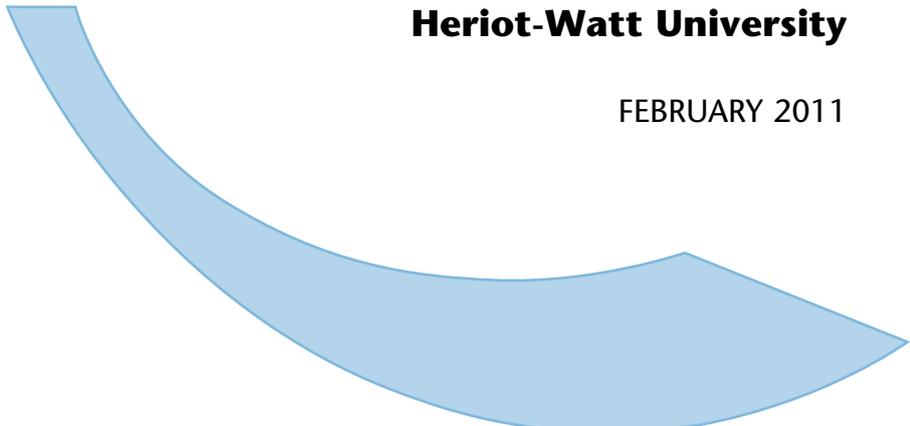


# Enhancement-led institutional review

**Heriot-Watt University**

FEBRUARY 2011



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## Enhancement-led institutional review

### Heriot-Watt University

#### Introduction

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

#### ELIR method and report

2 The ELIR method was revised during 2007-08 following extensive consultation with the Scottish higher education sector. Full detail on the method is set out in the *Enhancement-led institutional review handbook: Scotland (second edition) 2008*, which is available on 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 a case study on a major transformational project undertaken by the University, 'Restructuring the Academic Year' (RAY) (see paragraphs 104-106). The ELIR team also received the report of the University's previous ELIR, which took place in 2006.

5 The process of producing the RA was overseen by an ELIR Steering Group, comprising a number of senior University staff and a staff member of the Heriot-Watt University Students' Union (the Students' Union). The RA was drafted primarily by a writing group comprising the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the Assistant Registrar (Learning Strategies) and the Academic Registry Quality Officer. The Students' Union was involved in producing the RA in a number of ways: through membership of the ELIR Steering Group, membership of the University's Learning and Teaching Board, and through providing revisions to particular sections of the RA and commenting on drafts. The University stated that student engagement with producing the RA enabled the Students' Union and the University to clarify areas for institution-level action, and ensured that the strategic activities of the Students' Union were properly reflected in the RA.

6 The ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 19 and 20 January 2011 and the Part 2 visit took place in the week beginning 28 February 2011.

7 The ELIR team comprised: Mr Pat Devlin, Professor Marianne Howarth, Professor Kerri-Lee Krause, Mr Gavin Lee, Professor Colin Raban, and Dr Jonathan Teppett. The review was managed on behalf of QAA by Dr Janice Ross, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

## **Background information about the institution**

8 Heriot-Watt University was established in 1966, and is a modern, medium-sized University, based mainly on a custom-built campus on the outskirts of Edinburgh (the Edinburgh campus). The University has two additional Scottish campuses in Galashiels (the Borders campus) and Orkney, and a fourth campus in Dubai.

9 The University is organised into eight schools: the School of the Built Environment; the School of Engineering and Physical Sciences; the School of Life Sciences; the School of Management and Languages; the School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences; the School of Textiles and Design; the Institute of Petroleum Engineering; and the Edinburgh Business School. The last two schools have postgraduate provision only. The University's portfolio reflects an emphasis on professional programmes which prepare students for graduate-level employment and professional career opportunities. The portfolio covers science, engineering, the built environment, information technology, business, management, languages, and textiles and design.

10 The University participates in a number of collaborative activities with other higher education institutions, including three validation partners and 16 joint collaborative partners. The University also has a significant number of students studying off-campus for the University's awards through Approved Learning Partner institutions. These partnerships are primarily with international academic institutions, but are also with a smaller number of local further education colleges. In addition, the University has a significant number of independent distance learning students.

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

11 The University's strategy for quality enhancement, which is contained within its Learning and Teaching Strategy, is based around four themes: the student experience, academic practice, employability, and institutional growth. The University identifies the key features of its strategic approach to quality enhancement as a clear vision and strategic plans; a supporting Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement Framework; a joint approach between University management, schools and professional services; partnership with students; formal monitoring processes; and staff recognition and reward.

## **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**

12 In 2009-10, the University had a total population (by headcount) of approximately 23,900 students. Of this total, some 9,400 students (approximately 39 per cent) are based on the University's four campuses, with the majority of these (7,400 or 79 per cent) being located on the Edinburgh campus. Approximately 1,330 (14 per cent) of the on-campus students are based at the Dubai campus, with smaller numbers at the Borders and Orkney campuses (652 and 13 students respectively). The remaining students (approximately 14,500 or 50 per cent are enrolled with Approved Learning Partner institutions, or are independent distance learning students.

13 Of the on-campus students, the majority (approximately 72 per cent) are studying undergraduate programmes; approximately 23 per cent are on taught postgraduate programmes, and approximately 5 per cent are postgraduate research students. The University notes that its expansion in postgraduate student numbers in recent years has been driven by the significant growth in overseas student numbers. The majority of campus-based students are full-time (91 per cent), with 9 per cent of students studying part-time. The exception to this profile is at the Dubai campus, where the proportion of postgraduate students is greater (approximately 47 per cent of the campus population), most of whom are studying on a part-time basis.

14 The University participates in a range of activity to support widening access, both for UK and for international students, and believes that it performs well against national benchmarks. Using data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency and the Scottish Funding Council, the University identifies that 91 per cent of its undergraduates are from state schools or further education colleges, and that 6.8 per cent of its Scottish undergraduates are from the 20 per cent most deprived areas of Scotland.

15 The University has a distinctive international profile in its student population. On the three Scottish campuses, European Union and overseas students constitute approximately one third of the student population. The University's Dubai campus has grown significantly since the 2006 ELIR, and plans for a new Dubai campus building (to be opened in September 2011) include the expectation that student numbers will grow to between 3,000 and 4,000 within the next few years. Additionally, approximately 75 per cent of the University's independent distance learning students, and those studying with Approved Learning Partners, are non-UK students.

16 In its 'Focus on the Future' Strategy, the University identifies international growth as one of its four key objectives. As part of this, the scale of international activity is expected to double in the next five to 10 years. The University states that it intends to achieve this by the following routes: the opening of a new international campus, the development of strategic Approved Learning Partners, increased student recruitment onto the existing campuses, and growth in current activities.

17 Management information about the student population is centrally compiled by the Director of Planning, and reports on the student population are widely used for strategic planning, monitoring and review. Statistical data on the student population is reported to the Planning and Management Executive, and to its boards and groups, in order to monitor progress against key performance indicators. A common set of key performance indicators is used at institutional, school and discipline levels to allow comparability across the institution and to benchmark against national indicators.

18 The University has recognised that its in-house student information system no longer provides the full range of management information now required, and the University is therefore in the process of incrementally implementing a new commercial student administration system. The functions for students' self-service and direct admissions became live in August 2010, and it is intended that the new system will be fully implemented by summer 2011. It is anticipated that the new student administration system will allow improved reporting and will provide schools with easier access to data.

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

### **Student representation**

19 The University noted that, since the 2006 ELIR, the partnership between the institution and the Students' Union has matured, leading to the development of a professional partnership. There is evidence of a strong working relationship between the University and the Students' Union. The Union's sabbatical officers are significantly involved in the committee work of the University and it is clear that their contributions are respected by both staff and students.

20 The University's Edinburgh and Borders campuses promote student engagement in a number of ways: through student representation on University, school, and subject-level committees; student involvement with the University's monitoring and review processes (see paragraphs 68 and 70); and through the provision of Student Voice sessions, which include all student representatives and are also open to the entire student body. A Students' Union sabbatical President post has recently been established at the Dubai campus, and a Student Council based on student representatives is also being established. Student Voice sessions were

also successfully run at the Dubai campus during 2010-11. The Students' Union provides a supporting role to the Students' Council in Dubai and also works closely with students at the Borders campus. The Students' Union does not currently have any formal representative responsibilities for students at Approved Learning Partners.

21 Student school officers play an important role as a conduit between sabbatical officers and class representatives, in order to ensure that schools are aware of students' concerns. School officers are trained, supported and paid for carrying out their role and attend weekly school officer meetings with the Students' Union Senior Vice President, which ensures that sabbatical officers are aware of matters being raised throughout the University. The University stated that school officers are members of school learning and teaching committees, in order to ensure their involvement in discussions of policy and strategy. However, there is some variability in practice, with only school officers in some schools being members of deliberative policy-setting committees. The University is asked to reflect on the engagement of students in school committees, in order to promote more fully student involvement in discussions on strategy and policy. The University acknowledged that an unintended consequence of the school officer system has been an impact on the effectiveness of the subject-level student-staff committees, whereby these now tend to focus on more routine and practical matters. Consequently, the University and the Students' Union intends to review the staff-student committee representative structures in order to ensure a greater focus on academic matters. The University is encouraged to progress this review.

22 Postgraduate research students are represented by school-based representatives who form the Research Student Representatives Group. Research student representatives meet regularly with, and are supported by, their school's Research Student Co-ordinator, who is a member of academic staff. Postgraduate research students confirm that access to staff members is satisfactory and that informal discussions allow the resolution of many minor issues. However, research students also identify a lack of opportunities to be directly represented on school and University research-focused committees. At the time of the current ELIR, the University was reviewing its postgraduate research student representative structures in order to ensure the greater engagement of research students through its committee structures, and this is a positive development.

### **Student feedback**

23 The University participates in a number of external student surveys: the National Student Survey, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, and the International Student Barometer. The University benchmarks the outcomes of these against both national outcomes and those of its key competitor higher education institutions. In relation to the National Student Survey, those schools falling below the University's expected satisfaction ratings are required to instigate action plans; these action plans are agreed with the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and are monitored by the University's Learning and Teaching Board. The University intends to review and formalise its processes for managing and responding to all external surveys to mirror its established procedure used for the National Student Survey, and this is likely to be beneficial.

24 In December 2008, the University introduced an institution-wide online Course Feedback Survey, which aims to provide all students, irrespective of mode or location of study, with the opportunity to provide feedback each semester on their courses (the exception to this being the Edinburgh Business School, which continues to operate its own survey). Course Feedback Survey results are received by course leaders, action plans are agreed between course leaders and school directors of learning and teaching, and the outcomes of the Course Feedback Survey are reported through the annual programme monitoring process. The implementation of the new student administration system (see paragraph 18) will allow for cross-institutional comparison of the survey results, and also for disaggregating results between on-campus students and students undertaking independent distance learning or studying at an Approved Learning Partner. The

University is supported in its ambition to fully embed the Course Feedback Survey in order to ensure the rigorous monitoring of multi-location, multi-mode delivery to facilitate more detailed comparability of the student learning experience.

25 Both the University's Survey Management Group and the schools have responsibility for informing students of the actions taken in response to their feedback. This dissemination takes a number of forms, including communication through committee structures, feedback from heads of department, and 'You Said...We Did' posters. In addition, the Students' Union and student school officers collaborate with schools in disseminating the results to the wider student body. Students confirmed that their responses to the Course Feedback Survey are valued and that the University is generally successful in closing the feedback loop to students.

### **Student support**

26 The University has identified feedback to students on their academic performance as a prominent issue, and that students have highlighted assessment feedback as an area for improvement, for example in the 2009 National Student Survey and through the first evaluation of the 'Review of the Academic Year' (RAY) Project, also in 2009 (see paragraphs 4 and 104 to 106). During 2009-10, the University took further steps to enhance assessment feedback across all the schools, drawing on good practices identified through the RAY Project. This enhancement activity was supported by the work of the Academic Enhancement Team, which developed a briefing paper, a toolkit and tailored workshops to support academic staff in developing their approach to assessment feedback. The University considers that its approach has been successful, with evidence of greater student satisfaction, and with students recognising that feedback on their performance can be delivered in a wide variety of ways. Students confirm that the reviews of the RAY Project have encouraged student engagement with the process, and that their feedback has been listened to and acted upon.

27 The University supports students in a number of ways, including through a mentoring system and through a broad range of professional services. The 2006 ELIR identified variability in the mentoring of on-campus students, and the University recognises that this continues to pose a challenge in some schools for both on and off-campus students. At the time of the previous ELIR, the University had recently introduced a Code of Practice on Mentoring (for on-campus students) to address a diversity of practice across the schools. During the current ELIR there was evidence of some good practice in mentoring, although students reported variable experiences depending upon the school and the individual mentor. Variability between schools is acknowledged both by academic staff with mentoring responsibilities and by support staff. To address this, the University intends to review mentoring arrangements across all types of provision during 2011, including an update and extension of its Code of Practice on Mentoring, and the University is encouraged to pursue this intention.

28 The University provides a wide range of professional services for students on the Edinburgh campus, including learning support services. All students (irrespective of location) are entitled to use these services, with a variation of the services being offered on the University's other campuses. At the Dubai Campus, a number of support services are provided through a service agreement with a private service provider.

29 The Professional Services have direct responsibility for some services provided on the University's other campuses. For example, the Careers Service has staff permanently based at the Dubai and Borders campuses, and Careers staff can be available at the Orkney campus as required. The Careers Service is also working with a newly appointed Student Experience Officer based at the Dubai campus to develop a careers service for students. Professional Services staff confirm that there is support for, and engagement with, other staff in comparable roles across all the University's campuses; however there is little engagement with colleagues in comparable support services at Approved Learning Partners.

30 Since the previous ELIR, the University has established a Student Experience Forum (see paragraph 62) with responsibility for developing the student experience theme of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy (see paragraphs 100 to 103). To date, the Forum has undertaken a number of reviews of elements of the student experience: student induction, the development of a centralised Student Services Centre, and the student experience in Dubai. The Forum has oversight of the support services delivered by the Students' Union and by the University Professional Services. There may be benefit in the University considering giving the Forum a more holistic overview of the student experience including, for example, academic support such as mentoring and the learning experience of students at Approved Learning Partners.

31 The University's Research Student Co-ordinators Group has responsibility for overseeing the research student experience and the postgraduate research student Code of Practice, and also has an overview of the researcher development programme. This group carries out a positive role, facilitating the coordination of support across the University and promoting the dissemination of good practice. Postgraduate research students expressed general satisfaction with their learning experience. While research students identified some examples of good practice in relation to their induction, they indicated that this was variable, depending on the school students are located in. For example, some research students had received a copy of the Postgraduate Research Student Code of Practice at induction, but this was not replicated across all the schools. The University is encouraged to build upon the opportunities provided by the Research Students Co-ordinators Group to ensure greater consistency of the research student experience.

32 The University offers support for the specific developmental needs of research students through the Researcher Development Programme. This programme is optional and open to all of the University's research students. It is supplementary to the skills training provided by schools and the training provided in conjunction with the University of Edinburgh. Students who had attended the Researcher Development Programme were positive about its benefits. There would be benefit in the University considering how to encourage greater student uptake of the opportunities available through the programme.

33 The University aims to provide its students with opportunities to engage in co-curricular, voluntary and other activities designed to broaden their overall learning experience and is supporting the Students' Union in its aim to engage students in activities such as sport, societies, volunteering and community engagement. The University is also taking steps to increase the opportunities for placement and work-related learning opportunities, either as a formal part of, or alongside, a programme of study. The University also actively promotes, and intends to further develop, opportunities for students to study at a different location, for example transferring between the Edinburgh Campus and the Dubai Campus, or through exchange programmes such as Erasmus. The University's Quality and Standards Committee receives an annual exchange report which includes a summary of feedback from students on outgoing exchange programmes. This is used to improve the experience of future outgoing exchange students.

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

34 The Learning and Teaching Strategy sets out the University's approach to the development of graduate employability. The University has a clearly articulated set of 'aspirational' graduate attributes that it believes that all graduates will be able to develop, and seeks to embed the delivery and assessment of skills development into the curriculum. Based on the principle of equality of learning opportunities across multi-location, multi-mode delivery, the University believes all students are given equal opportunity to develop graduate attributes. Staff confirm that the specification of graduate attributes is a requirement for course and programme approval and that these are also considered through the annual monitoring and review process. However, in practice, such programme documentation tends to refer to more generic personal attributes rather than making an explicit link to the University's specific graduate attributes.

35 Both students and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to skills development and to enhancing employability. However, students' and staff's awareness of the specific Heriot-Watt University graduate attributes does not appear to be widespread. The University's Academic Enhancement Framework Project (see paragraph 107) intends to support schools to further enhance the curriculum and associated activities in order to ensure that all students can develop these Heriot-Watt University graduate attributes. The University is encouraged to progress implementation of the project in order to achieve these ambitions.

36 Since 2005, academic mentors (see paragraph 27) have been responsible for providing support to students on professional development planning (PDP). Responsibility for implementing PDP has been devolved to schools, with support provided by the University's Careers Advisory Service, for example through its website and the provision of common materials. There is a strong working relationship between the schools and the Careers Advisory Service to effectively implement PDP and to support students in reflecting on their learning. One example of the success of this partnership approach was the University's 2010 Learning and Teaching Award being awarded jointly to a member of staff in the Careers Advisory Service and a member of academic staff in the School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences. Students have varying levels of engagement with PDP. For some students PDP is clearly an integral part of their studies, while other students view PDP as an optional undertaking, and others still have a limited awareness of PDP. While it is evident that there are examples of good practice across the institution in the implementation of PDP, there is scope for the University to promote engagement with PDP more widely.

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

37 Improvements to the learning environment are managed through the Student Learning Experience theme of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. The learning environment is seen as comprising formal learning space; social areas for learning; academic support services; and information technology (IT) and other technical services, including the virtual learning environment (VLE). Both the Academic Enhancement Framework Project (see paragraph 107) and the Student Experience Forum (see paragraphs 30 and 62) have a role in advising on the types of learning and social space which will be required in the future.

38 The University believes that the quality of its teaching and learning infrastructure has a direct influence on students' learning experiences, and concludes that spaces for learning must be flexible, easily adaptable to accommodate different users, and meet the needs of both staff and students. In response to pressures on space resulting from the growth in student numbers, the University has engaged in a number of projects to improve the range of learning spaces on the Edinburgh campus; areas within the Library have been refurbished to provide group study and discussion space, social learning space and additional study space, and commercial catering outlets have been redesigned to provide social learning spaces. Other planned developments include the introduction of additional, unsupported learning spaces at the Edinburgh campus.

39 Other developments to the learning environment include a new Student Service Centre, to bring together a range of support and administrative functions within one central location; the opening of a Postgraduate Centre on the Edinburgh campus; and the major redesign of the Borders campus as part of a co-location on a single site with the Borders College. A new campus in Dubai is expected to open in September 2011.

40 The University's virtual learning environment (VLE) is intended to enable students to work at their own pace, interact with staff, and collaborate with peers in a structured and supported way. The Review of the Academic Year (RAY) Project (see paragraphs 4 and 104 to 106), prescribed a basic set of information to be provided on the VLE at course level, but this is being reviewed as part of the Learning and Teaching Strategy Operational Plan. A review in 2010 indicated that the VLE should support and enhance all aspects of the student learning experience,

and the University states that the focus of future activity will be on promoting the VLE as a learning tool, thereby facilitating, for example, peer-to-peer learning and reflective learning. The University is encouraged in its intent to develop the use of the VLE as a learning tool. In so doing, it will contribute to embedding the University's graduate attributes.

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

41 The University's approach to equal opportunities is set out in its Promoting Equality and Eliminating Discrimination Equality Scheme (2009), and a broad range of activities is overseen by the Equal Opportunities Committee. The University indicated that the promotion of equality and diversity relies on a close working relationship with the Students' Union, which is achieved through representation from the Students' Union on the Equal Opportunities Committee and the Student Experience Forum. There is a full-time Equality and Diversity Adviser who has responsibility for advising staff and students. At the time of the ELIR, the Equal Opportunities Committee had not met since 2009, pending the University's review of Professional Services.

42 The University has a dedicated Disability Service, which was reviewed in March 2010, resulting in the service changing its operations and increasing its staffing in order to meet increased demand. An Equality and Disability Adviser collaborates with the Students' Union's sabbatical officers through contributing to the training programme for the Union's officers and providing advice and support when required. Students indicate broad satisfaction with the Disability Service.

43 Online training is available from the Academic Enhancement Team for all staff, covering diversity in both the workplace and in learning and teaching, and advice and information for the support of disabled students is accessible from all campuses. The Academic Enhancement Team delivers sessions which raise awareness of the needs of students with disabilities and of the equality and diversity agenda. Staff confirmed that they had been sensitised to equality and diversity issues in relation to their teaching. The University is to be encouraged in these activities, which have the clear potential to enhance learning and teaching practice.

44 The University engages in a range of activity to support widening access (see paragraph 14). Partnerships with further education colleges are core to the University's widening participation agenda. The co-location project with the Borders College has expanded the opportunities for articulation, enabling students to transfer between Higher National Diploma and degree programmes at the Borders campus. Furthermore, the University has received funding from several sources which has enabled it to develop a range of articulation routes. The University is involved in a number of outreach activities as well as being a longstanding partner of the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP), which promotes access for mature learners. Widening participation is supported at the Dubai campus through a Degree Entry Programme which prepares students for degree-level study.

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

45 A core theme of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy is Enhancing Academic Practice, the aim of which is to foster a university-wide culture where staff value and contribute to the continuous enhancement of learning and teaching. The University acknowledges that, as it pursues its international ambitions, it needs to have in place mechanisms to support staff in becoming proficient in new teaching methods and technologies.

46 Staff development courses are delivered through the People and Organisational Development Department, which was created in 2009 to integrate within a single unit all human resources, educational development, and organisational development activity. The Department contributes to the assessment of organisational needs and provides workshops which seek to

support staff in improving their performance, implementing change effectively, and developing leadership skills. The Department also developed the annual Performance and Development Review process, which is compulsory for every member of University staff.

47 Academic practice programmes are run by the Academic Enhancement Team, which is part of the People and Organisational Development Department. In addition to providing individual support, the Academic Enhancement Team also offers a themed programme of activity, with weekly workshops covering areas such as career development, IT infrastructure, internationalisation, and learning partnerships. The Academic Enhancement Team has plans to visit the University's Dubai campus twice a year to work on emerging academic enhancement priorities. Since January 2010 a distance learning version of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice programme has been available to staff on the Dubai campus.

48 While the University requires staff at Approved Learning Partners (ALPs) to have specified teaching skills and experience to be accepted as Approved Tutors, additional training is not routinely provided to ALP academic staff, and responsibility for providing staff development is devolved to the partner institution. However, the University's Academic Enhancement Team has delivered bespoke development sessions for staff in Approved Learning Partners connected with the University's Institute of Petroleum Engineering. The University has outline plans to make available a formal institutional staff development programme for staff in partner institutions (see paragraph 124) and is also developing a Postgraduate Certificate in Enhanced Learning and Teaching, aimed at developing staff in Approved Learning Partners.

49 The development of core teaching skills is embedded in the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP), a 60-credit award which is managed by the Academic Enhancement Team and accredited by the Higher Education Academy. The programme is mandatory for new staff at all campuses who do not already have the relevant teaching skills, and is available to others who support student learning such as librarians and research associates. The PGCAP programme is based on a reflective practitioner model of professional development, and aims to develop the skills and knowledge needed to be an effective teacher; it includes training for research supervision, as well as introducing staff to the challenges of teaching mixed cultural groups. It is clear that careful consideration has been given to the design and delivery of the PGCAP programme. The University considers that the programme has had a significant impact on raising the profile of, and value for, learning and teaching.

50 The University's Learning Enhancement and Development Skills (LEADS) programme, for which Higher Education Academy accreditation is being sought, is mandatory for all new teaching-active staff who do not possess the requisite level of teaching expertise, and who the University requires to undertake the course. It provides staff such as tutorial assistants and laboratory demonstrators with the opportunity to acquire basic teaching skills.

51 Where a staff appointment is made for a probationary period, training is complemented by the advice and guidance provided by a mentor, who is a senior member of academic staff, nominated by the relevant head of school. Staff who had received mentoring indicated that this arrangement works well, with the mentor's role in providing reports during the probation period being particularly developmental. Recently appointed staff indicated that they found the mentoring system to be very supportive.

52 Peer observation is a compulsory element of the PGCAP and LEADS programmes, and schools are introducing a Peer Development Framework as a means of enhancing academic practice more widely. The Framework is intended to provide a model of peer review which is complementary to student feedback. While staff involvement will be voluntary, and adoption will be at the discretion of schools, the University's Learning and Teaching Board have strongly encouraged its adoption.

53 The University has in place a promotion route for teaching-only staff, enabling progression from Teaching Fellow through Senior Teaching Fellow to Professorial Fellow. To date, seven staff members have been promoted to professor by this route. The procedures for awarding bonuses and accelerated increments recognise highly performing academic staff. In addition, there are a number of prizes and awards for excellence in learning and teaching including, for example, the 'Learning and Teaching Oscars', which are awarded to staff, based on student nominations at an event organised by the Students' Union. The University is to be supported in its approach to enhancing the academic practice of its staff.

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

54 The University has an extensive number of collaborative partnerships, leading to a significant number of students being enrolled with partner institutions (see paragraph 12). The majority of such students (approximately 8,800, by headcount in 2009-10) are studying with the University's Approved Learning Partners, which are primarily overseas-based academic institutions. The majority of the Approved Learning Partner students are enrolled through three of the University's eight schools: the Edinburgh Business School (55 per cent); the School of the Built Environment (21 per cent); and the School of Management and Languages (20 per cent).

55 The University is committed to the principle that the arrangements in place at its Scottish campuses for managing the student learning experience are also applied to its collaborative programmes. The University's relationship with its partners is underpinned by three principles: that programmes have the same learning outcomes irrespective of location or mode of study; that programmes have the same academic standards irrespective of location or mode of study; and that, provided that the same learning outcomes are maintained, students in different locations and modes of study may have different learning experiences in order to meet their needs.

56 Central to the University's approach is the provision of standard learning materials and access to common learning resources. For students at Approved Learning Partners, and students on joint, exchange and placement programmes, the services provided are stipulated in the contract between the University and the partner institution. The approval process for Approved Learning Partners (see paragraphs 91 to 92) includes an evaluation of the teaching, learning and other space available for students, the specific requirements being detailed in each contract.

57 As part of the contractual arrangements, partners must provide the required library resources. In addition, the University states that all students should be able to access the University's resources, either through the University Library's e-services or through its virtual learning environment (VLE). At the same time, the University acknowledges that the VLE is used mainly by on-campus students, and that most programmes delivered off-campus still rely on paper-based learning materials. Staff indicated that, while the use of VLE is widespread and developing, there are technical limitations in some overseas locations. Additionally, the University acknowledges that in some Approved Learning Partners there is limited student awareness of access to the VLE. Feedback from students at Approved Learning Partners confirms their variable access to, and use of, the VLE. As part of its intention to increase the use of the VLE as a learning tool (see paragraph 40), the University should reflect on how to improve the engagement of all students with the VLE, including those studying with Approved Learning Partners.

58 The University requires each of its Approved Learning Partners to provide sufficient student support services, as set out in its formal agreement with the partner institution. There is evidence that students are appreciative of the academic support provided by Approved Learning Partners. However, there is some variability of practice in delivering learning skills and providing pastoral support for students. As part of the University's quality assurance processes, University staff are committed to visiting each Approved Learning Partner every three years (see paragraphs 93-96). However, in this process there is limited engagement of Professional Services staff in supporting their equivalent colleagues at Approved Learning Partners.

59 The University's student representative system (see paragraphs 19 to 22) does not operate for off-campus provision. Some schools are developing the role of 'Student Ambassador' at their respective Approved Learning Partners to enhance the student representative role at these institutions. More generally, the University and the Students' Union are exploring measures to increase the opportunities for student representation at Approved Learning Partners, and this is a positive development.

60 The University believes that all students, irrespective of location or mode of study, should have an opportunity to communicate their views on their learning experiences through the Course Feedback Survey (see paragraph 24). The University anticipates that the current difficulties with disaggregating feedback from off-campus students (such as Approved Learning Partner students) should be resolved upon implementation of the new student administration system (see paragraph 18). Schools are responsible for responding to the views of off-campus students, and this can lead to variability in practice. In this regard, the University acknowledges the need for a more institutionally-managed approach.

## **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.**

61 The University is confident that its monitoring and review arrangements are robust, and that they continue to satisfy the assurance requirements of an institution operating over a wide range of locations and with a variety of modes of study. These arrangements are based on procedures for approval, annual monitoring, and periodic audit and review, and responsibility for these lies with the Senate. The Senate has delegated operational responsibilities to three of its key committees: the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies committees are responsible for the approval of new programmes and for the approval of major modifications to existing programmes, and the Quality and Standards Committee is responsible for monitoring and review activities and for the policies and guidelines which constitute the University's Quality Assurance Framework. Administrative responsibility for the assurance of quality and academic standards lies with the Academic Registry.

62 The University distinguishes between academic matters, which are the responsibility of the Senate and its committees, and business matters, which are the responsibility of the Planning and Management Executive (PME) and its boards. The boards reporting to the PME include a Learning and Teaching Board, which has strategic responsibility for the management of the University's approach to engaging and supporting students in their learning. There is also an Infrastructure Board, which is responsible for ensuring a coordinated approach to the management of student matters, and a Student Experience Forum which, from 2010-11, reports to the Learning and Teaching Board on the improvement of all aspects of the student experience (see paragraph 30). While the Learning and Teaching Board is formally located within the PME structure, in practice it reports equally to the Senate and to the PME. The University describes its executive and deliberative structures as having been designed to ensure that there is an integrated and coordinated approach to the management and strategy of the University.

63 The University devolves an extensive range of management and administrative functions to its schools. Although the University states that its committee structure is mirrored in individual schools and that there are equivalent structures to approve and monitor academic activities within each school, in practice there is considerable variation between the arrangements adopted at school level. The principal lines of communication between the schools, the Senate and the PME are provided by the staff representatives on Senate committees, and by school directors of learning and teaching who, by virtue of their role, are members of the Learning and Teaching Board. A cross-university perspective is provided by the two elected deans, who are members of the Learning and Teaching Board and various Senate committees, and who chair the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies committees.

64 The Edinburgh Business School differs in character and status from the University's other seven schools. Having been established as a limited company with charitable status, the Business School operates according to its own strategy; staff are employed by the Business School rather than by the University, and the school's activities are overseen by a Board, the membership of which includes University representatives. The school maintains its own administrative arrangements and instead of having a formal committee system it relies on its managers to consult with colleagues with regard to specific objectives or issues. Members of the Business School's management team represent the school on all the University's main committees and boards.

65 The Edinburgh Business School (see paragraph 9) has responsibility for the management of a large portfolio of collaborative provision, primarily with Approved Learning Partners (see paragraphs 12 and 54), and all of its programmes can also be undertaken through independent distance learning. The University believes that it has extensive oversight of the Business School's activities for all academic matters. Given the nature of the School's portfolio of provision, and of its relationship with the wider institution, the University should ensure it has effective arrangements for overseeing the activities of the Edinburgh Business School.

66 The University's established risk-based procedure differentiates categories of activity according to the extent to which they present a potential risk to the University's finances, brand or reputation. There are two aspects to the University's approach to risk assessment: in the first, activities are defined as 'high', 'medium' or 'low' risk on the basis of the mode and location of study, and the second entails case-by-case judgements by schools on the particular risks that might be presented by their proposals for new partnerships. Provision that is deemed to be high-risk is subject to special arrangements for programme or partner approval, annual monitoring and internal audit.

67 Since the 2006 ELIR, the University has revised its annual monitoring and review ('annual monitoring') system. This has entailed the replacement of programme-level reports with school-level reports in which schools produce an 'enhancement-led' report on their low-risk activities, accompanied by an 'assurance-led' review of high-risk activities. The latter includes summary reports on high-risk activities such as courses delivered at the Dubai campus, independent distance learning courses, and collaborative provision. The annual monitoring reports are typically prepared by the school Director of Teaching and Learning and are approved by the school management group, prior to being submitted for consideration by the University's Quality and Standards Committee. The annual monitoring reports provide informative accounts of schools' key activities, although the focus on the school level means that they rarely identify issues relating to individual programmes.

68 The University distinguishes between its two means of periodic review: 'enhancement-led' internal review and 'assurance-led' internal audit. The internal review system considers all of the University's academic disciplines over a five-year cycle, and review teams typically include two external members and two student reviewers. The first review cycle was completed in 2008 and, in view of the nature and demands of the Restructuring the Academic Year (RAY) Project review (see paragraphs 4 and 104 to 106), the Senate agreed that the normal cycle of internal reviews should be suspended during 2008-09 and 2009-10. Internal review reports are approved by the Quality and Standards Committee and the outcomes are communicated to the Senate and the Planning and Management Executive. Overall, the internal review arrangements meet the expectations of the Scottish Funding Council guidelines.

69 The internal audit process was introduced in 2008-09 as a means of providing assurance of the proper management and delivery of high-risk activities, including ensuring the high quality of programmes and the student experience. Internal audits are conducted on a three-year cycle by teams comprising the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), a Dean of the University and two academic staff (normally a school Director of Learning and Teaching and a member of the Quality and Standards Committee). From the start of the second cycle in 2011-12, the audit team will also include a clerk from the Academic Registry. The University does not include external

members or students on its audit teams on the grounds that the focus is on internal, procedural matters, primarily of a management and operational nature. Internal audit teams normally work with a small group of senior staff from a school and do not normally meet students.

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

70 The University stated that its monitoring and review arrangements are designed to include consideration of all students, irrespective of mode or location of study. Annual monitoring reports require schools to consider the needs of undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research students, as well as providing a summary of issues raised by partner institutions. The guidance for internal review self-assessments and review reports is less explicit, although the self-assessment template does require that the student experience section must include reference to all students including research students, independent learners, and students studying with academic and industrial partners. The internal review reports suggest that review teams' meetings with students do not routinely include independent distance learners, those studying with partner institutions, or those on remote campuses.

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

71 The University confirmed that it is committed to the continual evaluation and adaptation of its monitoring and review processes, given the geographical distribution of its student population and the diversity of modes of delivery. The monitoring and review processes are described as involving a wide range of external observers and reviewers, and the Academic Infrastructure developed by QAA is a key reference point for both the review of these processes and the evaluation of the University's academic provision. The University also identifies that changes to its approval, monitoring and review processes are informed by its approach to identifying and managing risk (see paragraph 66). The University indicated that all of its programmes and awards are located within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and subject benchmark statements provide an important point of reference for curriculum development. Additional external reference points are provided by the accreditation requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and, for programmes delivered outside the UK in certain cases, the need for approval by overseas governments.

72 The University has responded to the outcomes of the 2006 ELIR by establishing a working group of the Quality and Standards Committee to review professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' reports in order to identify common issues and learning points. Additionally, the Quality and Standards Committee oversees the work of Professional Services and schools in reviewing and implementing revisions to sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* published by QAA. Overall, the University's approach to self-evaluation and its use of external reference points is effective.

### **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 information that supports the University's monitoring and review activity is managed centrally, at school level, and by partner organisations. At university level, the Academic Registry provides schools with data to inform the preparation of annual monitoring reports. The University acknowledges that some of the information required by schools cannot currently be generated by central data systems and that considerable responsibility for the manual production of student information is devolved to schools. Arrangements for the collection and use of management information at the school level are periodically evaluated through the internal audit process (see paragraph 69).

74 The University anticipates that the introduction of the new Student Administration System (see paragraph 18) will provide more specific data on independent learners and students enrolled with Approved Learning Partners. The production of comparative key performance indicators for postgraduate students remains an area for development.

75 The Quality and Standards Committee has responsibility for the monitoring and review of academic programmes, and for this purpose it is reliant on the statistical data provided by schools in their annual monitoring reports. The information provided by school annual monitoring reports tends to focus mainly on the demographic characteristics of their student populations rather than such matters as student progression and achievement. The Learning and Teaching Board, however, routinely considers such key performance indicators as student applications and admissions, progression, awards, first destinations and module assessment results. Neither the Quality and Standards Committee nor the Learning and Teaching Board receive annual reports on student complaints, appeals or academic misconduct.

76 The University is committed to improving the quality of its statistical reports and ensuring that these provide comprehensive information on the diverse groups within its student population. In securing these improvements, there would be benefit in the University considering whether the Quality and Standards Committee should receive institution-wide statistical reports that would enable it to undertake evaluations of the performance of schools and, in addition to the data considered already by the Learning and Teaching Board, whether this evidence should include annual reports on student appeals, complaints and academic misconduct.

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

77 The University is confident that its processes for setting and maintaining academic standards are secure. These processes include the design and approval of programmes, assessment frameworks and procedures, and the University's arrangements for external examining.

78 The approval of new courses, modifications to existing courses and minor modifications to programmes is devolved to schools. Major modifications, new programmes and the introduction of new modes of learning for existing programmes require the approval, as appropriate, of the Undergraduate Studies or Postgraduate Studies Committee. Prior to their submission to the Undergraduate or the Postgraduate Studies Committee, proposal documents are considered by the relevant school Learning and Teaching Committee or, in the case of the Edinburgh Business School, by the Director of Learning and Teaching.

79 In preparing new programmes for approval, staff are supported by comprehensive guidelines for curriculum structure and a learning, teaching and assessment toolkit. These support materials, which were developed through the RAY project (see paragraphs 4 and 104 to 106), complement the University's policy and templates for the approval of programmes and courses.

80 In the approval of courses and programmes, academic standards are set and assured through staff engagement with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and subject benchmark statements, and through engagements with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). Except where it is a PSRB requirement, there is no provision for external participation in the approval process, although schools are expected to take appropriate external advice. While the deliberations of the Undergraduate Studies Committee and Postgraduate Studies Committee in the approval process are thorough, these committees do not usually raise issues concerning the academic content of curricula or a school's proposals for the teaching and assessment of students. The University is encouraged to consider the benefits that might arise from the greater participation of external subject specialists in its approval processes and, in doing so, reflect on the alignment of its procedures for programme approval with the *Code of practice*.

81 The University is confident in the security and appropriateness of its assessment arrangements for both campus-based and off-campus provision. The University has identified

that, due to increased student numbers in its off-campus provision, there is growing pressure on individual markers, resulting in the likely need to make greater use of Approved Teachers to mark summative assessments, with moderation provided by UK-based academic staff. Overall, there is evidence that the University has taken great care to ensure that the assessment of students across the full range of its provision is both rigorous and consistent. This is accompanied by equally rigorous arrangements for the conduct of examination boards. These arrangements include a requirement that boards be attended by a Dean of the University, so as to ensure the equity and consistency of decision-making.

82 The external examiner system is regarded by the University as one of the processes by which it assures itself that the academic standards of its degrees are comparable to the awards of other higher education institutions. External examiners are appointed by the Undergraduate Studies Committee or by the Postgraduate Studies Committee. All appointees, including external examiners for research degrees, are provided with a Handbook on Examining. In addition, the University is considering a proposal for the training of new external examiners. The reports of external examiners are reviewed by the relevant Head of School, the deans and the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), and a comprehensive summary report is considered annually by the Quality and Standards Committee. Overall, the University's arrangements for external examining are robust.

### **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**

83 Three types of public information are actively managed by the University. These comprise the statistical data published through the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA); public information for students; and the information published by the University's partners. Responsibility for the provision of information to both Unistats and HESA lies with the central departments for Recruitment and Admissions, the Academic Registry, and the Careers Advisory Service. For these purposes, oversight is exercised by the Director of Planning on behalf of the Planning and Management Executive. Statistical information is also published in the University's Annual Statistics Report. The Academic Registry is responsible for the publication on the University's website of the outcomes of internal reviews, and for the issue of European Diploma Supplements, including information on programme specifications.

84 Responsibility for the management of information for students is shared between schools and Professional Services. This includes student handbooks, prospectuses and related online information, and the University has acted to promote greater consistency between schools in the provision of such information. The University indicated that it has recently taken steps to improve the information provided through its partner institutions, including the formal approval by the University of all marketing and other information, and the issue to partners of a communications toolkit. The University acknowledges that, in practice, considerable responsibility is devolved to partners, and it has taken action to ensure a more systematic review of partner institutions' websites. Overall, the University takes an effective approach to managing public information about quality and academic standards.

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

85 Following a review in 2009-10, the University formally separated its quality assurance and quality enhancement functions. The former Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee was replaced by the Quality and Standards Committee, which retained its responsibility for the assurance of quality and academic standards. Responsibility for all quality enhancement activities was assigned to the Learning and Teaching Board. Notwithstanding this separation of roles and functions, the University seeks to adopt an integrated approach to assurance and enhancement.

For example, the Learning and Teaching Board formally reports to the Senate, and there is some overlapping membership across the Board, the Quality and Standards Committee and the Senate.

86 The University is seeking to strengthen the enhancement focus of its annual monitoring and review processes. The internal review procedure has been revised recently to incorporate consideration of schools' own enhancement activities and, in future, the Learning and Teaching Board will also have a role in confirming as appropriate the enhancement and development actions arising from internal review. Additionally, in future, both internal review and annual monitoring activities will be explicitly reported to the Learning and Teaching Board in relation to schools' implementation of the objectives of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

87 The University's intention to strengthen the enhancement focus of the school annual monitoring reports is a positive step. The University is encouraged to consider ways of reinforcing the valuable opportunity these reports represent for sharing information between the Learning and Teaching Board, the Quality and Standards Committee and the schools. In doing so, it will optimise the value of the two-way communications that the University identifies as a feature of its committee structure.

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

### **The University's portfolio of collaborative provision**

88 The University's International Strategy commits the institution to growth through transnational and collaborative activity (see paragraph 16). The University currently has partnerships with some 50 institutions in 30 countries, and it has set itself the target of doubling over the next five to 10 years the number of international students enrolled with the University through both independent distance learning and through study at its partner institutions.

89 The University distinguishes between four types of collaborative activity: Approved Learning Partners, validation partners, joint collaborative partners, and articulation partners. The largest category comprises Approved Learning Partners, most of which are located overseas. Approved Learning Partners are organisations which have been approved to deliver programmes of study leading to the University's awards, with the University retaining responsibility for curriculum development, the preparation of learning materials, approving the final admission of students, setting and marking all summative assessments, and making decisions on student progression and awards. In the case of validation partners, the programmes are developed, delivered and assessed by the partner. The University has only three partnerships based on a validation arrangement, one of which is being phased out. Articulation partnerships are based on an agreement to offer transfer routes for students into the University's programmes.

90 The University's joint collaborative partners are UK, European and international higher education institutions which have been approved to offer joint awards. The common feature of these partnerships is that each institution in the partnership takes joint responsibility for academic content, academic standards and quality. The University's preferred arrangement is for those partnerships leading to a single joint award.

### **Partner approval**

91 Proposals to deliver a programme in partnership with another organisation require the approval of either the Undergraduate or the Postgraduate Studies Committee. All partnership programmes undergo a two-stage approval process. In the case of Approved Learning Partners, during the negotiation stage the school staff visit the proposed partner and produce a visit report which includes a number of documents underpinning the approval, including a risk assessment, financial case, a profile of the proposed Approved Learning Partner, an overview of the

partnership, the contract, and evidence that the approved learning partner has the necessary government approval to deliver the programme. This documentation is considered in the second stage of approval by a team comprising the Head of School, the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the Legal Services Manager and the Secretary of the University. Once approved, the contract remains in force for an initial period of three years, and subsequent reapproval is undertaken as part of the internal audit process (see paragraphs 69 and 96).

92 The visit report is the only provision within the process for the collection of direct evidence on the proposed partner, and specialist Professional Services staff are not normally involved in these visits. In some cases the schools' proposal documents tend to focus on the business case for the partnership and the risk assessments are mainly concerned with non-academic risks. The University should consider whether its Approved Learning Partner approval procedure enables staff from outside the school to gather evidence with which to challenge the judgements made in stage one, should the need arise. In doing so, the University is asked to consider the alignment of its Approved Learning Partner approval process with the expectations of the *Code of practice*, in relation to the independence and objectivity of the approval decision made by the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Committee.

### Monitoring and review

93 The University states as a key principle that all prospective students should have equal opportunity to learn irrespective of mode or location, and that it engages and supports students in their learning through a standard approach which is common to all modes and locations of learning. The examples the University gave of this are access to information resources, learning support, and careers advice. A recent meeting of the Senate commented on the importance of acknowledging that, while the experience of students studying off-campus was not the same as for students studying on-campus, there were advantages to all types of study and location. During the ELIR, University staff confirmed that the key principle should be interpreted as referring to an equivalence rather than equality of learning opportunities.

94 Formal visits by University staff to each Approved Learning Partner are required at least once in every three years and prior to the re-approval of the partnership. The University emphasised the importance of obtaining direct feedback from individual students during these visits. The University's procedure for visits and its Visit Report Form lists the various issues that should be considered during a visit, but they do not stipulate that visits should include meetings with students, and there is no expectation that staff from the University's Professional Services should visit partner organisations. While some of the visit reports are full and informative, others are brief and provide limited evidence in support of the conclusions they reach. The University should consider whether its procedures for quality assurance visits to Approved Learning Partners enable it to fully consider the equivalence of students' learning opportunities.

95 Validation, collaborative and Approved Learning Partners are required to participate in the University's annual monitoring process. The annual monitoring and review report prepared by the partner is forwarded to the appropriate school which, in turn, provides the relevant Dean of the University and the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) with copies of the report and of the school's letter of response to the partner. Until recently, the Quality and Standards Committee was only furnished with reports summarising the generic issues arising from partners' reports. In October 2010 the committee agreed that all partner reports should be considered by the full committee in order to strengthen its oversight of the annual monitoring process. The committee also agreed to the introduction of a less onerous process for its review and oversight of the schools' monitoring reports.

96 The internal audit procedure provides the University with an opportunity to review periodically the effectiveness of schools' management of their collaborative provision, and to provide the assurance that all high-risk activities (see paragraph 66) are being delivered and

managed properly. The internal audit procedure also confers reapproval on a school's partnerships. Internal Audit reports indicate that audit teams are thorough in the execution of their responsibilities. However, the decisions reached by internal audit teams are largely reliant on documentary evidence, and the reports provide little information to explain an audit team's decisions or recommendations. As such, it is not always possible to determine the extent to which an audit team has considered the robustness of a school's collaborative arrangements. There would be benefit in the University reflecting on its processes to make this more explicit.

### **Assessment and external examining arrangements**

97 One of the key principles which underpin and inform the University's decisions is that any programme of study offered in more than one location or by more than one mode of study must have identical academic standards, meet the same learning outcomes and develop the same knowledge and skills. The University has established a Common Assessment and Progression System for all of its provision, and for most of its partnerships the University retains the responsibility for the assessment of students. The University has also taken careful steps to ensure the security of assessments, including having rigorous arrangements for the assessment of courses in languages other than English.

98 In relation to external examining, the work of all students enrolled on a programme is considered by the same external examiner, irrespective of students' location or mode of study. The University does not prescribe the basis upon which examination scripts, coursework and dissertations should be sampled for external examining purposes and external examiners do not normally know a candidate's location of study, even though they are required to confirm that the board of examiners has received and considered an analysis of the different student groups. The University is encouraged to consider whether its commitment to the key principle of common academic standards and learning outcomes across different locations and modes of study would be further strengthened by issuing guidance on the sampling of assessments for external examiner scrutiny.

### **Award certificates and transcripts**

99 The University has identified one respect in which it does not adhere to the precepts of the *Code of practice*. This relates to the recording of the location of study on the certificates and transcripts awarded to students. The issue had been raised as a point for consideration in a 2007 QAA overseas audit report and had consequently been discussed during 2008 at some length by the Senate and the (now former) Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee. While the committee accepted that different locations and modes of study would provide different learning experiences, and had concluded that transcripts should in future record the location and mode of study, the Committee's recommendation was not approved by the Senate, on the grounds that the University's procedures and practices ensured that all students have the same experience in terms of academic contact and quality, irrespective of their location of study. Given the variability, in practice, in the student learning experience between on-campus and off-campus provision (see paragraphs 54 to 60) and the Senate's recent recognition of this (see paragraph 93), the University is asked to consider identifying the location of study on students' certificates and transcripts.

## **Strategic approach to quality enhancement**

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

#### **The University's vision and strategic objectives for quality enhancement**

100 In its Strategic Plan, 'Focus on the Future', the University sets out a vision of a Heriot-Watt education typified by strong relevance to the world of work, by the promotion of an international outlook, and by a supportive learning environment which allows students to get the very best out of their time at University. The key objectives of the University's strategy for quality enhancement derive from this vision and are set out in the Learning and Teaching Strategy, 'Building on Excellence and Relevance' (2009-15), and are underpinned by the International Strategy, the Student Experience Strategy and the Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy.

101 Within the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the University has identified the principal areas for quality enhancement as the student experience, employability, and academic practice. These three themes are brought together in an overarching framework, the Academic Enhancement Framework Project (see paragraph 107).

102 The University believes that the alignment of all the elements of its Learning and Teaching Strategy with its Focus on the Future Strategy provides an integrated framework for managing the enhancement of learning and teaching at a range of levels and locations, including at institutional and school levels, among the Professional Services, and at the level of individual practitioners. The University seeks to ensure that the ownership of its Learning and Teaching Strategy is shared, and that there is an effective link between the development of the University strategy and its implementation across the institution.

103 The University considers that, since the 2006 ELIR, its strategic approach to enhancement has become more centrally managed, while continuing to facilitate some degree of local autonomy and providing active encouragement and support for enhancement projects in schools and Professional Services. As a result, the University has focused on what it describes as major transformational projects which have the capacity to engage staff and students across the institution as a whole, and to effectively deliver strategic change.

#### **Restructuring the Academic Year (RAY) Project**

104 The Restructuring of the Academic Year (RAY) Project, which was formulated and implemented during the period 2003-08, had as its key objective the enhancement of student learning. While a principal outcome was the restructuring of the academic year from three terms to two semesters, the RAY Project also encompassed a wholesale redesign of undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision.

105 Since the implementation of the RAY Project, the University has undertaken two reviews of RAY, the second of which was designed to enable schools to evaluate a full academic year's operation of the new structures and curricula, and had the specific aim of supporting schools in their enhancement strategies for assessment, teaching quality and student feedback and engagement. The outcomes of the second RAY review have also helped to inform the current phase of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy Operational Plan (see paragraphs 112 to 113).

106 The RAY Project provides evidence of the success of the University's 'transformational project' approach. It is clear that the approach to planning and implementing RAY, and the lessons learned from the RAY reviews, have collectively ensured the successful delivery and embedding of the project's aims and objectives across the University.

## **Academic Enhancement Framework**

107 The University's Academic Enhancement Framework (AEF) Project is an ongoing five-year project which aims to support the development of students as confident, independent learners. In particular, the project seeks to enhance students' learning experience by effecting institution-wide change in the areas of curriculum, assessment, learning spaces and internationalisation. Implementation of this project was postponed, pending approval of the University's International Strategy. Having finalised the International Strategy, the University is now in a position to move forward with the project, and its implementation will be led by the Head of the Academic Enhancement Team.

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

108 To support the implementation of its strategies and policies for quality enhancement, the University makes use both of its executive and its deliberative committee structures. The Planning and Management Executive discharges its responsibility for quality enhancement through its Learning and Teaching Board. The principal function of the Learning and Teaching Board is to develop and implement the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, with a remit which includes the enhancement of academic practice. The Board's work is complemented by that of the Student Experience Forum, which from 2010-11 will be responsible for developing the student experience theme of the Learning and Teaching Strategy and will report directly to the Learning and Teaching Board on progress in this area.

109 From 2010-11 the Quality and Standards Committee will have responsibility for the monitoring of the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy (through existing annual monitoring processes) and for reviewing its implementation on a periodic basis (through existing processes for the internal review of schools and Professional Services). The University intends that this will provide externality to the annual evaluation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy undertaken by the Learning and Teaching Board. At the time of the current ELIR, these revised arrangements had only recently been implemented.

110 While the Learning and Teaching Board and the Quality and Standards Committee have some common membership, including the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the deans of the University, and the Academic Registrar, there is currently no formal reporting relationship between these committees. The University is encouraged to consider the strategic merit of formalising the reporting lines between these committees to further enhance the effectiveness of its approach to promoting quality enhancement across the institution.

111 The Learning and Teaching Strategy's Operational Plan sets out institutional enhancement priorities, and schools and relevant Professional Services departments use the plan to develop their own learning and teaching strategies and associated operational plans. The University is encouraged to ensure that schools and Professional Services departments are supported in this process, including the prioritisation of enhancement activities. The University, through the Academic Enhancement Team, is also encouraged to use the planning processes as an opportunity to communicate, clarify and embed a widely shared understanding of quality enhancement across the University.

112 The University identifies that it could make greater use of the nationally developed Indicators of Enhancement in its enhancement planning processes. While these were drawn upon to inform the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the University considers that the indicators might be helpfully employed in the development, implementation, monitoring and review of the enhancement strategies of the schools and Professional Services departments. As the University develops the Learning and Teaching Strategy Operational Plan for the period 2011-15, it is encouraged in its intention to guide schools and Professional Services departments on the use of these enhancement indicators in their own learning and teaching strategies and operational plans.

113 There is some evidence of a divergence in understanding between the University and the wider staff body on the nature of quality enhancement across the institution. For example, some academic staff did not recognise the University's view of strategic enhancement as a more centrally managed approach, and gave many examples of school autonomy in different areas of enhancement activity. Similarly, the enhancement priorities of Professional Services staff do not necessarily align with those of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. In general, the Professional Services staff tend to operate in a predominantly client-responsive manner, and indicate that they have not benefited from university-level direction on how to prioritise their activities in the context of the University's strategic enhancement agenda. The University has expressed a desire to strengthen the process for aligning the learning and teaching strategies of schools and Professional Services with that of the institutional strategy, and this is to be strongly supported.

114 The divergence in understanding on the nature of the University's strategic approach to enhancement has the potential to inhibit its embedding in the institution. The University is strongly encouraged to clarify with all staff its strategic approach to quality enhancement in order to promote such an understanding, and to develop a common vocabulary to promote an institution-wide dialogue relating to its strategic approach. Such an approach is likely to reinforce and strengthen the existing elements of the University's quality enhancement culture.

### **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**

115 The University emphasises the importance it places on the use of external reference points in the development of strategies and policies to improve the student learning experience. The University particularly highlights the extensive use of national and international reference points in the RAY Project (see paragraphs 4 and 104 to 106), including the comprehensive research undertaken by the Academic Registry into global practice in the structural aspects of semesterisation.

116 As part of the RAY Project, the Academic Registry and the Educational Development Unit (now the Academic Enhancement Team) produced university-wide guidelines and academic toolkits to support schools in redesigning curricula (see paragraph 26). The production of these was significantly informed by reference to national and international academic practice, including pedagogic research, practice at other higher education institutions, and with reference to the national Enhancement Themes current at that time. The University regards the background research into external reference points undertaken for the RAY Project as establishing its future approach to major enhancement projects. The University values this evidence-based approach as a means of encouraging staff to engage with proposals under debate, and of facilitating their acceptance.

117 The University acknowledges that, beyond the RAY Project, staff participation in earlier national Enhancement Themes has been largely confined to staff in Professional Services and individual enthusiasts, and that engaging the wider academic community in the Themes has proven to be a challenge. Current initiatives to raise staff awareness of, and participation in, the Enhancement Themes are being encouraged through the employability strand of the Academic Enhancement Framework Project (see paragraph 107), in particular through the outcomes of the Graduates for the 21st Century Theme. The University has indicated that, through this approach, there are early signs of the more productive involvement of staff, and of a more systematic learning from the Enhancement Themes. The University is encouraged to continue to promote wider staff engagement in the Themes.

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

118 The University considers that the successful implementation of its Learning and Teaching Strategy is dependent upon identifying good practice to inform decision-making. The University seeks to adopt a strategic approach to identifying, disseminating and implementing good practice, and identifies four broad categories of activity: the production of the Learning and Teaching Strategy and its Operational Plan, the development of policies and procedures by University committees, the production of local operational plans by schools and Professional Services, and the enhancement of academic practice by small teams and individuals.

119 There are many examples of the enhancement of academic practice by teams and individuals within schools, as well as examples of good practice being disseminated within schools. These include activities which help enhance the learning experience of off-campus students. For example, the School of the Built Environment implemented a project to improve the learning experience of independent distance learning students through staff development activity, and the School of Engineering and Physical Sciences has used the virtual learning environment to provide tailored learning material and interaction 'space' for students at Approved Learning Partners.

120 The University has identified the need to encourage a more formal evaluation of enhancement projects, in particular those at school and individual levels. There would be benefit in the University considering introducing a mechanism for reporting the outcomes of these initiatives, and their evaluation, through school committees to the Learning and Teaching Board, with a view to supporting quality enhancement activities across the institution.

121 The University's annual Learning and Teaching Conference provides an opportunity for the widespread dissemination of good practice. Run since 2004, the conference is seen as a fundamental means of engaging the wider academic community in enhancing learning and teaching, and while the conference is designed to appeal to individual practitioners, its agenda is shaped by the objectives of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. The inclusion of external guest speakers provides an opportunity for staff to be made aware of national and international practice, and the Academic Enhancement Team helps to support the dissemination of the Conference's outcomes. From 2011, the Conference will run twice-yearly and focus on themes based on the enhancement priorities of the Academic Enhancement Team in support of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

122 The University recognises the need to put in place a more integrated and systematic approach to capturing and disseminating good practice, and this is to be strongly encouraged.

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

123 The University states that, to date, it has given priority to strengthening its quality assurance mechanisms in relation to its partner institutions, and acknowledges that the enhancement of collaborative provision had not been a priority area. Thus, for example, an action arising from the first Partners' Conference held in June 2010 was the development of a handbook of quality assurance procedures, described as a simple reference manual to be available on partners' websites by mid-2011.

124 At institutional level, the Academic Enhancement Team has responded to specific needs by providing staff development sessions for staff from individual Approved Learning Partners associated with the Institute of Petroleum Engineering during their visits to the University. At the time of the current ELIR, the Academic Enhancement Team was also in the process of developing the Postgraduate Certificate in Enhancing Learning and Teaching (PGCELT) to support Approved Learning Partners in teaching and learning activities, with this programme due to be approved in March 2011.

125 In three of the schools (the Institute of Petroleum Engineering, the School of the Built Environment, and the School of Life Sciences), there have been academic and administrative staff appointments with the specific brief to enhance the learning experience of off-campus students and/or to deliver academic enhancement activities to Approved Learning Partners. There is also evidence of the sharing of experience between two of the schools which have established Approved Learning Partner provision and one school which is developing such provision (the School of Management and Languages and the School of the Built Environment working with the School of Life Sciences).

126 Other enhancement activities include the imaginative use of technology to enhance student learning, such as the commissioning of a video suite to facilitate greater interaction between staff at the Edinburgh campus and staff and students in Approved Learning Partner institutions, a pilot project investigating the distribution of learning materials on handheld electronic devices, virtual group project work, and the use of social networking to foster a sense of course identity among students.

127 Overall, there is clear evidence of enhancement activity relating to provision at Approved Learning Partners being undertaken by some schools. However, the University has recognised that it does not yet have formal mechanisms whereby schools can share good practice in relation to their Approved Learning Partners, or for the University to develop an informed overview of such enhancement activity. The University also recognises that there is limited provision for the sharing of good practice between the University and the Approved Learning Partners, and has identified a need to be more proactive in encouraging and supporting the good practice arising in Approved Learning Partners.

128 Given its plans to expand partnership activity, and in the context of its internationalisation strategy, (see paragraph 16), the University recognises the need for a more systematic and coordinated approach to the enhancement of the student learning experience in partner institutions. The University intends to take this forward through the development of the Academic Enhancement Framework Project (see paragraph 107). The University is strongly supported in these plans.

## Conclusion

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

129 Overall, the University has an effective system of student representation at its Edinburgh and Borders campuses. These arrangements include a mature, professional partnership between the institution and the Students' Union, whereby the Students' Union's sabbatical officers are significantly and effectively involved in the University's committee work. There is also a developing student representation system at the University's Dubai campus, underpinned by support from the Students' Union. An important feature of student representation in the University is the role of student school officers. In practice, there is some variability in how school officers are involved in the work of schools' committees, and the University is encouraged to reflect on how to engage school officers more effectively in discussions on strategy and policy in these committees. The University is encouraged to pursue its intention to review, in collaboration with the Students' Union, the operation of the subject-level student-staff committees in order to ensure they place a greater focus on academic matters. In a positive move, the University is currently reviewing postgraduate research student representation in order to ensure the greater engagement of research students in quality management.

130 The University participates in a number of external student surveys, including the National Student Survey. Its arrangements for responding to the outcomes of the National Student Survey are well developed, and include detailed action planning. The University intends to mirror these arrangements for responding to the outcomes of the other external surveys, and this is a positive development.

131 The University has an established online Course Feedback Survey which gives students the opportunity to provide feedback on their courses each semester. Overall, students consider that their contribution to the Course Feedback Survey is effective, and that the University is generally successful in closing the feedback loop to students. The University is in the process of introducing a new student information management system, which is intended to facilitate the identification of feedback from different student groups, particularly off-campus students. This is a positive development, which is likely to enable more detailed monitoring of students' learning experiences across different locations and modes of study.

132 The University has taken steps to improve the provision of feedback to students on their academic performance, many of these being delivered through the 'Restructuring the Academic Year' Project. A positive outcome of this is the evidence of increased student satisfaction with the feedback they receive.

133 Since the 2006 ELIR, the University has taken a number of steps to enhance its mentoring system to support students. Students and staff continue to identify some variability in the quality of mentoring provision for students and, to address this, the University intends to review its mentoring arrangements across all forms of provision during 2011.

134 Postgraduate research students are generally satisfied with their learning experience, although they also report some variability in schools' practices to support them in their learning. The University is encouraged to build upon the positive work of the Research Student Co-ordinators Group in order to promote greater consistency of the research student experience.

135 The University is committed to the key principle that its arrangements for managing the student learning experience apply across all locations and modes of study. In practice, students enrolled at Approved Learning Partners do not always have equivalent learning opportunities in comparison to those students studying on-campus, including opportunities for student representation and access to the virtual learning environment. The University is to be encouraged in its intention to enhance the learning experience of students enrolled with its Approved Learning Partners.

136 A key theme of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy is the promotion of students' employability. As such, it has a clearly articulated set of Heriot-Watt University graduate attributes, which it seeks to embed through curriculum design, delivery and assessment. While both staff and students demonstrate a high level of commitment to employability and skills development, there is not yet a widespread awareness of the University's particular graduate attributes. In progressing the work of the Academic Enhancement Framework, the University is encouraged in its intention to support schools in embedding graduate attributes across the institution. There are examples of good practice across the institution in the implementation of professional development planning (PDP). To build upon this, the University is encouraged to promote students' engagement with PDP more widely.

137 Another key theme of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy is the enhancement of academic practice, including the continuous enhancement of learning and teaching in the context of the University's internationalisation agenda. The University has a range of mechanisms for supporting and developing staff with the aim of promoting effective learning for students. Particular strengths include the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice, which promotes the academic development of teaching skills, and the mentoring support provided for probationary staff, which has a supportive and developmental focus. The University is in the process of designing a staff development programme for staff in partner institutions. This is a positive development which will support the implementation of the University's International Strategy.

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

138 Overall, the University's arrangements for monitoring and review are robust and meet the assurance requirements for an institution operating over a wide range of locations and modes of delivery. As part of these arrangements, the University distinguishes between what it considers to be different levels of risk, and provision deemed to be 'high risk' is subject to special arrangements for approval, monitoring and internal audit or review. The University's processes for setting and maintaining academic standards are secure. The University has rigorous arrangements for the assessment of students, including for the conduct of examination boards, and for its arrangements for external examining. The University is encouraged to consider the benefits of greater participation of external subject specialists in the programme approval process.

139 In relation to its collaborative arrangements, and in particular regarding its Approved Learning Partners, the University is encouraged to consider the extent to which its quality arrangements generate sufficient information to enable it to fully manage the quality of the student learning experience across its Approved Learning Partners. The University is also asked to consider identifying the location of study in the certificates and transcripts awarded to students.

140 The Edinburgh Business School has responsibility for managing a large portfolio of collaborative provision, primarily with Approved Learning Partners, although all of its programmes can also be undertaken by independent distance learning. The School has been established as a limited company with charitable status, operating with its own strategy, staff and Board. Given the nature of the School's relationship with the University, and the nature of its portfolio of provision, the University should ensure that it has effective arrangements for overseeing the School's activities.

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

141 The University considers that its strategic approach to quality enhancement has evolved since the previous ELIR, and that it now promotes a more centrally managed approach, based on major transformational projects which have the capacity to engage students and staff across the institution. This is exemplified by the 'Restructuring the Academic Year' (RAY) Project, and it is evident that the project's aims and objectives have been successfully met.

142 The University has now embarked on a successor transformational project, the Academic Enhancement Framework, which represents the institution's primary vehicle for enhancing the quality of the student learning experience, and which is seeking to effect institution-wide change across a number of key areas.

143 The University is encouraged to clarify with all staff its strategic approach, so as to promote a widely shared understanding of the nature of quality enhancement within the University. Taking such steps is likely to reinforce and strengthen the existing elements of the University's quality enhancement culture. The University is also encouraged in its intention to use the Academic Enhancement Framework as a catalyst for aligning enhancement priorities across the University.

144 Within the schools, there are many examples of quality enhancement activity and the sharing of good practice. The University has recognised the need to establish a more integrated and systematic approach to capturing and disseminating this good practice, including that taking place in its Approved Learning Partners. The University is encouraged to pursue such an approach.

## **Overarching confidence judgement**

145 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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