Enhancement-led Institutional Review

University of Edinburgh

NOVEMBER 2011

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Introduction

1   This is the report of an Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) of the University of Edinburgh (the University) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). QAA is grateful to the University for the 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 accompanied by a number of documents including three case studies relating to: learning and teaching spaces for enhancing student engagement; research-teaching linkages; and enhancing postgraduate distance learning. The ELIR team also received the report of the University's previous ELIR which took place in 2006.

5   Preparation of the RA was overseen by a Steering Group led by the Assistant-Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance, in consultation with staff from across the University. The Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) was involved at all stages of the process, making an active contribution to the content. The University emphasised that it had drawn on a range of guidance and good practice to support its RA preparation including *Good practice in Reflective Analysis when preparing for Enhancement-led institutional review* on the QAA Scotland website and the experience of the University of Glasgow and Edinburgh College of Art. The RA was approved by the University Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) on 25 May 2011 and by the Senate on 8 June 2011; it was endorsed by the University Court on 20 June 2011.

6   The ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 12 and 13 October 2011 and the Part 2 visit took place in the week beginning 28 November 2011.

7   The ELIR team comprised: Professor Ursula Böser, Emeritus Professor Malcolm Cook, Mr Tommy Gore, Mr Chris McIntyre, Professor Peter McPhee, and Mr Peter Watson. The review was managed on behalf of QAA by Ms Ailsa Crum, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

Background information about the institution

8   The University of Edinburgh is one of Scotland's ancient universities, and has the largest student population of the Scottish universities with just under 29,000 students (by headcount) in 2010-11. The University describes itself as a large and diverse research-intensive university with a

clear commitment to excellence in learning and teaching. The University also describes itself as distinctly Scottish but with a reach and aspirations that are global. Around 30 per cent of the total student population comes from over 120 countries outside the UK. The University highlights that it offers the most comprehensive range of subjects in Scotland (and the third most comprehensive in the UK). Following the merger with Edinburgh College of Art (in August 2011), the University's students study across 103 of the 144 principal subjects defined by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Students are taught in 22 schools across three colleges: the College of Humanities and Social Science; the College of Science and Engineering; and the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine.

Institution's strategy for quality enhancement

9   The University's Learning-Teaching Enhancement Strategy (LTES) has three chief aims, to:

- strengthen and enhance the quality of students' experiences of university study wherever necessary, appropriate and practicable

- sustain an environment in which excellence in learning and teaching can thrive and where refinements and innovations in practices are prized and promulgated

- encourage everyone involved in teaching and supporting learning to play their part in enhancing as well as ensuring quality.

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

10   In 2010-11, the University had a total student population of just under 29,000 (by headcount), comprising over 19,000 undergraduate students and just under 10,000 postgraduate students. Of the postgraduate students, over 5,600 were studying on taught programmes and over 4,200 were research students. Following the merger with Edinburgh College of Art (in August 2011), the University estimates that its student population has risen to almost 30,000, including an increase of around 1,300 undergraduate students and over 400 postgraduate students.

11   In 2010-11, around 80 per cent of the University's students were studying full-time. Around 40 per cent of the total student population came from Scotland, with a further 25 per cent coming from the rest of the UK. Around 11 per cent of students came from the European Union (other than the UK) and around a further 21 per cent came from other overseas countries.

12   The University has an explicit strategic intention to increase its proportion of international students and to increase the number of postgraduate taught students. In particular, the University's Distance Education Initiative is aimed at addressing taught postgraduate student growth, focusing initially on new programmes and courses to be delivered online and at a distance. The University is also increasing its research student population. Home undergraduate student numbers are capped annually by the Scottish Funding Council, leading to significant competition for places and highly qualified students at entry.

13   Since the 2006 ELIR, the University's student record system, Edinburgh University Complete Lifecycle Integrated Development (EUCLID), has been implemented. This enables the University to produce centralised data on a number of aspects of the student learning experience, which facilitates comparisons between colleges and schools to support strategic decision making. The implementation of EUCLID has been challenging and not all of the original ambitious intentions for the project have yet been fully realised. However, a number of benefits of the system have been identified and are appreciated by staff, for example the online application process, which has supported the strategic aim of growing international student numbers. The

EUCLID Future Projects documents set out a range of ways in which EUCLID could have a positive impact on the student experience. The University is aware of the need to continue monitoring EUCLID on a project by project basis. There would also be benefit in the University continuing to work in partnership with the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) to ensure that it can achieve the intention for EUCLID to provide students with a simple, straightforward and seamless experience.

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

14   The University indicated that its approach to engaging and supporting students in their learning is derived from the University Learning-Teaching Enhancement Strategy (LTES).

Student representation

15   The University emphasised that effective student representation is a vital aspect of its quality assurance processes, with the University and the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) working in partnership to promote student representation and engagement. The 2006 ELIR report commented positively on the arrangements in place at that time, and the University has highlighted a number of ways in which it is continuing to enhance this activity, including through working jointly with EUSA, and with the national development service, student participation in quality scotland (sparqs).

16   EUSA sabbatical officers are represented on all the key University committees. The EUSA President and Vice President (Academic Affairs) both sit on the University Court. EUSA is also represented on the Senate and its subcommittees, and on the variety of task groups and subgroups that are formed, such as the Assuring the Quality of the Student Experience Task Group which reports to the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). In many cases, these groups are convened or co-convened by the EUSA officer. In certain committees, such as the Senate QAC, time is made in the first meeting of the year to allow EUSA sabbatical officers the opportunity to outline their priorities for the year. These arrangements represent good practice and it is evident that the contribution of EUSA officers is greatly appreciated by staff and students alike.

17   The EUSA sabbatical officers are able to develop effective working relationships with committee members and key senior managers. Professional staff in EUSA support the sabbaticals by ensuring they are up to date with key University and national developments. At school and college levels, student representation is not supported in this way and has to be accommodated around study demands. EUSA officers have emphasised the importance of the University having professional and consistent student representation, particularly at the college level given that the University's devolved structure gives significant power to colleges and that many key decisions are made at that level. In recognition of this, the University has been working with EUSA and sparqs and is encouraged to continue seeking ways of enhancing this area of student representation.

18   The University stated that the class representative (class rep) system underpins all other student representation at the University. It is overseen by EUSA with support from the University. It is intended that the class rep role will be recognised in the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) from 2011-12. The term 'class rep' is applied to any student who is elected to represent fellow students at programme or course level. The ways in which class reps are elected and the mechanisms through which they engage with course organisers and fellow students differ between schools, reflecting the variety of structures, courses and programmes across the University. With assistance from sparqs, EUSA and staff from the Academic Registry are working to ensure clear guidance about the class rep system is readily available to all students and staff, and that the system is well promoted.

19   Students indicated that the class rep system is generally working well and provided examples of good practice, including: students being responsible for chairing the meetings; short,

weekly meetings being held to ensure a quick response to matters raised by students; and mechanisms to enable all students (not only class reps) to contribute to discussions. In all cases, students highlighted the positive nature of the meetings, with staff being receptive to changes suggested by students and acting quickly to introduce them. Students also indicated that staff were approachable and they were confident about raising matters with them. However, a number of staff appeared to be uncertain about the framework for the class rep system and there were also examples given of the arrangements not working optimally. The significant variation in the operation of the class rep arrangements, including variation in the frequency and format of meetings, presents challenges for the University in identifying and resolving matters that are raised across programmes and schools.

20   It is evident that the University places a high priority on student representation, and there is clear evidence of an extensive and effective partnership between the institution and EUSA, particularly at the strategic level. It is positive that the University and EUSA are working proactively together to enhance arrangements at the school and college levels. The University is encouraged to ensure that the new guidelines for the class rep system are introduced and promoted to ensure that all students have equivalent opportunities for having their views represented, and to facilitate the collection and consideration of comparable information about student views across programmes and schools. Given its remit in relation to student surveys, there is likely to be benefit in the University using the Assuring the Quality of the Student Experience Task Group to help promote consistent approaches to gathering and analysing student views and feedback across the institution.

Gathering and analysing student views

21   The University participates in a number of national student surveys including: the National Student Survey (NSS); the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES); the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES); and the International Student Barometer (ISB). Senior staff emphasised the importance of these surveys in identifying key institution-wide matters and in providing comparative data across colleges and schools. Schools whose survey outcomes suggest they have matters to address are required to produce an action plan and efforts are made to share good practice across the institution. It is clear that the University places considerable significance on the outcomes of these external surveys and that action to address any unfavourable outcomes is monitored carefully.

22   The 2006 ELIR report asked the University to reflect on the ways in which it could develop a clearer view of the undergraduate student experience. The Student Voice project has since been launched, through which the University is seeking to develop a more coherent approach to the analysis of student survey data in order to achieve a holistic view of the entire student population. The project will make use of external survey data, and one aim is to predict how changes in survey outcomes will impact on the institution's performance against the targets in the Strategic Plan.

23   The University indicated that schools are required to gather feedback from students on their experience, and mainly use end of course or programme surveys, although increasing use is being made of focus groups and other imaginative forms of qualitative data gathering. The method used for obtaining student feedback is devolved to schools, as is the management of the information gathered. The University is aware of the limitations of this approach in terms of producing comparable information, and plans to review this activity as part of the work of the Assuring the Quality of the Student Experience Task Group. The outcomes of student feedback are reported in the annual course monitoring process (see paragraphs 71 to 73).

Feedback on assessed work

24   The 2006 ELIR report asked the University to improve its arrangements for providing feedback on students' assessed work. The University indicated that subsequent to the ELIR report

this matter was given 'substantial additional momentum' by the disappointing findings from the National Student Survey (NSS), in which the University participated for the first time that same year. The University Strategic Plan 2008-12 included a formal target to improve the NSS outcome in this area; specifically to move the University into the upper quartile of institutions surveyed. The Senate heard presentations from all schools in 2008 and 2009 on 'fast, effective student feedback'.

25   The University emphasised that there have been substantial and wide-ranging efforts within and across schools and colleges to review and enhance the quality and consistency of feedback. For example, in June 2010 the Senate adopted a set of Feedback Standards and Guiding Principles, and a variety of measures have been introduced to enable NSS data on feedback to be monitored and targeted more systematically, including taking action where the NSS scores for schools have fallen short of the institution's expectations. In 2010, in response to continued poor NSS outcomes, the University required eight schools to provide action plans for improvement. While the University has undoubtedly taken action, in some cases adopting imaginative and innovative approaches (see paragraph 129), this is taking a long time to have a meaningful impact across the institution.

26   It was evident from discussions with students that there is considerable inconsistency between schools in the amount and quality of feedback and in the time taken to provide it. There are examples of good practice in line with the Feedback Standards and Guiding Principles (see above, paragraph 25) as well as instances of poor practice. Some staff identified difficulties in sharing good practice within schools. The lack of consistency is particularly acute in the area of student access to and feedback on examination scripts. In some schools this is standard practice, while in others it is exceptional or non-existent. Although at its April 2011 meeting the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) discussed the possibility of students having sight of their examination scripts to assist with their self-reflective learning, there was no decision on the matter. The University should reach a view on students' entitlement to see their scripts and to receive feedback on their performance. This entitlement should then be communicated clearly to all staff and students (see paragraph 138).

27   The Strategic Plan 2008-12 included a target of simplifying and standardising assessment procedures and regulations by September 2009, while noting that there might be departures from them for 'academic reasons'. There has been positive work to introduce greater consistency in the assessment regulations, but the completion date for the Strategic Plan target relating to feedback on students' assessed work has been moved to 2012.

28   The University should take prompt action to clarify and monitor its expectations concerning feedback practice. In particular, the University should ensure there is consistency in institutional guidance and practices relating to student access to examination scripts and related feedback.

Director of Studies system

29   The University indicated that following the 2006 ELIR it had reviewed and strengthened its framework of academic and pastoral support. This support is provided to students through networks of academic staff with a designated role as Director of Studies (DoS). At the start of 2010-11, the University introduced Standards and Guiding Principles on Pastoral and Academic Support which include a set of core expectations and responsibilities for the DoS role. The academic and pastoral support arrangements intentionally operate differently in each of the three colleges, reflecting the different academic and professional cultures and requirements.

30   Although it is recognised that there have been improvements to the DoS system, the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) has ongoing concerns about the consistency of support provided across the University. These concerns are acknowledged by senior staff. In discussions with students during the current ELIR, it was evident that some students were able to

identify good practice in the DoS system, but many indicated that they and their classmates had had a poor experience.

31   Following consideration at the Principal's Strategy Group in October 2011, the University developed a discussion document, 'Guidance and Support to Students - A Framework of Proposals for an Enhanced Approach'. The document proposed a new personal tutor system with a structure of personal tutors, senior tutors at school level, and a dean of students at college level. It indicated that the University would make additional funding available for schools to ensure personal tutors were relieved of the administrative and clerical burden of their role. The document proposed that implementation of the arrangements would be overseen by the Senate Learning & Teaching Committee through a Personal Tutor Task Group, which would be chaired by a senior academic manager. The University indicated its aim was to make an interim recommendation in May 2012. The University is strongly encouraged to prioritise the implementation of the revised arrangements and to maintain strategic oversight of this area to ensure there are significant improvements for students.

International study exchanges

32   The Strategic Plan 2008-12 identified a target for increasing the proportion of the University's students attending another international institution as part of their study by 50 per cent between 2008 and 2012. In line with experience at most other UK institutions, the University has found this goal challenging. Between 2007-08 and 2010-11, there was a 25 per cent increase in the number of students who undertook a formally approved period of study abroad (comprising 577 students in 2010-11) with a further increase forecast for 2011-12. The University has Erasmus agreements with 180 universities in more than 20 countries, and has a further 65 partner institutions in North and South America, Australasia and Asia through the International Office's International Programme. Further mandatory study abroad schemes are provided through schools and are specific to the requirements of the programme.

33   The University sets out the expectations of staff and students in its Code of Practice for University of Edinburgh Students Studying Abroad. The Code is clear in its identification of roles and expectations. However, students described significant variation in the experiences of those who had studied abroad. There were instances of good practice with planned meetings and contact taking place before, during and after the students' time away from the University. There were also examples of students who had not received contact during their study abroad or support on their return to the University. The University is asked to ensure that the Code is implemented consistently and that the student experience is monitored to ensure all students receive the support as intended. The University indicated that while there is no single institution-wide approach to grade recognition and the award of credit for study abroad, there is consistency within bands of similar programmes in line with the learning outcomes of the degree programmes. There would be benefit in the University introducing a consistent approach to the arrangements for recognising grades and awarding academic credit for study abroad opportunities.

Changes in the student population

34   The University is making a number of strategic changes to the composition of the student population (see paragraph 12). In particular, the University intends to continue increasing the number of international students. These students are able to access the support available for all students and, in addition, receive support through the International Office and the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA). In 2011-12, EUSA had 270 registered societies with 38 international societies, which provide year-round, peer-led student support. In direct response to international student needs, EUSA provides peer proofreading and an International Buddying Scheme, both of which are positive developments. International students commented very positively about their experience at the University.

35   One result of the University's internationalisation strategy, Edinburgh Global, has been the creation of Global Academies within the University, such as the Global Development Academy and the Global Health Academy. The Academies provide forums for collaboration between staff to address global challenges, working across traditional discipline boundaries to create new postgraduate programmes. The Academies represent an innovative route for programme and research development.

36   In addition to the more recent development of the Global Academies, the University has historically attracted international students, and therefore many of the academic and support staff are experienced in making curricular, pastoral and other adjustments. However, a number of staff raised concerns about the extent to which the existing University infrastructure will be adequate to support the planned large increase in international student numbers. They indicated that the process of rethinking ways of presenting their curricula and the types of assessment used to suit the changed dynamics of the student community could be time consuming, and they would welcome additional support from the University to allow them to carry this out efficiently and effectively, including opportunities to learn from colleagues' experiences and to share good practice. The University is, therefore, encouraged to adopt a strategic and planned approach to anticipating the likely developments and adjustments that will be needed in the curriculum and academic environment to meet the needs of the changing student population.

Research-led teaching

37   The University highlights its strong commitment to research, emphasising that it aims to ensure its undergraduate and postgraduate students are taught in a way that is informed and enhanced by the institution's research activity. The University stated that all of its learning and teaching activities take place in a research-intensive environment that places value on learning by enquiry and by the development of autonomous and critical learners. The University is able to identify several notable examples of research-teaching linkages in practice.

38   The University Learning-Teaching Enhancement Strategy (see paragraph 114) does not refer explicitly to research-teaching linkages, although in different ways, all of the college strategies contain strong statements emphasising the centrality of the research environment and research-led enquiry. External examiners' reports include comments on the research-led characteristics of the University's programmes and a number of postgraduate awards include international research collaborations. Students at all levels of study were aware that they are attending a research-led university and were able to provide many examples of how this is reflected in their learning, including: academic staff highlighting their own research; classes on research methodology; and opportunities to engage in research-based project work. It is evident that the University has established a strong and evolving culture of research-led teaching which represents good practice.

39   Overall, students are very positive about their learning experience, speaking highly of the curriculum content and the emphasis placed on research-led teaching. The University is able to attract high-achieving students who are demanding learners, who clearly enjoy their time at the University, and who are proud to be its ambassadors.

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

40   The Strategic Plan states that the University's mission is to produce graduates who are equipped for high personal and professional achievement. The University also indicated that it is planning for a long period of attention to graduate attributes, driven by an ongoing commitment to this area of activity and by the hostile employment market. A key development in this area since the 2006 ELIR is the formation of an Employability Consultancy in autumn 2007 as one response to four years' strategic funding from the Scottish Funding Council.

41   The Employability Consultancy is managed by the Director of the Careers Service and its work is overseen by the University Employability Strategy Group, which leads the University's approach to employability, linking activity to the institution's strategic objectives. The Consultancy's work falls into four broad areas: school or subject-specific projects; work with the colleges; institution-level projects; and a small number of sector-level projects. Activity is evaluated and the University is able to point to successes in each of the four areas. The University indicated that one of the key benefits has been increased connectivity on employability activity across the institution.

42   Through partnership with EUSA, the University is working to develop graduate attributes in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. In particular, EUSA is leading on developing opportunities for volunteering and for enhancing the training of class representatives, both of which are well received by staff and students.

43   In 2009-10, in support of its work on personal and professional development planning, the University procured an e-portfolio system which has been available to all staff and students through the web portal MyEd (see paragraph 51). Learning from an evaluation study carried out in the College of Humanities and Social Science, the University recognises the importance of the e-portfolio being embedded in the student experience in order to have the greatest impact on learning and teaching. The focus of development activities is now on working with schools and course teams to produce tools and resources that are tailored to the local context which can be closely linked to course activities. The University is encouraged to continue with this work.

44   In discussions, students were able to identify numerous examples of how graduate attributes and employability were embedded in the curriculum, for example through an increased emphasis on presentations and debates in class. The students were also clear about how these activities are intended to benefit their future development and spoke positively about the opportunities for those studying at all levels, not only those in their final year, to participate. Students studying in the College of Science and Engineering also indicated that non credit-bearing courses had been introduced on CV writing and interview techniques. Overall, the University has made good progress with its aim of embedding employability and graduate attributes.

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

45   The University described its learning environments as a blend of the digital with the physical, reflecting both the campus-based nature of the majority of its programmes and the technology-rich nature of the institution as a world-class research establishment. The University also has the Distance Education Initiative which represents a substantial investment and a significant new direction in learning and teaching for the institution.

46   Infrastructure investment and development of the knowledge-based/IT learning environment is overseen by a University Court committee, the Knowledge Strategy Committee, which is convened by the Vice-Principal Knowledge Management. It and its subcommittees all have student representation. In 2006, the University formed the Learning and Teaching Spaces Advisory Group (LTSAG) to provide a holistic approach to the current requirements and future developments of learning and teaching spaces. It is a multidisciplinary forum that brings together: estates staff, Information Services staff, the Vice-Principals for Academic Enhancement and Knowledge Management, academic staff from the three colleges, and the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) Vice-President (Academic Affairs). It reports directly to the Space Management Group and to the Estates Committee, with a requirement to report to the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee as appropriate.

47   LTSAG appointed a former EUSA Vice-President (Academic Affairs) to carry out its Learning, Teaching & Study Spaces Project with the aim of learning from space development projects across the sector, reviewing existing learning spaces, and considering future aspirations for development. This formed the basis of a discussion paper which was considered by the Academic Policy Committee in April 2008. In February 2009, LTSAG coordinated a special

meeting of the Senate at which projects were showcased. Subsequently, LTSAG developed a set of Guiding Principles for Development of the Learning & Teaching Estate which will form the basis for future strategic development and which have already informed the University Estate Strategy 2010-20.

Main Library Refurbishment Project

48   Since 2005, students have been closely involved with the planning of the Main Library redevelopment, participating in focus groups and evaluation. The planning stages also involved staff visiting broadly comparable libraries around the sector and overseas. Key to the success of the redevelopment has been the creation of a variety of study spaces, providing students with increased choice about where to work including silent spaces, spaces where talking is permitted, and study pods where students can hold group discussions in semi-enclosed spaces. Between 2008-09 and 2009-10, when the ground and first floors were completed, usage of the Main Library increased by 50 per cent, with further increases of around 33 per cent in 2010-11. The University acknowledged that this has led to challenges with heavy use around peak times. To address this, the University is adding more seats and is also working with the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) to find suitable solutions; for example, there is an agreement to redesignate space originally intended for staff.

49   Undergraduate and postgraduate students commented positively and enthusiastically about the new design of the Main Library. They particularly appreciated the study pods, although some students commented that they would like to be able to book the pods in advance. Undergraduate students also indicated that the provision of books was not always sufficient, especially when assessment deadlines were imminent. Overall, the refurbishment has clearly been a success with careful planning involving consideration of national and international practice as well as systematic engagement with staff and students.

Postgraduate study space

50   From discussions during ELIR, it emerged that the provision of study and office space for postgraduate students varies considerably across the schools and colleges. The University has a code of practice for research students and supervisors which sets out minimum expectations. There would be benefit in the University ensuring that these are adhered to across the institution.

Web portal

51   The University's web portal was launched in January 2004 and is known as MyEd. It provides staff, students and alumni with a personalised, secure gateway to web-based services within the University and beyond. These include: personal and registration details; programme and course information; examination results; Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) events; and library and virtual learning environment access. The University records usage statistics indicating that 87 per cent of the student population log in more than 10 times per week. In discussions during ELIR, students expressed a variety of views about MyEd from which it appeared that usage varied between schools. Staff commented that MyEd was not the most intuitive portal and that, in particular, navigating around it could be challenging (see paragraph 54).

Digital learning environment

52   The University indicated that since their introduction in the late 1990s the institution's virtual learning environments (VLEs) have formed the backbone of the online learning and teaching systems used widely across the campus. The VLEs include features for content provision, including e-submission, gradebooks, and discussion forums. There is also a wide range of further e-learning applications in use that make up the wider digital learning environment (DLE). The applications include: e-portfolios, virtual worlds, wikis, blogs, e-assessment, plagiarism checking,

a virtual classroom, and podcasts. Not all services are operated within the University; some are procured as externally hosted services and some are available through a secure internet connection (in the 'cloud'). The various components of the DLE are provided by a combination of Information Services, college services, and various levels of direct support in schools. The University described the DLE as crucial in the planned expansion of its online distance education.

53   The University recognises that keeping up with the rapid change in opportunities for using online methods for learning and teaching continues to be a challenge for busy academic staff. Additional support staff with expertise in e-learning have been appointed both centrally and in schools. Support for the e-learning community is also provided through the e-Learning Professionals & Practitioners' Forum, which is a community of practice across the institution.

54   While many courses use technology, provision is not uniform across the various disciplines. Students increasingly expect some form of engagement with a VLE as part of their study, and there would be benefit in the University identifying minimum expectations in this area.

Student involvement

55   The Academic Services Liaison Group (ASLG), which is organised and chaired by the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA), meets several times each year to promote discussion on issues of immediate concern to Information Services and EUSA. The University described it as a very productive forum. During 2007-08, the Group was involved in the development of the study pods in the Main Library (see paragraphs 48 to 49).

56   In 2009-10 EUSA ran a competition in conjunction with the University called 'Pimp my School', to provide an opportunity for students to identify and submit ideas for spaces within the University's buildings that could benefit from improvement. This led to a decision to upgrade the Crush Hall area in the School of Engineering as the winner from 36 entries. The competition will run again in 2011-12. In itself this has clearly been a worthwhile initiative and it is only one example of the many and systematic ways in which students are able to contribute to the development of the learning environment.

57   Overall, it is evident that the University's learning environment is carefully managed and that significant developments are informed by wide consultation with staff and students.

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

58   The University stated that it strives to build a culture which supports inclusion, celebrates difference, challenges prejudice, and promotes fairness. The University has had an Equality and Diversity (E&D) Strategy since 2003, and since 2007 it has had a Vice-Principal Equality and Diversity. The Vice-Principal is currently leading a review of the E&D Strategy and its action plan.

59   Since 2005-06, there has been an increase in the number of the University's students who have disclosed a disability. In particular, there has been a significant increase in the number of disabled international students. For some time the University has engaged in activities relating to 'Teachability', which is the process of creating an accessible curriculum and enabling environment for students with disabilities. This activity aims to anticipate student needs and to create programmes that are 'accessible by design' to all students. In 2010-11, the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) established a Teachability Task Group to ensure that University policy and practice continues to remain fit for purpose and ensures provision is inclusive of all students. The Teachability activity has included some very positive work, and the review and monitoring of this area represents good practice.

60   The University stated that it seeks to attract a wide range of applicants from different social, cultural and educational backgrounds, including those who come from schools or

backgrounds that are currently under-represented in higher education. To this end, the University participates in a range of widening participation initiatives including the Lothian Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS), which is a partnership with the other higher education institutions in Edinburgh and the four local authorities in Edinburgh and the Lothians. The University highlighted that the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data show a year-on-year increase in the number of entrants from state schools, to 70 per cent in 2010-11. Nonetheless, the University acknowledged that encouraging more prospective students from under-represented groups was a particular challenge.

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

61   In 2009, the University conducted a fundamental review of its provision in support of academic development which resulted in the establishment of the Institute for Academic Development (IAD). The IAD was launched at the start of 2011-12 and aims to bring centrally provided academic development and study skills support together into a single organisational unit. It is hosted by the College of Humanities and Social Science and housed in a new central location, from which it provides a university-wide service for staff and students in all three colleges, working closely with other support services and the schools. It provides a range of activities including: orientation of new academic staff; continuing professional development; dissemination of best practice in teaching and supervision; development of innovative strategies in teaching and assessment; promotion of student study skills; and professional and transferable skills for research students and staff. A particularly innovative feature is the opportunity for colleagues from schools and support units to work in collaboration with the IAD through secondments. Staff spoke positively about the range and quality of services provided by the IAD. The secondments in particular are regarded as being a potentially powerful mechanism for promoting enhancement (see paragraph 122).

62   In June 2007 the University introduced a new Postgraduate Certificate in University Teaching. From December 2011, this certificate will be known as the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice and it will continue to be externally accredited by the Higher Education Academy. The Certificate includes an orientation to University teaching for staff who are new to the institution, and information on the IAD web pages indicates that new teaching staff are contractually required to participate in the orientation and to attend at least two optional courses. However, staff indicated that this requirement is not enforced and that some new staff have not undergone the orientation. The University should ensure that its stated requirements are fulfilled in practice and, specifically, that all staff do undertake the orientation.

63   The 2006 ELIR report indicated that the University should develop its Peer Observation System in ways that would demonstrate to staff the advantages of peer review in facilitating reflection on teaching and learning practices across the institution. In the current ELIR, the University confirmed that while it is expected that all teaching staff will engage in peer observation of teaching, it is not a requirement. Schools have been given flexibility to determine the best way of engaging in peer observation and are asked to report on this in their annual Quality Assurance Reports (see paragraph 72). The University indicated that the Learning and Teaching Committee intends to give further consideration to the development of peer observation in liaison with the IAD, and the institution is encouraged to pursue this.

64   A series of supervisor briefing events that have been organised for some time through the former Transkills Unit are now the responsibility of the IAD, which works with colleges and schools to organise the activity. It is a University requirement that all supervisors should attend a briefing event at least once every five years. The briefings and the requirement to undertake them represent good practice, but the numbers attending suggest that the requirement is not being fulfilled. There would be benefit in the University ensuring that its policy relating to supervisor briefing is implemented.

65   The 2006 ELIR report asked the University to ensure that all students who fulfilled a teaching role would undertake the training provided and receive ongoing support for the role. Following a Principal's Strategy Group meeting in November 2007, the heads of college agreed in principle to ensure that this requirement was brought to the attention of schools. In discussion with postgraduate students during the current ELIR, it was clear that while there are University guidelines in this area, practice varies considerably between schools and colleges. There is no apparent central oversight of this stated requirement, although the University has indicated that tutor training and development will form the subject of a Learning and Teaching Committee task group in 2011-12. The University is asked to assure itself that its requirements relating to tutor training and development are being carried out in practice.

66   Staff at all levels are expected to undertake annual appraisal, and this process is overseen by the heads of school. The Strategic Plan includes a target on the uptake of the appraisal processes by staff, but the University's monitoring report shows that the target is not being met in any area with the exception of staff on an NHS contract. The University should ensure that its appraisal process is implemented throughout the institution in order that the development needs of staff can be properly monitored by heads of school and the information gathered can be used effectively.

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

67   The University has a small number of collaborative programmes. The main accreditation agreement is with the Scottish Agricultural College.

68   The expectation is that partner institutions will have their own arrangements in place for student representation and providing feedback to students, but that these will be broadly equivalent to those at the University. Arrangements for student support are considered as part of the partner approval process. Subject to availability, staff involved with programmes validated by the University are able to access staff development courses and events relevant to learning and teaching provided by the University.

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

69   The Senate Committee structure was under review at the time of the 2006 ELIR, and this review resulted in a number of substantial changes which were aimed at strengthening the academic governance within the University and enhancing the student experience. From 2009-10, a new set of committees was created. For example, all quality assurance matters are now within the remit of a single committee, the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), which provides an overview of undergraduate and postgraduate provision. Over the same period, a new leadership and management structure has been introduced for quality assurance and enhancement. There is a Vice-Principal Academic Enhancement, an Assistant-Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance, and an Assistant-Principal Taught Postgraduate Programmes.

70   The Senate QAC is convened by the Assistant-Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance, and is responsible for the University's academic quality assurance framework. It also oversees the monitoring and review arrangements of colleges and student support services, and acts as a planning forum for the discussion and promotion of developments in academic quality assurance. It is clear that the QAC has improved the institutional oversight of the outcomes from monitoring and review processes (see paragraphs 73 and 78).

Annual monitoring

71   The University indicated that its annual monitoring arrangements had been strengthened since the 2006 ELIR to include more systematic monitoring of postgraduate taught courses and programmes as well as postgraduate research programmes. The annual monitoring process covers all credit-bearing provision and there are clear responsibilities and expectations for the process set out in the quality pages of the University website.

72   The University stated that the course is the key unit of academic provision across most of the institution, and annual course monitoring can therefore provide detailed scrutiny. The University does not prescribe how course organisers should conduct the annual monitoring, but there is guidance provided through the quality pages on the website and colleges have developed their own course monitoring forms. In addition, schools have all developed their own internal processes, which they set out in annual quality assurance reports to the relevant college quality committee. The colleges in turn provide annual reports to the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). In 2010-11, revised guidance was introduced for the annual college quality assurance reports with the intention of implementing it fully in 2011-12. The aim of the guidance is to provide a framework for considering key trends arising from annual monitoring and review, with the intention of identifying at University level areas for follow-up or action.

73   The QAC has confirmed that colleges have made good use of the revised annual reporting structure, with evidence of monitoring and review being carried out effectively in schools. The QAC also noted that additional emphasis needed to be given to the outcomes of the processes in order for key trends to be identified. The University is encouraged to consider whether greater consistency in the ways in which information is gathered and reported at course level would facilitate this (see paragraph 82).

Research students

74   The Annual Progress Report is the formal mechanism for monitoring research student performance and this is now well embedded at the University. There are university-wide criteria for the annual reports set out in the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students, but the exact review procedures employed by schools can vary according to discipline, individual student requirements, and the supervision arrangements in place. The annual progress reports are considered by the college Postgraduate Studies Committee, or equivalent, along with any issues raised by the students' examiners. Since 2009-10, annual research monitoring has been included with the school annual quality assurance reports (see paragraph 72) and the University indicated that this arrangement is still becoming embedded.

Student support services

75   In 2009-10, the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) established a task group to review the method of monitoring and reviewing student support services. A series of recommendations were made including: the introduction of enhanced annual reporting using a report template to facilitate better comparison and trend analysis across the services; inclusion of a wider range of support services; introduction of periodic reviews for certain support services; and the introduction of a thematic element to reviews to allow closer alignment with key strategic learning and teaching priorities. The key outcomes are that all support services will continue to produce annual monitoring reports but these will change to a template format, and a small number of support services will undergo periodic review on a maximum cycle of six years. The first of these will take place in 2012-13 when a thematic review of the international student experience will be carried out. In developing the periodic review element, the University has taken account of the impact of the support service on the student learning experience and the extent of existing external accreditation. This has been a positive series of developments in line with sector expectations.

Periodic review

76   The University has two systems for periodic internal review: Teaching Programme Review (TPR) of undergraduate teaching provision and Postgraduate Programme Review (PPR) of postgraduate taught and research provision. Both are conducted on a six-year cycle and meet the Scottish Funding Council guidance. In response to growth in postgraduate provision and to requests from schools, the University indicated that it has been considering different ways of organising internal reviews to ensure they continue to meet the needs of the institution. In some subject areas, taught postgraduate provision is more closely aligned with undergraduate provision, whereas in other areas it is more closely aligned with research provision. The University is considering having a range of review configurations in the future to allow for review in clusters of: undergraduate provision; undergraduate and taught postgraduate combined; postgraduate taught and research provision combined; and research only.

77   The TPR process was established in 1999 and has evolved over time. Detailed guidance is available (for example through the quality pages on the website) and is provided to all areas undergoing review and to the review panel members. The PPR process was formally introduced in 2004-05 (building on previous arrangements for reviewing postgraduate taught and research provision). It has many similarities with the TPR process and the University is aligning the processes further, for example to offer shared briefing events, and is updating the PPR guidance to reflect these adjustments.

78   TPR and PPR reports are considered by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). The review area formally responds to the recommendations in the reports three to four months after their receipt, which is generally too early for all of the consequent action to have been completed. The University indicated that it is considering moving to a year-on-year system of responding to the TPR and PPR reports in order that progress towards addressing the recommendations can be monitored. Currently progress monitoring is carried out through the college quality assurance arrangements and should be reported through the annual monitoring process, although the University has identified that this is not carried out consistently in all cases. To improve this, the University is developing an action plan template based on approaches adopted elsewhere including the General Medical Council and the University of Leeds. This would be a positive development to improve the clarity of outcomes and the speed at which they are reported through the committee structure. The TPR and PPR reports, and the review area response to them, are published on the University website.

79   In 2009-10, the QAC established a task group to review the TPR and PPR processes. It concluded that internal review at the University generally meets good practice established in the sector and that it has a sustained impact on teaching quality. The task group also identified scope for improving the processes, and consequently a number of developments were introduced from 2010-11 including: revising the standard remit to make certain key elements more explicit; producing enhanced briefing for review areas and panels, particularly for students and to support analytical report writing; introducing summary reports aimed at students in addition to the full reports; aligning the processes more closely with external review or accreditation where possible (for example with professional, statutory or regulatory body activity); and increasing the emphasis on enhancement in a range of ways, such as providing additional opportunities for sharing good practice identified during TPR and PPR.

80   The University has continued to review and enhance its periodic review processes, which meet sector expectations and are widely understood and embedded within the institution. The processes are supported by helpful and comprehensive guidance, briefing notes and templates which are readily accessible to all participants through the University website. There would be benefit in the University pursuing its intention to introduce closer monitoring of the action taken following TPR and PPR (see paragraph 78).

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

81   The University indicated that students are involved at all stages of the formal quality assurance and enhancement processes, with information on how to get involved made available on the Quality section of the website. All new programmes and courses are expected to take account of the target student population, including giving due consideration to equality and diversity to ensure there will be an accessible curriculum. Students are able to engage with curriculum development and design through the class representative system and their membership of various learning and teaching committees. The University was able to identify examples of students having engaged proactively with curriculum design, such as changing the duration of a study abroad opportunity.

82   The University emphasised that all students have the opportunity to provide feedback on their courses and programmes, which forms a key element of annual monitoring and the school annual quality assurance reports to colleges (see paragraph 72). In discussions, a number of students identified improvements that had resulted from student engagement in annual monitoring of undergraduate and postgraduate provision, but others did not share that experience. Some students considered that the different formats adopted for gathering and reporting on student feedback as part of annual course monitoring made comparisons between courses difficult to achieve for students and staff. There would be benefit in the University promoting greater consistency in the gathering and reporting of student feedback information at course level.

83   Since 2009-10, all Teaching Programme Review (TPR) and Postgraduate Programme Review (PPR) panels have included a student member and the University confirmed the value of involving students as full members. They are recruited by the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) and become involved on reviews outside their own subject area. Since 2010-11, the standard TPR and PPR remit has required that explicit consideration should be given to all students in the review area; this had previously been implicit. Particular attention is paid to the student profile on the programmes under review and to equality and diversity matters. The introduction of summary reports in 2010-11 has been welcomed by EUSA as means of facilitating student engagement with the review outcomes. Students who have participated in TPR and PPR have found it valuable.

84   The University considers that its monitoring and review arrangements are inclusive of all students. It is also intended that students will be involved in the new processes for monitoring and reviewing the support services (see paragraph 75). The University has identified areas for continuing improvement, including ensuring that students are able to engage in activity in advance of the TPR and PPR processes, for example by contributing to discussions on the subject-specific remit and the analytical report before they are submitted. There are also challenges, for example ensuring there are adequate students available to participate in the TPR and PPR processes (particularly taught postgraduate students) in the context of the competing priorities and pressures on their time. In addition, the University has indicated that it is working with EUSA to ensure that its systems continue to include all students as the institution moves towards a greater proportion of distance education. Overall, the University has effective arrangements for including consideration of all students in its monitoring and review processes.

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

85   The University confirmed that self-evaluation and the use of external reference points are embedded in all stages of its monitoring and review processes. Colleges are responsible for ensuring that subject benchmark statements, the Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice) and qualifications frameworks have been taken into account when their courses are designed and approved. Guidance on annual

quality assurance reports and the Teaching Programme Review (TPR) and Postgraduate Programme Review (PPR) processes has been revised to emphasise the importance of self-reflection (including explicit use of external reference points). Task groups, for example reporting to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), are increasingly used to reflect on and review current practice in light of external reference material.

86   Externality is a key feature of the monitoring and review processes, and is reflected in the use of external examiners and external subject specialists on internal reviews, and in consultation with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and employers. The University places particular emphasis on the use of external examiners, describing them as a 'crucial' source of external advice (see paragraph 95). Thirty-eight PSRBs accredit more than 140 of the University's degree programmes, and assist in assuring the external comparability of their quality and standards. The University is developing a web-based PSRB database to record the data from PSRB accreditations more systematically; the information was previously held by colleges.

87   The 2006 ELIR report asked the University to make more explicit reference to the Academic Infrastructure in its process documentation. The University indicated that its regulations, guidance and codes of practice do take account of the precepts of the Code of practice and are kept under regular review, including recently as a result of the merger with Edinburgh College of Art. Following good practice adopted at other Scottish higher education institutions, the University has begun to map its process documentation explicitly to the precepts in the Code of practice and intends to continue this mapping once the revisions to the new UK Quality Code for Higher Education are complete. This is a positive development which the University is encouraged to continue pursuing.

88   During the current ELIR, it emerged that the University has been slow to fully address a number of the matters contained within the 2006 ELIR report, particularly those relating to the management of the student experience (see paragraphs 22, 24 and 31). In one case (feedback on assessment), the document summarising actions from the 2006 ELIR indicated that activities were 'complete', when in fact significant challenges remain. In the case of the Director of Studies system, although an Academic and Pastoral Support Task Group had been set up in 2009-10 and associated activity had been undertaken, proposals to address the fundamental challenges relating to student guidance and support were only formulated at the time of the current ELIR. The University is, therefore, asked to ensure that it addresses all of the outcomes from the current ELIR in a timely manner.

89   Overall, the University's policies and practices are informed by a wide range of external reference points, notably external examiners and the outcomes of external student surveys. The University considers that its approach to self-evaluation has matured since the 2006 ELIR and practice demonstrates an increasing emphasis on self-reflection in a number of the key processes, in particular TPR and PPR.

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

90   Implementation of the Edinburgh University Complete Lifecycle Integrated Development (EUCLID) project (see paragraph 13) has been a significant development since the 2006 ELIR. EUCLID provides an integrated admissions, student, course and programme record system, which reduces duplication of data entry and provides a secure and accurate record system which supports the majority of the University's monitoring and review data requirements. Not all of the initial aspirations for EUCLID were able to be delivered on formal completion of the project, but the University believes it provides the foundation for the phased delivery of further projects.

91   Senior staff indicated that EUCLID has delivered improvements in the management of admissions data and, since the start of 2010-11, it has facilitated the ability to interrogate 'on programme' data, enabling more detailed analysis. EUCLID holds the central data to support the annual quality assurance reports produced by schools and colleges, including grade profiles for

courses and programmes and student performance. The Governance and Strategic Planning section has designed standard statistical reports covering the core data required to support the Teaching Programme Review (TPR) process, including figures on student progression and cohort analysis. For large TPRs, the statistical reports are produced at programme level with the option for those involved in the review to ask for statistics on individual courses in cases of special interest or concern. Otherwise, reports are produced at course level. Standardised central reports allow the review area to reflect on trends in the data. The University is considering a similar approach for the Postgraduate Programme Review (PPR) process.

92   Overall, the University has an effective approach to the management of information, which has been strengthened by the implementation of EUCLID. Proposals to develop a more coordinated approach to the analysis of external survey data through the Student Voice project (see paragraph 22) offer opportunities for further enhancement.

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

93   The University Senate is ultimately responsible for the academic quality and standards of the University's awards. This responsibility is devolved to college committees within the context of an academic regulatory framework which is the responsibility of the Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee (CSPC) and a quality assurance framework which is the responsibility of the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (QAC).

94   New awards that are based on agreed models within the University's Curriculum Framework and new courses are approved at college level. New patterns of awards such as professional practice doctorates, or those that have implications across the institution, are approved directly by CSPC. The University makes use of external reference points, such as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), subject benchmark statements, and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements, in its programme design and approval arrangements.

95   External examiners are regarded as fulfilling a crucial role in monitoring and maintaining the academic standards of all awards. The external examiner role is embedded in the University regulations and outlined in the University Code of Practice for External Examiners, which has been updated since the 2006 ELIR through the work of a QAC task group. The University intends to revisit its Code in 2011-12 following the publication of the Universities UK and GuildHE recommendations of the review of external examining.

96   The 2006 ELIR report confirmed that the University had appropriate arrangements in place for managing its external examiner system, and asked the institution to continue its work on the management of assessment and the operation of its boards of examiners. As a result, the University formulated a set of Guiding Principles for Boards of Examiners along with additional guidance for those involved in the examination process. This was reviewed by CSPC during 2009-10 and is being communicated to staff through college training events. The key features of these Guiding Principles are that Boards of Examiners should: assess sufficient students to provide a level of comparison between small programmes; finalise course marks in one event, and use these agreed marks to identify class outcomes for degrees in a second event; identify one member of the Board with responsibility for the correct application of regulations, and another with responsibility for special circumstances; ensure that student anonymity is the general case; and ensure that the Board membership enables appropriate scrutiny of all the marks.

97   The Assessment Regulations Task Group and CSPC have simplified and clarified the previous regulations into a single set of assessment regulations for taught courses and programmes. In 2010-11, the University's assessment regulations were integrated with those of Edinburgh College of Art (eca), which involved some changes to facilitate studio-based pedagogies. The University indicated that its assessment practice is underpinned by a set of key

principles which will be revised following the work of the CSPC Assessment Regulations Task Group and the Learning and Teaching Committee's Assessment Futures Task Group. In addition, during the academic year 2012-13 the University intends to revise its regulations on research degrees and the guidance and regulatory framework relating to special circumstances.

98   The University has effective mechanisms in place for setting and maintaining academic standards. There are clear and detailed regulations and guidance for these processes which are publicly available and which are kept under regular review to address external developments, changing practices in learning and teaching, and the planned changes to the student population.

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

99   The University is committed to making information openly available and has published a wide range of material on its website for a number of years. It has a comprehensive publication scheme setting out the information that is made available on a proactive basis. This includes material on governance, teaching quality, student administration, student support, and support for disabled people.

100   The 2006 ELIR report commented positively on the University's open approach, but asked it to establish systematic mechanisms for ensuring that all the information it publishes about quality is complete, accurate and fair. The University considers that this has been addressed by the Edinburgh University Complete Lifecycle Integrated Development (EUCLID) project and by the Web Development Project, both of which were aimed specifically at improving the consistency and accuracy of published information. The Web Development Project ensures that one definitive version (known as the 'golden copy') of information owned by the relevant stakeholder department is included in client websites across the University. EUCLID ensures the existence of one 'golden copy' of a wide range of student and student-related information.

101   The Registry Academic Services section is responsible centrally for the University's regulations, policies and guidance relating to learning and teaching, research, and quality assurance. Updating of regulations, policies and guidance is managed through the relevant Senate committee. Information on courses and programmes of study is published in the University Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study which have been incorporated into EUCLID. Other information for current students, such as more detailed course and programme information, is primarily provided in handbooks, many of which are in electronic form. Individual schools or disciplines are responsible for their accuracy. In view of the likely changes to sector guidance from the Scottish Funding Council in relation to public information and, specifically, the Key Information Sets, the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) intends to reflect during 2011-12 on the current guidance available for staff on the information provided to students.

102   The University has published all reports from internal reviews on its website since 1999, and the annual quality assurance reports from colleges are published as part of the QAC papers, ensuring that students and staff have access to the outcomes of internal monitoring and review. In 2010-11 the University introduced a summary report for each Teaching Programme Review (TPR), primarily aimed at the student audience and for use in staff-student liaison committee meetings. This was intended to make the TPR outcomes more accessible to a wider audience. All information on accreditation and related activity will be held centrally within the University and therefore will be more readily available to internal and external audiences.

103   Overall, the University has an effective approach to managing public information about quality and academic standards. Of particular note is the University's commitment to making a wide range of material accessible to the public.

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

104   Since the 2006 ELIR, the University has created more explicit links between its monitoring and review processes and its enhancement arrangements. Staff involved in the Teaching Programme Review (TPR) and Postgraduate Programme Review (PPR) processes indicated that the outcomes are highlighted and communicated in a variety of forms to support the dissemination of good practice. There were similarly positive comments about the opportunities to share good practice in the annual monitoring process, although unsurprisingly this was considered to work best at the school level rather than the college or institution level. Staff involved in enhancement activities confirmed that they are able to use a combination of the committee processes and more informal approaches to capture good practice arising from monitoring and review.

105   The enhancements the University has made to its internal monitoring and review processes, and the related changes in the committee structure and senior management roles, have facilitated closer links between the institution's assurance and enhancement functions. Overall, the University has effective processes in place for sharing the good practice arising from monitoring and review.

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

106   The key features of the University's monitoring and review arrangements for collaborative activity include: procedures for the initial approval of a partner institution, procedures for the approval of the programme, and mechanisms for the monitoring and review of the programmes. In 2010-11, a Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) Collaborative Provision Task Group reviewed the guidance relating to collaborative provision resulting in the production of revised and enhanced guidance.

107   Where the University has entered into an accreditation agreement with a partner, a separate accreditation committee operates to consider the content, delivery and performance of all programmes leading to awards of the University delivered wholly or jointly by the accredited institution. The University devolves maximum authority to accredited institutions to operate their own quality assurance mechanisms, which are overseen and evaluated as part of an annual quality assurance report from the accredited institution. The Scottish Agricultural College moved to an accreditation agreement in 2010-11; the first Accreditation Board met in March 2011.

108   With the exception of accreditation agreements, all students on collaborative programmes are registered at the University and entered into the Edinburgh University Complete Lifecycle Integrated Development (EUCLID) system, which provides the basis from which course and programme performance can be monitored. Information on the performance of students at accredited institutions is provided as part of their annual monitoring and periodic review processes. The key issues arising from the reports are discussed at the relevant Accreditation Committee meeting and are contained within the relevant college's annual quality report to QAC. Data and information on joint degrees is discussed at the relevant examination board/committee at the school level, and matters arising from such joint programmes are reported in the school's annual quality report to the college, and onward through the college annual quality report to QAC.

109   Overall, the University has effective arrangements in place for managing its collaborative activity.

Strategic approach to quality enhancement

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

110   The University's approach to enhancement reflects the devolved structure of the institution, and the University confirmed that enhancement roles and responsibilities do not reside solely at the centre of the institution or in the colleges, but are 'by design shared'. Developments in the area of enhancement also demonstrate the University's engagement with the recommendation from the 2006 ELIR that there would be considerable benefit in the University clarifying the locus of responsibility for quality enhancement, particularly at institutional level.

111   The University highlighted the fundamental transformation of enhancement activities over the course of the last two years. Changes in the management of quality enhancement and assurance and the associated committee structure are at the heart of this. Since 2009, responsibility for quality enhancement has been vested in the Vice-Principal Academic Enhancement who chairs the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC), the central forum for all matters relating to quality enhancement. Several committees and groups report to LTC including college committees with oversight of learning and teaching, the Employability Strategy Group, and the Student Induction Working Group. LTC also receives reports from the Recruitment and Admissions Strategy Group and from the Institute for Academic Development (IAD).

112   Coordination between LTC and the other Senate committees is ensured through the newly established Convenors' Forum, which reviews progress against an annual agenda. The creation of short-life task groups, such as the Feedback and Assessment Task Group and the Academic and Pastoral Support Task Group, supports the discussion and decision-making processes in the formal committees. The University intends to review the new Senate committees on an annual basis to monitor the effectiveness of the new structure; the first such review having taken place at the Senate Committees Awayday in May 2010.

113   The University outlined the ways in which responsibility for quality enhancement is shared between the institution and the college level. The University establishes the strategic framework for enhancement and monitors the progress of strategic and policy initiatives. The colleges have a role in developing their own enhancement strategy within the University's strategic framework, as well as implementing institutional policy and monitoring implementation in the schools.

114   The University's Learning-Teaching Enhancement Strategy (LTES) is formulated in consultation with the Senate committee convenors as well as college, school and Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) representatives. The Strategy is endorsed by the Senate LTC. For the period 2010-12, the following four strategic priorities were identified: employability; assessment and feedback; student guidance and support; and enhancement infrastructure.

115   Each college develops its own learning and teaching enhancement strategy within the framework of the University's Strategic Plan. The Plan outlines a proactive approach to enhancement and embeds enhancement into the University's planning processes under two headings: 'excellence in learning and teaching' and 'enhancing our student experience'.

116   The college strategies were originally developed at different times, but were redeveloped during 2010-11 in consultations led by the Vice-Principal Academic Enhancement and involving the Senate committee convenors and college, school and EUSA representatives. The goal was to generate University and college learning and teaching enhancement strategies that would be in synergy. This has been a positive step and there would be benefit in the University ensuring that the college and institutional strategies continue to be reviewed in synergy.

117   The University aims to strengthen the strategic role of schools in enhancement through the formulation of school-level strategies. Currently the position varies between schools: some do not yet have a strategy; others have strategies in a well established form; and in others, the

strategies take the form of implementation plans or sets of principles. There would be considerable benefit in the University clarifying the status and function of school-level strategies within the process of managing enhancement.

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

118   The effectiveness of the University's strategies for enhancement is assessed through a range of quantitative and qualitative indicators. The University highlighted the annual monitoring of progress against the 33 quantitative targets in its Strategic Plan as an indication of its implementation of enhancement. Following the last annual review in October 2010, the University Court confirmed the achievement of 26 of the 33 targets in this plan. The only remaining target relating directly to enhancement is the improvement of student feedback and assessment to a level that equates with the upper quartile of institutions surveyed in the National Student Survey (NSS) (see paragraph 24).

119   The colleges each have different approaches to implementing and monitoring their Learning-Teaching Enhancement Strategies (LTESs). Progress across the three colleges on implementation of their LTESs is monitored by the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) and reported through the annual reporting process to the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (QAC).

120   The University has established a number of additional forums which, while not being solely dedicated to enhancement, assist in strengthening an enhancement-informed approach. Dedicated Senate discussions address matters relating to the enhancement of learning and teaching. An Academic Strategy Group has been launched. This is chaired by the Principal and includes all heads of college, schools and key services. The newly created Student Experience Forum is convened by the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) Vice-President Academic Affairs (see paragraph 16). It facilitates discussions on the improvement of the student experience between staff and student representatives. The impact of these forums, and the strategically aligned initiatives they oversee, provides evidence that enhancement has become embedded more prominently into institutional processes since the 2006 ELIR.

121   The Institute for Academic Development (IAD) was established in 2011-12, bringing together academic and study skills support which was previously offered separately through the Centre for Learning and Teaching and Assessment, the Postgraduate Transferable Skills Unit, and the Researcher Development Programme. The IAD Advisory Board is chaired by the Vice-Principal Academic Enhancement. Membership of the Board includes senior college representatives, Senate committee convenors, heads of support services, and representatives from EUSA. The IAD Director, who is also a member of the Senate Convenors' Forum, ensures linkage with the development and implementation of University strategy; not least through annual reporting against key University Strategic Planning targets. The IAD also works in close collaboration with schools to establish an overview of development needs.

122   Of particular note are the opportunities for college or school-based staff to be seconded to the IAD. By March 2011, eight staff had been seconded to the IAD and the number is set to double in 2012. Discussion with staff provided evidence that this mechanism facilitates the dissemination of good practice across schools and colleges, enabling colleges to target strategic priorities in an efficient manner. Secondees work on a range of projects including personal development planning, graduate attributes, online peer feedback mechanisms, and the development of the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR).

123   A review of the operational effectiveness of the IAD will take place in 2013. Initial views of staff are very positive, highlighting the improved accessibility and transparency of provision for staff development. There is evidence that even at this early stage the IAD has started to make a valuable contribution to quality enhancement, by acting as a focal point for the communication and implementation of strategic priorities, and as an initiator of strategic enhancement activity.

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

124   The University emphasised that making good use of external reference points to guide effective practice plays an indispensible part in pursuing and refining the institution's approach to sustaining and enhancing excellence.

125   The International Student Barometer (ISB) is one means by which the University compares its services and facilities against those of other UK and international universities. The University highlighted changes that had been made as a result of participation with the ISB, including improved guidance for international students. The ISB is also used as an instrument to assess the University's performance against one of the targets in the Strategic Plan. The University emphasised the extent to which its membership of international networks provides opportunities for learning about challenges and advances in practice that have relevance across national higher education systems, such as issues of credit transfer for study abroad students. A number of the University's significant projects have been informed by proactive exploration of practice at other institutions, such as the redevelopment of the Main Library (see paragraphs 48 to 49).

126   The University has made a significant contribution to the national Enhancement Themes through the engagement of a number of senior staff who have chaired steering committees or undertaken other developmental work in relation to several of the Themes. Outcomes from the Integrative Assessment Theme have informed a variety of events at the University including seminars and committee discussions, and have served as baselines for evaluating assessment practice at the institution. The Research-Teaching Linkages Theme has also had a significant impact at the University, for example encouraging the institution to consider ways in which students could become engaged in research activities at an earlier stage in their studies. This is now reflected in the college learning and teaching enhancement strategies.

127   It is evident that the University has a proactive approach to identifying and making use of a wide range of external reference points.

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

128   The University highlighted that, in recent years, it has been devoting progressively greater efforts to identifying, celebrating and sharing examples of good practice, whether the examples are internally or externally generated.

129   Since 2007, the University has been engaged in strategic activity known as Enhancing Feedback, which is aimed at addressing the outcomes of surveys that indicate that students do not rate highly the feedback they receive on their assessed work (see paragraph 24). A key component of the strategic approach being pursued involves identifying and promoting good practice. In September 2010, under the auspices of the Institute for Academic Development (IAD), the Enhancing Feedback website and the Feedback Wheel were launched. The Feedback Wheel brings together over 30 evidence-based strategies for improving feedback, and links these to a rich body of school and subject-specific examples drawn from across the world. Evaluation of the Enhancing Feedback website use indicates that it has been actively picked up within the University and extensively accessed from across the UK and overseas. University staff have also been in demand to provide keynote presentations and workshops.

130   The Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) Teaching Awards were launched in 2008 to recognise and reward academic staff who are committed to delivering excellence in teaching. This was the first fully student-created, student-run university teaching award scheme in the UK. The approach has subsequently been promoted in other institutions by the Higher Education Academy and the National Union of Students. The scheme has become a significant success within the University. Students nominate teachers online throughout the year and those

who are shortlisted are rewarded at an annual ceremony. In 2011, 777 members of staff were nominated by a total of 5,168 students; the nominations spanned 277 courses and 73 subject areas.

131   EUSA and the IAD jointly organise an Inspiring Teaching Conference for staff and students. The annual conference includes presentations and workshops from teaching award winners and nominees, as well as an exhibition where schools and support services share examples of learning and teaching practice.

132   From the current academic year, the University has introduced an Innovative Learning Week, where a particular week in semester two is designated across the institution to provide opportunities for students to engage in a variety of novel learning experiences that would not be feasible within the conventional weekly timetable. Each school has been invited to produce plans that best meet the needs of its particular student constituencies, and it is intended that these will be disseminated widely through face-to-face discussions and a wiki led by a working group under the remit of the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee. This is a potentially powerful opportunity for promoting innovation in learning and teaching across the University with a subject-level focus.

133   The University is engaged in a variety of innovative and imaginative enhancement activities, a number of which represent sector-leading good practice. A challenge for the University, notably in relation to its Enhancing Feedback activity, continues to be the extent to which good practice is implemented within schools across the institution.

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

134   A number of the University's collaborative partners are autonomous institutions that are subject, in their own right, to the requirements of the Scottish Funding Council and sector expectations. Opportunities for the University to learn from their practices are provided through the annual and periodic review arrangements in place.

Conclusion

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

135   Students are positive about the learning experience provided by the University, particularly the emphasis placed on research-led teaching. They are enthusiastic about the content of the curriculum and about the approach to learning and teaching, which includes a focus on research methodologies and opportunities for students to engage in research projects. There is careful planning and management of the learning resources required to support the research-led curriculum. Overall, it is clear that the University has taken proactive steps to ensure that its approach to designing and managing its learning spaces has been informed by national and international practice, and by staff and student views.

136   The University has strategic plans to change the composition of the student population, including increasing the number of international and distance learning students. There are examples of staff making positive adaptations to suit the revised composition of the student population, but as the student body continues to diversify, there is an increasing need for the University to adopt a more strategic and planned approach to anticipating the associated curricular developments and adjustments to the academic environment.

137   There is clear evidence of an extensive and effective partnership with the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA), especially at the strategic level. The University is encouraged to continue its joint work with EUSA to enhance student representation at college and school levels. Student engagement and feedback is valued by staff and students, and there is evidence of action being taken as a result. There are some good and flexible practices in place for

capturing students' views at school and programme levels, although approaches vary considerably across the institution. This creates a challenge for the University in terms of gathering and presenting comparable information between programmes and schools.

138   Variability of practice across the schools is a recurring theme, and the University is asked to ensure greater equity and consistency in a number of key areas, including training of new staff, tutors and demonstrators; staff appraisal; and academic and personal support. In some cases the University has clear expectations, but needs to put effective mechanisms in place for ensuring these expectations are met in all schools. The University has identified plans for improving the academic and pastoral support to students and the implementation of these plans now needs to be prioritised. The University has undertaken work to improve the arrangements for providing students with feedback on their assessed work, but the remaining inconsistencies should be addressed, and the University should communicate clearly to students their entitlement to feedback on their examinations.

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

139   There have been a number of amendments to the University's processes, committee structures, and senior roles since the last ELIR which have improved the effectiveness of review and monitoring activity. In particular, the recently established Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) has improved institutional oversight of the outcomes from monitoring and review. The quality processes meet sector expectations and are supported by helpful and comprehensive guidance, briefing notes, and templates which are readily accessible to all participants through the University website.

140   As the University continues to review and enhance its processes, it is encouraged to introduce greater consistency in the ways in which information is gathered and reported at the course level as a means of helping to identify trends across the institution. The University is also encouraged to pursue its intention to introduce closer monitoring and more timely reporting on the outcomes of its periodic review methods within the committee structure.

141   The University has been slow to address a number of matters raised in the 2006 ELIR, and is therefore asked to ensure that it takes substantive action to address all of the outcomes of the current ELIR in a timely manner.

142   The University is committed to making a wide range of information accessible to the public through its website, and there have been positive developments since the 2006 ELIR to promote the currency and reliability of that information.

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

143   The three college learning and teaching enhancement strategies were redeveloped in 2010-11 to provide synergy between the University and college-level strategies. The University anticipates that these will be followed by school-level strategies. Currently a range of approaches are in place within the schools, and there would be considerable benefit in the University clarifying the status and function of the school-level strategies.

144   The restructuring of the Senate committees and related quality remits has led to a clearer strategic focus on enhancement, with enhancement becoming more embedded in a variety of institutional practices. In a number of areas, for example feedback on assessment and research-teaching linkages, the University's enhancement activities represent sector-leading good practice; although there can also be variable implementation across the institution. Of particular note is the University's proactive approach to learning from national and international practice to inform initiatives within the institution, such as the redevelopment of the Main Library.

145   The University has been a significant contributor to the national programme of Enhancement Themes, and there is considerable evidence of the institution using the outcomes of the national Themes to inform its own policies and practice. Although recently established, it is already clear that the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) is an effective driver for promoting an enhancement culture. The opportunity for staff to undertake secondments to the Institute is a particularly positive development, promoting the exploration and exchange of good practice.

Overarching confidence judgement

146   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 offers.