



Enhancement-led Institutional Review of the University of the West of Scotland

Outcome Report

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

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

About this review

This is the Outcome Report of the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of the West of Scotland. The review took place as follows: Part 1 visit on 21-23 October 2014 and Part 2 visit on 1-5 December 2014. The review was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Professor Howard Colley (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor Liz Deane (International Reviewer)
- Patrick Devlin (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor Ian Pirie (Academic Reviewer)
- Emilia Todorova (Student Reviewer)
- Gabrielle Weir (Coordinating Reviewer)

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

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

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

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

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

¹ Further information about the ELIR method: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/enhancement-led-institutional-review

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

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

⁴ Technical Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10007800

About the University of the West of Scotland

The University of the West of Scotland (the University or UWS) was formally established in 2007 by the merger of the University of Paisley and Bell College. It has its basis in the foundation of Paisley Technical College and School of Art in 1897. The University has a strong commitment and mission to deliver accessible higher education to a wide range of students and to provide a transformative educational experience. The University describes itself as being highly learner-centred with a strong applied research and knowledge transfer culture. The University is spread across four campus locations in Ayr, Dumfries, Hamilton and Paisley. In 2013-14, the University had a total student population of 15,650 (12,289 FTE) of whom around 74 per cent were undergraduate, eight per cent were postgraduate taught and three per cent were postgraduate research. A further 2,253 were enrolled as lifelong learning students.

Following the appointment of a new Principal and Vice-Chancellor in 2013, a new Corporate Strategy was formally launched in October 2014 which sets out an aspirational vision to 2020 with key performance indicators (KPIs) designed to stretch the University. At the core of the strategy is the focus on providing a transformational and internationalised learning experience for UWS students fit for the 21st century. This is reflected in the University's new vision, 'Dreaming, Believing, Achieving'.

With the introduction of the new Corporate Strategy, organisational re-structure to support it and review of the academic portfolio, the University is undergoing a period of significant change.

Overarching judgement about the University of the West of Scotland

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

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

Areas of positive practice

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

2 **Widening participation** - there are well-established relationships with schools and colleges that facilitate successful transitions to the University for students from non-traditional backgrounds. A range of activities aimed at widening participation are carried out including providing access to University learning resources for groups of college students who are given associate student status. Student mentors who had participated in the 'Routes for All' programme, an initiative that provides academic and study skills support for senior year high school pupils, were very positive about their experience.

3 **Culture of personalised learning support** - the University has developed a suite of activities and initiatives aimed at improving progression, retention and engagement, in alignment with its strategic aim to provide a transformational student experience. This approach includes compulsory and supported personal development planning and the introduction of school enhancement developers across all schools to promote student engagement. Both of these activities are designed to link with the Personal Tutor System.

4 **Systematic approach to equality and diversity** - staff are required to consider and address equality and diversity issues in all module descriptors and programme specifications, ensuring a systematic approach to their identification and resolution.

5 **Professional development of academic and professional support staff** - the University's commitment to the development of professionalism in learning and teaching is underpinned by ambitious targets in its Corporate Strategy. For example, it aims to have all academic staff affiliated to the Higher Education Academy Fellowship Scheme through the UK Professional Standards Framework and encourages uptake of the Standards by professional support staff.

6 **Promoting staff use of the virtual learning environment** - in order to stimulate staff usage and development of the virtual learning environment (VLE), the University awards medals that recognise defined levels of good practice in online design. Targets for the achievement of medals are driving change and staff commitment to ensuring the ongoing improvement of learning sites. A variety of small working groups have also been established to provide direct help to staff on technology-enhanced learning. The University is encouraged to continue to progress this work to ensure consistency in the quality of VLE provision across all schools.

7 **Integrated quality assurance and enhancement procedures** - the University continues to have a comprehensive and robust approach to self-evaluation using a number of review methods including institution-wide holistic review, subject health review, policy

review and thematic reviews. The methodologies used allow the University to be responsive, carrying out mid-term adjustments, where appropriate, to policies and strategies. An example of this approach can be seen in the annual updating of the Assessment Handbook to reflect changes in regulations and current good practice, based on sector benchmarking and reflection on external examiners' comments and the outcomes of annual monitoring. The outcomes of institution-led quality reviews, including annual monitoring processes, are effectively disseminated to staff and students, with students having a leading role in the conduct of reviews. The University is encouraged to continue ensuring the consistent application of processes intended to promote the visibility, accessibility and use of examples of good practice in learning and teaching which are already gathered through a range of positive approaches. The continued consistency and rigorous application of all of these quality assurance and enhancement processes is of particular importance, given the extensive institutional change in which the University is currently engaged.

8 **Effective use of data** - learner analytics are being used effectively by staff to: inform programme developments; identify performance and attainment data; and analyse student feedback. The data is easily accessible to staff through a series of dashboards and can be used to support internal and external comparisons.

Areas for development

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

10 **Support the pace of international expansion** - given the pace of change required to meet stretching targets for international expansion in collaborative provision, ensure that robust processes are in place for evaluating, monitoring and reviewing the planned expansion and its impact on the student learning experience, both for existing and new students.

11 **Internationalisation of the curriculum** - consider how internationalisation of the curriculum can be progressed and delivered in ways that all students can access, building on positive student feedback from the implementation of the Global Citizenship module. The University is currently engaged in reviewing its approach to programme design which is also likely to offer an opportunity to embed internationalisation into the curriculum. In taking forward its plans for internationalisation of the curriculum and increasing its international student community, the University is encouraged to take advantage of appropriate international academic reference points.

12 **Implementing strategy for work-related learning** - in order to make demonstrable progress with targets outlined in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, include a wider variety of opportunities for assessed work-related learning for all students, especially those in non-professional areas, and make certain that students are aware of these opportunities.

13 **Visibility of graduate attributes** - progress its plans to ensure the visibility of graduate attributes to students both through its work on personal development planning and through the promotion and use of graduate attributes in module descriptors, programme specifications and learning outcomes.

14 **Overseeing and supporting student mobility** - in view of the University's intention to increase student mobility, review the processes in place for overseeing student exchange programmes, paying particular attention to: curriculum matching, ensuring the comparability of academic content in the host institution; student support on placement;

re-integration of students on return to the University; and use of student feedback following their return from exchange.

15 **Optimising the use of technology** - ensure the recent significant investment in information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure will be used to enrich the learning experience of students. There would be benefit in further developing technology-enhanced learning to enable a consistent learning experience, for example when programmes are delivered across multiple sites.

What happens next?

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

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

Further information

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

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

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

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

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

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