

University of Strathclyde

APRIL 2005

Enhancement-led institutional review

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, the 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). QAA operates equivalent but separate processes in Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

Enhancement-led approach

Over the period 2001-2003, the QAA, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, Universities Scotland and representatives of the student body have 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.
- Enhancement-led institutional review (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

The 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 the 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 for 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 the 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 Enhancement-led institutional review

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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Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000

Fax 01452 557070

Email comms@qaa.ac.uk

Web www.qaa.ac.uk

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Linney Direct
Adamsway
Mansfield
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Tel 01623 450788

Fax 01623 450629

Email qaa@linneydirect.com

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Introduction

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

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 academic quality and standards in higher education* (Code of practice), published by QAA; subject benchmark information; and student, employer and international perspectives. Full detail on the method is 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. The 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 sets out 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 1998 QAA continuation audit report for the University, the Institutional Profile at 23 February 2005, the University's Strategic Plan 2003-07, A Guide to University Policy and Procedures for Teaching and Learning, the Management Handbook 2004-05, and the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses for 2005. The RA provided the focus for the review and was used to develop a programme of activities by the ELIR team to provide a representative illustration of the way the University approaches the management of quality, enhancement and academic standards.

5 The University submitted five case-studies with its RA. These illustrated the way in which the University seeks to encourage and manage quality enhancement. A common theme across the case-studies was the linkages between activity in departments and faculties and institutional strategy and processes. The case-studies illustrated:

- the impact of the University's Teaching and Learning Methodologies Initiative
- the ways in which the University seeks to facilitate communication with its staff and students and, in particular, how the use of virtual learning environment (VLE)

developments in certain areas of the institution has enhanced teaching and learning

- initiatives to improve retention and enhance the first-year experience
- one faculty's approach to progressing the quality enhancement agenda
- an example of a departmental quality enhancement initiative, which was supported through the University's devolved approach to organisational management.

6 Primary drafting responsibility for the RA lay with the Head of the Academic Office who was supported by the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching), the Deputy Secretary and the vice-deans. There was extensive consultation with staff in academic and support areas and with students. A final draft was approved by the Senate following consideration of previous drafts by heads of department, the Academic Committee, members of the Senate, and the Students' Association (USSA). The clear and evaluative nature of the RA provided a helpful starting point for the review.

7 The ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 2 and 3 March 2005 and the Part 2 visit took place between 18 and 22 April 2005.

8 At the beginning of the Part 1 visit, the ELIR team had an informal introduction to a group of senior University staff, followed by a programme of presentations and discussions involving staff and the President of USSA. The programme included a session led by the Principal focusing on the University's Strategic Plan, and a set of presentations by staff involved in some of the initiatives illustrated by the case-studies.

9 Part 1 continued with three further meetings involving groups of senior staff; students with a variety of representative roles; and a group of staff with an involvement in the University's departmental review process.

10 The Part 1 discussions enabled the ELIR team to explore a range of themes including

the role and function of the University's departmental and course review processes; its assessment practice; the nature and extent of the public information programme; the nature of the student experience and matters impacting on student retention; the nature and extent of academic support services; the linkage between the Strategic Plan and the institution's approach to quality enhancement; and the roles of key personnel in relation to the University's strategy for quality enhancement.

11 During Part 1, in addition to documentation that had been identified in the RA, the University made available supplementary information including the minutes of the main University committees 2003-2005; a set of University policies, procedures and guidelines; and a range of quality assurance reports. The information made available during Part 1, including the presentations and discussions with staff and students, enabled the ELIR team to develop a programme of meetings for the Part 2 visit.

12 The ELIR team comprised Mr Will Garton, Professor Barry Gower, Professor Morag Gray and Dr Bill Long (reviewers), and Ms Lucy Jack (review secretary). The review was coordinated on behalf of QAA by Ms Ailsa Crum, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

Background information about the institution

13 The University of Strathclyde's history dates back to 1796 when, following the vision set out in the will of John Anderson, his trustees established a 'place of useful learning' in the centre of Glasgow. By the early twentieth century it had become known as the Royal College of Science and Technology. In 1964, the Royal College merged with the Scottish College of Commerce to form the University of Strathclyde. The University expanded in 1993 when it merged with Jordanhill College of Education. The University considers that its mission of useful learning is reflected in its subject portfolio. It has the largest faculties of business, education and engineering in

Scotland and the third largest postgraduate population in the UK. It is structured into five faculties: Strathclyde Business School; Education; Engineering; Law, Arts and Social Sciences; and Science. The Faculty of Education is based on the Jordanhill Campus in the west of the city and the other four faculties are located on the John Anderson Campus in the city centre.

14 The University has had a strategic alliance, known as Synergy, with the University of Glasgow since 1998. Initially conceived as a research alliance, Synergy's scope has now expanded to include collaborations in teaching. Through Synergy the University has two joint departments with the University of Glasgow: Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering, and the Glasgow School of Social Work; and one joint graduate school: the Glasgow Graduate School of Law. In addition there are 17 joint undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and Synergy scholarships are offered to postgraduate research students who will graduate with a joint degree of the two Universities.

15 In 2004-05 the University had 15,500 full-time equivalent students registered on programmes leading to the award of a degree. The majority of its undergraduate population is full-time and over 90 per cent of undergraduate entrants are Scottish-domiciled. The University's postgraduate student population comprises a large number of part-time students and includes a large and growing number of students from overseas.

Institution's strategy for quality enhancement

16 In 2001, staff and students were consulted on how the University might best express a common view of its aims and objectives for the future. Their feedback informed the Strategic Plan (2003-07), which reaffirms the University mission of useful learning, and is focused around three development themes: innovative learning; research excellence; and personal and professional development.

17 The RA set out the University's firm belief that since innovation primarily depends upon releasing the potential of staff and encouraging well-informed and enthusiastic practitioners, the main focus of its quality enhancement strategy should be to create a culture and conditions that enthuse and motivate staff and students.

18 The University has identified the principal priorities of its strategy for quality enhancement as being:

- 'to achieve greater connectivity and synergy between and across the University's considerable quality enhancement endeavours
- to encourage and promote internal and external networking
- to encourage and promote the recognition and reward of effective innovators
- to increase beneficial learning from high quality national and international initiatives
- to improve internal and external communication of the University's strategy and of progress with it
- to monitor progress and regularly reflect on the efficacy and continuing appropriateness of the strategy'.

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

19 The RA stated that the University is managed through a system which successfully marries academic and managerial values. The Court is the overall governing body with responsibility for the management of the University's resources. It has ownership of the

Strategic Plan. In addition to receiving annual reports from faculties and senior officers, after each meeting Court members visit one of the academic departments to hear about the departmental strategy for learning and teaching, research, and resource management. The Senate is responsible for all academic matters within the University. Its membership comprises the senior officers, heads of department, elected professorial, non-professorial and research staff, together with the President and Deputy President of USSA. All the vice-deans (academic) are entitled to attend.

20 The University Management Group (UMG) is the central executive body, advising the Court and Senate on policy, and on financial, academic and strategic management matters, as well as having executive authority for decision making in a range of areas. It is chaired by the Principal. The Convener of Court and the President of USSA are invited to attend but are not members. The Strategy Management Group reports to the UMG and is responsible for ensuring that individual budget holders are acting in accord with the strategic direction of the University.

21 The RA explained that considerable responsibility is vested in individual managers. At University level the Vice-Principal, Pro-Vice Principal and the three deputy principals are described as playing a 'pivotal role'. Deans, vice-deans and heads of department have important managerial roles in their faculties and also contribute to corporate University policy through their participation in key University committees. The University identifies as distinctive its focus on the department as the primary academic unit and its emphasis on faculty level management.

22 The RA stated that the University operates 'a multi-layered approach to quality and standards', in which staff at all levels take responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning. Operating within 'intentionally flexible' institutional guidelines, departments and faculties are said to be 'free to

operate in the way best suited to their needs'. The RA explained that 'each faculty has developed its own infrastructure for ensuring the quality of learning and teaching', and that this 'devolved system of responsibility' allows 'academic staff the freedom to innovate at individual, departmental and faculty levels'. The RA also emphasised that the University looks 'for some consistency of output to enable it to form a view of the effectiveness of practice across the institution and therefore to substantiate effective quality assurance'.

23 The Academic Committee is responsible to the Senate for monitoring quality assurance procedures and practices at the institutional level, as well as advising Senate on their adequacy. It provides an overview of the faculty reporting exercise (see below, paragraph 30) to the UMG and the Senate. Staff explained that this mechanism enables 'comparison of processes and aspects of performance across departments and faculties as a basis for strategic action'.

24 A subcommittee of the Academic Committee, the Advisory Group on Student Progress and Examinations Monitoring (AGSPEM) is responsible for monitoring undergraduate and postgraduate student progress, undergraduate pass rates and the follow-up to any significant comments from external examiners.

25 The Vice-Principal, as the current University senior officer with responsibility for learning and teaching, chairs both the Academic Committee and AGSPEM. The vice-deans (academic) are responsible for coordinating the links between the department and faculty, and between the faculty and the Academic Committee. The RA described the Academic Committee as an essential forum for interaction between the vice-deans (academic), faculty officers, the Academic Office and the Vice-Principal.

Internal approval, monitoring and review

Course and class approval

26 The University uses the terms 'course' and 'class' when referring to what might be described in other parts of the sector as 'programme' and 'module' respectively.

27 The RA explained that the 'standards of degree courses are set initially by subject experts at department level'. The approval processes for new courses and classes are set out in the University's Procedures and Guidelines for Course and Class Approval. New course proposals are required to include the course rationale which should be informed by consultation with external examiners and potential employers, detailed information about the curricular content, a programme specification, draft course regulations and an indication of the resource implications. New class proposals contain similar information and include details of delivery and assessment methods. Proposals are moderated through a faculty approval process that follows institutional guidelines. This begins with discussion in the relevant department and faculty, following which the proposals are considered by the faculty board of study and, finally, passed to the Senate. Regulatory aspects are scrutinised, following Senate approval, by the University Ordinances and Regulations Committee. The ELIR team learnt that the University is considering introducing electronic pro forma to standardise and streamline the academic and operational information provided in new course and class proposals.

28 The ELIR team discussed the process with staff and considered a range of documentation including sample course approval documentation from each of the five faculties. Although the submission documentation varied in detail, all accorded with the institutional guidelines. The team was also able to confirm that the arrangements align with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review*.

Course and class monitoring

29 Courses and classes are monitored annually within departments. The University's commentary on the procedure indicated that the details of the processes used are 'many and varied' across the University. The RA explained that all processes used are informed by consideration of centrally provided information about admissions, progression and completion; student feedback; external examiners' reports; and the involvement from professional and statutory bodies (PSBs) and other stakeholders. Outcomes of the monitoring processes are considered at faculty level, either at meetings of heads of department or through the faculty committee's scrutiny of departmental reports.

30 There is an institutional template for annual Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Reports, which requires the reports to include a summary of teaching and learning monitoring and review activity, and to identify any developments. The reports are assembled by the relevant vice-dean (academic) and faculty officer, and are considered by the Academic Committee and by the Vice-Principal.

31 The ELIR team discussed the course and class monitoring process with staff and read a range of documentation relating to the operation of the process across the University. The team noted the central role played by the vice-deans (academic) in interpreting and ensuring adherence to the University's policies and procedures at departmental and faculty levels. This role is of particular importance during course monitoring, given the diversity of methods used for that purpose. The team concluded that the methods of course and class monitoring in place work well, and are in accord with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review*.

Departmental review

32 The RA pointed out that the University has been carrying out Departmental Reviews since the 1980s and that the process used has developed over time. The University believes it is essential to recognise the context within

which teaching and learning takes place, therefore its Departmental Review process considers the 'entire spectrum' of each department's activity: learning and teaching, scholarship, research, management, facilities and resources.

33 Institutional guidelines detail the arrangements for the process which operates on a five-year cycle. Review panels are appointed at faculty level and consider a set of information compiled by the department including plans for developments in learning, teaching and assessment, together with course and class review outcomes, external examiner reports, recruitment, progression and completion statistics and departmental committee business. Panels comprise the dean or a vice-dean, one or more members of staff from other departments within the faculty, a member of staff from another faculty, and one or more members external to the University. During a day-long visit, panels meet academic, support and student members of the department.

34 Departmental Review reports are considered by the relevant faculty board and are also passed to the faculty planning committee and the Vice-Principal. The faculty board monitors the department's response to the report's recommendations through a six-month follow-up report. A summary of the review outcomes and proposed follow-up action is included in the annual Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Report to the Academic Committee and the UMG (see above, paragraph 30). Information on the six month follow-up report is included in the following year's faculty report.

35 The RA pointed out that some faculties also operate systems of regular course review in parallel with the Departmental Review process. Where course review is used, it is generally intended to consider interdisciplinary or joint courses where more than one department is involved in course delivery.

36 The University has, at various times, given careful consideration to the inclusion of students on the Departmental Review panels

but on each occasion it has been concluded that the wide coverage of the reviews, with much material that would have limited immediate concern to students, militates against this. Representatives from USSA who met the ELIR team shared this view. Staff pointed out that there were opportunities for students to comment on elements of the material departments submitted and that students' views were sought during the panel one-day visit (see below, paragraph 93). The team noted that the Academic Committee intended to keep under review the possibility of including students on Departmental Review panels.

37 The ELIR team had helpful discussion with staff and students who had taken part in recent Departmental Reviews. In particular, it was stressed to the team that despite the wide-ranging nature of the one-day review visit, consideration of the documents before the visit allowed the panel to devote attention to matters relating to learning and teaching. An advantage of the panel composition was that it included members already familiar with the department and it was explained that this assisted in focusing attention on the relevant issues rather than spending time understanding operational detail. The inclusion on the panels of members external to the faculty and the University prevents any potential insularity.

38 In addition to its discussions with staff and students, the ELIR team considered a wide range of material relating to the Departmental Review process. The team learnt that because of the need for departments to reflect on how best to address the panels' recommendations, the process from review to reporting of follow-up activity in the annual Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Reports could take up to 18 months depending on the timing of the review. This seemed potentially a long response time, but the team considered that this was off set by the impact of recent revisions to the template for the annual reports which requires fuller details to be included of the action taken than previously. In these annual reports, faculties are also required to highlight areas of good practice identified in

Departmental Reviews which might be applicable to other parts of the University, and the team saw a number of examples of this within the annual reports.

39 The ELIR team considered the evaluative nature of the faculty reports, supported by University templates, to be a positive feature. The reports are a valuable source of information relating to the security of standards and the assurance of quality, and have more recently been developed into instruments capable of capturing and disseminating good practice. Overall, the team formed the opinion that the University's Departmental Review process operates in a robust manner which is consistent with the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review* and SHEFC guidelines.

External examining and assessment practices

40 The RA indicated that the University views the role of the external examiner as a key element in its quality assurance and monitoring system and in the maintenance of the standards of its awards. The RA also stated that the University's management of its external examining arrangements is guided by the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*.

41 External examiners' reports are considered within departments and inform the annual course and class monitoring process. For each report, a commentary and response is sent to the vice-dean (academic) and made available to the external examiner. A composite report of external examiners' comments for each faculty is prepared by the Academic Office and is discussed at faculty level and at the University AGSPEM (see above, paragraph 24).

42 The ELIR team learnt that external examiners are asked specifically to comment on whether course aims are appropriate with reference to subject benchmark statements, the SCQF and professional body requirements. The team also learnt that the format for faculties presenting external examiners' comments to the University AGSPEM has been changed recently to enable better monitoring of

departmental responses, a development which is also intended to help monitor the prompt receipt of reports from external examiners. The team formed the view that the University has in place an external examining system that, through interactions between departments, faculties and institutional committees, ensures appropriate checking takes place to secure academic standards. Further, the team noted that by including in the pro forma for the external examiner's report an invitation to comment on areas of good practice, and by departments similarly being asked how identified good practice might be promoted, the University is developing the quality enhancement potential of the process.

Assessment

43 The 1998 continuation audit report invited the University to consider the advisability of developing and applying a single, institution-wide model for degree classification. The report also invited the University to consider the desirability of introducing greater transparency and explicitness to its marking conventions for student work at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

44 During the Part 1 visit, the ELIR team learnt of the University's commitment to 'improving assessment techniques'. It also learnt that the Academic Committee had produced, in consultation with faculties, institutional procedures and guidelines relating to summative assessment. The guidelines acknowledge the variety in the exact nature and circumstances of different assessments, and therefore permit faculties and departments to have additional local procedures.

45 The University document, *A Guide to University Policy and Procedures for Teaching and Learning*, states that some courses 'with the approval of Senate, apply compensation schemes at final and in some cases earlier stages of study'. The use of compensation arrangements and the range of compensation schemes in use across the institution, have been debated a number of times in University committees. At a recent meeting, the Senate

invited the Academic Committee to give further consideration to reducing the number and variety of such schemes, in recognition of the significant benefits which could be gained by adopting a more standard compensation scheme across the University. The ELIR team would encourage the University to give further consideration to its use of compensation schemes.

46 The ELIR team noted that University-wide undergraduate marking criteria are now in use and that honours degree classifications have been standardised. The University has also adopted a common Pass mark for taught postgraduate classes. These arrangements are set out in the Guide to University Policy and Procedures for Teaching and Learning. In discussions with the team, students confirmed that they are made fully aware of marking criteria, the manner in which degree classifications are calculated and similar assessment-related information. From its discussions with staff, the team also learnt that the University had recently led a successful bid for SHEFC funding in connection with the development of innovative assessment methods. Overall, the team formed the opinion that the University has made significant advances at the institutional level in the management of assessment.

Collaborative provision

47 The University's strategic alliance with the University of Glasgow (see above, paragraph 14) includes collaborative teaching that is currently administered by the University of Strathclyde. The RA stated that, while 'the Senates of both institutions are jointly and severally responsible for the maintenance and oversight of educational provision, quality assurance and enhancement, and the academic standards of the programme, this responsibility is discharged in accordance with the procedures of the administering University'. The RA explained that the University has a number of other collaborative agreements which are subject to similar arrangements in respect of quality and academic standards. The University also has validation and articulation agreements

with several UK institutions, some of which are overseen by joint groups reporting to the Senate and an institutional Board of Management. The University has arrangements with a number of overseas institutions for accelerated entry into certain courses, and others in which specified overseas institutions provide resource and support for University distance-learning programmes. The RA indicated that all such provision follows the University's guidelines on collaboration which adhere to the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

48 The ELIR team noted that the University's collaborative provision is subject to the same approval processes used for mainstream courses. Departments and faculties are responsible for monitoring and reviewing collaborative programmes in which they are engaged. In discussions with staff, the team learnt that although details of how monitoring and review is carried out depends on the kind of collaborative arrangement involved, in each case it involves processes comparable in rigour, and in some cases identical, to those used for the equivalent University-based provision. The team also learnt that where a validated course has a University of Strathclyde campus-based equivalent, a common external examiner is used.

49 The template for the self-analysis used in the Departmental Review process (see above, paragraph 33) requires reflection on 'the success or otherwise of existing collaborative provision and any developments in this area that are in progress or in prospect'. The template for the annual Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Reports also asks for information relating to collaborative provision, including the faculty's view of its continued validity and viability. Data on progression and completion relating to collaborative provision are considered, like that for other classes and courses, by the University AGSPEM. The ELIR team heard from staff, and was provided with documentation, about a recent modification to a collaborative agreement that had arisen from such monitoring.

50 The ELIR team formed the view that the University's arrangements for monitoring and reviewing its collaborative provision have the potential to work effectively, given the key role of the vice-deans (academic) in interpreting and ensuring adherence to the University's policies and procedures. The team concurred with the University's view that its management of collaborative provision adheres to the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

Research degrees

51 The University has identified the need for further work in the area of monitoring and maintaining academic standards in relation to research degrees. Currently, a cross-faculty Graduate Council, chaired by one of the deputy principals, advises the UMG on postgraduate matters. Research programmes operate in accordance with an institutional policy and code of practice that was updated in 2002. In some faculties, vice-deans (research) perform a function in interpreting and ensuring adherence to institutional requirements, and a head of department or vice-dean monitors research student progress, a process taken into account in Departmental Review. At institutional level, the AGSPEM tracks trends in research student performance.

52 To address the identified need for further work in this area, the University is reviewing the composition and remit of the Graduate Council and is revising its policies and procedures for research programmes, taking into account the Joint Funding Council's consultation paper on improving standards in research programmes and the recent revision to the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

53 The ELIR team regarded the University's review of its policies and procedures as a positive measure. The team was provided with draft versions of the revised University policy and code of practice for research programmes, and received a draft copy of new guidelines for external examiners of research degrees. The team considered that the University is making

good progress in maintaining standards and strengthening its assurance of the quality of the research student experience.

Overview of the use made of external reference points for assuring quality and standards

54 The RA indicated that, within departments, the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, subject benchmark statements and PSB accreditation criteria are key reference points. It went on to state that these external reference points also inform the continuous review and updating of institutional policy and procedures undertaken by the Academic Committee, the Graduate Council and other groups. Several institutional procedures and guidelines connected with quality assurance explicitly take account of the sections of the *Code of practice*, and the policy and guidelines for research degrees were being revised at the time of ELIR to reflect recent revisions to that section of the *Code*.

55 In relation to the SCQF, the RA stated that the University has used the credits and levels currency of the SCQF for all courses from the 2003-04 intake, and this is expressed in the University's framework for undergraduate awards. The Regulations for Postgraduate Instructional Degrees are being revised in the current session. The University Calendar sets out the minimum credit requirements for each level of undergraduate award and the ELIR team noted that these were lower than the minimum credits specified for each award in the SCQF.

56 Within the terms of the University's framework, minimum requirements of credit attainment are set for awards within particular courses. The RA identified that for certain courses in two of the five faculties, degrees could be awarded on completion of less than the minimum number of credits identified in the SCQF. It was explained that this was in order to give students the flexibility to take elective classes in faculties which use a different credit tariff to their 'home' faculty. The ELIR team noted from the University Calendar that

Pass and honours degrees in the other three faculties also required fewer than the minimum credits. The RA went on to state that, in practice, very few students graduated with fewer than the minimum credits specified in the SCQF, and this was confirmed in the team's discussions with staff.

57 Staff acknowledged to the ELIR team that the use of credit-based systems for describing courses had been adopted relatively recently in the University, and that some variation between different parts of the institution, and an apparent incomplete alignment between the University framework and the SCQF in part reflected this. In discussion, staff expressed readiness to reflect on how the University regulations might better represent the credits actually attained by the majority of students. The team considered that this would be helpful.

58 The ELIR team noted that there is also variation across the University in the requirements for the award of integrated master's degrees. In some cases the award could be made on the attainment of less than the 600 credit points indicated in the SCQF. In all of the cases noted by the team, the award required attainment of less SCQF level 11 credits than the minimum specified in the SCQF. The University document, Policy Procedures and Guidelines: Summative Assessment, explained that where master's level classes include material also used at SCQF level 10, the learning outcomes are, in practice, assessed at SCQF level 11. The team formed the view that there would be benefit in the University making the level of attainment of such outcomes more explicit.

59 The ELIR team noted that University policy and guidance concerning many aspects of quality assurance and the maintenance of academic standards make reference to aspects of the Academic Infrastructure. For example, the guidelines for course approval, guidelines for annual departmental reports to faculties, the self-evaluations submitted prior to Departmental Reviews, and the template for external examiner reports all include prompts to refer to elements of the Academic

Infrastructure and other external reference points. From the samples provided, the team was able to confirm that appropriate attention was given to the range of reference points.

60 The ELIR team was satisfied that the University, through extensive references to the Infrastructure in its processes, and through its widely disseminated document A Guide to University Policy and Procedures for Teaching and Learning, together with supplementary material, generally operates in accordance with the precepts of the Academic Infrastructure. The team was also satisfied that, through the activity of the vice-deans (academic) and of the Academic Committee, the University has mechanisms to ensure adherence to the University Guide and its supplements, and through them, to the Academic Infrastructure. The team was interested to learn of a mechanism of 'bottom-up' comment on institutional teaching and learning policy. The template for the annual Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement report asks whether there are areas in which faculty practice is not consistent with University policy, and it also asks whether there are aspects of University policy or guidelines that the faculty believes require updating. The team noted examples of faculties reporting self-correction of minor deviations from institutional guidelines.

61 The ELIR team reached the conclusion that with the minor reservations identified in relation to the SCQF (see above, paragraphs 57 and 58), the University currently makes appropriate use of external reference points, including the Academic Infrastructure, in assuring the quality and academic standards of its awards.

Programme specifications

62 The RA included the specification of courses in the set of mechanisms used by the University to maintain the standards of its academic awards and each new course proposal must include a programme specification. The ELIR team learned that programme specifications are routinely scrutinised and, if necessary, updated as part

of the annual course monitoring exercise. Exemplars to assist those framing proposals for new courses are provided on the University website. The team saw a number of completed programme specifications which, although varying in the quantity of detail provided, all contained the material specified in SHEFC guidance concerning information to be made accessible on or through the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website.

63 The ELIR team was interested to learn that the University is considering introducing an institutional template for the production of programme specifications, and is also considering producing specifications in a format readily accessible for their potential readers in addition to those concerned with scrutinising course proposals.

Personal development planning

64 Throughout the review, it was clear to the ELIR team that the University places a strong emphasis on the practical relevance of its curricula, making frequent references to its founder's aim to establish a 'place of useful learning' (see above, paragraph 13). The RA highlighted that personal and professional development, with enhanced employability as a clear outcome, is a key element of the University's Strategic Plan, along with the explicit intention to develop students' key skills.

65 In 2003, the University formed a Key Skills and Progress Files Group, which later became known as the Student Personal Development Planning Group. The remit of the Group was, with the involvement of USSA, to take forward the introduction and promotion of personal development profiles. Endorsed by the Senate, separate pilot projects ran in all faculties during 2003-04. The ELIR team heard that currently personal development planning (PDP) provision is available to just under half of all first-year undergraduates and is planned to be available for all first-year students from 2005-06. There are also plans to extend the PDP provision to research and taught postgraduate students and to students studying on courses involving articulation agreements.

66 The ELIR team noted statements, made in 2003, by the Principal and USSA President to the University community strongly endorsing the provision of PDP facilities. Clear and succinct explanations of PDP and its potential benefits for students, staff and the University as a whole are available on the University website. The team also noted references to PDP throughout a range of documentation at faculty and institutional levels. The team learned that implementation of the processes was devolved to the local level and therefore sensitive to the internal and external dynamic of each undergraduate programme. The team heard that the University was encouraging faculties and departments to embed PDP across the curriculum and this was happening in many areas, with others preferring to implement PDP within discrete, credit-bearing classes.

67 In its discussion with staff and students, it was apparent to the ELIR team that the different parts of the University are variously but very actively engaged in PDP implementation. This momentum was also evident indirectly, in some of the case-studies presented during the Part 1 visit which severally demonstrated considerable innovative practice connected with professional development. In discussion with the team, students understandably showed various degrees of awareness of PDPs, depending on the stage of the curriculum that they had reached. The team noted that students had been involved in PDP implementation through membership of the Student PDP working group (see above, paragraph 65) and through their engagement in focus groups convened by the USSA. The team also heard that students had been consulted about PDP within the faculties. Further, a recent USSA training session for student representatives had included consideration of PDPs. The team learned that mechanisms by which staff were to support student needs during PDP provision differed in different parts of the University and that, in some areas, PDP implementation had acted as a catalyst for the revision of student support practice (see below, paragraph 101).

68 The ELIR team gained a strong impression of purposeful collegiate engagement with a strategy that the University believes to be of fundamental importance. The team also formed the view that the trialling of diverse models sensitive to different needs in different faculties has provided the University with a very positive opportunity to enhance the process by sharing emerging good practice.

Professional and statutory bodies and employers

69 All eligible programmes within the University are approved and/or accredited by their respective PSBs, and the RA cited instances in which the University is one of only a few institutions receiving accreditation from particular bodies. Over 50 per cent of undergraduates and about 90 per cent of taught postgraduates study on approved/accredited programmes, for which ongoing accreditation was said to provide an assurance of threshold standards.

70 The 1998 continuation audit report welcomed the University's declared intention of strengthening further its institution-wide strategy for considering reports from PSBs. The ELIR team noted that consideration of PSB criteria is a required element of a range of the University's processes, including new course approval, annual course monitoring and Departmental Review. Information concerning PSB accreditation reports and how issues arising from them are to be addressed forms part of the annual Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Report to the Academic Committee.

71 The ELIR team reached the view that the University now has an effective framework in place in which PSB reports can be considered within departments and faculties, and whereby the process can be monitored at institutional level.

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

72 The University's internal mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing quality and academic standards are secure and subject to suitable checks. The annual course and class monitoring arrangements are moderated at faculty level, and the five-year Departmental Review process is monitored at institutional level through the Academic Committee.

73 The University is engaged in a number of activities that illustrate its willingness and capacity to adjust its processes to enhance practice connected with assuring quality and maintaining academic standards. These include the development of guidelines and procedures for summative assessment, the adoption of a single model for degree classification, the formal embedding of learning outcomes into course and class information, and the revision of quality assurance mechanisms for postgraduate research programmes. While the University has made a number of improvements in its management of assessment, it is encouraged to pursue its intention to reconsider its use of compensation schemes.

74 The University achieves a successful balance between its devolved system of responsibility and its requirement for consistency of output, having effective mechanisms in place to moderate practice in the departments. There are examples, such as the University's encouragement of diverse approaches to PDP implementation, where the part-devolved quality management system not only shows sensitivity to the diverse needs of its constituent parts, but provides opportunities for allowing success in one area to inform practice in others.

75 The University emphasises the importance of the role played by the vice-deans (academic) in ensuring there is effective communication between departments, faculties and the institutional committees. They were described as a 'fulcrum' on which the balance between

departmental and faculty autonomy, and institutional strategy and oversight in quality assurance and standards maintenance rests. The information gained through ELIR accords with that view, and suggests that their importance in helping the University to elicit enhancement of practice from quality assurance monitoring is likely to grow.

76 Recent revisions to the annual Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Reports are positive, providing a potentially powerful tool with which good practice might be captured and shared. A similar opportunity to identify possible enhancements from existing processes is provided within the arrangements for receiving and commenting on external examiners' reports.

77 Attention to external reference points, including the Academic Infrastructure, forms an important element in guiding the University's quality assurance processes. The University's regulations make it possible for students in some areas of study to receive awards having achieved less than the minimum credit requirements set out in the SCQF although, in practice, this affects very few students. The University is encouraged to consider the alignment of its awards framework and regulations with the SCQF.

78 The University is implementing PDP with the strong support of senior managers and the close involvement of students. The expressed intention to embed it across all provision as part of the student learning experience is a laudable one, fully compatible with the University's Strategic Plan.

79 Overall, consideration of the effectiveness of the institution's internal review systems suggests that 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

80 The RA stated that designated senior officers of the University are responsible for the accuracy of its key planning and policy documents, which are published following the approval of the Senate or Court, as appropriate. Publications intended primarily for internal use, for example, information about student services and the component parts of the Handbook for Heads of Department, are produced by managers of the appropriate support or central administrative services. Faculty, departmental, course and class publications are the responsibility of faculties and departments. The ELIR team noted that the standard terms and conditions for collaborative agreements specify that the University will approve all publications pertaining to the course prior to their publication or distribution.

81 Following a review of the previous arrangements, the University has brought together the services responsible for the University's main external publications within a new Office of Marketing and Communications. The University intends that this should ensure greater coordination of recruitment practice and the continued provision of fair and accurate information to prospective students and other interested parties. In 2002, the University convened a Web Steering Group to undertake a comprehensive review of its website and, in 2003, work commenced on the Web Development Plan, a key recommendation of which was that a content management system should be introduced to ease the design, use and updating of web material, and to develop the Registry staff and student information server (known as PEGASUS) and integrate it with the two main VLEs used in the University.

82 From the RA and meetings with staff, the ELIR team learnt that the University has actively engaged in discussions concerning information to be mounted on the TQI website, and is currently preparing that material.

83 From its consideration of a wide range of information, the ELIR team found that, in general, the material was of a high standard and appropriate to its several functions. The University document, A Guide to University Policy and Procedures for Teaching and Learning, and its supplements provide a particularly clear and concise overview of institutional requirements regarding academic standards and quality assurance, which is essential given that significant elements of the University's systems are devolved. These documents appeared to be well known to the staff that the team met and the University has indicated its intention to update the content and disseminate that even more widely among staff.

84 In discussion with the ELIR team, students expressed general satisfaction with the appropriateness and accuracy of the information provided to them before entry and through their curriculum. The students valued the website as a source of information about advice and support. There was variation in the style and content of the sample student handbooks provided for the team, but generally they were of a high standard.

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

85 The measures taken to improve further the coordination of activity relating to the publication of material for external use are very positive, and are likely to enhance the University's ability to maintain and monitor the accuracy and quality of such information. The University's promotion and support of a web-based information system represents very positive practice. The emerging system has great potential for improving the accessibility and accuracy of administrative information and, in doing so, is likely to enhance the communication of information about resources and support to students. It is also likely to benefit the student learning experience through the development of a managed learning environment.

86 The content and presentation of student course handbooks is, generally, good. There are no institutional guidelines concerning their content or presentation and there would be benefit in the University considering the development of such guidelines, in particular, to ensure the handbooks are accessible to all students.

87 Overall, the University has secure arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair.

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

88 The University believes the student voice is critical to its promotion of an effective learning experience, and a focus on students can be found in all its strategic documents. The University is proud of its cooperative relationship with USSA. Both the University and USSA identify the quality of their interrelationship as one of the institution's 'great strengths'. The wider student body is represented by the USSA Executive on the main University committees, notably the UMG, the Senate and the Court, and on committees concerned with student support services, such as the Disability Advisory Group. The Senate-Student Committee advises the Senate on policy and regulations relating to student services and considers matters of mutual concern. In addition, the Principal and the USSA President meet every six weeks.

89 USSA is routinely consulted on matters of relevance to students, for example, on PDP (see above, paragraph 65). USSA is also consulted from time to time by individual faculties and departments, for example, the Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Sciences involved USSA when developing its peer mentoring scheme (see

below, paragraph 110). Similarly, the Faculty of Education consulted USSA as part of a faculty review of academic counselling (see below, paragraph 100).

90 USSA aims to consult as widely as possible with its membership and seeks views through a range of mechanisms. Throughout the University, there are a variety of constituencies for student representation: class, course, subject or year representatives, based in departments and faculties. Both USSA and the University work hard to ensure that USSA can coordinate student representation and communications throughout the devolved system. In seeking to do so, USSA is dependent on information provided by departments and faculties, and the University and USSA have worked together to bring about significant improvements in the return rate of this information. It is anticipated that USSA will have a complete database of student representatives from 2005-06.

91 The professional staff in USSA, together with staff from the University's central services, provide training for members of the USSA Executive at the beginning of each session. Training is also offered to all student representatives and, as part of the partnership between the University and USSA, this is provided by USSA. In 2004-05, USSA offered two tailored training sessions to student representatives: an introduction to student representative skills and advanced student representative skills. Both sessions were repeated over a number of days to maximise attendance. USSA also provides a handbook and briefing material for student representatives which is available through the USSA website. USSA is in communication with the national student information service, student participation in quality Scotland (sparqs), and this year distributed the sparqs Course Representative Handbook to all those who attended USSA training sessions. In addition, student representatives have the opportunity to attend a programme of key skills training sessions provided by the USSA Student Training Team, a group of students who have undergone a 'Training the Trainers' certificate

offered through the National Student Learning Programme. These sessions are held throughout the year and are open to all the University's students.

92 Student feedback to inform the course and class monitoring and review processes is obtained through staff/student committees, class/course-specific questionnaires and the University-wide questionnaire. The University-wide questionnaire is available for students to complete electronically through PEGASUS. The University has recognised that although Departmental Reviews investigate department's responses to student feedback and the ways in which students are informed of the outcomes, some student representatives have highlighted difficulties associated with the communication of the outcomes between the University and students. This was borne out in discussions with students who believed their views were valued and actively sought but were less clear about how their feedback influenced or impacted on provision. As a possible mechanism for addressing this, the University highlighted that from 2005-06, the database of student representatives (see above, paragraph 90) will be linked to the University VLE to facilitate communication with and between student representatives and between the representatives and their constituencies. There may also be benefit in the University reflecting on the diverse range of tools that can be used to gather, and respond to, student feedback rather than relying on electronic mechanisms which may have poor response rates.

93 Students' views are captured as part of the Departmental Review process (see above, paragraphs 32-39) but there is considerable variation in the ways this occurs in practice. All Departmental Review panels meet with groups of students but the style of these meetings can differ in their degree of formality. In discussion, students considered that they had contributed positively to the exercise and that their opinions had been taken into account. There was less clarity about how their views had impacted on provision. The University could enhance the Departmental Review process by reflecting

further on how it could adopt a more consistent approach to engaging students, as well as providing information to students on action taken.

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

94 The University seeks to support and enhance learning and teaching in ways which emphasise the autonomy of student learning, and it aims to offer a learning experience as innovative and dynamic as any in UK higher education.

Learning resources and environment

95 In recent years, the University has invested significantly in teaching infrastructure and in IT developments. For example, it has invested in managed teaching clusters of refurbished adjacent rooms with extensive multimedia facilities in order to improve the physical learning environment and support new teaching methods. It has also developed a secure, web-based student portal, PEGASUS, which provides access to personal and curriculum information, and is integrated with the VLE.

96 Originating from experience in the Faculty of Science which has had a VLE in place for some time, the University's Strategic Plan proposed the wider introduction of a VLE. This was implemented from the start of 2004-05 and, in its first year, the VLE has been adopted by almost half of the academic community. The University is in the process of developing mechanisms for establishing in-depth information about how it is used in learning and teaching. The University has identified that around 80 per cent of its students have access to a Broadband internet connection and, consequently, have high expectations about the types of material they should be able to access electronically.

97 In discussion, students praised the University's laptop initiative through which they can borrow or purchase specially configured

laptops providing access to a range of learning materials. Some of the students had experience of studying on-line and emphasised the benefits of being able to interact with their peers or tutors at times when they would not be able to physically attend the University. Senior staff are aware of the potential disadvantages associated with over-emphasis on information and communication technologies, such as students becoming isolated. The University has identified the importance of achieving a balance between enabling individual, remote access to an electronic learning environment and providing opportunities for students to mix with their peers and staff.

Academic and personal support

98 A system of academic advisers and personal counsellors is operated at faculty level. In some faculties these are separate functions, in others they are combined. Students are expected to see their academic advisers at the start of first year and once a semester thereafter, and to see their personal counsellors as necessary. It emerged in discussion with students that, in practice, they do not all meet their academic advisers as frequently as the University intends. There may also be some confusion about whether the staff, or the students themselves, are intended to take the initiative to arrange meetings.

99 The University has identified limitations in its practice of leaving students to self-refer for support and has expressed an intention to develop a more proactive approach. There is good practice in providing academic support within some departments, for example, in the Faculty of Engineering first-year students on the BEng (Hons) Electrical Energy Systems Engineering course are assigned to a small group which meets weekly with their designated academic member of staff to discuss academic or organisational problems, and to facilitate the development of good study habits.

100 Another example of good practice was identified in the Faculty of Education which has recently reviewed its system of academic and personal counselling (see above, paragraph 89).

The Faculty has a Student Support Adviser Team comprising a group of academic staff whose role is to provide students with initial advice and support. This team complements the role of the personal counsellor by providing students with the opportunity to meet a member of staff not directly involved in teaching them, and who can provide information and advice personally, or refer them to other University support services as appropriate. Members of the team undergo formal staff development in preparation for their role. In other faculties, members of academic staff assigned roles as personal counsellors do not generally receive formal training, and staff recognise this as a weakness.

101 The University considers that the introduction of student PDP (see above, paragraphs 64-68), with its requirement for regular meetings between staff and students, could act as a catalyst for revising existing academic and pastoral support mechanisms. The University could usefully work with the Students' Association, as the Faculty of Education has done, to explore ways of ensuring that students gain access to support when they need it. There would be benefit in the University providing staff development for those who take on the personal counsellor role, not least because of the sensitive nature of some of the issues that they may be required to deal with. It would also ensure that the role was undertaken in faculties within agreed University guidelines.

Student support services

102 The University aims to provide a full range of student support services. The University services are supplemented by the USSA Ask4 Advice Centre. A leaflet outlining the services on offer is sent to all new and continuing students at registration and full details are also available on the University website. PEGASUS is used to issue electronic messages from, and about, these services. The Director of Student Affairs and his staff participate in University, faculty and departmental student induction events. The Director also gives a presentation to

new members of academic and support staff to ensure that they are aware of the full range of support services available.

103 The Centre for Academic Practice offers advice, resources, individual consultation and courses aimed at helping undergraduate and postgraduate students develop confidence and competence in managing academic workloads and enhancing learning, research and communication skills. The Centre aims to complement the work of academic departments and collaborates with lecturers to achieve this. The Centre also networks with the student support services to provide assistance in individual cases and to organise a variety of support and development programmes. The Centre has a comprehensive website containing a wide range of support materials for students at differing levels of study.

104 The University has established a Disability Service comprising staff who can offer both general advice to students with disabilities and specialist training in the use of equipment and software. The Service seeks to enhance continually its provision for students with disabilities and to monitor the latest developments in legislation, teaching methods and technology. The Service is also working to develop its network of contacts in academic departments and its strong collaboration with related services including the Centre for Academic Practice and the Centre for Learning Services.

105 The University is leading a national SHEFC-funded project, Teachability, which promotes the creation of an accessible curriculum by providing information on good practice to the sector. Within the University, three academic departments were involved in the early development work for the project and others subsequently used the Teachability materials to evaluate their provision. All departments are now expected to evaluate their provision regularly and report on the outcomes through the course and Departmental Review processes.

106 The University has established a Disability Resource Development Fund to which academic departments can apply for the

purchase of equipment to support existing students or to anticipate the needs of future students. Academic staff collaborate with staff in the Disability Service to identify solutions to the problems that might be experienced by disabled students arising from standard teaching methods or equipment. Helpers for disabled students are now employed directly by the University rather than by the disabled student him/herself. This makes it much easier to organise support earlier in the academic session and removes part of the burden from the student.

107 The University policy for promoting opportunities for students with disabilities is embedded at department and institutional level. There are clear mechanisms for communication between departments and the Disability Service and other central services with examples of joint working at all levels.

108 The University's student support services have consistently received positive evaluations from internal and external reviews. The University continues to evaluate its provision in this area and currently has plans to enhance the service to students further through a range of measures, most significantly by integrating the services to offer a 'one stop shop' for students. This is likely to be a positive development which, among other benefits, will promote awareness across the student body of the full range of services available.

Student retention

109 Improving the student progression and course completion rates is a priority for the University and the Strategic Plan sets out particular targets to be achieved in this area. The Centre for Academic Practice has undertaken an analysis of data concerning student progression and course completion in order to help the Educational Strategy Group identify steps that might be taken to achieve these targets. The University Court has also debated this matter and identified the need for more proactive measures, particularly to help students in their first year. The reasons for problems with retention, as well as the extent

of the problems, vary widely across the University, and various initiatives are being used to address them.

110 The Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Sciences has introduced a mentoring scheme in which students are provided with training by USSA to act as mentors to their peers. Evaluation of the scheme has demonstrated that progression rates were higher among those who had participated than those who had not. The evaluation also showed that progression rates among students who had acted as mentors were very high. Mentors identified as a benefit of participating the fact that they had become much more aware of the range of student support services available.

111 Overall, the University is responding constructively to the challenge of student retention and is taking action which should enable it to fulfil the targets identified in the Strategic Plan.

Social and recreational environment

112 The University's Estates Development Framework indicates that the academic objectives and priorities include the provision of improved student services and sports facilities, continued improvement in teaching accommodation and improved social space for staff and students. Staff identified a number of forthcoming initiatives including the opening of an internet café and the development of a new sports centre. The University's commitment to provide more social space was welcomed in discussions with groups of students and staff.

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

113 The University places a strong emphasis on the practical relevance of its provision and on transferable skills. Promoting effective partnerships with employers and expanding professional development programmes are key elements of the Strategic Plan. The University has strong links with industry, government agencies and other stakeholders. As a result of

these links, many students across all five faculties participate in placements with appropriate bodies in the UK, Europe or further afield.

114 The University considers employability to be an outcome of high-quality learning and teaching, which includes key skills development and professional careers information and advice. The Careers Service and the academic departments work together complementing one another as an 'integral element' of the University's learning and teaching provision. Academic departments foster the development of personal skills to enable students to meet employers' needs, and careers education is increasingly embedded in course delivery. Separate skills training is provided by the Careers Service and the Centre for Academic Practice, and relevant key skills are incorporated into the intended learning outcomes of classes and courses at all levels within the University.

115 The Careers Service provides a high quality and comprehensive careers education, information, guidance and job search consultancy for students that is appropriate to their needs both during their course and after graduation. The Careers Service has been reviewed recently and the resulting report draws attention to the external assessor's view that an exemplary service is delivered using a model that could be followed in other institutions. The review confirmed that the Service is highly regarded within the University and by the commercial, industrial and public sector organisations it works with.

116 The University is implementing student PDP (see above, paragraphs 64-68) reflecting the institution's commitment to sustain and enhance a culture of concern for the employability of its graduates. Some faculties have embedded the development and assessment of key skills within the student PDP process so that the students' engagement relating to maintaining their personal development profile is credit-rated.

117 Within the University's framework of regulations every degree programme should include at least 20 credits obtained through

taking elective classes, which can be selected from across the institution's provision. As part of this, students are encouraged to take elective classes in entrepreneurship through the Hunter Centre for Entrepreneurship @ Strathclyde, which is part of the Strathclyde Business School. The Centre seeks to develop students' ability to seize entrepreneurial opportunities as their careers progress and, in doing so, the Centre uses participative and practical learning approaches.

118 In discussion, students highlighted the practical relevance of their studies as a very positive feature; in many cases identifying this as the main reason for having chosen to study at the University. Staff and students spoke enthusiastically of the benefits of the University's explicit focus on employability and of the institution-wide approach to integrating key skills within the curricula.

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

119 The relationship between the University and USSA is productive, characterised by a wide variety of opportunities for consultation and constructive dialogue. There is evidence of the student representative arrangements working well across the devolved structure, with full-time students represented at all levels. It is harder to engage part-time students and this is an area the University could explore with USSA to consider how such representation could be enhanced. Overall, student representatives are regarded, by staff and students alike, as making a valuable contribution.

120 While students consider that they are able to contribute positively to the Departmental Review process, the University could enhance the process by reflecting further on how it could adopt a more consistent approach to engaging students with it, as well as providing information to students on the action taken.

121 The University places a strong emphasis on the practical relevance of its provision and has an overt focus on the employability of its graduates. Increasingly transferable skills are embedded within the curricula and this is regarded positively by staff and students.

122 The University offers a full range of student support services and facilities which have been highly evaluated by individuals external to the University. A number of the services link to national initiatives. Many of the student support areas work collaboratively already and the University has expressed its intention to enhance the services by integrating them further to provide a 'one stop shop' for students. Such a move is likely to promote an increase in students' awareness of the complete range of services available. In addition to the central support service units, staff within faculties and departments provide information and advice to students on pastoral, as well as academic matters. The University has expressed a willingness to review its academic and pastoral support arrangements, having recognised limitations in its practice of leaving students to self-refer for support. The University has identified its introduction of student PDP as providing a potential catalyst for revising its support arrangements, and this may assist the University as it seeks to adopt a more proactive approach to department-based student support. Staff who undertake a personal counselling role are not usually trained and there would be benefit in the University ensuring that those who take on this responsibility are provided with staff development to ensure they can carry out the role within agreed University guidelines.

123 The University has secure arrangements for monitoring and evaluating its academic and support provision, and uses the outcomes to enhance its activity. A particularly positive feature of the University is the extent to which it is willing to reflect on its practices to enhance the student experience.

124 Students have a very positive view of the University generally. A strong sense of identity with the University is evident across the student

body, and is shared by staff. There appears to be an ethos among the student population which informs a common culture of participation in, and respect for, the University. Although hard to quantify, the contribution that such an ethos can make to the holistic student experience is considerable.

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

125 At institutional level, the explicit context for the University's approach to quality enhancement is the Strategic Plan. Following extensive consultation with the University's staff, the Plan identifies innovative learning as one of its three themes, and it specifies particular actions through which the theme will be developed. The successful development of the theme will be demonstrated by the achievement of identified targets. Implementation of the Plan is monitored by the UMG which considers the continuing appropriateness of the identified targets as well as success in achieving them. The University Court engages actively with the fulfilment of the Plan, for example, the innovative learning theme was a key discussion topic at a recent residential Court meeting. The contributions of the Court to such discussions are well informed and are welcomed by the University.

126 The Academic Committee, as the principal teaching and learning committee of the University (see above, paragraph 23), is chaired by the Vice-Principal and includes the vice-deans (academic) as members. It is responsible for developing a University Academic Strategy which will align with the actions and targets of the innovative learning theme in the Strategic Plan and which will provide a practical framework for the encouragement and support of departmental initiatives. The most recent version of the Academic Strategy, by

incorporating an outline of the University's intentions for quality enhancement, gives prominence to those respects in which improvements in the learning environment can facilitate the implementation of the Strategic Plan. The Educational Strategy Group, also chaired by the Vice-Principal and reporting to the Senate and the Academic Committee, has a responsibility to promote a continuous programme of quality enhancement in accordance with the Academic Strategy, and to take forward institution-wide initiatives for improving the effectiveness of learning. It is expected to review the quality enhancement programme on a regular basis and to report its findings to the Academic Committee.

127 The Educational Strategy Group is informed and assisted by the work of the Centre for Academic Practice. In partnership with departments and faculties, this Centre articulates initiatives, approaches and strategies, and designs and delivers appropriate professional development programmes and events for academic and academic-related staff. Since it was established in 1987, it has gained an international reputation for applied research, scholarship and expert advice on educational and management frameworks appropriate for the professional development of staff, and for the enhancement of students' learning experience. The 2004 review of the Centre concluded that it carried out work that is both essential to the University and of high quality. The review recommended that in view of the Centre's increasingly significant role in facilitating the enhancement of undergraduate and postgraduate learning, it should be renamed the Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement. The review report also observed that 'there remained considerable scope for the wider institution to benefit from [the Centre's] expertise' and that in order to realise more of its potential it should adopt a 'more proactive, targeted and strategic approach'. As the University continues with its development of such an approach to innovation and improvement, more of the benefits of the Centre's expertise are likely to be realised, particularly if its role in implementing

the Academic Strategy can be further clarified and made more specific.

128 Following a recommendation from the 2004 review of the Centre, the University established a Learning Enhancement Network to bring together staff of the Centre and faculty representatives with interests in, or experience of, enhancement activities. The Network has been in operation for a relatively short period of time but it is already clear that the role envisaged for it in the 2004 review, and particularly its suggestions regarding partnerships between Centre staff and faculty members of the Network, have significant potential as a means for making the expertise of the Centre staff more widely available.

129 In its approach to enhancement the University seeks to bring together those incremental improvements originating in departments in response to specific needs, opportunities and initiatives, with institutional strategies bringing about distinctive changes in the students' learning environment. One example of this, provided in ELIR as a case-study, is the University's development of an institution-wide VLE building on the experience of several departments in providing students with electronic access to supplementary teaching and learning materials. The University has captured this in the innovative learning theme in the Strategic Plan which calls for the enhancement of teaching and learning through the appropriate use of technology, and in support of this intention an academic strategy for teaching and learning through technology has been developed and is being implemented.

130 Other examples of successful and established innovations include the funding of new IT developments such as the Laptop Initiative and the student e-learning portal, PEGASUS; the support provided for international students to enable them to make good use of the opportunities provided by the city and the University; the development of the Hunter Centre for Entrepreneurship in the Business School as a resource available to all students; and increasing the accessibility of the resources of the library in response to

ascertained needs. These examples show that the University's policy of supporting and encouraging enhancement initiatives has been successful.

131 The University has some experience of engaging with the national Enhancement Themes and the Academic Strategy promotes the engagement of staff in activity relating to the Themes in order that the good practices identified can be shared and implemented. In addition, the Vice-Principal has agreed to convene a national steering group for the Systemic Enhancement Theme, an important aim of which is to consider how institutions can best engage with a sector-wide enhancement-led approach.

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

132 The University's quality management system assigns a major role to the faculties and their constituent departments. Faculties have established responsibilities to provide the Senate with assurances about both quality and standards, and an important instrument they use for this purpose is the comprehensive annual report they each prepare, based on information provided by the departments (see above, paragraphs 30 and 39). The format of these annual reports has recently been revised to take account of enhancement activity in a more explicit manner and they have been renamed Annual Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Reports. They provide information about, and evaluations of, improvements made to teaching and learning following recommendations made in Departmental Reviews, as well as providing opportunities to comment on the development of areas of good practice identified in these reviews which might be applicable elsewhere in the University. In these ways, there is potential for faculties to develop in a more explicit manner strong and productive links between the assurance and enhancement of quality. Many of the incremental improvements

initiated in departments have arisen from the critical evaluations prompted by monitoring and reviewing activities. The revised format of the Annual Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Reports provides an opportunity for faculties to develop an enhancement-led approach to their quality management responsibilities, and thereby contribute to the University's intention that enhancement should be central to its Academic Strategy.

133 The vice-deans (academic) are the designated officers responsible for the management of academic processes in the faculties and, by virtue of their membership of the Academic Committee, play an important role in the monitoring of academic performance at University level. Enhancement is an increasingly prominent element of their work partly because of the developing links between assurance and enhancement at faculty level, and partly through the Academic Committee's focus on establishing the Academic Strategy. In discussion, the vice-deans (academic) were supportive of the increased emphasis on enhancement in quality management, and welcomed the opportunities it gave them to promote and facilitate initiatives for improvement.

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

134 A focus for the University's approach to recognising and rewarding innovation and improvement in teaching and learning is the attention given to 'teaching scholarship' in its criteria for promoting academic staff, and in its use of accelerated increments and discretionary pay. Each year, a number of promotions to senior lecturer or reader are made on the basis of teaching excellence. For many years the University has made accelerated increments or discretionary payments to staff who provide evidence of their good practice in teaching or curriculum development.

135 The University has given consideration to using prizes to recognise and reward good practice in teaching and learning but there is no strong consensus that their introduction would bring additional benefits, and they are not used currently. The University prefers to focus on providing support and recognition to staff through the work of the Centre for Academic Practice and by ensuring the ongoing identification and dissemination of initiatives begun by individual members of staff in departments.

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

136 The University's general approach to enhancement seeks to build on its experience of successful initiatives intended to improve the learning environment it provides for its students. Its founding mission, reinforced in the Strategic Plan, is to be a 'place of useful learning' and this characterisation supports a culture of continuous improvement in all aspects of the University's work and, in particular, encourages an enhancement-led attitude towards the provision of teaching and learning opportunities for students.

137 The University has substantial experience of the practical steps which can be taken, principally but not exclusively at a departmental level, to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Some of these steps have been taken in response to perceived needs as revealed by evaluations arising from effective monitoring of relevant data or from external or internal reviews of provision. Others have been taken in response to the opportunities provided by new technologies, or as a consequence of initiatives where members of staff exercise their professional skills.

138 Further progress is being made as the faculties play a greater role in using the outcomes of the quality assurance processes they manage in order to identify and disseminate good practice, and as the vice-deans (academic) increasingly provide advice

to both the academic staff in their faculties and the senior officers of the University. The Centre for Academic Practice has been playing an important role in providing advice and expertise to departments, and the recent review of its work has provided helpful and constructive suggestions about the nature and direction of its future activities. These important links between the faculties and the institutional level will assist the University to embed an enhancement-led approach to its strategic management of academic quality.

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

139 In describing its management of quality enhancement, the University has made a distinction between incremental and step change improvements, although it recognises that the support provided by incremental improvements is often essential to the success of the more distinctive step changes envisaged in its strategic approach. Effective implementation of improvements depends to a great extent on the ability of the faculties to combine quality assurance and enhancement activity, and there are a number of examples of this beginning to occur.

140 The University is devoting considerable attention to reconsidering and reviewing its strategic intentions for quality enhancement. A prominent feature of this is the development of an Academic Strategy which incorporates enhancement as an integral part of a broader picture covering the management of all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. This approach is positive because it builds on the work the University has begun in establishing links between enhancement and its quality assurance arrangements, and because it will help to make the University's enhancement strategy a catalyst for change rather than a codifier of existing practice.

141 The Academic Strategy will be expected to demonstrate how the requirements of the innovative learning theme in the current Strategic Plan will be met, and indeed some of

those requirements are relevant to current enhancement activities and will feature prominently as more detail is added to the Academic Strategy. The University Court is providing effective regular reviews and evaluations of the progress being made in implementing the Strategic Plan. In relation to the broad intentions of the Academic Strategy, the existing measures to monitor and evaluate the Strategic Plan may have limited scope and it may be appropriate to identify further measurable indicators or targets in order to help the Academic Committee evaluate the progress made in implementing the Academic Strategy. In general, there would be benefit in developing the means for evaluating the Academic Strategy so that the University is able to demonstrate the achievements of its staff in helping all of its students to satisfy and exceed their ambitions.

Summary

Background to the institution and ELIR method

142 The University of Strathclyde's (the University) history dates back to 1796 when, following the vision set out in the will of John Anderson, his trustees established a 'place of useful learning' in the centre of Glasgow. By the early twentieth century it had become known as the Royal College of Science and Technology. In 1964, the Royal College merged with the Scottish College of Commerce to form the University of Strathclyde. The University expanded in 1993 when it merged with Jordanhill College of Education. It is structured into five faculties: Strathclyde Business School; Education; Engineering; Law, Arts and Social Sciences; and Science. The Faculty of Education is based on the Jordanhill Campus in the west of the city and the other four faculties are located on the John Anderson Campus in the city centre.

143 The University has two joint departments with the University of Glasgow: Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering, and the Glasgow School of Social Work; and one joint graduate school: the Glasgow Graduate School of Law. These have been established through the strategic alliance, known as Synergy, between the two universities.

144 In line with the Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) method, the University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA) in advance of the review. The RA set out the institution's strategy for quality enhancement, its approach to the management of quality and standards and its view of the effectiveness of its approach. The clear and evaluative nature of the RA provided a helpful starting point for the review.

145 The University submitted five case-studies with its RA. These illustrated the way in which the University seeks to encourage and manage quality enhancement. A common theme across the case-studies was the linkages between activity in departments and faculties and institutional strategy and processes. The case-studies illustrated:

- the impact of the University's Teaching and Learning Methodologies Initiative
- the ways in which the University seeks to facilitate communication with its staff and students and, in particular, how the use of virtual learning environment (VLE) developments in certain areas of the institution has enhanced teaching and learning
- initiatives to improve retention and enhance the first-year experience
- one faculty's approach to progressing the quality enhancement agenda
- an example of a departmental quality enhancement initiative, which was supported through the University's devolved approach to organisational management.

Overview of the matters raised by the review

146 The particular themes pursued in the review included the relationships between departments, faculties and the institution; the use of the Academic Infrastructure and the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF) in particular; the operation and integration of the student support services; the University's arrangements for promoting employability; the focus on student retention; and the linkage between the Strategic Plan and the University's approach to quality enhancement.

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

147 The University's internal mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing quality and academic standards are secure and subject to suitable checks. The annual course and class monitoring arrangements are moderated at faculty level, and the five-year Departmental Review process is monitored at institutional level through the Academic Committee.

148 The University is engaged in a number of activities that illustrate its willingness and

capacity to adjust its processes to enhance practice connected with assuring quality and maintaining academic standards. These include the development of guidelines and procedures for summative assessment, the adoption of a single model for degree classification, the formal embedding of learning outcomes into course and class information, and the revision of quality assurance mechanisms for postgraduate research programmes. While the University has made a number of improvements in its management of assessment, it is encouraged to pursue its intention to reconsider its use of compensation schemes.

149 The University achieves a successful balance between its devolved system of responsibility and its requirement for consistency of output, having effective mechanisms in place to moderate practice in the departments. There are examples, such as the University's encouragement of diverse approaches to student personal development planning (PDP) implementation, where the part-devolved quality management system not only shows sensitivity to the diverse needs of its constituent parts, but provides opportunities for allowing success in one area to inform practice in others.

150 The University emphasises the importance of the role played by the vice-deans (academic) in ensuring there is effective communication between departments, faculties and the institutional committees. They were described as a 'fulcrum' on which the balance between departmental and faculty autonomy, and institutional strategy and oversight in quality assurance and standards maintenance rests. The information gained through ELIR accords with that view, and suggests that their importance in helping the University to elicit enhancement of practice from quality assurance monitoring is likely to grow.

151 Recent revisions to the annual Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Reports are positive, providing a potentially powerful tool with which good practice might be captured and shared. A similar opportunity

to identify possible enhancements from existing processes is provided within the arrangements for receiving and commenting on external examiners' reports.

152 Attention to external reference points, including the Academic Infrastructure, forms an important element in guiding the University's quality assurance processes. The University's regulations make it possible for students in some areas of study to receive awards having achieved less than the minimum credit requirements set out in the SCQF although, in practice, this affects very few students. The University is encouraged to consider the alignment of its awards framework and regulations with the SCQF.

153 The University is implementing student PDP with the strong support of senior managers and the close involvement of students. The expressed intention to embed it across all provision as part of the student learning experience is a laudable one, fully compatible with the University's Strategic Plan.

154 Overall, consideration of the effectiveness of the institution's internal review systems suggests that 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 its provision is complete, accurate and fair

155 The measures taken to improve further the coordination of activity relating to the publication of material for external use are very positive, and are likely to enhance the University's ability to maintain and monitor the accuracy and quality of such information. The University's promotion and support of a web-based information system represents very positive practice. The emerging system has great potential for improving the accessibility and accuracy of administrative information and, in doing so, is likely to enhance the communication

of information about resources and support to students. It is also likely to benefit the student learning experience through the development of a managed learning environment.

156 The content and presentation of student course handbooks is, generally, good. There are no institutional guidelines concerning their content or presentation and there would be benefit in the University considering the development of such guidelines, in particular to ensure the handbooks are accessible to all students.

157 Overall, the University has secure arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair.

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

158 The University regards the relationship it has with the Students' Association (USSA) as a particular strength. There are many formal links between the University and USSA, such as the USSA Executive's membership of a wide range of the University committees, and the Principal and USSA President's regular meetings. USSA is routinely consulted on matters of relevance to students at institutional level and, from time to time, faculties also seek students' views through USSA. The relationship between the University and USSA is productive, characterised by a wide variety of opportunities for consultation and constructive dialogue.

159 There are a variety of constituencies for student representation across the University: class, course, subject or year. Full-time students are represented at all levels and there is evidence of the representative arrangements working well across the layered structure. It is harder to engage part-time students in the representative structures and this is an area the University could explore with USSA to consider how such representation could be enhanced. Overall, student representatives are regarded, by staff and students alike, as making a valuable contribution.

160 Students consider that they are able to contribute positively to the Departmental Review process, although there is considerable variation in the manner in which their views are sought. There is a lack of clarity among students on how their views impact on provision following the Reviews. The University could enhance the Departmental Review process by reflecting further on how it could adopt a more consistent approach to engaging students with it, as well as providing information to students on the action taken.

161 The University places a strong emphasis on the practical relevance of its provision and has an overt focus on the employability of its graduates. Increasingly transferable skills are embedded within the curricula and this is regarded positively by staff and students.

162 The University offers a full range of student support services and facilities, which have been highly evaluated by individuals external to the University. A number of the services link to national initiatives. Many of the student support areas work collaboratively already and the University has expressed its intention to enhance the services by integrating them further to provide a 'one stop shop' for students. Such a move is likely to promote an increase in students' awareness of the complete range of services available. In addition to the central support service units, staff within faculties and departments provide information and advice to students on pastoral, as well as academic matters. The University has expressed a willingness to review its academic and pastoral support arrangements, having recognised limitations in its practice of leaving students to self-refer for support. The University has identified its introduction of student PDP as providing a potential catalyst for revising its support arrangements, and this may assist the University as it seeks to adopt a more proactive approach to department-based student support. Staff who undertake a personal counselling role are not usually trained and there would be benefit in the University ensuring that those who take on this responsibility are provided with staff

development to ensure they can carry out the role within agreed University guidelines.

163 The University has secure arrangements for monitoring and evaluating its academic and support provision, and uses the outcomes to enhance its activity. A particularly positive feature of the University is the extent to which it is willing to reflect on its practices to enhance the student experience.

164 Students have a very positive view of the University generally. A strong sense of identity with the University is evident across the student body, and is shared by staff. There appears to be an ethos among the student population which informs a common culture of participation in, and respect for, the University. Although hard to quantify, the contribution that such an ethos can make to the holistic student experience is considerable.

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

165 The University's general approach to enhancement seeks to build on its experience of successful initiatives intended to improve the learning environment it provides for its students. Its founding mission, reinforced in the Strategic Plan, is to be a 'place of useful learning' and this characterisation supports a culture of continuous improvement in all aspects of the University's work and in particular encourages an enhancement-led attitude towards the provision of teaching and learning opportunities for students.

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