



University of the West of Scotland

Follow-up Report to the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)

May 2021

Preface

One year after publication of their ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to submit a Follow-up Report to QAA Scotland. These reports are also submitted to the Scottish Funding Council. Follow-up Reports are written in the institution's own words and require to be endorsed by the institution's Governing Body prior to publication on the QAA website. Guidance on the content and structure is provided by QAA Scotland.

Institutions are asked to focus on the action they have taken since the review and to include an indication of the effectiveness of that action. ELIR reports highlight positive practice as well as areas for development, and institutions are encouraged to comment on key areas of activity relating to good practice that they have prioritised since the ELIR.

Follow-up Reports are discussed with institutions as part of the ELIR annual discussion meetings.

University of the West of Scotland ELIR ONE YEAR FOLLOW UP

1. Introduction

The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) ELIR was undertaken in November 2019 and followed the ELIR 4 methodology. The Outcome and Technical reports were published on the 13 March 2020. This one year follow up report outlines the actions taken by the University in response to the ELIR recommendations and provides a brief commentary on the commendations identified by the ELIR reviewers.

The University's Education Advisory Committee (EAC) had primary responsibility for the UWS ELIR. EAC is chaired by the Vice Principal (Learning, Teaching and Students) and reports to the University Senate, this ensured that regular updates were provided on the progress of the ELIR visit and subsequent outcomes. EAC also delegated responsibility for monitoring the ELIR follow up activity to the Academic Quality Committee (AQC) – one of the EAC sub committees and created short life working groups to review specific issues as needed. Following receipt of the ELIR 4 Outcomes report, QuEST presented the recommendations at the annual Institutional Enhancement and Annual Monitoring which is facilitated by AQC. Delegated from across the institution were invited to consider and discuss possible activities that might be used to address the areas identified by the ELIR panel in a world café session, this promoted cross institution awareness of the outcomes and facilitated idea generation in how the recommendations could be addressed from a range of perspectives. The output from this event was then fed into the relevant committees and helped inform the action planning.

ELIR follow up and action planning is a standing item on the AQC agenda with progress on actions being monitored at each meeting and regular updates provided to EAC and Senate.

This follow up report was drafted by AQC and approved by EAC in February 2021. The report was also endorsed by Senate in March 2021 and at Court on the 26th April 2021.

2. Response to the ELIR Outcomes

The University was pleased to note the ELIR 4 outcome as positive, with an effective judgement placed on the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience it provides. Good progress has been made on a number of the recommendation identified by the ELIR panel but some activities have been integrated into the new Student Experience Programme (SEP) which underpins and operationalises the UWS Learning and Teaching Thematic Plan. The SEP is a significant, cross university, programme of change and enhancement for UWS which will enable us to take a dynamic step forward in terms of how we operate. We envisage that the enhancements and efficiencies that come from this work will impact positively on both staff and students.

The programme comprises 7 targeted workstreams, which will each have an identified strategic lead and a core leadership team to drive forward change, review, and enhancement:

- Workstream 1 – Curriculum Renewal
- Workstream 2 – Curriculum Incubator
- Workstream 3 – Learning Environments and Digital Infrastructure
- Workstream 4 – Student Journey
- Workstream 5 – Policy Review
- Workstream 6 – Academic Capabilities and Workforce
- Workstream 7 – Performance Culture, Learner Analytics and Management Information

Oversight of progress on all 7 workstreams will be the responsibility of the Student Experience Programme Board chaired by the Deputy Principal. Given the underpinning nature of the SEP in ensuring the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Thematic plan, EAC will play a key role in monitoring progress of the work, outcomes, and impact of the SEP. The workstreams vary in size and scope and will be empowered to create and task short life working groups with reviewing specific underpinning activities which are core to supporting the overall success of the workstream. There is a clear link between the ELIR outcomes and the workstream activities of the SEP, we have highlighted in the update below where further work will be driven by specific workstreams of the SEP moving forward.

The following provides an update on the recommendations made by the ELIR reviewers and details the progress to build on the positive practice identified.

Recommendations

- 1 **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.*

Response

To address this recommendation in 2020 Education Advisory Committee agreed to task a short-life working group with reviewing the current approach to student communication to identify potential barriers, challenges and opportunities to ensure that we are able to communicate effectively with student on institution wide priorities and actions.

This group was chaired Deputy Dean of Education and Social Sciences and had membership from the Students' Union, Schools and Professional Services. As part of the work of the group a student survey was undertaken to secure student views on formal/informal messaging from UWS and what methods of communication would be preferred. The feedback suggested that students felt that university email should be used for formal messaging (such as information on assessment and examinations) and that Facebook should be used for more informal messages regarding events that students may wish to attend.

Several core issues were explored by the group including inter alia:

- Inclusion and accessibility of student communications (given that UWS has a very diverse student body).
- The purpose of communications.
- The medium used and impact.
- Timing of communication.
- Importance of staff awareness of student communications.

Outcome

The group reviewed work and practices across the university and agreed a set of key strategic principles for student communication:

1. Expectations should be set for frequency and type of communication that students can expect to receive from us.
2. Staff should be apprised where possible and appropriate, of significant communications prior to dissemination to students.
3. Communications should be:
 - a. aligned with the UWS Strategy and underpinning truths
 - b. student centred
 - c. timely, simple (jargon-free), succinct and relevant
 - d. be consistent with GDPR requirements, accessible and inclusive
 - e. clear in purpose and clear where the recipient is required to take action (task-orientated)
 - f. such that critical information is heard
 - g. such that it encourages student feedback

These principals were approved by EAC in February 2021.

The group also secured examples of effective practice from across the university and it was agreed to create a communications toolkit to share practice, support staff and improve consistency of approach. It was agreed that having taken the first step in setting the strategic principles that further work required to be undertaken and EAC supported the creation of the Student Communication Group to take forward the development of a formal Student Communication Strategy and supporting toolkits and good practice guides.

Next Steps

Moving forward this work will be embedded in SEP Workstreams 4 and 5, and will of course also form a key part of the communication strategy for the SEP Board to ensure that there is regular communication with staff and students on the progress of the SEP.

- 2 ***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.

Response

In reflecting on this recommendation EAC members agreed that this was potentially linked to the recommendation on communication with students in that we were confident that support was available for all students but that we may need to reinforce the messaging and awareness of the support available. The Hub at UWS plays a crucial role in supporting students and we have emphasised its role as the first point of contact for support or for students to ask questions that they may have during their student journey at UWS. There's a Hub on every campus and online information and guidance at hub.uws.ac.uk students can also contact The Hub by phone and email. The Hub ensures the provision of the support to all our students regardless of campus or mode of study. All students can access information on the following services via the Student HUB:

- Academic Skills Development
- Careers
- Counselling and Wellbeing
- Disability Service (including Assistive Technology)
- Finance (including payments)

- Funding and Advice
- Information Technology (password resets)
- International Student Support
- Student Administration – Registry (including enrolment enquiries, student ID cards, council tax and academic transcripts)
- Multi Faith Chaplaincy

The Doctoral College provides support for all postgraduate research students regardless of School or discipline. The aim of the UWS Doctoral College is to foster a collaborative, peer-supported, doctoral research culture across the University and our partner institutions worldwide.

Personal Tutoring is key agenda item for UWS and A short student survey was undertaken which asked students if they knew who their personal tutors was and if they had met with their tutor, the results of this survey along with data from Banner which showed which showed the number of staff assigned as personal tutors and variance in allocation of personal tutees was used to promote debate and discussion on the issue at the University Wide Annual Monitoring event in January 2020. A number of key outcomes arose from this event which were reported at EAC including the need to provide clarity on the requirements of the role, an acknowledgement that a one size fit all approach may not work for all programmes and that each School has different requirements and utilises the PT role differently to suit their needs, including those of associated professional bodies.

Outcomes

At the start of session 2020/21 the Vice Principal (Learning, Teaching & Students) created a rapid response student engagement team, to review data and analytics to identify and support students at risk of disengaging. The Student Success Team was launched in September 2020 and focuses on working with colleagues across the University to trial and establish targeted support strategies with the aim of maximising student retention, achievement and supporting positive outcomes for the student. The Student Success Team work in partnership with other services and Schools to signpost students and intervene early when low engagement becomes apparent using engagement data.

The use of topdesk to underpin The Hub means that we can use the data on calls and request for support from students to drive institutional enhancements. By monitoring the volume and timing of communication through The Hub we can identify where we may wish to provide further information to students, where a system may need adjusting or where we need to provide enhanced signposting for students. This also helps to provide feedback on the effectiveness of our student communications.

The Doctoral College offers year-round events and initiatives such as wellbeing and socialising clubs to tackle isolation and support healthy lifestyle in a friendly environment, joint international events with partner institutions worldwide and supporting PGR students peer-mentoring programmes to improve transition to PGR studies, in addition to the professional development offered by UWS Academy.

It is acknowledged that postgraduate research students often face a range of challenges during their studies which can impact on their wellbeing, the Doctoral College, jointly with the Student Services, the Students' Union, Sports Centre and other stakeholders, develops and runs a series of events, classes and respite sessions to maintain physical and mental wellbeing of our postgraduate research students.

EAC noted several outcomes from the Annual monitoring event relating to Personal Tutoring including the need to work in partnership with the Students' Union to ask students what they want from the role, clarify their expectations. It was agreed that the role of Personal Tutor at UWS needed to be defined and that reflection on related policies and procedures was needed

to ensure appropriate scaffolding for the PT system. It was key for guidance and support for PTs to be developed once the role was defined. Discussion on creating principles for Personal Tutoring commenced early in 2020 and were progressed through the Provost's Advisory Group led by the Deputy Principal. This group reviewed the current approach and sought to identify areas of positive, effective practice to take forward. This has now been overtaken by the Student Experience Programme.

Next Steps

In considering a holistic approach to student support, the Student Experience Programme Workstream 4 (Student Journey), will create a UWS Student Support Model which is envisaged to include mentoring and coaching, personal academic support (personal tutors), the role of sport and leisure in the learning journey, student union engagement and student support.

The Student Success Team also play a key role in shaping the UWS approach to student support and makes recommendations directly to the Vice-Principal Learning, Teaching and Students about future measures that should be adopted based on their interaction and feedback from students.

Support arrangements are monitoring through Education Advisory Committee and the Doctoral College Board.

- 3 ***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.***

Response

Academic Quality Committee (AQC) undertook a review of practice across the sector during 2020 to determine how UWS could enhance its approach to the review of Professional Services. AQC was clear that in adopting a formal system of Professional Service Review that it was essential for this to be based on evidence and feedback from service users and stakeholders as this was a real strength of the approach taken to review of academic provision. There was a strategic discussion at AQC Institutional Wide Annual monitoring event on each of the recommendations from the ELIR visit and the session on Professional Service Review generated the most discussion in terms of how this could be implemented. Participants at the event were asked who should lead on the review of professional services and what criteria should be used for the reviews.

Outcomes

A number of proposals for Professional Service Review were discussed at both AQC and EAC during 2020 and consensus was reached that a panel style review process, similar to Institution Led Reviews (ILRs) should be explored further. It was proposed that panels would include a selection of key stakeholders, including students, and would provide formal outcomes to a committee, possibly AQC. Consideration should also be given to the introduction of service level agreements. It was also agreed that a mapping of all student processes would be useful in order to identify areas where enhancements could be made and to understand where ownership of systems/processes sat in terms of Professional Service Reviews and how these should best be structured.

Next Steps

Through the Student Experience Programme Workstream 4 (Student Journey), the University intends to create a rolling programme of professional services reviews whilst being mindful of the need to avoid survey overload on students.

- 4 **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.*

Response

The University launched the London Campus in 2015 and was pleased to apply learnings from four years of delivery to a revised model launched, in partnership with The Education Group, in late 2019. This revised approach included the development of a new campus location with modern, pedagogically-appropriate facilities, effective partnership with TEG to manage recruitment and services, and University-responsibility for all degree-level programmes delivered at the UWS London Campus.

Outcome

The University now directly employs fifteen academic staff based at the London campus who provide strong academic leadership. These staff are employed across our four schools and are deeply embedded in the wider activities of the school and university, ensuring parity and equity across campuses. Academic staff work in partnership with The Education group to oversee the delivery of non-degree level teaching (foundation/pathway and pre-sessional English providing a robust quality assurance process which ensures parity of experience. These include provision of all teaching material, moderation of student work, and oversight through assessment and examination boards. Moreover all students are encouraged to take part in module and programme evaluation surveys, provide feedback through student representatives at Student Staff Liaison Groups and other fora as appropriate.

Unlike the previous partnership model, the University is now responsible for the physical resources at London. The campus building is leased by the University and has been fitted out to provide a comparable learning space to other campuses. Classrooms have been designed with input from the Education Futures, and all IT is managed through the University's Information Services directorate. Students have online access to the Careers and Skills team in the University, and the campus in liaison with the school of Business and Creative Industries, is looking at creating a business incubator in London to support enterprise skills development.

Next Steps

The campus is also keen to recruit a business development manager who would source placements and other work experience opportunities for students.

Building on Commendations

- 1 **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.*

Update

The Strategy 2025 reaffirms our commitment to our students to provide a strong, supportive learning and teaching environment which leads to successful student outcomes. During 2020, much of the focus has been on how to deliver a positive hybrid experience to students whilst

adhering to government guidelines. This has resulted in some excellent initiatives from across the University including increasing engagement through digital academic skills support, embedded wellbeing support, digital counselling, and targeted interventions through our Student Success Team.

- 2 **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.*

Update

Widening Participation is intrinsic to UWS. Within our Strategy 2025, we state our purpose is 'to change lives, transform communities and encourage enterprise through outstanding, distinctive and progressive higher education and making a difference to the communities we serve. We are an inclusive organisation that welcomes and values diversity.'

In 2018-19, over a quarter (28.2%) of Scottish domiciled full-time first-degree entrants at UWS came from SIMD 20 areas, which was significantly higher than the Scottish average (15.9%). UWS not only addresses SIMD 20/40 challenges but is also able to tackle rural challenges – particularly in Ayrshire and in Dumfries and Galloway. UWS has a strong track record in providing higher education to students from care experienced backgrounds and in articulating students from college to degree-level courses. In 2018-19, 66% of Scottish-domiciled learners articulated from college to degree level courses at UWS with advanced standing compared with the national average of 55%.

UWS continually monitors and annually reviews its admissions procedures to ensure we are responsive and applicant-focussed, and compliant with relevant legislation and best practice in admissions. In response to the nationally evolving coronavirus situation, we introduced the Digital Hardship Scheme this academic year, which is available to UK students who, because of financial hardship, are unable to afford the essential technology needed to engage in studies. This may include basic equipment such as laptops, or connectivity such as mobile broadband.

Our Widening Access Plan details the priorities for the Widening Participation team and is updated annually. Through a variety of activities, the Plan supports the team's aims to increase non-traditional and under-represented groups into UWS; and support non-traditional and under-represented groups pre-entry and until 2 years after they graduate from UWS. Our most recent success is an application for Aiming Higher for Student Carers, an award for which we have been approved. Further information can be found at the Carers Trust website: [Going Higher for Student Carers: Recognition Award - Carers Trust](#)

- 3 **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.*

Update

Whilst the pandemic has dramatically shifted our focus from campus-based teaching, we remain committed to transformational learning experiences and have embraced hybrid learning with an enthusiastic velocity. Senate and EAC has provided leadership to support the swift pivot to online working and teaching has been highlighted in recent ILRs and external

examiner reports as a strength, with experts commenting favourably on our assessment adjustments and on our sector leading VLEs. Following consultation through our committee structures, we have recently approved a revised Learning and Teaching Thematic Plan which details our clearly understood and embedded, approach to learning and teaching that delivers on the educational ambitions of the UWS Strategy 2025, fosters an engaging, inspiring student experience and reflects our commitment to producing work ready graduates. The Plan in turn is underpinned by the Student Experience Programme referred to earlier in this report.

- 4 **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.*

Update

The Quality Enhancement Support Team continue to provide assurance and enhancement to the student learning and teaching experience whilst remaining flexible in our approaches to meeting statutory requirements. The team quickly adapted to online working, successfully moving our Institution-led Reviews online during 2019/20 keeping to schedule, whilst continuing to support staff and students through the typical calendar of quality enhancement and assurance activities. We have had a pivotal role in providing guidance to external examiners and staff on covid-related programme and module adaptations to ensure that there is cognisance of student experience, quality assurance, regulatory matters and external examiner input.

With regards to Enhancement and Annual Monitoring, QuEST Business Partners have supported schools to manage these activities online and attended School Boards and events to offer advice and guidance. At our Institutional Enhancement and Annual Monitoring Event in January 2021, we took the opportunity to reflect on the past year under the pandemic with our Deputy Deans and Students' Union representatives and identified positive practice arising from the online pivot that we have shared more widely within the institution, some of which we will retain when campus working becomes possible again. Our thematic reporting continues to highlight overarching areas for development and those of positive practice.

- 5 **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.*

Update

A key priority for 2021-22 will be continuing to develop and roll-out learner analytics. From a rapid development of a dashboard for hybrid student engagement, Strategic Planning have begun to build data tracking student retention. Working in partnership with the Vice Principal, Learning, Teaching and Students and Information Services, 2021-22 will see an overhaul of the learner analytics modelling – with Strategic Planning proposing the use of Qlik dashboards to replace the MyJourney tool, introducing greater flexibility and responsiveness to the changing environment. Crucially, this joined-up approach will seek to deliver information to effective support structures to enable implementation of impactful action through the Student Success Team.

The learner analytic works in 2020-22 will be the first phase of increasingly analytical dashboards embedding predictive modelling into standard business processes. Currently reactive activity – such as reporting on student retention or identifying low entry tariffs – will be part of sophisticated dashboards used to inform admissions decisions, flag early warnings for

intervention, and evidence the impact of engagements. The new more valuable data will be delivered in more accessible, user-friendly methods and mobile-enabled.

The development of a data warehouse and integration of data from across multiple systems (e.g. student, finance, people, and research) will enable complex assessment of performance at individual, unit and institutional level and move from data to information and insights.

During 2020, UWS improved the use of EvaSys – an online survey tool – to introduce new module and mid-module evaluations to enable swift, remote feedback from students on their learning experience. The new questionnaires were developed in partnership across the Institution and were shorter, sharper and intended to facilitate direct closing of the feedback loop within the module.

A more agile approach was also taken to getting feedback in 2020 on key topics as such as staff and student views of learning platforms to inform the procurement exercise for a social learning platform, effectiveness of induction and initial experiences of hybrid delivery, using an online evaluation tool. These fed into discussions at school, service and executive-level and led to demonstrable change.

6 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.

Update

At Institutional level, all collaborative partnerships are now overseen by our new Provost & Deputy Principal (appointed August 2020) and will explore the strategic aspects of such partnerships in line with UWS Strategy 2025. The Partnerships and Collaboration Committee (PCC) has strengthened its remit to ensure viability and strategic fit are at the forefront of School decisions for our taught partnerships. In terms of the research collaborative partnerships, a more managed approach is being taken forward with the Doctoral College having identified a dedicated staff member to oversee this.

Since ELIR 2019, the University's approval process for collaborative provision remains principally the same with an extra consultation stage to involve the Vice-Principal, Planning and Recruitment to ensure this person has sight of any new proposals at an early stage. This is to ensure that only those considered satisfactory, from a financial, reputational, and quality stance are progressed and to prevent unnecessary efforts by colleagues in progressing a futile proposal. The University remains committed to targeting a small number of core partners and building on current relationships.

Since ELIR, six further collaborative reviews of taught provision have been undertaken, all with successful outcomes. Periodic due diligence is now undertaken either in advance or in tandem to collaborative reviews which is proving useful.

Conclusion and Future Plans

The UWS Strategy 2025 launched shortly after ELIR 2019 and through the thematic plans, Student Experience Programme and Curriculum Framework there is a clear strategic and

operational pathway towards addressing not only the recommendations arising, and an energy to build on the commendations for meaningful enhancement, but to go further in realising our aims of flexible programmes of study with digital hybrid delivery options which allow students to engage in learning around the world. The institutional response to the covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated incredible resilience and capability to radically transform our educational offering and, while we look forward to a return to meaningful on-campus delivery and engagement, we have learned incredible lessons which will stand us in good stead to deliver the pedagogical changes planned to 2025 and beyond. With rigorous oversight from the Education Advisory Committee, the University will drive the progress to enhance the student experience which will in turn support our planning for ELIR 5.

We are here for our students.

QAA2598 - May 2021

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