

ELIR 4 Thematic Report

The Postgraduate Student Experience

September 2022



Introduction

As part of the [Enhancement-Led Institutional Review \(ELIR\) method](#), QAA Scotland produces regular Thematic Reports to support learning from the outcomes of individual ELIR reports. The purpose of the Thematic Reports is to inform future development work in the sector and to inform future QAA activity including work carried out with the [Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee \(SHEEC\)](#).

QAA Scotland follows up the ELIR outcomes with institutions individually through institutional liaison visits, and each institution is required to produce a Follow-up Report indicating how it has addressed its own ELIR outcomes. QAA Scotland also promotes collaborative working between institutions to share good practice and to find collective solutions to common areas for development.

Scope and structure of the report

This report identifies material relating to the postgraduate (PG) student experience contained within the ELIR reports for the 18 Scottish higher education institutions reviewed in the ELIR 4 cycle. The fourth iteration of Scotland's institutional review process, ELIR 4, ran from 2018 to 2022. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the remaining reviews were postponed to support institutional and sector-wide responses to the pandemic.

This report covers practice relating to both the postgraduate research (PGR) and postgraduate taught (PGT) student experiences. Where a section refers specifically to either PGR or PGT, it will be stated in the text.

The institutions included in this report are:	
University of Aberdeen	University of the Highlands and Islands
Abertay University	Queen Margaret University
University of Dundee	Robert Gordon University
University of Edinburgh	Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
Edinburgh Napier University	Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)
University of Glasgow	University of St Andrews
Glasgow Caledonian University	University of Stirling
Glasgow School of Art	University of Strathclyde
Heriot-Watt University	University of the West of Scotland

This report analyses the examples of commendations and recommendations which have been highlighted in the ELIR 4 Outcome Reports and the more detailed findings included within ELIR 4 Technical Reports. It is possible that additional practice takes place within these 18 institutions, but only those elements of practice included within the ELIR reports are included in this Thematic Report.

Where the report refers to a commendation or recommendation, these have been identified by the ELIR review team in the ELIR 4 Outcome Reports. Similarly, while the ELIR review

teams may have 'encouraged' an institution to action, this is reflected in the ELIR 4 Technical Report, but was not listed as a commendation or recommendation in the ELIR 4 Outcome Reports.

Sector context

The PG student experience continues to emerge through the ELIR process as an area with elements of good practice and also areas in need of development within the Scottish HE sector. In 2016-17, QAA Scotland delivered '[PGR Student Experience](#)' as the annual Focus On topic, exploring: [training and support for PG students who teach](#); [support for staff who supervise PGR students](#); [building a research community for PGR students](#); and [student representation for PGR students](#). In January 2017, QAA Scotland published a [Thematic Report](#) on practice relating to the PG student experience that emerged in the ELIR 3 cycle. Four years on, the ELIR 4 cycle highlights that PG student experience continues to be a necessary focal point for institutional enhancement.

Rising numbers of both PGT and PGR students across the Scottish HE sector emphasises the continuing need to review and enhance the PG student experience at our institutions. Of the 18 institutions reviewed as part of ELIR 4, 72% saw an increase in overall PG student numbers since the ELIR 3 review cycle. Where Scottish institutions experienced a decrease in PG student numbers, the decrease in PG student population was under 5% since their previous ELIR. There is one institution which is an outlier with a more than 5% decrease in its PG student numbers.

By the end of the ELIR 3 cycle, 12 of the 18 Scottish higher education institutions reviewed had institutional or school/college-based Graduate Schools. While, in most cases, these Graduate Schools provided institutional or local oversight for the PG student experience, some operated wholly within a digital landscape, rather than in a physical space. Since the previous ELIR cycle, there has been a significant shift in the role and purpose of institutional Graduate Schools. 50% of the Scottish higher education institutions included in this report operate institutional Graduate Schools. All of these institutional Graduate Schools, with the exception of St Leonards Postgraduate College - an institutional Graduate School at the University of St Andrews - focus solely on oversight and community building for the PGR student community.

The operation of institution-wide Graduate Schools is also a more recent development. In ELIR 3, 67% of Scottish higher education institutions reported the introduction and operation of Graduate Schools. However, only 50% of those Graduate Schools were institutional - the remaining 50% operated at an individual academic college or school-level. ELIR 4 has recorded a significant shift in the introduction of institutional Graduate Schools. Since 2017, the University of Aberdeen and University of Strathclyde have both introduced institutional Graduate or Doctoral Schools, and the University of the West of Scotland restructured its Graduate School into an institutional Doctoral College. The value of a Graduate or Doctoral School lies in the centralisation of institutional efforts to oversee and support the PG student experience. The inherent benefit of centralised efforts to enhance the PG student experience has also been recognised by Heriot-Watt University and the University of Dundee, which reported, at the time of their ELIR, to be considering the introduction of institutional PGR-focused Graduate Schools. However, the 'PG student experience' also encompasses the experience of PGT students, who are not directly served by the move towards primarily PGR-focused Graduate Schools. The institutional ELIR 4 Outcome and Technical Reports considered within this report demonstrate that there is good practice within the sector for supporting the whole of the PG student experience, but that more needs to be done to ensure the consistency of support, representation, and learning and teaching opportunities provided to our PG student communities.

Commendations

A key function of the ELIR 4 Thematic Reports is to highlight the commendations identified by ELIR review teams as part of the ELIR 4 Outcome Reports. Three institutions received commendations in the area of PG student experience:

University of Dundee

PGR student experience: There is an excellent PGR student experience provided across the University, including monitoring which takes place at least twice-yearly through thesis monitoring committees, independent of the students' supervisor, and includes both academic progress and pastoral support needs. In addition, a range of imaginative support is available to students, such as the Thesis Bootcamp.

Edinburgh Napier University

Approach to monitoring postgraduate student academic progress: Since the 2015 ELIR, the University has developed a robust approach to overseeing individual PGR student academic progress, including the introduction of regular review meetings every six months involving an independent panel chair.

Queen Margaret University

Graduate School: The University has made significant enhancements to the role and operation of its Graduate School since the previous ELIR, including strengthening the research environment and attracting positive student feedback.

Recommendations

In contrast, 12 of Scotland's higher education institutions received recommendations in the area of PG student experience.

University of Aberdeen

Personal Tutoring: Continue to monitor its personal tutoring arrangements to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose, in the context of the University's changing student population. The University should progress its intention to extend personal tutoring for PGT students, including those studying online.

Postgraduate Research School: Continue work defining the role of the Postgraduate Research School and its relationship to the academic schools, enabling the University to ensure that all research students have an equivalent experience. The University is also asked to ensure that new PGR supervisors undertake the training provided by the University.

Preparation for Teaching: Ensure all new staff and PG students who teach and assess complete, as a minimum, the University's 'Learning and Teaching in HE' course before taking up teaching responsibilities.

University of Edinburgh

Training for PGR students who teach: Ensure effective implementation of its policy for the training and support of postgraduates who teach and ensure all PGR students are trained before engaging in teaching activities.

Edinburgh Napier University

PGR culture: In line with the strategic objective to enhance the research community and sense of belonging for postgraduate students, consider introducing a structured and longitudinal institution-wide induction, to include appropriate training and development. This recognises positive steps the University has taken to enhance the arrangement for monitoring students' academic progression.

Training for postgraduates who teach: Ensure that all PGR students (current and future) who teach, complete the mandatory course prior to commencing teaching.

Approach to institution-led review: Progress with the implementation of revisions to the institution-led review process which are likely to provide greater institutional oversight of the process and consistency in considering outcomes including ensuring that appropriate action is taken at an institutional level. The University is asked to ensure that the current institutional approach to reviewing postgraduate study considers more fully the wider student learning experience beyond student progression. There would also be benefit in the University ensuring it includes an appropriate level of externality and considering the extent to which the method will continue to be fit-for-purpose as PGR student numbers grow. In addition, the University is asked to establish a systematic and timely mechanism for reviewing the contribution of professional support services to the quality of the student experience.

University of Glasgow

Advising for PGT students: In view of differing models operating across the colleges, make certain that arrangements in place for advising PGT students are communicated clearly to students; in particular, identifying each student's designated adviser/advisory team at an early stage, as well as outlining the adviser role and responsibilities.

Annual monitoring of the PGR student experience: Ensure that the PGR student experience is monitored systematically and on a regular basis, in a manner comparable to the University's taught provision. This should enable the University to have an overview of the totality of the PGR student experience including student progression, student feedback, and student engagement with training and research skills provision.

University of the Highlands and Islands

Training for postgraduates who teach: Ensure that all current and future PGR students undertaking teaching roles, complete the University's standard training course prior to commencing teaching and that an appropriate monitoring mechanism is developed to ensure completion of this training is recorded and monitored to enable institutional oversight.

Heriot-Watt University

PGR student environment: Engage proactively and work in partnership with PGR students to identify ways to improve their sense of belonging in the university community and develop a consistent, institution-wide PGR student environment.

Queen Margaret University

Support for Graduate Teaching Assistants: Consider the benefit of implementing a centralised system for monitoring Graduate Teaching Assistants' completion of the skills development course provided to support them in their teaching.

Robert Gordon University

Training for postgraduate students who teach: By the start of academic session 2021-22, develop an effective oversight mechanism to ensure that all postgraduate students receive formal training before commencing teaching and assessment.

Scotland's Rural College

Using data to enhance the student experience: Recognising the progress made in improving business information, continue to enhance the range of data sets produced, analysed and reported on; ensuring this evidence informs monitoring and decision-making on all aspects of academic quality including enhancing the student experience. There would be considerable value in Scotland's Rural College working with its awarding institutions to ensure the institution has access to management data, particularly that related to its PGR students.

University of St Andrews

Oversight of PGRs who teach: Develop more effective oversight of the training and support provided at school level to PGRs who teach. The University has put in place clear guidance regarding the mandatory generic teaching training provided to PGR students, but schools are responsible for overseeing teaching and marking activity, and students report a variable experience in terms of the provision of guidance, support and workload management.

University of Stirling

Oversight of the PGR student experience: Review the current governance and reporting arrangements for the Institute for Advanced Studies to ensure these provide the University - in particular, the Academic Council - with appropriate and effective oversight of the totality of the PGR student experience including student progression and awards, student feedback, and student engagement with training and research skills provision.

Research supervisor training: In the context of its ambition, to grow PGR student numbers; as a matter of priority the University is asked to review and clarify its requirements for the training and ongoing development of PGR supervisors, ensuring these are clearly communicated to staff and that all supervisors (new and more established) have the opportunity to undertake these training and development requirements, and appropriate mechanisms are in place to ensure completion is recorded and monitored.

University of Strathclyde

Training for PGR students who teach: Ensure that all PGR students receive formal training before commencing teaching or assessing others. These arrangements, along with the facility to monitor attendance at training, should be introduced by the start of next academic session.

Institutional oversight and governance

The most common approach taken by Scottish higher education institutions to the oversight and governance of the PG experience is one which separates the PGT and PGR student experience and provision. Where the Technical Report included information about an institution's governance structures, a clear pattern has emerged. Institutional governance structures, as exemplified by Heriot-Watt University, University of St Andrews and the Glasgow School of Art (among others), manage the oversight of 'taught provision' as a single

entity, encompassing both the undergraduate (UG) and PGT experience, and manage research degrees separately. While there is an obvious value in utilising a consistent approach to the governance and management of an institution's taught provision, this approach perpetuates a divide between the PG student experience for taught and research students.

The two most common institutional approaches to the review and assurance of the quality of the PG student experience emphasise two institutional perspectives on the PG student experience: one in which there is more similarity between the undergraduate and PGT provisions than that of the PGR student experience; and one where the PG student experience is considered alongside the undergraduate taught provision. The University of the West of Scotland, Heriot-Watt University and the University of St Andrews operate institution-led review processes, which review the quality of all undergraduate and PG provision within the same process. Scotland's Rural College broadened its existing institution-led review process to include a distinct review of the PGR student provision in 2018-19. The broadening of their review process to include this dedicated review was praised by the ELIR 4 review team. The two recommendations relating to institution-led review of the PGR experience, received by Edinburgh Napier University and the University of Glasgow, emphasise the need for institutions to operate clear, systematic and comprehensive reviews of the PGR student learning journey.

Induction

Whether at an undergraduate or PG level, institutional support for students transitioning into university studies has been a long-held area of positive practice within the Scottish higher education sector. The ELIR 4 cycle demonstrates that developing robust induction programmes, specifically tailored to the needs of PGT and PGR students, has been a sector-wide priority since the previous ELIR cycle. Effective frameworks of induction provide institutions with the flexibility to ensure that a diverse PG student population receives consistent information about the skills required to effectively engage with their studies and the institutional support available to them.

The length of time of the induction programme does not necessarily indicate whether it is successful - instead, emerging positive practice is to develop flexible induction activities that students can engage with through different modes (in person or remotely) and at different times (specifically different entry dates). The University of St Andrews launched a PG pre-arrival Transitions Toolkit in 2019 to supplement their existing induction provision. The Transitions Toolkit is designed to develop students' appreciation of the learning environment prior to arrival and to reflect on their approaches to learning. The University of Dundee's Academic Skills Centre (ASC) delivers a four-day induction event for PG students - 'Gateway to Postgraduate Study' - which focuses on academic culture, research skills and writing. An abridged one-day version of the event is available online and accessible to all students, regardless of entry date. PGR students at Scotland's Rural College receive inductions from their awarding institution, as well as their research group and the institutional PG Office. Scotland's Rural College also delivers online induction modules to supplement the in-person programme. The main student induction programme is delivered in October each year to support the majority of new research students. However, additional sessions are available for students starting at different dates within the academic year. Similarly, Glasgow Caledonian University delivers a one-day induction programme for all PGR students, which is offered three times per academic year. The University also provided support for PGR students at its London campus to travel to Glasgow to attend induction.

Where institutions are undertaking improvements to their PG induction programmes, the need for flexibility of delivery, consistency in the information provided to students, and clear messaging about the training was emphasised. Heriot-Watt University continues to improve

the induction provided to PGR students through a redesign of its induction programme. The University also acknowledged that better communication was needed to ensure that the difference between university, school and campus inductions was clear to students. Scotland's Rural College continues to enhance its induction arrangements for PGR students following feedback which indicated that students found the complexities of PhD studentships challenging to understand. Induction programmes offer universities an opportunity to provide clear and consistent messaging about the PG experience within their institution and the support available to students. It appears from the ELIR 4 Technical Reports that flexibility in the mode of delivery of these induction programmes is becoming increasingly common practice within the sector but, given the timespan of the ELIR 4 cycle, may also have been positively influenced by Scottish Universities' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be interesting to follow up in subsequent review cycles on the longer-term development of practice here.

Learning and teaching

The distinctiveness of PGT and PGR study, and thus their student cohorts, necessitates an intentional approach to community building within a university. Developing a sense of belonging within a PG academic community is particularly challenging for PGT students, who are often undertaking their studies on a single-year programme. The sector's move to PGR-focused Graduate Schools (or Doctoral Colleges/School) is likely to have resulted in a move away from a distinctive 'PG community' to a 'taught community' and a 'research community', the latter bringing together PGR students and academic staff. The University of the West of Scotland, University of Strathclyde and Queen Margaret University each use their Graduate School (or Doctoral College/School) to promote a PGR student community, through tailored events, training and resources. While this approach will have been a positive step in fostering a coherent 'research community' within institutions, it may have also negatively impacted the sense of belonging of PGT students within the institutional 'PG community'. Students at Abertay University and the University of Edinburgh shared with ELIR 4 review teams that they did not feel a sense of community among PG students. It is important to note that these students communicated that they knew that they could attend events at their institutional Graduate School but did not feel included within the Graduate School community.

There are different institutional strategies used across the sector to support the development of PG student communities, each with their own merits. Heriot-Watt University has encouraged and supported its student-led PG student society to foster a sense of community among its PGT and PGR students. The University of St Andrews' St Leonards College operates as an institutional Graduate School for PGT and PGR students, providing the same access to events, resources and support for all of its PG student community. In contrast, the University of Stirling has devolved responsibility for PGT students to its academic faculties, and the PGT faculty officers - who are student representatives - are significantly involved in community building within their faculty. There is not one single approach to fostering a sense of belonging or community among PG students, nor should there be. However, it is important that institutions continue to ensure that effective mechanisms are in place to support them to continually review and evaluate their approaches to community building, ensuring that both PGT and PGR students are provided with appropriate support to enhance their student experience during their studies and that students have the opportunity to influence further enhancements.

ELIR 4, like its predecessor, has emphasised the value of a clear and consistent institutional approach to the supervision of PGR students, which is effectively communicated to staff and students. The membership of supervisory teams differs greatly based on the institution. There are some examples, such as at Scotland's Rural College and Glasgow Caledonian University, of the consistent use of supervisory teams of two or more staff members. Another

approach, based on the operation of a one-to-one supervisory relationship, can be found at other institutions, including the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the University of Aberdeen. Often, institutions that operate one-to-one supervisory relationships provide PGR students with a mentor, who provides pastoral support for the student. ELIR teams reflected the need for institutions to have a single, consistent approach to supervision across an institution, which is effectively and well understood by students and staff, in order to support a coherent and equitable PGR student experience.

A consistent institutional approach to supervision of PGR students can most commonly be seen through the provision of comprehensive training for new and experienced PGR supervisors. In ELIR 3, 'areas for development' in the training of PGR supervisors focused on the implementation of new and review of existing institutional training programmes to provide appropriate support for new and experienced PGR supervisors. While ELIR 4 reviewers noted that there had been considerable enhancements developed to support new and experienced PGR supervisors, many encouraged institutions to continue to improve their training provision. ELIR review teams encouraged institutions with regular, centrally-delivered and mandatory training programmes for new and experienced PGR supervisors, like Scotland's Rural College and Glasgow Caledonian University, to continue with their approach. Several institutions, including the University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, University of Aberdeen, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, and the University of Edinburgh, were encouraged to review some or all of their training provision for PGR supervisors to ensure consistency of support or oversight across the institution. A consistent institutional approach to supervisory training ensures that all supervisors, regardless of experience, are provided with up-to-date information about the expectations for PGR supervision and support to undertake the role of a PGR supervisor.

ELIR 4 emphasised that effective progression monitoring is integral to supporting PG students through to the completion of their studies. The monitoring of progression and completion rates for PGT students is commonly considered alongside those of UG students due to the significant taught components of these programmes. Given the distinctiveness of PGR degrees, institutional approaches to the monitoring of PGR student progression frequently differs greatly from the structures for monitoring taught programmes. Most institutions require PGR students and supervisors to retain an online record of supervisory meetings. Online platforms, such as 'My PGR' at the University of the West of Scotland and 'Research Compass' at the University of Stirling, are used to retain records of supervisory meetings in addition to flagging identified training and development needs.

The annual or biannual review of PGR student progress by a panel of staff members external to their supervisory team is the most common institutional approach used by the sector. The benefits of the externality of these progress review panels were articulated by students at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, outlining the academic rigour of the process and the value of the feedback that they received. The University of Dundee and Edinburgh Napier University's progression monitoring processes include a six-monthly meeting between a monitoring committee/panel and every PGR student. The University of St Andrews and the University of the Highlands and Islands hold annual review meetings with individual PGR students to monitor progress. The ELIR 4 reports confirm that regular progress monitoring meetings are used by all institutions to explore the effectiveness of the student-supervisor relationship, evaluate student progress, and provide pastoral support as required. ELIR review teams reflected that clear communication of the purpose of the progression monitoring process is essential to ensuring that students can effectively contribute to discussions about their academic progress and wider student experience.

Support

There are many institutional support mechanisms for PG students to access pastoral support used across the sector. All of Scotland's HEIs operate central student support services teams, which provide comprehensive support to UG and PG students in line with institutional strategy. Additionally, the ELIR reports confirm that most institutions also offer centralised support tailored to the PG student experience. The University of St Andrews' Wellbeing Working Group identified PG wellbeing as a strategic focus. As a result, PG students can now access pastoral support from the institutional PG Wellbeing Adviser and Coach and a Mental Health Development Worker. All PG students also have access to a non-academic mentoring scheme. Robert Gordon University's expansion of online student support services resulted in increased PGT student access to support, particularly Graduate Apprentices, international and online students, and those who are also in employment. PG students at the University of Stirling spoke highly of the value of the institution's careers and counselling services, and the learning disability support provided.

In addition to the student support services delivered by central institutional teams, most institutions also operate a 'personal tutor scheme' for PGT students. The role of a 'personal tutor' varies by institution but is most commonly focused on academic advice and guidance, and signposting to institutional support services as necessary. All UG and PGT students at the University of Dundee, Heriot-Watt University, Robert Gordon University, the University of the Highlands and Islands, the University of Glasgow, and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland are allocated personal tutors. The University of Aberdeen acknowledged that the current institutional personal tutor scheme does not extend to all PGT students.

A consistent institutional approach to advising PGT students, which is often delivered through a 'personal tutor scheme', is likely to offer a number of advantages in ensuring that students receive accurate information and appropriate support for their circumstances. In 2020, Heriot-Watt University made significant revisions to their 'personal tutor scheme', developing a single SharePoint site with resources for staff and students. The development of this single set of resources resulted in greater consistency in the operation of the scheme by defining minimum points of contact and specifying the allowed forms of interaction during the closure of university buildings at different campuses due to COVID-19. In addition, the University introduced mandatory training for all personal tutors, supported by a handbook and the new SharePoint site. The University of the Highlands and Islands has an embedded personal tutor scheme, which serves both UG and PGT levels. The role of a personal tutor is to signpost students to services for support, advise on the academic programme and study methods, and support the production of a personal development plan. Each student is contacted by their personal tutor at least once per semester and the staff providing this support have access to online resources and training through a development day. Where schools/colleges/faculties have devolved responsibility for the allocation and monitoring of 'personal tutor' schemes, the ELIR reports indicate there can be variability in the quality of the provision of support and advice across an institution, as seen at the University of Edinburgh and Robert Gordon University.

Unlike UG and PGT students, the ELIR 4 reports confirm that, across the sector, PGR students are not allocated a 'personal tutor', as academic advice and guidance, and signposting pastoral care falls within the remit of a PGR supervisor or supervisory team. PGR students can access support through institutions' central Student Support Services teams.

Academic and professional skills development

All of Scotland's HEIs offer their PG student community opportunities to develop their academic and professional skills. Skills training for PG students are often provided by a dedicated professional services team or by the institutional Graduate School, where one exists. These training opportunities can be broad, focusing on developing both PGT and PGR students, or specific, supporting the professional development of PGR students. Examples of skills development and training for the whole PG community can be found across the Scottish HE sector. The University of Dundee's Academic Skills Centre (ASC) offers a broad range of advice, support and academic skills training for PG students. ASC offers PG students a four-day event - Gateway to PG Study - focusing on academic culture, research skills and writing. There is also a one-day abridged version available online and accessible to all students. The University of St Andrew's Centre for Educational Enhancement and Development (CEED) delivers a range of skills development programmes available to PGT students. The University also employs a joint Careers-CEED Officer role to support developmental skills training and advice primarily focused on science subjects. The design and delivery of PG-specific skills development is integral to support PG students, specifically PGT students, to effectively transition through and out of their academic studies.

There are a variety of institutionally delivered and supported skills development opportunities provided to PGR students studying at Scotland's universities. It is common practice for PGR students to be provided with support to engage in professional development opportunities, including presenting at conferences or workshops, and writing journal articles. These opportunities can be provided by an institution, by a student-led initiative or sector organisation. PG students at the University of Aberdeen can contribute to *Granite*, a PG interdisciplinary journal, giving them the opportunity to publish their work and gain experience of the publishing process. Heriot-Watt University's Research Futures Academy launched the Research Culture Grant in 2019 to fund student and postdoctoral-led initiatives to enhance research culture at the University, funding a range of projects such as a Data Club and the development of culture in academia for female researchers. Edinburgh Napier University's Research and Innovation Office provides training and development courses for research students and early career researchers on topics including thesis writing, building positive relationships with research supervisors and the supervisory team, project managing the PhD, the viva experience and stress management.

Some institutions have also developed formal structures for recognising the professional development activity of their PGR students. The University of Strathclyde expects all PGR students to undertake the PG Certificate in Researcher Professional Development. Similarly, in 2016-17, Queen Margaret University developed a 60-credit, SCQF Level 12 Certificate in Researcher Enhancement and Development, which recognises PGR student engagement with activities that support their doctoral studies. PGR students are automatically enrolled on the programme in the first year of their doctoral studies but can choose to withdraw from the programme with the agreement of their supervisory team and the Head of the Graduate School. The formal recognition of the professional development activity expected of PGR students during their studies, through the award of a PG Certificate, is an innovative approach to supporting the enhancement of the PG student experience.

The provision and monitoring of appropriate supports for PGR students who teach continues to be a sector-wide concern. The term 'postgraduates who teach' is a catch-all term often used to describe students who take on roles as 'Graduate Teaching Assistants' or similar. The function and title of these roles vary across, and even within, institutions. In ELIR 3, eight of the 18 institutions reviewed received a recommendation in this area - these included recommendations to introduce and/or monitor the completion of mandatory training for PGs who teach. It is striking, then, to note that this area received the largest number of recommendations, relating to PG students, in ELIR 4; eight of 18 institutions reviewed

received a recommendation in this area. Four of the institutions who received a recommendation for PG students who teach in ELIR 4 received a similar recommendation in ELIR 3. The focus of the recommendations to these four institutions shifted from implementation of training and support to effective monitoring of the completion of training.

As the ELIR 4 Technical Reports demonstrate, the institutional delivery of mandatory training for PGs who teach is important to assure and enhance the quality of the teaching, assessment and feedback delivered by PG students. In addition, there are clear benefits to institutions in retaining an accurate record of students' completion of this training before commencing with any teaching duties. Examples of existing mandatory institutional training courses for PGs who teach can be found at the University of Glasgow, the University of Dundee, the Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, the University of St Andrews, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University and the University of Stirling. The duration of these training programmes differed significantly with some lasting for one day, as seen at Robert Gordon University, and others, like that of Queen Margaret University, lasting for a week.

Representation

Student partnership is a key component of Scotland's approach to the enhancement of the student experience. An effective PG student representative structure is important in fostering and enhancing the PG student experience. Due to the distinctive nature of the PGT and PGR degrees, the ELIR 4 reports indicate that there are two styles of PG student representative structure used in the Scottish higher education sector. One approach, utilised by Scotland's Rural College, the University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, the University of St Andrews, the University of Stirling and the University of Edinburgh, combines UG and PG representative systems, supported by the institution's students' association/union. For example, the University of Glasgow's Student Representative Council (SRC) has a governing body comprised of four student Sabbatical Officers, four UG College Convenors, four PG College Convenors, the PG (research) Convenor, nine Welfare and Equal Opportunities Officers, four General Student Representatives, two First-Year Representatives, and 19 School Representatives who represent the students of their particular school or research institute. Similarly, the University of Stirling's student representative system, supported by the University of Stirling Students' Union, is made up of three tiers: Sabbatical Officers, Faculty Officers (both UG and PG), and module/programme representatives. Including both UG and PG representation in the same institutional student representative structures should enable the development and maintenance of a single, consistent institutional approach to student engagement, representation and feedback.

The second approach to PG student representation, which can be found at Robert Gordon University, Queen Margaret University and Abertay University, is to operate a student representative system that includes UG and PGT student representation, supported by the students' association/union, and a second, distinct student representative system for PGR students supported by the institutional Graduate School (or a similar association). Queen Margaret University's Doctoral Candidates' Association operates independently from the Students' Union. It includes four appointed co-chairs who represent the interests of PGR students and are members of the Graduate School Academic Board, Research Strategy Committee and the Student Experience Committee. At Abertay University, PGR students are represented by school-based Research Degree Representatives who are members of the University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee and interface with the University's Graduate School. Additionally, PGR students are encouraged to contribute to the biannual Graduate School Forum. The value of operating two distinct student representative systems - one with a focus on taught degrees and the other on research degrees - is that it enables greater focus on the issues that are unique to each style of programme and type of student. However, it is important to ensure that there are equivalent

opportunities for students to raise concerns and issues regardless of whether they are PGT or PGR students and that these opportunities for feedback and representation are clearly communicated and signposted.

Across the ELIR 4 cycle, it seems both institutional approaches to PG student representation ensure that PG student representatives are supported to actively engage in relevant academic governance committees and structures. The ELIR 4 reports also indicate that PG students represent their own cohort's interests as members of institutional academic governance committees across the Scottish higher education sector. At Edinburgh Napier University, PGT and PGR student representatives are members of the institutional Research and Innovation Committee, and the Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Student Experience Committee. Similarly, two PG student representatives are members of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Research Degree Committee. It is important that universities and students' associations/unions continue to work in partnership to support PG students to represent their interests by providing effective, robust training on committee membership and representation. QAA Scotland would encourage any institutions and students' associations/unions who intend to enhance this area to contact student partnerships in quality Scotland (sparqs) for support.

In addition to working with student representatives, the use of sector-wide surveys, such as the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is the most common institutional approach to gathering feedback from PG students on their learning experience. Where universities do not use PTES or PRES, alternative forms of feedback gathering, through module evaluation or internal student satisfaction surveys, have been used to understand the PG student experience. Abertay University, the University of Aberdeen, the University of the West of Scotland, and Glasgow Caledonian University have developed internal institutional surveys to replace their use of PTES. Both the University of the West of Scotland and Glasgow Caledonian University noted that their internal PG surveys were intended to be similar to the PTES to allow continued sector benchmarking. Heriot-Watt University introduced an internal survey of the PGR experience to replace its use of PRES. The gathering of student feedback, through engagement with student representatives and survey mechanisms, is a positive and established sector-wide approach to supporting the enhancement of PG student experience.

Conclusions and further enhancement

Given the strategic aims of many Scottish universities, the enhancement of the PG student experience remains a continuing priority for the sector. ELIR 4 served to highlight several key areas where institutions can focus strategic, policy and practical efforts to support the ongoing development and enhancement of the PG student experience. The following are reflective questions to support institutional review of the PG student experience:

- 1 **Sense of belonging:** What is your institutional approach to developing and fostering a sense of community and belonging with PG student cohorts? What support do you provide both PGT and PGR students to build a sense of community?
- 2 **Induction:** How do you ensure that PG students are receiving consistent information about the skills required to effectively engage with their studies and the institutional support available to them? How can institutional induction programmes be tailored to support the PG student experience?
- 3 **Supervision:** What training is made available to new and experienced PGR supervisors at a local (subject-area) level and at an institutional level? How do subject areas monitor and record the completion of necessary supervisor training?

- 4 **PGR progression monitoring:** Does your institution have a consistent approach to the monitoring of PGR student progression across all subject areas? How can PGR progression monitoring processes at your institution be used as an effective opportunity to identify appropriate and necessary support for students to successfully complete their studies?
- 5 **Personal tutors:** How might your existing institutional approach to advising PGT students need to change to ensure that students receive accurate information and appropriate support for their circumstances. How could the effectiveness of these changes be reviewed and monitored?
- 6 **Postgraduate students who teach:** How does your institution ensure that PG students who teach are receiving appropriate institutional and subject-area specific training? How do you monitor students' completion of required training before they commence with any teaching duties? What role do PG students who teach have in the regular review and enhancement of institutional training?
- 7 **Student representation:** What role does your institution play in the provision of effective, robust training to PG students on committee membership and representation? Are there other opportunities where the institution can work in partnership with the students' association/union to support PG student representatives?

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18 Bothwell Street, Glasgow G2 6NU
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Tel: 0141 572 3420

Website: www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland