Enhancement-led institutional review

Edinburgh Napier University

MARCH 2011

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Introduction

1   This is the report of an Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) of Edinburgh Napier University (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.

ELIR method and report

2   The ELIR method was revised during 2007-08 following extensive consultation with the Scottish higher education sector. Full detail on the method is set out in the *Enhancement-led institutional review handbook: Scotland (second edition) 2008*, which is available on the QAA website.

3   ELIR reports are structured around three main sections: the management of the student learning experience; institution-led monitoring and review of quality and academic standards; and the strategic approach to quality enhancement. Each of these three sections leads to a 'commentary' in which the views of the ELIR team are set out. The three commentaries, in turn, lead to the overarching judgement on the level of confidence which can be placed in the institution's management of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. A summary report is also available in printed form (from QAA) and from the QAA website.

Method of review

4   The University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA), which provided the focus for the review. The RA was supported by a number of accompanying documents, including three case studies: the introduction of the University's 20 credit modular scheme; the institution's approach to graduate employability and capability; and supporting and developing staff to promote effective learning. The ELIR team also received the report of the University's previous ELIR which took place in 2006.

5   The production of the RA was led by an ELIR Project Team, the membership of which included experienced staff from the faculties and Professional Services, together with a Napier Students' Association officer. A draft RA was made available for consultation on the University's intranet, and was also discussed through the University's committees and within the Students' Association. The University stated that students' views were particularly significant in contributing to sections of the RA on student representation and feedback, and in the development of the case study on graduate employability.

6   The ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 2 and 3 February 2011, and the Part 2 visit took place in the week beginning 14 March 2011.

7   The ELIR team comprised: Ms Kari Arbouin, Professor Rae Condie, Mr Rio Floreza, Professor Monica Shaw, Dr Lorraine Walsh, and Mr Peter Watson. The review was managed on behalf of QAA by Dr Janice Ross, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

Background information about the institution

8   The history of the University can be traced back to 1964. The institution attained university status in 1992, and in 2009 formally changed its name to Edinburgh Napier University. The University Strategy (2009-2015) sets out the vision that by 2015 the institution will be 'established as one of the leading, modern professional universities in the United Kingdom'.

9   The University is organised into three faculties, each of which contain a number of schools. The faculties are: Engineering, Computing and Creative Industries; Health, Life and Social Sciences; and the Business School.

10   The University has a number of collaborative agreements with partner institutions both in the UK and overseas, with the University's programmes being delivered through a franchise model. The University has 12 collaborative partnerships with Scottish institutions, the majority of which are in the college sector. The University also has eight collaborative partnerships with overseas institutions, the most significant of which are institutions in Hong Kong and in India. A small number of students are studying on the University's programmes delivered within the European Union. Almost all the students based in these overseas partnerships (approximately 95 per cent) are on programmes delivered through the Business School.

Institution's strategy for quality enhancement

11   The University's approach to quality enhancement is embodied in a number of institutional-level strategies: the University Strategy; the Academic Strategy; and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy. The University considers that these strategies together provide a framework for enhancement which both builds on existing strengths and drives institutional priorities.

Management of the student learning experience

Key features of the student population and the effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing information about its student population

Student population

12   In 2009-10, the University had 17,605 students, of whom 14,533 were undergraduates, 2,851 taught postgraduates, and 222 postgraduate research students. Of the total student population, approximately 72 per cent study full-time and 28 per cent part-time. The University reports that it has experienced unprecedented growth in recruitment in recent years, with applications for 2010-11 entry to its UK-based programmes up just over 20 per cent on the previous year.

13   The University has a diverse student profile. Of its students studying in the UK, 89 per cent are from the UK or the European Union, and 11 per cent from overseas (predominantly China and India). The University notes that it has the fourth highest proportion of overseas students in the UK. Approximately 12 per cent of students have previously studied in the Scottish college sector, many of whom enter the University through articulation onto years two or three of undergraduate programmes. Approximately half of students are the first in their family to enter higher education, and a high proportion of students come from the greater Edinburgh region. Approximately 39 per cent of students are aged 25 years or over. Around 7 per cent of students report a disability, health condition or specific learning need.

14   In 2009-10, the University had approximately 3,224 students studying overseas with its collaborative partners in Hong Kong (2,846 students) and India (378 students). The University Strategy (2009-2015) includes the aim to be an 'international university', and the International Strategy (2009-2015) includes the ambition to develop its international student population, both at home and overseas.

Management information

15   The University's Policy, Planning and Intelligence unit provides a range of statistical and evaluation services to the institution. These include the production of a range of student datasets;

the analysis of internal and external student satisfaction surveys; information to support annual monitoring processes; and the analysis of institutional-level key performance indicators.

16   The University highlights that it places importance on the effective use of student data and qualitative information on student feedback to inform its approaches to learning and teaching and the provision of student support services. The University also highlights that its use of such information has developed considerably over recent years, and continues to be reviewed and improved. Overall, the University takes an effective approach to managing information about its student population.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to engaging and supporting students in their learning

17   The University stated that it utilises a range of mechanisms to ensure that students' voices are heard. These include: an established relationship between the University and the Students' Association; student representation through the institution's committee structures; student module feedback questionnaires; and the use of internal and external surveys.

Napier Students' Association

18   The University has an effective partnership with the Students' Association. The Students' Association is represented on all university-level committees, with the exceptions of the Research Degrees Committee and the Research and Knowledge Transfer Ethics and Governance Committee, which include discussion of individual students and reserved business. Additionally, Students' Association officers also sit on faculty-level committees. The Students' Association plays an active role in the development and implementation of strategic initiatives to support the student learning experience. For example, the Students' Association regularly reports to the University's Student Experience Committee on matters of interest to the student body. It also works with the University's Academic Development unit on a number of initiatives, including implementing the Student Involvement in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (SILTA) project (see paragraph 22), and the piloting of advanced training for student representatives. The Students' Association sabbatical officers also undertake the role of student panel members in the University's subject review process (see paragraphs 89-92).

19   The University stated that it values the consistent and reliable participation of Students' Association officers at University level. Sabbatical officers appreciate the University's commitment to fully involving the Students' Association in strategic matters, and regard this as a positive step. The Students' Association indicated some concern about its capacity to sustain this active role in the context of a growing set of University initiatives and activities related to the student experience. The University is encouraged to reflect on how best to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the Students' Association's contribution to a significant range of strategic activities.

Student representation and engagement

20   The University identified that it enjoys a long-standing tradition of active student representation, including through school committees and programme-level student staff liaison committees (SSLCs). Student representatives are supported in their role through training, provided jointly by the University, the Students' Association and the national Student Participation in Quality Scotland service (sparqs).

21   The SSLC system is a well-established and important mechanism for ensuring that students' views about their programme are heard, and student representatives provided examples of the University responding quickly to matters raised by students through the SSLCs. The University is undertaking a number of initiatives to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of SSLCs, including a pilot project within the School of Arts and Creative Industries to develop a more informal model for SSLCs, which promotes greater discussion between students and staff.

Students indicated that they consider this to be a positive step. Other initiatives include the piloting of a fully online SSLC and, for particular student groups such as flexible learning students, the use of online open chat forums.

22   More widely, the University is seeking to strengthen and embed student engagement through its Student Involvement in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (SILTA) project. The SILTA project, which runs until summer 2011, covers six broad strands of activity. Within these strands, particular initiatives undertaken during 2010-11 include: advanced training for student representatives undertaking additional duties; professional credit for student involvement; staff development to support student involvement; increasing the engagement of postgraduate research students and flexible learning students in quality processes; and additional support for student committee representatives.

23   The University is to be supported in its approach to embedding student engagement in its quality processes and, in doing so, is encouraged to continue to explore ways in which the SSLC system can be effectively implemented across the University.

Communicating with the student body

24   The University stated that its student portal provides a mechanism for all students to access a range of core information to aid their learning, support and information needs. Students can use the portal to access news, updates and information on core University services. In addition, each school has its own student portal for targeted news and announcements. During the ELIR, students indicated variable use of the student portal; while student representatives identified the portal as a mechanism for communicating University actions in response to student feedback (see paragraph 28), other students suggested limited awareness and use of the portal.

25   The Students' Association plays an important role in helping the University communicate with the wider student body. For example, Students' Association sabbatical officers helped the University to prepare students for the introduction of the revised modular structure in 2008-09 by producing a written guide explaining these changes. Sabbatical officers also have informal discussions with Professional Services and the Vice Principal (Academic Quality and Customer Services). These mechanisms for communicating with students are generally effective.
The University considers that it has given a great deal of attention to communicating to students significant institutional changes that impact on students' learning experience. However, during the ELIR, students expressed some dissatisfaction with the lack of timely and clear information provided in relation to significant changes to facilities and services which impact directly on their learning experience. These issues included changes to teaching and services arising from efficiency measures, campus relocation issues, and reductions in the library opening hours.
The University is encouraged to ensure it communicates with the student body effectively on key institutional changes that have direct implications for the student learning experience.

Arrangements for gathering, and responding to, student feedback

26   The University has a range of mechanisms for gathering and responding to student feedback, including both informal and formal approaches. The University places value on informal mechanisms, for example having an open door policy, tutorial sessions, and in-class feedback. The University also gathers feedback from students through social networking sites and tools. Formal feedback mechanisms include module evaluation questionnaires (for all taught students) and the University's Student Satisfaction Survey (which includes most taught and research students, but not all students taught through collaborative arrangements). The University stated that the outcomes of module questionnaires are used to inform routine annual monitoring (see paragraphs 85-88), and the outcomes of wider surveys are reported through the University's committee structures, in addition to being considered within the annual monitoring process.

27   The University has participated in the National Student Survey since 2009, and also takes part in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. The 2006 ELIR encouraged the University to consider how best to consider the outcomes of student surveys at a senior level. Since 2006, the outcomes of external surveys and the University's Student Satisfaction Survey have been considered by the Student Experience Committee, which reports directly to the Principal's Executive Group. In response to the National Student Survey outcomes, the University requires each school to implement an action plan to identify areas for enhancement.

28   The University has recognised that student feedback from questionnaires and surveys normally results in changes which benefit future student cohorts. To address this, it has introduced a 'You said - We did' mechanism to provide direct feedback to students and raise awareness of how their views are acted upon. 'You said - We did' is available through the student portal (see paragraph 24), and on a social networking site. However, during the ELIR, students indicated that they did not get consistent feedback on how their views, expressed in module questionnaires and surveys, had been acted upon. The University has identified the 'feedback loop' as one of six key areas of enhancement activity in its SILTA project (see paragraph 22), and SILTA is also working on improving feedback mechanisms for disparate student cohorts such as part-time, distance learning and flexibly managed students. The University is encouraged to progress these enhancements in order to ensure that actions taken in response to student feedback are communicated clearly throughout the institution.

The University's approach to learning and teaching

29   The University characterises its approach to learning and teaching as including: a strong professional orientation; an emphasis on practical academic learning experiences; the development of students' transferable and generic skills; and the recognition that a prominent feature of the student experience is that of students' academic transition through multiple entry and exit points. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (see paragraphs 126-129) defines the University's approach to academic practice and is designed to support staff both in the development of their own teaching and assessment practices, and in supporting and facilitating student learning. The Strategy seeks to progress the University's commitment to practical, applied and vocational experiences as central to the student learning experience.

30   The outcomes of the University's 2009 Student Satisfaction Survey indicate that a significant majority of students were satisfied with the teaching on their programmes, and with the enthusiasm of teaching staff. During the ELIR, this was echoed by students, who were positive about the range of learning and teaching opportunities they experienced, and satisfied with the range, transparency and fairness of assessment methods.

Student induction

31   The University highlighted that integral to its development of a 20 credit modular structure in 2007-08 (see paragraph 4) was the establishment of a 'Week One' induction at the beginning of each trimester. As part of this, schools work in partnership with the Confident Futures team in Student Affairs to run workshops which encourage students' social interaction and positive approaches to study. Now in its third year of operation, Week One has proved to be successful for new students, but has received more mixed feedback from returning students and staff. In response, the University has modified the Week One format to allow formal teaching to take place in the first week for continuing students and direct entrants, while preserving a programme of activities which prepare students for the trimester. During the ELIR, students were mainly positive about their experience of Week One, particularly as part of an initial orientation to the University.

32   Information supplied to students prior to entry and during induction is comprehensive. Examples include: a Welcome Guide provided when students have accepted an offer; and online advice for direct entrants, mature students, students with care responsibilities, and distance learning students. On entry to the University, students receive a student diary; a programme handbook; and Students' Association publications including a Fresher's Handbook and Student Survival Guide. The student portal (see paragraph 24) provides access to a range of information, including links to the virtual learning environment and the Students' Association website. During the ELIR, students reported that they found the information provided before and after joining their programme to be accurate and helpful; they valued the University's open days, and appreciated the ease with which they could change modules or programmes during induction.

Support for learning

33   A significant proportion of learning support (including students' study skills and the development of other key learning skills and attributes) is embedded within programmes and delivered by academic staff working in liaison with, and supported by, central support services. In addition, several teams within central support services offer a variety of workshop options and can arrange tailored assistance to meet the learning support needs of individual students. In general, students are positive about learning support, and find academic staff and the central support services to be helpful and accessible.

34   The University attaches particular importance to its Personal Development Tutoring (PDT) system as a primary point of contact for students seeking help with academic decision-making, for referral on to central support services, and for supporting students' personal development planning (see paragraph 54). The University also recognises the contribution that personal development tutors can make to improving student retention (see paragraphs 48-50). The 2006 ELIR highlighted the PDT system as an area for review and development. An internal audit undertaken in 2009 confirmed that the PDT system was operating with mixed effectiveness, and recommended that the system should be further improved with additional central guidance and staff training, to ensure that the role of the PDT was clear. The audit also identified what support and advice students want from their PDT.

35   The University has recently clarified the role of the personal development tutor, which is now recognised in the formal workload allocation model for teaching staff. Responding to student feedback, the University also intends to ensure that personal development tutors meet with students during Week One.

36   Progress in developing proactive PDT practice is evident in some areas of the University. However, during the ELIR, staff described a very wide range of PDT arrangements, and some expressed the view that training for the role is unnecessary. Students confirmed the value of PDT as a support for learning, but offered a mixed picture of its effective operation, ranging from highly positive experiences, to delayed or minimal contact with their personal development tutor. The University is encouraged to confirm and communicate a consistent institution-wide entitlement for students in a clearly defined PDT system, particularly as the University identifies PDT as an important element in addressing student retention.

Arrangements for providing feedback to students on their assessed work

37   The University emphasised that staff are encouraged to consider how assessment supports students' learning and skills development, and places emphasis on the value of different forms of assessment, including formative assessment. The University recognises that good feedback supports effective learning for students; it is committed to the return of students' coursework within three weeks, and the use of a template with marking criteria to give students structured feedback on their coursework.

38   Feedback on student work is the University's main internal enhancement theme for 2010-11 and is the focus of the Academic Development staff conference in June 2011. The University is working with the Students' Association on a three year Feedback for Learning Campaign designed to improve feedback practices as well as the quality of feedback. The Campaign builds on a range of initiatives in schools and projects led by teaching fellows and Academic Development. These initiatives include: the use of exemplars and model answers as a way of providing 'feed forward' to students; encouraging students to request more focused feedback on their assessments; a rapid improvement event on assessment feedback; a good practice forum for staff on giving effective feedback on student work; the piloting of a marking tool that assists staff with the production of efficient, accurate and consistent coursework feedback.

39   Students indicated that there has been an improvement in assessment feedback, in particular feedback using marking criteria. However, they also report variability in the level of detail provided in feedback on their work, and in the timely return of feedback. The University is encouraged to continue to develop best practice in the quality of assessment feedback and in its consistent implementation across the faculties.

International students

40   Many of the University's overseas students transfer with advanced standing into years 2 or 3 of degree programmes after studying on franchise programmes in-country. The University attaches importance to developing staff to support student transitions, particularly those articulating from further education or international colleges, and has a number of initiatives in schools. The Student Pre-arrival Induction for Continuing Education (SPICE) programme has been developed to help students overcome the challenges they experience in adapting to UK higher education, and provides a range of online preparatory induction and self-help materials for students articulating from India. This is in the process of being extended to other overseas cohorts, and is also being adapted for students entering from the UK college sector.

41   International and European Union students are supported by English language workshops, offered across the University by a small team located in the School of Marketing, Tourism and Languages, and English as a Foreign Language credit-bearing modules which can be taken as part of a programme. Some students perceive that language difficulties can impact on effective student discussion in classes; and staff suggest that a lack of adequate English language skills might in some cases influence poor examination results and slow PhD completion rates. In view of its plans to increase the number of international students (see paragraph 14), there may be benefit in the University keeping under review its English language provision to ensure it can meet demand and cater for the needs of both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The research student experience

42   The University currently has a relatively small number of research students (108 part-time and 113 full-time students, constituting some 2 per cent of the student body) but intends to increase its research student population. Postgraduate research students are dispersed across the University, and are located in subject areas in schools, or in research institutes. A dedicated small central team supports research students and deals with enquiries, admissions, quality and regulatory matters, and provides advice to supervisors and students. The Research Degrees Committee is responsible for overseeing the quality of the student experience, with day-to-day activities devolved to faculties, who each have their own research degrees committee. The University Research Degrees Coordinator acts as the strategic link between the University and the faculties in relation to strategy, policy and procedures.

43   Research students are supervised by a team of either two or three supervisors, and the students are largely satisfied with their supervision arrangements, which they view as effective. The progress of each student is monitored yearly through two progress meetings chaired by an

independent member of staff. Student progress is considered by the faculty research degrees committees, and is overseen by the University's Research Degrees Committee. Student completion rates are somewhat slow and may be affected by the English language needs of overseas research students (see paragraph 41).

44   Responsibility for research student training is devolved to the faculties, and is coordinated by academic staff with additional part-time roles as faculty research student coordinators, in liaison with the University Research Degrees Coordinator. Skills training for research students is provided by supervisory teams, and through research seminars or conferences organised mainly at school or research institute levels, and through external events. Research students keep a reflective Professional Development Record, which is used by supervisory teams to identify career training needs. The pattern of skills training across the University is accordingly variable and training is also optional, although it may be strongly recommended by research supervisors. At present, there is no institutional level policy for generic skills training and research students expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of centrally provided training for research skills. The University is asked to review this in order to meet sector expectations and best practice.

45   Research students have some opportunities to undertake teaching and to work as demonstrators, and also have the opportunity to undertake the SCQF level 11 module Teaching at University, delivered by Academic Development. At the time of the current ELIR, the University offered no compulsory training for these teaching activities other than an induction. During the ELIR, research students expressed dissatisfaction with the opportunities for teaching. The University has recently launched a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) scheme, and participation in the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education will be integral to the GTA scheme. The development of the GTA scheme is a positive step in improving teaching opportunities for research students.

46   There are some examples of good practice in integrating research students at school level, for example through their participation as demonstrators and other activities in the School of Life, Sport and Sciences. Overall, however, there are limited opportunities to bring research students together at the University level, and students confirmed that there is a limited sense of a wider research community or research culture to which they might belong. The University is encouraged to reflect on ways in which it might further develop a research student community, building on existing good practice.

47   Supervisor training for academic staff is provided through workshops run by the University's Research Degrees Coordinator. Three university-wide workshops are currently offered on the topics of: getting started as a supervisor; the role and responsibility of the panel chair; and sharing good practice in research supervision. Staff indicated that other workshops are offered as needed, with some taking place in schools or faculties. This approach does not guarantee a systematic and shared approach to initial research supervisor training, and the University is encouraged to strengthen its approach by putting in place a clearly articulated programme designed to develop the generic skills of research supervisors. The University acknowledges that there is a need for greater engagement with a larger number of experienced supervisors to update their knowledge of regulations and to encourage mentoring. During the current ELIR, staff indicated that there is no institutional framework of continuing professional development for experienced supervisors, with responsibility devolved to the schools to recognise the need for training; and some experienced supervisors have never undertaken any form of training. There would be benefit in the University considering the development of a centrally-organised programme which is a requirement for supervisors. The University is encouraged to strengthen its arrangements for initial research supervisor training and for the continuing professional development of experienced research supervisors.

Student retention and progression

48   The University is committed to developing strategies to increase the number of students who progress through their programme of study and succeed in achieving the award they aspired to when they applied. The University recognises that its student retention rates constitute an ongoing challenge, despite significant effort and resource, and regards retention as a multi-faceted matter and therefore complex to improve. The University's Student Retention Steering Group (SRSG) oversees the shape and effectiveness of the University's retention activity. The SRSG sets institutional priorities each year, considers action plans produced by each school, and seeks to disseminate good practice identified in schools' plans. The University has taken a multi-faceted approach to addressing retention, and is permissive in allowing schools discretion in their retention activities, leading to considerable variability of practice.

49   There is clear evidence of the University taking a wide ranging approach to improving student retention through the oversight of the SRSG, and through a number of successful initiatives being trialled by schools. These initiatives include the School of Computing's use of personal development tutors (see paragraphs 34-36) and the work of the School of Life, Sport and Social Sciences in helping students settle in during the early weeks of their studies. The School of Computing has also undertaken positive work in tracking students, and staff indicated that this initiative is being disseminated to other subject areas, including through a workshop run jointly by the School and Professional Development.

50   The University has recognised that there is the potential for devolved approaches to improving student retention to be variable in their development and effectiveness. During 2011, the Principal's Executive Group recommended that successful, and evidence-based, retention activities be prioritised across the University, suggesting a more decisive approach to addressing the matter of student retention. The University is encouraged to give priority to determining and implementing the most effective measures to promote student retention, and to ensure their consistent use across the institution.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting the development of graduate attributes, including those relating to employability, in all of its students

Employability and graduate attributes

51   The University highlighted that it has a sustained and strong record for graduate employability, with some 94 per cent of its 2008-09 cohort of students in employment or further study six months after graduating, thereby exceeding the HESA benchmark. Student employability remains a strategic priority for the University, which aims to have an international reputation for the employability of its graduates. The University is committed to developing students' transferrable and generic skills, and seeks to prepare students to look beyond the immediate goal of gaining a degree and first job. The University's Confident Futures initiative, which was being piloted at the time of the 2006 ELIR, aims to work with students to enhance their personal skills for their own professional development. Students participate in Confident Futures through a series of workshops, either as an integrated part of their academic programme, or through stand-alone workshops delivered throughout the year. During the current ELIR, students expressed variable awareness of the initiative and some were unclear about its value. The University is encouraged to reflect on how to further promote Confident Futures to the student body.

52   The University has actively engaged with the current national Enhancement Theme, Graduate Attributes for the 21st Century (see paragraph 133), and has sought a range of perspectives on what are considered to be graduate attributes, including from staff, current students, alumni and employers. A well-defined Edinburgh Napier Graduate Attributes model has emerged from this widespread consultation, and a communications plan is in place to roll out and promote graduate attributes to staff and students. The Skills and Learner Development

section has a remit of increasing student engagement with skills development. A revised student employability model was developed for 2010-11, and it is anticipated that this will be subsumed within the Graduate Attributes model. Additionally, it is clear that the University displays a strong commitment to work-based learning, with a wide range of placement opportunities and practical learning experiences available to students.

53   The University indicated that, since the 2006 ELIR, it has instigated a fundamental change in approach to careers education, information and guidance. Employability Services offer a range of support for students including: workshops on preparing for seeking employment; CV preparation support; and a range of electronic resources available through the student portal. Students recognised the improvement in the careers services available to them, and indicated that they found the support to be generally helpful.

Personal development planning

54   The University is committed to the professional development of all of its students and has produced a set of comprehensive principles for personal development planning (PDP), including that it should be a mainstream programme activity for all of its undergraduate and postgraduate students and should be supported and guided by the student's personal development tutor (see paragraphs 34-36). Individual student action plans for personal development are expected to be approved, normally through one-to-one interviews conducted each semester. The University acknowledges that different academic programmes will deliver PDP as appropriate, but provides a student entitlement model in which personal development tutors are required to articulate to students the PDP opportunities available within their academic programme and from other services, including Confident Futures (see paragraph 51). During the ELIR, students indicated that, with the exception of the proactive development of PDP models in some schools, PDP was not widely used and suggested there was little enthusiasm for it. There would be benefit in the University reflecting on the implementation of its PDP policy.

55   Overall, the University takes an effective approach to promoting the development of graduate attributes, including those relating to employability, in all of its students.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing the learning environment

Estates Strategy

56   The University's Estates Strategy consolidates the development of learning and teaching facilities on to three campuses. The Edinburgh Napier Business School has been located at the Craiglockhart campus since 2004. The Sighthill campus was re-opened in January 2011 and provides specialist clinical skills and life and sports science laboratories as well as integrated sports facilities for the Faculty of Health, Life and Social Sciences. The Merchiston campus is due to be refurbished in 2012 to relocate all provision in the Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Creative Industries. Each campus has dedicated library and IT facilities which include spaces for individual study and group discussion; additionally, the Merchiston campus has 24 hour computing facilities.

Library facilities

57   The University considers that the Library's role in supporting and engaging students in their learning is effective through the provision of accessible facilities and a wide range of learning resources. The Library's E-learning Advisor ensures that developments are pedagogically sound and include student consultation.

58   The Library Information Service (LIS) takes a strategic approach to consulting students on resource development, involving user surveys aimed at a range of different groups, including direct entrants, international students, students with disabilities, and distance learners, as well as academics and researchers. It also conducts induction surveys, and bi-annual exit surveys, and gauges user needs through the use of focus groups, blogs/wikis, ad hoc workshops and a 'Have your Say' page on the student portal. Overall, the LIS is effective at gathering students' views on its services and responding to customer needs, and is a positive example of the University responding to student feedback. The LIS's claim to be strongly user-orientated has been confirmed though its achievement of the UK Customer Service Excellence Government Standard in 2009. The University's 2009 Student Satisfaction Survey reported that 89 per cent of students were satisfied with the quality of library services.

Learning technologies

59   The University has an average of 650 fully online distance learning students, and approximately 2,000 students on 'heavily blended' or fully online campus-based modules. Following a managed learning environment (MLE) review in 2009, the University is seeking to further increase staff engagement with online technologies through a more ambitious MLE benchmark. An 'Enhance-Extend-Empower' Framework has been designed to extend the minimum virtual learning environment (VLE) presence for every module, and to further develop staff use of technology. This move towards an 'active' minimum online presence is still being embedded, with varying levels of staff engagement. The University acknowledges that the majority of technology enhanced learning (TEL) support and provision is currently focused at the full-time and undergraduate level, with large areas for TEL to develop, including part-time provision, master's programmes and work-based learning.

60   During the current ELIR, a number of examples were provided of online technologies being used to support learning, teaching and assessment, including: online virtual classrooms; assessment feedback tools; and electronic feedback systems to support classroom learning. Further examples were given of the use of technologies to enhance student learning through collaborative wikis linking UK and overseas students, and a project aimed at improving first year student retention by providing advice through podcasts. The use of technologies to assist the transition of different student cohorts to the University includes e-mentoring for direct entrant students from partner colleges in India as part of the SPICE project (see paragraph 40), and the 'Student transition to Edinburgh Napier: supporting the journey with technology' project.

61   Overall, the University takes an effective approach to managing the learning environment.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting equality of opportunity and effective learning for all of its students

Equality and diversity

62   The University's Equality and Diversity Strategy commits the institution to widening access to higher education and supporting student achievement without regard to social and cultural boundaries. The University sets out its commitment to ensure fair treatment for all its students and staff in a general Equality Statement, and believes that creating equality of opportunity for staff and students, current or potential, will assist in achieving its strategic aims, notably widening access. The University is in the process of moving towards a Single Equality Scheme with an associated action plan. An Equality Impact Assessment is applied to relevant policies, such as Admissions. The University's Equality and Diversity Committee is chaired by the Vice Principal (Academic Quality and Customer Service) who has the lead role in developing policy, and responsibility for ensuring that annual action plans are met in relation to equality and diversity, disability, access, inclusion and admissions. The Vice Principal (AQCS) is assisted by specialist staff in Student Affairs and Human Resources who contribute to ensuring that relevant external and internal equality and diversity agendas are met.

63   As part of a recent governance review, the Students' Association is modifying its structures to offer more opportunities for all students to become involved in Students' Association and University activities. The proposal is to create a new position of Diversity and Equality Officer on the Students' Association's Executive. The Officer will facilitate forums for groups to meet and feedback into the Executive the issues which they feel need to be addressed.

Support for students with disabilities

64   Support for students with disabilities is coordinated by the Special Needs & Diversity team in Student Affairs, and is implemented at school level by nominated school disability contacts, in liaison with other academic staff. The Special Needs & Diversity team provides support for all students with disabilities, health conditions and specific learning needs, and provides advice and guidance to school staff about these students' learning requirements. The University acknowledges a particular challenge in managing volume before and at the start of each academic session and the increasing numbers of students who declare dyslexia and other specific learning needs. The University considers that students are satisfied with the support offered, and staff indicate that peaks in demand are managed effectively by careful planning of staff availability.

Widening access

65   The University aims to be accessible and flexible to deliver a high quality experience to the widest possible range of students; it has a large number of collaborative partners in Scotland and overseas, whereby students are offered advanced standing on to the University's own programmes. In support of its wider access agenda the University is actively engaged with a number of access partners to facilitate student preparation for university entrance, such as the Lothian Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS), the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP), and the South East and Fife and Tayside Fora. The University leads the Edinburgh, Lothians, Borders and Fife Regional Articulation Hub (ELRAH) - a partnership of 14 regional universities and colleges to support Higher National Diploma to degree level articulation.

66   Overall, the University has an effective approach to promoting equality of opportunity and effective learning for all its students.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to supporting and developing staff to promote effective learning for their students

67   The University's approach to supporting and developing staff combines compulsory development for those new to academic practice and a range of voluntary professional development opportunities thereafter. Academic Development's Professional Development team provides central support for staff development, which is additionally delivered through schools and faculties, and teaching fellows (see paragraphs 69 and 138) play an active role in promoting effective learning for students.

68   New academic staff undertake two inductions - institutional and academic. Institutional induction comprises a helpful induction pack which details key elements to be achieved at day one, week one, and month three when a progress review is initiated. Through this induction, staff are familiarised with Professional Services and opportunities for continuing professional development. As part of the process, new staff are allocated a mentor. Academic induction involves four days devoted to learning, teaching and assessment issues through a two-part induction, with each part comprising a two-day residential which encourages staff to network across discipline boundaries. Academic induction is used as an element of the first module of the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (Pg Cert TLHE). Staff who are new to higher education undertake the Pg Cert TLHE as a formal requirement of the two-year probationary period. This programme is part-time, work-based and delivered through blended learning. The University stated that it has received positive staff feedback on induction and this was confirmed by recently appointed staff during the current ELIR.

69   The University's Staff Development Policy clearly sets out roles, responsibilities and staff entitlements. Staff are expected to engage in five days of continuing professional development each year to acquire or update knowledge and skills related to their post, and staff development is informed by priorities set out in the Strategic Plan. Individuals also identify needs in the annual Professional Development Review Scheme and these are either met locally or notified to Academic Development. In their first year of service, academic staff are not normally expected to have more than eight hours of teaching each week and recently appointed staff confirmed that this was honoured. The University actively engages with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and currently 247 members of staff are HEA members. New academics are required to make substantial progress towards Fellowship of the HEA within two years of appointment and more experienced staff are supported to apply through the direct route.

70   Through Academic Development's Professional Development team, staff are able to engage in an interesting and varied programme of staff development opportunities which reflect the University's strategic objectives, pedagogic and technological developments, and teaching, learning and assessment priorities. The University wishes to extend its provision of online and blended learning programmes and this is reflected in the CPD programme. During the ELIR, staff confirmed the wide choice of development opportunities available to them. Overall, the University's approach to the initial and continuing development of staff in relation to the promotion of effective learning is a strength.

71   To reward and celebrate excellence in teaching, the University has an established Teaching Fellow Scheme; the teaching fellows play an important role in the promotion of quality enhancement (see paragraph 138). The title of Teaching Fellow is awarded for a period of three years, after the submission of a portfolio which is internally and externally assessed against stated criteria, and staff are required to evidence excellence in their approaches, as well as wider involvement in learning, teaching and assessment practice and fellowship of the HEA. Currently there are 51 teaching fellows and 13 senior teaching fellows. In addition to the University's own awards, since 2009, the Students' Association has run its own 'I love my…' awards, which seek to reward good practice, innovation and commitment by staff across five learning and teaching categories.

The effectiveness of the institution's management of the student learning experience on collaborative programmes

72   Students at international and UK-based partners are supported in their learning in a number of ways: study skills guidance provided during induction; a library distance learning service; module guides and related study guides. Examples made available during the ELIR indicated that comprehensive guidance is provided for students learning at a distance. Most modules are the same as those offered on the programmes at the University, but some are customised to provide in-country examples. All collaborative students have access to the University's student portal, and also have a University email account. Collaborative partners use their own non-academic student support systems, which are subject to initial approval through the partnership approval process, and monitored and reviewed thereafter though the University's quality processes.

73   Overseas programmes have student staff liaison committees which are usually chaired by the visiting University programme leader and their findings reported to boards of studies; student feedback is obtained through module questionnaires. UK partners have their own established student feedback systems and the University seeks to ensure that these are used effectively for the University's students.

74   The University has developed effective systems for the delivery of overseas franchised programmes; these include variations of a 'fly-in' model, with University lecturers delivering induction activities and 15 hours of lecturing, followed by weekly classes from a local module tutor who is supported through continuing contact with the University module leader. This

model was identified as a positive feature of University practice in the 2009 QAA Audit of overseas provision report of collaborative provision in India.

Institution-led monitoring and review of quality and standards

Key features of institution-led monitoring and review at the institution, and the extent to which these arrangements meet sector-wide expectations

75   The University's approach to setting academic standards and assuring quality is set out in its Quality Framework (QF). Initially introduced in 2001-02, the QF has been reviewed, developed and updated in response to internal and external change, including the move to a new 20 credit modular structure in 2007-08. The University views three features as central to the QF: external involvement; benchmarking against sector-wide expectations; and the involvement of students in monitoring and review activities. In addition, it states that the QF has been designed to embed the promotion of quality enhancement within its procedures.

76   The QF now consists of 12 sections which set out the key procedures for approval, monitoring and review, as well as providing guidance on related aspects of academic provision. Linked to these, there are a number of associated templates and pro formas which are intended to ensure consistency of practice across the University. The University considers that the effectiveness of its QF is dependent upon the inter-relationship of different levels of responsibility and ownership across the institution, and the ways in which the processes are managed and implemented. The University also considers that the partnership between academic areas and Professional Services is important in ensuring the effectiveness of its institutional procedures.

77   At the time of the 2006 ELIR, the University was about to implement a new three faculty structure, and had begun a review of its academic portfolio and its committee structure. The academic portfolio review led to a number of key initiatives, including the revision of the modular structure; the introduction of 'Week One' (see paragraphs 31-32); and a programme of work under the banner Consistency in Assessment (see paragraph 113). A key aim of the review of the committee structure was to clarify the matrix of management responsibilities, notably those for assurance and enhancement. The review of the committee structure has resulted in a number of significant developments, including: the University's Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee becoming a Committee of the Academic Board; the creation of the Student Experience Committee within the executive line; and the establishment of new posts, including the appointment of associate deans at the faculty level. Since the 2006 ELIR, there have also been a number of changes in senior management posts, including the creation of the posts of Vice Principal (Academic Quality and Customer Service) and Vice Principal (Academic).

78   A review of Professional Services followed the portfolio and committee reviews, and was completed in 2007. This review led to the creation of two new bodies: Academic Development (primarily staff-facing services); and Student Affairs (primarily student-facing services). Academic Development encompasses the previous Educational Development and Quality Enhancement units, as well as having responsibility for aspects of lifelong learning.

79   The University's revised committee structure shows clearly identified lines of responsibility and reporting, and staff indicate that the cross-membership of committees facilitates effective communication. The introduction of faculty-level associate deans was highlighted by staff as particularly helpful in this regard. The consolidation of a number of previously separate professional services units into two units (Academic Development and Student Affairs) further strengthens communication.

80   The 2006 ELIR report identified that there was potential for the University's quality management arrangements to be mechanistic and repetitious. The University's review of the Quality Framework, its committee structures, and its reporting lines have done much to address

this. Overall, the University's committee structures and quality management arrangements provide a sound basis for securing academic standards and assuring quality.

Module and programme approval

81   Approval of a new module or programme requires both business approval (that there is a recognised market) and academic approval. Academic approval of a new module is determined in two stages: proposals are scrutinised at the subject and school level, and then forwarded to the faculty quality committee for approval.

82   New module proposals use the University's standard module descriptor template. The template is comprehensive and in addition to core information on content, learning outcomes and assessment, proposals must also indicate how the module will take account of the University's enhancement priorities. The proposal is also expected to take cognisance of the school culture document, which sets out the school's approach to programme development and delivery with regard to: enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment; embedding employability and PDP; internationalising the curriculum; addressing the need for scholarly skills; and supporting equality and diversity.

83   At the second stage of the approval process, the faculty quality committee assesses proposals against a module approval checklist, which ensures a consistent approach across the faculties. The checklist seeks assurance that the subject and school scrutiny process has included external peer review and that module proposers have addressed any comments raised by these external peers. The checklist also requires confirmation that account has been taken of the school culture document and the University's enhancement priorities. Once approved, new module descriptors are incorporated into the University's module catalogue. Examples of these seen during the ELIR were clear and provided sufficient information to allow students to make informed choices on their curriculum.

84   Proposals for new programmes are considered at faculty level and at University level by a Joint University Panel established specifically for the event. The Panel considers the programme proposal alongside the school culture document and a briefing paper which sets out a rationale in support of the programme. Scrutiny at both faculty and University levels involves external peers. At the faculty level, external peers are sought for their expertise in the subject area, while the Joint University Panel includes a senior academic who can comment on a broader range of issues related to learning and teaching in higher education. The University's Quality Framework also requires that the Panel includes a suitably experienced and senior representative from a different faculty. The University considers that use of externals in this manner is central to assuring the effectiveness and robustness of the procedures. The procedures for module and programme approval are thorough and consistently applied. They involve an appropriate level of external involvement in the scrutiny of proposals, and take account of a range of external reference points, including subject benchmark statements and the SCQF.

Annual monitoring

85   The University states that the annual monitoring of modules and programmes should take place as soon as possible after delivery. Module and programme leaders are expected to undertake a critical review of the effectiveness of provision, taking account of: student performance; student feedback; comments from external examiners; and staff reflection. To guide the monitoring process, staff are provided with two templates, the module evaluation form and the programme evaluation pro forma, both of which provide space for reflection on the outcomes of the monitoring process, and for the identification of future enhancement activity.

86   The annual monitoring reports are scrutinised at subject and school levels, and by the faculty quality committee. The faculties then submit an overview report to the University's Quality Committee. There is evidence that the Quality Committee gives detailed consideration to these faculty monitoring reports, including the implications for practice at faculty and University level.

87   Overall, module and programme leaders undertake annual monitoring in a critical and reflective manner. Good practice observed during the ELIR included the preparation of an action plan which identified where responsibilities for taking actions rested, and set timescales for completion. Evidence from a number of module and programme monitoring reports indicates that staff use the module template consistently, but that there is more variation in the use of the programme template. While some variation across subjects might be anticipated, the programme monitoring reports varied significantly in their length and emphasis, and this could limit the extent to which the University's Quality Committee can have effective oversight of good practice and areas for strategic action.

88   The University considers that its approach to annual monitoring is detailed and designed to take account of subject, school and faculty perspectives, although it also acknowledges that the process is complex and demands a significant time commitment from staff. The University has identified that staff feedback indicates some confusion regarding the value added by each staff member and stage in the process. As a result, the University indicated that individual roles and responsibilities have been reviewed, clarified and clearly articulated. This is a positive development, and the University is to be encouraged to progress its implementation of this revised guidance.

Subject review

89   In 2008-09, as part of the review of the Quality Framework (see paragraphs 75-76), and informed by the outcomes of the 2006 ELIR, the University introduced a revised process of Subject Review, replacing its previous process of School Review. Subject Review is designed to assure and enhance the quality of the student experience, to encourage critical reflection, and to promote dialogue between peers. Responsibility for Subject Review, which encompasses programme review, is the responsibility of the University's Quality Committee, which has approved a rolling schedule of Review on a six-year cycle.

90   Review panels are chaired by a vice principal or by the Director of Academic Development, and involve both external and internal peers. Since 2009 the panels have included a student panel member, who is a Students' Association sabbatical officer. Where foreign language provision is included, the panel includes a peer with appropriate language expertise.

91   Subject Review involves three stages. The first phase leads to the production of an evaluative commentary by the subjects under review. The second phase involves the Subject Review panel undertaking a two-day visit to the school, in which the panel reviews evidence and meets with students and staff, and which leads to the panel's report. The third phase is the development of a school enhancement plan, responding to the panel's report, and which seeks to identify good practice to be shared, and enhancement activities to be undertaken. The Quality Committee receives the report and the enhancement plan and comments on the extent to which the action planned is appropriate. Progress with the plan is assessed through consideration of the subsequent annual summary report.

92   In 2010, the University undertook a review of the effectiveness of its Subject Review process, and concluded that it met the aim of being enhancement-focused both in terms of method and output, and that it provided opportunities for reflection, debate and engagement with peers. This view was confirmed during the current ELIR. The University has also identified aspects of the Subject Review process which can be strengthened for the next cycle of review, and is to be supported in this intention. The University's Subject Review method meets the expectations of the Scottish Funding Council's guidance for institution-led quality review.

93   Overall, the University's approval, monitoring and review procedures are rigorous, effective and undertaken in good time.

Research degrees

94   The Research Degrees Committee has responsibility for oversight of research degree provision, specifically for ensuring the academic standards of research degree awards, monitoring and reviewing research students' progress, the appointment of examination teams, and recommendations for awards. It also has responsibility for monitoring and reviewing strategy and policy relating to research degrees. The University notes that this dual role, oversight of policy and practice, makes significant demands on the Committee's members.

95   The University states that its regulations relating to research student provision provide a robust framework with a degree of flexibility, and notes that some of the flexibility is the result of disparity across disciplines with regard to supervisory capacity and experience. In 2009-10, the Research Degrees Committee examined the structure, function and activities of school research committees, and concluded that the research degree support process had evolved to the extent that faculty research committees could be used in place of school-level committees in most cases. As a result, faculty research degree committees were established. In addition, identified academic staff at both University and faculty levels are allocated a part-time role to manage and oversee the research student experience. The University Research Degrees Co-ordinator provides oversight of the research student community.

The extent to which the institution's monitoring and review arrangements include consideration of all students

96   The University stated that it seeks to ensure that all students are considered in its monitoring and review processes, and that it uses consistent methods in order to achieve this, as well as evaluating and reflecting on the effectiveness of the approaches used. These methods include module evaluation questionnaires; the University's Student Satisfaction Survey, student staff liaison committees and external surveys (see paragraphs 26-28). The University also noted that equivalent mechanisms operate for students on collaborative programmes, although it identifies that not all mechanisms, such as the National Student Survey, can apply.

97   The University recognises that capturing the views of off-campus, distance learning and part-time students can be challenging. For such students, alternative approaches to student staff liaison committees (SSLCs) are being developed and piloted (see paragraph 21). These are intended to be more flexible in their application, with the aim of capturing a more representative set of responses. In addition, the Students' Association has developed an online forum that allows students to make contact with their representatives and to raise matters for SSLC agendas.

98   Staff confirmed that the monitoring and review arrangements used with overseas collaborative partners mirror those used for home-based students. In addition, specifically commissioned student questionnaires and focus groups are used in the partner institutions, and these also contribute to monitoring and review. In addition, the first cohort review activity, undertaken with new programmes (see paragraph 120), involves visits to overseas partners, and feedback from students is regarded as an important part of this process. However, the first cohort review reports available during the current ELIR did not refer specifically to student feedback.

99   Overall, the University provides a range of opportunities for all students to contribute to monitoring and review, and is taking positive steps to engage with 'hard to reach' student groups. The University is encouraged to progress the steps it is taking to involve the consideration of all students.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to self-evaluation including the use made of external reference points

100   The University stated that it is committed to the regular and systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of policies and procedures. It regards self-evaluation as built into routine procedures, and indicated that it has formal evaluations of larger initiatives commissioned. The University

identifies its thematic audit process (see paragraphs 104-106) as an example of the way in which critical reflection is an integral component of monitoring and review. The University acknowledges that a culture of critical reflection is yet to be fully embedded across the institution, citing, for example, how self-evaluation in routine monitoring varies from school to school. It is optimistic however that progress will continue to be made, primarily through shared experiences in Subject Review and as a result of clear leadership at the senior University level.

External reference points

101   The University stated that its approach to external benchmarking is set within the context of the Scottish higher education sector's Quality Enhancement Framework, Scottish Funding Council guidance, the QAA Academic Infrastructure, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), and the expectations of relevant professional and statutory bodies. Within this context, the University's procedures seek to capture such external expectations and to implement them in ways which align with the institution's requirements, culture and provision. In doing so, the University considers that its approach has developed since the 2006 ELIR. The development of school culture documents (see paragraph 82), which provide a sense of school identity and define schools' approaches to module and programme design and delivery, is one example of how this has been realised.

102   The University's approach to the use of external benchmarks is set out in the Quality Framework. The Quality Committee monitors external expectations and considers their impact and implications for the University. For example, as QAA's *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* has been revised, the University has undertaken mapping exercises to ensure adherence to the *Code*. Similarly, the Research Degrees Committee has sought to ensure engagement and alignment with guidance from the Research Councils and other relevant bodies.

103   The 2006 ELIR noted that the University did not systematically identify institutional-level matters arising from professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) accreditation reports, thereby limiting the opportunities for institutional learning and evaluation. Evidence from the current ELIR indicates that the Quality Committee has oversight of PSRB visits through summary reports from schools on the conduct and outcomes of such visits, and is taking steps to address issues raised.

Thematic quality audit

104   The University undertakes thematic quality audit to test and explore cross-cutting and generic themes within its provision. The audit method was approved in 2008-09 and was reviewed by the University in summer 2010. Typically, two audit themes are selected by the Quality Committee for each academic session, and the audit panel is led by a senior individual appointed by the Quality Committee. The audit report, which is submitted to the Quality Committee, is expected to cover aspects including: the effectiveness of management across the University; the degree of consistency in operation across different areas; the identification of good practice worthy of further dissemination; and recommendations for improvement and enhancement.

105   In practice, no audits were undertaken in 2008-09 due to the workload resulting from the introduction and evaluation of the new modular structure, but three themes were identified for 2009-10. These were: articulation opportunities in the University; customised and flexibly-managed provision; and enhancement of the student learning experience arising from the 2006 ELIR action plan. The Quality Committee received the reports on the first round of thematic audits in May 2010, and responsibilities for taking forward actions were confirmed at the Committee's October 2010 meeting.

106   The thematic audit reports are informative and identify aspects of good practice and recommendations for enhancement, although they vary in format and presentation. While some

variation may be inevitable as a result of the nature of the specific themes under consideration, the University is encouraged to consider whether greater standardisation of the reporting format would facilitate the identification of issues which have institution-wide implications or are the concern of individual schools or faculties. The University should also consider how it can ensure that responses to issues raised are made in a timely manner.

107   Overall, the University takes an effective approach to self-evaluation, including the use of external benchmarks.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to the management of information to inform the operation and evaluation of its monitoring and review activity

108   The University makes considerable use of a wide range of management data for routine administrative tasks at institutional level, as well as for the monitoring of quality and academic standards. Data sets on student assessment and achievement are provided centrally by the Policy, Planning and Intelligence unit; they inform the evaluation of the academic standards of each module and programme, and are used in annual monitoring. The use of such data sets is a positive development in supporting staff in monitoring and review. Monitoring and review activities are also informed by student satisfaction information gathered through a number of internal mechanisms. An overview of the information gained from external student surveys is considered in depth by the Student Experience Committee and annually by the Academic Board. The University has professional market research expertise within its Policy, Planning and Intelligence team to manage student feedback data. In addition, the wider team support monitoring and review processes through the provision of consistent data sets. Both are seen as positive developments. Overall, the University takes an effective approach to the management of information to inform the operation and evaluation of its monitoring and review activity.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to setting and maintaining academic standards including the management of assessment

External examiners

109   The University appoints external examiners to all modules and programmes at SCQF levels 7 to 11 against a set of criteria. Their roles and responsibilities are set out in the University regulations. External examiners act in an advisory capacity and contribute to decision-making at boards of examiners. Some perform a dual role, acting as examiners at both module and programme levels. The University seeks consistency in assessment and academic standards by appointing external examiners to cover both home and collaborative activity. New external examiners take part in an induction event and receive a comprehensive set of information, which is available both in hard copy and on the University's website. The link to this website is sent to all external examiners annually to help ensure they remain familiar with any changes to assessment guidelines and regulations.

110   External examiners' reports, which are produced annually and to an agreed pro forma, are received by Academic Development on behalf of the Principal and circulated to nominated contacts. Appropriate module or programme staff identify key matters raised and compile a response to each, which is sent back to the external examiner. The dean of faculty or associate dean (academic quality and customer service) approves each response, and ensures appropriate actions or recommendations are identified. An institutional summary of external examiners' reports and planned resultant actions are considered by the Quality Committee, together with faculty summary reports which include reflection on external examiners' comments. Evidence from the current ELIR confirms that the Quality Committee considers the annual faculty reports in detail, has an effective institutional oversight of matters arising from the external examining process, and identifies matters for institutional-level activity and further discussion. The University is asked to ensure that, as part of this process, the Quality Committee continues to reflect on

matters raised in previous annual reports, including the extent to which they have been resolved within an appropriate timescale.

111   Overall, the University's arrangements for external examining are fair and consistent, and effectively implemented.

Management of assessment

112   The current regulations for undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research provision were introduced in 2003-04, and subsequently modified to take account of changes arising from the move to the 20 credit modular structure. The principles and approach underpinning the regulations for all credit-bearing provision are based on the SCQF, and are well-established across the University. The regulations are available on the University's intranet for both students and staff.

113   The University reported on a significant and comprehensive programme of work, undertaken over a two year period (2006-08), under the banner of a Consistency in Assessment (CIA) initiative. Progress reports on the CIA initiative were submitted to the Academic Board at the end of each year. The University's assessment codes of practice which were developed as a result of CIA have been combined into a single document, the Assessment Handbook: an integrative approach to enhancing our practice. The University's intention is to link the Handbook to its Resource Bank (see paragraphs 127, 136 and 137).

114   The change from marks to grades for postgraduate taught provision in 2000 has not been extended to undergraduate provision, although it is the University's intention to do so. To date, the demands of introducing the 20 credit module framework has prevented this work from being progressed. A major institutional theme for enhancement during 2010-11 is that of assessment, and this will include the reconsideration of grading for undergraduate provision. The Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee has established a working group to take this work forward, with the intention of adding examples of good practice to the Resource Bank (see paragraphs 127, 136 and 137). The University is encouraged to progress its work in this area. Overall, the University's arrangements for the management of assessment are effective.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing public information about quality and academic standards, including the linkage with the institution's monitoring and review arrangements

115   Publications such as prospectuses, policy statements and marketing information, as well as the information provided on the University's internet and intranet, are produced centrally by Corporate Affairs with involvement of staff from across the University. The University has established procedures for checking and signing off such publications, designed to ensure accuracy. Data reports to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and HESA are produced by the Policy, Planning and Intelligence unit. The annual report to the SFC is produced by Academic Development and is considered by the Quality Committee, the Academic Board and the University Court before submission.

116   The University has specific arrangements in place for public information related to its collaborative provision, as set out in the collaborative agreements. All publicity material for international programmes must be approved by the University's Head of Brand. The University works with the colleges with whom it has collaborative agreements, to publish annual reports on progress and performance.

117   Overall, the University has effective procedures in place for the management of public information across its portfolio.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to linking its monitoring and review processes to its enhancement arrangements

118   The University emphasised that enhancement is embedded within its quality assurance procedures and, as a result, it is difficult to separate the two. It regards routine monitoring as typically leading to incremental changes which enhance the student learning experience. The enhancement focus of monitoring and review activities, and their reporting upwards to the Quality Committee, where an institutional-oversight is afforded, provides the basis for more significant enhancements and initiatives. The features of the University's Quality Framework go beyond quality assurance, and emphasise the need for staff to consider how the student learning experience can be enhanced. Overall, the University takes an effective approach to linking its monitoring and review processes to its enhancement arrangements.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to monitoring and reviewing its collaborative activity

Collaborative agreements

119   The Collaborative Partnerships Committee (CPC), which reports to the Quality Committee, has oversight of all collaborative agreements. In 2008, it published 'Principles and processes for collaborative programme approval, monitoring and review', which are closely aligned to the *Code of practice*. Further work was undertaken in 2010, with the revised procedures for collaborative provision being incorporated into the Quality Framework. The CPC annually reviews support arrangements for students studying overseas, and integrates student data from international collaborative partnerships into the University's reporting arrangements. The CPC also receives annual faculty reports on collaborative programmes.

120   The 'Principles and processes for collaborative programmes' sets out the procedures to be followed from the decision to develop a collaborative partnership, through to the monitoring and review of an established programme. A significant element of the approval process is the undertaking of a risk assessment using a prescribed risk matrix. Roles and responsibilities are clearly identified, and timescales for monitoring and review are specified, including the first cohort review. The first cohort review is an in-depth evaluation of the operation of the programme after the first year of delivery and, overall, represents effective practice.

121   In 2009, QAA undertook an audit of the University's provision in India. Following that audit, the University continued work on its initiatives to develop a staff development programme for staff in India; to address academic misconduct; and to develop online study skills support for students articulating to study at the University.

122   Overall, the University's regulations and procedures for overseas collaborative activity provision are appropriately thorough and robust.

Articulation agreements

123   The University has a number of articulation agreements with partner colleges. In 2009-10, the University undertook an internal thematic audit (see paragraphs 104-106) of the articulation opportunities available at the University. The audit concluded that articulation arrangements were beneficial in terms of student recruitment, widening access and strengthening relationships with the college sector. The audit report also identified a number of operational issues to be addressed, including a lack of consistency across faculties in their strategic oversight of the number and character of articulation agreements, with most agreements generated at the subject level. It was unclear whether existing agreements could be described as formal or informal, and where written agreements existed, these varied in the extent to which they specified potential students' entitlement regarding entry to a programme. The audit report also recommended that

all articulation arrangements should be subject to regular monitoring and review, in order to ensure that articulation agreements are refreshed as programmes are modified. While articulation agreements are considered to be an important strand in the University's widening access agenda, the thematic audit found that it was not possible to track students who entered through such routes. During the current ELIR, reports on collaborative activity with three of Scotland's colleges revealed interesting and useful data on students' progress and performance. While it is evident that such data is gathered, it is not always systematically considered at University level.

124   The University recognises the need for greater institutional oversight of its articulation arrangements with its partners, and has plans to address the matters identified in its thematic audit. The University is encouraged to progress its identified actions in order to support its institutional priorities to increase student recruitment through widening participation and strengthen its relationship with the college sector.

Strategic approach to quality enhancement

Key features of the institution's strategic approach to quality enhancement

125   The University defines quality enhancement as 'planned changes designed to enhance the quality of the learning experience of our students'. The University considers that quality enhancement is embedded at a strategic level, in that it is led by key staff who form agendas for change and set direction. Enhancement is seen to be integrated within the Quality Framework and its procedures, and is also regarded as an outcome of local initiatives and the work of individuals. Enhancement is considered to embrace both continuous improvement (small changes made as a result of reflection on experience and information) and deliberate strategic steps (larger, planned changes strategically-led at institutional level).

126   The University identifies that quality enhancement is embedded at the strategic level within the University Strategy (2009-15), the Academic Strategy (2009-15) and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy (2010-15), which together provide a framework for enhancement. The University Strategy outlines the institution's 'academic signature', which reflects the institution's mission, vision and values, and links to the principles contained within the LTA Strategy.

127   The University intends that the LTA Strategy is flexible and dynamic, setting out institutional priorities and direction. Accordingly, the LTA Strategy, which is set out on a dedicated space on the University's intranet, has three levels of activity. The top level consists of a set of 10 key statements on the University's approach to learning, teaching and assessment. These statements define the strategic direction to 2015. At the second level is a series of statements outlining how schools, Professional Services and the Student's Association are responding to each of the key statements. The intention is that these second-level statements will remain 'live' and be updated in response to both University priorities and school or faculty priorities. At the third level is the Resource Bank, a wide range of learning, teaching and assessment resources and case studies, which staff can use and contribute to, thereby promoting the sharing of good practice.

128   The University initially developed a Quality Enhancement Strategy in 2005. Consideration of a revised enhancement strategy was deferred until the development of the LTA Strategy, and it was subsequently considered that a culture of quality enhancement was embedded sufficiently in the University so that a separate enhancement strategy was no longer needed. However, it was agreed that it would be useful to have an agreed statement outlining the University's approach to enhancement. The quality enhancement statement, 'Our strategic approach to enhancing the quality of the student learning experience', comprises two sections: key features of quality enhancement; and taking quality enhancement forward. The statement makes clear that the new LTA Strategy is the main vehicle for taking forward the strategic direction of enhancement.

129   The tripartite nature of the LTA Strategy means that it is well placed to embed and support enhancement at all levels. The decision to move away from the idea of a separate enhancement strategy is also consistent with current practice across the sector, supporting the idea that quality enhancement should be an integral part of academic practice and not a separate activity. Consequently, the purpose, and additional value, of the quality enhancement statement is less clear. At the time of the current ELIR, the statement had only recently been approved, and had not yet been widely shared across the institution. The University is encouraged to reflect in due course on the additional value afforded by having a separate quality enhancement statement.

The effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategies and policies for promoting quality enhancement across the institution

130   The LTA Strategy is seen as a key tool for heads of school, subject group and programme leaders, and Professional Services directors to use to manage quality enhancement locally. This translates in practical terms through encouragement for schools to develop enhancement statements and corresponding projects aligned with the LTA Strategy. Schools are encouraged, on completion of these projects, to submit these to the Resource Bank so that their practice may be shared. There is clear alignment of school enhancement statements with the key statements within the first level of the LTA Strategy. To develop and help embed the Resource Bank, a teaching fellow from the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Care has been seconded for 18 months to Academic Development. Although only operational since February 2011, the innovative nature of the Resource Bank's design and approach to engaging staff and the Students' Association demonstrates significant potential for engagement and enhancement across the University.

131   There is clear evidence of the embedding of a quality enhancement culture, with many initiatives which contribute to the enhancement of the student learning experience. Individual staff enthusiasts, in particular the teaching fellows (see paragraphs 71 and 138), play an important role in driving such enhancement. The University acknowledges that the next stage of progressing enhancement will include reviewing how best to set future enhancement agendas, as led by senior staff. The University is to be encouraged in this intention, so as to fully align enhancement activities with its strategic aims and priorities.

The effectiveness of the institution's use of external reference points in its approach to quality enhancement, including the extent to which the institution's approach is informed by national and international practice

132   The University's approach to quality enhancement is informed by its engagement with a range of external reference points. The University identifies that senior staff continue to play an active role in the work of the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee, including the recent work on international benchmarking of the research student experience. The University also actively engages with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) (see paragraph 69).

133   The University's engagement with the national Enhancement Themes is wide ranging and includes hosting conferences and visiting speakers, contributing to case studies, and funding attendance at Themes events. Significant enhancement projects, such as the development of the University's graduate attributes, have been informed by specific Themes, for example Graduates for the 21st Century (see paragraph 52). The University's professional development programme also includes a number of distinct strands which are identified as largely aligning with the national Themes, including Assessment and the First Year Student Experience.

134   Overall, the University makes effective use of external reference points in its approach to quality enhancement.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to identifying, disseminating and implementing good practice in the context of its strategic approach to enhancement

135   The University's Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee's remit includes the dissemination of good practice both internally and externally. The University identifies that there had been a tendency in the past for faculties and schools to be inward looking, with good practice not being shared beyond the discipline or school. To address this, the University has taken a number of steps to identify, share and implement good practice. The Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee now includes a showcasing of pedagogic initiatives at the conclusion of each Committee meeting, and this has led to a number of initiatives being adopted within other schools. One faculty has adopted the Committee's approach and has a similar showcase at each of its faculty joint LTA/quality committees.

136   The online Resource Bank contains a wide range of learning, teaching and assessment resources and case studies. The Resource Bank is a recent development, having been formally launched at a staff conference in January 2011. Notwithstanding, there is clear evidence of staff engagement, with some 136 examples of practice now included in the Bank, and a significant number of hits on the intranet site. During the current ELIR, staff identified examples of the uptake of case studies from the Resource Bank. For example, a marking tool developed in the School of Computing is now widely used across the University.

137   To encourage further population of the Resource Bank, Academic Development has introduced Best Practice Awards with winners from four categories awarded at the University's annual staff conference. The University staff conference in June 2011 will present staff awards for case studies focused on enhancing student feedback, in alignment with the institution's Feedback for Learning campaign. The Resource Bank and the Best Practice Awards provide positive opportunities for academic staff to actively engage on an iterative basis with the University's LTA Strategy.

138   The Teaching Fellow Scheme is well-established, and the 2006 ELIR report regarded the Scheme as having an important quality enhancement role. Since 2008, teaching fellows have been supported by a Teaching Development Fund of £70,000. The University has introduced Teaching Development Fund grants to encourage projects which support the achievement of the LTA Strategy, and to ensure that the work of individual teaching fellows and group projects are disseminated across the University and, as appropriate, externally. Examples of the projects supported by this funding reflect a wide range of topics and innovatory approaches, which together demonstrate the University's commitment to the enhancement of academic practice. The teaching fellows, in conjunction with the Academic Development unit, organise biannual teaching and learning conferences which align with institutional enhancement priorities. Teaching fellows also provide informal support to other academic staff, and the recent establishment of interest groups led by teaching fellows will assist in further disseminating good practice. Overall, the Teaching Fellow Scheme plays a significant role in providing a proactive approach to disseminating good practice across the University.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to enhancing collaborative provision

139   The University states that its collaborative provision is overseen and enhanced through its routine quality procedures and by additional specific measures. The Collaborative Partnerships Committee (CPC) has designated responsibility for the enhancement of collaborative provision, informed by the Quality Framework for collaborative programme approval, monitoring and review, which was updated in 2009. The University considers that the CPC itself acts as a vehicle for enhancement through its membership and procedures. The Committee draws on cross-institutional expertise and knowledge of operating collaborative partnerships to share good practice across the faculties. The University has developed draft training materials to support the work of the Committee members.

140   After the first year of operation of a collaborative programme, the University undertakes a first cohort review (see paragraph 120), and this leads to enhancements in provision. Routine monitoring and review, and the level of contact between University staff and staff in partner institutions, means that matters for improvement can be identified and enhancement actions taken in a timely manner. Examples of such enhancement activity include the provision of study skills workshops for students, and professional development sessions for partner staff. The University states that there is increasing staff development support for its partners and has introduced two modules as part of its Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education to support partner staff both in overseas and in UK partner institutions.

141   The University operates its collaborative activity under a 'fly in' model arrangement (see paragraph 74), providing greater contact at the local level and therefore the opportunity to monitor and enhance the quality of the student learning experience directly. Staff indicated that this model of delivery, although intensive, supports enhancement activities. The University has identified that the success of plans to expand collaborative activity may be dependent on the scalability of this model, and alternative ways of providing support to partner institutions which are more economic or scale up more easily, such as videoconferencing and online learning, are under consideration.

142   Overall, the University's approach to enhancing collaborative provision is effective.

Conclusion

Effectiveness of the institution's management of the student learning experience

143   Overall, the University has well-established arrangements for student representation. The University has an effective partnership with the Students' Association, which plays an active role in the development and implementation of strategic initiatives. The partnership working between the University and the Students' Association involves the latter in a significant range of activities, and the University is encouraged to reflect on how best to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the Students' Association's contribution to such initiatives. The University's student staff liaison committee (SSLC) system is an important part of the representation arrangements. The University acknowledges that there is some variability in the effectiveness of the SSLCs, and is encouraged to continue pursuing a number of initiatives which seek to enhance their accessibility and effectiveness.

144   The University has a range of mechanisms for gathering and responding to student feedback, and these are generally effective. Library Information Services is a positive example of the use of student feedback to inform the enhancement of services for students. The University has identified the 'feedback loop' as an important area of enhancement activity, and has taken steps to improve the feedback mechanisms for 'hard-to-reach' student groups, which is a positive development. The University is encouraged to give greater attention to communicating effectively with the student body on significant institutional changes which impact directly on students' learning experiences.

145   The University regards its Personal Development Tutoring (PDT) system as a primary source of support and information for students, and also recognises the contribution that personal development tutors can make to improving student retention. The University had identified that the PDT system was operating with mixed effectiveness and has taken a number of steps to address this. There is evidence of some good PDT practice, but there is continuing variability in the quality of PDT provision, and the University is encouraged to communicate a consistent institution-wide entitlement for students. The University recognises that its student retention rates are an ongoing challenge, and there is clear evidence of the institution taking a wide-ranging approach to improving student retention, including implementing a range of initiatives within the schools. The University recognises the potential for such devolved

approaches to be variable in their effectiveness, and is supported in its intention to give greater emphasis to identifying and prioritising the most effective measures to improve retention.

146   Overall, the arrangements for the supervision of postgraduate research students are effective. At present, training arrangements for research students are devolved to faculties, and there is no provision for university-wide generic skills training. The University is asked to review this in order to meet sector expectations and best practice. The University is also encouraged to reflect on the ways in which it might foster a research student community, building on existing good practice.

147   The University's approach to the initial and continuing development of staff in order to promote effective learning is a strength. The University is encouraged to strengthen its arrangements for initial research supervisor training and for the continuing professional development of experienced research supervisors.

Effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for institution-led monitoring and review of quality, and academic standards of awards

148   The University's quality management arrangements, including its committee structures, provide a secure basis for establishing and maintaining academic standards, and for assuring quality. The review of the University's Quality Framework has been successful in creating more opportunities for critical reflection within its quality processes, and a greater focus on enhancement.

149   The University has a number of articulation agreements with partner colleges. It recognises the need for greater institutional oversight of these articulation arrangements, and is encouraged to progress its identified actions in order to support its institutional priorities.

Effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategic approach to quality enhancement

150   The University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy for 2010-15 is the primary instrument for taking forward the strategic direction of enhancement. Based on three connected levels of activity (University, school, individual), the Strategy is well placed to support enhancement across the institution, and there is early evidence of the alignment of enhancement activities across these strategic levels. The University has recently produced a quality enhancement statement, in addition to the LTA Strategy, and is invited to reflect on the additional value of the separate enhancement statement.

151   There is clear evidence within schools and faculties of a quality enhancement culture becoming embedded, with many initiatives which contribute to the enhancement of the student learning experience. The University acknowledges that the next stage will include ensuring that enhancement activities are fully aligned with the University's strategic priorities.

Overarching confidence judgement

152   The findings of the ELIR indicate that there can be confidence in the University's current, and likely future, management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of the student learning experience it provides.