

University of St Andrews

MARCH 2006

Enhancement-led institutional review

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE.

To do this, QAA carries out reviews of individual higher education institutions (HEIs) (universities and colleges of HE). In Scotland this process is known as Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR). The Agency operates equivalent but separate processes in Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

Enhancement-led approach

Over the period 2001 to 2003, QAA, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, Universities Scotland and representatives of the student body worked closely together on the development of the enhancement-led approach to quality in Scottish HE. This approach, which was implemented in academic year 2003-04, has five main elements:

- a comprehensive programme of review at the subject level, managed by the institutions
- improved forms of public information about quality, based on addressing the different needs of the users of that information including students and employers
- a greater voice for student representatives in institutional quality systems, supported by a national development service (known as the student participation in quality scotland - sparqs - service);
- a national programme of enhancement themes, aimed at developing and sharing good practice in learning and teaching in HE
- ELIR involving all of the Scottish HEIs over a four-year period, from 2003-04 to 2006-07. The ELIR method embraces a focus on: the strategic management of enhancement; the effectiveness of student learning; and student, employer and international perspectives.

QAA believes that this approach is distinctive in a number of respects: its balance between quality assurance and enhancement; the emphasis it places on the student experience; its focus on learning and not solely teaching; and the spirit of cooperation and partnership which has underpinned all these developments.

Nationally agreed reference points

ELIR includes a focus on institutions' use of a range of reference points, including those published by QAA:

- the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- *Guidelines on preparing programme specifications*, which are descriptions of what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. Programme specifications outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the SCQF.

Conclusions and judgement within ELIR

ELIR results in a set of commentaries about the institutions being reviewed. These commentaries relate to:

- the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards at the level of the programme or award. This commentary leads to a judgement on the level of confidence which can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The expression of this judgement provides a point of tangency between the ELIR method and other review methods operating in other parts of the UK. The judgement is expressed as one of: broad confidence, limited confidence or no confidence
- the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair
- the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students
- the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning
- the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement.

The ELIR process

The ELIR process is carried out by teams comprising three academics, one student and one senior administrator drawn from the HE sector.

The main elements of ELIR are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution in advance of the review visit
- a Reflective Analysis document submitted by the institution three months in advance of the second part of the review visit
- a two-part review visit to the institution by the ELIR team; Part 1 taking place five weeks before Part 2, and Part 2 having a variable duration of between three and five days depending on the complexity of matters to be explored
- the publication of a report, 20 weeks after the Part 2 visit, detailing the commentaries agreed by the ELIR team.

The evidence for the ELIR

In order to gather the information on which its commentaries are based, the ELIR team carries out a number of activities including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, as well as the Reflective Analysis institutions prepare especially for ELIR
- asking questions and engaging in discussions with groups of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the national reference points.

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Introduction

1 This is the report of an enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) of the University of St Andrews (the University) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). QAA is grateful to the University for the willing cooperation provided to the ELIR team.

2 The review followed a method agreed with Universities-Scotland, student bodies and the Scottish Funding Council for Higher and Further Education (SFC), and informed by consultation with the Scottish higher education sector. The ELIR method focuses on: the strategic management of enhancement; the effectiveness of student learning; and the use of a range of reference points. These reference points include: the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)*, the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, subject benchmark information, and student, employer and international perspectives. Full detail on the method is set out in the *Handbook for enhancement-led institutional review: Scotland* which is available on the QAA website.

Method of review

3 The University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA) which provided the focus for the review and set out the institution's strategy for quality enhancement, its approach to the management of quality and standards and its view of the effectiveness of its approach. Other documents available to the ELIR team included the institutional profile at February 2006, a class representatives pack and guides for students produced by the Students' Association, Prospectuses for 2006, the 1999 QAA Continuation Audit report, and QAA subject review reports relating to the University's provision. The University also provided a CD-ROM containing the supplementary documents which had been referred to in the RA including strategy documents, committee papers, and staff and student handbooks.

4 The University submitted three case studies with its RA:

- Innovative pedagogic developments in the School of Classics, which illustrated a number of flexible learning initiatives, each led by a member of staff (three of them probationary staff) and supported by the University's central learning and teaching unit, SALTIRE.
- The extension of creative writing courses in the School of English showing how the taught postgraduate programme had led to the development of undergraduate modules, activities in the community and a new module entitled 'Speeches and Speechwriting'.
- The degree programmes in Sustainable Development launched in 2004 which had pioneered an interdisciplinary approach to programme design at the University involving ten schools and developed largely as a result of student demand.

5 The University's preparation for ELIR was led by the Quality Enhancement Steering Group. The RA was drafted by a subcommittee of the Group, with the final version being informed by comments from the University Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC) and the Academic Council. The student sabbatical officer, Director of Representation, was a member of the Group and was involved in the preparation of the RA. The clear, open and engaging nature of the RA provided a very helpful starting point for the review.

6 The ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 15 and 16 February 2006 and the Part 2 visit took place between 20 and 24 March 2006.

7 The Part 1 visit opened with a short informal introduction to the Principal, senior staff and student sabbatical officers. This was followed by a series of informative presentations chaired by the Principal and delivered in front of an audience of staff and students. The Principal outlined the University's vision, including plans for the development of the estate and the continuing enhancement of its

research-led teaching portfolio, in particular the expansion of postgraduate programmes. The President of the Students' Association outlined the key aspects of student life at the University, emphasising the partnership enjoyed by students with academic staff. Subsequent presentations focussed on the three case studies and a range of matters including: the University's quality enhancement strategy; the central support for enhancing learning and teaching; the opportunities available for staff development, including that to support the use of the University's chosen virtual learning environment (VLE); and study skills and mathematics support for students. The morning ended with a short question and answer session. In addition to the scheduled presentations, the University provided a range of learning and teaching-related exhibits which were available during a break.

8 The ELIR team had three further meetings during Part 1 with groups of senior staff, student representatives, and staff involved in recent internal reviews at the subject level. These meetings enabled the team to identify a number of topics for further development including: the University's strategic priorities; committee structures and management roles and responsibilities; the opportunities and barriers to cross-University development and consistency of practice; the quality enhancement strategy; the nature and effectiveness of student representation; the students' experience of assessment; employability; the impact of the national enhancement agenda on the quality assurance and enhancement processes; the use of external reference points; and the development of assessment policy and practice.

9 During the Part 1 visit, the University made available a set of documentation which had been identified within the RA and a small amount of supplementary information that was identified during the course of the visit. This enabled the ELIR team to develop a programme of meetings and to identify a targeted set of documentation for the Part 2 visit in order to provide a representative view of the University's approach to assuring and enhancing quality, and maintaining the standards of its awards.

10 The ELIR team comprised: Professor Graham Chesters, Mr Tim Cobbett, Professor Monica Shaw and Dr Andrew Walker (reviewers), and Ms Joanna Morrow (review secretary). The review was coordinated on behalf of the Agency by Ms Ailsa Crum, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

Background information about the institution

11 The University, founded in 1413, is the oldest university in Scotland and one of the smallest in the UK. Its mission statement is 'As an avowedly research-intensive institution, the University of St Andrews is committed to delivering research and educational outputs of the highest international standard whose impact in the Humanities, Social Sciences, Science and Medicine will ensure that, during the forthcoming planning period, it remains Scotland's leading university and retains and improves its position among the top 10 United Kingdom universities and enhances its position among the world's top universities.'

12 The University has stated that much of its character has been shaped by its location in the town of St Andrews on the coast of rural Fife. The University's staff and students constitute more than one-third of the town's total population. In 2004-5 the University had 6,841 matriculated students, of whom 1,053 were postgraduate (both taught and research). Part-time students constitute around 2% of the total. The student population is drawn in almost equal one-third portions from Scotland, the rest of the UK and overseas, particularly from North America. In 2004-05, the University had 1,846 staff of whom 704 were academic and research based.

13 The University is organised around four faculties - Arts, Divinity, Sciences and Medicine - and eighteen schools. The schools are the key structural unit in the delivery of learning and teaching and each holds its own budget.

Institution's strategy for quality enhancement

14 The University's quality enhancement strategy is structured around the SFC vision for higher education in Scotland, to deliver a University:

- that is flexible, accessible and responsive to the needs of learners and society
- that encourages and stimulates learners to achieve their full potential
- where learning and teaching promote the employability of students
- where learning, teaching and scholarship are highly regarded and appropriately resourced
- where there is a culture of continuous enhancement of quality, which is informed by and contributes to international developments.

Internal monitoring and review

Overview of the institution's internal arrangements for assuring the quality of programmes and maintaining the standards of its academic awards and credit

Structures, roles and responsibilities

15 The University stated that, through its current committee structures, there is 'explicit and effective linkage of quality assurance, quality enhancement, policies and practice'.

16 The Senatus Academicus is the supreme academic body of the University under the presidency of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal. The Academic Council, which is formally a committee of Senate, is the committee with the most operational authority and the RA stated that all academic business is ultimately ratified by it. It is convened by the Principal and its membership includes the Master, who oversees the strategic development, planning and management of academic activities, the two academic vice-principals, the deans and the heads of school.

17 The University identifies the main committee with responsibility for quality assurance as the Academic Audit Committee (AAC) which was described in the RA as 'guardian of quality and standards'. AAC reports directly to the University Court. The University explained that this separation of academic audit from other academic business was intended to keep the audit function distinct from those bodies that establish and operate the policy and procedures being audited. In recognition of the fundamental importance of AAC's business to the Academic Council and Senate, the AAC convener, currently the Deputy Principal, presents its Minutes to the Academic Council for consideration and comment. The AAC convener also makes a report to the TLAC.

18 The University established its TLAC following the 1999 QAA Continuation Audit, in part response to the report's concerns about a lack of consistency in academic policy across the faculties. TLAC replaced the previously separate faculty councils and, the RA stated, it ensures that all schools are involved, simultaneously, in the formation of academic policy. TLAC is convened by the Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching (VPLT) and its membership nominally includes the heads of school although, in practice, the school directors of teaching fulfil that role. There are three faculty business committees: Arts & Divinity, Medicine and Science. They are convened by the deans and are responsible for the routine business of the faculties, as well as being able to propose new policies for consideration by TLAC. Their membership is constituted to share knowledge and understanding of faculty processes widely among the relevant schools.

19 The VPLT has primary responsibility for all matters relating to learning and teaching and is part of the Principal's Office. The VPLT supports the work of the AAC and the Director of Learning and Teaching Quality in all matters of learning, teaching and quality assurance. The focus of the VPLT role was described to the ELIR team as being on quality enhancement, although the heads of school recognised the

VPLT as being 'ultimately responsible' for quality assurance. The VPLT also convenes two further groups that influence TLAC: the first with a strong operational flavour, a TLAC Steering Group which meets before and after each TLAC meeting to track actions; the second with a more deliberative function, a Cross-Faculty Consultative Group (CFCG) which considers, for example, guidance notes and suggestions from the deans and heads of school. CFCG membership consists of the four deans, and the Academic Registrar. There was evidence in the recent documentation supplied to the team that this latter group was increasingly active in promoting consistency of policy and practice across the University.

20 The VPLT is supported by four deans of faculty, two of whom (the Deans of Arts and Science) have particular and distinctive responsibilities in the areas of quality assurance, as well as enhancement and student progress. Formerly elected by the faculties but, in a recent change, now appointed by the Principal, these two deans play a significant role both in translating University policy for schools and representing schools' interests at University level. These two deans are clearly positioned both to influence corporate policies and to encourage their adoption in the schools. The ELIR team was able to confirm, through instances where the deans were authors of significant policy documents relating to important aspects of maintaining academic standards (for example, on assessment and on the mapping of grades), that they exercised this influence to good effect. Their membership of key committees and groups such as the AAC, TLAC, the TLAC Steering Group and the CFCG, together with their recent inclusion within the Principals' Office, suggested to the team that the Deans of Arts and Science will increasingly play a more authoritative corporate role in quality assurance.

21 The deans work closely with the heads of school who are managers of autonomous academic units working within what the RA described as a broad 'regulatory framework'. Their quality assurance role, secondary to that

of the dean, is courteously worded in their role descriptions and seems largely one of encouragement and responding to requests. While schools continue to protect their autonomy, it was clear to the ELIR team from its discussions with the heads of school that they do in fact consider themselves responsible for quality assurance and, especially within the Annual Academic Audit process, are expected to 'justify actions' through an annual personal engagement with the review of their school's learning and teaching (see below, paragraph 27).

22 The University's central learning and teaching unit, SALTIRE [St Andrews Learning and Teaching: Innovation, Review, Enhancement], (created in 2001) and the Registry (under the leadership of a relatively new post of Academic Registrar) are two central agencies that provide support to both quality assurance and quality enhancement. The former, particularly through the Director of Learning & Teaching Quality, plays a significant role in academic audit processes. The latter, particularly its Academic Policy section, supports TLAC and its sub-committees, faculty business committees and the development of policy documents and regulations.

23 It was clear to the ELIR team that changes made by the University to its committee and management structures have substantially enhanced consistency of practice in the area of quality assurance and brought greater balance between a central framework and school autonomy. Heads of school emphasised the extent to which consistency has been enhanced through the establishment of TLAC and how the school directors of teaching are able to act collectively as well as voice the particular concerns of the autonomous schools. This taken with a range of other developments, the important role played by the VPLT, the growing significance of the deans' role in quality assurance, the creation of SALTIRE, the appointment of an Academic Registrar to oversee a single, unified support service, and the energetic work of the CFCG, serves to emphasise the greater institutional oversight of academic policy and practice.

Internal approval, monitoring and review

Approval

24 The RA emphasised that all teaching staff share a responsibility for quality and standards and that most module and programme changes originate with individual staff. At the University level, all proposals for new programmes or modules are considered by school teaching committees, and require formal approval by the head of school before being scrutinised by the relevant faculty business committee. All proposals are circulated between the deans for comment and are published on the University intranet in order to encourage comments from outside the originating school. Complex proposals, such as those involving institutional collaboration, are also considered by the CFCG. The University's guidance on new programme/module proposals states that proposals cannot be submitted for consideration by TLAC unless external approval has been given and been attached in the form of a report. Having completed these steps, TLAC considers proposals and recommends them, where appropriate, for approval to the Academic Council.

25 New taught postgraduate proposals have an additional layer of scrutiny through the Principal's Office where a formal business plan is evaluated in order to assure the University of the sustainability of the programme. As the University seeks to expand its offering of taught postgraduate programmes, this additional process is a way of securing institutional oversight of the portfolio as a whole.

26 The University's arrangements for module and programme approval are generally secure. In order that the University can satisfy itself that there is no conflict with other aspects of the external examiners' role, there may be benefit in it considering the role of the external examiner in approving, as opposed to advising on, new proposals.

Annual Academic Audit

27 The RA explained that the Annual Academic Audit process had evolved in

response to the University's own evaluation of the form audit should take as well as in response to external stimuli. In the current arrangements, schools produce an Annual Academic Audit report in November which reviews all teaching and assessment relating to the previous academic session. The University's web-based Quality Assurance Handbook contains guidelines for writing these reports which include statistical information on student performance (provided by the Registry), a module by module analysis, summary information based on student evaluations and a detailed commentary by the head of school. In January, the full Academic Audit Committee interviews the head of school and the school director of teaching, using the report as a focus for exploring issues relating to quality assurance processes, quality enhancement and their interconnections. The AAC secretary takes detailed minutes of the interviews and the AAC produces an overview of the whole process annually.

28 Since 2003-04, the AAC has moved to interviewing a sample of the heads of school each year, with the proviso that each head will be interviewed at least once every two years.

29 From all the documentation, it is clear the process is rigorous, comprising a persuasive blend of self-reflection, inferences drawn from statistical analysis and dialogue. The Academic Audit Committee evaluates the operation of the audit process and has taken action to address the points it has identified, such as variability in the quality of the school reports. The ELIR team recognised the general effectiveness of the audit process, and the AAC's role, in promoting self-reflection within the schools and in informing the University on the maintenance of academic standards, and the assurance and enhancement of quality.

Internal reviews of learning and teaching

30 The University operates Internal Reviews of Learning and Teaching (IRLT) on a five or six year cycle. The RA indicated that the process had been modified in recent years to include a student as a full member of the IRLT team, to lengthen the review visit from one to two days

and to involve a second external assessor on the IRLT team.

31 The operation of the IRLT process is set out in the University's Guidance for Reviewers. This important document explains how IRLT is modelled on the former QAA Subject Review methodology, focusing on the academic standards of the awards, the quality of the learning opportunities, and the management of quality and standards. A self-evaluation document (SED), drawing on accumulated data and the Annual Academic Audit process, is provided in advance and is supported by programme specifications. These documents are intended to address external reference points including the SCQF, subject benchmark statements, and the *Code of practice*, published by QAA.

32 Based upon the SED, the IRLT team undertakes an intensive programme of interviews with teaching and support staff, as well as with students. These dialogues form the basis of what the RA described as a 'factual report', by which is meant an accurate record of the essence of the review dialogues. A second, more evaluative report is produced by the external assessors in which there is an explicit statement that there is reason to have confidence in the academic standards of the awards made in that subject area. The subject area under review is invited to make a written response to the evaluative report.

33 Since 2002, the AAC has conducted reviews, along similar lines to the IRLT process, of those central support services which are most clearly linked to the delivering of learning and teaching, such as the Library or Student Support Services. This is a positive development which is likely to aid the extent to which the University can evaluate the learning and teaching experience offered to students.

34 The University provided the ELIR team with copies of several IRLT SEDs, and IRLT reports, both factual and evaluative. From this evidence and through discussions with academic staff, it is clear that IRLT is a respected and productive process. The team nevertheless shared some of

the reservations expressed by one group of staff about the guaranteed effectiveness of the external assessors, and would encourage the University to undertake a more critical scrutiny of nominations to ensure that there is sufficient distance between the external assessors and those being reviewed. The RA confirmed that the University had increased the expectation that these external assessors should have relevant quality assurance experience, and the team would endorse this approach.

35 The IRLT factual reports demonstrate the liveliness of the review dialogues, and the evaluative reports are rich and useful documents for the future development, management and resourcing of the subject areas. While recognising the benefits of externality, the ELIR team considered that leaving the confidence judgement to the external assessors was not conducive to creating a general internal capacity to make robust peer judgements. The University's Guidance for Reviewers describes IRLT as 'first and foremost, a review by the University for the University'. An explicit commitment to the judgement by internal reviewers would be in line with that description of the process. The team would, therefore, encourage the University to consider the closer involvement of the internal reviewers with the confidence judgement and to evaluate, and ensure the consistent application of, the criteria for IRLT teams to reach the judgement. From its reading of IRLT documentation, the team also noted that IRLT teams did not always appear to follow the Guidance in terms of considering elements of the academic infrastructure, for example there was significant variation in the extent to which programme specifications were scrutinised (see below, paragraph 51).

36 The RA noted that, as the University is coming to the end of a full cycle of reviews, there is an opportunity to reconsider its practice. In addition to the points set out above, the ELIR team would encourage the University to pursue its stated intention of placing greater focus on follow-up and action planning in the IRLT process.

Academic standards

37 The QAA Continuation Audit Report advised the University to debate more deeply and widely the academic standards of its awards. The University's one-year-on follow-up response (provided in December 2000) pointed to the formation of TLAC as providing a forum for such debate across the institution and for ensuring consistency of procedures in all schools.

38 The RA emphasised the University's track record of external subject specialists confirming the academic standards of its awards, and highlighted the internal debate which had taken place around the output standards of achievement by students. The ELIR team considered that the extent and intensity of the internal debate, conducted through TLAC, was noteworthy and constructive. The team also considered that the debate had focused primarily on policies relating to the outputs of assessment and the achievement of standards, rather than taking the full opportunity to debate the role of external reference points in the design of programmes, including the relevance of level descriptors that describe the characteristics of learning expected at each stage of programmes. The team was reinforced in this view when TLAC members described the SCQF as 'slowly coming to life' at the University.

39 The ELIR team noted recent documentation produced by the Registry relating to the proposal process for new modules and programmes in which it is indicated that statements of intended learning outcomes should be consistent with the SCQF descriptors for the stated level of the module. The team was able to confirm through its scrutiny of recent programme specifications that there is already some good practice within the University in defining appropriate academic standards with reference to the SCQF. There would be considerable benefit in this practice being disseminated and implemented systematically across the institution.

40 The module specifications available to the ELIR team in programme and module handbooks demonstrated that there is no

agreed approach to the number or framing of intended learning outcomes. While there is evidence of very good practice in articulating differentiated grade criteria with reference to level and type of assessment (for example, in the Modern Languages documentation), there is inconsistency in the effectiveness with which different schools explain to their students what is meant by progressive levels of study and what criteria are used to grade different levels of achievement. While the results of the University's student surveys indicate that students, generally, feel clear about the criteria for assessment, the University should address the consistency and appropriateness of its approach in this area.

Assessment

41 The RA is emphatic in stating that 'no topic has received more attention than assessment'. It cited how the University produced a single classification system for honours degrees based upon a common University algorithm, how this focus drew attention to a perceived need to map 'raw' marks to grades on a common assessment scale, and how the exercise of specifying learning outcomes provoked a related identification of suitable modes of assessment, leading to greater (and justifiable) diversity of practice. The ELIR team was provided with significant documentation on matters of assessment policy and practice; two papers were particularly useful: *Assessment Policies, Strategies and Practice at St Andrews* (May, 2005) and *Marking and Assessment at St Andrews* (March, 2006). Both of these sought with candour to address sector-recognised challenges in the conduct of assessment within the context of the University.

42 The nature of the University algorithm has been the subject of recurrent and properly detailed debates at all levels within the University, including with its external examiners. The piloting of various versions of the algorithm (while safeguarding students' interests), the willingness to monitor and revise, the persistence in explaining to, and consulting with, external examiners are all evidence of a

principled approach to seeking greater consistency across all schools in this most crucial process. The ELIR team recognised that the algorithm appears to have achieved its main aims of addressing the inconsistency between schools and producing the fairest outcome for students.

43 The process of converting (or 'mapping') marks to grades on a common reporting scale is reviewed and formalised in a detailed 2003 paper, *Assessment of Coursework and Examinations: Marks, Grades and Mapping Procedures*, although the practice itself dates from the introduction of the common assessment scale when the University adopted a modular academic structure in 1995-96. The aim of the 2003 paper was identified as being to promote the gradual convergence of module and degree outcomes and the paper emphasised that the intention was not to 'impose uniformity with normalised identical distributions, which would ignore important subject-specific issues'. The paper set out the considerable variety of approaches taken by schools at that time to the scrutiny of module continuous assessment grades. It entered into matters of principle and practice with sustained vigour and purpose but acknowledged considerable diversity of practice across a range of assessment processes and disciplines. What is signalled as a policy document, therefore, allows significant latitude in the operation of mapping processes.

44 The ELIR team asked students their views on the common assessment scale and the mapping process and was struck by the confusion that they expressed. It became clear during the discussions that the variety of practice among schools (for example, in the use of decimal points on the 1-20 scale) was only one cause of confusion. A number of students declared that they did not know nor could they discover how their mapped grades were derived. It appeared to the team that one cause of confusion might arise from the fact that the mapping process appears to have two separable purposes: first, to adjust marks in order to take account of inherent, subject-specific differences (for example, between

'quantitative' and 'qualitative' disciplines); and, secondly, to adjust marks in order to reduce unusual or aberrant distributions. While it is possible to reconcile these two purposes within a single process, the conflation presents difficult challenges when it comes to explaining to students how, why and when their marks have been mapped onto grades. The 2003 paper states that all handbooks should contain clear guidance on policy relating to marks and grades, and suggests standard text for this. From the handbooks made available to the team, it seemed that they do not routinely contain such guidance.

45 The ELIR team concluded that the 2003 policy paper had been less effective than might have been hoped, in part because there seems to be some confusion about its status (see below, paragraph 46) and partly due to the difficulties of communicating a clear and consistent message to students. The University could usefully re-articulate the purposes of mapping, emphasising its aim to reduce subject-specific differences for the sake of fairness and clarifying the locus of the moderation function (in the sense of addressing unusual distribution) with respect to the conversion processes. The team formed the view that the University is likely to be better able to address its concerns over consistent distribution of grades and comparability of classification results if it were to apply in a more sustained way the principles found in the SCQF and other academic infrastructure documents at earlier stages, such as programme development, the approval of programme specifications, module design, the crafting of learning outcomes and the definition of grade criteria at the respective levels of study (see below, paragraph 51).

46 The production of the 2003 paper was cited in the RA as an example of the effectiveness of the University committee structure in bringing about enhancement. This example does raise questions, however, about the status and authority of particular procedures within the University's regulatory framework. Although the RA referred to its

having been adopted by the University, as would be expected of a policy document, it is referred to elsewhere in the RA as 'guidance', and the ELIR team found that it had not been universally adopted. The University should take steps to clarify for all staff the particular authority of its policies and emphasise the boundaries between policies and guidelines.

External examiners

47 The RA asserted that the traditional guarantee for the standard of the University's awards was its external examiner system and that this has been significantly strengthened by a review, conducted between 2001 and 2003, of all relevant University policies, resulting in a University Code of Practice on External Examining for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes and several other documents, all of which can be found in the Assessment section of the Quality Assurance Handbook.

48 External examiners' reports are received by the Vice Principal Learning and Teaching (VPLT) and then copied to the relevant head of school and dean, and to the Academic Registrar. The head of school must respond by an identified date and this may be supplemented by the relevant dean and VPLT if there are university-wide matters to be addressed. The Academic Registrar prepares a substantial annual overview of all reports, faculty by faculty and distinguishing between postgraduate and undergraduate programmes. This overview and all the external examiners' reports are submitted to the AAC, which considers them as part of the Annual Academic Audit and IRLT processes. Each year, the VPLT sends a letter to all external examiners, which is co-signed by the deans of Arts and Science focusing on the University-level matters raised by their reports.

49 Through detailed scrutiny of the documentation, the ELIR team was able to confirm the University's confidence in the way in which the external examiner system is managed. The team considered that the VPLT's annual letter to external examiners and the Academic Registrar's annual overview represented particularly good practice. The

team also recognised the effectiveness of the revised University Code of Practice on External Examining for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes in bringing clarity to the external examiners' role.

Overview of the use made of external reference points for assuring quality and standards

50 The RA set out the arrangements the University has in place to evaluate its policies and practices against the *Code of practice*, published by the QAA, including arrangements for addressing recent revisions to a number of the sections of the *Code*. This involved experienced staff comparing practice at the University with that set out in the *Code*. The ELIR team considered that these arrangements were adequate for the University to assure itself that its key policies are in alignment with the *Code*.

51 The RA indicated that, in order to adhere to the SCQF, the University had required to make some adjustments to its General Degree, but a more significant consequence had been the decision to differentiate more clearly between provision credit rated at SCQF levels 9, 10 and 11. Supplementary documentation indicated that the purpose of this differentiation was to demonstrate intellectual progression as students moved through the stages of an undergraduate degree and in the transition to postgraduate study. The ELIR team would encourage the University to extend this logical approach to the crafting of intended learning outcomes and the design of assessment criteria by level of study (see above, paragraph 45). The team also noted that, although the institution continued to debate matters relevant to the SCQF (for example in a 2006 meeting, TLAC had considered the SCQF implications for the titles of University awards) and the SCQF nomenclature is used in programme specifications and approval documentation, the University frequently uses its existing numerical conventions when referring to levels of study.

52 The University's arrangements for producing programme specifications were set

out in the RA, where it is indicated that their format and content will be revisited in 2007. As part of institution-wide action on refining academic standards setting, the University is encouraged to accelerate the rate at which programme and module specifications containing links to the SCQF and the assessment section of the *QAA Code* will be made available.

Commentary on the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards

53 The University's policies and processes for assuring the quality of its provision and securing the academic standards of its awards are all captured in the essential, web-based *Quality Assurance Handbook*. The schools continue to operate as autonomous units, but the University has made efforts to bring about greater consistency of practice through a number of key roles - such as the Vice Principal Learning and Teaching, the deans, the school directors of teaching and the Academic Registrar overseeing a unified support service - and through groups or units such as the TLAC, SALTIRE and the energetic work of the CFCCG. The deans' role in quality assurance is becoming increasingly significant and they have been active in drafting policy and providing guidance. There is a lack of clarity in the precise status of some of the Universities documents, in particular the distinction between matters of policy and guidelines can be blurred with documents being referred to as policy or guidance interchangeably. There would be benefit in this being made clearer both for ensuring consistency of practice and to provide a more secure foundation for the enhancement of practice.

54 The TLAC provides a forum in which the academic standards of the University's awards are discussed, and a lengthy, detailed and lively debate has taken place. To date, this debate has focused upon outcomes and student performance, and the University is strongly encouraged to extend its deliberations to the setting of academic standards and the role of

external reference points in establishing standards. Within the University, there are examples of good practice in producing programme specifications and in defining academic standards with reference to the SCQF. There would be considerable benefit in this practice being disseminated and implemented systematically across the University so that the principles found in the SCQF and other elements of the academic infrastructure can be applied in a more sustained way in, for example, programme development, the approval of programme specifications, module design, the crafting of learning outcomes and the definition of grade criteria at the respective levels of study. The University has expressed its intention to revisit the format and content of its programme specifications and is encouraged to accelerate the rate at which specifications containing clear links to the SCQF will be made available.

55 The University has taken considerable steps in seeking to achieve greater consistency in assessment. A single classification system for honours degrees has been established and is recognised as having achieved its major aim of bringing about greater consistency between schools and producing the fairest outcome for students. The related practice of mapping students' marks to grades on a common assessment scale has been less effective, largely because of the latitude permitted to schools by the policy itself and partly because of the difficulties in explaining the process to students.

56 The University's management of its external examiner system has been strengthened through the production of a University Code of Practice which has brought greater clarity to the role. Good practice is evident in this area through the Academic Registrar's detailed annual overview of the matters raised by the external examiners' reports, and the VPLT's annual letter to all external examiners focussing on institutional level matters.

57 The Annual Academic Audit process is generally effective, as is the role of the AAC, in promoting self-reflection within schools to inform the University on the maintenance of

academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement. The IRLT process is also effective overall and, as the current cycle of reviews comes to an end, the University has appropriate plans in place for revising the process to place a greater focus on follow-up and action planning. There would be benefit in the University involving internal members of the review teams more closely in the judgemental report.

58 In the light of these findings, broad confidence can be placed in the University's current, and likely future, management of the quality of its provision. Based on a range of factors including: the sound management of the external examiner system, the module by module analysis undertaken through the Annual Academic Audit process, and the extent of reflection within the University on matters relating to assessment, broad confidence can also be placed in the University's current, and likely future, management of the academic standards of its awards. In order to provide further security in relation to the academic standards of its awards, the University should address the inconsistencies inherent in its practice of mapping students' module and component marks to grades, and accelerate institution-wide action on refining academic standards setting. In particular it should frame learning outcomes and grade criteria with clearer reference to level of study, and establish more consistently their link to assessment practice.

Overview of the institution's approach to ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of provision is complete, accurate and fair

59 The RA acknowledged that the University's approach to the accuracy of published information has, in the past, been more organic than strategic, involving responsibility being devolved to schools and units. In recognition of the need to safeguard corporate reputation, the University has in place a publications approval process which builds in a responsibility for the maintenance and updating of content in all formats. The University stated that increasing

regulatory requirements in this area and the potential for fast-format web products were among the factors which had led it to consider agreeing a more formalised approval policy. The development of guidelines and a strategic approach to the University website is now within the remit of the Vice-Principal for External Relations and this work is being progressed through a Website Working Group.

Commentary on the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair

60 In general, the University has appropriate arrangements for ensuring that the information that it publishes about the quality of provision is complete, accurate and fair. There would be benefit in the University progressing the work of its Website Working Group to accelerate the implementation of a formalised publications approval policy.

The student experience

Overview of the institution's approach to engaging students in the assurance and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning

61 The University regards as integral to the enhancement of quality in learning and teaching the encouragement and support offered to learners and teachers to reflect upon their practice, discuss areas of improvement, and learn from the dissemination of good practice originating in the institution and beyond. The University actively involves students in decision-making, consultation and developments that directly affect the student experience.

Student representation

62 Students have extensive representation on the University's committees. The Students' Association has four sabbatical officers, all of whom are elected by the student body. One sabbatical position, the Director of

Representation, is responsible for the Association's representational strategy in the fields of education, accommodation, welfare and equal opportunities. The Association President and the Director of Representation are members of the University Court and Senate. The President, the Senate Postgraduate representative and two faculty representatives are all members of the Academic Council. There is also student representation on all the University committees relevant to students' interests including the Academic Audit Committee and the Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC). Membership of TLAC provides a particular opportunity for students to contribute to policy decisions affecting their learning experience. Through the Director of Representation's membership of the Academic Audit Committee, that post has a direct involvement in the Annual Academic Audit process and all Internal Review of Learning and Teaching teams include a student member. In addition, students are included in the membership of ad hoc committees or working groups concerned with learning and teaching matters.

63 At school level, students have membership of school teaching committees, and the staff-student consultative committees (SSCCs) have over 200 students in their membership across the University. SSCC minutes are included in the documentation for IRLT. Informed by a policy document developed by the Students' Association, the SSCC system was revised for 2004-05 to standardise practice across the University in a number of respects including: the early election of class representatives and the notification of their names to the Students' Association for training and support purposes; provision for students to be offered first choice of chairing the meetings; and agreement that it is good practice for students to hold a pre-meeting without any staff presence. Long-established at undergraduate level, the SSCC structure is not uniformly in use as yet for postgraduate students.

64 There are many examples of the representative systems enabling students to propose ideas and influence institutional debates, such as the development of a personal tutor system and improvements to the learning and teaching infrastructure. In discussion, students indicated that the school representative arrangements were mainly effective with staff being responsive in providing feedback on the matters raised in most cases. Students were less clear about the outcomes of the representation conducted on their behalf through the Students' Association.

65 Officers of the Students' Association stressed that they worked to improve the student experience in an ethos of partnership with the University; a view that is shared by senior staff. Equally, the Association recognises it needs to establish stronger links with representatives in and across schools and it is aware that the lack of continuity inherent in the sabbatical officer system limits the participation of students in strategic decision making. The University has demonstrated its willingness to help the Students' Association, for example by funding the appointment of a part-time student advocate to provide support in the area of accommodation, and making more extensive provision for briefing and involving newly elected sabbatical officers before they take up office. The University, through the Principal's Office, has also outlined arrangements for providing support to the Students' Association in undertaking strategic planning. As an innovative step and at the request of the Students' Association, the Association will in future be reviewed through the processes operated by the AAC to facilitate the continuous improvement of its partnership with the University.

66 Student representatives expressed the view that, in order to become full stakeholders, training for sabbatical officers and other representatives is vital. The University and Students' Association have worked with the national student support service, sparqs (Student Participation in Quality Scotland) and there may be benefit in extending the training

opportunities to support the efforts being made by the University to promote the greater strategic involvement of the Students' Association.

Student feedback

67 In addition to the use of more formal instruments, many schools have informal mechanisms for eliciting student views of their learning experience, such as ad hoc focus groups or electronic notice-boards, and the small size of the University facilitates this. Formal student feedback is obtained through the use of module evaluation questionnaires, the outcomes of which inform the Annual Academic Audit process.

68 During 2004-05, the University operated three student surveys with the aim of capturing a broader view of the student experience than could be gained through the module evaluations. These took the form of: a series of structured focus groups involving over 450 students; an on-line questionnaire for final-year students; and an almost identical questionnaire for first year students.

69 The University found that the three survey methods produced broadly consistent results, with students reporting a very positive opinion of their learning experiences. These echoed the findings of both external and internal reviews that students had a very positive view, in particular, of the programmes of study and the support provided by the schools. Three areas emerged as being of concern to students: the library and IT services; the careers service; and the nature of the first year experience as a foundation for future study. The University has clear plans for completing the detailed analysis of the three surveys, identifying related action plans and discussing the findings with the Student Services Committee and the Quality Enhancement Steering Group to inform the Academic Council and Court, and to engage staff and students in a full discussion to facilitate the further development of operational plans.

70 The University has decided to enter the National Student Survey but intends also to issue its own questionnaires to successive

cohorts of first and final-year students so trends can be analysed. One of the ways the institution intends to reduce the possibility of questionnaire fatigue is by ensuring it is seen to be responsive to students' views by taking action on the issues raised. There is clear evidence, both from the module evaluations and the institution-wide surveys that the student voice is influential in the University's management of quality.

Overview of the institution's approach to the promotion of effective student learning

71 The University has expressed its desire to pursue excellence in learning and teaching as well as in research. In pursuit of this, schools are supported and encouraged to admit students who can demonstrate the highest levels of academic achievement, appoint staff of the highest international calibre and research skills, target resources to allow low student staff ratios across subjects, and enhance teaching quality and the learning environment through local initiatives, shared good practice and responsiveness to University policy. The University has also identified as challenges confronting teaching staff the increase in student numbers, and the need to preserve the close contact between full-time research active staff and students, in a context where teaching and research activities have to be balanced. These matters were discussed in a recent TLAC forum. The University's case-studies, prepared for ELIR, indicate that increasingly a variety of innovative methods of teaching and assessing students are being developed. In discussion, similar to the student survey outcomes, students confirmed their overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching and the balanced range of teaching staff delivering their programmes, the range of teaching and assessment methods and the opportunities for module choice. They also expressed an awareness of the changing expectations, and the skills required, as they move towards more independent learning in the later years of their programmes.

Central learning support

72 SALTIRE provides valuable central learning support for students who require help with study skills and promotes enhancement of the students' learning experience in a number of innovative ways. Assistance for study skills is offered through one-to-one sessions, transferable skills courses and specific courses requested by schools. Mathematics support is provided in a new centre which is much in demand, positively evaluated by students and fulfilling a clearly identified need. Enhancement of student learning is promoted through an annual essay competition in which students are encouraged to reflect upon their learning and share this with others. Students also benefit from changes made to module or programme delivery through awards taken up by staff to develop innovations in learning and teaching. In some cases students are directly involved in these developments, bringing a user perspective to bear as well as enhancing their own learning.

VLE and the learning environment

73 The University is in the process of articulating an e-learning strategy and is encouraging the use of its VLE to enhance the student experience and to support student-led learning and the acquisition of research and information skills. Through its Learning Technology Consultant, who provides technical and pedagogical support, SALTIRE has made a strong contribution to enabling staff to make use of the VLE in their teaching across most schools. These developments are at an early stage but are on an upward trajectory of expansion and some innovative developments are already apparent. For example, the new undergraduate degree in medicine is delivered online but not at a distance, and may provide valuable experience from which the rest of the University could benefit.

74 The University's Teaching Infrastructure Group oversees the planning of improvements to the quality of the learning and teaching environment. This includes the phased refurbishment of lecture theatres, seminar rooms and teaching laboratories. In

consultation with the schools, a 10-year plan for teaching infrastructure improvements and priorities will be in place by summer 2006 and will be informed by a commissioned survey of the estate. New buildings with modern learning and teaching facilities for Business Studies, Computer Science and Arts have been or are being acquired. Further changes and improvements to the central learning environment are planned as the University progresses its IT Strategy and takes steps to develop the library.

The library

75 The University described the library as emerging from a transitional period. Following repeated, critical feedback from students, including the 2004-05 student survey and the outcomes of the University's 2002 audit, significant plans are in place to enhance the environment and the service offered. A new Head of the Library has been appointed and operational improvements have been made to make the Library and its holdings more accessible. The Head is consulting widely with staff and students on development plans for the new layout of one floor to recognise student learning needs, such as additional group working areas and increased IT facilities.

76 In order to integrate the Library better within the University, proposals are under discussion for improved formal liaison arrangements with schools and links into course development from an early stage. These and other proposals to increase Library support for students to acquire information and research skills depend on the appointment of additional staff. The University recognises the urgency of addressing these issues and is committed to the phased modernisation of the premises and services.

Student support

77 Student Support Services provides advice and support centrally across a wide range of areas through a combination of in-house and visiting experts and liaison with external agencies. An Academic Audit Committee review of Student Support Services, carried out in

2004 and including external involvement, commended the strong team ethos, the impressive range of expertise and professional status within a relatively small number of staff, and the work of student volunteers in SupNet, a pioneering scheme of buddying activities and peer support. The review report identified a high level of student satisfaction regarding access to the services and the quality of provision, and this was echoed in discussions with students during ELIR. One of the 2004 review's key recommendations was that student support services should move from a deficit model of addressing students' needs when problems had emerged to a more proactive role in student development. In discussion, staff recognised that this transition has not yet been activated. As the University seeks to implement its plans to introduce a personal tutor system and PDP, there may be benefit in considering how those new arrangements could link with student support services.

78 In relation to students with disabilities, Student Support Services liaises with schools via a network of disability co-ordinators and provides other support mechanisms, including a guide for staff and a new central service for converting teaching materials into alternative formats. In discussion, although broadly satisfied with the support offered, students highlighted the difficulties associated with providing support to all students with a disability, given their differing support needs. They suggested additional ways in which particular needs could be recognised, including making use of a panel of student representatives to assist liaison with Student Support Services.

79 The University has a formal academic adviser system for ensuring that students' academic programmes are appropriate and properly recorded. In relation to guidance on non-academic matters, the schools have adopted a wide variety of approaches. Consultation with the schools has confirmed a willingness to formalise arrangements to offer academic support outside of classes, and the schools are being asked to implement the

academic adviser arrangements more consistently. The University has recognised, largely as a result of student feedback, that many students would welcome a personal tutor system. The schools are being asked to consider the development of personal tutor schemes which would help students to engage with employability, develop study skills and address issues of performance. There would be benefit in the University accelerating the implementation of a personal tutor system, which is likely to facilitate the development of PDP (see below, paragraph 89).

Postgraduate students

80 Postgraduate students make up 15% of the total student population and the University intends to allow that proportion to rise. Consistent with its aspirations for expansion in this area, the University has implemented significant improvements to the postgraduate learning environment, including developing and maintaining a Code of Practice for Supervisors and Students in Taught and Research Postgraduate Programmes. This comprehensive Code clarifies expectations and requirements and is kept up to date by the prodeans (postgraduate). It is regarded as helpful by staff and students.

81 The Vice-Principal (Research) has taken the lead in developing a strategy consistent with the University's approach and external developments. In 2004, the University introduced a new two-day induction programme for research students which is preceded by a half-day orientation meeting for new students. To complement the subject-specific training provided by schools, there is a year-long centrally organised programme covering research skills and career development, GRADskills. The GRADskills programme draws strongly on student feedback in its continuing development and is negotiated in liaison with the schools. A key element of the University strategy is to identify students' needs at the beginning of the session, and to track their acquisition of appropriate skills. This is achieved through the use of a logbook, which is adapted by the schools from

a central template. The intention of the logbook to promote a reflective dialogue between supervisor and student as the basis of the required annual report to the faculty, is regarded by students as a positive development, although this was recognised as more meaningful in those schools where it was integrated with progress reviews. In order to avoid a mechanistic approach to the recording of students' skills acquisition, the University is encouraged to draw on the good practice evident in some schools to realise the full potential of the logbook as an effective reflective tool for all students.

82 Postgraduate students are offered the opportunity to teach, which they value. A two-day training course is provided by SALTIRE and students are given feedback on their teaching performance in their schools, although the form this takes varies with only some schools providing regular briefing and review session. Undergraduate students, who generally report a positive view of the teaching they experience at the University, offered a range of opinion on the teaching contribution made by postgraduate students with some identifying positive benefits while others raised concerns about the ability of postgraduate students to run seminar discussions and to mark undergraduate work. There may be a case for extending the good practice in some schools to ensure that all postgraduate students are properly prepared and given appropriate feedback in order to help them develop their teaching skills.

83 The University is aware of the need to provide appropriate space and facilities for postgraduate students. It has developed a Graduate Business School in the modern and well-equipped Gateway building and its Estate Strategy recognises the need to improve accommodation for all postgraduate students. Taught postgraduates do not normally have dedicated space and use the library or their residential accommodation for study purposes. In discussion, research students indicated that they consider their accommodation to be good, although they highlighted differences

across schools and also indicated that accommodation is not always provided within the schools. Overall, taught and research postgraduate students expressed strong satisfaction with most aspects of their learning experience.

Feedback on assessment

84 The final-year student survey found that these students wanted speedier and fuller feedback on their work. Feedback on coursework is provided in most cases through comments on front cover forms, the quantity and quality of which students have indicated varies between members of staff and between schools. In discussion, students reported excellent feedback practices in some subject areas, such as Modern History and in Physics where students receive peer feedback as well. A very wide variety of practice operates in relation to providing feedback on examination performance. University policy permits all students to see their scripts under supervision but staff indicate that this has a low take-up. There also appeared to be variations between schools about whether a fee is levied if a copy of the examination script is provided.

85 Students are well informed and aware of the standard of work required to achieve the various degree classifications but they are less clear about how the overall module grade is arrived at through the calculation of its component assessments or through mapping grades to the University's 20 point scale (see above, paragraph 44). In discussions, students outlined the various arrangements in place to provide them with information about their performance. In general, students receive an initial mark, in the individual school tradition, for the coursework element of modules and, later, are informed of their overall performance in the module but this would be reported to them using the University's 20 point grading scale. Because of their confusion around the process of their 'raw' marks being mapped to grades, some were uncertain how they could calculate their relative performance in the examination component of modules. Drawing on good practice in place in some schools, the

University should introduce a more consistent approach to ensuring that all students receive appropriate feedback on their coursework and examination performance.

Appeals/complaints

86 The University's Code of Practice on Student Appeals, Complaints and Discipline has undergone significant revision in the last year, as was recommended in the 1999 Continuation Audit Report. There is a timetable for resolving cases and the institution attempts to resolve issues as quickly as possible and close to the level where the complaint first occurred. The new arrangements include provision for a sabbatical officer from the Students' Association to act as one of the three individuals who assess each academic appeal and complaint to determine whether there is a case to be answered at a full hearing. The Students' Association has expressed satisfaction with the operation of the revised procedures and is now working to ensure that all students are aware of them and of where to find advice. In discussion students expressed confidence that advice would be available if they should need it.

Overview of the institution's approach to the promotion of employability of its students

87 Employability has become an important theme for the University. Significant changes have been made to the Careers Centre and the institution has a close involvement with the national enhancement theme on Employability. The University has developed an Employability Strategy which seeks to embed generic employment skills in the curricula, provide access to specific career research skills and encourage schools to develop employability initiatives, including personal development planning (PDP). The University working group which produced the strategy has now been replaced by a standing committee on employability.

88 In response to student concerns about the Careers Centre and in order to meet the University's employability objectives, the Centre

is being developed to establish stronger links with schools and to provide more relevant and accessible advice to students, delivered earlier in their programmes. In discussion, students remained critical of the service provided but this may reflect the recent nature of some developments. The introduction of careers library interns is a promising development to improve the image of the Centre. The interns act as a student focus group and also as champions to encourage students to use the Careers Centre.

89 In 2004-5 in response to the national theme on Employability, the University established a working group to develop a concept of PDP appropriate to the institution which would meet the needs of students and be practical for staff. The working group is at an early stage of considering an appropriate approach, but is informed by three pilots that have been undertaken in Chemistry, Medicine and Psychology. The experiences of the pilots have been shared through a TLAC open forum. It is possible that a web-based PDP approach will be adopted but the University has indicated that this is likely to be combined with face-to-face contact. The University has also expressed its intention to implement PDP in phases, with career development providing an initial focus. While it is clear that the University is taking a reflective approach, it is encouraged to accelerate its introduction of an appropriate form of personal tutor system in order to facilitate PDP implementation (see above, paragraph 79).

90 Schools are developing a variety of employability initiatives and some are linking with the Careers Centre to invite early advice to students on their programmes. Undergraduate students are aware of the need to learn a variety of different transferable skills and are keen to do so but, as yet, they are unfamiliar with the concept of PDP. In discussions, students expressed the view that the development of employability skills is more advanced in science subjects and may be more hidden in arts and social sciences. Schools have focused on different initiatives and are clearly at different stages in implementing them. The

overall impact, therefore, is difficult to gauge but, implementation of the Employability Strategy and the establishment of the Employability Committee, should provide a clearer framework to support a more coordinated approach.

Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students

91 The University provides an effective and stimulating teaching and learning experience for students in a research-led environment. Teaching and assessment methods are becoming more varied and most schools are engaging with a positive agenda to encourage more independent and student-led learning through the development of the University's VLE. There is confusion among students concerning the mechanisms for deriving module marks and there is a related need for the University to draw on existing good practice to ensure that all students receive appropriate feedback on their coursework and examination performance.

92 The University has recognised that in order to realise its ambitions of providing an excellent learning experience, investment in and development of the library and Careers Centre are essential.

93 There is clear evidence of an emerging partnership between staff and students in the development and enhancement of the University, with extensive student representation on committees and further improvements planned to enable the Students' Association to have a stronger strategic role. The University has demonstrated its commitment to drawing upon the student voice in the range of feedback mechanisms it uses, including the recent innovative use of focus groups and student surveys.

94 Overall, students express high levels of satisfaction with their learning experience and emphasise the extent to which they find staff within schools, SALTIRE, and student support services to be accessible and supportive. In

particular, SALTIRE provides an effective central support for students to develop their study skills. The University has made considerable progress in enhancing the postgraduate experience with the development of a comprehensive and helpful Code of Practice for taught and research students. Improved induction arrangements and a highly effective graduate skills programme are in place for research students. There are plans to introduce personal development planning (PDP) which will help to enhance the articulation of skills development for undergraduate students and to promote their employability. The University is encouraged to accelerate the development of an appropriate form of personal tutor system and to consider the ways in which that system might facilitate the introduction of PDP.

Effectiveness of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement

Overview of the institution's approach to managing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning

Quality enhancement strategy

95 The University produced a quality enhancement strategy (QES) in September 2003 which it has reviewed annually. It was developed from and complements parts of the University's overall Strategic Plan, and is structured around a number of high level aspirations that echo the Funding Council's (2001) published vision for higher education in Scotland. The QES notes that in the pursuit of excellence the desire to improve continuously is not only aspirational but also practical. This is reflected in the structure of the QES, in which each of the key aspirations is resolved into a number of component areas for enhancement, and each of these includes a list of activities by which that enhancement is to be achieved. The QES is essentially an expanded version of the University's *Operational Plan - Learning and Teaching* (January 2005), giving more information about the context of each of the main components. The *Operational Plan*, on the

other hand, assigns responsibility for tasks to named individuals. In this way, as senior staff explained, operational plans translate aspirations into action. The *Operational Plan* is itself derived from the University's *Strategic Plan 2004/05-2008/09*, and this hierarchy of documents gives substance to the University's view that strategic planning is crucial to learning and teaching.

96 In seeking improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, the University has three stated aims: to increase awareness of the wider enhancement agenda, to maintain teaching and learning of the highest quality at the heart of its mission, and to encourage innovation and initiative. In managing quality improvement the University seeks to allow school and subject-specific developments to flourish within a context set by the University and, therefore, a large measure of responsibility for the implementation of the QES is devolved to schools. Initiatives at University level give schools the scope to experiment and innovate, and in this way individual members of staff enhance the students' learning experience. The University cites curriculum development as an example of enhancement through local innovations. For example the awards in Sustainable Development, which featured as one of the case-studies submitted for ELIR, were devised in response to student demand following the introduction of a single module in Sustainability. This module and the awards that followed were highly innovative, as the University's first venture into interdisciplinary, cross-faculty teaching.

97 Although good practice can be found at school and individual level, the University recognises the challenge of encouraging schools to focus on broad enhancement themes, both sector-wide and in some cases the University's own themes. Central direction was given in the most recent revision of the QES in the form of 'Action for Schools', which set out the arrangements for schools to align their enhancement agendas with the QES and articulate these as part of the strategic planning process. To facilitate this, the VPLT set six short-

to medium-term priorities that encompass both the University's engagement with the national enhancement themes and more local priorities.

98 While it is too early to appraise the success of this planning, the School Summaries of Recent Developments, produced for the current ELIR, provide evidence of engagement with broad University and sector themes, although it appears to be variable across schools, as has been noted by the AAC's External Assessor in his 2005 report. Since there is little explicit reference to the QES in the School Summaries, the clear direction provided in the Action for Schools document is likely to be an important means of ensuring that school plans become aligned with the QES. Nevertheless, schools retain considerable autonomy for local initiatives, and in taking this approach the University is attempting to balance the benefits of that autonomy with institutional strategic imperatives.

99 The University has acknowledged that, while the link between school and University strategic planning has been strengthened, the extent to which strategic enhancement is a priority for individuals remains a challenge. There is a strong staff commitment to enhancement through a wide range of innovative approaches to learning and teaching, and various means of disseminating good practice at school and institutional level. It is to be expected that, as University strategy becomes embedded in school plans and as explicit linkage between quality assurance processes and quality enhancement is strengthened and becomes a familiar part of the University's learning and teaching culture, individuals' engagement with the QES will be strengthened.

Quality Enhancement Steering Group

100 The VPLT has institutional managerial responsibility for quality enhancement and he is advised on the implementation of the QES by the Quality Enhancement Steering Group. It is chaired by the VPLT and its membership includes the Master, the deans, the Academic Registrar, the Director of Learning and Teaching Quality, the Students' Association President and

the Director of Representation. The Group meets regularly and, while its meetings are minuted, these are not reported to other bodies. It is able to create ad hoc working groups, for example the PDP working group, and monitors their progress. It also assigns projects to central support units, for example to SALTIRE to formulate the web-based Quality Assurance Handbook. Although it was formed to assist preparations for the ELIR process, the University has indicated that it will continue to meet to coordinate enhancement activities.

National enhancement themes

101 The University has an active and wide-ranging involvement in the national enhancement themes. The VPLT convenes one of the current steering groups and a number of other members of staff sit on the other groups, and have therefore played a large part at sector level in determining the development of the themes and in disseminating their outcomes through workshops, conferences and publications. Within the University, there has been dissemination through reports to TLAC, the establishment of working groups, discussions at TLAC Open Fora, and at school level through directors of teaching reporting at their teaching committees. The University has effectively integrated its work on the enhancement themes with existing initiatives in the institution in ways that support the implementation of its QES. This approach has been greatly assisted by the activities of SALTIRE in the dissemination of information and in staff development, including the award of funds to enable staff to pursue innovative teaching and learning approaches (see below, paragraph 114), and in providing financial support for staff to attend enhancement theme events. It seems likely that the diversity of ways in which the outcomes of the themes are being implemented through schools and central units ensures ownership of this aspect of enhancement at an operational level.

Central support for enhancement

102 Learning and teaching is supported by a number of central units, which include SALTIRE, Library and Information Services, Student

Support Services, the Academic Registry, Careers Centre, Continuing Education and Estates. Interlocking membership of committees means that these units are part of an integrated infrastructure that supports enhancement. In this, SALTIRE plays a key role, coordinating the activities of the central units as part of its remit to support both quality assurance and quality enhancement, the latter through a range of activities within the areas of academic staff development, support for student learning and the development of e-learning. SALTIRE also acts as a central channel of information about external teaching developments, including the national enhancement themes and issues discussed by Universities Scotland's Teaching Quality Forum. Through the activities of its small team of staff and coordination of central support services, SALTIRE plays a major part in managing the improvement of teaching and learning, by helping both to determine strategy and to translate strategy into action.

Overview of the linkage between the institution's arrangements for internal quality assurance and its enhancement activity

103 Three independent mechanisms link quality assurance and enhancement: the Academic Audit Committee (AAC), an effective committee structure and externality. Since 2003, the remit of AAC has included enhancement and, related to this, it asks schools to respond to set themes in their annual reports. The AAC identifies good practice by examining schools' responses to these themes and disseminates good practice through its overview report of the Annual Academic Audit process. Schools are now asked to treat the summary report of the previous Annual Academic Audit as one of the bases for their next report and, although this was not universal practice in the 2004-05 reports, there is evidence that it is starting to happen. AAC is now seeking similar improvement in the IRLT by increasing their emphasis on enhancement, by disseminating the review outcomes more widely and through a more systematic check of actions arising from the IRLT process.

104 A number of the University's committees and groups include quality assurance and quality enhancement within their remits. Clearly defined channels of communication between these bodies, facilitated by interlocking membership, provides a mechanism by which needs can be identified and measures taken towards meeting those needs. This is exemplified most obviously through the reporting links between the key institutional committees, but the network of connections extends more widely. For example, representatives of all the central units that support learning and teaching (except Estates) attend TLAC, the Academic Registrar is a member of the Quality Enhancement Steering Group, Estates is represented on the Teaching Infrastructure Strategy Group (which is chaired by the VPLT), the deans sit on the Planning and Resources Committee, and the VPLT is the strategic manager of SALTIRE. The parts played in quality enhancement by the various committees and services are described in the QES, and, in discussion, staff confirmed the effectiveness of the committee structure and were confident of their roles within it.

105 Externality as a link between assurance and quality enhancement is most obviously seen in the external examiner system. The Academic Registrar's overview report on each year's external examiners' reports is a valuable route towards quality enhancement through the identification of areas of common concern and of good practice. At present, however, the University considers that the most significant external influence on quality enhancement is through the involvement in IRLT of two senior subject specialists from other universities.

106 The Honours degree algorithm, peer observation of teaching and the reform of the SSCC procedures are all institution-wide forms of enhancement that arose by issues being identified through the quality assurance procedures. In relation to this, the remit of SALTIRE, encompassing both quality assurance and quality enhancement, means that it is well-placed to help convert ideas for enhancement into action, not least because the Director of

Learning & Teaching Quality acts as secretary to the Academic Audit Committee. Within SALTIRE, therefore, links between quality assurance and quality enhancement are embodied within a small team. For example, SALTIRE provides guidance and practical support for peer observation of teaching and for the framing of questions about teachers in the end of module questionnaires.

107 It is clear that staff are familiar with the notion of quality assurance and quality enhancement being a continuum, in part because of individuals reflecting on, and seeking to improve, their own teaching practice in the light of the outcomes of quality assurance processes. In addition, this awareness of enhancement as a consequence of assurance has been reinforced by the positive steps taken by the AAC to increase the emphasis on enhancement within the Annual Academic Audit process. One manifestation of this focus on enhancement was the requirement, starting in 2001-02, for schools to address specific themes in their annual reports, pre-dating the adoption of this approach in the national enhancement themes.

Overview of the institution's approach to recognising, rewarding and implementing good practice in the context of its strategy for quality enhancement

108 One of the aspirations of the QES is that learning, teaching and scholarship are highly regarded within the University. In pursuit of this, the QES specifies two strands: first that schools will be encouraged to disseminate examples of good teaching practice and monitor the effectiveness of teaching; and secondly that staff will be supported in their teaching through recruitment and promotion procedures, and through a culture of continuous learning and self-development.

109 The University considers that excellence in teaching and learning depends not only upon fostering innovation and disseminating good practice but also upon the appointment of good teachers and rewarding them appropriately. As part of the selection process,

deans are required to ensure that teaching quality and practice are addressed during the formal interview. Interviewees are asked to give a talk on their research to an audience including students so that their presentation style can be appraised. All newly appointed inexperienced staff are required to attend a week-long induction, involving SALTIRE staff and others, including the VPLT and the deans, to familiarise them with University procedures. In discussion, recently appointed staff indicated that the induction had been very useful and they had found the SALTIRE staff extremely supportive.

110 There is a probationary period of up to four years in order that support and guidance can be given to prepare new staff for careers in research and teaching. During probation, staff have a mentor with the responsibility for observing and commenting on teaching practice. Probationers are also normally required to produce a series of three reflective reports on their teaching, research and administrative activities, drawing on a portfolio of evidence which they are encouraged to compile. These reports (or profiles) are the same as those required of staff applying for promotion, and the University has expressed its intention to develop a single process for assessing and rewarding teaching, at both probation and promotion. The probationers' reports are monitored by the mentor, the school director of teaching and the head of school. The University has detailed criteria, covering scholarship and research, teaching, administration and collegiality, by which an individual may be judged to have passed probation.

111 The process of promotion to all academic grades includes an assessment of teaching. This assessment is based on a range of evidence, such as information derived from student questionnaires, involvement in curriculum development or with Higher Education Academy subject groups, information about FILTA or SELF awards (see below, paragraph 114, as well as the applicant's own reflective analysis of his or her contribution to teaching

and learning. Clear criteria are set out in the University's promotion procedures for the assessment of an individual's case in terms of research, teaching and service. The impression of staff was that teaching is now valued more highly than previously, although younger staff still considered that research was likely to carry greater weight. The University recognises that taking teaching activities into account in promotion decisions is a way of supporting staff in their commitment to teaching. At school level, such commitment can also be supported by fair and transparent workload allocations. There is some evidence of dissatisfaction over a lack of such transparency, as highlighted in a small number of IRLT reports. In discussion, senior staff confirmed that this would be resolved as a result of work currently in progress to devise a standard workload allocation model.

112 The University is aware that good practice in teaching and learning must first be recognised in order that it can be disseminated more widely. Peer observation of teaching has been developed in tandem with the revised arrangements for student module questionnaires. Specifically, schools have been asked to include at least three questions on individual teacher performance. Together with peer observation, this is intended to provide regular information about teachers that will allow heads of school to monitor the quality of teaching and provide support and staff development when required.

113 In addition to peer observation, the University encourages a number of ways of recognising and sharing good practice by individuals, including student feedback, and presentations to colleagues at TLAC Open Fora, particularly by recipients of SELF and FILTA awards. At institutional level Annual Academic Audit is the primary means by which good practice, revealed within schools, is identified and spread. In addition, the AAC encourages schools to organise fora at which all staff can discuss learning and teaching matters as an informal adjunct to the school teaching committees. The TLAC Open Fora provide a

useful means of exchanging ideas and disseminating good practice and initiatives. Topics covered since January 2004 have been: assessment methods, modularisation, employability, research-led learning and teaching, and teaching large groups. Each forum has included presentations by staff, students and external speakers. Notes of each forum are produced by the VPLT, and electronic copies of presentations are available on request. Staff are familiar with these means of dissemination and generally enthusiastic about the forums, although it is less easy to identify the extent to which shared good practice is actually adopted by others.

114 Implementation of good practice on the part of the individual may be informal in that members of staff make improvements on their own initiative, or formal through staff development activities. Continuing professional development is offered to all staff through SALTIRE, and includes seminars, workshops and conferences on a range of topics such as mentoring, assessment, course design, e-learning and research supervision. Training for contract research staff and postgraduate tutors is coordinated by a newly-appointed skills development officer, who is responsible to the Vice-Principal (Research) but interacts closely with SALTIRE. Funding is available from SALTIRE to support specific innovative projects that encourage the development of new patterns of learning and teaching: the Fund for Initiatives in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (FILTA) and the Strategic Enhancement of Learning Fund (SELF). Broadly, these funds recognise a distinction between personal initiatives (FILTA) and those responding to strategic direction (SELF), although in all cases applications for funding must be aligned with schools' enhancement priorities. Students are now represented on the panels judging the bids for funding, reflecting the University's commitment to ensuring that the successful projects will contribute to improvements in learning. An impressive diversity of projects has been supported by these funds and the recipients are motivated and enthusiastic about the various ways in which they could see their

teaching practice being enhanced. The projects had been disseminated through presentations to new staff at induction, the SALTIRE newsletter and through incorporation in school's learning and teaching strategies.

115 The translation of more general good practice into policy and procedure is effected in three ways: by recognising good practice and encouraging its adoption across the University; through pilot schemes; and through central support and resources. For the purposes of ELIR, the University identified three examples of the recognition and dissemination of good practice: guidance on mapping of marks to grades; the TLAC Open Fora; and the adoption of a university-wide code to regulate the structures and procedures of staff-student consultative committees. The VLE is cited as the best example of good practice being supported centrally, in this case by SALTIRE. Good practice that becomes policy might be disseminated across the University, but its adoption may still depend on the inclinations of schools or even individuals. The question of the guidance/policy status of policies has been noted (see above, paragraph 53). In relation to the VLE, although the promotion of e-learning is part of the QES and its use has grown to over 350 modules in the four years since its introduction, greater consistency of uptake across schools would enhance the learning experience more equitably.

Commentary on the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning

116 The University has effective links between quality assurance and quality enhancement, which have been strengthened in recent years by a conscious effort to shift the focus of the annual and periodic review processes towards enhancement. The University's quality assurance processes have been designed so that areas for improvement can readily be identified and acted upon. The Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee and the Academic Audit Committee each play a key role in recognising good practice and putting in place mechanisms for its

dissemination. Individuals, such as the deans, heads of school and directors of teaching, have a clear understanding of the important roles they play in the systems to identify and disseminate good practice. There is a culture of encouraging initiative and innovation, both for improvements in teaching and learning at individual level and in curriculum development.

117 The University's management of quality improvement involves considerable devolution of authority to schools through which the institution seeks to create an environment in which subject-specific enhancement of the learning experience will flourish. There is a recognition at all levels of the importance of quality enhancement and that its implementation is a shared responsibility. As a result, there are clear examples of innovative practice within schools at individual level. In a recent move to ensure schools are undertaking activity within the overall institutional strategic context, they have been asked to align their own plans with the University QES, and to report on enhancement activity through the strategic planning process. The University is encouraged in its efforts to find a balance which enables the benefits of autonomy to be realised within the overall strategic direction of the institution. In this context, although there have clearly been moves towards greater consistency of policy and practice, the University should consider the extent to which opportunities for quality enhancement might be increased through the more consistent application of policy across the institution. Achieving a suitable balance between school autonomy and shared institutional goals can also be expected to create an environment in which the institution's ambitions to promote interdisciplinary curriculum developments can thrive.

118 The University has played a significant part at sector level in the development of the national enhancement themes. The outcomes of work on the themes have been disseminated by a variety of means within the University, and integrated with local developments. SALTIRE staff have been particularly active, both through membership of steering committees

and in keeping the University informed about these and other sector-wide developments. More widely, SALTIRE's role in staff development is held in high regard by colleagues. The teaching and learning awards (FILTA and SELF) encourage staff to think creatively about new approaches and link individual initiatives with school and institution aims. A number of mechanisms are in place to publicise these, and other, innovative approaches to learning and teaching within the University in order to help promote a culture of continuing self-development. The University recognises that there are more regular opportunities for the sharing of good practice among recently appointed staff, and is encouraged to find ways of involving experienced staff.

Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement

119 The close relationship between the University Quality Enhancement Strategy (QES), the Operational Plan - Learning and Teaching and the Academic Strategy section of the University's Strategic Plan, from which the QES is derived, reflects the University's recognition that strategic planning is crucial to the quality of learning and teaching. The QES and the Operational Plan provide the details of context, and collective and individual responsibility that make possible the implementation of the QES. In seeking to achieve this, the University has adopted a deliberately multi-faceted approach. This has included a requirement for greater attention to quality enhancement in school plans and in the Annual Academic Audit process, the use of working groups and pilot studies to evaluate different approaches, various methods of disseminating good practice and of encouraging innovation, and ways of using the outcomes of the national enhancement themes to integrate the themes with University priorities.

120 Responsibility for quality enhancement is included in the remits of a number of committees and groups. Effective

implementation of the QES is further facilitated by key individuals with authority having membership of more than one of these bodies, ensuring clear communication between committees and groups. The network of connections extends beyond the committees most obviously concerned with formal governance of learning and teaching to encompass the support units, estates, teaching infrastructure and other resources. In preparing for ELIR, the University recognised the need for a group, the Quality Enhancement Steering Group, to co-ordinate and direct the activities of the various committees and individuals working towards quality enhancement. The Group, although formed to prepare for ELIR, continues to play an important role in maintaining an overview of the development and implementation of the QES.

121 Individual members of staff are not necessarily engaged fully with the QES itself. However, the various ways in which the strategy is being implemented have resulted in clear ownership of the University's efforts to improve the quality of the students' learning experience. Furthermore, individuals are likely to become more engaged in the future through the requirement for quality enhancement to be embedded in individual school plans and through quality enhancement being given greater emphasis in Internal Reviews of Learning and Teaching.

Summary

Background to the institution and ELIR method

122 The University, founded in 1413, is the oldest university in Scotland and one of the smallest in the UK. Its mission statement is 'As an avowedly research-intensive institution, the University of St Andrews is committed to delivering research and educational outputs of the highest international standard whose impact in the Humanities, Social Sciences, Science and Medicine will ensure that, during the forthcoming planning period, it remains Scotland's leading university and retains and improves its position among the top ten United Kingdom universities and enhances its position among the world's top universities'.

123 The University is organised around four faculties - Arts, Divinity, Sciences and Medicine - and 18 schools. The schools are the key structural unit in the delivery of learning and teaching and each holds its own budget. In 2004-05 the University had 6,841 matriculated students, of whom 1,053 were postgraduate (both taught and research). Part-time students constitute around 2 per cent of the total. The student population is drawn in almost equal one-third portions from Scotland, the rest of the UK and overseas, particularly from North America. In 2004-05, the University had 1,846 staff of whom 704 were academic and research based.

124 In line with the enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) method, the University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA) in advance of the review. The RA set out the University's strategy for quality enhancement, its approach to the management of quality and standards and its view of the effectiveness of its approach. The RA provided the focus for the review and was used by the ELIR team to develop its programme of activities.

125 The University submitted three case studies with its RA:

- Innovative pedagogic developments in the School of Classics, which illustrated a number of flexible learning initiatives,

each led by a member of staff (three of them probationary staff) and supported by the University's central learning and teaching unit, SALTIRE.

- The extension of creative writing courses in the School of English showing how the taught postgraduate programme had led to the development of undergraduate modules, activities in the community and a new module entitled 'Speeches and Speechwriting'.
- The degree programmes in Sustainable Development launched in 2004 which had pioneered an interdisciplinary approach to programme design at the University involving ten schools and developed largely as a result of student demand.

Overview of the matters raised by the review

126 The University's quality enhancement strategy is structured around the Scottish Funding Council's vision for higher education in Scotland, to deliver a University:

- that is flexible, accessible and responsive to the needs of learners and society
- that encourages and stimulates learners to achieve their full potential
- where learning and teaching promote the employability of students
- where learning, teaching and scholarship are highly regarded and appropriately resourced
- where there is a culture of continuous enhancement of quality, which is informed by and contributes to international developments.

127 The particular themes pursued in the review included: the nature of the quality enhancement strategy, issues relating to autonomy and consistency including matters relating to the management of assessment and academic standards, and roles, responsibilities and authority.

Commentary on the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards

128 The University's policies and processes for assuring the quality of its provision and securing the academic standards of its awards are all captured in the essential, web-based Quality Assurance Handbook. The schools continue to operate as autonomous units, but the University has made efforts to bring about greater consistency of practice through a number of key roles - such as the Vice Principal Learning and Teaching, the deans, the school directors of teaching and the Academic Registrar overseeing a unified support service - and through groups or units such as the Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee, SALTIRE and the energetic work of the Cross Faculty Consultative Group. The deans' role in quality assurance is becoming increasingly significant, and they have been active in drafting policy and providing guidance. There is a lack of clarity in the precise status of some of the University's documents, in particular the distinction between matters of policy and guidelines can be blurred with documents being referred to as policy or guidance interchangeably. There would be benefit in this being made clearer both for ensuring consistency of practice and to provide a more secure foundation for the enhancement of practice.

129 The Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee provides a forum in which the academic standards of the University's awards are discussed, and a lengthy, detailed and lively debate has taken place. To date, this debate has focussed on outcomes and student performance, and the University is strongly encouraged to extend its deliberations to the setting of academic standards and the role of external reference points in establishing standards. Within the University, there are examples of good practice in producing programme specifications and in defining academic standards with reference to the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF). There would be considerable benefit in

this practice being disseminated and implemented systematically across the University so that the principles found in the SCQF and other elements of the academic infrastructure can be applied in a more sustained way in, for example, programme development, the approval of programme specifications, module design, the crafting of learning outcomes and the definition of grade criteria at the respective levels of study. The University has expressed its intention to revisit the format and content of its programme specifications and is encouraged to accelerate the rate at which specifications containing clear links to the SCQF will be made available.

130 The University has taken considerable steps in seeking to achieve greater consistency in assessment. A single classification system for Honours degrees has been established and is recognised as having achieved its major aim of bringing about greater consistency between schools and producing the fairest outcome for students. The related practice of mapping students' marks to grades on a common assessment scale has been less effective, largely because of the latitude permitted to schools by the policy itself and partly because of the difficulties in explaining the process to students.

131 The University's management of its external examiner system has been strengthened through the production of a University code of practice which has brought greater clarity to the role. Good practice is evident in this area through the Academic Registrar's detailed annual overview of the matters raised by the external examiners' reports, and the Vice Principal Learning and Teaching's annual letter to all external examiners focussing on institutional level matters.

132 The Annual Academic Audit process is generally effective, as is the role of the Academic Audit Committee, in promoting self-reflection within schools to inform the University on the maintenance of academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement. The Internal Review of Learning and Teaching (IRLT) process is also effective overall and, as the current cycle of reviews comes to an end,

the University has appropriate plans in place for revising the process to place a greater focus on follow-up and action planning. There would be benefit in the University involving internal members of the review teams more closely in the judgemental report.

133 In the light of these findings, broad confidence can be placed in the University's current, and likely future, management of the quality of its provision. Based on a range of factors including: the sound management of the external examiner system, the module by module analysis undertaken through the Annual Academic Audit process, and the extent of reflection within the University on matters relating to assessment, broad confidence can also be placed in the University's current, and likely future, management of the academic standards of its awards. In order to provide further security in relation to the academic standards of its awards, the University should address the inconsistencies inherent in its practice of mapping students' module and component marks to grades, and accelerate institution-wide action on refining academic standards setting. In particular it should frame learning outcomes and grade criteria with clearer reference to level of study, and establish more consistently their link to assessment practice.

Commentary on the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair

134 In general, the University has appropriate arrangements for ensuring that the information that it publishes about the quality of provision is complete, accurate and fair. There would be benefit in the University progressing the work of its Website Working Group to accelerate the implementation of a formalised publications approval policy.

Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students

135 The University provides an effective and stimulating teaching and learning experience for students in a research-led environment. Teaching and assessment methods are becoming more varied and most schools are engaging with a positive agenda to encourage more independent and student-led learning through the development of the University's VLE. There is confusion among students concerning the mechanisms for deriving module marks and there is a related need for the University to draw upon existing good practice to ensure that all students receive appropriate feedback on their coursework and examination performance.

136 The University has recognised that in order to realise its ambitions of providing an excellent learning experience, investment in and development of the Library and Careers Centre are essential.

137 There is clear evidence of an emerging partnership between staff and students in the development and enhancement of the University, with extensive student representation on committees and further improvements planned to enable the Students' Association to have a stronger strategic role. The University has demonstrated its commitment to drawing upon the student voice in the range of feedback mechanisms it uses, including the recent innovative use of focus groups and student surveys.

138 Overall, students express high levels of satisfaction with their learning experience and emphasise the extent to which they find staff within schools, SALTIRE, and Student Support Services to be accessible and supportive. In particular, SALTIRE provides an effective central support for students to develop their study skills. The University has made considerable progress in enhancing the postgraduate experience with the development of a comprehensive and helpful Code of Practice for taught and research students. Improved induction arrangements and a highly effective graduate skills programme are in place for research students. There are plans to introduce personal development planning (PDP) which

will help to enhance the articulation of skills development for undergraduate students and to promote their employability. The University is encouraged to accelerate the development of an appropriate form of personal tutor system and to consider the ways in which that system might facilitate the introduction of PDP.

Commentary on the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning

139 The University has effective links between quality assurance and quality enhancement, which have been strengthened in recent years by a conscious effort to shift the focus of the annual and periodic review processes towards enhancement. The University's quality assurance processes have been designed so that areas for improvement can readily be identified and acted upon. The Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee and the Academic Audit Committee each play a key role in recognising good practice and putting in place mechanisms for its dissemination. Individuals, such as the deans, heads of school and directors of teaching, have a clear understanding of the important roles they play in the systems to identify and disseminate good practice. There is a culture of encouraging initiative and innovation, both for improvements in teaching and learning at individual level and in curriculum development.

140 The University's management of quality improvement involves considerable devolution of authority to schools through which the institution seeks to create an environment in which subject-specific enhancement of the learning experience will flourish. There is a recognition at all levels of the importance of quality enhancement and that its implementation is a shared responsibility. As a result, there are clear examples of innovative practice within schools at individual level. In a recent move to ensure schools are undertaking activity within the overall institutional strategic context, they have been asked to align their own plans with the University Quality

Enhancement Strategy, and to report on enhancement activity through the strategic planning process. The University is encouraged in its efforts to find a balance which enables the benefits of autonomy to be realised within the overall strategic direction of the institution. In this context, although there have clearly been moves towards greater consistency of policy and practice, the University should consider the extent to which opportunities for quality enhancement might be increased through the more consistent application of policy across the institution. Achieving a suitable balance between school autonomy and shared institutional goals can also be expected to create an environment in which the institution's ambitions to promote interdisciplinary curriculum developments can thrive.

141 The University has played a significant part at sector level in the development of the national enhancement themes. The outcomes of work on the themes have been disseminated by a variety of means within the University, and integrated with local developments. SALTIRE staff have been particularly active, both through membership of steering committees and in keeping the University informed about these and other sector-wide developments. More widely, SALTIRE's role in staff development is held in high regard by colleagues. The teaching and learning awards Funds for Initiatives in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (FILTA) and the Strategic Enhancement of Learning Fund (SELF) encourage staff to think creatively about new approaches and link individual initiatives with school and institution aims. A number of mechanisms are in place to publicise these, and other, innovative approaches to learning and teaching within the University in order to help promote a culture of continuing self-development. The University recognises that there are more regular opportunities for the sharing of good practice among recently appointed staff, and is encouraged to find ways of involving experienced staff.

Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement

142 The close relationship between the University Quality Enhancement Strategy (QES), the Operational Plan - Learning and Teaching and the Academic Strategy section of the University's Strategic Plan, from which the QES is derived, reflects the University's recognition that strategic planning is crucial to the quality of learning and teaching. The QES and the Operational Plan provide the details of context, and collective and individual responsibility that make possible the implementation of the QES. In seeking to achieve this, the University has adopted a deliberately multifaceted approach. This has included a requirement for greater attention to quality enhancement in school plans and in the Annual Academic Audit process, the use of working groups and pilot studies to evaluate different approaches, various methods of disseminating good practice and of encouraging innovation, and ways of using the outcomes of the national enhancement themes to integrate the Themes with University priorities.

143 Responsibility for quality enhancement is included in the remits of a number of committees and groups. Effective implementation of the QES is further facilitated by key individuals with authority having membership of more than one of these bodies, ensuring clear communication between committees and groups. The network of connections extends beyond the committees most obviously concerned with formal governance of learning and teaching to encompass the support units, estates, teaching infrastructure and other resources. In preparing for ELIR, the University recognised the need for a group, the Quality Enhancement Steering Group, to co-ordinate and direct the activities of the various committees and individuals working towards quality enhancement. The Group plays an important role in maintaining an overview of the development and implementation of the QES.

144 Individual members of staff are not necessarily engaged fully with the QES itself.

However, the various ways in which the strategy is being implemented have resulted in clear ownership of the University's efforts to improve the quality of the students' learning experience. Furthermore, individuals are likely to become more engaged in the future through the requirement for quality enhancement to be embedded in individual school plans and through quality enhancement being given greater emphasis in Internal Reviews of Learning and Teaching.

