

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

Outcome Report

November 2019

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About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method

The QAA website explains the method for [Enhancement-led Institutional Review \(ELIR\)](#) and has links to the ELIR handbook and other informative documents.¹ You can also find out more about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\)](#).²

Further details about ELIR can be found in an accompanying [brief guide](#),³ including an overview of the review method, information about review teams, and explanations of follow-up action.

About this review

This is the Outcome Report of the ELIR conducted by QAA at the University of the West of Scotland. The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 3 October 2019 and Review Visit on 18-22 November 2019. The review was conducted by a team of five reviewers:

- Ms Karen Barton (Academic Reviewer)
- Dr Gary Campbell (Academic Reviewer)
- Ms Kerry Harrison (Student Reviewer)
- Dr Maggie King (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Paul Probyn (Coordinating Reviewer).

This report sets out the threshold 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.

The threshold judgement for this report can be found on page 3, followed by commendations and recommendations.

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

¹ About ELIR:

www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review

² About QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland

³ Brief Guide to ELIR: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/brief-guide-to-elir-method.pdf

⁴ Technical Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/University-of-the-West-of-Scotland

About the University of the West of Scotland

The University of the West of Scotland (the University or UWS) was formally established in 2007 following the merger of the University of Paisley and Bell College. UWS inherited a rich history from the institutions that preceded it, including the Paisley School of Arts, founded in 1836. UWS comprises five campuses - four situated in the west and south-west of Scotland: Ayr, Dumfries, Lanarkshire and Paisley; and one in London. The London Campus was opened in 2015, and now accounts for around 8% of the University's total student numbers.

The University's vision is to be a transformational influence on economic, social and cultural development in Scotland and beyond by providing student-centred, personalised and distinctive learning experiences underpinned by innovative and relevant research. In each of its three priority areas - Student Success, Research and Enterprise, and Global Engagement - the Corporate Strategy is supported by an enabling plan. These plans incorporate explicit actions to support achievement of the aspirations set out in the Corporate Strategy and link it to the plans of the University's schools and professional services. In addition, the Corporate Strategy articulates a set of 'UWS truths' that serve as guiding principles for the University.

In 2018-19, UWS had a total student population of 19,280 (headcount) of whom: 76% were undergraduate (UG); 19% were postgraduate taught (PGT); and 5% were postgraduate research (PGR). Of these: 17% of students were part-time; 4.8% were studying by distance-learning; and 8.3% were studying with overseas partners. 82% of students were classified as home/EU students; 2.1% were from the rest of the UK; and 16% were non-EU.

Threshold 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.

This is a positive judgement, which means that the University meets sector expectations in securing the academic standards of its awards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience it provides, currently and into the future. This judgement confirms there can be public confidence in the University's awards and in the quality of the learning experience it provides for its students.

Commendations

1 The University is commended for the following areas of good practice.

2 **Student-centred culture** - the University has developed a genuinely student-centred culture which is reflected in the approach of staff at all levels, and in the institution's focus on learning, teaching and assessment activities which are designed to promote student success.

3 **Widening access** - the University demonstrates a strategic approach to recruiting and supporting a diverse range of students, based on a clear understanding of its student population and a strong commitment to meeting the needs of the communities in which it is located. A range of widening access initiatives are in place which are tailored to particular student groups including targeting engagement with areas designated as SIMD 20 and promoting partnership with local colleges to support student articulation. The University has made significant progress in improving the retention of students who enter from under-represented groups.

4 **Transformation of learning and teaching** - the strategic intention to transform learning and teaching across the University has resulted in changes to infrastructure and teaching practices. The Lanarkshire Campus was designed to act as a catalyst for pedagogic transformation and has inspired the widespread adoption of student-centred learning and teaching across the University. In particular, the campus has prompted reflection in the use of learning spaces and technologies.

5 **Quality assurance and enhancement processes** - there are well-designed, effective and flexible quality processes in place. In particular, the two-phase institution-led review process enables the review visit to be tailored to the subject area being reviewed, addressing the most pertinent topics. The introduction of school and institutional events as part of the Enhancement and Annual Monitoring process has facilitated broader engagement with the process by staff, promoting discussion on areas for enhancement and sharing good practice.

6 **Use of quantitative and qualitative data** - there is an increasingly sophisticated, integrated, transparent and widely understood approach to using an extensive range of internal and external data to promote enhancement and inform decision-making and evaluation.

7 **Collaborative provision** - the University has a strategic and focused approach to managing its collaborative provision which includes targeting a smaller number of core partners and strengthening its processes for approving, monitoring and reviewing the provision to ensure partnerships align with institutional priorities and business processes.

The University is encouraged to continue with the implementation of the enhancements it has identified to the management of its collaborative provision which have improved its oversight of these awards and the experience of students studying through collaborative partners.

Recommendations

8 The University is asked to consider the following recommendations.

9 **Communication with students** - improve the effectiveness of two-way communication between students and staff, in particular relating to institution-wide changes and initiatives. The University is asked to develop a strategic approach for communicating with students on institutional changes, taking into consideration the content, format and method of dissemination of information to ensure there is widespread understanding of institutional priorities and actions.

10 **Consistency of student support** - ensure there is consistent support in place for all students irrespective of the host School or students' location and mode of study. In addressing this the University is asked, in particular, to consider the Personal Tutoring system, the support provided by professional services, and the support provided to postgraduate students.

11 **Review of student-facing professional services** - introduce a process to review the contribution of student-facing professional services to the quality of the student experience. The University should draw on existing good practice in the University's approach to institution-led review of its academic provision. Reviewing these services will be particularly useful in the context of the University having conducted its 'rebalancing' exercise.

12 **London Campus** - continue with its plans to change the collaborative partnership model, taking full responsibility for all aspects of the student experience at the London Campus, which is likely to ensure there is parity of experience and academic outcomes for students studying across the University. This should include arrangements for student access to resources and facilities, and the provision of work-related opportunities.

What happens next?

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

14 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. The final version of the institution's Follow-up Report is published on the QAA website. Institutions also engage in a range of enhancement and development activities including Focus On projects where institutions work collaboratively to improve policy and practice relating to topics that are frequently occurring in ELIR outcomes.

Further information

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

16 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](#).

17 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](#).

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

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

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