from the outset, and implementation has been accompanied by effective staff training and ongoing support. Undertaking the role is also recognised in the University's workload allocation model.

5 **Student teaching award** - the Recognising Achievement in Teaching Excellence (RATE) award, which is run by the Students' Union, incorporates a number of positive features, including every member of staff nominated for an award being provided with written feedback on the reasons for their nomination. The awards are also linked to the annual learning and teaching conference, which provides an opportunity to celebrate and share good practice.

6 **Directors of learning and teaching** - the directors of learning and teaching play a pivotal role between school and institutional level, chairing the school learning and teaching committees and being proactive in their establishment of a discussion group at university level. It is evident that they are agents of change, providing a positive network of colleagues for identifying challenges and sharing good practice, for example directors lead working groups on a range of topics, including consulting with staff and students on the review of the Learning and Teaching Quality Enhancement Strategy; internationalisation of the curriculum; and student evaluation of teaching.

Areas for development

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

8 **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. Linked to this, 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. The planned introduction of Graduate Officers is likely to give the research student population a stronger voice and enable them to enjoy a productive partnership with the University.

9 **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.

10 **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.

11 **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.

12 **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.

13 **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.

14 **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.

15 **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.

16 **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.

What happens next?

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

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

Further information

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

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

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

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

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

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