



# Enhancement-led Institutional Review of University of Stirling

## Technical Report

December 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.<sup>1</sup> You can also find more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>2</sup>

Further details about the enhancement-led approach can be found in an accompanying [ELIR information document](#),<sup>3</sup> 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 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).

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 a case study on its Transforming the Student Experience project.

## 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 which hosted the review, and to provide an information base for the production of thematic reports that identify findings across several institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information about the ELIR method:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/enhancement-led-institutional-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/enhancement-led-institutional-review).

<sup>2</sup> Further information about QAA: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus).

<sup>3</sup> ELIR information document: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=61](http://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.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Outcome Report: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10007804](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10007804).

## Overarching judgement about the 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.

### 1 Institutional context and strategic framework

#### 1.1 Key features of the institution's context and mission

1 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 numbers were just over 9,000 (full-time equivalent), of which 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.

#### Strategic change

2 Since the 2011 ELIR, the University had undergone an ambitious programme of change, which was still underway at the time of the current ELIR. The changes are in line with the University's strategic ambitions and, the institution indicated, have been informed by the outcome of the 2011 ELIR, the national Enhancement Themes and a number of other sector-wide developments. The ELIR team heard that, linked to all of this activity, the University had reviewed many aspects of the student experience, and changes had been made to both the institutional and committee structure, the intention being to create a more coherent approach. In addition, a number of new senior posts have been created.

3 Following an academic restructure, which took place prior to the 2011 ELIR and which reconfigured 15 departments into seven schools, the University began a review of the committee structure. An explicit aim was to keep the number of committees to a minimum, while creating an appropriate structure to facilitate delivery of the University's Strategic Plan 2011-16. In the first phase, in 2011, the Finance and Resources Committee and the Policy and Planning Committee were replaced by a Joint Policy, Planning and Resources Committee.

4 Phase two, beginning in early 2012, saw the creation of the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC), with responsibility for the governance and strategy relating to postgraduate and undergraduate learning, teaching and enhancement, as well as the student experience more widely, including admissions. ESEC is chaired by the Deputy Principal (Education and Students) and reports to the Academic Council, making recommendations both to the Academic Council and the University Court. Other changes to the committee structure included the formation of a number of panels that report to ESEC, namely the Academic Appeals Panels (Taught and Research), the Academic Panel, the University Discipline Committee, and the University Disciplinary Appeal Board.

5 A Deputy Principal (Education and Students) was appointed in January 2012 to succeed the former post of Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching). The University indicated in its Reflective Analysis for the current ELIR that the change in title was intended to strengthen its focus on the student experience overall. In 2014, the role of dean was introduced to support the deputy principals in delivery of key strategic objectives, for example the Dean of Student Affairs has a cross-university role to support the Deputy

Principal (Education and Students). At the time of the current ELIR, there were five deans covering: equality and diversity, internationalisation, research enhancement, research impact and student affairs. The University was advertising one additional deputy principal post (relating to internationalisation and graduate studies) and the existing Deputy Principal (Research) post that had recently become vacant, to support the existing posts of Deputy Principal (Education and Students) and Deputy Principal (Operational Strategy and External Affairs).

6 Much of the extensive programme of institutional change is embodied in the University's Transforming the Student Experience project, which was the subject of the case study submitted for the current ELIR. Related to the project, a suite of changes were implemented from 2014-15, including:

- a transition to 20-credit undergraduate modules
- the introduction of compensation
- changes to the marking scheme
- changes to the honours classification
- changes to the dates of the spring semester
- changes to student progression and resits
- the introduction of personal tutoring.

7 The ELIR team learned from discussions during the review visits that the extent of institutional change and the pace at which it has occurred have placed considerable strain on staff and, at times, students. The team was reassured that this had been recognised and that more recent initiatives have included increased support for those involved and a more incremental approach to implementation, including the use of pilot arrangements where possible. The team also noted the extent of consultation with staff and students, particularly in relation to the Transforming the Student Experience (TSE) Project.

### **New Strategic Plan**

8 At the time of the current ELIR, the University was preparing a new Strategic Plan. The ELIR team heard from senior staff that the new Plan will build on the current Strategic Plan (which runs from 2011-16) by linking and aligning to the supporting strategies.

9 It was evident to the ELIR team that there had been a consultative approach to developing the new Strategic Plan, including staff, students, and external involvement. Academic staff were involved in conversations with the Senior Management Team, including the Deputy Principal (Education and Students), with a number of open 'world café' events having been held. Staff who met the team were generally of the opinion that there had been much more consultation over this Plan than the previous one.

### **Current ELIR**

10 The University indicated that, through the ELIR process, it was particularly seeking engagement on aspects of its student learning experience, including: managing quality across diverse locations; learning and teaching strategy implementation; and managing collaborative processes. These topics are picked up throughout this report. The University's response to the 2011 ELIR is also addressed below (see paragraph 108).

## 1.2 Strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching

11 The University's current Strategic Plan emphasises the institution's commitment to continually enhance learning, teaching and the student experience. The University identified its Learning and Teaching Quality Enhancement Strategy (LTQES) as the main internal driver for the enhancement of learning and teaching.

12 Each school has a learning and teaching strategy, or a dedicated section within its school plan, which is aligned to the University LTQES. Within each school, implementation of strategy is the responsibility of a number of key post holders, including the Head of School, the Director of Learning and Teaching (DLT), the Director of Research, and the School Manager. Each school has a School Executive and a Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC). Some of the larger schools have divisions, each with its own set of committees.

13 The DLT role is fundamental for the implementation of institutional strategy for learning and teaching. The DLT role description includes leading the implementation of the LTQES within their schools and disseminating changes in University policy where this requires changes in school practice. Working closely with their Head of School, the DLTs provide the key link to institutional strategy through their membership of ESEC, the DLT Forum that meets for discussion before each meeting of ESEC, and by chairing the school LTCs. Additional reporting lines between schools and the Senior Management Team are provided by the chairs of the school research committees, who sit on corresponding institutional committees, and by the School Managers, who meet regularly with the Deputy Secretary.

14 The current Strategic Plan includes as one of its stated values, 'One University: We are one team working to achieve shared goals.' The ELIR team learned that the University is seeking to develop consistency across the schools through a number of strategic developments, including a common marking scheme, shared graduate attributes, and an institution-wide Personal Tutor system. In discussion, senior staff told the team that the University was moving from a position of considerable school autonomy to a more balanced state.

### Education and Student Experience Committee

15 The Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) remit includes responsibility for the University's suite of strategies relating to learning, teaching, quality enhancement, and the wider student experience. This includes ESEC monitoring implementation of these strategies at school level, including the extent to which school-level plans align with University strategy. In addition to the Deputy Principal (Education and Students), ESEC membership includes the seven directors of learning and teaching, elected members of the professoriate, the Head of the Stirling Graduate School, the Academic Registrar, and three representatives from the Students' Union.

16 In November 2014, a working group was formed to conduct a review of the effectiveness of ESEC following one full year of its operation. The working group comprised two directors of learning and teaching, representatives from the Academic Registry and Governance Services, and the Students' Union President. A brief interim report was made available to the ELIR team, and senior staff informed the team that, overall, ESEC was found to be working well, with some minor changes being identified by the working group.

17 The ELIR team noted that ESEC meets three times a year to cover an extensive remit. The team also noted from ESEC papers that a considerable volume of business is conducted by chair's action (see paragraphs 22, 103 and 123).

## **Planning cycle**

18 The University has a devolved structure, in which the schools carry responsibility for interpreting and operationalising institutional strategy and policy. The annual planning statements prepared by schools act as a significant driver for implementing institutional strategy at school level. These plans are combined at institutional level into the document A University Plan for Academic Success, which describes the activities that will be carried out in order to achieve the Strategic Plan targets.

19 The ELIR team considered the annual planning arrangements to be robust, providing an effective mechanism for driving and monitoring implementation of institutional strategies in the schools. The head of each school develops a school plan in line with the emerging institutional plan, and with explicit reference to key University strategies. The annual planning cycle includes review of the previous year's performance, in discussion with the Senior Deputy Principal. The discussions are structured, covering learning and teaching as well as financial matters. Discussions are also held mid-cycle. The Planning Review Group considers all school plans, including financial and capital plans. An institutional health check, the Annual Performance Report, summarises institutional performance against a range of key performance indicators (KPIs). In discussion with the ELIR team, staff indicated that they had been consulted in the planning process and had contributed to the preparation of their school plans.

### **1.3 Effectiveness of the approach to implementing strategies**

20 Overall, the University has an effective approach to implementing its strategies. Previous strains identified around the pace and extent of change have been recognised. Recent initiatives have been implemented in a more incremental manner with increased support for staff and students involved, which is positive. Through activity such as the TSE project, the University has been able to introduce greater coherence across the schools and this is likely to benefit students.

21 The annual planning round is an effective mechanism for contextualising and implementing institutional strategy in a devolved school structure. A number of key post holders are vital to the success of this process, including Heads of School, directors of learning and teaching, and the deans. Oversight of the process is provided by the Deputy Principal (Education and Students).

22 The changes to the committee structure have placed a considerable workload upon one committee, ESEC, resulting in reduced opportunities for round-table discussion and over-reliance on chair's action (see paragraphs 103 and 123).

## **2 Enhancing the student learning experience**

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

23 The total student population has remained stable since the 2011 ELIR. There was a total population of 9,262 (FTE) in 2010-11 and 9,023 (FTE) in 2014-15. In 2014-15, there were 7,432 undergraduate, 1,232 taught postgraduate and 358 research postgraduate students. Included in this total are 1,299 overseas students (outside Europe). In 2014-15 the University had 493 students studying on transnational programmes and 107 students studying on the joint venture with INTO. The University's strategic aims are to increase student enrolments in areas that are currently under-represented, including: international undergraduates; international and EU taught postgraduates; and research postgraduates.

24 Part-time student numbers increased from 19.7 per cent in 2012-13 to 20.5 per cent in 2013-14. The proportion of part-time students varies considerably across schools, with the highest proportion (36.4 per cent) in the School of Applied Social Science, and the lowest (7.7 per cent) in the School of Arts and Humanities.

25 The University's Strategic Plan includes the intention to increase taught postgraduate numbers by 30 per cent, from a baseline of 1,300 FTEs in 2010-11 to around 1,700 FTEs by 2015-16. At the end of 2012-13, the University was broadly on track to achieve the Strategic Plan target of increasing student numbers by around 100 FTE per year. The ELIR team learned, however, that a number of factors had impacted adversely on student recruitment and numbers. In 2013-14 the University experienced a sharp drop in overseas undergraduate and overseas taught postgraduate student numbers (just under 25 per cent in each category between 2010-11 and 2014-15), particularly from the Chinese market, where the University had previously been successful in recruiting students. This produced an overall drop of around seven per cent in the total taught postgraduate student population between 2010-11 and 2014-15.

26 In line with the University Internationalisation Strategy 2014-19, current postgraduate student recruitment is focused on improving conversion rates across all markets and subject areas, and fostering relationships with key agents and partners. To maintain growth in the research postgraduate population, and to meet Strategic Plan objectives, the University aims to recruit a minimum of 135 FTE new research students during 2015-16.

27 The University plans to maintain and, where possible, improve undergraduate retention rates of 93.8 per cent for all Scottish domiciled entrants compared to a 2011-12 baseline of 92.4 per cent, and 92 per cent for SIMD40 entrants. The University has a positive record of recruiting and supporting widening participation students. In 2015-16 the University will receive 20 per cent of the available additional SIMD40 places being funded by the Scottish Funding Council, amounting to a total of 148 additional places representing an increase of 23 places compared to 2013-14.

28 The University is committed to offering students flexible routes for accessing higher education as reflected in its portfolio of articulation arrangements with other institutions, including INTO and Forth Valley College (see paragraphs 130 and 131). The University also operates an Access Course.

### **Student data**

29 The collection and monitoring of student data was previously undertaken by the Admissions Progress and Awards Committee. Following the review of committees in 2012, this was delegated to staff within the Academic Registry and Governance Services, with direct reporting lines to the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) and schools. In March 2013 the Student Engagement Programme (SEP) was launched, with the aim of further developing the range of data, and quality of the electronic systems and processes, that support a range of student and applicant processes. Another objective of the SEP was the provision of a comprehensive catalogue of enhanced programme and module data to meet a range of internal and external reporting requirements, such as reporting on the University's collaborative arrangements and annual programme monitoring.

30 As part of the SEP, the University has identified a need to develop an Enhanced Student Record (ESR) which it had recently launched at the time of the current ELIR. The ESR aims to collate and present a wider range of student information centrally than was previously held in various locations around the University. The enhanced information is available to an agreed range of staff. The benefits include better information sharing and the

identification of student non-engagement at an earlier stage, as well as identifying students at risk of academic failure.

## **2.2 Supporting equality and diversity in the student population**

31 The University has an effective approach to supporting equality and diversity in its student population. The effectiveness of the University's approach to embedding equality and diversity, and its impact on enhancing the student learning experience, is reviewed by the Equality Steering Group. It is chaired by the Deputy Principal (Operational Strategy and External Affairs) and reports directly to the Joint Policy, Planning and Resources Committee. The Equality Steering Group monitors the University's progress in achieving its Equality Outcomes Action Plan, a four-year plan including a range of SMART targets. The University also produces an Annual Staff and Student Equality Report.

32 In 2014, the University appointed the Head of Stirling Management School to the post of Dean of Equality and Diversity to provide visible leadership for institutional strategy and policy in this area. The University has designated Equality Champions within each school and has established an Equality Action Forum. The Forum is chaired by the Dean of Equality and Diversity and is intended to raise awareness of best practice and provide support in equality matters. The University's web-based OneStirling initiative also supports equality and diversity activity by signposting additional resources and providing online information and support.

33 All University staff are required to undertake online training on equality and diversity. The ELIR team learned that University and Higher Education Academy training sessions on curriculum design to promote equality and diversity are available to staff.

34 The University has a gender imbalance in its student population, which it is taking action to address. In 2014-15, 63 per cent of students were female, which is a similar distribution to the three previous academic years. The University considers that the high proportion of female students is due to the profile of programmes offered by the University, such as Nursing, which attracts significantly more female than male entrants. In 2014-15, 88 per cent of students studying in the School of Health Sciences, and 67 per cent of those studying in the School of Education, were female.

35 The ELIR team noted that the University's commitment to raising the profile, and embedding a culture, of equality and diversity across its student population has been recognised through a number of external awards, such as the Athena SWAN Bronze Award (received in September 2013). The University has established a short-life working group to explore intake targets, with the intention of encouraging greater gender diversity in its undergraduate student recruitment. The ELIR team supports the University's intention to continue monitoring the gender composition of its student population and taking action to promote greater diversity.

## **2.3 Engaging and supporting students in their learning**

36 The University stated that it aspires to provide a student learning experience that reflects the best of accessibility, innovation and excellence in learning and teaching, and strives to support individuals from all backgrounds to achieve their full potential. The strategic context for student engagement and support is set by a combination of the Strategic Plan 2011-16, the Learning and Teaching Quality Enhancement Strategy 2015-17, and the Transforming the Student Experience project.

## **Collaboration with the Students' Union**

37 The University works collaboratively with the Students' Union and the wider student population, which enables the student voice to be heard at key stages of the decision-making processes and facilitates a student contribution to the ongoing development of learning and teaching policy and practice. The ELIR team saw a number of examples of this collaborative working, for example in relation to the student-led teaching awards (see paragraph 66) and the consultation around developments in the University estate. 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. The University was in the process of developing a student charter for implementation during 2015-16, setting out the respective expectations of students and the institution.

38 Since the 2011 ELIR, the University has initiated a considerable number of student facing and institutional business process projects, many of which are reflected in the Transforming the Student Experience project. It was evident to the ELIR team that the University and the Students' Union officers had an exceptional commitment to extensive consultation and collaborative ways of working to enable these initiatives to be delivered. Particular examples include the introduction of School Officer training delivered jointly by schools and the Students' Union; consultation with students around the change in the number of teaching weeks; an increasing emphasis on student participation in learning and teaching reviews; and student involvement in the development of the Personal Tutor role.

## **Student representation**

39 The Students' Union sabbatical officers are members of key University committees, including ESEC; Joint Policy, Planning and Resources Committee; Academic Council; and University Court. The sabbaticals also meet on a regular basis with senior academic staff, including the Deputy Principal (Education and Students), as well as with members of staff from the Academic Registry and Governance Services.

40 Since the 2011 ELIR the role of School Officer has been developed further. School Officers engage with course representatives and directors of learning and teaching, among others, to facilitate dialogue and feedback. They also undertake specific projects during their term of office, for example engaging in working groups and gathering information from students. School Officers are recruited and trained by the Students' Union in conjunction with the relevant school, and report to the Students' Union Vice President (Education). They work closely with sabbatical officers and staff in the Students' Union as well as with University staff.

41 School Officers who met the ELIR team were enthusiastic about their role, indicating that they had an important facilitative effect providing a valued interface between student course representatives and school staff. Both staff and students in the wider population spoke very positively to the ELIR team about the benefits of School Officers. Through a combination of the periodic learning and teaching reviews and student focus group feedback, the University has identified some variation in the impact of School Officers across schools. The University and the Students' Union are addressing this by providing additional support to enhance communication with course representatives (and Staff Student Consultative Committees) and are enhancing the training provided to School Officers during 2015-16. This is positive evidence of the University reflecting on its activity and seeking to enhance it.

42 The ELIR team learned that the University plans to introduce a Graduate School Officer role aimed at the postgraduate student population. The University intended to

recruit seven taught postgraduate and seven research postgraduate School Officers for 2015-16. Based on the positive impact of the current School Officers, the team considered this was likely to enhance the partnership between the University and the postgraduate student population.

### **Student feedback**

43 The University is proactive in seeking to provide opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experience and is responsive to the feedback provided. Student feedback is obtained through a wide range of mechanisms, both formal and informal. Action taken as a result of student feedback through external surveys - and internal processes such as Staff Student Consultative Committee (SSCC) meetings, discussion forums, and learning and teaching reviews - is communicated to students by a number of means, including the virtual learning environment (VLE), email, social media, plasma screens in key locations and You Said, We Did announcements. The University recognises that communication of the outcomes of SSCC meetings remains variable and intends to address this jointly with the Students' Union as part of the ongoing review of course representative training.

44 It is positive that the periodic learning and teaching review process engages directly with the relevant SSCC as a method of obtaining student feedback. Student members of the SSCC for the subject area under review are invited to contribute to the review process by producing a document detailing any issues they wish to draw to the attention of the review panel. Annual programme review reports also include an explicit section on student feedback from SSCCs, which the ELIR team views as an effective way of emphasising the importance of student feedback.

### **Personal tutors**

45 Related to the Learning and Teaching Quality Enhancement Strategy 2015-17 and the outcomes of the Transforming the Student Experience project (see paragraph 6), the University has developed strategies aimed at identifying students whose academic success may be at risk, with a view to providing early intervention and appropriate support. The University indicated that part of this approach is the introduction of the Personal Tutor scheme, which provides each student with a personalised point of contact within the academic community with a remit to provide pastoral support throughout the student's time at the institution. The Personal Tutor scheme operates in conjunction with the existing Adviser of Studies system, which focuses on academic-related advice and support. In discussion with the ELIR team, staff were clear about the distinction between the roles of Personal Tutors and Advisers of Studies, but they also acknowledged that there can be an understandable 'blurring' of the roles on occasion.

46 The ELIR team considered that the University's implementation of the Personal Tutor system had been successful and represents positive practice. The role was clearly defined from the outset in a code of practice that identifies the respective responsibilities of the Tutor and the student. Although some blurring of the boundaries between the Personal Tutor and Adviser of Studies roles exists, overall, staff and students were clear about the distinctions and spoke very positively to the ELIR team about the introduction of Personal Tutors. Implementation of the role was accompanied by training in advance of staff undertaking the role and by ongoing staff support. All of the academic staff who met the team confirmed that the training had been delivered effectively and was fit for purpose. Furthermore, the role is recognised in the University's workload allocation model. It is positive that the University keeps the effectiveness of the role under review and has identified ways in which it could be enhanced further: for example, to promote greater consistency in this support for all students.

## **Student support**

47 At the time of the current ELIR a number of developments were in progress relating to the University's desire to enhance its student support arrangements. The University indicated that a key ambition for 2015-17 was to launch a student 'hub' with the aim of providing integrated support to students from one central, physical location on the Stirling campus. This was at an early stage of consideration. The staffing structure of the Student Support Services team was under review and was likely to evolve from the current four teams to a two-team structure comprising a Disability Service, and Student Guidance and Wellbeing. As part of the University's desire to prioritise arrangements aimed at evaluating the impact of Student Support Services, in 2015-16, it established a Student Support Coordination Group to facilitate greater cohesion across services areas involved in providing student support to students at all campuses. Although these were all recent or forthcoming developments, they have the potential to enhance the student experience and are clearly linked to institutional strategic priorities, for example through the Learning and Teaching Quality Enhancement Strategy.

48 A peer mentoring scheme (known as STEER) is in place and is run largely by students for students. STEER provides mentors for undergraduates and Buddies for taught postgraduates. The scheme aims to provide support for students from their first year of study and is intended to complement other arrangements on offer from the University and the Students' Union. Training and development opportunities are provided for students undertaking support roles. 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.

## **Learning resources**

49 In discussion with the ELIR team, senior staff highlighted the importance of developing learning spaces and the use of technology to effectively support contemporary pedagogy and the student learning experience. The Learning and Teaching Quality Enhancement Strategy is intended to inform such developments, and the work of the Learning Spaces Group is aimed at delivering ongoing enhancements to the teaching and learning environment, such as introducing electronic examinations to facilitate the enhanced legibility of students' answers, ease of marking and more effective feedback to students. Students who met the ELIR team indicated that the learning resources were adequate currently, with some reporting variability in the extent to which staff make use of the VLE.

## **Postgraduate students**

50 The Stirling Graduate School was established in 2011 as a virtual school, working in partnership with the existing schools and professional service areas to enable postgraduate (taught and research) students to maximise the benefits available to them during their time at the University and to enable students to feel part of the University's postgraduate community. In discussions with the ELIR team, staff indicated that an initial priority of the Graduate School had been to bring greater consistency to taught programme structures, and to redraft the research degree regulations and the associated code of practice to make University and student expectations clearer at a range of key stages, such as in relation to monitoring progress. This activity had involved extensive engagement with the schools. This work had clearly been productive and necessary.

51 Through the Graduate School, the University introduced the Research Compass, a web-based system for providing support, formal and informal progress monitoring, and an interactive skills development and skills training system for the postgraduate research

student community. Students who met the ELIR team indicated that staff and student engagement with the Research Compass varied greatly, and students expressed mixed views about the utility of the online facility.

52 In discussion, research students indicated that the Graduate School only had a marginal impact on developing a sense of a postgraduate community across the University. By contrast, the students spoke positively about the support provided within their individual schools. An exception to this was that not all students had an identified person to contact if they had difficulty with their original supervisory team. On the whole, taught postgraduate students who met the team were more positive about their learning experience, indicating that they were content with the interaction they experienced with the University, for example referring to joining instructions, handbook information, assessment feedback and support for dissertations and their transitions. There would clearly be value in the University reflecting on a number of aspects of the research student experience and the role of the Graduate School (see paragraph 60).

53 The ELIR team formed the view that both research and taught postgraduates found it more challenging than undergraduate students to have their voice heard. The team considered that the plans to introduce Graduate School Officers were likely to give postgraduate students, and research students in particular, a stronger voice and enable them to enjoy a productive partnership with the University.

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

54 The 2011 ELIR report asked the University to consider developing a more comprehensive framework for the development of all graduate attributes through the University's curricular and co-curricular provision. The current ELIR team noted that, while the University has a range of approaches to promoting graduate attributes and, particularly, employability, work was still in progress in relation to identifying a more comprehensive framework.

55 In 2013-14, the University reviewed its graduate attributes, taking into consideration practice at a range of institutions, including those outside the UK. This resulted in the development of revised graduate attributes, reflecting a holistic approach to the student experience, including all aspects of co-curricular activities. The University indicated that the graduate attributes are embedded in the Learning and Teaching Quality Enhancement Strategy and the Employability Strategy. The University also indicated that it was now focusing on embedding graduate attributes in the curriculum, raising student awareness of the attributes, and developing arrangements for monitoring the institution's progress. A short-life working group had been convened in summer 2015 to produce institutional guidance for schools on the implementation of the revised graduate attributes during 2015-16, with the intention that a comprehensive framework for the development of the attributes would be produced by 2016-17.

56 In discussion with the ELIR team, staff confirmed that they were aware of the ongoing work to enhance student employability and embed graduate attributes into academic programmes. Similarly, students who met the team were aware of the emphasis that the University placed on supporting and preparing them for their future pathways.

57 The Careers and Employability Service has developed a series of workshops (known as Lift Off) to provide students with a confidence toolkit to enable them to build their graduate attributes and to develop their lifelong employability skills. The Service has also worked in partnership with alumni to develop specific alumni mentoring programmes for schools. In addition to Lift Off, a number of joint University and Students' Union initiatives

have been developed, such as the volunteering fair, and the Students' Active and Innovative Leadership programme. Students spoke positively to the ELIR team about their experience of volunteering opportunities and the range of workshops and personal development modules available to them. At postgraduate level the University is part of the Making the Most of Masters initiative (with Aberdeen and Edinburgh universities), which has worked successfully with staff, students and employers to provide the opportunity for work-based dissertations at master's level.

## **2.5 Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience**

58 There is an effective and systematic approach to enhancing the student learning experience. A commitment to engage with its students is embedded in the University culture. There has been a substantial volume of change and this 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. The School Officer role, which was being piloted at the time of the 2011 ELIR, has been extended successfully to the whole University with plans in place to appoint Graduate School Officers for the research student population.

59 The Personal Tutor system has been implemented successfully and is positively regarded by students and staff. The Personal Tutor 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.

60 The University is asked to 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.

## **3 Enhancement in learning and teaching**

### **3.1 Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice**

61 There are effective mechanisms in place for identifying and sharing good practice within schools and across the institution. These arrangements could be enhanced by the University considering how to promote more widespread engagement with the opportunities available and how to promote greater consistency in the implementation of good practice across the schools.

62 The University employs a variety of strategies for identifying and sharing good practice and these are actively promoted by the Deputy Principal (Education and Students). Good practice is identified and disseminated through the committee structure by the Directors of Learning and Teaching (DLTs). For example, good practice identified during internal periodic learning and teaching reviews is shared through school Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) meetings, meetings of the DLTs and various short-life working groups.

63 The DLTs are a pivotal communication link between the central management of the University and the schools. They are members of the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) and have formed a DLT group (see paragraphs 13 and 81), as well as

chairing the school LTCs. As a result, DLTs are the key to information flow between school LTCs, the DLT group and ESEC. The ELIR team noted that ESEC matters, including examples of good practice, are considered at school LTCs to a varying extent ranging, from simply noted to more extensive discussion and debate. The team noted other examples of University policy being implemented in a variable manner within schools, such as the assessment and feedback policy.

64 At University level, there is an annual learning and teaching conference at which good practice is presented and shared. In 2015, the conference was host to 82 attendees, including students, service staff, academic staff and external attendees. The conference is an important event in the calendar and an excellent opportunity to share developments in teaching both within the University and from the wider sector. The ELIR team considered that the structure of the conference, with invited keynote speakers and parallel paper sessions, was comprehensive, interesting and relevant to all university teachers. The team noted that the University had taken action to encourage more academic staff to attend and there would be benefit in continuing to promote participation.

65 During semester time, there is a regular weekly programme of lunchtime teaching practice sessions, known as Teaching Bites, to which all staff are invited. These presentations cover a wide range of good teaching and learning practice. Speakers include internal staff and invited presenters from other Scottish institutions. The ELIR team heard that attendance at the Teaching Bites sessions could be improved.

66 In 2010-11, the University introduced the Recognising Achievement in Teaching Excellence (RATE) awards scheme. RATE is a student-run nomination-based annual awards programme, which recognises exceptional teaching. The awards ceremony takes place during the annual learning and teaching conference. A new initiative, in 2014-15, was for the Students' Union to provide every nominated staff member with the text of the nomination submitted in relation to their teaching practice. The ELIR team considered that disseminating the nomination text is an excellent way of sharing good practice and providing positive feedback to teaching staff.

### **3.2 Impact of the national Enhancement Themes and related activity**

67 Topics relating to the national Enhancement Themes are visible in the University's Learning and Teaching Quality Enhancement Strategy (LTQES), the Transforming the Student Experience project, and in a range of other activities and events. The University's engagement with the current Enhancement Theme, Student Transitions, is managed through an Enhancement Themes Steering Group that establishes, initiates and promotes work in the institution. The Steering Group is chaired by the Dean of Student Affairs, and members include academic, administrative and support staff, as well as a student representative.

68 The Stirling Enhancement of Learning Fund (SELF) supports developments in learning, teaching and assessment that align with the LTQES, and the QAA Enhancement Themes Institutional Fund provided support for the Students' Union to host an inaugural Accessing Higher Education Conference. The Conference was designed to encourage and support non-traditional students entering higher education. The Enhancement Theme agenda is reflected in the focus of the University's Annual Learning and Teaching Conference. In 2014, the theme for the Annual Conference (formerly known as Eudafair) was centred on the Developing and Supporting the Curriculum Enhancement Theme. In 2015, the Dean for Student Affairs spoke on the Quality Enhancement Themes and another keynote speaker gave a talk relating to facilitating effective transitions into and through higher education. In 2016 it is intended that the Conference will focus on 'Changing Places:

Student Transitions in Higher Education'. Staff who have received funding through SELF are expected to present at the Conference.

69 The engagement with the current Enhancement Theme, Student Transitions, includes work on transition into university, reflection of students on first year and integrated degrees, international experience, transition from second to honours year, and navigating work places. The Enhancement Themes Steering Group meets regularly and has held an awayday dedicated to the work on Student Transitions. The ELIR team heard about the move from a consultative approach to more active student engagement in the most recent Enhancement Theme work and the positive experiences of actively involving the Students' Union in this work. In addition, the ELIR team heard about the early impact of the engagement with the Student Transitions Theme through the development of a four-year-long e-module, which is planned to flow through the student journey and is intended to facilitate the transition of the student between each year. It was at an early stage of development at the time of the current ELIR but clearly had the potential to provide valuable student support.

### **3.3 Engaging and supporting staff**

#### **Academic development and support**

70 In a relatively recent move, responsibility for the delivery of staff development relating to learning and teaching rests with the Academic Development Team within Human Resources and Organisation Development (HR&OD). The University highlighted that many academic functions underpinning learning and teaching development have a human resources component; as such, the University considers the co-location of academic staff development with staff and organisational development in HR&OD to be a positive development.

71 Through HR&OD, training is provided to support new University initiatives and technological changes, for example Personal Tutor training and the introduction of the current VLE (known as SUCCEED). HR&OD delivers the University Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, which is designed for new members of academic staff as well as those who wish to enhance their practice. The ELIR team learned that the programme had recently been accredited by the Higher Education Academy.

72 The E-Learning Liaison and Development Team (part of the Information Services Academic Liaison and Development Team), together with HR&OD, develops and delivers events through an E-Learning Forum. They also coordinate the Teaching Bites sessions aimed at sharing good practice (see paragraph 65). In addition, the E-Learning Liaison and Development Team provides online E-Learning Forum sessions that are accessible to staff teaching on remote campuses, covering topics such as electronic marking. The team publishes a helpful blog that provides useful advice and information about e-learning provision, conveys reports from attendees at national level conferences and advertises the Teaching Bites sessions.

73 An informal academic development advisory discussion group, which included the Dean of Student Affairs, the Deputy Principal (Education and Students) and Deputy Head of Human Resources, met twice in 2014-15 to discuss the University's academic development plans, Higher Education Academy accreditation of the PGCert, and a continuing professional development framework. The group has discussed the content and accessibility of the portfolio of core and optional development programmes made available at both school and institutional levels through the E-Learning Liaison and Development Team and HR&OD. These discussions

have clearly been useful and there would be merit in the University giving further thought to the core and optional development programmes (see paragraph 77).

### **Support for teaching assistants**

74 The ELIR team found that there was insufficient training provided for teaching assistants prior to their engaging in teaching at the University. From discussions during ELIR, it was evident that the nature and level of support provided within schools varied across the institution. In particular, teaching assistants expressed the view that they required training in the VLE that they were expected to use, as well as understanding the broader principles and practices expected when teaching and assessing students at the University. The University should provide training and support for all teaching assistants.

### **Research supervisor training**

75 The ELIR team heard that the University had discontinued the institution-level training that had been provided for research student supervisors. While the ELIR team heard that there were plans to engage with an external provider for supervisor training, no training was currently available. The University is strongly encouraged to address this gap and re-establish compulsory training for new research student supervisors, in addition to creating a mechanism to ensure all existing supervisors' training and development needs can be updated.

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

76 Overall, there are effective arrangements in place for promoting good practice across the University. There would be benefit in the University providing a more coordinated approach to academic staff development, and reflecting on the ways in which it can encourage wider engagement, including among senior and research-focused staff, with opportunities to develop and reflect on teaching practice. There would be value in the University coordinating the identification and dissemination of good practice with those themes arising from its regular quality processes, such as annual monitoring, institutional-led review and student feedback. This would also help to promote greater consistency between schools in the extent to which good practice is identified and shared.

77 The University should ensure there is a coordinated approach for identifying and addressing the developmental needs of staff across the institution 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 should pursue its intention to reintroduce research supervisor training at institutional level and put in place a mechanism for identifying and monitoring supervisor training and support needs, including ensuring that all existing supervisors are updated. The University should also ensure all students and staff who teach receive adequate training in advance and are supported to carry out the role.

78 There are many positive features relating to the Recognising Achievement in Teaching Excellence (RATE) award, which is run by Stirling Students' Union. These include 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.

## 4 Academic standards

### 4.1 Approach to setting, maintaining and reviewing academic standards

79 The University has an effective approach to setting, maintaining and reviewing its academic standards. The University's monitoring and review processes in respect of its taught programmes are robust. An annual report summarising the outcomes of annual monitoring is received by the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC), which also receives the annual institutional report on institution-led review that is required by the Scottish Funding Council. These reports help to provide institutional oversight of the key quality processes.

#### Committee and regulatory framework

80 The Academic Council is the ultimate authority for quality assurance and academic standards: it delegates operational responsibilities to its reporting committees, including ESEC, which has responsibility for undergraduate and postgraduate learning, teaching and quality enhancement, as well the enhancement of the student experience. ESEC provides an annual report on its operation to the Academic Council, providing assurance that it is operating according to its remit.

81 School Learning and Teaching Committees (LTCs), chaired by the Directors of Learning and Teaching (DLTs), have oversight of a number of quality assurance and enhancement processes, including the development and initial approval of new programmes and modules. The University confirmed that the minutes of school LTC meetings are not reported through the University committee structure. Reporting from the school LTCs is through the DLTs, who are members of ESEC.

82 The University's Academic Regulations and degree programme tables form part of its regulatory framework, which also includes: ordinances, codes of practice, and the policies and standards that govern the academic conduct of students and staff. The regulations set out the criteria for the assessment and achievement of credit and awards; any exceptions, such as in the case of programmes with specific professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements, are detailed within the regulations. The regulations for undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research degrees have undergone major review during the past few years as part of the University's aim of achieving a more consistent institution-wide approach.

83 The overall arrangements and criteria for the admission, supervision, progress, monitoring and assessment of students undertaking research degrees are set out in the Academic Regulations. The Graduate School, in partnership with Academic Registry and Governance Services, reviewed the relevant regulations and the associated code of practice during 2014-15, and these were approved by ESEC in May 2015. Key changes to the regulations included the enhancement of milestones for progress monitoring purposes, with a number of specific requirements set out for students.

84 The University's academic policies are contained in its Quality Handbook, which is accessible on its website and provides a useful frame of reference for staff. At the time of the current ELIR, the Handbook was being revised and was due to be re-launched in 2016-17. A number of sections were identified as 'under review', which was made clear on the website and within the Handbook itself. The University reviews its academic policies regularly; the Quality Handbook is informed by and aligned to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

85 The responsibilities of key role holders in relation to quality and standards are set out in the Quality Handbook. These include the Deputy Principal (Education and Students), who is responsible for the strategy and direction of the University's approach to academic quality and enhancement, and the student experience; Heads of School; the Dean of Student Affairs; and the DLTs. The DLTs have responsibility for leading, stimulating, influencing and supporting good practice in learning and teaching. It was clear to the ELIR team, through discussion and minutes of committees, that the DLTs play a key role in communicating University strategy and policy to schools and in helping to ensure their consistent and effective implementation.

86 The Governance and Review Team within Academic Registry and Governance Services undertakes a number of functions to assure quality and academic standards including scrutiny of external examiners' reports and annual programme reviews. School Managers meet regularly as a group with the Deputy Secretary. They attend LTC meetings and support consistency of practice in the implementation of quality assurance policy and procedures across the schools.

### **Programme approval**

87 The University indicated that, since the 2011 ELIR, it has enhanced its process for programme development and approval, including increased engagement of students in the process. The development of new programmes and modules is initiated at school level, and the initial approval and quality assurance process is managed through the LTCs. ESEC has final institutional oversight and responsibility for programme approval. The process involves two stages. Following initial approval by the relevant Head of School, a programme panel (which can meet physically or virtually), comprising academic and professional support staff and students, develops the programme. Programme panels are expected to take account of a range of external reference points, including PSRBs, external examiners and industry views, although the University acknowledged that the nature of engagement with and by industry varies. Programmes are signed off by the LTCs with final approval by ESEC. The University confirmed that ESEC approval was given through chair's action, and this was evident in ESEC minutes. While the design and development stage of the process involves a number of internal staff and external stakeholders, the documentation provided to the ELIR team relating to programme development did not demonstrate how proposals meet the requirements of external reference points, such as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and Subject Benchmark Statements, and there is no external academic involvement in the approval process. The University is encouraged to involve academic expertise from outside the institution in its programme approval arrangements, in line with the Quality Code (see paragraphs 100 and 114).

### **Programme withdrawal**

88 Programme withdrawal is also operated through LTCs. ESEC is responsible for approving the withdrawal of academic programmes upon completion of the process, which includes preparation of a justification for the withdrawal and a description of the measures taken to notify and protect the interests of students. As with programme approval, ESEC's final approval is enacted through chair's action. Discussions with the University and available documentary evidence confirmed that the programme withdrawal process is working as intended and that steps were being taken to safeguard the quality of the student experience during the withdrawal process.

## **4.2 Management of assessment**

89 The University has effective arrangements for managing assessment. Ensuring consistency of practice across schools is an ongoing part of the institution's

focus on assessment and feedback. This is reflected in the outcomes of the Transforming the Student Experience project and in the review of assessment and grading procedures across the University, which was led by the Dean of Student Affairs in 2014-15.

90 The University's policy on assessment was reviewed and developed to align with the outcomes of the Transforming the Student Experience project, and the revised Policy was approved by ESEC to be effective from 2014-15. The Policy is the means by which the University seeks to ensure consistent and equitable practice across the institution. The Policy notes that, while it does not prevent schools/divisions from introducing additional practices and procedures, no practice or procedure may be adopted that either conflicts with or undermines it. The Policy covers all aspects of the assessment process: for example, it sets out the requirements for the anonymous marking of assessment and the requirement for all formally assessed work to be moderated through sampling, although the sample size is not explicitly defined.

91 In the Reflective Analysis the University commented that all formally assessed work is systematically moderated, based on a sample across the full spread of marks, in order to verify the overall marking standards. Marking by new members of staff and teaching assistants is monitored as appropriate. Consistency of moderation practice was considered as part of the Dean of Student Affairs' review of assessment practices. However, the DLTs have recognised that moderation is not being implemented in all schools and that steps were being taken to resolve this. The ELIR team also noted in the minutes of one LTC that moderation practices were acknowledged to be variable in the school, with no school-wide policy in place. The University should give attention to the implementation of institutional policy in the schools (see paragraph 100).

92 As an outcome of the Transforming the Student Experience project, the University adopted a revised common marking scheme for undergraduate and postgraduate work from 2014-15. This replaced six different scales that had previously been used across the University. Students expressed mixed views about the new scheme: some students were very positive about the change, indicating that it was easier to understand, while others preferred the previous arrangements, although they acknowledged that it was probably a result of the scheme being new.

93 As part of the Transforming the Student Experience project schools reviewed their assessment approaches for each programme, and published details for students and staff on feedback arrangements for assessed work. Students were aware of the University's policy on feedback to students and the requirement for timely return of coursework, although they described variation in practice across the institution. The ELIR team noted that there was inconsistency in the turnaround times stated in the University's Assessment Policy and its revised Feedback Policy. Students who met the team were largely content with the quality of feedback they received. In meetings with the team, staff outlined a number of ways they were considering monitoring the timeliness of feedback to students and are encouraged to progress these.

### **4.3 Use of external reference points in managing academic standards**

94 Overall, the University's use of external reference points is in line with sector expectations.

95 The University has mapped its policies and procedures to the Quality Code. The mapping led to the University identifying some areas for development, including work on examination and grading procedures and the development of policy on student attendance and engagement. The mapping is reflected in the University's Quality Handbook.

96 The University's processes for design and approval of new programmes incorporate the use of external reference points. Where programmes are accredited by PSRBs, their requirements and guidelines are taken into account. As noted earlier (see paragraph 87), the University is encouraged to involve academic expertise from outside the institution, and to consider taking account of the views of industry more consistently, in its programme approval arrangements. The University meets sector expectations in relation to external engagement with its other quality assurance process, including institution-led learning and teaching reviews.

97 The University's external examining system, set out in the Quality Handbook, has been developed with reference to the Quality Code. At the time of the current ELIR, this section of the Quality Handbook was under review. The University has a robust process for the appointment of external examiners. External examiners are appointed by, and are responsible to, the Academic Council on the recommendation of schools; the normal period of appointment is four years, with an exceptional extension of one year. The University and school provide external examiners with documentation to enable them to carry out their role, including an External Examiners Handbook.

98 The University's procedures for reporting and responding to external examiner reports are clear. External examiners report on a standard template, which prompts explicit comment in relation to external reference points, including Subject Benchmark Statements and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. Examiners are also asked to comment on good practice and identify areas for enhancement. Any areas of concern are drawn to the attention of the Deputy Principal (Education and Students). Schools are required to respond formally to external examiners' reports; programme directors consider any matters raised by external examiners as part of the annual programme review process; external examiners' reports, and school consideration and responses to these reports, are also considered as part of the learning and teaching review process. Schools produce a summary of external examiners' comments, and an institutional level report, which is produced by Academic Registry and Governance Services, is considered by ESEC.

99 Students are represented on LTCs where external examiner reports are considered. The University expects that external examiner reports are made available to students by schools on request. Students who met the ELIR team were generally aware of the role of the external examiners in the assessment process, and this is set out in modules and programme handbooks. Students were less clear how they would access external examiner reports, and this would benefit from clarification.

#### **4.4 Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards**

100 Overall, the University has an effective approach to securing academic standards. There is evidence of a more consistent University-wide approach having been introduced, both in terms of regulatory frameworks and in practice, with the DLTs working to communicate and support implementation of policy within the schools. Following this positive work, the University should give attention to defining where flexibility can and cannot be permitted when institutional policy is implemented in different disciplines and contexts. The University is also encouraged to involve academic expertise from outside the institution in its programme approval arrangements, in line with the Quality Code.

101 The DLTs play a pivotal role between school and institutional level, chairing the school LTCs 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.

## **5 Self-evaluation and management of information**

### **5.1 Key features of the institution's approach**

102 In its Reflective Analysis the University noted that its approach to self-evaluation and management of information is informed by a commitment to the delivery of its strategic objectives, and that this is supported by the effective use of data and the development of new technologies. The ELIR team found evidence of the University's approach in minutes of the Academic Council and Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC), where it was clear that the University regularly reviews its academic policies and procedures. The University's approach to self-evaluation is also reflected in its Transforming the Student Experience project, a significant and extensive project that addresses the enhancement of a number of elements of the student experience, from revised regulatory frameworks to student support through the revised personal tutoring system and institution-wide engagement (including staff and students) with the development of the new Strategic Plan.

#### **Evaluation in the committee structure**

103 ESEC governs the strategic direction and monitors the implementation of agreed strategy and policy relating to education and the student experience. ESEC minutes demonstrate that it covers a wide range of business, which was also confirmed in discussion with senior staff during the current ELIR. Some of ESEC's business, such as programme approval and withdrawal, is always transacted through chair's action, thereby increasing risk and denying the University a valuable opportunity to share ideas and engage in debate about key academic principles (see paragraphs 22 and 123). In recognition of the need for more time and a forum for discussion and debate, the Directors of Learning and Teaching (DLTs) have set up a group that meets prior to ESEC taking place. Currently, the outcomes of these meetings do not report directly to a University committee.

#### **Annual and periodic evaluative processes**

104 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.

105 The procedures for module review require module coordinators to consider a range of feedback from student module evaluation questionnaires, external examiners, and Staff Student Consultative Committees (SSCCs). Module review outcomes are discussed at school Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) meetings and actions followed up through the relevant school committee and SSCC. Annual programme monitoring reports summarise and comment on the outcomes from the module review process. In this way, there is integration between the module and programme review arrangements.

106 Annual programme monitoring reports are produced to a standard template by programme directors and require commentary on, and analysis of, a number of areas, including student feedback, external examiner reports, curriculum and assessment methods, learning resources, the implementation of changes proposed in earlier monitoring reports and any future developments. Annual programme review reports are considered at school LTCs. Schools submit annual programme review reports to Academic Registry and Governance Services. The examples seen by the ELIR team confirmed a generally thorough

and evaluative approach, although there was variable use of data, such as that relating to student outcomes and feedback. Academic Registry and Governance Services produce institutional summary reports for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, which comment on good practice and areas for enhancement, and are considered by ESEC. Academic Registry and Governance Services also monitor the actions taken by schools as a result of the annual monitoring process; in doing so they provide systematic institutional oversight of the process.

107 The University reviews its curriculum regularly through its periodic learning and teaching reviews, which operate on a four to six-year cycle. The University publishes a schedule of its reviews on its website. The University considers its learning and teaching reviews to be a significant element of its quality processes, given the primary responsibility of schools for the quality of provision and the maintenance of academic standards. Subject areas produce a self-evaluation document and compile supporting documentation as part of the process. Reviews are conducted by panels, chaired by the Deputy Principal (Education and Students) and supported by a senior officer from Academic Registry and Governance Services. Composition of the panels adheres to Scottish Funding Council guidance. Following the 2011 ELIR, the University is still considering ways in which the pool of student reviewers may be increased. Learning and teaching review reports demonstrate a comprehensive approach, in line with sector expectations, which considers all aspects of a subject area. The final version of learning and teaching review reports, together with the subject area responses, are submitted for formal approval to ESEC. Staff spoke positively about the changes that have been made to the learning and teaching review process since the 2011 ELIR, including the greater involvement of staff in the preparation of the self-evaluation documentation, and an increased emphasis on student engagement and feedback.

### **Response to the 2011 ELIR**

108 The University has responded fully to a number of the areas for development that were highlighted in the 2011 ELIR, including implementing the School Officer role across the institution, developing a policy on assessment feedback, and making improvements to the module evaluation arrangements. Other areas of development from the 2011 ELIR have been addressed in part, such as: the balance of mandatory and optional elements of staff induction and training; the introduction of greater consistency in the research student experience; and greater institutional coordination of the dissemination of good practice. The current ELIR team also noted that there were development areas remaining to be addressed: formal evaluation of the DLT role, and creating a more comprehensive framework for the development of all graduate attributes through the University's curricular and co-curricular provision. In relation to the final point about graduate attributes, the team noted that the University has begun to address this area but the new framework will not be implemented fully until 2016-17 (see paragraph 55).

### **Management information**

109 The University's self-evaluation processes are underpinned by the use of management information. The Policy and Planning Team compiles and analyses data on the University and higher education generally, which is used by the University Court, senior management and other areas of the institution to devise policy and review performance. The University uses a number of KPIs, which are reviewed throughout the year by the Senior Management Team and the Court. KPIs also inform the University Plan for Academic Success and support the University planning process. School-level KPIs are considered within the schools as part of the annual planning process and schools are also expected to use the KPIs to inform their annual planning statement. The ELIR team considered this to be a thorough approach.

## **5.2 Commentary on the advance information set**

110 The Advance Information Set (AIS) submitted for the ELIR presented a summary of the University's evaluative practices and their consideration through the institutional committee structure. The AIS confirmed that the University has systematic and robust procedures for assuring the quality of the student experience and securing academic standards. The University's quality arrangements generally meet sector expectations, although there are areas where further development would be beneficial, such as reintroducing research student supervisor training and including external involvement in programme approval (see paragraphs 75 and 100).

111 The process for making changes to programmes permits LTC approval of changes to be agreed through chair's action. The ELIR team saw an example where changes to a programme had been approved by chair's action at school level and, when it was reported to ESEC, the changes were ratified by chair's action at University level as well. There would be considerable value in the University reviewing its arrangements for approving modifications to programmes to ensure there is adequate scrutiny (see paragraph 123).

112 The University routinely seeks student feedback through a wide range of means, including: external surveys (NSS, PTES and PRES); module evaluations; internal surveys; School Officers; course representatives; SSCCs; LTCs; the Student's Union; and annual programme, and the periodic learning and teaching, reviews. Module evaluation feedback, following a pilot of an electronic system, is now gathered uniformly across the University; a comprehensive document showing analysis of student feedback was presented in the AIS. The University seeks to identify themes arising from its analysis of student feedback and the ELIR team noted this being given careful consideration in the committee structure, including at the Academic Council, ESEC and LTCs, with actions being taken in response. The quality of student feedback was commended in the external examiner reports. Overall, the ELIR team recognised that a commitment to engage with the student voice is part of the University's regular way of operating.

## **5.3 Use of external reference points in self-evaluation**

113 The University engages with a range of external reference points, including the Higher Education Statistics Agency, the Quality Code, external examiners and PSRBs, in line with sector expectations. The University routinely engages external views as part of the annual periodic quality reviews to ensure they meet sector-wide expectations.

114 The process for approving new programmes is operated within schools, and the documentation describing the process indicates there should be engagement with relevant external information (such as market research) and relevant professions or industry (such as future employers of the graduates from the new programme). The University acknowledges that the way this works in practice varies according to the type of programme. The documentation provided to the ELIR team did not clearly demonstrate how programme proposals use required external reference points, such as Subject Benchmarks Statements and Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework level criteria. The University should make it clearer in the programme proposal documentation how these required external reference points have been used in the development process.

## **5.4 Management of public information**

115 Overall, the University has an effective approach to managing public information, which meets sector expectations.

116 The Development and External Affairs Directorate has overall responsibility for the collation of general University information and course content, and for ensuring its

accuracy. The Directorate is responsible for producing the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses and associated materials, and ensures information regarding the University's other campuses is accurate and current. The Directorate is also responsible for the management of the University website.

117 The schools are responsible for updating their course information and are responsible for the accuracy of course content. The web team checks and approves any content changes. Programme directors are responsible for checking the accuracy of publicity materials published by collaborative partners. The Policy and Planning Team coordinate the return of HESA's key information set (KIS) for use on the Unistats website. Course information is maintained by schools through the 'Single Source of Course Information' database, a recent development, and data submitted for KIS purposes is approved by the appropriate School Manager. The Policy and Planning Team audit course data to ensure accuracy prior to submission.

118 The University's web pages are subject to its Information Services' Regulations and Information Technology Use Policy. The University also has a records management policy and strategy, available on its website, to support the management of its public information. The ELIR team noted that a number of the information policies are dated and the arrangements for updating them would benefit from clarification.

119 A student handbook template was agreed at the University LTC in 2008. Schools are encouraged to use the template and provide links to the policies and procedures to ensure that the most up-to-date version is used and consistency is maintained across schools. Students who met the ELIR team indicated that they were satisfied with the accuracy of the information they had received about their programmes before and after admission. Students also confirmed that they receive a range of helpful handbooks.

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

120 Overall, the University is effective in its approach to self-evaluation and subsequent enhancement of the student experience, which is demonstrated through the systematic annual monitoring and periodic review processes, its responsiveness to student feedback, and its engagement with the Transforming the Student Experience project.

121 In general, the University meets sector expectations as captured, for example, in the Quality Code. In the case of its approach to programme approval, the University is asked to include academic expertise in the process and to make it clearer in programme proposal documentation how the required external reference points, such as Subject Benchmark Statements and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, have been used in the development process.

122 While the ELIR team recognised that the University has responded to some of the development points in the 2011 ELIR, a number of areas were still being addressed or had not yet been addressed at the time of the current ELIR. It is acknowledged that the University has undergone a period of significant change; nonetheless, it should ensure that the outcomes of the current ELIR are addressed in a timely and reflective manner.

123 The University's streamlined committee structure places considerable emphasis on the role of ESEC to provide institutional oversight of the development and consistent implementation of key policies and processes relating to learning and teaching, quality assurance and enhancement. The ELIR team noted that key aspects of ESEC's business are undertaken through chair's action. The University is asked to give early attention to revising the streamlined committee structure to include greater opportunity for critical academic dialogue at the institutional level and to 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.

## **6 Collaborative activity**

### **6.1 Key features of the institution's strategic approach**

124 The University's Strategic Plan 2011-16 includes the priority to 'connect locally and globally to students', and highlights ambitions to 'develop a focused set of international partnerships which expand the University's reach in research and education'. More detail is provided in the University's Internationalisation Strategy 2014-19, which identifies collaboration, in particular through strategic partnerships, as one of six key strategic focus areas. In 2015 the University created the role of Dean of Internationalisation to assist the University in taking forward its international partnership agenda.

125 Recognising that expansion of its portfolio of collaborative partners would benefit from a more systematised approach, the University was, at the time of the current ELIR, in the process of revising its arrangements for the approval and monitoring of collaborative partnerships. The ELIR team considers the development of the more structured approach to be timely and highly desirable, given the University's stated intention to increase this activity.

126 At the time of the current ELIR, the University had recently established an Institutional Partnership Development Committee (IPDC) to provide support and advice to staff developing and managing collaborative provision. The IPDC reports to the Internationalisation Steering Group and to the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC). The Internationalisation Steering Group is chaired by the Deputy Principal (Education and Students) and provides strategic oversight of the development of collaborations. It reports to ESEC (also chaired by the Senior Deputy Principal), which has responsibility for the approval and monitoring of academic partnerships.

127 The IPDC had discussed the revised policy and procedures relating to the management of collaborative provision. The ELIR team learned that the proposed new arrangements would be reported to ESEC for approval during the current academic year, with the intention that a new framework for the approval and monitoring of collaborative provision would be introduced in September 2016. The new approach would include: revised templates for proposals and agreements; enhanced annual reporting for collaborative programmes; and the establishment of enhanced arrangements for institutional oversight of student performance.

128 The International Affairs Team of the Development and External Affairs Directorate is responsible for the coordination of collaborative activity. Within this team there are two dedicated International Partnership Managers who provide support to schools when developing collaborative arrangement proposals, and also support the monitoring and oversight of the arrangements once they are running. The International Affairs Team maintains oversight and tracking of Memoranda of Agreement end dates to ensure that periodic review is scheduled before Memoranda of Agreements end if the arrangement is to continue. Procedures for the approval and monitoring of collaborative partnerships are set out in the Quality Handbook and meet the expectations of the Quality Code. At the time of the current ELIR these procedures were identified as under review.

129 The University has undertaken to invest in its business intelligence reporting, which is likely to enhance the effectiveness of reporting on collaborative provision from the University's systems. A central register of collaboration-related contacts with other institutions has been created including student exchange programmes, Memoranda of

Understanding and Memoranda of Agreement. New templates have been developed to facilitate improved reporting and reviewing of partnerships.

130 At the time of the current ELIR, the University had 23 collaborative arrangements, including 12 with overseas partners. In 2014-15 there were 805 students enrolled across all collaborative programme types. In 2013-14, the University developed a partnership with INTO University Partnerships to create two INTO Stirling centres: one in Stirling and one in London. The Stirling INTO partnership is overseen by a Joint Venture Management Group comprising University and INTO representatives. The INTO Stirling centre is based on the main University campus and offers a range of foundation and diploma pathway programmes, including an English language course. The pathway programmes provide a direct route for students into years two and three of undergraduate degree programmes, and into Stirling master's degrees. The London centre is based within the INTO World Education Centre in East London and offers a range of master's degrees specialising in business, finance, management sport and education, as well as preparatory courses for UK postgraduate study. Teaching in London is delivered by a combination of staff appointed through the joint venture, who are based in London, and 'flying faculty' from the University of Stirling. Students in London use the University VLE as a key interface with Stirling-based staff. Students studying at the London centre who met the ELIR team spoke positively about their learning experience.

131 The University's work on widening access is supported by a number of articulation arrangements, including an established partnership with the local college sector institution, Forth Valley College. Working in partnership, the University and Forth Valley College have developed four programmes on a fully integrated model where the programmes are jointly designed, developed and delivered by the college, University and industry partners. Students enrol at both the College and the University and are encouraged to make use of learning and student support facilities on both campuses. The partnership is led by a joint project board, supported by a cross-functional team whose role is to support students and provide a suite of University interactions for students during their time at the College. In September 2015, the first cohort of 42 students from this partnership made the transition into year three in two of the integrated programmes. The ELIR team noted the careful planning that had gone into this activity and the strong desire to ensure a smooth transition for students.

## **6.2 Securing academic standards of collaborative provision**

132 The University has effective arrangements in place for securing the academic standards of its current collaborative provision.

133 Currently, every new collaborative proposal must be approved-in-principle by ESEC before a detailed report is initiated. A University panel will visit the proposed partner if the proposal involves a validation or franchise arrangement. The panel report will be considered by ESEC. The ELIR team noted that, on a number of occasions, chair's action had been taken to approve reports on collaborative arrangements and it was not always clear whether there had been any discussion of these reports at ESEC or elsewhere in the committee structure (see paragraph 123).

134 A draft Memorandum of Agreement is prepared for each collaborative arrangement using a standard template, and is considered by the International Affairs Office. The full proposal is scrutinised by the relevant International Partnership Manager and forwarded to relevant service areas for comment. The draft Memorandum of Agreement is sent to the University Secretary for comment. When all feedback has been collated, the proposal is considered by ESEC. If changes are made to the Memorandum of Agreement, these are discussed with the proposed partner institution before the agreement is finalised.

A copy of the signed agreement is held in the central register of collaborative provision. Though differing in detail according to the nature of the partnership, each Memorandum of Agreement provided to the ELIR team comprehensively covered the requirements, expectations and responsibilities in respect of admissions, registration, programme structure, programme delivery, assessment, awards, quality assurance, complaints, appeals and marketing, in addition to the financial arrangements underpinning the partnership. The Memoranda of Agreement explicitly state that the University has ultimate responsibility for the academic standards and quality of its awards, while, in some partnerships, operational responsibility is delegated to the partner, provided they operate according to the University's regulations and quality arrangements.

135 Under Stirling Ordinance 21, teaching on University academic programmes must be undertaken by persons formally recognised as teachers of the University. There is a screening process for the appointment of staff from a partner institution who will teach on a University programme, to ensure that only University approved teachers can teach. The recommendation comes from the University programme director and must be signed off by the relevant Head of School. This recognition as an approved University teacher is confirmed in writing for a defined period of time. The ELIR team considered the 'recognition' arrangements to be a positive measure and would encourage the University to include reference to this important quality assurance mechanism in the Quality Handbook.

136 Programmes offered in conjunction with collaborative partners are subject to ongoing monitoring, which includes external examiners and their reports, module review and annual programme review. These processes are supported by regular visits by flying faculty. While the arrangements to obtain student feedback are generally robust, the University acknowledged that a number of modules included in the annual programme review had received no feedback responses from students. Taking the view that online student surveys might be responsible for lowering the response rate, the University had reverted to a paper-based student feedback survey instrument in an effort to improve response rates.

137 A report to ESEC in February 2015 noted that an analysis of student performance on collaborative programmes had revealed that students based in one overseas location generally performed less well than students based at Stirling, and highlighted that action would be undertaken in 2015-16 in the relevant schools to address concerns and to monitor improvement, for example reviewing feedback policies and mechanisms, providing enhanced guidelines to students and staff, and reviewing different ways of assessing students. The ELIR team regarded it as positive that the University was able to recognise disparity in student performance and was seeking to take action accordingly.

138 From 2015-16 the University requires that the annual programme review report to ESEC must include all collaborative programmes. In addition, each school Learning and Teaching Committee is now required to provide an overarching annual report on collaborative programmes, rather than a separate paragraph within the wider report. The ELIR team regarded these as positive measures to provide greater institutional oversight of collaborative activity.

### **6.3 Enhancing the student learning experience on collaborative programmes**

139 A key strategic focus of the University's Internationalisation Strategy 2014-19 is the student experience, and the University recognises the need for equivalence of the student experience whether programmes are offered in the UK or overseas. This includes access to IT and library resources, access to academic staff, the provision of student support, engagement with the Students' Union and opportunities to provide feedback. The University indicated that these aspects of the student learning experience are considered and agreed

during the partnership development process, and, 'where required', are detailed within the Memorandum of Agreement. In the sample set of Memoranda of Agreement provided to the ELIR team the content varied; for example, one Memorandum did make reference to the provision of student support, including library and IT access, while another Memorandum did not make any reference to who provides student support. As the University introduces its revised framework for collaborative provision, there would be value in making the equivalence of student support arrangements an explicit statement in all Memoranda of Agreement.

140 The University requires each of its collaborative partnerships to establish a joint programme committee (or equivalent) to manage the collaborative programme(s). Collaborative programmes are subject to the same quality assurance arrangements as the rest of the University's awards, that is: student feedback on modules; annual monitoring; periodic review; and external examining processes. Schools consider the annual reports and submit a summary report to Academic Registry and Governance Services each year. Academic Registry and Governance Services prepares an annual aggregated report for consideration by ESEC.

141 In discussions with the ELIR team, students expressed general satisfaction with the level of contact that they had with University staff and the effectiveness of the VLE, known as SUCCEED. Students also reported that they had appropriate access to University resources such as library e-journals and other student support.

#### **6.4 Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative activity**

142 Overall, the University has an effective approach to managing its current collaborative arrangements. It has introduced arrangements to improve institutional oversight of its collaborative activity, which are positive. To support the strategic intention to expand its collaborative activity, the University plans to introduce a revised framework for the approval and review of collaborative provision. The ELIR team encourages the University to progress its plans for implementing the revised arrangements for the start of 2016-17.

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