Summary report on the
Enhancement-led institutional review

University of Strathclyde

MARCH 2010
Preface

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

The enhancement-led approach

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

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

Conclusions and judgement within ELIR

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

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

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

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

ELIR reports

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

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

ELIR method

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

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

ELIR team and visits

4 In line with the review method, the ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 10 and 11 February 2010 and the Part 2 visit took place in the week beginning 15 March 2010. The team comprised a group of peers: a student reviewer from a Scottish university; three senior academic reviewers drawn from across the United Kingdom; a senior academic international reviewer; and a coordinating reviewer with senior administrative experience from a Scottish university. The review was managed by an Assistant Director from QAA Scotland.

Background information about the institution

5 The University traces its history to 1796 when John Anderson left instruction in his will for there to be a 'place of useful learning' in the city of Glasgow. The University describes itself as research-led with a reputation for innovation in learning and teaching, and for industry and community engagement. It is currently organised into five faculties: Science; Engineering; Business; Education and Law, Arts and Social Sciences. The service and support infrastructure is provided by the Professional Services. In 2008-09, the University had 16,212 full-time equivalent (FTE) students, of whom 3,571 FTE were taught postgraduate students and 966 FTE were postgraduate research students. The majority of students study full-time but, in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of part-time students. There has also been a planned increase in the numbers of postgraduate research students and of international students. The University has extensive collaborative links across a number of countries, but the majority of courses admit less than 30 students.
Outcomes of the review

ELIR reports highlight areas of good practice and identify areas in which institutions should take action, in many cases the actions have been identified by institutions during their preparations for ELIR. Key outcomes from the University’s ELIR report are set out below.

The University has systematic processes in place to secure academic standards and assure the quality of the student experience. The University has an unambiguous clarity of purpose about its Strategic Plan and is in the process of rebalancing itself following a period of intensive change.

Areas of positive practice

The full report highlights good practice at the University in a range of areas.

- **Partnership with the Students’ Association** - a positive partnership has been developed between the University and the University of Strathclyde Students' Association (USSA), for example, working together to improve the class representative system.

- **Gathering and responding to students' views** - extensive use is made of a range of internal and external surveys and other mechanisms for gathering students' views. The outcomes of these are used to inform institutional strategy and initiatives.

- **Assessment** - the University has played a significant role at a national level in exploring issues around assessment practice and providing feedback to students on their assessed work. In particular, the University developed the Re-engineering Assessment Practices (REAP) project which has attracted interest in other institutions and has begun to have a positive effect on the student learning experience at Strathclyde. The University is encouraged to implement the project more consistently across the whole institution.

- **Student induction and retention** - the University has developed its Student Transition Framework as a mechanism for bringing together a range of work aimed at promoting student retention, such as the institution-wide approach to induction. The Framework and its related activities have had a positive impact on the student experience.

- **Employability** - the University has a number of strengths relating to employability and is undertaking a programme of work focused on the Strathclyde Graduate for the 21st Century. An innovative ‘Interns@Strathclyde’ project enables undergraduate students to work with established research groups and external partners.

- **Educational development and support** - the Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement (CAPLE) provides a range of educational development activities for the University’s staff and students. It has a strong reputation in the sector for its educational development work and research.

- **Quality monitoring and review** - the University’s quality review arrangements meet the Scottish Funding Council guidance.

- **Key role of vice-deans and faculty officers** - the University operates a devolved structure where departments and faculties have authority to make decisions and considerable flexibility to interpret institutional strategies and guidance. In the devolved structure, vice-deans (academic) and faculty officers play an important role in linking the work of the faculties to the University.

- **Use of external reference points** - extensive use is made of external reference points, notably the national Enhancement themes, to inform University strategy and practice.
Areas for development

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

19 **International students** - identify and introduce more systematic arrangements for supporting the learning and teaching needs of international students. The University is also asked to reflect on the development needs of academic staff in supporting these students.

20 **Information for University committees** - ensure the key University monitoring committee has the data it requires about postgraduate research student progression and completion. In addition, the University is asked to reflect more generally on the level of detail that should be reported from the faculties to the University Quality Monitoring Committee.

21 **Devolved structure** - reflect on the balance between consistency and flexibility that exists within the University’s devolved approach to quality management. Related to this, reflect on the extent to which consultation, debate and decision-making takes place inside and outside the academic committee structures.

22 **Holistic review** - in the context of the strategic changes that have been made, carry out a holistic review of the quality review arrangements, drawing on the learning points that have arisen from the University’s experience of a range of internal and external methods.

23 **Collaborative activity** - review the University’s approach to managing collaborative activity to ensure the risks associated with this type of provision can be managed effectively. In addition, the University is asked to adopt an enhancement-led approach to managing its collaborative provision, through the development of staff within the University and its partner institutions.

24 **Sharing good practice** - reflect on the ways the University can, more purposefully, identify and disseminate good practice using the range of existing mechanisms, including capitalising on the expertise within CAPLE.

Overarching confidence judgement

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

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

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

Follow-up to the review

27 In the ELIR method, institutions are asked to provide a formal, written response to the review one year after publication of their ELIR report. Institutions’ responses are also discussed during annual meetings with senior staff from QAA Scotland. The final version of the institution’s response is published on the QAA website.