

# Enhancement-led Institutional Review of the University of Strathclyde

## Technical Report

March 2014

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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 Strathclyde. The review took place as follows: Part 1 held on 4-6 February 2014 and Part 2 held on 10-14 March 2014. The review was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Professor Alan Davidson (Academic Reviewer)
- Dr Pam Harris (Academic Reviewer)
- Mrs Carol Morris (Coordinating Reviewer)
- Professor Ian Pirie (Academic Reviewer)
- Associate Professor Gordon Suddaby (International Reviewer)
- Dr Filippo Trevisan (Student 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 case studies on their unified virtual learning environment (VLE) and student engagement.

## 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 which identify findings across several institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information about the ELIR method: [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/elir.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/elir.aspx)

<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/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/ELIR-information.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/ELIR-information.aspx)

## Enhancement-led Institutional Review of the University of Strathclyde

Technical Reports set out the ELIR team's view under each of the report headings. Shorter Outcome Reports are provided which 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/InstitutionReports/Reports/Pages/ELIR-Strathclyde-14.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/Reports/Pages/ELIR-Strathclyde-14.aspx)

# Overarching judgement about the University of Strathclyde

The University of Strathclyde 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 Strathclyde became a University in its own right in 1964 when it was awarded its Royal Charter. It was originally established in 1796 when John Anderson left instruction in his will for the establishment in Glasgow of 'a place of useful learning' - a University open to everyone regardless of gender or class. The University maintains a strong commitment to widening participation in higher education and also has the ambition to be among the leading technological universities in the world, describing itself as 'distinctive in the Scottish Higher Education environment, but rooted in heritage'. The University has a population of approximately 23,000 students of whom 64 per cent are studying at undergraduate level, 30 per cent are studying taught postgraduate programmes and 6 per cent are postgraduate research students.

2 The academic structure is based on four faculties: Engineering, Humanities and Social Sciences, Science and the Strathclyde Business School. Each faculty contains a number of departments or schools and is led by an Executive Dean. Executive deans are supported at institutional level by the Vice-Principal and five associate deputy principals (ADP) who have responsibility for education, research and knowledge exchange.

3 A new Strategic Plan was developed for 2011-15, and is underpinned by a strategic working document, the Performance Measurement Framework, which provides clear direction and explicit key performance indicators for the University. Together, they set out the University's agreed priorities including strategic objectives related to: research quality and intensity, knowledge exchange and impact, teaching and student experience, international profile and reputation and operational excellence.

4 Since the last ELIR in 2010, the University has undergone rapid and extensive restructuring and organisational change to support the implementation of its strategic initiatives including: the merger of the Faculty of Education with the Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Sciences into the new faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences; the consolidation of learning and teaching activity on a single campus in Glasgow city centre; re-structuring of professional support services including the establishment of an Internationalisation Directorate; re-organisation of management structures at senior level to include executive deans, associate deputy principals (including a new ADP focusing on internationalisation in education); streamlining of staff development routes and implementation of a single University-wide virtual learning environment (VLE).

5 In the ELIR methodology institutions are asked to identify areas on which they particularly invite the ELIR team's view. The University indicated that it would welcome feedback on: its plans to internationalise the curriculum in the context of its new institutional internationalisation plan; and its approach to sharing and disseminating good practice and making use of new technologies and evaluating their impact on learning and teaching.

## **1.2 Strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching**

6 The University has an effective strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching which is set out within its well articulated and widely understood Education Strategy 2011-15 and Education Strategy Action Plan, both of which were developed in consultation with staff and students. The Education Strategy is one of the key components of the Strategic Plan to 2015 and is based around the aims of: developing a distinctive curriculum that is internationally recognised; ensuring a high quality distinctive student experience; creating internationally competitive postgraduate taught study opportunities; strengthening international presence; and providing a curriculum and student experience that is attractive to students from a variety of backgrounds.

7 Responsibility for the Education Strategy lies with the Vice-Principal and the three associate deputy principals for education. Faculties take responsibility for implementing strategy at departmental and school level, with oversight of this activity delegated to vice deans academic for each faculty. Monitoring and reporting on faculty progress is undertaken through the Education Strategy Committee, Quality Assurance Committee and Learning Enhancement Committee. Institutional oversight of enhancement initiatives is provided by these three committees.

8 The University reviewed its support for learning and teaching practice in 2011-12, and as a result replaced its Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement with a new structure, the Learning Enhancement Framework. A team of study skills advisers was created and situated within Student Experience and Enhancement Services (SEES) and support for academic professional development activity was consolidated within the Organisational and Staff Development Unit. In 2012-13, the structure was streamlined further when the Education Strategy, Quality Assurance and Learning Enhancement team and Learning Technology Enhancement team merged and were also located within SEES. The University considers that this structure promotes partnership working between academic and support services. During the ELIR, staff commented positively about the new structures.

9 The University has clearly defined its vision to be a 'leading international technological university' through benchmarking work with international comparator universities. This vision underpins the University's approach to innovation in learning and teaching, and can be evidenced through initiatives like the development of the Technology and Innovation Centre (TIC). The aim of the Centre, which is currently being built, is to bring together research, education and knowledge exchange activity from all four faculties and allow students to work with leading global industry partners. A further example of this approach can be seen in the provision of Vertically Integrated Projects, which provide students at all levels with an opportunity to work with staff in multidisciplinary teams on research and development projects.

10 Although at an early stage of development at the time of the current ELIR, the intention to develop distinctive learning and teaching opportunities based around the creation of the TIC and the development of collaborations to support research, teaching and industry linkages was positively regarded by the ELIR team.

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

11 The University has an effective approach to implementing strategies and there is a clear link between institutional strategy and operational planning. The University has developed and communicated a clear strategy and vision, building on institution-wide self-evaluation and involving significant organisational change. The strategic leadership of the management team is evident (see paragraph 84) and the strategic goal to become an

international technological university has been effectively communicated to staff and students. It was clear from discussions with staff that they are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the University's current direction.

12 The University has an effective and systematic approach to engaging staff in the delivery of institutional strategy. This is demonstrated by the Accountability Development Review (ADR) process and the four pathways career structure (academic, research, teaching and knowledge exchange) for staff recruitment and development (see paragraphs 62-66). These arrangements ensure that staff have a clear understanding of where their individual performance contributes to the achievement of University aims and objectives.

13 The restructure of the University's Professional Services, in particular the directorate of SEES, has been a significant undertaking. Aligned to University strategy the work of SEES is informed and guided by feedback through institutional student surveys. The restructure has been successful in providing targeted support for learning and teaching staff and students. There is evidence that staff consider they are engaged in the change process and have a sense of ownership in making the new Learning Enhancement Framework effective (see paragraph 8).

14 The extensive and rapid change described above has been carried out effectively, and staff and students have been consulted and engaged in the process. There is evidence of a continual process of strategic review, informed by changes in the external environment. There is clarity to the structural representation for each of the faculties and of cross-university roles and responsibilities to facilitate cohesion across subjects and disciplines. Significant emphasis is placed on the collation and analysis of statistical data to inform decisions and this is evident across a number of activities both academic and in professional services. Discussions with a broad range of staff during the ELIR indicated that the University has been successful in aligning people and structures to enable and manage the successful implementation of its new strategic direction.

15 An example of the University's capacity to lead, implement and support complex change is evidenced through the unified VLE project. This project has required the University to replace a number of discrete VLE systems with an overarching University-wide VLE and has involved extensive consultation with staff and students across the institution.

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

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

16 The University has a student population of approximately 23,000 students of whom 64 per cent are undergraduates, 30 per cent are postgraduate taught and 6 per cent are postgraduate research.

17 The majority of students study full-time (71 per cent), although the proportion that study part-time is higher for postgraduate taught students (55 per cent in 2012-13). A significant number of the part-time student population is also made up of students studying with the Centre for Lifelong Learning, with 3,338 students registered on the part-time certificate in Open Studies in academic session 2012-13. A further 92 part-time students are registered on the non-graduating Access to Higher Education programme. The undergraduate student demographic is primarily Scottish (84 per cent), with an increasing international and 'rest of the UK' population. Three per cent of undergraduate students are from the rest of the UK. In recent years there has been an increase in EU student numbers, from 1,128 in 2009-10 to 1,590 in 2012-13.

18 There is a growing international student population, in line with the University's internationalisation strategy and the aim of increasing the postgraduate research student population by approximately 230 to a total of 1,600 by academic year 2015-16. International students currently account for 14 per cent of undergraduates, 46 per cent of postgraduate taught and 30 per cent of postgraduate research numbers. A further dimension to the internationalisation strategy is the development of international articulation routes, such as the provision of facilitated entry to year three of undergraduate programmes for students from partner institutions in countries such as China, India, Malaysia and Pakistan.

19 The University has begun two significant IT projects since the last ELIR that it considers will improve data management in relation to its student population: the Corporate Management Information project which aims to make data on areas such as student intake more accessible and easier to analyse and the procurement of a new Student Information and Management System.

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

#### **Widening participation**

20 The University has a clear and effective strategy for the development of a diverse and internationalised student community that also pro-actively supports under-represented groups, and the ELIR team recognised this as an area of positive practice. The learning experience, student support, staff profile, structure and content of the curriculum are being actively developed in support of the University's strategic direction. The University has taken steps to further enhance provision in this area by updating its Widening Access strategy in 2012 and establishing a Widening Access team (with 2.6 FTE staff) in 2013 within the Student Experience and Enhancement Service.

21 There is an effective approach to recruiting students from Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) backgrounds in line with the University's strategic goals and long-term commitment to widening access, and the University places first among research-intensive institutions and fourth overall in Scotland for the number of students from this demographic. In particular, the most recent Scottish Funding Council statistics show that, in 2012-13, the University's proportion of SIMD20 students was 10.8 per cent against a sector average of

9.7 per cent and its proportion of SIMD40 students was 25.3 per cent against a sector average of 23.2 per cent.

22 The University is engaged effectively in local outreach and widening participation with new initiatives to promote advanced entry to level 2 or 3 (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework level 8-9) of undergraduate degree programmes being developed across all faculties, in collaboration with both schools and further education colleges. This includes the Engineering Academy, where students studying on enhanced Higher National Certificate provision in the further education sector articulate to level 2 (SCQF level 8) of the engineering degree course. The aim of the initiative is to break down the barriers for college students articulating to higher education and enhance skills in this student group. Following the successful launch of the Engineering Academy in 2013, the University aims to increase articulation in the local area further, as evidenced in its updated Widening Access strategy, which includes plans for a 30 per cent increase in the number of entrants from local colleges by the academic year 2015-16.

23 The ELIR team found that the University has a culture of developing strategic, wide-ranging and pro-active approaches to providing outreach initiatives to support students from non-traditional backgrounds to gain access to higher education. Examples of innovative approaches to widening access include: school-based mentoring and support for school children through the Children's University, a learning accreditation framework for learning outside of school hours for children aged 7-14 in collaboration with Glasgow City Council; the Innovative Routes to Learning Unit which includes activities such as an accelerated one-week summer programme for S4 and S5 pupils, where they focus on a specific area of study and work with student mentors through interactive activities designed to increase awareness of higher education; an inter-generational learning programme; and a student association-led initiative, 'Strathguides', where student volunteers deliver 'University survival' workshops to S5 and S6 school pupils and provide one-to-one support. Also of particular note is the approach taken to encouraging children from a 'looked after' background to attend University. Key to this is the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland, hosted at the University. This Centre engages in activities to promote widening access for 'looked after' children at other higher education and further education institutions in Scotland

24 In the curriculum, students are engaged in widening participation through project work. One project in the Business School involves students on the Management Development Programme in designing campus events for schools with low participation rates in higher education. Another example is the Literacy Clinic, where trainee teachers work with children from the most deprived backgrounds in the local area with the dual aim of giving the children a positive view of higher education and improving the students' teaching skills.

25 To ensure that the University's ambitious targets for widening participation are consistently met, from 2013-14 the institution is using contextual data in admissions. Such data include the applicant's postcode, their school to higher education progression rate, as well as their care background. This information is drawn both from application forms and publicly available datasets and is used to ensure that the context in which qualifications were obtained is appropriately understood and considered throughout the admission process.

### **Equality and diversity**

26 The University has an effective approach to supporting equality and diversity. There is a clear commitment to and a well established strategy for widening access, which is aligned to the University's Outcome Agreement with SFC and is a core part of the University's ethos, mission and strategy. The University's current Strategic Plan identifies a clear set of corporate aims designed to promote equality of opportunity. The Strategic Plan is



underpinned by the University's Equality Outcomes document and action plan which are reviewed biennially.

27 A dedicated Equality and Diversity Manager post was established in 2011. In addition, responsibilities around equality and diversity are shared across the professional services and are clearly defined. As an example, the Estates Service has established an Equality and Diversity Working Group that includes student representatives from the University of Strathclyde Students' Association (USSA) with the aim of addressing inclusivity issues on campus. In addition, USSA works in partnership with Professional Services through the Equality and Diversity Manager to promote inclusive events, and has plans to work more closely with academic departments in the future to roll-out these opportunities across the institution.

### **International students**

28 In meetings with the ELIR team, students commented very positively on the quality of induction programmes, emphasising the consistency of support and experience provided across the institution, which is positive, given that much responsibility for induction lies with individual faculties. The University has plans to further strengthen support for international students and better facilitate their transition to the Scottish higher education system by expanding the range of pre-arrival information provided to prospective international students. In relation to interpersonal integration and inclusion of international students, discussions with student representatives during ELIR highlighted the 'buddying' system recently introduced in Psychology as a successful initiative that could be replicated in other departments.

### **Postgraduate research students**

29 The University's flexible and wide-ranging Researcher Development Programme anticipates the University's intention to grow postgraduate numbers. The ELIR team identified the programme, which has a compulsory credit-bearing element, as an area of positive practice because it supports the systematic development of a range of professional skills and attributes for all research students.

30 The ELIR team noted that the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice introduced in 2013 sets out clear expectations around supervisory provision for postgraduate research students, with strong emphasis on the roles of both primary and secondary supervisors. The University is encouraged to continue to strengthen its arrangements in this area in view of the future planned growth of postgraduate research numbers, ensuring that postgraduate research student supervision is formally recognised as part of academic workloads in all faculties and that supervisors have sufficient time to dedicate to academic student support.

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

31 The University has an effective approach to engaging and supporting students in their learning.

### **Support for innovation in learning and teaching**

32 The University has a culture of encouraging and supporting teaching initiatives that enhance the student learning experience. This is underpinned by the University's use of innovative and active experiential learning environments which enable students to learn in live or simulated 'real-world' contexts. The ELIR team highlighted this as an area of positive practice. Experiential learning opportunities are embedded in the curriculum across all faculties, evidencing the University's aspiration to be a 'Place of Useful Learning' and illustrate the University's commitment to the graduate attributes it has developed. Examples of this approach include: Vertically Integrated Projects (see paragraph 9); the 'Dragons' Den'

scheme, which offers a further opportunity for staff and students to pitch research and knowledge exchange ideas to a panel consisting of senior University staff, academics and external partners; and 'Interns@Strathclyde', which provides undergraduate students with research-based summer placements involving 'one-to-one' mentorship from academic staff.

33 Given the strength of the strategic emphasis on experiential learning and research-teaching linkages, the University is encouraged to explore ways in which it can increase flexibility to enable students to further engage in these types of learning activities. Currently, not all students have the option to participate in this type of learning due to the limited scale of the projects and/or timetabling restrictions. The ELIR team also noted there could be possibilities for increasing experiential learning opportunities and strengthening research-teaching linkages through the Technology Innovation Centre, although plans for the development of both are at a very early stage.

34 The University of Strathclyde Students' Association (USSA) conducted a detailed analysis of the data from their 'Teaching Excellence Awards' to produce a 'Best Practice Report' that outlines the characteristics and attributes in their teachers that students respond most positively towards. This was well received by the University and discussions are taking place between USSA and the University about whether this will become an annual piece of work. The ELIR team considered this was an imaginative and valuable addition to this initiative.

### **Student mobility**

35 The ELIR team regarded student mobility as an area of positive practice, noting the University's support for outward student mobility and the innovative approaches to creating opportunities for all students to participate. The University takes a proactive approach to identifying and addressing potential barriers to mobility. For example, in some programmes where professional accreditation requirements might prevent students from gaining international experience, alternative measures have been put in place. One specific example in Psychology was the establishment of a summer ERASMUS placement to address this issue.

36 The University has provided support for students with significant additional requirements to participate in the ERASMUS exchange programme, including exchanges for deaf and blind students. Few students with disabilities currently choose to participate in ERASMUS. However, the institution considers that recent successful exchanges and action taken in light of evaluations of these will encourage further international mobility for this student group.

37 The University also aims to learn from engagement with external partners in work involving placement and exchange activity, evidenced by ongoing analysis of student participation in the ERASMUS programme. Student feedback is used to inform and guide future students' placements and the ELIR team highlighted this as an area of positive practice.

### **Student representation**

38 The University is committed to student engagement and has a strong relationship with the University of Strathclyde Students' Association (USSA). This was evident in meetings with staff and students and in a number of projects led by USSA or jointly managed by USSA and the University, for example peer support (see paragraph 44).

39 Student representation is in place at all levels and USSA are included in senior committees and in regular meetings with senior institutional managers, including monthly meetings between the Principal and the Student President.

40 The Annual Student Congress is a full-day event intended to engage and inform student representatives at the University. The Principal, senior management, and heads of professional services regularly attend (by USSA invitation). This provides an opportunity for USSA representatives to discuss issues affecting the learning experience at the University and suggest future developments. Outcomes from Congress are reported back to the Education Strategy Committee. Communication and collaboration between and within different layers of student representation and senior University managers is supported by the Annual Student Congress.

41 An effective class representative system is in place with student representatives at class, department and faculty level for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students. Student representatives receive training from USSA and from Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs), with class representatives being offered training, including online training, in both semesters.

42 Postgraduate research students are represented on the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee. A Postgraduate Students' Society was established in 2012 with a view to creating a sense of postgraduate community across the institution and the University considers that this will improve student representation for this population.

### **Student views**

43 The University systematically and comprehensively uses feedback from student surveys to enhance the student learning experience and to inform institutional policy and practice. The ELIR team considered that the University's approach was an area of positive practice and that it demonstrated a commitment to self reflection and the promotion of continuing enhancement. This is evidenced through the creation of a dedicated Student Surveys Team within the Student Experience and Enhancement Service Directorate, which implements, analyses and coordinates the process of responding to student feedback.

### **Peer support**

44 USSA, in partnership with the University, is leading on the development of peer-support pilot initiatives at departmental level with a view to strengthening the student community and improving retention rates. Student representatives are highly invested in this project and aim to extend peer-support across the whole University in the future. Student communities are also strengthened by several subject-specific societies, which benefit from the engagement and support of their respective departments.

### **Assessment and feedback**

45 The University has identified assessment and feedback as an area for continued focus and improvement, and students continue to raise particular issues around course organisation and management in relation to the communication of assessment requirements and feedback provision. In discussions with the ELIR team, students also raised concerns around the scheduling and sequencing of assessments and the timing of feedback on assessment. The University is aware of these issues and is currently in the process of revising policy and practice in this area.

46 A range of initiatives is in place to improve the effectiveness of this area, including a short-life assessment and feedback working group led by a specially-appointed academic champion working in partnership with students. In discussions with the ELIR team, staff and students commented positively on areas of good practice emerging within specific departments and classes. The University aims to build on these positive student experiences through improved ways of sharing and embedding good practice across the institution.

47 The University sees further development of the VLE as a key component in improving consistency in the communication of course and class information on assessment and feedback. It also plans to use the development of the new assessment and feedback policy to establish consistency of practice across faculties and the ELIR team considered that the University should continue to progress this work. In addition, the University is asked to place particular emphasis on the scheduling and sequencing of assessments and the related feedback, communicating clearly to students about expected turnaround times.

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

48 The University has an effective approach to the promotion and development of graduate attributes, including employability, that could be enhanced further by better communication and promotion of the attributes to students.

49 The University calls its graduate attributes the 4Es, which stands for engaged; enterprising; enquiring; and ethically, culturally and globally aware. The University is now seeking to embed the 4Es in the curriculum. Graduate attributes are evidenced in the curriculum through a wide range of opportunities that allow students to be involved in 'real-life' projects, many with credit-bearing elements. One example is where students from the Business School develop marketing strategies for external clients (who are actual employers). It is important that all students have equal opportunity to develop these attributes and are able to access these opportunities (see also paragraphs 32-33).

50 Graduate attributes and employability skills are embedded in the delivery of postgraduate research student programmes, chiefly through the credit-bearing Research Development Programme. The success of the collaborative PhD model is evidenced by the number of Strathclyde's PhD students who gain employment outside academia following graduation.

51 The ELIR team's discussions with students indicated a lack of awareness with the 4E terminology, but students said that the concepts included in the graduate attributes resonated with their experience of being a student at the University.

52 The ELIR team considered that the University has been proactive and successful in providing opportunities for students to develop employability skills. The team also considered that the University could develop this further by making more explicit reference to graduate attributes in curriculum design, for example through the newly-introduced procedures and online tools for its Course and Class Approval Process. This would ensure that graduate attributes are explicitly embedded in the curriculum and in course documentation. Communicating the graduate attributes clearly to students would also serve to underline the importance of the attributes themselves.

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

53 The University has an effective and systematic approach to enhancing the student learning experience. Students are very positive about their experience, and the University has a positive and constructive partnership with USSA.

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

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

54 The University has effective arrangements in place for identifying and sharing good practice. The new academic and professional services structures and the recently unified VLE have the potential to facilitate more systematic ways of identifying and sharing practice and enabling more widespread staff engagement. These developments build upon established structures, strategies and mechanisms for the reporting and sharing of good practice across the University, such as the reporting links between the Learning Enhancement Committee, Information Services and Resources Directorate, and the faculties.

55 The Learning Enhancement Committee plays a central role in developing and sharing good practice and has supported the establishment of staff and student intern teams to work on key projects, such as personal development planning, assessment and feedback and the flexible curriculum.

56 A peer review approach is used in annual quality reporting and the ELIR team identified this as an area of positive practice. Faculties work in pairs to produce a summary report for each other that identifies their strengths and areas for development. In order to disseminate good practice and share common issues, colleagues report on the outcomes of their partner faculty to a joint meeting of the University's Quality Assurance Committee and Learning Enhancement Committee. A key themes report is produced annually for each faculty to inform the Education Strategy Action Plan.

57 The University has a number of schemes to encourage innovation in learning and teaching, for example the Education Excellence Fund (EEF). Members of staff receiving funding are expected to report results, outcomes and the impact of projects to the Learning Enhancement Committee. These schemes are intended to stimulate innovation at the discipline level and encourage the adoption of new practices across the University. In some cases, the EEF has been used to support the implementation of good practice across the University.

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

58 There is evidence of long-term engagement with the national Enhancement Themes. Work undertaken for the Graduates for the 21st Century and Developing and Supporting the Curriculum Themes has been instrumental in helping the University to shape its graduate attributes. The positive impact of this is clearly evidenced by students who are actively engaged in a variety of related projects. For example, the ELIR team noted the innovative use of student interns working in partnership with the University to explore curriculum development.

59 Staff are active in enhancement-led initiatives in learning and teaching, contributing across the sector and within their respective professional networks, business and industry. This contribution to enhancement activity is built into the Accountability Development Review process for staff (see paragraph 62).

60 There is clear evidence that the University has a culture of encouraging and supporting enhancement activities and is actively using its Performance Measurement Framework to develop this further. There is a wide range of measures in place to help inform impact and effectiveness.

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

61 The University has an effective and systematic approach to engaging staff in the delivery of institutional strategy and supporting their development. The ELIR team identified the approach as an area of positive practice.

62 This approach is illustrated by the Accountability Development Review (ADR) process and the four pathways career structure (academic, research, teaching and knowledge exchange) for staff recruitment and development. These arrangements ensure that staff have a clear understanding of where their individual performance contributes to the achievement of University aims and objectives. Through the ADR process staff explicitly demonstrate their ongoing engagement with developments in learning and teaching and their personal contribution to enhancement through the setting of objectives. Enhancement activities aligned to strategic priorities are incentivised, encouraged and rewarded. The online system developed to support ADR also allows senior managers to analyse data on staff performance in 'real-time' for the purposes of identifying development needs, prioritising resources and forward planning.

63 The four pathways career structure provides the University with an opportunity to develop all staff engaged in enhancing student development. The framework builds on individual strengths to provide all staff with a viable career path. It also helps schools and departments to deliver on their ambitions by enabling recruitment onto particular pathways where gaps in knowledge or experience are identified. An additional benefit is the potential for movement between pathways, in agreement with individual staff members. In discussion with the ELIR team, staff indicated that this flexibility provides opportunities for staff and school/department development, which those involved welcomed. In addition, the University's online Development and Training Gateway, provides a consistent and easily accessible 'one stop shop' for staff to access information on development opportunities, with academic development coordinated by the Organisational and Staff Development Unit.

64 The University has ensured that its organisational structures are supportive of its approach. The reorganisation of professional services has enabled the delivery of effective, prioritised support across the University and allowed for greater partnership working between support services and academic staff (see paragraph 8).

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

65 The University has an effective approach to promoting good practice in learning and teaching and has a culture of reflection and enhancement. There is an integrated approach to staff support and development, with clear linkages between the ADR process, the four pathways career structure and the range of learning and development opportunities provided. The ADR process and accompanying reward, recognition and incentivised learning and teaching initiatives enable the University to promote good practice in learning and teaching effectively.

66 The Organisational and Staff Development Unit is responsible for staff development in approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. It has developed a comprehensive infrastructure to support the ongoing development of staff and provides a clear pathway to support staff development in learning and teaching. It runs the Advanced Academic Studies programme which aligns to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) and is accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The Advanced Academic Studies programme plays a key role in the development of learning and teaching and allows staff to

focus their development in the areas of academic practice, research development and knowledge exchange.

67 The University's Teaching and Learning Online (TALON) course has been effective in improving digital literacy among staff and in the development of online learning resources. The University's recent experience of developing Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) is also providing an opportunity to further develop expertise and experience in the design of online learning materials and teaching in online environments.

68 In discussions with staff, the ELIR team noted that the unified VLE project (see paragraph 15) has the potential to allow teaching staff to more easily share their pedagogic approaches to course design, and this could be developed further.

## **4 Academic standards**

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

69 The University has well documented, clearly structured procedures in place for setting, maintaining and reviewing academic standards, including procedures for course design, course approval, annual monitoring, validation and review. These procedures are thorough and effective, providing a framework for the assurance of academic quality and the maintenance of academic standards. They align with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

70 Implementation of a new Course and Class Approval Process (C-CAP) is helping the University to streamline its approach to curriculum design. Staff indicated that C-CAP invites alignment of teaching objectives with assessment at the design stage, encouraging detailed consideration of feedback at that early stage.

### **4.2 Management of assessment**

71 The University is managing its assessment practices effectively. The Procedures for Assessment and Award (2010) document covers all aspects of the process, including marking conventions, compensation schemes, ranking conventions for awards, composition and conduct of boards of examiners including the role of external examiners, examination arrangements, marking of examination scripts, publication of results and appeals processes. Updates are in progress, and the revised version will be available for the academic year 2014-15. The Marking Guide for staff was last approved in 2009 and there would be benefit in the University reviewing it to reflect current learning and teaching practices.

72 The work of the Re-engineering Assessment Practices (REAP) project was successful, as was the subsequent Peer Evaluation in Education Review (PEER) project in stimulating an ongoing review of practice and innovation in departments across the University. The REAP project, which was lead by the University and is now complete, piloted the re-design of formative assessment and feedback practices in large-enrolment first-year modules with the aim of developing strategies for embedding new thinking about assessment into institutional policies and quality enhancement processes. The PEER project aims to build on the work of REAP by looking at how peer assessment practices can improve student learning and promote student engagement with assessment feedback. Outcomes from both projects have been considered in the review of the University's Assessment and Feedback Policy (see paragraph 73).

73 In 2013, a review of feedback and assessment policy and practice was carried out by an Assessment and Feedback Working Group reporting to the Quality Assurance

Committee. This was informed by consultation with 29 staff, representing their department and 350 students as part of an Education Excellence Fund project. Research was completed by student interns under the guidance of an Academic Champion for assessment and feedback. A new Assessment and Feedback Policy was subsequently approved by the University Senate in March 2014.

74 The University is maintaining its commitment to proactively changing and improving assessment practice. The changes to policy and procedure noted above have been subject to substantial consultation. It has identified assessment and feedback as a development area and has been engaging with staff and students to improve it. The University is asked to continue to progress work in this area and to make policy explicit to students. (See also paragraph 45.)

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

75 The University makes effective use of a range of reference points in managing its academic standards.

76 The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) is a key reference point for the formulation, review and development of policies and procedures at the University. A thorough mapping exercise was undertaken during 2013 to ensure adherence of University practice with the Expectations of the Quality Code. The mapping exercise included involvement and expertise from all faculties, various professional services areas and USSA. Outcomes of the mapping indicated that the University meets the Expectations in the Quality Code, although the University has itself identified a need to develop its policies and procedures in relation to a small number of the Indicators in the Quality Code.

77 External examiner reports viewed by the team confirmed that the University's programme aims and objectives are appropriate with respect to academic and professional subject matter with reference to subject benchmark statements, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), and, where relevant, to professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. The University has recently revised its approach to the analysis of, and reporting on external examiner reports. This analysis confirms external examiners' positive views of moderation of standards, and is helpful in sharing effective practice.

78 The University's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) receives external examiner reports and subsequent responses from the faculties. Departmental/course directors are required to respond directly to the external examiners, and the reports and responses are taken by the faculty representatives to the relevant faculty academic committees or their sub-committees, for consideration and comparison with results from other faculties, and to the QAC. In turn, QAC reports to the Senate.

79 The outcomes of external examiner reports are systematically considered as part of the University's annual monitoring processes and are used to enhance the student learning experience and inform institutional strategy. This systematic analysis and its use to enhance the student experience represents positive practice.

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

80 The University has an effective approach to securing standards. The processes and procedures in place are thorough.



## 5 Self-evaluation and management of information

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

81 The ELIR team considered that the University's approach to self-evaluation and the management of information meets sector expectations including the Scottish Funding Council guidance and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

#### **Performance measurement framework**

82 The University's approach aligns strategy, the Performance Measurement Framework (PMF), committee structures, and internal review and monitoring processes. This approach is underpinned by a culture of external engagement which includes adherence to external legislation and use of external reference frameworks. The PMF is the University's working strategic document, linking vision, strategic themes, objectives, strategies and performance measures. Use of the PMF is accompanied by a revised approach to analysing and reporting management data, including quarterly Court Business Reports.

#### **Committee and staffing structures**

83 The University has recently implemented a new committee structure. Its strategic committees - Senate, Education Strategy Committee, Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and Learning Enhancement Committee (LEC) play a key role in the management of information and data. The Education Strategy Committee, convened by the Vice-Principal, provides strategic direction, while QAC oversees the institutional quality framework and LEC focuses on enhancement of learning and teaching. Senate has overall responsibility for the quality and standards of University awards, and has delegated authority to QAC, which is chaired by an Associate Deputy Principal for education. QAC's business includes review of progression and awards (undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research) using data drawn from planning statistics to show key trends over a four-year period, discussion of National Student Survey results, issues arising from complaints and Senate discipline and appeals cases. The creation of LEC has provided an opportunity to establish a joint forum with the QAC to review annual faculty reports, enabling reflection on assurance and enhancement issues. This change has been effective in allowing the sharing of good practice and communication of issues. Senate receives minutes of Quality Assurance Committee meetings, which incorporate the outcomes of departmental review reports, highlighting any commendations and recommendations.

84 The University also has a Leadership Group, convened by the Principal, with membership comprising the Vice-Principal, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer, deans, vice deans, associate deputy principals, heads of departments and professional service directors. The Leadership Group meets monthly and discussions are themed around key issues facing the University. The group also invites expert contribution from those outside the sector, often from the University's many business and industry partners. The ELIR team considered that this group was a useful forum for engaging staff in the vision and strategy for the University.

85 Restructuring of the Professional Services and underlying operational processes has included formation of the Strategy and Policy Directorate bringing together governance, planning and corporate management information activities, and this has helped the University use data more effectively to inform institutional policy and practice.

#### **Institution-led quality review**

86 The University has a documented quinquennial, faculty-led process for internal review of learning and teaching at the departmental level. The review format has a wide scope and considers not only teaching but research, knowledge exchange and management

in the department and the interaction between these functions. University policy and procedures on the Internal Review of Learning and Teaching date from 2009.

87 Since the 2010 ELIR, the University has undertaken a number of reviews that have followed a different format from that described in the University's policy and procedures. In 2011, the Strathclyde Business School replaced the existing process of quinquennial departmental review with a quinquennial faculty-wide review which looked at seven departments simultaneously. Subsequently, the establishment of the new Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in August 2010 produced an organisational structure in which courses belong to the faculty or a school rather than to a department. To reflect these changes, the Faculty undertook a quinquennial school-level review in 2013, following the same procedures as for departmental reviews.

88 The ELIR team considered documentary information relating to recent reviews, and discussed review practices with groups of staff and students. The team noted considerable variability in the scope and focus of implementation, including the extent of reflection and supporting information related to learning and teaching. This variability was not related to the size of the unit being reviewed; for example the documentation for the recent review of the seven departments in the Business School included significant discussion of learning and teaching, supported by extensive, detailed appendices, whereas documentation for a number of smaller departments in other faculties included very limited evidence and discussion of learning and teaching. There was also significant variation in the extent to which reviews explicitly considered the experience of postgraduate research students.

89 The ELIR team concluded that institution-led quality review was an area of development for the University due to variability in practice across the institution and lack of evidence that recommendations from the 2010 ELIR had been actioned. The Reflective Analysis identified plans to revise the process as a priority for March 2014, but also indicated that the University considered the current approach provided an appropriate level of scrutiny.

90 The University is asked to make demonstrable progress, within the next academic year, in revising the approach to periodic institution-led review to ensure that the revised process gives adequate scrutiny to learning and teaching across all parts of the institution. The University should consider the scope, focus and consistency of implementation across the institution, reflecting on the linkages with existing annual monitoring processes. The University is also asked to consider the consistency of interpretation and implementation of periodic review across the institution. In doing so, the University should consider the extent to which analysis, synthesis and reflection undertaken during periodic review connects with the learning experience of students.

91 There would be considerable value in the University reflecting on how all of its institution-led review activity interrelates, for example by considering links between periodic review, annual faculty reporting and monitoring processes, and collaborative audits. The University should also evaluate the best way to consider the impact of student-facing support services in its periodic review processes.

### **Student engagement**

92 Student engagement in representation supports evaluative activity. Students are engaged formally through student staff liaison committees, membership on University committees (including Senate and Court) and in periodic reviews. Informally, the University also seeks to engage students through meetings between USSA officers and senior staff, including the Principal.

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

93 Collectively, the Advance Information Set (AIS) indicates that the University has systematic arrangements for identifying and addressing situations that have the potential to threaten the academic standards of its awards or the quality of the student learning experience. As noted above, the ELIR team had significant concerns about periodic institution-led review. However, the effective implementation of the annual monitoring process enables the University to identify and address potential threats as well as recognising good practice.

94 The University provided the ELIR team with access to extensive information that included all elements of the AIS. The material submitted provides reassurance that the University is meeting sector expectations. The University's mapping of its policies and processes to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education was comprehensive and reflective, using traffic light coding to highlight the extent to which Expectations and Indicators are currently met, plus examples of evidence and notes of areas for attention or improvement.

### **Annual monitoring**

95 Faculties report annually to the Senate through the Quality Assurance Committee on the effectiveness of learning and teaching across the faculty, informed by the joint meeting with Learning Enhancement Committee. The reports (Annual Faculty Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Reports) consider both assurance and enhancement, including identification of good practice, supported by detailed information and summary updates on previous reports and planned actions. They also include consideration of the effectiveness of professional support services. Information covered includes analysis and overview reporting of: external examiner reports; student surveys; appeals and complaints; and collaborative activities. The process includes peer review by another faculty (see paragraph 56). Staff commented that this was a very valuable aspect of the approach and the ELIR team supported this view, highlighting it as an area of positive practice.

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

96 The University makes use of a wide range of external reference points to inform its self-evaluation processes. Monitoring and review processes at the programme and school level make reference to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) guidance, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), subject benchmark statements, professional, regulatory and statutory body (PSRB) requirements including accreditation criteria, and the views of external examiners. The University also makes use of sector league tables and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) performance indicators to inform policy. The University is an active participant in the national Enhancement Themes and has also undertaken development work in partnership with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC).

## **5.4 Management of public information**

97 The ELIR team considers that the University has an effective approach to managing public information that meets sector expectations.

98 A number of professional services have key roles in the management of information, specifically the Strategy and Policy Directorate, the Education Enhancement team and the Student Surveys team (within the SEES Directorate) and the Marketing and Development Services Directorate. Collectively, they manage reporting to HESA including the Key Information Set (KIS), led by Education Enhancement. The University has used the KIS as an opportunity to develop a new, more consistent approach to collating and

presenting undergraduate information. The University has also engaged with USSA to produce student-friendly policy web pages explaining academic policy.

99 Course prospectuses and related information to inform student choice are published after consultation between the Marketing and Development Services Directorate and key contacts in academic departments and schools, nominated by the head of department/school. Discussion with students during the ELIR visit indicated a predominant view that information available to support recruitment and prior to enrolment was helpful in informing choice, and that the reality of their experience matched their expectations. Discussion did include an instance of lack of clarity about the course options available within the University on a specific articulation route - in particular the option to progress to honours. The University should check how it ensures that all prospective students considering entry via articulation routes are provided with information on course structures and options that is definitive and up-to-date.

100 The University's mapping of practice against the UK Quality Code identified that the quality of public information produced in collaborative partnership institutions could be improved. The University reported that the Quality Assurance Committee will continue to monitor progress in this area, and the ELIR team would encourage it to do so.

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

101 The ELIR team considered that the University's approach is effective overall in meeting sector expectations, including those of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and Scottish Funding Council guidance. The University should make demonstrable progress to address the recommendations on institution-led quality review without delay.

102 As a feature of positive practice, the outcomes of student surveys and external examiner reports are systematically considered as part of the University's annual monitoring processes, and are used to inform institutional policy and practice.

## **6 Collaborative activity**

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

103 The University has ambitious strategic plans to grow and extend its collaborative activities. These include increasing international collaborations and articulations, increasing Scottish entrants from colleges, promoting widening access initiatives, and increasing formal industrial collaborations including through the University's Technology Innovation Centre.

104 The University currently operates a number of types of collaborative activity including articulation with further education colleges in Scotland, and internationally with five universities in China, Malaysia, India and Pakistan. In 2012-13 these partnerships involved 124 students. In September 2013 the University also entered into a partnership with the private provider Study Group UK, and launched the Strathclyde International Study Centre. The Centre is based at the University and currently has 73 students studying on foundation programmes which have been designed to prepare international students for entry to undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. The University also offers a master's degree programme in collaboration with Aalborg University in Denmark and Hamburg University of Technology in Germany, as well as a Master of Science programme with the International Prevention Research Institute in Lyon.

105 In addition, Strathclyde Business School delivers a range of postgraduate taught programmes on international branch campuses. The University has service level agreements with local education partners who provide administrative support and teaching facilities, and manage students' daily requirements. Teaching is delivered by academic staff from the University who visit the centres for intensive teaching onsite. In 2012-13, the University had seven service agreements with a total intake of 370 students.

106 The University currently has one collaboration with an industrial partner to provide research degree programmes for the partner's employees through a combination of work-based learning and joint professional and academic research supervision. This collaboration currently has 29 employees of the partner plus 33 newly-recruited research students. The University is discussing the initiation of similar programmes with other industrial partners.

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

107 The University has effective arrangements in place that meet sector expectations including those set out in the UK Quality Code.

108 The University has taken action to review its approach to managing collaborative provision, as recommended in the 2010 ELIR. This has included undertaking a series of audits of collaborative provision and revising University policy and the code of practice on collaborative provision, which sets out the approach to assuring its academic standards and the quality of provision. The ELIR team reviewed the most recent set of Annual Faculty Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Reports and these indicated specific and detailed consideration of collaborative provision.

109 The University's mapping against *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code indicates the University is meeting the Expectation, and identifies action points against three of the Indicators. The sample of evidence considered by the ELIR team confirms the outcome of this mapping. The University is encouraged to follow up, as intended, the small number of action points that it has identified.

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

110 The University has effective arrangements in place to enhance the experience of students on collaborative programmes, and has a range of activities to communicate information about collaborative programmes to staff and students. The Reflective Analysis described a number of initiatives, for example, articulation arrangements through which international students are admitted to programmes, that are extensively used in parts of the University, and in particular, in the Faculty of Engineering. There is recognition of the challenges of integration and support for students admitted through these routes, and the Faculty has supported a number of practices, including induction, evening classes and intensive short courses to improve the experience of this group of students.

111 The University has undertaken a sequence of institution-level audits of collaborative activity which have increased institutional oversight, and brought about the development of it revised policy and code. Consideration of collaborative activity in annual reporting supports institutional oversight and sharing of approaches. The University should continue to use these processes to promote enhancement of the student experience in its collaborations, and to identify and share approaches that are effective.

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

112 The University has an effective approach to managing its collaborative activity. It seeks to grow this activity both on account of its widening participation strategy and its internationalisation strategy. The University has emphasised its commitment to both strategies and has included actions in each to support students on collaborative programmes.

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