

University of Aberdeen

APRIL 2005

Enhancement-led institutional review

ISBN 1 84482 349 0

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Preface

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

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

Enhancement-led approach

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

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

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

Nationally agreed reference points

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

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

Conclusions and judgement within ELIR

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

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

The ELIR process

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

The main elements of ELIR are:

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

The evidence for the ELIR

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

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

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Introduction

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

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

Style of reporting

3 ELIR reports are structured around three main sections: internal monitoring and review of quality and standards and public information; the student experience; and the effectiveness of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement. Each section contains a sequence of 'overviews' and 'commentaries' in which the team sets out its views. The first commentary in the first main section of the report leads to the single, formal judgement included within ELIR reports on the level of confidence which can be placed in the institution's management of quality and standards. This judgement is intended to provide a point of tangency with the methods of audit and review operating in other parts of the UK where similar judgements are reached. In the second and third main sections of the report, on the student experience and the effectiveness of the institution's quality enhancement strategy, there are no formal

judgements although a series of overviews and commentaries are provided. These are the sections of the ELIR report which are particularly enhancement focused. To reflect this, the style of reporting is intended to address the increased emphasis on exploration and dialogue which characterises the ELIR team's interaction with the institution on these matters. The reader may, therefore, detect a shift in the style of reporting in those sections, and this is intended to emphasise the enhancement-led nature of the method.

Method of review

4 The University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA) which outlined the University's strategy for quality enhancement, its approach to the management of quality and standards and its view of the effectiveness of its approach. Other documents available to the ELIR team with the RA included the Institutional Profile agreed at 21 April 2004 and updated on 7 February 2005; the Strategic Plan 2004-09; the Academic Quality Handbook (on CD-ROM); undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses 2005; University Calendar 2004-05; Catalogue of Courses 2004-05; Quality Enhancement Strategy including Action Plan 2004-05 and summary of action taken in regard to Action Plan for 2003-04; and Directorate of Information Systems and Services Annual Survey 2003-04. The RA provided the focus for the review and was used to develop a programme of activities by the team to form a representative view of the way the University approaches the management of quality, enhancement and academic standards.

5 The University submitted two case studies with its RA. The first case study 'Virtual Experiences: An Illustration of Successful Collaboration' highlighted three examples of the experimental and productive collaborations between academic staff and the University's Learning Technology Unit to develop e-learning. The second case study: 'Refurbishment of the Zoology Labs G6 and G8: Enhancements to Practical Classes' described the design and fitting out of laboratories to

provide environments with new opportunities for student learning and methods of teaching.

6 The production of the RA was overseen by the University Quality Enhancement Strategy Team (QUEST), which included student representation, and was monitored through the University Committee on Teaching and Learning before being approved formally by Senate in January 2005. The process of finalising the RA involved extensive consultation with staff and students across the University. At the first meeting with the ELIR team, senior staff expressed the view that the production of the RA had been an inclusive and valuable experience for the University, stimulating debate and highlighting a range of good practice in learning and teaching. The team considered the RA, with its combination of clear description and critical evaluation, to be a very useful introduction to the University, providing a valuable reference throughout the review.

7 The ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 16 to 17 March 2005 and the Part 2 visit took place between 25 to 29 April 2005.

8 The first morning of the review visit was organised by the University and included an informal introduction to staff and students including the Senior Vice Principal and the Vice President (Education) of the Students' Association. This was followed by presentations on current issues including: University developments since the submission of the RA; developments in the colleges; developments to the student representation system; and the review of the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy. The morning concluded with presentations on, and demonstrations of, the collaborative projects highlighted in the case studies.

9 Following the presentations, the ELIR team met a group of senior staff with responsibility for managing quality and enhancement across the University and staff involved in internal review at the subject level in Business, Chemistry, History, Modern Languages, Molecular and Cell Biology and Psychology. The team also met a group of students, including members of the Student's Association, class representatives and students

involved in internal reviews. The team discussed a range of matters in these meetings, many of which had been raised in the RA, including reorganisation of the University and the new college management structures; the internal subject review process and other quality assurance matters; student representation, the student learning experience and student support issues; and the University's quality enhancement strategy and its evolving teaching and learning strategy.

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

11 The ELIR team comprised: Professor Graham Chesters (Part 1 visit only), Ms Jadwiga Koprowska, Dr Daniel Lamont (Part 2 visit only), Dr Karl Leydecker and Professor Allan Walker (reviewers), and Ms Lesley Rowand (review secretary). The review was coordinated on behalf of QAA by Dr Janice Ross, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

Background information about the institution

12 The University of Aberdeen, founded in 1495, is the third oldest university in Scotland and the fifth oldest in the UK. It is the descendent of two older universities which existed in the City and which were united in 1860 by Royal Ordinance. The University's governance was prescribed by the Universities (Scotland) Act of 1858 which created the University Court. In December 2001 the University merged with the Northern College of Education (Aberdeen campus).

13 The mission of the University is to be 'world class' and '...excellent in delivering learning and teaching, in undertaking research and commercialisation, in promoting research

and scholarship, and in governance and management...and to be accessible and inclusive'.

14 The University was restructured in 2003 and is now organised into three colleges with twelve associated schools. The College of Arts and Social Sciences contains the six schools of Divinity, History and Philosophy; Education; Language and Literature; Law; Social Science; and the University of Aberdeen Business School. The College of Life Sciences and Medicine contains the four schools of Biological Sciences; Medicine; Medical Sciences; and Psychology. The College of Physical Sciences contains the two schools of Engineering and Physical Sciences; and the School of Geosciences. Graduate schools have been established in the College of Life Sciences and Medicine and in the College of Physical Sciences. A Graduate School is also being formed in the College of Arts and Social Sciences.

15 In 2004-05 just over 13,500 students were registered with the University; some 10,000 undergraduate students and some 3,500 postgraduate students, including 760 research students.

Institution's strategy for quality enhancement

16 The RA stated that the development of the University's quality enhancement strategy, approved by the Senate in November 2003, was in response to the new *Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework*. The strategy sets out the key definitions and principles guiding the University's quality enhancement activities, the agents and procedures used to safeguard academic standards and improve the quality of education provided for students, and incorporates action points that identify specific quality enhancement related activities to be carried out over a given timescale. The RA indicated that in the last 18 months, the University had developed its understanding of what strategic management of quality enhancement means, and that it had made significant progress in strengthening its capabilities to deliver on these terms.

Internal monitoring and review of quality and standards and public information

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

17 The University's approach to the assurance of quality and academic standards is based first on 'ownership by schools of courses and programmes, and of responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning provision, and for the academic standards of the associated awards'. Secondly, heads of college, working with their directors of teaching and learning and, where applicable, heads of the graduate schools, have overall responsibility at college level for quality assurance and quality enhancement. Each college has a teaching and learning committee, to which the teaching and learning committees of the schools (or in some cases disciplines within a school) report. A third element is the University's quality assurance and enhancement infrastructure, which is designed to formulate policies and procedures; implement quality control procedures; ensure continual enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning; and satisfy the Senate that University, college and school obligations are being fulfilled. The final element of the University's approach to assurance is said to be 'senior management who are committed to, involved in and responsible for the establishment, execution and review of the University's strategy for the quality assurance and enhancement of learning and teaching'.

18 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) has delegated responsibility, on behalf of Senate, for the assurance and enhancement of the quality of the University's educational provision and for the safeguard of academic standards. The UCTL is convened by the Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) and includes the three college directors of teaching and learning and a senior

member of staff from each college nominated by the head of college. The UCTL oversees the work of two academic standards committees, one covering undergraduate and the other postgraduate provision. The UCTL also oversees or monitors the work of a number of units which support the enhancement of teaching and learning.

19 The University conducted a complete review of its quality assurance practices and procedures following the introduction of colleges in August 2003. This review was based on the principle that primary responsibility for learning and teaching rests with the colleges and schools operating within the University's institutional framework. The key aims of the review were that the University's standard processes should be no more than what is required both to safeguard academic standards and to maintain and enhance quality in teaching and learning; that the amount of time academic staff spend on quality assurance related administration should be reduced accordingly; and that internal institutional regulation should be reduced to the level required to satisfy both University internal procedures and those of the external environment. Key changes arising out of this review included a streamlining of documentation required for course and programme approval and revisions to the Internal Teaching Review procedures to place a greater emphasis on enhancement. To assist academic staff with quality assurance matters, assistant college registrars provide administrative support for teaching and learning in each of the colleges. The committee structure of the University was also streamlined, with the creation of a single Undergraduate Academic Standards Committee for undergraduate programmes and a parallel Postgraduate Academic Standards Committee (both taught and research provision). The two academic standards committees have devolved responsibility, on behalf of the Senate, for the monitoring and maintenance of academic standards and for the provision of appropriate mechanisms for student guidance and learner support. Additionally, the Postgraduate

Academic Standards Committee plays a key role in the formulation and implementation of postgraduate policy. The two academic standards committees are seen by the University as a distinctive strength, providing an institutional perspective of provision across more than one college.

20 The team looked at the minutes of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning and the academic standards committees, noting that all minutes of central committees had been made available on the University's website since the late 1990s. From discussions with a range of staff, the team learned that the new structures had become established, with committees exercising their responsibilities for quality assurance effectively. The meetings confirmed that staff at all levels had an understanding of, and strong commitment to, quality assurance matters. It is clear that the academic standards committees exercise their University-wide responsibilities for quality assurance with rigour and attention to detail, and that the University Committee on Teaching and Learning is exercising its function of strategic oversight effectively.

Internal approval, monitoring and review

Course and programme approval

21 The University has a modular teaching structure which is organised into half sessions. Within this modular scheme, a 'course' is defined as a programme of study, normally spanning a half-session, which is self-contained and leads to a specified amount of credit. A 'programme' is the aggregation of all taught elements (courses), leading to a defined graduating curriculum, including an honours programme, where appropriate.

22 Since 1996, the University's procedures for course and programme approval have been based on the use of a suite of Senate Academic Standards (SENAS) forms. These forms were revised, following the introduction of the Academic Infrastructure by QAA in 2000, in order to encourage staff to reflect on aims and learning outcomes, to consider transferable skills and to encourage reflection on the

accessibility of courses for disabled students. The University undertook a revalidation exercise of all its programmes between 2000 and 2002, requiring schools to submit programme proposal forms with programme specifications. In 2003 the SENAS forms were reviewed again, following the establishment of college teaching and learning committees, and were substantially streamlined. In particular, the requirement to submit programme specifications to accompany new programme proposals was removed. For undergraduate courses and programmes, the SENAS forms are submitted to the college teaching and learning committee, which has primary responsibility for the academic scrutiny, as well as consideration of resource and academic planning implications. This includes responsibility for ensuring that appropriate scrutiny has been undertaken at school level, including consideration of external involvement. Normally, all proposals are considered by the college director of teaching and learning (who convenes the teaching and learning committee) in advance of the committee meeting. Where the college director of teaching and learning is content with the proposal, the approval is simply reported to the committee. Where issues are identified, the committee is invited to consider the proposal. Once approved by the college teaching and learning committees, the SENAS forms are scrutinised at University level by the convener of the Undergraduate Academic Standards Committee prior to approval by that Committee. In the RA the University stated that the new system is more effective, in that the burden on academic staff of preparing paperwork is reduced. College directors of teaching and learning ensure a greater consistency of approach across schools and have improved oversight of the profile of courses offered across the college. The University considers that the strong cooperation between the college directors of teaching and learning, their assistant college registrars, the Convener and members of Undergraduate Academic Standards Committee and Registry staff has strengthened the approval process.

23 The arrangements for the approval of postgraduate courses and programmes are broadly similar in that individual schools initiate proposals and postgraduate SENAS forms follow a similar process. In two colleges (Life Sciences and Medicine; Physical Sciences) responsibility for initial consideration of proposals rests with their respective graduate schools. In the College of Arts and Social Sciences, responsibility for postgraduate matters currently rests with the individual schools. All postgraduate proposals are subsequently considered by the relevant college teaching and learning committee and the University's Postgraduate Academic Standards Committee. The RA explained that the College of Arts and Social Sciences is currently working to establish a graduate school and the ELIR team considered that, once this graduate school is established, it would be appropriate for the University to consider course and programme approval arrangements in line with practice in the other two colleges.

24 The University has revised the SENAS course proposal form to require more detailed information about courses to be submitted, ensuring the appropriate scrutiny of course proposals. The ELIR team was interested to explore with staff the appropriate level for the approval of courses (as opposed to programmes) within the University. Senior staff from the Registry and members of the academic standards committees expressed the view that approving all courses formally at academic standards committee level (and ultimately at the Senate), did add value, particularly when the colleges were still relatively new.

25 The SENAS form for new programme proposals requires schools to provide details of the programme rationale, programme prescription (the programme structure and constituent courses for each year of study), any additional resource requirements, and to consider any accessibility issues for students with disabilities. The ELIR team noted that there is no requirement for schools to indicate, for example, programme aims or learning outcomes, the use of external reference points

in programme design or the assessment arrangements for the programme. The team learnt that college directors of teaching and learning were active in liaising with schools regarding new programme proposals, and that as part of Internal Teaching Review, schools were required to give a comprehensive account of school arrangements for the development and approval of courses and programmes prior to submission to the college. The team, through its discussions with staff and consideration of a sample of completed programme proposals, formed the view that the formal role of the college teaching and learning committees and the academic standards committees in programme approval would be strengthened by schools providing more comprehensive programme documentation. The University is currently reviewing the format of its programme specifications (see below, paragraph 37). Once this review is complete, the University could usefully consider reintroducing the requirement to submit a programme specification to accompany the programme approval, as this is likely to provide much of the information which would allow full scrutiny of the proposals.

26 As part of the programme approval process, the convener of the relevant college teaching and learning committee may approve the proposal and report this approval to the committee (see above, paragraph 22). The University should consider whether it would be appropriate for new programmes (and where applicable, new courses contributing to new programmes) to be formally scrutinised and approved by the full college teaching and learning committees or graduate schools.

Course and programme monitoring and review

27 The Academic Quality Handbook sets out in comprehensive detail the arrangements for course monitoring (termed course review by the University), for which responsibility rests with the heads of schools. Course review is conducted each half-session, drawing on student course evaluation forms, staff-student liaison

committee minutes and comments by external examiners. After discussion in the staff-student liaison committee, course review reports are submitted by the head of school to the Undergraduate Academic Standards Committee or Postgraduate Academic Standards Committee and the head of college. The convener of the academic standards committee completes a report on the courses of each school or subject area, which is referred to the head of school (copied to the college director of teaching and learning) and from there to the staff-student liaison committees. From the sample of reports considered by the ELIR team, there is clear evidence of the rigour with which courses are reviewed and the attention paid by the academic standards committee to ensure that all feedback loops are closed, including ensuring that course reviewers refer back to the corresponding report from the previous session.

28 In addition to the half-yearly course review exercise, the RA stated that 'each year, usually in the first half-session, schools are asked to undertake a broad review of their courses'. This review draws on the outcomes of feedback, the experience of those teaching the course, and the outcomes of assessment. This review was said to inform the development of, and revision to, courses and programmes. The ELIR team examined a sample of committee documentation which indicated that schools were giving consideration to the range of courses that were being offered and noted that, while this broad review of courses takes place in all schools, in many cases it occurs informally and, as such, it is not always documented. The team explored with a range of staff the extent to which this broad review constituted a form of programme monitoring. From these discussions, the team learnt that, while staff did reflect more broadly on the balance of courses at subject and school level, and that the requirements of professional and statutory bodies ensured that some programmes were more formally monitored on an annual basis, the University does not operate a formal system of annual programme monitoring. There would be benefit in the University ensuring that all schools and subject areas reflect systematically

on their programmes in the periods in between the six year cycle of formal programme review (see below, paragraphs 34-36).

Academic standards

29 The University believes that decisions relating to academic standards should reside primarily with the judgments of academic staff. In the RA, the University stated that expected academic standards are made explicit to both students and staff in a number of ways including the University's degree regulatory frameworks; the definition of aims and objectives and learning outcomes of courses and programmes; criteria for admission to honours programmes; the use of a Common Assessment Scale; and the use of a University-wide Grade Spectrum to determine honours degree classification and the award of taught postgraduate degrees.

30 The Academic Quality Handbook, which is published on the University's website, provides clear and comprehensive information and guidance for staff and students on University structures and processes relating to quality and standards. The ELIR team saw clear evidence that academic standards are made explicit, and that aims and objectives and learning outcomes are communicated clearly to students, with the best examples particularly impressive in this regard. Overall the team formed the view that the University's approach to the explicit communication of academic standards to staff and students was effective.

External examining

31 External examiners are nominated by the heads of school. Nominations are scrutinised by the head of the relevant college and by the Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) who also monitor that the University's criteria for appointment are applied. External examiners are appointed by the University Court on the recommendation of the above senior staff. The University states that external examiners play a crucial role in verifying, monitoring and ensuring the comparability of academic standards across the University. In addition to their

examining role, external examiners are also asked to comment more generally on courses and programmes, both in their report forms and through discussion with staff. External examiners' reports are first analysed in the Registry, where any matters of concern or suggestions for improvement are highlighted. They are then disseminated to the Convener of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, the convener of the relevant academic standards committee, the relevant college director of teaching and learning, and the relevant head of school. Schools make their response to the college director of teaching and learning, who collates responses and makes a college-wide report to the academic standards committee for consideration twice a year. Policy issues are referred by the academic standards committee to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning. Heads of school are responsible for informing their external examiners of the action taken by the school, academic standards committee or University Committee on Teaching and Learning in response to their comments. The external examining system was reviewed in 2000-01 and is currently being reviewed again. The current review is focusing on the procedures for considering external examiners' comments, to develop the quality enhancement potential of the reports and to address the timeliness of the deadline for submission of external examiners reports.

32 The University indicated that a role of external examiners at examination boards is to determine on which side of the boundary (pass/fail, or borderline between degree classifications) a candidate should be placed. The ELIR team explored with staff whether there were formal criteria in place to guide external examiners in exercising judgment in resolving borderline cases. The team would encourage the University to build upon, and disseminate more widely, established good practice in the schools for determining degree classification in borderline cases, in order to ensure that there is consistency across the University.

33 From its discussions with staff and consideration of documentation, the ELIR team

was able to conclude that the external examiner system is working effectively, and that the University is taking deliberate steps to bring about further improvements. The team heard that some staff found the external examiners' informal comments on programmes to be very useful, and that in some disciplines this feedback has been formalised through its inclusion on the examination board agenda. In its current review of external examining, the University could consider the benefits of extending this good practice more widely. Formal programme-level feedback from external examiners might then also help to inform the processes of programme monitoring and review (see above, paragraph 28).

Internal teaching review

34 The University regards Internal Teaching Review (ITR) as a key feature of its quality assurance framework. The University revised its ITR procedures in 2003, to take account of the SHEFC guidelines for internal review. Reviews are conducted on a six-year cycle, and in two of the colleges reviews are conducted at the level of the school. The smaller College of Physical Sciences has retained the subject discipline as the unit of review. Dedicated support for schools preparing for ITR is provided by the Registry. Schools prepare a self-evaluation document according to a standard template, and this is supported by programme review reports (see below, paragraph 36) and a summary of the school's support for its postgraduate research students. Other documentation made available to the ITR panel includes, for example, programme specifications, external examiners' reports, and minutes of school committees. Schools may also submit additional documents that showcase strong features of provision. All ITR panels include one or more external subject specialists and, since 2003, a student member. Review visits take between one and two days, depending on the range of provision involved, and the review panel meets with a range of staff and students, including members of the staff-student liaison committees. Review reports provide a detailed critical commentary on the

quality of learning opportunities and the school's approach to quality management. The reports also highlight particularly positive aspects of provision and make recommendations for enhancing provision. Schools discuss the report of the ITR panel with the college director of teaching and learning, and submit a response to academic standards committee for approval. Schools also submit a one-year follow-up report to academic standards committee. The University considers its ITR system to be a major strength, which it believes 'preserves the best features of external subject review but sets these in a more inclusive and prospective context', and also raises the status of teaching and those most clearly involved with its management. The University recognises the need to ensure that it is making the most of what it learns from individual ITRs, for example by ensuring that identified good practice is disseminated at college level. The RA emphasised that the response by schools to the revised ITR procedures had been positive, and that ITR was generally approached with enthusiasm by staff.

35 The ELIR team considered that the ITR process is thorough and noted the particularly comprehensive way in which points for action are identified and followed up at all levels in the University. The team was able to confirm the University's view that ITR is a major strength of its quality assurance infrastructure. From its discussion with staff, the team was able to confirm the University's view that staff are enthusiastic about the revised process, believing it to be less burdensome and conducted in a more positive atmosphere of critical self-reflection and self-evaluation than either external subject review or previous internal review methods.

36 The University instituted a system of periodic programme review in 2000 as an integral component of the six-year ITR cycle. Review reports are completed according to a detailed common template, and include the requirement for schools to produce an action plan as part of programme review ahead of ITR. Recent revisions to the periodic review process,

including emphasising its status in relation to ITR and promoting the action plan as a key outcome of the self-reflective process, are regarded positively by staff.

Programme specifications

37 The University produced detailed programme specifications for all its programmes as part of its revalidation of all programmes between 2000 and 2002. The requirement to produce programme specifications was discontinued in 2003, though 'outline programme specifications' continue to be published in the University Calendar. Following guidance issued by QAA in August 2004, the University is in the process of finalising a new template for programme specifications, to be available from 2005-06. This ongoing work will utilise existing programme prescriptions as a key component of the web-based programme specifications. The ELIR team considered that the new specifications would be helpful for a range of stakeholders, particularly students. The University may wish to reflect on the role of programme specifications in programme approval (see above, paragraph 25).

Use made of external reference points for assuring quality and standards

38 The RA detailed the use the University makes of a range of external reference points, including the Academic Infrastructure and the Higher Education Academy and its subject centres. The University considered that it has demonstrated the importance it attaches to external reference points, citing the revision of its degree regulations to adhere to the SCQF as an example of this. The University has a large amount of provision accredited by professional and statutory bodies, and makes extensive and positive use of professional and statutory bodies' comments in its quality assurance and enhancement processes (see below, paragraph 116). The ELIR team noted the systematic way in which ITR panels focused on the engagement of schools with external reference points in general and the Academic Infrastructure in particular.

39 ITR reports read by the ELIR team confirmed that the ITR system systematically encourages the schools to engage with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. It is clear that the University's provision adheres to the SCQF, and that the University is addressing the task of developing level descriptors. The University believes that its policies and practices are consistent with the good practice identified in the *Code of practice*. The University has reviewed and continues to review its policies and procedures systematically against the *Code* and also continues to raise staff awareness of the *Code* and from the evidence available to the team, it is clear that the University is making appropriate use of external reference points for the assurance of academic quality and standards.

Validated and collaborative provision

40 The University makes awards to students who successfully complete approved programmes of study delivered at other institutions. The University validates the BA in Rural Business Management and a number of MSc programmes offered by the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC). A formal accreditation agreement was signed with SAC in 1999. This agreement affords SAC wide authority to exercise powers and responsibility for academic provision, with the University retaining a broad oversight of the quality assurance functions, while retaining ultimate responsibility for the quality and standard of programmes. In 2004 the University signed an accreditation agreement with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) Millennium Institute for the delivery of research degree programmes in Theology, Marine Science, Environmental Science and Nuclear Decommissioning. It has recently agreed to validate two BEng Honours programmes to be taught at the North Highland College, Thurso (an academic partner of UHI Millennium Institute). In 2004 it also validated two taught MLitt Programmes offered by the Al-Maktoum Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, Dundee.

41 The University's quality assurance procedures for collaborative arrangements

were described in the RA as robust and as incorporating the University's procedures for scrutiny of courses and programme proposals. Central to the process of validation is the report of the validation panel, which operates under the auspices of the relevant academic standards committee. The panel normally consists of the convener of the academic standards committee, and at least three other members of University academic staff, including specialists in the subject area of the programmes to be validated. The Academic Quality Handbook notes that 'consideration should be given to at least one member of the Panel being external to the University' which, for franchise arrangements, would include the external examiner for the programme delivered by the University.

42 The ELIR team looked at the detailed guidance on policy and procedures for collaborative provision set out in the Academic Quality Handbook, and also considered the documentation for the validation link with Al-Maktoum Institute and the accreditation process for the UHI Millennium Institute. The team noted that, due to practical reasons beyond the control of the University, no external member had been included on the validation/accreditation panels for either of these. In the case of the Al-Maktoum Institute it was noted in the panel's report that 'an external subject specialist would be appointed in the near future to consider the documentation submitted by the Institute and to comment on the Panel's Report' and the team learnt that the external subject specialist was due to be appointed shortly.

Research degrees

43 The University's policies and procedures for postgraduate research students are set out in the Academic Quality Handbook. Research degree provision is overseen by the Postgraduate Academic Standards Committee and 16 college postgraduate officers. In addition, in November 2004 the University established a Postgraduate Strategy Advisory Group to oversee the development, provision, quality assurance and evaluation of induction

and training programmes for postgraduate students at school, college and University level. Following the revision to the relevant section of the *Code of practice*, the University is conducting a review of its postgraduate provision, which will be considered by the Postgraduate Strategy Advisory Group and the Postgraduate Academic Standards Committee.

44 The RA identified four key mechanisms for assuring the quality of postgraduate provision: a Postgraduate Structured Management Framework which is designed to develop the student-supervisor relationship, monitor student progress and supervisor performance, and assure the quality of provision; a Code of Practice for Research Students; a half-yearly research student assessment report, completed by the supervisor and scrutinised by a college postgraduate officer from a different area of study; and an annual confidential questionnaire issued to postgraduate research students, which is considered by the Postgraduate Academic Standards Committee and fed back to colleges and schools.

45 From its consideration of documentation and discussions with staff and students, the ELIR team formed the view that the University provided clear information to supervisors and to research students, and overall had effective mechanisms in place for monitoring all aspects of provision. The team heard that some postgraduate research students were unaware of the confidential questionnaire system, and that some staff were not clear about the mechanisms for receiving feedback on the outcomes arising from the analysis of these questionnaires (see, below, paragraph 64).

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

46 Overall, the University has effective quality assurance procedures. A notable feature is the University's demonstrable commitment to keeping policies and procedures under review to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. The University's Academic Quality Handbook provides comprehensive and accessible

information and guidance to staff and students on all aspects of quality assurance. The University has thorough procedures in place for approval, monitoring and review at the level of the course. The system of ITR is a major strength of the University's quality assurance infrastructure and is particularly effective in ensuring that issues identified are followed up across the institution. There would be benefit in the University giving greater emphasis to some aspects of its quality assurance procedures at the programme level. In particular, the University should consider giving greater emphasis to programme level approval through the provision of more comprehensive documentation to the college teaching and learning committees and academic standards committees. There would also be benefit in the University developing more systematic programme monitoring and in formally linking a system of annual programme monitoring to the use that the University makes of its external examiners, and student feedback.

47 The University's external examining system is effective. It could be strengthened further by the University building on and disseminating more widely the good practice evident in some schools for determining degree classification in borderline cases.

48 On the basis of these findings, there can be broad confidence in the University's current, and likely future, management of the quality of its provision and the academic standards of its awards.

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

49 The University has adopted the Model Publication Scheme in fulfilment of its obligations under the *Freedom of Information Act*. The University publishes an Institutional Academic Profile annually, which is drawn directly from the computerised Student Record. The RA described the Academic Profile as a key element of the University's management of quality assurance and enhancement, and

therefore the University asks schools to comment on their use of this data in the ITR self-evaluation document.

50 The University prospectuses are available in both hard copy and on its website. Heads of school are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the information in the prospectuses, with additional checks made by Registry officers to ensure that programmes have been approved by the relevant academic standards committee. Heads of school (or their nominees) also check the accuracy of additional publicity material produced by the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service. The University produces an International Handbook available in hard copy and on the web, and a series of leaflets for international students. The University's web pages for prospective students are managed and maintained by the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service, with heads of school having responsibility for the quality and accuracy of the information provided on school websites. In practice about two-thirds of the school websites are also managed by the central web team, while the remaining third are maintained by the schools themselves. Other publications for students include the undergraduate Catalogue of Courses and the University Calendar, the latter containing regulations and outline programme specifications. Both of these publications are produced by the Registry with checks for accuracy by the schools and matters requiring approval being referred to the convener of the relevant academic standards committee. The RA stated that details of postgraduate courses are not currently provided centrally, but on school websites. The ELIR team learnt that the University has recently decided to extend the central provision of course information to include postgraduate courses. To ensure the accuracy of information published by its partner institutions, all such material which bears the University logo requires to be approved by the Registry.

51 The ELIR team came to the view that the University places a strong emphasis on the quality and accessibility of information to staff and students. In discussion with the team,

students were especially complimentary about the undergraduate prospectus and the speed with which the University responds to requests for information prior to entry. The team noted that the current undergraduate prospectus had recently won a national award. Information provided to students after arrival was also regarded highly by students. Students identified one or two instances where school websites contained information that was not completely up-to-date, and there may be benefit in the University extending the central maintenance of school websites to all parts of the institution. The University's approach to data collection is robust, with the team noting the way that, having identified weaknesses in the collection of data on student entrance qualifications, the University had acted quickly to ensure that data collected was now complete.

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

52 The University has effective arrangements in place to ensure that, overall, the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair. The quality and accessibility of information, particularly the accessibility afforded by the comprehensive web-based information, is a strength of the University.

The student experience

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

Student representation

53 The University 'strongly encourages and attempts to secure student involvement' in its decision making processes in relation to quality assurance and enhancement. In order to achieve this, elected officers of the Students' Association are members of the majority of the University's major committees including the Senate, the

Court, the University Committee on Teaching and Learning and the academic standards committees. Students are also members of the college and school teaching and learning committees. Since January 2004, students have also served as full members of the Senate and Court Academic Appeals Committees.

54 Student representatives have been included as full panel members on Internal Teaching Review (ITR) since 2003. The Students' Association is free to select student members of ITR panels from the 10 student members of the Senate. Their role on these panels may include convening meetings with students. The University recognises the need to support students in preparing for ITR panel membership and has recently developed specific training sessions to support them. Student panel members described participation in ITR as initially daunting, in relation to the preparation required, but found the actual review to be an enjoyable and valuable experience which had provided them with confidence and greater knowledge of the University and its systems.

55 There is an 'open and strong partnership' between the University and the Students' Association. Regular, and often informal, meetings are held with the Principal and Secretary and the senior officers of the Students' Association, and sabbatical officers' views are taken seriously by the University. The University involves students effectively through the formal committee structures particularly at undergraduate level, and also through informal meetings.

56 The University considers that the partnership is greatly assisted by the 'proactive approach' taken by the Students' Association. The University has supported the Students' Association by maintaining five sabbatical officer posts including a President and four Vice-Presidents, each with a specific responsibility for advice and support, societies and student development, and sport. In 2003-04 a new post of Vice-President (Education) was established to increase the capacity of the Association to deal with teaching and learning matters.

57 The University has acknowledged that student representation at postgraduate level (both taught and research) is less formal and is not consistent across all programmes. It has been identified as a priority for institution-wide action in the coming year. The need to formalise postgraduate representation and provide support for postgraduate student representatives is echoed by Students' Association representatives, students and staff. Good practice at school level has been identified, for example, in engineering, and students and staff believe that the graduate schools already play a significant role in gaining student involvement. For example, the Graduate School in the College of Life Sciences and Medicine involves student representation on the two school committees and on an overarching committee.

58 The Students' Association non-sabbatical posts include the Academic Affairs Committee Convener and eight areas of study conveners. The University has acknowledged that there is less formal support for these officers and that further development is required to ensure both continuity and effective support. The support provided for new Student's Association officers includes a formal briefing session and funding for a month-long hand over between incoming and outgoing sabbaticals. This is particularly important in relation to student appeals as there is only a short period before the Vice-President (Advice and Support), whose role includes provision of support to students wishing to appeal, takes up his/her position and the start of the appeals process.

59 In discussions, the Students' Association representatives demonstrated a high level of knowledge of University procedures and exhibited a strong commitment to supporting and representing their student community. Overall, it is evident that the Students' Association enjoys good working relations with staff and high levels of University support.

Feedback from students

60 The University's formal mechanisms for gaining student feedback at undergraduate and postgraduate levels include the Student Course

Evaluation Form (SCEF) and the staff-student liaison committees.

61 The SCEF operates at undergraduate and postgraduate (taught programmes) levels and is a course level review which, in the absence of annual programme monitoring, is the main mechanism for obtaining student feedback. It is a retrospective process which requires students to respond to a number of pre-set questions. Each school has the opportunity to design their own questions at the end of each course, following which student feedback is considered by the staff-student liaison committees at least twice per session. The University recognises that this and other feedback methods may no longer be fit for purpose and that regular requests for feedback via questionnaires may also result in 'questionnaire fatigue.' It is not always evident to students that committee responses to their feedback has been acted upon. As a response, the University Committee on Teaching and Learning has established a working group on student and graduate feedback to make recommendations for revised procedures, and alternative forms of feedback are being explored by the University, building on good practice which exists in the colleges. This includes the School of Medicine, which is exploring the possibility of introducing an on-line system for course evaluation, and the Business School with its 'three good things, three bad things' survey. The working group is also exploring alternative ways of obtaining feedback including seeking feedback at the point of graduation.

62 Representatives are elected to staff-students liaison committees for each course or, for certain programmes, year of study. This system was reviewed in 2003-04 by the Students' Association, working together with the University Committee on Teaching and Learning. The review was prompted by problems relating to the identification and training of class representatives, including late notification by the schools of class representative names to the Students' Association, and low attendance by representatives at the available training. In addressing these problems, the Registry has

been working with heads of school, the Students' Association and the assistant college registrars (teaching and learning) to ensure that the names of class representatives are identified in good time to enable training to be undertaken appropriately. The process has been more effective in 2004-05 with a total of 580 representatives having been identified. In addition, the Students' Association has been working with the national student information service, Student Participation in Quality Scotland Service (sparqs) to provide enhanced training for class representatives.

63 In 2004-05 the Students' Association introduced a system of college forums in order to enable class representatives to meet to discuss wider issues. Although at an early stage in their development, these forums have considerable potential to enhance student feedback processes.

64 Postgraduate research students have the opportunity to provide confidential feedback on their supervision and facilities on an annual basis in a questionnaire which is reported to the Postgraduate Academic Standards Committee. The outcomes of these are reported back to the colleges and schools, and the minutes of the Postgraduate Academic Standards Committee are available to students on the University's website (see above, paragraph 45). University staff acknowledge that there is a need to take more action to ensure students are aware of the consideration by the Postgraduate Academic Standards Committee of the feedback provided in the questionnaires, and the resulting outcomes.

65 Overall, there is a high level of commitment to gaining quality feedback from students through the student course evaluation forms and staff-student liaison committee arrangements. The current systems could be enhanced in relation to training for class representatives, and in the formal arrangements for postgraduate feedback, and the University is addressing this. The level of feedback from students is generally good and it is evident that student feedback influences the University's decision making.

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

66 The University is committed to developing a culture of effective student learning and providing an appropriate learning experience for all its students. This culture is based on the opportunities provided to students through the course system, which provides a broad range of opportunities for disciplinary and interdisciplinary study, and on the research-led academic environment. Although the links between research and learning and teaching environments are only beginning to be explicitly and strategically explored and related to a 'model of the learner' (see below, paragraphs 111-112), it is clear that research informed teaching is an important part of the learning environment. In addition, a particular feature of the University is the major role it has created for e-learning which it describes as a 'core component' of learning and teaching.

Curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment

67 In order to promote effective student learning, the University has well established academic support systems which include undergraduate advisers of studies, postgraduate coordinators and research supervisors. It has also established two institutional level directorates to provide coordinated and integrated management systems: The Directorate of Information Systems and Services (DISS); and the Directorate of Student Affairs. DISS includes the Learning Technology Unit and management of the library services. The Directorate of Student Affairs consists of the Careers and Appointments Service, Sport and Recreation Services, Campus Services and Student Support Services, the latter of which includes Counselling, the Chaplaincy, and Hall Wardens and the Student Advice and Support Office.

68 The advisers of studies system is managed by the Director of Undergraduate Programmes and clear guidelines are provided for the advisers, whose role includes providing non academic and personal support. Students attend

interviews with their advisers of studies at the start of the academic year and are required to meet their adviser if they are reported as being 'at risk'. Both undergraduate students and staff are clear of their academic responsibilities and of the various lines of communication which exist. Taught postgraduate students have a programme coordinator, and postgraduate research students are allocated a supervisor, and both are responsible for providing guidance and learner support. Induction and training programmes for postgraduate students are overseen by the Postgraduate Strategy Advisory Group. These arrangements are clearly understood by students and generally work well.

69 The Directorate of Information Systems and Services, which incorporates the University's library, communications and information technology, audiovisual and museum functions is considered by the University to underpin the student learning experience. The Directorate of Information Systems and Services is responsible for 24-hour computer access, and for provision computers for students with a disability. The University website, which is under the technical management of the Directorate of Information Systems and Services, is regarded as playing an increasingly important role in the delivery of e-resources in support of teaching and learning.

70 The Directorate of Information Systems and Services is responsible for the management of the University library which currently occupies four sites. There are plans to develop a new library which will provide a modern study environment.

71 The Directorate of Information Systems and Services plays an important role in enhancing students' learning experience, and acts as a force for continuous improvement. The University has developed an award winning Joint Information Systems Committee-funded LEMUR ('Learning with Museum Resources') Project which enables students to browse and retrieve images and information from a database produced from the University archives. There is an integrated help desk for the computing and library facilities, and a variety of training, fact sheets, quick reference cards and self help guides. The 'Message of the

Day' service, a web page available for staff and students to publicise events or post announcements, highlights the potential for enhancing communication across the academic community. Students are consulted on the work of the Directorate of Information Systems and Services through a web-based satisfaction survey and there is a Students' Association representative on the University Information Systems and Library Users Committee.

72 The Learning Technology Unit was established in 1998 to promote, support and develop the use of technology within teaching, learning and assessment. The Learning Technology Unit undertook a University-wide audit of the current and planned role of communication and information technology in teaching, learning and assessment, and its prediction of strong growth in e-learning informed the development of a comprehensive communication and information technology strategy.

73 The University's integrated approach to its development of a communication and information technology strategy includes the strategic use of portals which have been designed to link the University and its staff and students. The Student Portal, which was introduced in 2002-03, provides personalised on-line access to data including personal details, teaching and examination information and results. Currently plans for the further development of the portal include the enabling of feedback on assessment and personal development planning. The portal system is a powerful force in the development of independent learning at the University and is becoming an integrated part of the academic life of the University, the potential and benefits of which are realised according to the individual needs of particular students.

74 The University states that it was one of the early institutions to adopt a virtual learning environment and this is now a core service, developed and provided by the Learning Technology Unit. The Unit plays an important collaborative role, and staff of the Unit have worked closely with academic staff on the

realisation of over 100 collaborative e-learning projects. In particular, highly productive and creative collaborations with academic staff from each of the three colleges have created innovative and ambitious new learning opportunities for students, such as the virtual field trip (College of Physical Sciences), the virtual laboratory (College of Life Sciences and Medicine) and the virtual museum (College of Arts and Social Sciences). All these projects have been evaluated and have received positive student feedback. These projects are significant developments in e-learning, and represent a particular strength of the University's approach to the enhancement of learning. A range of academic support also exists at college and school levels. The University is supported in its efforts to find effective mechanisms for disseminating good practice from the schools and colleges across the Institution.

Student support

75 The Directorate of Student Affairs was established in 2002 with the aim of providing quality services to students which will support their physical, psychological, emotional and professional needs throughout their University life. These services operate University-wide and include the Student Support Services, Careers and Appointment Service, Sport and Recreation, and Campus Services. The Student Support Service liaises with academic and non-academic staff, including the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service, the Centre for Lifelong Learning, the Language Centre and the Academic Learning and Study Unit to provide advice, information and support for students, including those with disabilities and international students. The Directorate of Student Affairs holds twice termly meetings with the Students' Association.

76 Overall responsibility for the management of arrangements for students with disabilities in the University currently rests with the Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) who convenes the Disabilities Sub-Committee. Students with disabilities are encouraged to notify one of the University Disability Advisers in order that appropriate support be provided.

There is a range of information available for students on the University's website relating to disability coordinators, dyslexia, and library and computing services for students with disabilities.

77 Guidance to staff is provided on the University's website on a range of matters including the *Disability Discrimination Act*, examination arrangements for students with disabilities, and staff development courses. Accessibility for students with disabilities is a requirement for consideration during new course and programme proposals (see, above, paragraphs 21-26) and this is monitored through the Internal Teaching Review process (see, above, paragraphs 34-36). With the intention of creating accessible curricula for students with impairments, the University is currently undertaking a University-wide 'Teachability Project' linked to the national 'Teachability' initiative. This builds on work previously carried out in some former University departments. At the time of ELIR, most of the schools in the College of Arts & Social Sciences, and some disciplines in the College of Life Sciences & Medicine, had completed this exercise, and a timetable had been agreed for the College of Physical Sciences. One Teachability report considered during ELIR identified provision available for students with a disability in that school. The University stated that the provision available was typical of that available across the institution as a whole and includes a 'bank' of note takers/proof readers, ground floor tutorial rooms, separate examination facilities, examination papers printed in coloured paper, additional time for examinations, and assistance with impairment registration forms. As part of the Teachability exercise, schools are encouraged to identify improvements which could be made at subject, school, college and University levels. The Teachability report considered during ELIR includes six wide ranging recommendations, which identify the need for University discussions on the development of support strategies, more flexible scheduling of tutorials, improving building access arrangements, and ensuring that information on disability support on the website is up-to-date. Once a report has

been submitted, the Vice-Principal (Teaching & Learning) and the Senior Disability Adviser ensure that the recommendations are passed through the relevant channels and that the school receives appropriate feedback.

78 The University seeks to adopt a proactive approach to enhancing its provision for students with disabilities, and this is borne out by the scope of the Teachability project, which follows closely the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. In undertaking the project, key issues have been highlighted at a local level and schools have sought guidance at University level on the way in which, for example, tensions can be resolved surrounding a student's right to privacy and the need to inform members of teaching staff about any impairment a student may have. The completion of the 'Teachability' projects in all the colleges, and the implementation of the recommendations arising from these projects, will be an important step forward in enhancing provision for students with disabilities.

79 The University has agreed to fund a temporary post of Assistive Technology Adviser whose role is to assess the technological requirements of individual disabled students; to make recommendations as part of a student's Disabled Student's Allowance application; to assist students with the purchase and set up of specialist equipment; and to provide training on, and to initiate improvements to, the provision of assistive technology in University computer classrooms. The University has a wide-ranging system in place to support students with a disability, including University Disability Advisers; School Disability Co-ordinators; the consideration of disability related issues through the committee structure; and a rolling programme by Estates for improving access to University buildings. The results of recent annual surveys completed by disabled students indicate that 83-87 per cent of disabled students have expressed satisfaction with the support received, while some students identified perceived shortfalls. In discussion during ELIR, students expressed differing views about the availability of support, particularly in relation to the effectiveness of systems in place to

support examinations. Some students considered they had been well supported but others did not. The University is encouraged to continue to enhance its support for students with disabilities.

80 The University provides a range of support for international students, including English foundation courses, summer schools and a free pre-session intensive course, details of which are set out in the International Handbook. The University acknowledges that there has been a considerable increase in the work arising from new legal requirements and Home Office regulations relating to immigration (only three staff, all in Student Support, are 'qualified' under Home Office regulations to offer advice to international students on immigration matters). As a result, less time is available to provide students with wider pastoral support, including social support events and integration with the wider University community and local community.

Student retention and progression

81 The University is taking systematic steps to consider how to reduce the number of students who leave the University without an award. This approach has included the establishment of a working party of the University Committee for Teaching and Learning in 2000-01, the creation of a Retention and Progression Team in 2002 and the commissioning of research by the University's Centre for European Labour Market Research (2003).

82 The research report highlighted academic failure as the biggest cause of dropout, with the main problem occurring in the first year, particularly by students with low entry qualifications. The University has implemented the recommendations of the report including the revision of its progression regulations to provide students with an automatic right to repeat each year of the programme; the introduction of a formal system for monitoring students at risk using student record systems; and the establishment of an Academic Learning and Study Unit. The Academic Learning and Study Unit provides advice and support to colleges, schools and students including one-to-one advice sessions, workshops, in-course sessions and online

resources. In its first two years of operation, the Academic Learning and Study Unit has delivered a wide range of measures aimed at improving the student experience.

83 The University has also been an active participant in the 2003-04 national Quality Enhancement Theme, 'Responding to Student Needs'. The colleges have each engaged with the Theme, developing their provision for first year students in ways which address college-specific needs through, for example, enhanced induction and learning support arrangements.

84 The measures put in place by the University to improve retention and progression are showing signs of success and pass rates for those students reported 'at risk' have improved significantly. The systematic manner in which the University has responded to the problem of retention and progression has greatly improved the quality of academic support for students in the first year of study and represents good practice.

Academic, social and recreational environments

85 The University's approach to the improvement of its physical infrastructure includes a rolling programme of improvements to the University buildings. Currently these include major investment in projects such as the refurbishment of the MacRobert Building, the creation of the Student Centre, a new library, and indoor sports centre. The Student Centre will provide an improved resource bringing together the Students' Association and the Careers and Appointment Service. It was described by Students' Association officers as a 'dream project' which will make their services more visible, accessible and, in so doing, will enhance student support.

86 The rolling programme of improvements to the learning environment includes the refurbishment of the teaching laboratories in one school, highlighted by the University as a case study of how major investment in physical infrastructure can be used to improve teaching and learning. These spaces successfully integrate communication and information technology into practical laboratory teaching, with innovative

layout and design of collaborative work stations. The University's approach to the improvement of its estate is having a considerable positive influence on the development of the learning environment for students.

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

87 The University's approach to employability is set out in its Institutional Policy and Plan on the Provision of Career Education, Information and Guidance. The University Committee on Teaching and Learning has formal responsibility for reviewing and monitoring the quality of careers education, information and guidance (CEIG) provision including the review of CEIG policies every four years and assessment of CEIG provision as part of the Internal Teaching Review.

88 The University has actively engaged with the national 'Employability' Quality Enhancement Theme and, as part of that engagement, the University Committee on Teaching and Learning has appointed a working group to develop an employability strategy, which will provide an institutional framework and guidance for colleges and schools. The working group is convened by the Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) who also chairs the QAA Employability Steering Committee.

89 The Institutional Policy on CEIG highlights the role of the Careers and Appointments Service in providing guidance to students and individuals on careers management skills while schools specialise in the development of transferable skills that are particularly relevant to the discipline and to future employment. Currently the University is piloting an employability survey in two schools in two different colleges to increase awareness of what is meant by employability, to collect examples of good practice, and to identify gaps in provision and areas for future action. The survey will also identify training and support needs.

90 The University intends that its institutional employability strategy will provide an overarching framework to guide the development and

delivery of action plans at college and school levels for the promotion of employability in and through the curriculum, and will also build on the development of the partnership between the Students' Association and Careers and Appointments Service. This is a positive development which will provide guidance and support at discipline level for employability.

91 The Careers and Appointments Service have individual careers advisers who are responsible for specific discipline areas. Schools are encouraged to establish employers' liaison groups where these do not already exist. The Service explained in its 2004 annual report to the University Committee for Teaching and Learning that partnership agreements between the Careers and Appointments Service and schools continue to be made in parallel with Internal Teaching Reviews. Recent Internal Teaching Review reports show that there are inconsistencies in the extent and nature of CEIG provision between schools. These reports have also highlighted a number of good practices in particular schools including examples of Careers and Appointments Service collaborating with schools to develop courses focusing on placement and career skills.

92 The Careers and Appointments Service is also developing its relationship with the Students' Association, collaborating on initiatives such as the Future Skills Competition for students who work with the Students' Association's many clubs and societies. The University is also exploring options to accredit part-time and voluntary work through the Centre for Lifelong Learning.

93 The extent to which employers are used as points of reference, or on courses and programmes, varies between colleges and schools. There are a number of instances of good practice evident in some school where feedback on the curriculum is sought through employers' panels. There may be benefit in providing further institutional guidance on this matter. The graduate schools seek to emphasise skills training and development, highlight future employment possibilities including academic careers and maintain good links with

employers. One graduate school includes students on employers' liaison groups.

94 Overall, it is clear that careers guidance is an embedded part of the student experience at the University, although the awareness and engagement of the schools with the Careers and Appointments Service varies.

Personal development planning

95 The University is committed to introducing personal development planning (PDP), from 2005-06 as part of its teaching and learning and employability strategies. Currently, PDP is most advanced for postgraduate research students. The University has responded decisively to the national agenda in this area, allocating appropriate resources to the implementation of PDP. The University's postgraduate generic skills training will be centrally coordinated, and the institution has established a fixed-term appointment in the Educational and Staff Development Unit to develop provision in partnership with the colleges. In 2004-05, the University has had in place the Aberdeen Skills for Postgraduate Innovation, Research and Employability programme through which it has offered a wide range of training opportunities to students, including a session on PDP. Postgraduate students appreciate the greater emphasis now paid to generic training. There is a working group tasked with implementing PDP across the rest of the University. It is anticipated that this process will be supported by an on-line resource which will be made available to students through the Student Portal. A pilot of e-based undergraduate PDP was carried out in the School of Education in 2004-05, and a further pilot is planned for 2005-06. A paper-based PDP is currently being operated in the School of Medicine for students on the MBChB degree programme.

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

96 The University is committed to securing student involvement in its decision making processes in relation to quality assurance and

enhancement. Overall, the University involves students effectively through the formal committee structures at all levels, in working groups and forums, and through informal means. The University is aware of the need to seek the greater involvement of postgraduate students. Communications between staff and students at the University are good, and there are effective working relations between the Students' Association and senior staff of the University.

97 There are well-established academic support systems for students and these are complemented by the comprehensive support systems provided by the Directorate of Student Affairs and the Directorate of Information Systems and Services.

98 Support for academic staff to enable them to enhance their approaches to teaching and learning is very good, and is facilitated by an integrated approach to learning support services provided by the Directorate of Information Systems and Services. It is exemplified through collaborations between academic staff and the Learning Technology Unit in the use of virtual learning environment to deliver innovative, student-centred virtual learning experiences.

99 The University has been reflecting on the issue of student retention and progression over recent years and has taken steps to address this issue. The systematic manner in which the University has responded to the problem of retention and progression has greatly improved the quality of support for first year students, and represents good practice.

100 The University takes a proactive approach to enhancing its provision for students with disabilities. The completion of the Teachability projects in all colleges, and the implementation of the recommendations arising from these, will have a major impact on providing support for students with disabilities. The University is encouraged to continue to enhance its support for students with disabilities.

Effectiveness of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement

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

101 Since the establishment of the new *Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework* in 2003, the University has developed its approach to quality enhancement and, in particular, it has explored the institution's understanding of what the strategic management of quality means. The University has introduced its quality enhancement strategy, and a new college structure, both of which the University considers have substantially improved its ability to respond to the *Framework*.

Quality enhancement strategy

102 The quality enhancement strategy (QES) sets out the definitions, purpose and principles guiding the University's quality enhancement activities, and identifies the quality agents and procedures of its framework for quality assurance and enhancement. The quality enhancement strategy includes institutional-level action points which identify enhancement related activities for a particular academic year. The reciprocal relationship between the quality enhancement strategy and the University's Strategic Plan is also identified within the quality enhancement strategy itself.

103 The QES promotes a deliberate, coherent process of University-wide change. This is intended to be achieved through a culture of critical reflection on learning and teaching; closing of all feedback loops; joined-up thinking and actions; improving the flow of quality related information; and disseminating good practice. The University believes that while the QES provides a central framework to encourage and support enhancement in teaching and learning, the responsibility for undertaking enhancement activities rests primarily with staff in the University's schools and other academic units.

104 Responsibility for developing, monitoring and reviewing the quality enhancement strategy rests with the Quality Enhancement Strategy Team (QUEST) which acts as a central driving force for enhancement. QUEST is convened by the Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) and its membership includes the college directors of teaching and learning; the conveners of the academic standards committees; the Deputy Academic Registrar (Teaching and Learning); the assistant college registrars; a representative of the Directorate of Information Systems and Services; and the Students' Association Vice-President (Education).

105 QUEST is a subcommittee of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, to which it reports regularly. The substantial cross-membership between these two committees ensures that their areas of work are brought together. Through a combination of cross-membership and formal reporting, QUEST has links to the other University quality committees. These relationships ensure that the quality enhancement strategy embraces the full range of teaching and learning support activities.

106 Part of QUEST's remit is to implement, and keep under review, the 'SMART' institutional action points identified yearly within the QES. Sixteen action points were identified in the 2003-04 QES and, by February 2005, half of these had been completed with significant progress being made on the remaining targets; some targets were subsequently subsumed within larger projects, such as the teaching and learning strategy review. A further 18 action points have been identified in the 2004-05 QES. This significant programme of quality enhancement activity, and the achievement of these targets, confirms the progress made by QUEST over a two-year period.

The colleges

107 The reorganisation of the University into three colleges was designed to generate greater interdisciplinarity in both research and teaching, and to improve the management of quality assurance and enhancement. To take forward teaching and learning objectives, all

three colleges were required by the University to establish college teaching and learning committees, convened by college directors of teaching and learning who are, in turn, supported by assistant college registrars.

108 The college teaching and learning committees work with the QES in different ways, reflecting the distinctive identity, focus and approaches of the colleges. The University recognises that, for staff ownership of the QES to be meaningful, the strategy must fit with the priorities of the colleges, schools and their respective disciplines. The college teaching and learning committees which have quality enhancement as a major component of their remit, play a key role in raising awareness of the University's QES. This awareness raising has been facilitated by the clear links between the college teaching and learning committees and the links each college teaching and learning committee has with the central University committees and those in schools.

109 In discussion, staff spoke very positively about the University reorganisation and generally regarded it as a success. Staff expressed the view that the new structure enabled the distinctive nature of each college to be recognised, within an institutional strategic approach. Staff confirmed the significance of the college directors of teaching and learning and, in particular, the input of the school teaching and learning committees into the college quality enhancement activities. The committee structure facilitates the communication of the QES to staff at the course level, and promotes communication between schools and colleges and the institutional level.

Teaching and learning strategy

110 As part of the 2004-05 QES action, the University is undertaking a thorough review of its approach to teaching and learning, and is producing a new University-wide teaching and learning strategy. Previously, the University did not have a separate teaching and learning strategy, instead incorporating relevant targets in the Strategic Plan. The teaching and learning

strategy is being developed in the context of two chief strategic objectives: to be a research-led University ranked in the 'UK top 20'; and the ambition to enhance the quality and distinctiveness of the student learning experience. The purpose of the new strategy is to create a teaching and learning framework which will provide all students with greater opportunities to realise their potential. An interim report on the development of the teaching and learning strategy was presented to the Senate in May 2005. The finalised strategy will be considered by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning in October 2005, and by the Senate in November 2005.

111 A key element of the strategy is the Model of the Learner, which sets out what the University wants for, and expects of, its students. The Model seeks to encourage the development of the student as an autonomous self-aware learner, whose progress through their studies is marked by increasing independence of learning and initiative development. In encouraging this progressive development, the Model also seeks to identify what emphasis needs to be given to different types of teaching and learning, the acquisition of knowledge and skills and student support at different levels of study. The University states that it does not intend the Model to be prescriptive, leaving schools to determine how the Model will be implemented, recognising the distinctive nature of individual disciplines and the needs of their student communities.

112 In discussion, senior staff described the teaching and learning strategy as a major new initiative in which the relationship of learning and teaching to research, and the development of the Model of the Learner, provide clear strategic vision and focus for enhancement across the University. They anticipated that the consultation on the strategy would engender a productive debate amongst the University community. This was supported in discussion with wider groups of staff where a number confirmed that they are beginning to think more strategically about the use of research activity to inform teaching. A number of

examples were also identified in which student independent learning is encouraged. Students confirmed their support for the concept of progressively developed independent learning. Overall, it is clear that the draft teaching and learning strategy is beginning to shape a clear vision of enhancement which brings together a number of previously disparate strengths in research and pedagogy, and has considerable potential for the future development of the University.

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

113 The University highlights the significance of its Internal Teaching Review (ITR) (see above, paragraphs 34-36) process in identifying good practice and capturing it within the strategic planning process. Colleges are now required to comment on the action plans produced by a school as part of the ITR process and are also required to outline what they have learned from the ITR, including identifying issues for wider action or dissemination. On an annual basis, the Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) reviews that year's ITR reports, thus ensuring an institutional quality enhancement focused overview of ITR activity. The outcomes of these reflections inform college strategic plans for the following year.

114 The ITR process includes a one year follow-up report which fulfils a valuable enhancement function. These reports respond to the issues raised in the original report and show how they have been addressed. Examples provided during ELIR demonstrate that schools take a thorough and self critical approach. In discussion, staff highlighted that the questions posed by the ITR pro forma were useful in prompting them to re-appraise their approaches to teaching and learning. They emphasised that the process helps to identify strengths for dissemination and also weaknesses which can be addressed.

115 The University also makes use of external examiners' reports in a quality enhancement context, currently primarily through their

inclusion as part of the ITR submission. The current University review of the external examining system (see above, paragraphs 31-33) seeks to develop the quality enhancement potential of the external examiners' reports and a number of staff are reflecting on how external examiners' reports might move beyond identifying good practice to commenting on why and how the good practice is taking place.

116 In relevant disciplines the University makes use of professional and statutory bodies accreditation processes (see above, paragraph 38) to identify good practice and innovation. They have also been used to inform curriculum development.

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

117 The Strategic Plan contains an explicit commitment to the professional development of staff in teaching and learning and sets out a number of specific actions. The University identifies several institutional developments as having strengthened its capacity to achieve these strategic aims, including the establishment of an Educational and Staff Development Unit, a Learning Technology Unit, and an Academic Learning and Study Unit. The University has also established an Educational Development Sub-Committee (reporting to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning) to help coordinate the activities of these three units, and it has introduced college forums to inform and engage staff in staff development.

118 The University Management Group has approved in principle two proposals to enhance staff development for teaching and learning. The first involves placing responsibility for the design and delivery of continuing professional development for teaching and learning with the colleges and schools, supported by a central University unit, which would provide generic pedagogic advice and support. The second proposal involves grouping the resources of the existing individual units,

to form a single central group with the remit of supporting a substantial range of staff development related activities. A certain amount of staff development activity is organised currently at college level where teaching and learning committees initiate subject-specific staff development and this is regarded by staff as leading to more relevant activity. The college directors of teaching and learning fulfil an important role, ascertaining the needs of staff, identifying cross-college needs and working collaboratively with each other to establish forums in which staff can discuss quality enhancement opportunities. The recent proposals are likely to build on the existing examples of good practice in engaging staff at the college level to produce a managed institutional approach to staff teaching and learning related staff development.

119 The University's formal staff appraisal scheme was interrupted three years ago by restructuring and it has recently been re-introduced. At the time of ELIR all senior staff, including heads of school, had been appraised. Staff appraisal had also been completed in the College of Life Sciences and Medicine, but was less advanced in the other two colleges. In the longer term, the University intends to review its staff appraisal arrangements to include a form of measurement of assessment of contribution.

120 Currently, peer observation of teaching takes place as a matter of course during staff probation and in a limited number of other specific cases. The University recognises the desirability of a wider system of peer observation and one college is considering its implementation for 2005-06.

121 The University recognises that its policy on promotions does not reward excellence in teaching, particularly at the most senior level. To address this a strategic target for 2004-05 is to review promotions policies to ensure that teaching and student support activities are given appropriate recognition. The University is committed to introducing the new promotions policy by 2006-07.

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

122 The University has established a quality enhancement strategy (QES) which was approved in 2003. This defines the principles used to guide quality enhancement activities at all levels and identifies the bodies, procedures and specific actions necessary to bring about continual improvement. Fundamental to this is the development of a culture of critical reflection on all aspects of learning and teaching.

123 In parallel with the development of the QES has been the restructuring of the University into three colleges. This has given the University the opportunity to create a new teaching and learning infrastructure to improve its management of quality assurance and enhancement at college and school levels. A key feature of the new structure is the creation of college directors of teaching and learning, supported by college teaching and learning committees. The committee structure plays an important role in the successful communication of the QES between the school, college and University levels.

124 The University's QES has facilitated the development of a formal learning and teaching strategy which is designed to ensure that all students are given full opportunity to realise their academic potential, develop as autonomous, self aware learners, and make the most of the learning opportunities on offer in a research-led institution. This strategy, in draft form at the time of ELIR, has the potential to bring together the strategic priorities of both research and teaching, crystallised around the concept of the model of the learner.

125 The University has a clear commitment to the professional development of its staff for their roles in teaching and learning and is currently reviewing its provision for supporting the quality of its teaching and learning through staff development activities. The University is also reviewing its arrangements for recognising and rewarding excellence and innovation in teaching

and student support activities, and plans to introduce a new promotions policy in 2006-07.

126 The University has in place a range of policies and processes which include a focus on enhancement, and which are well understood and supported by staff. In particular, the University has an effective system of Internal Teaching Review (ITR) which encourages colleges and schools to reflect on the operation of their provision and undertake an enhancement focused review. The outcomes of ITR are reflected upon at University and college level and this informs the strategic planning process. Where the University's programmes are accredited by professional and statutory bodies, the process of accreditation is used to complement ITR in encouraging the enhancement of provision.

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

127 The QES identifies institutional-level actions and activities on an annual basis. A Quality Enhancement Strategy Team (QUEST) is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the quality enhancement strategy. QUEST acts as an information broker and as an agent of change across the institutional, college and school levels. It has made very significant progress over the two years since it was established. Through QUEST and the associated links between the school, college and institutional committee structures, the University has created a framework for the effective management of quality enhancement. This enables the colleges to develop their own approaches, driving innovation in a manner appropriate to their disciplines, within the context of the University's QES.

Summary

Background to the University and the ELIR method

128 The University of Aberdeen (the University), founded in 1495, is the third oldest university in Scotland and the fifth oldest in the UK. It is the descendent of two older universities which existed in the City and which were united in 1860 by Royal Ordinance. The University's governance was prescribed by the Universities (Scotland) Act of 1858 which created the University Court. In December 2001 the University merged with the Northern College of Education (Aberdeen campus).

129 The mission of the University is to be 'world class' and '...excellent in delivering learning and teaching, in undertaking research and commercialisation, in promoting research and scholarship, and in governance and management...and to be accessible and inclusive'.

130 The University is organised into three colleges with twelve associated schools. The College of Arts and Social Sciences contains the six schools of Divinity, History and Philosophy; Education; Language and Literature; Law; Social Science and the University of Aberdeen Business School. The College of Life Sciences and Medicine contains the four schools of Biological Sciences; Medicine; Medical Sciences; and Psychology. The College of Physical Sciences contains the two schools of Engineering and Physical Sciences; and the School of Geosciences. Graduate schools have been established in the College of Life Sciences and Medicine and in the College of Physical Sciences. A Graduate School is also being formed in the College of Arts and Social Sciences.

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

way the University approaches the management of quality, enhancement and academic standards. The University submitted two case studies with its RA. The first case study 'Virtual Experiences: An Illustration of Successful Collaboration' highlighted three examples of the experimental and productive collaborations between academic staff and the University's Learning Technology Unit to develop e-learning. The second case study: 'Refurbishment of the Zoology Labs G6 and G8: Enhancements to Practical Classes' described the design and fitting out of laboratories to provide environments with new opportunities for student learning and methods of teaching.

Overview of matters raised by the review

132 The University's quality enhancement strategy (QES) seeks to promote a deliberate, coherent process of University-wide change, and includes the identification of annual enhancement related activities and actions. At the time of the ELIR and, as part of its QES, the University was in the process of establishing a formal teaching and learning strategy developed in the context of its strategic research and teaching and learning objectives.

133 The particular themes pursued in the review included reorganisation of the University and the new college management structures; internal subject review processes and other quality assurance matters; student representation; the student learning experience and student support issues; and the embedding of its QES.

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

134 Overall, the University has effective quality assurance procedures. A notable feature is the University's demonstrable commitment to keeping policies and procedures under review to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. The University's Academic Quality Handbook provides comprehensive and accessible information and guidance to staff and students on all aspects of quality assurance.

The University has thorough procedures in place for approval, monitoring and review at the level of the course. The system of Internal Teaching Review (ITR) is a major strength of the University's quality assurance infrastructure and is particularly effective in ensuring that issues identified are followed up across the institution. There would be benefit in the University giving greater emphasis to some aspects of its quality assurance procedures at the programme level. In particular, the University should consider giving greater emphasis to programme level approval through the provision of more comprehensive documentation to the college teaching and learning committees and academic standards committees. There would also be benefit in the University developing more systematic programme monitoring, and in formally linking a system of annual programme monitoring to the use that the University makes of its external examiners, and student feedback.

135 The University's external examining system is effective. It could be strengthened further by the University building on and disseminating more widely the good practice evident in some schools for determining degree classification in borderline cases.

136 On the basis of these findings, there can be broad confidence in the University's current, and likely future, management of the quality of its provision and the academic standards of its awards.

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

137 The University has effective arrangements in place to ensure that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair. The quality and accessibility of information, particularly the accessibility afforded by the comprehensive web-based information, is a strength of the University.

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

138 The University is committed to securing student involvement in its decision-making processes in relation to quality assurance and enhancement. Overall, the University involves students effectively through the formal committee structures at all levels, in working groups and forums, and through informal means. The University is aware of the need to seek the greater involvement of postgraduate students. Communications between staff and students at the University are good, and there are effective working relations between the Students' Association and senior staff of the University.

139 There are well-established academic support systems for students and these are complemented by the comprehensive support systems provided by the Directorate of Student Affairs and the Directorate of Information Systems and Services.

140 There is very good support for academic staff to enable them to enhance their approaches to teaching and learning, facilitated by the learning support services provided by the Directorate of Information Systems and Services. This is exemplified through collaborations between academic staff and the Learning Technology Unit in the use of virtual learning environment to deliver innovative, student-centred virtual learning experiences.

141 The University has been reflecting on the issue of student retention and progression over recent years and is taking steps to address this issue. The systematic manner in which the University has responded to the problem of retention and progression has greatly improved the quality of support for first-year students, and represents good practice.

142 The University takes a proactive approach to enhancing its provision for students with disabilities. The University is currently undertaking an institution-wide 'Teachability Project' and the completion of the projects in all colleges, and the implementation of the

recommendations arising from these, will have a major impact on providing support for students with disabilities. The University is encouraged to continue to enhance its support for students with disabilities.

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

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144 In parallel with the development of the QES has been the restructuring of the University into three colleges. This has given the University the opportunity to create a new teaching and learning infrastructure to improve its management of quality assurance and enhancement at college and school levels. A key feature of the new structure is the creation of college directors of teaching and learning, supported by college teaching and learning committees. The committee structure plays an important role in the successful communication of the QES between the school, college and University levels.

145 The University's QES has facilitated the development of a formal learning and teaching strategy which is designed to ensure that all students are given full opportunity to realise their academic potential, develop as autonomous, self-aware learners, and make the most of the learning opportunities on offer in a research-led institution. This strategy, in draft form at the time of ELIR, has the potential to bring together the strategic priorities of both research and teaching, crystallised around the concept of the model of the learner.

146 The University has a clear commitment to the professional development of its staff for their roles in teaching and learning and is currently reviewing its provision for supporting the quality of its teaching and learning through staff development activities. The University is also reviewing its arrangements for recognising and rewarding excellence and innovation in teaching and student support activities, and is committed to the introduction of a new promotions policy in 2006-07.

147 The University has in place a range of policies and processes which include a focus on enhancement, and which are well understood and supported by staff. In particular, the University has an effective system of ITR which encourages colleges and schools to reflect on the operation of their provision and undertake an enhancement focused review. The outcomes of ITR are reflected upon at University and college level and this informs the strategic planning process. Where the University's programmes are accredited by professional and statutory bodies, the process of accreditation is used to complement ITR in encouraging the enhancement of provision.

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

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