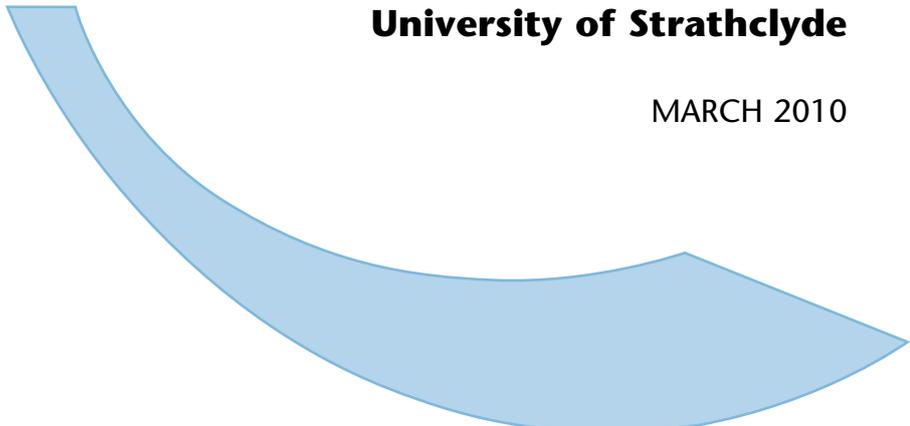


# Enhancement-led institutional review

**University of Strathclyde**

MARCH 2010



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ISBN 978 1 84979 169 4

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

## **Enhancement-led institutional review University of Strathclyde**

### **Introduction**

1 This is the report of an Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) of the University of Strathclyde (the University) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). QAA is grateful to the University for the willing cooperation provided to the ELIR team.

### **ELIR method and report**

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

### **Method of review**

4 The University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA), which provided the focus for the review. The RA was supported by a number of accompanying documents including four case studies relating to: a re-engineering assessment project, the student transition framework, the introduction of a standard credit framework, and the management of collaborative provision. The ELIR team also received the report of the University's previous ELIR which took place in 2005.

5 Development of the RA formed one part of the University's ELIR preparations which involved a programme of consultation and discussion across the institution over an extended period of more than a year. A small project team was formed in early 2009 to lead on the preparations. Its membership comprised: the Deputy Principal Learning and Teaching; the Director of Corporate Services; the Head of Learning Enhancement (the unit previously known as CAPLE); the Head of Governance, Management and Policy (GMAP); and a Policy Officer from GMAP. Two successive University of Strathclyde Students' Association (USSA) presidents were also involved in the project team meetings. In support of the project team, a broader ELIR management group was formed to include the vice-deans (academic), faculty officers, USSA representatives and staff from the Professional Services. The ELIR management group considered the main themes for inclusion within the RA and the case studies, as well as providing feedback on drafts. The RA was consulted upon widely including through a dedicated section of the University website. The Senate was kept informed of ELIR preparations and a draft of the RA was made available for members' comments. One member of the University Court gave detailed consideration to the RA. The process for finalising the RA was approved by the Senate and the University Court.

6 The ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 10 and 11 February 2010 and the Part 2 visit took place in the week beginning 15 March 2010.

7 The ELIR team comprised: Ms Joy Elliott, Dr Maggie King, Dr Patsy Paxton, Professor Colin Raban, Dr Jon Scott and Dr Jonathan Weyers. The review was managed on behalf of QAA by Ms Ailsa Crum, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

## **Background information about the institution**

8 The history of the University dates to 1796 when John Anderson left instruction in his will for there to be a 'place of useful learning' in the city of Glasgow. The University describes itself as research-led with a reputation for innovation in learning and teaching, and for industry and community engagement. It is currently organised into five faculties: Science; Engineering; Business; Education; and Law, Arts and Social Sciences. The service and support infrastructure is provided by the Professional Services. The University has extensive collaborative links comprising more than 70 courses across several countries, although the vast majority of courses are small, admitting less than 30 students.

## **Institution's strategy for quality enhancement**

9 The University indicated that it has a framework for implementing and promoting quality enhancement across the institution which is represented by a range of features: the Academic Strategy; the University Strategic Plan; annual statements from the faculties, departments and Professional Services; the University's engagement with sector initiatives and the activities of other higher education institutions; and partnership working across the University and with USSA to deliver enhancements to the student learning experience.

## **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 2008-09, the University had 16,212 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. The majority of the population is undergraduate (11,676 FTE in 2008-09) of whom 11,262 are full-time. In 2008-09, there were 3,571 FTE taught postgraduate students (of whom 2,503 were full-time) and 966 FTE postgraduate research students (855 full-time).

11 The student population has changed in recent years: while the overall number of home full-time undergraduate students has remained relatively stable, there has been an increase in part-time students (21 per cent increase over a three-year period to 2008-09). Over the same three-year period, there was a planned increase in the number of international students, which rose by 13 per cent to 2,070 FTE or 12.8 per cent of the total student population. The University also has a strategic aim to increase the number of its postgraduate research students and these rose by 35 per cent over the three-year period to 2008-09 (from 712 to 965 FTE). A further feature of the University's student body is the number of mature students (those who are 21 years old or over on entry); in 2008-09, 21 per cent of the full-time undergraduate entrants were mature students.

12 These changes, in particular, the increase in international student numbers, are a reflection of the University's vision of itself as an International Technological University which aims to offer a student perspective that is 'global in outlook but locally grounded'. At present, the internationalisation expansion has had most impact in terms of the postgraduate population, with 31 per cent of taught postgraduate students being from overseas (in 2008-09). In the same year, 91 per cent of the undergraduate students were from the UK and mostly drawn from the west of Scotland.

13 Collation of data regarding the student body is undertaken by the Planning Team in Corporate Services and this information is made available to the faculties and relevant committees through the annual management information profiles. The Education Strategy Committee analyses trends in the student population with reference to the Strategic Plan and the Equality, Diversity and Disability Committee monitors the demographic data with regard to equal opportunities. The Quality Monitoring Committee is responsible for monitoring undergraduate and postgraduate student progression (see paragraph 33).

14 The annual faculty academic quality assurance and enhancement reports (see paragraph 58) contain sections for reporting on student progression and completion, but, at the time of the ELIR, these had not been completed for 2008-09 by some faculties, due to timing issues regarding the provision of management information. The Quality Monitoring Committee receives progression statistics for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes, and comparative data regarding the award classifications for undergraduate programmes. At the time of the ELIR, although this Committee received data regarding the numbers of postgraduate research awards made, the University is aware that this does not allow for cross-faculty comparisons of progression rates (see paragraph 33).

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

### **Communication with students**

15 The University highlighted that it has a positive history of consulting with its student body and it recognises that the ongoing and extensive changes at the institution have reinforced the importance of providing timely and accurate information to its students. The University has established a series of protocols that set out the communication responsibilities of staff at different levels within the institution. The Principal meets monthly with the University of Strathclyde Students' Association (USSA) Student Executive through the Student Engagement Group, and there are informal monthly meetings between the Student Executive and the University Governance, Management and Policy team to support USSA's engagement with the institutional systems.

16 The departments and faculties produce sets of handbooks that detail course structures, general regulations and provide some guidance regarding sources of information and support. University-wide guidelines for faculty handbooks were introduced in June 2009 and, in the current academic year, the University produced the Student Support Handbook in an effort to ensure that information common to all students is consistent and correct, including information relating to academic misconduct and complaints. The Handbook is provided to students in print form prior to arrival, with online versions supplementing and providing opportunity for update. Production of the Handbook is one of a set of positive developments linked to the Student Transition Framework (see paragraph 24). In general, students expressed positive views regarding the levels of communication at course and institutional levels, indicating that they were kept well informed.

### **Student representation**

17 Since the 2005 ELIR, there have been a number of developments in the formal arrangements for student representation. Following an extensive review of the University's governance, management and decision-making structures in 2009, students are represented on all of the University's strategic committees, with the single exception of the Staff Committee. The USSA President is also a member of the University Court and the Court Business Group.

18 At faculty and department levels, students are represented through the staff-student liaison committees but the University has, for some time, recognised a number of challenges in securing effective student participation. In an effort to promote better student involvement, the Education Strategy Committee approved USSA proposals to introduce a new class representative system from autumn 2009. The new arrangements have a number of features including: every class (see paragraph 58) having at least one representative; administrative responsibility for the system residing with USSA; and two student congresses being held for representatives during the academic year. Student representatives are offered training through the national service, student participation in quality scotland (sparqs).

19 The Education Strategy Committee has noted some difficulties in recruiting sufficient class representatives and this was reflected in the views of student representatives who noted that levels of engagement with decision-making varied across the University, often being dependent on the support of individual departments or staff members. Students were more positive about the opportunities for engagement at institution level provided by the new committee structure. In particular, they were positive about student involvement with the Education Strategy Committee and the relationship between USSA and the University.

20 Taught postgraduate students have a similar representative structure to the undergraduate students, including staff-student liaison committees which report to the institution-level committees and USSA. There are a variety of approaches for securing the engagement of postgraduate research students but, generally, they appear to have less opportunity for engaging in networks of peers to provide feedback than the taught students, although there are examples of good practice, for example in English Studies where a network of taught and research students collaborate regularly. Research students can have membership of the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy Committee but this was not taken up during 2009-10, and research students do not always take up opportunities to attend faculty-level committees. USSA's recent work aimed at improving the representation arrangements has been welcomed by postgraduate students.

21 Overall, the revised arrangements are likely to bring about improvements in student representation.

### **Gathering students' views**

22 The University solicits institution-wide student feedback through a range of external and internal mechanisms. The externally generated surveys include the National Student Survey (NSS), the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey. The internal mechanisms include the First Year Experience Survey and a system of pyramid discussions for obtaining the views of second and third-year students. In 2008, following consideration of other institutions' approaches, the University ran a 'Tell Us What You Think' campaign aimed at increasing feedback from students and this was supported by a 'You Told Us That...' campaign to highlight the actions taken in response to feedback. The University evaluates the outcomes from the external surveys at institution level, and produces comparative data regarding subject-level performance which the departments comment on, along with the outcomes of internal surveys, through the annual faculty academic quality assurance and Enhancement reports (see paragraph 58).

23 In June 2009, the Senate approved an Obtaining and Responding to Student Views strategy, aimed at coordinating the variety of mechanisms for obtaining feedback. The strategy indicates that the University will undertake systematic surveys of all year groups and modes of study, at least biennially, using a wide variety of survey methods, working in partnership with USSA and student representatives and using external surveys wherever possible. The strategy also sets out guidelines for the operation of class and course questionnaires which are administered by the delivering departments. Students indicated that the format and implementation of class and course questionnaires vary across faculties, and student representatives indicated that they were not always clear about how student feedback was addressed when it related to matters outside the delivering department. Other students considered that attention was paid to the feedback they provided and that the departments responded effectively wherever feasible. In particular, postgraduate students expressed a high level of satisfaction in relation to their opportunities for providing feedback. There are a number of examples of student feedback being used to inform institutional strategies and initiatives, such as the Student Transition Framework and the Strathclyde Framework for Researcher Development (see paragraphs 24 and 34).

## Student retention and support

24 The Academic Strategy (2006-09) indicates that the student experience is central to the success of the University. The Strategy also identifies one of its main challenges as engaging all students fully in their learning, enabling them to develop as independent and autonomous learners with high aspirations. In this context, the University has identified student retention as a priority because, although retention has improved since the 2005 ELIR, the University has identified that it remains below its benchmark in terms of the HESA performance indicators. The University indicated that it is prioritising holistic approaches to promoting retention, such as the introduction, in 2009, of the Student Transition Framework which brings together the findings from the First Year Student Survey, the Re-engineering Assessment Practices (REAP) project, the University's retention study and a business process review of the early undergraduate and postgraduate taught experience. There have been a number of benefits arising from the Student Transition Framework including the coordination of activities across the University to provide a common induction experience, and the production of the Student Support Handbook, which provides clear guidance for students including contact details for the University's support services and procedures (see paragraph 16). The University has also appointed a First Year Adviser within the Student Advisory and Counselling Service who has been responsible for producing the Student Support Handbook and for developing a more coordinated approach, in collaboration with the faculties and USSA, in relation to the University's Welcome Week activities.

25 The Student Experience and Enhancement Services (SEES) was created in 2009 to provide support, information and advice for students at different stages in the student lifecycle. SEES comprises: the Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement (CAPLE), Careers, Registry and Student Support Services (Student Advisory & Counselling Service, Chaplaincy, Disability Service and the Student Health Service). SEES also works closely with other professional services, the faculties, departments and USSA. Currently, the constituent services within SEES are physically dispersed across the University but the Directorate is working towards converging services and locating them together in one existing building as part of the new University Estates Strategy.

26 Within the faculties, each student is allocated an adviser of study (or equivalent) to help with course choice and to act as a first point of contact for advice. In some faculties, students are also allocated an academic counsellor, who is a member of the academic staff and is concerned with the overall progress of the student's studies and is able to direct the student to a range of student support services. The main contact for taught postgraduate students is the course coordinator.

27 The University has recently undertaken a review of academic advising entitled 'Academic Advising, Personal Development and Pastoral Support for the 21st Century: a unified approach', which was reported to the Education Strategy Committee in November 2009. The review addressed the provision of personal development and pastoral support across the institution. The review report recognised that significant variation in roles and titles of staff giving advice exists across the institution and that, although the arrangements worked well at departmental/course levels, the system was overburdened and there was a significant need for staff development and training. The Education Strategy Committee established a working group with a remit to provide further clarification of the roles of academic counsellors; consider how the counselling system could take account of the devolved nature of the University; and make recommendations regarding the future role of academic counselling and the provision of personal development planning.

28 Students recognised that a wide variety of approaches are in place depending on the faculty and department. Some students were not clear whether they had a counsellor or an adviser, but others expressed positive views of the arrangements. Students were universally positive about the support they receive from individual members of staff. Students were also positive about the support provided by the Advice Support Knowledge (ASK) service, which is managed by USSA and, in many cases, students indicated that they would seek advice from ASK before contacting the University's Student Support Services. There would be benefit in the

University proceeding with its positive work to ensure greater consistency of support provision for students across the institution.

### **Credit framework**

29 In response to the 2005 ELIR report and following extensive consultation with the faculties, the University established a 20-credit framework for all undergraduate and integrated master's awards. The framework was approved by the Senate in 2007 for a phased introduction beginning in 2009-10. The University regarded the introduction of the new credit framework as an opportunity for significant curriculum redesign and renewal and this was supported by a significant Learning Enhancement Network event, held in 2007. The event was facilitated by an external academic and included students and staff. Through the curriculum renewal process all departments were encouraged to make use of the opportunity to embed relevant assessment principles in the curriculum and to draw on good practice from the enhancement projects that had been run at the University. Some faculties adopted a staged approach to introducing the 20-credit framework with the new framework being introduced for the first year of undergraduate and integrated master's programmes in 2009-10. Some departments moved to the 20-credit framework for their entire courses in 2009-10. The University indicated that curriculum renewal is seen as an iterative process whereby there will be a need for ongoing review and regular renewal of all curricula. It will be important that, as part of the ongoing review, the University ensures its curricula continue to meet sector expectations concerning the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework*.

### **Assessment**

30 The University has played a significant role at a national level in exploring issues around assessment practice and providing feedback to students on their assessed work. Of particular note is the sector-leading work of the Re-engineering Assessment Practices (REAP) project (2006-07), which was developed through the Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement (CAPLE) and supported by funding from the Scottish Funding Council. The REAP project produced a set of 12 Assessment and Feedback Principles', which were refined following discussions across the University and were approved by the Senate in 2008 for adoption across the institution. The Principles were also promoted across the UK by the Higher Education Academy and were published as part of the national Enhancement Theme on the First Year. In September 2009, the University launched the Feedback is a Dialogue campaign, aimed at informing students of their active role in making feedback work, and supporting staff in the design of more innovative and effective feedback mechanisms. Students indicated that the provision of feedback on their assessed work currently takes variable forms ranging from very detailed, constructive comments to minimal guidance, depending on the individual member of academic staff (see paragraph 117). The University indicated that departments had been encouraged to adopt those principles that were most relevant to the discipline in question and recognises that there is variability in the current implementation of the 12 Principles. The University is encouraged to monitor the adoption of the Principles to ensure that the variability has an academic justification and does not impact negatively on the student experience.

### **Arrangements for managing the research student experience**

31 The University's Policy, Procedures and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes were comprehensively revised in 2005 and further updated in 2009, taking account of revisions to the relevant section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA. The Policy sets out the various responsibilities and duties undertaken by the faculties, departments and supervisors for overseeing and supporting the studies of postgraduate research students. The Policy identifies a number of key staff: the 'Responsible Person' and the supervisory team. The Responsible Person is usually the Vice-Dean (Research) or head of department, as appropriate. The Responsible Person allocates each research student to a supervisor and second supervisor, with these nominations being approved by the faculty board of study. The supervisor is required to undertake training

and has to have had experience of at least one successful supervision as a second supervisor. CAPLE also provides an accredited module for all doctoral supervisors. Each student's progress record is updated every six months and signed off by the Responsible Person. There is also a formal, intermediate assessment at the end of the first year. The final thesis examination is undertaken by an external and an internal examiner, with an internal convenor in attendance.

32 Selection and admission of research students is undertaken by the Responsible Person, in association with another member of staff, usually the prospective supervisor. The decision to admit includes consideration of the student's qualifications and the research fit of the project in relation to the department's portfolio. Applicants are interviewed wherever this is practicable and appropriate. The University Policy states that research students should be provided with opportunities to develop relevant general, interpersonal and communication skills and a broad understanding of research methods within the discipline. General skills training is provided by CAPLE (for example on thesis writing and presentation skills) and this is supplemented by more subject-specific development opportunities at departmental and faculty levels. Departmental and faculty training comprises compulsory generic elements related to the development of core skills, along with more subject-specific optional training. Research students are required to undertake specific training prior to engaging in teaching.

33 Strategic oversight of the management of postgraduate research students falls within the remit of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee, with responsibility for the overall student experience also falling within the remit of the Education Strategy Committee, which considers elements of the research student experience to ensure consistency in opportunity and experience across the entire student population. In 2008, the University created a Postgraduate Research Office within the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate, with responsibility for collating data on research students' progression and completion rates via a new Research Information Management System. From the beginning of 2009-10, this data has been reported to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy Committee and it is intended that these reports will also be provided to the University Quality Monitoring Committee for institutional monitoring and scrutiny. In the current session, the information made available to the Quality Monitoring Committee related to the numbers of awards made rather than allowing monitoring of the comparative completion rates within each faculty. As the University implements its Research Information Management System, it should ensure that the Quality Monitoring Committee has the data it requires to perform its monitoring role effectively.

34 The University has recently produced a Strathclyde Framework for Researcher Development to include staff and students, with the aim of developing a Strathclyde researcher community and enhancing the researcher experience. Development of the Framework was informed by the outcomes of two Postgraduate Research Experience Surveys (PRES) (see paragraph 22) and consideration of national policy developments. The Framework includes cross-institutional strategies for induction and communication and will be instrumental in promoting parity of provision. It is also designed to bring together development opportunities to promote the provision of skills training and the dissemination of good practice in research for all researchers across all disciplines. The establishment of the Framework is clearly a positive development.

### **International exchanges**

35 The University highlighted that it aims to provide opportunities for all of its students to gain some international experience. One way the University seeks to achieve this is by promoting international exchange opportunities through a variety of arrangements such as the ERASMUS programme and direct collaboration with overseas higher education institutions. The University highlighted that there has been a year-on-year increase in the uptake of places by Strathclyde students from the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE), making the University the largest provider of students to that scheme in Scotland.

The International and Graduate Office provides information and support for students who are going on exchange and for those coming to the University on exchange from other institutions. In addition, some faculties and departments provide specific support for exchanges, for example the Business School. The Management Group for International Education and Exchange oversees this activity at an institutional level and engages with administrative and thematic issues relating to the mobility of students and staff. There would be added value in the Group having a greater role in evaluating students' experiences in this area. Overall, the efforts taken to coordinate and promote this activity across the institution represent positive practice.

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

36 The University emphasised its historic role in ensuring that its students would be attractive to employers and provided evidence of a significant level of current activity aimed at enhancing employability. It is engaging with the national Enhancement Theme, Graduates for the 21st Century. The University's Employability Committee has been renamed the Strathclyde Graduate for the 21st Century Working Group, and aims to identify and develop appropriate graduate attributes as well as determining how these can be supported. The 21st Century Graduates Work Plan, which draws on the institutional Employability Strategy and Action Plan as submitted to the Scottish Funding Council in 2007, details how the work is being taken forward.

37 In 2007, the University appointed an Employability Coordinator in CAPLE and seconded an Academic Champion to undertake a scoping exercise with the academic and Professional Services Departments aimed at defining Strathclyde graduate attributes. This was followed by a pilot mapping exercise using existing degree programmes and, to date, three of the five faculties have participated. This, now overseen by the Strathclyde Graduate for the 21st Century Working Group, has led to the identification of attributes in a Graduate Attribute Framework. The University intended that the attributes would be central to the new Corporate Strategy, which was currently under development. It was proposed that discussion around the attributes would take place through Learning Enhancement Network (LEN) and other events.

38 The report of the graduate attributes pilot mapping exercise tested the validity of the Graduate Attribute Framework as a mapping tool. A number of issues were raised from this exercise, including difficulties in explicitly identifying some of the attributes within the existing curricula, and the University is considering developing the Graduate Attribute Framework further to outline the principles of curriculum design, and to ensure the course approval process and quality monitoring arrangements request information relating to graduate attributes. There would also be of benefit in the University considering how these attributes will be assessed across the curriculum. The 2009 Annual Faculty Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement (AFAQAE) reports highlighted a need for the University to provide more guidance on ways of developing employability. The University intends to establish a community of practice of academic staff to work with the Employability Co-ordinator, for example in identifying curricular and co-curricular developments to support students' acquisition of the graduate attributes. This would be a positive development.

39 In 2009, the University granted funding from its Education Excellence Fund (see paragraph 108) to support the Interns@Strathclyde project to create 29 research internships for undergraduate students, enabling them to spend eight weeks working with established research groups and external partners. These internships include a two-day induction programme delivered by CAPLE to introduce the interns to different aspects of research and to encourage them to think about research careers. Following the initial success of the project, the University is extending its operation. Students who had participated in the scheme confirmed that it had been a rewarding experience, and it is clear that it represents good practice in supporting employability.

40 In 2009, the University adopted a revised policy and guidelines relating to careers education, information, advice and guidance in recognition of changes to the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. The revised policy provides a framework of responsibilities for supporting students' career and employability development through partnership working between the Student Experience and Enhancement Services, the academic departments and USSA. The policy also recognises the responsibilities of students themselves to enhance their employability by taking up the opportunities and support provided. The University has undertaken an interim review of the policy and the outcomes will inform the Strathclyde Graduate for the 21st Century Working Group and the formation of the revised Education Strategy.

41 The University considers that effective and timely personal development planning (PDP) is important in developing graduate attributes and promoting employability. However, on the basis of feedback from the First Year Survey and a variety of other student feedback mechanisms, the University has learned that students have mixed views on the usefulness of PDP. As part of its periodic review of academic activities and in conjunction with its review of academic counselling (see paragraph 27), the University is reviewing its PDP provision. This is being overseen by a working group of the Education Strategy Committee and is likely to inform the development of the University's new Education Strategy. This institutional oversight has the potential to realise the University's intended role for PDP.

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

42 The University has a strategic aim to revitalise the campus environment and provide effective learning support services. The Teaching Infrastructure Support Group had the role of ensuring that there is an institutional overview of the alignment between academic and estates priorities. Operational responsibility for this has now passed to Estates Services. The University has embarked on an ambitious estates strategy: the Estates Development Framework 2, which is a 10-year plan. The Framework includes the creation of a new teaching and learning building by 2022 and investment in flexible learning spaces, open-plan offices and teaching clusters with the aim of creating a high quality environment to further enhance the student experience. There is also a plan to develop a convergence and co-location of student services by 2014.

43 The 2005 ELIR report recognised the University's significant use of technology in learning and teaching activities. For the current ELIR, the University highlighted a number of investments in teaching room facilities that had taken place since 2005, aimed at ensuring the availability of new technologies in a variety of teaching spaces.

44 Over the period 2005-2006, the University worked to develop a single institutionally-funded virtual learning environment (VLE), LearnOnline, which was intended to replace the multiple VLEs that were in use across the institution. The University considered that, while the diversification of VLEs had led to innovations in supporting learning using virtual media, it also presented challenges for students and staff who had to log onto different platforms. Despite the successful implementation of LearnOnline, use of the existing VLEs continued in faculties and departments. In 2007-08, the University undertook an 'Excellence Review' (see paragraph 63) entitled 'Learning with New Technologies'. The review aimed to provide strategic oversight and management of learning with new technologies, provide appropriate support, and eliminate duplication. One of the review's key recommendations was the establishment of a single VLE for the University.

45 At the time of the current ELIR, several VLEs remained in use by the different faculties in addition to LearnOnline. Students recognised that there is a variety of online provision but appeared aware of where they would find specific information. The University was in the process of migrating modules to the new, unified VLE and further developments were proposed, one outcome of which would be to create a single portal to the VLE, so that students would have uniform access to the learning environment. There would clearly be a number of benefits arising from this development.

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

46 In September 2009, the University established the Equality Diversity and Disability Committee to replace two former groups (the Disability Advisory Group and the Equality Diversity Committee) and bring together the oversight of equalities legislation both for staff and students. The new Committee includes representation from the USSA including the Equal Opportunities Officer. The University's second Disability Equality Scheme (2009–12) includes operational data collection and evaluation, and action points for the lifespan of the Scheme.

47 The University was the lead institution for a sector project, 'Teachability', which was funded by the Scottish Funding Council between 1999 to 2006. Teachability aimed to create an accessible curriculum for students with disabilities and underpinned the University's approach to embedding equality within the curriculum and within policies and practices at all levels across the institution. The project resulted in the publication of sets of guidelines covering all aspects of programme design and delivery, including placements and field trips.

48 Linked to its strategic aim of expanding overseas student numbers (see paragraph 11), the University recognises that the provision of support for international students is key to providing a high quality student experience. The University also recognises that international students have particular, and sometimes complex, needs. The International and Graduate Office provides a range of information, support and advice for overseas students, including practical pre-entry information on visa requirements, extensive induction, and drop-in sessions. The Office also runs an International Students Club offering weekly meetings and a social programme. Staff and students were very positive about the support provided by the Office.

49 Several staff expressed the view that international students come to the University for the 'Strathclyde experience' and emphasised the importance of integrating these students with the rest of the student population. The University has made efforts to facilitate this integration but has also recognised the challenges associated with it, particularly where relatively large groups of students attend from the same country and can appear to be self-supporting. This is a view shared by students, many of whom commented that there was limited integration between the home and international student groups. While there are examples of academic staff making explicit use of learning and teaching techniques to facilitate this integration, there is not yet a planned and coordinated programme of professional development activities for preparing and supporting academic staff for the challenges presented by multi-cultural classroom contexts, including the use of specific strategies for engaging international students within an innovative learning and teaching context. There would be considerable benefit in the University identifying and introducing more systematic arrangements for supporting the learning and teaching needs of its international students, and reflecting on the development needs of academic staff who provide that support.

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

50 The Strategic Plan includes the objective of recruiting and retaining excellent academic staff and ensuring that development opportunities help them be at the forefront of learning and teaching. The University offers staff development opportunities for members of staff at all stages of their careers with two central units performing a key coordinating role. The Leadership and Organisation Development Unit offers training and development opportunities for all categories of staff, and CAPLE provides a more tailored range of educational development activities. The activities provided by CAPLE include a three-day induction programme on teaching, learning and assessment in higher education, which is also available for lecturers who already have teaching experience; and a Postgraduate Certificate in Advanced Academic Studies which is compulsory for staff who are new to teaching. Engagement with staff development opportunities outside the University is also encouraged, for example with the Higher Education Academy subject centres.

51 CAPLE engages with faculties to support enhancement activities and manages LEN, which it established in 2005. Through LEN, CAPLE organises a series of events relating to a wide range of learning and teaching themes. Recent events have included consideration of the nature of enhancement, learning spaces, research-teaching linkages, and plagiarism. Staff at a variety of levels spoke positively about LEN, indicating that it provided a good opportunity for networking with academic colleagues across the institution. However, the number of LEN events has decreased over recent years with only four events in 2009, which were attended by an average of 12 academic staff. Senior staff indicated that there were plans for LEN to be revitalised (see paragraph 118).

52 At departmental level, staff are supported through a structured system of mentoring: new staff are allocated to a mentor within their department and the head of department is provided with a set of milestones for the new staff relating to induction and developmental activities. The mentoring process includes support for teaching development, for example through peer observation of teaching, and the probationary staff participate in a developmental annual review process. The mentoring system has been established as part of the ongoing PDP process undertaken biennially by all staff and annually by probationary staff. Through the PDP processes, staff identify development goals and training needs, and heads of department are required to report to Human Resources on the cycle of PDP for the members of their departments. Staff indicated that mentor support is also provided to individuals who are moving into new roles within the University, and this received positive comment from those who had experience of the arrangement.

53 In 2007-08, the University established an annual Education Excellence Fund which allows faculties and the Professional Services to bid for support for specific development projects aimed at enhancing programme delivery and the student experience, for example the Interns@Strathclyde project was initiated in this way (see paragraph 39). The outcomes of these projects are published in annual reports that are disseminated widely across the University.

54 The University has identified the need to recognise and reward the contributions made by staff whose main focus is on teaching. In 2009, the University Court approved the concept of the Academic Professional for implementation in 2010, the objective being to give parity of esteem across the three groups of staff: academic, research and teaching. Significantly, this report proposed the creation of more explicit promotion arrangements for teaching staff, the standardisation of the job title and role, and the establishment of professional development frameworks to support career development. 2009-10 has also seen the introduction of Teaching Excellence Awards as a joint development between the University and USSA. In the current year, it was intended to make two such awards: Outstanding Teacher Award and Innovative Teacher Award.

55 It is evident that the University has systematic arrangements for recognising, supporting and developing its staff. As a further enhancement, there would be benefit in the University considering the extent to which the development opportunities provided are addressing the changing nature of the student population and the ability of staff to support the more diverse student body (see paragraph 49).

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

56 The University emphasised that the effective management of the student learning experience for collaborative programmes is of strategic importance. There are a variety of types of collaborative provision in place. Where students attend the University through an articulation arrangement, they are generally registered and follow the regulations of their home institution until arrival at the University, whereupon they are treated as 'Strathclyde' students. The status of students on collaborative courses, and specifically their rights of access to University library and other support services, was discussed at a meeting in September 2009 between the University and its collaborative partners. At the meeting, it was emphasised that agreements are made on

the assumption that the students and the provision of resources to support them are the responsibility of the partner organisation (see also paragraph 88).

## **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**

57 The University's approach to the management of quality assurance builds on the philosophy that innovation in learning and teaching is best taken forward by academic subject specialists. The University believes that this devolved approach is effective in combining clear institutional standards with a culture that encourages innovation and distributed responsibility for quality enhancement and assurance. The University stated that this approach requires a strong supportive framework of institutional policies and guidelines, and close interactions between committees at departmental, faculty and university level.

58 The University uses the terms 'course' and 'class' when referring to what some other institutions might describe as 'programme' and 'module' respectively. There are arrangements within faculties for the annual review of courses and classes and the resulting Annual Faculty Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement (AFAQAE) reports are considered by the University Quality Monitoring Committee. There is also a well-established system of quinquennial departmental review which has been supplemented in recent years by a variety of other procedures for reviewing the work of the departments, faculties and professional services.

59 Faculties employ their own procedures for class evaluation, annual class review and annual course review. In at least one faculty, departments are required to produce an annual report and, although review outcomes in all faculties are considered by the Vice-Dean (Academic), faculty officer and the head of department, not all course and class review reports are considered by a faculty committee. The process of course and class review makes an important contribution to the production of the faculties' AFAQAE reports. The University issues a template for these reports to ensure that they deal both with the operation of faculty quality assurance arrangements and with issues that have arisen in the reporting period. At faculty level the process is comprehensive and thorough. The reports are informative and include commentary on external features, pedagogic and curricular developments, and engagement with the national Enhancement Themes and with the University's Academic Strategy.

60 The University described the AFAQAE reporting arrangements as the mechanism for providing the Quality Monitoring Committee (QMC) with assurance that robust quality assurance and enhancement procedures are in place in each of the five faculties. Each AFAQAE report is reviewed by two colleagues from another faculty and this practice assists in the identification of good practice and in the promotion of inter-faculty dialogue. QMC receives the reviewers' summary reports and the original AFAQAE reports produced by the faculties.

61 Through the quinquennial departmental review procedure, the University addresses the Scottish Funding Council guidance on the conduct of institution-led quality reviews. Responsibility for reviewing departments is assigned to the faculties, working to a schedule that is monitored by QMC and within a procedural framework approved by the Senate. Review panels are normally chaired by the dean of faculty and include two members of staff and a student from other departments within the faculty. Review panels also include at least one member of staff from another faculty and two external assessors from outside the University, one of whom should be from outside Scotland. Training for student members has been provided by the national student participation in quality scotland (sparqs) service. From 2009-10, in response to comments from students about the generic nature of the sparqs training, the University has offered additional tailored training for students involved on the departmental review panels.

62 Review panels are required to take a holistic approach, giving full consideration to departmental management, learning and teaching, research, knowledge exchange, resources and strategic plans. They are expected to consider an extensive range of documents, including the most recent departmental review report, the Management Information Profile, committee (including staff-student committee) minutes and external examiners' reports. Panels do not routinely receive copies of assessed work or student handbooks and cannot, therefore, evaluate assessment practice or the information provided to students. Panels do meet with staff and students as a routine part of the process. Review reports are considered by the relevant faculty committees including the faculty board of study, and departments are required to report to the faculty their formal response to the review's recommendations. Summaries of the review reports and the departments' responses are included in the faculty's AFAQAE report. It is clear that the faculty-level process is conducted thoroughly and that the departmental review reports are rich in information on departmental operations and issues.

63 Since the 2005 ELIR, the University has adopted a number of additional review methods. Excellence Reviews, focusing mainly on the work of academic departments, were established for the purpose of ensuring alignment with the University's Strategic Plan 2007-2011, and Business Process Reviews were commissioned to consider the various processes which are the shared responsibility of academic areas and professional services departments. Overarching Institutional Strategic Reviews were instituted in early 2009 to address the more generic issues identified through the Excellence and Business Process Reviews. In each case, these reviews were commissioned by the University Management Committee.

64 It is clear that the University is taking care to evaluate both its institution-wide processes and the provision of its professional services and academic areas. The University is also aware that the variety and frequency of reviews could place an excessive burden on departments and faculties. QMC has acknowledged the need for the central collation of information on the wide range of review activities and the Committee has considered the extent to which the requirements of Departmental Review could be met by Excellence and other strategic reviews such that, in certain circumstances, a department might undergo an Excellence Review in place of having a Departmental Review. In two recent cases, the reports of reviews had been presented to the University Court without first having been considered by the Senate or QMC. In determining the future form of institution-led quality review, the University should ensure that primary responsibility for the periodic review of its academic provision remains with the Senate and its committees, and that the purposes and focus of periodic review are not compromised. Senior staff stated that a number of these matters were being addressed alongside the University's evaluation of the Departmental Review process (see paragraph 65). There would be benefit in the University pursuing this.

65 The University is considering the appropriateness of its approach to institution-led review and it has been proposed that the current procedure could be replaced by one with a broader faculty focus. Senior staff indicated that attention was being paid to the nature and level of detail of the information that would be generated from any new process. It was emphasised that the University's intention is to develop an approach that is sufficiently flexible to give due consideration both to individual subjects and to inter-disciplinary courses. As it evaluates its approach to institution-led quality review, there would be value in the University considering carefully the information QMC requires on the quality and academic standards of individual courses and departments in order to perform its monitoring role effectively. Specifically, the University should consider whether, in enabling it to discharge the responsibilities delegated by the Senate, QMC should have access to and discuss the direct evidence of the quality and standards of the University's provision. There would also be value in the University undertaking a holistic evaluation of its institution-led quality review requirements to ensure that the new method meets the needs of the new organisational structures and revised institutional strategies (see paragraphs 104 and 105).

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

66 The University stated that students have an important role in the quality assurance and annual monitoring arrangements. Course and class reviews were described as important departmental mechanisms for assessing the quality of the student experience. These are carried out for all taught provision and include the consideration of student feedback. For postgraduate research students, annual monitoring takes place at department and/or faculty level (depending on the faculty) and a progress record is maintained. Due to its holistic nature, the Departmental Review process applies to all students irrespective of mode or level of study. Consideration of student groups within the student population, such as international students or those with disabilities, is addressed through the student feedback mechanisms.

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

67 As a central element to the implementation of the Strategic Plan, the University reviewed its governance, management and decision-making structures. As a result, a new committee and management structure was introduced in 2009-10. The new arrangements are designed to facilitate more effective and efficient decision-making and to enable the University's main committees to concentrate on matters of strategy and policy. The streamlined committee structure is supplemented by an increased use of devolved authority by staff in the Professional Services departments taking greater responsibility for operational matters.

68 While primary responsibility for the quality and standards of the University's provision rests with departments, the University emphasised that there is a strong relationship between the departments and faculties. Each faculty has an academic administration committee and a board of study. Staff described the boards of study as a forum for the whole faculty. The Senate is supported by a number of University committees. These include the Quality Monitoring (QMC), Ordinance and Regulations, Education Strategy, and Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy Committees. The Education Strategy Committee has replaced the former Academic Policy and Student Experience committees. It is responsible for developing and monitoring the University's strategy for learning, teaching and assessment and for the enhancement of the student experience.

69 The Senate holds ultimate responsibility in this devolved structure for all academic matters, including academic standards and quality. Following the recent review of the University's decision-making structures and procedures, the Senate continues to oversee faculty operations and the business of University committees by receiving summaries of the key issues that have arisen from their meetings. Although responsibility for the quality assurance of the University's academic provision is delegated to QMC, it does not receive the minutes of faculty boards of study. Instead, it exercises this responsibility through its oversight of the University's annual and cyclical quality assurance processes and through the annual receipt of AFAQE reports from faculties (see paragraph 60).

70 The University's organisational framework for the management of quality assurance includes such key staff as the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), deans and vice-deans (academic), the Governance, Management and Policy (GMAP) team and the faculty officers. The deans report directly to the Principal and they are members of the Senate. The vice-deans (academic) report to the relevant dean, and are members of the Educational Strategy Committee and QMC; they also attend the Senate. The University described the faculty officers as providing a critical link between faculty and University processes. They are also ex officio members of QMC. The vice-deans (academic) were described in the 2005 ELIR report as a 'fulcrum' on which the balance between departmental and faculty autonomy, and institutional strategy and oversight in quality assurance and standards maintenance, rests. This remains a feature of the University's arrangements, and a similar role is performed by the faculty officers. Faculty officers are formally accountable to the Director of Corporate Services, and they and the vice-deans (academic)

have regular meetings with colleagues in the Registry. Staff indicated that inter-faculty consistency and institutional oversight is also achieved by the presence on each board of study of 'assessor members' who are drawn from other faculties.

71 The exercise of responsibility for quality assurance by the faculties is governed by a comprehensive set of policies, procedures and guidelines. These have been designed to take account of current legislation, the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)*, the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, Scottish Funding Council guidance for institution-led quality review, and the expectations of professional and statutory bodies. These documents include the general regulations set out in the University Calendar, and policies and procedures for such areas as student assessment and feedback, course and class approval, departmental review, external examining and for the management of collaborative courses. Vice-deans (academic) and faculty officers are responsible for ensuring that these policies and procedures are applied in a manner that maintains a balance between consistency of practice and flexibility for local variation. Although some of these policies and procedures have been revised since 2005, they have generally retained the 'intentionally flexible' character of the guidelines that were in place at the time of the previous ELIR. There would be benefit in the University reflecting on the balance between cross-institutional consistency and flexibility that exists within its devolved approach to quality management.

72 In response to the 2005 ELIR report, the University has taken a series of actions to ensure that its awards framework and programme specifications are fully aligned with the SCQF, and the Ordinances and Regulations Committee has a particular responsibility for ensuring that course regulations are consistent with University requirements. The University undertakes periodic reviews of its policies, procedures and guidelines to address sector and other external developments. Faculty and departmental adherence to the institutional policies and procedures is verified through the AFAQAE and Departmental Review processes. In general, the University adheres to the Academic Infrastructure and demonstrates a proactive engagement with QAA consultations and other external events.

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

73 The University undertook a review of IT provision in 2007-08 which led to the creation of an institutional IT strategy. There is now an Information Strategy Committee and a new Information Services Directorate as part of the new organisational and committee structure. The University indicated that these developments are intended to ensure that it will have the required IT and information infrastructure, and should provide a robust organisational framework for the provision of management information.

74 The University has identified that its systems are in need of modernisation and it has launched a management information project with the aim of creating a core data repository to better integrate data across the various departmental databases and other information systems. Similarly, a Research Information Management System is being developed in relation to research student data (see paragraph 33). The University is aware that progress with its management information system will be of key importance in enabling the QMC to discharge its responsibilities effectively in respect of monitoring student admissions, retention, progression and awards.

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

75 The University stated that the academic standards of its awards are maintained through the requirements set out in the Policies, Procedures and Guidelines on Learning, Teaching and Assessment. The University emphasised that it places particular importance on its arrangements for the approval of courses and classes for ensuring that its awards meet the expected sector level of attainment. In February 2010, the Education Strategy Committee considered a proposal to

conduct a 'wholesale review' of the course and class approval process and the underpinning business processes.

76 In the current arrangements, consideration of new courses and classes is undertaken by departments and final approval is given by the Senate on the basis of recommendations from the relevant faculty board of study and the Ordinance and Regulations Committee. The Procedure and Guidelines on Course and Class Approval does not prescribe the method of approval to be adopted by faculties, although it does specify the matters that should be addressed in the documentation supporting a proposal. It is only in the case of a proposal for the validation of an award offered by a collaborative partner that a formal event is required prior to seeking approval from the board of study. The Procedure indicates that panels should include external members, but these may be drawn from another faculty, provided they have not been involved with the development of the course. For courses to be delivered by a University department, the requirement for external participation in the scrutiny process is stated in permissive terms. While comments from members of academic staff in other institutions 'may' be provided, it is indicated that the views of current and previous external examiners should be sought. There would be benefit in the University considering whether its approval procedure stipulates adequate involvement from external subject specialists.

77 The Senate endorsement of a board of study's approval for new courses is contingent on the proposed course regulations being scrutinised by the Ordinance and Regulations Committee. The design of these regulations will be informed by the general regulations as set out in the Calendar, and the University's Policy and Procedures on Assessment and Feedback. However, the University's regulations are relatively permissive and it remains the case that specific assessment procedures and progression regulations can vary from course to course, and from class to class within courses. Differences between regulations governing such matters as the late submission of work or compensation can lead to inequalities between groups of students, and are likely to present particular difficulties for students enrolled on inter-disciplinary courses. In carrying out its planned review of the course and class approval arrangements, the University is asked to reflect on the balance between cross-institutional consistency and flexibility in its approach, with particular regard to the impact on students of variation in regulations.

### **External examiners**

78 Faculties nominate external examiners for approval by the Senate, and responsibility for managing the process lies with GMAP. There has been an increase in the number of external examiners recruited from outside the higher education sector and, in recognition of this, GMAP is revising its documentation to ensure that the University's expectations, and the roles and responsibilities of external examiners, are made explicit to those without detailed higher education knowledge. The GMAP team is also formulating a proposal for University-level induction to complement the current informal, departmental arrangements for the support of new external examiners. The University's plans for strengthening the information, advice and support it gives to its external examiners, especially to those it recruits from outside the higher education sector, will be important in ensuring the University continues to adhere to the relevant section of the *Code of practice*.

79 External examiners' reports are received by GMAP and forwarded to the head of department or course director and the vice-dean (academic) of the appropriate faculty for scrutiny and action. Departments are expected to send a response to the external examiner, and to complete a form providing details of the action being taken in response to the examiner's comments. This form is sent to GMAP and the faculty prepares an annual summary of its external examiner reports and departmental responses to them. While these activities are carried out diligently, there is no provision in the University's procedures for external examiner reports to be seen by a senior member of institution-level staff, for example the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), and QMC is reliant for its assurance of academic standards on summary reports that

are produced by the faculties themselves. The University should reflect on the institutional oversight of external examiners' reports to ensure it is operating in line with sector practice.

### **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**

80 The University indicated that responsibility for the strategic direction and oversight of its information resources has recently been assigned to the Information Strategy Committee. A corporate Content Management System has been introduced to ensure that the information the University puts into the public domain is presented in a consistent form. This requires the use of templates for material to be published on the web and has been accompanied by an extensive training programme for staff. The Marketing and Development Services will maintain ownership of the corporate information and departments will continue to be responsible for their own web pages and content. The University emphasised that, since the 2005 ELIR, it has developed a more managed approach to the production of its prospectuses. This involves the Communications Team fulfilling a key coordinating role and the use of a framework for departmental and faculty contributions. Qualitative and quantitative information for students is also provided through Unistats and the Higher Education Statistics Agency respectively.

81 Overall, the University provides information on quality and standards in accordance with Scottish Funding Council guidance.

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

82 The University described quality assurance and quality enhancement as mutually dependent processes. Quality assurance processes are said to incorporate enhancement through the highlighting and sharing of good practice, and by ensuring that challenges or problems identified from a quality assurance perspective are resolved through an enhancement-led approach. Particular significance is attributed to the AFAQAE reports and external examiners' reports as instruments for the identification and sharing of good practice. Staff explained that the dissemination of good practice is also achieved through the cross-representation of faculties on boards of study, the regular meetings of vice deans (academic) and faculty officers, the Quality Management Committee's peer review of AFAQAE reports and the work of CAPLE.

83 Senior staff highlighted the Excellence and Business Process reviews as examples of the way in which quality assurance processes support enhancement. Although these reviews are not formally part of the University's quality assurance framework, the strategic and developmental focus of these review methods potentially enables them to make a powerful contribution to the enhancement of the student experience. The scope of Departmental Review also includes strategic and developmental matters, although the reports of these exercises do not routinely include comment or recommendations relating to the wider University context.

84 Overall, the University can identify mechanisms for linking its assurance and enhancement arrangements. The current evaluation of the Departmental Review arrangements is likely to provide a valuable opportunity to maximise their potential for promoting enhancement.

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

85 The University's objectives for internationalisation include the development of sustainable partnerships with overseas educational providers and with institutions of 'high repute, where articulation arrangements can be adopted'. The University already has extensive collaborative links comprising more than 70 courses delivered in collaboration with organisations located in some 22 countries (including the United Kingdom). It does not currently franchise its provision or

maintain dual awards and the majority of its partnerships are based on articulation, validation or joint award arrangements.

86 Staff indicated that partnerships are normally the product of individual or local initiative, and it is notable that many of the University's collaborative programmes have small student intakes; in 2009-10 only six courses admitted more than 30 students. However, the University intends to develop its portfolio in a more strategic manner. It has recently formulated criteria for partnerships to ensure that the choice of new partners is aligned with faculty and University strategies and priorities, and the Executive Team is providing a framework to inform the future choice of strategic alliances. The University's guidance materials have been revised to include inter alia a set of principles governing the approval of new collaborative provision and the renewal of existing agreements. Some of these principles will inform the shape and character of the University's portfolio, while others specify the matters that must be addressed in the selection of prospective partners and the way in which partnerships should be managed.

### **The management of collaborative provision**

87 In November 2009, the University approved the most recent version of its Policy and Code of Practice for Collaborative (off-Campus and Overseas) Courses and for Flexible and Distributed Learning. This defines articulation as a partnership in which 'the collaborating agency has the primary responsibility for assuring the quality of its own course and the standard of any award given to the student before entry to the University', adding the important caveat that 'the University needs to continue to assure itself that [entrants] have the appropriate grounding'. This is achieved by University staff acting as external examiners for the partner's programme. The difficulties that can arise from pooling or combining powers through a joint awards arrangement are avoided by the appointment of either the University or its partner to act as the 'administering institution' with overall responsibility for the award and the course as a whole. Validation is defined as 'the formative, developmental hands-on process by which the University assures itself on a continuing basis that courses designed and delivered by appropriate external agencies are of an appropriate standard'. This assurance is obtained through the application of the University's normal procedures for annual monitoring, including course and class reviews.

88 Senior staff stated that the University's quality management arrangements are designed to maximise the Senate's control over the collaborative provision developed by the faculties. These arrangements are, nevertheless, largely the same as those which are applied to provision within the University, and no distinction is made between the requirements for the management of collaborative provision overseas or within the UK. Responsibility for quality assurance is delegated to departments and faculties, and they are expected to work within the framework of University guidelines and procedures (see paragraph 95).

89 The first stage in the approval of a partnership entails a due diligence procedure which comprises the completion of a collaboration checklist and an Outline Proposal to Collaborate for consideration by the relevant faculty board and the University Executive Team. The questions in the checklist are comprehensive and helpful in assisting staff in the subsequent planning of the partnership arrangements. However, neither the checklist nor the outline proposal requires staff to determine the standing of the prospective partner by consulting with other UK institutions which have, or have had, a relationship with the organisation. The University's due diligence procedure, which is largely undertaken on the basis of internal enquiries, would be enhanced by the inclusion of such a requirement.

90 The course proposal and regulations are approved in accordance with the University's standard procedures and a collaborative agreement is then approved by the relevant faculty board and the Senate, and signed by the Principal. The provision is subsequently monitored through the AFAQAE process. The template for AFAQAE reports includes a set of questions concerning the continuing validity and viability of the faculty's collaborative agreements and includes the facility to highlight issues that have arisen which require attention at faculty or

University level. Agreements are subject to review after a period of three years utilising a checklist of questions that is designed to identify any changes since the agreement was signed and to ensure that departments are fulfilling their responsibilities for the management of the collaboration. Departmental Review panels are expected to assess the extent of collaboration in both research and learning and teaching. They are not required to undertake a full evaluation of the department's partner organisations and the quality and standards of its collaborative provision. In practice, the Departmental Review reports mainly address the strategic and management aspects of a department's activities in this area.

91 Collaborative agreements are discussed by the Senate before they are approved. Once an agreement is approved, QMC is responsible for the quality assurance of the University's academic provision. In discharging this responsibility, QMC is reliant on the evidence provided by AFAQAE reports. Although AFAQAE reports are completed in a diligent manner, they provide little detail on the quality and standards of the collaborative provision for which faculties are responsible. The University should review the level of detail of the information provided to QMC (see paragraph 95).

### **Overseas audit**

92 In May 2008, the University participated in a QAA Overseas audit of its partnership with the Institute of Counselling and Psychological Studies in Athens. The audit report set out a number of areas requiring further consideration by the University, and the actions taken by the University in response to the report were highlighted during the current ELIR. These included a range of measures aimed at strengthening the management of all the University's collaborative agreements.

93 The Senate acted immediately in response to the Overseas audit report by resolving that the Principal should take convenor's action to approve any necessary amendments to the University's agreement with the Institute. This was followed by a decision that each faculty should audit its current agreements to ensure that they were being properly applied and that they were consistent with the *Code of practice* and the SCQF. The outcomes of the faculty audits were discussed by QMC and, in most cases, faculties confirmed that their collaborative agreements were live, valid and adhered to the University's policy and procedures. This exercise also resulted in the identification of a number of partnerships which were either inactive or which required renewal.

94 The Overseas audit also prompted the University to establish a new central database comprising a standard set of information for each collaborative partnership, including a copy of the signed agreement. This represents appropriate action to align the University's arrangements with the precepts of the relevant section of the *Code of practice* and the requirements of the UK Borders Agency.

95 The University has acknowledged that applying the same form and level of scrutiny to overseas collaborative activity as would be adopted for on-campus provision may, inadvertently, conceal potential weaknesses. In its formal, published response to the Overseas audit report, the University indicated that it would revisit its approach to the annual monitoring of collaborative agreements at faculty and institutional level. The University should now pursue this and, in doing so, should pay careful attention to the level and scope of information that the faculty and institutional committees require in order to perform their scrutiny and monitoring roles effectively (see paragraph 91).

96 Overall, while the University has taken a number of steps to improve its management of collaborative provision, it is strongly encouraged to carry out a more fundamental review of its approach. This should include an analysis of the risks associated with this form of provision and careful consideration of the fitness of its current arrangements for the purpose of managing these risks.

## **Strategic approach to quality enhancement**

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

97 The University identified five key elements of its framework for implementing and promoting quality enhancement across the institution: the University Strategic Plan; the Academic Strategy; annual statements produced by the faculties, departments and the professional services; engagement with sector enhancement activities; and partnership working, both between sections of the institution and with the University of Strathclyde Students' Association (USSA), to enhance the student learning experience. The University stated that, while well-motivated, well-supported and enthusiastic staff remain vital in the delivery of a high-quality student experience, the importance of the institutional framework has grown with the Court's approval, in spring 2007, of the 2007-11 Strategic Plan.

98 The Strategic Plan includes goals related to fostering excellence in research, education and knowledge exchange. Regarding 'Excellence in Teaching', it defines mechanisms for meeting its objective of providing high quality education and sets specific targets for measuring progress that are regularly monitored. The latter include: increasing numbers of international postgraduate students, improving entry standards for undergraduate students, rationalising student services and achieving above-benchmark results in external indicators.

99 Progress against strategic objectives is measured through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) embedded within Management Information Profiles which are reviewed by the University Court and the Executive Team. At the time of the current ELIR, the KPIs were in the process of being revised and, while those related to education were generally focused on quantitative data, such as metrics associated with the quality and numbers of applicants, it was also intended to develop indicators related to quality assurance. Senior staff acknowledged that, in practice, there were challenges in defining a KPI that would capture quality enhancement, and this remained an area of development.

100 The University has a number of mechanisms for reviewing and managing strategic change. The Quality Monitoring Committee (QMC) provides a report to the Senate and Court, which takes the form of a summary of the Annual Faculty Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement (AFAQAE) reports, and provides an opportunity for integrating quality assurance and enhancement with strategic thinking. The Court receives an annual report on learning and teaching which combines quantitative data, such as the KPIs, with qualitative information. In 2009, a 'Transition Team', reporting to the University Executive, was established to drive strategic change. Membership of this 11-strong team is drawn from management, academic and administrative areas. Its remit includes clarification of the University Vision, overview of strategic change projects, development of mechanisms for communication and the development of leadership skills. It is clear that this is a highly focused mechanism for steering faculty and departmental developments, and for monitoring progress on a wide range of tightly defined projects.

101 The University describes itself as a 'Place of Useful Learning' (see paragraph 8) and has advanced an institutional vision of becoming a leading international technological university. The Academic Strategy (2006-09) is aligned with this mission, seeking to integrate research and academic scholarship into learning and teaching; provide learning opportunities through placements and internships; engage with professional statutory and regulatory bodies through the accreditation of courses; and consult fully with the student body and its representatives. The Strategy also focuses on graduate attributes and on flexibility in course delivery, levels of entry and mode of attendance. Five strategic aims are highlighted within the Strategy with several measurable outcomes provided for each. These aims are supported by coordinated developments in the Professional Services. Notably, the Academic Strategy includes a specific Strategy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement which, in turn, incorporates four strategic objectives to encourage consistency among departments and faculties; support staff; maintain quality standards; and involve students in enhancement activities.

102 Following a comprehensive review of its decision-making structures in 2009, there has been a greater focus by the main committees on matters of strategy. The previous Academic Policy Committee has been replaced by the Education Strategy Committee (ESC), which reports to the Senate with a wider remit and broader student representation. In accord with this change, the Academic Strategy (2006-09) will be replaced by the Education Strategy (2010-13), the production of which is being managed by ESC and its working groups. A workshop on Learning for the 21st Century was held early in 2010 to give heads of department an opportunity to contribute to the new Education Strategy. By the time of the current ELIR, a draft work plan had been produced and the process had focused on a number of key elements, including flexibility in the curriculum; participation in and recognition of co-curricular activities (anticipating the Higher Education Achievement Record – HEAR); accreditation; cross-disciplinary activity; collaborative partnerships; and estates development. The University regards its Curriculum Renewal 2015 project as a key enabler for future activity. This project will be overseen by a working group reporting to ESC.

103 Each faculty, department and professional service produces an annual strategy statement using a standard format. The template includes a SWOT analysis for the unit, a summary of key issues in the internal and external environment and a list of strategic priorities linking to the three elements of the University Strategic Plan (see paragraph 98). At faculty level, these strategies address perceived risks and related training needs, international aspirations, staffing and other matters pertinent to the University Strategy (such as estates needs). Responsibility for ensuring effective links between the University and faculty strategies lies with ESC. It is clear that the faculty and department strategy statements have the potential for linking strategies and planning at different levels, and for supporting and coordinating enhancement initiatives (see paragraph 109).

104 It was apparent that, in the face of substantial recent changes within the University, preparation for the current ELIR had been used as an opportunity for reflection on strategy, policy and processes. As a project, production of the Reflective Analysis involved senior managers, academic and professional service staff, and students. It is clear that its development was an important starting point for the Education Strategy and the next University Strategic Plan, which is due to be approved later in 2010. A range of mechanisms has been used to communicate the University's reinvigorated strategic approach to staff and students. The role of the formal academic committees in determining and shaping the wider strategic approach may have been more limited. While there are examples of the committees discussing specific institutional strategies, it is less evident that the academic committee structure is systematically used to determine, debate and agree the wider strategic approach. There have also been instances of review reports being presented to the University Court before being considered by QMC or the Senate (see paragraph 64). A review of the University's governance, management and decision-making structures has been conducted recently (see paragraph 102). The University is encouraged to continue to reflect on the nature and location of consultation, deliberation and associated decision-making inside and outside the academic committee structures.

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

105 There is an unambiguous clarity of purpose about the University's Strategic Plan. The University has used the Academic Strategy to direct developments in a coordinated manner and has effectively monitored progress (see paragraph 101). This approach is likely to be enhanced through the successor Education Strategy, which has the potential to bring together a number of projects within a coherent whole. As a result of this strategically directed transformation, it appears that the University has a revitalised and strengthened sense of purpose, and is currently rebalancing itself following a period of intensive change.

106 A detailed action plan was included with both the Academic Strategy and the Strategy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement. Developments have been reviewed regularly via the ESC and, in particular, the April 2008 Interim Update on the Academic Strategy provided evidence of progress with the main strategic objectives, such as the review of student representative structures, revision of marking and compensation schemes, redesign of curricula and the creation of new institutional guidelines on formative and summative assessment. Subsequent to the ELIR visits, the University stated that the Education Strategy would become an embedded part of the Corporate Strategy, but confirmed that a detailed action plan would be produced to set out actions for the year ahead and to outline medium-term actions.

107 In 2007, the University developed two instruments for assuring alignment with the Strategic Plan: the Excellence Review and the Business Process Review (see paragraph 63). These structured yet adaptable review mechanisms have been implemented in specific areas identified by a group of senior officers reporting to the University Management Committee and on to the University Court. As instruments of change, these two review processes have led to substantial developments in organisational structures, staff complements and the realignment of educational priorities, including the closure and merger of units.

108 To incentivise change and support quality enhancement initiatives, the University has created an Education Excellence Fund, normally operating via a formal bidding process. Initiatives identified by senior managers and supported by the Fund in 2009-10 include re-equipping the Language Centre, the VLE Migration Project (see paragraph 45) and delivery of the Assessment and Feedback Campaign (see paragraph 30). The Fund is intended as a continuing initiative which the University considers to be effective in supporting the implementation of the Strategic Plan and the key institutional strategies. It has been successful in promoting a number of cross-University developments and has played a role in the dissemination of good practice across the faculties.

109 As a significantly devolved organisation, the University provides its faculties with considerable flexibility in their management of enhancement. Faculty strategy statements and AFAQAE reports together form a potentially powerful mechanism for monitoring and evaluating how that freedom is exercised. The Academic Strategy states that ESC will monitor the linkage between the University and the faculty strategies but this is not explicitly included in the terms of reference for the Committee and, at the time of the current ELIR, there had been few minuted discussions at ESC about the faculty strategies. The AFAQAE report template was revised in 2009 to include a forward look at priorities and the reports themselves contain useful information. The University recognises that it could benefit from reducing the duplication of effort within, and promoting the sharing of practice between, the faculties. As it develops and implements the new Corporate Strategy, there would be value in the University reflecting on the balance it is seeking to achieve between flexibility and consistency across the institution, with the aim of achieving a parity of experience across courses, departments and faculties for students.

### **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**

110 The University emphasised that its learning and teaching activities are informed by, and contribute to, national and international good practice, and engagement with sector enhancement initiatives is a key part of the University's framework for quality enhancement. Staff have been closely involved with the majority of the national Enhancement Themes and the University has performed a lead role in several Themes and related projects. For example, several projects to support the First Year Theme were undertaken by the University's staff and, internally, the Theme was progressed through the Student Transition Framework (see paragraph 24). The Framework exemplifies a holistic institutional approach to a strategic priority, in this case improving retention. It has taken account of a range of material, including research studies and student surveys, and has resulted in changes to the institutional approach to induction.

At the time of the current ELIR, the University indicated that it planned to embed the key learning points from implementing this project within the Education Strategy for 2010-13.

111 Departments are required to include consideration of external reference points, such as subject benchmark statements, in their development of programme specifications, and courses are required to align with the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)*. Many departments are in regular contact with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) (some of which are international) and the University places importance on PSRB accreditation as an indicator of success, as well as providing a further opportunity for staff to evaluate their learning and teaching practice.

112 The University carried out extensive research while developing its vision to become a leading international technological university. This involved exploring examples of such institutions in the UK, Europe and the USA, including making a number of site visits. This gathering and review of international practice is regarded as an important enhancement tool and it was evident that it had informed strategic developments. Further comparative research has been undertaken to support a number of the Excellence Reviews and the University's approach to gathering and responding to student views was informed by exploring practice at another Scottish institution.

113 There is significant evidence of the University drawing on external reference points and, notably in the case of the national Enhancement Themes, integrating these with the institutional strategy and practice.

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

114 The University highlighted that the identification, dissemination and implementation of good practice relies on effective communication between all sectors of the institution, and a key outcome of the Strategic Plan has been a refinement of its communications policies. A Protocol for the Cascading of Internal Communications has been introduced, which gives heads of department explicit responsibility for the exchange of information with staff and students. The further development of this approach is encouraged so that an open structure is created to support the participation of students and staff at all levels.

115 The AFAQAE reports provide a mechanism for identifying good practice. A specific section of each report asks staff to identify aspects of learning and teaching that may have wider relevance across the University and discussion of the reports at QMC provides a potential dissemination mechanism.

116 The University emphasised that the staff in its Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement (CAPLE) are acknowledged in research and development nationally and internationally. CAPLE has a remit to promote and support good practice in all aspects of learning, teaching and assessment. It leads a number of formal courses such as the Learning, Teaching and Assessment in Higher Education course for new staff (see paragraph 50) and conducts a series of workshops and other activities primarily focused on educational development. CAPLE also has a sector-wide reputation for its work on the national Enhancement Themes. Each faculty has a named senior contact within the CAPLE team and the Centre acts as a 'broker' to arrange staff development events.

117 In its 2004 review of CAPLE, the University encouraged the Centre to adopt a more targeted and strategic approach in order to maximise its benefit to the whole institution. One example of this enhanced approach has been the REAP project (see paragraph 30) where CAPLE's work has been linked to strategic priorities and engaged with institutional implementation. In accord with the devolved academic culture, implementation has involved a 'toolkit' approach where academic staff have taken advantage of the credit restructuring initiative (see paragraph 29) to embed new assessment practices in a discipline context. The 'Feedback is a Dialogue' initiative associated with the REAP project has attracted national

attention. Staff highlighted that, as a result, there is evidence of improving student attainment and students who had experienced the revised arrangements commented that they were benefiting from more immediate and enhanced feedback.

118 The University described the Learning Enhancement Network (LEN), which CAPLE manages, as 'core' to the development and effective dissemination of good practice. It is open to staff and students, which is positive, but its activities had declined in recent years (see paragraph 51). Senior staff emphasised that there is an innovative and receptive teaching community within the University and confirmed their intention to reinvigorate LEN as an important driver and facilitator of institutional discussions about good practice.

119 The University is encouraged to reflect on the ways in which it could, more purposefully, identify and disseminate good practice using the range of existing mechanisms, including ensuring it is fully capitalising on the expertise within CAPLE.

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

120 Prompted by the 2008 Overseas audit report (see paragraph 92) the University is planning to hold an annual staff development event for its collaborative partners to include feedback and discussion on issues that have been raised in the annual course monitoring reports. In addition, a range of meetings have been held in recent months to discuss University developments and initiatives with its partners. The Overseas audit report also asked the University to consider whether opportunities could be provided for staff exchange and staff development at the partner institution. The University is encouraged to adopt an enhancement-led approach to the management of its collaborative links through these activities for developing staff within the institution and its partners.

## **Conclusion**

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

121 The University has developed a positive partnership with the University of Strathclyde Students' Association (USSA), including holding monthly meetings between the student executive and the Principal, and informal monthly sessions with other key staff. The University and USSA have worked together to improve the student representative arrangements and a new class representative system was introduced from the beginning of 2009-10. The University solicits students' views through a range of external and internal mechanisms, including nationally-recognised surveys. There is clear evidence of the outcomes of these being used to inform strategic developments, such as the Strathclyde Framework for Researcher Development. The University has also taken positive steps to promote students providing feedback within departments through the use of two high-profile campaigns: 'Tell Us What You Think' and 'You Told Us That...'.

122 The Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement (CAPLE) provides a range of educational development activities for staff and students, including formal awards and bespoke engagement with the faculties to support enhancement activities. The sector-leading Re-engineering Assessment Practices (REAP) project (2006-07) was developed through CAPLE and supported by funding from the Scottish Funding Council. While implementation of the project has produced a number of enhancements relating to assessment practice and the provision of feedback to students on their assessed work, the University is encouraged to progress its efforts to embed the REAP project outcomes more consistently across the whole institution to ensure that any variability does not impact negatively on the student experience. Linked to the REAP project, in 2009, the University introduced the Student Transition Framework as a holistic approach to promoting student retention. The Framework has given rise to a number of benefits, including the development of an institution-wide approach to induction.

123 The University has a number of strengths relating to employability and is undertaking a programme of work focused on the Strathclyde Graduate for the 21st Century. In 2009, the University launched the innovative Interns@Strathclyde project which enables undergraduate students to spend eight weeks working with established research groups and external partners. Students who had participated in the scheme confirmed that it had been a rewarding experience, and it is clear that it represents good practice in supporting employability.

124 There has been a planned increase in the University's international student population over recent years, which is intended to continue. The University provides information, support and advice for these students, including an optional social programme, through the International and Graduate Office. Although there are individual examples of good practice, the University does not yet have a planned and coordinated approach to considering the academic support needs of international students, or to addressing the challenges presented by multi-cultural classroom contexts. There would be considerable benefit in the University identifying and introducing more systematic arrangements for supporting the learning and teaching needs of its international students, and reflecting on the development needs of academic staff who provide that support.

125 The University is developing a Research Information Management System to provide data on research students' progression and completion rates. As the System is implemented, the University should ensure that the Quality Monitoring Committee is provided with the data it requires to perform its institutional monitoring role effectively.

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

126 The University's approach to the management of quality assurance builds on the philosophy that innovation in learning and teaching is best taken forward by academic subject specialists. Its policies, procedures and guidelines offer significant scope for discretion in the exercise of the wide range of responsibilities that the University devolves to departments and faculties. Faculty-based vice-deans (academic), along with faculty officers, fulfil a pivotal role between faculty autonomy and institutional oversight, which is carried out diligently and with intelligent authority. Nonetheless, considerable scope exists for significant variation in regulations and practices between departments and faculties, and the University is asked to reflect on the balance between cross-institutional consistency and flexibility that exists within its devolved approach to quality management. The Senate has devolved its responsibility for the quality assurance of the University's academic provision to the Quality Monitoring Committee, and the University should consider whether the information reported from the faculties to the Committee is sufficiently detailed and supported by adequate management information for the Committee to perform an effective institutional monitoring role.

127 The University has arrangements in place for monitoring and reviewing its provision which adhere to the Scottish Funding Council guidance. However, the University has undergone a period of significant strategic change and there would be considerable benefit in undertaking a holistic review of its institution-led quality review arrangements, drawing on the learning points that have arisen from its experience of operating and evaluating a range of review methods.

128 Although the University has undertaken a number of positive steps to improve its management of collaborative provision since participating in a QAA Overseas audit in 2008, it is strongly encouraged to carry out a more fundamental review of its approach. This should include an analysis of the risks associated with this form of provision and careful consideration of the measures that need to be put in place to manage these risks.

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

129 The University has an unambiguous clarity of purpose about its Strategic Plan and is in the process of rebalancing itself following a period of intensive change. While a range of mechanisms has been used to communicate the strategic approach to staff and students, at times, the role of the academic committee structure as the location for debate and decision-making has not been evident. The University is, therefore, encouraged to reflect on the nature and location of consultation, deliberation and associated decision-making inside and outside the academic committee structures.

130 The University's strategies, policies and practices are informed by external reference points, ranging from use of the Academic Infrastructure in programme specifications to targeted research projects in support of specific institutional initiatives. Staff have been closely involved with the majority of the national Enhancement Themes and the University has performed a lead role in several Themes and related projects. Trends and learning points arising from a number of the Themes are evident in the University's work.

131 Linked to its devolved structure, the University recognises that it could benefit from reducing the duplication of effort within, and from the sharing of practice between, faculties. The University's emerging Corporate Strategy has the strong potential to bring together existing initiatives and practices into a coherent whole. As it continues with the development and implementation of the Strategy, there would be benefit in the University reflecting on the balance it is seeking to achieve between consistency and flexibility across the institution. The University is also asked to reflect on the ways in which it can, more purposefully, identify and disseminate good practice using the range of existing mechanisms, including capitalising on the expertise within CAPLE.

132 The University is encouraged to adopt an enhancement-led approach to the management of its collaborative activity through the development of staff within the University and its partner institutions.

## **Overarching confidence judgement**

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

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RG 636a 08/10