

Heriot-Watt University

FEBRUARY 2006

Enhancement-led institutional review

ISBN 1 84482 532 9

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Printed copies are available from:

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Company registration number 3344784. Registered charity number 1062746

Preface

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

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

Enhancement-led approach

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

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

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

Nationally agreed reference points

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

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

Conclusions and judgement within ELIR

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

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

The ELIR process

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

The main elements of ELIR are:

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

The evidence for the ELIR

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

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

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Introduction

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

2 The review followed a method agreed with Universities Scotland, student bodies and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), 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 ELIR team sets out its views. The first commentary in the first main section of the report leads to a 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 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 set 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 institutional profile at 9 December 2005; annual review 2004; annual accounts and financial statements 2004; undergraduate prospectus 2006; and postgraduate prospectus 2006-07. 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 one case-study with its RA which focused on the University's current and ongoing development of a strategy for 'employability and professional career readiness'. The case-study set out the University's ethos of professional career readiness, and the milestones for the finalisation and embedding of employability and professional career readiness as a key theme in the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and Strategic Plan by June 2006. The case-study included examples, drawn from across the University, which have been used to inform its emerging employability strategy.

6 The RA was prepared by a writing group comprising the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the Deputy Registrar, the Assistant

Registrar (Learning Strategies) and staff of the Educational Development Unit (the Unit having responsibility for the preparation of the case study). The RA included a student view of the effectiveness of the University's strategy for quality enhancement, written by the Students' Association Vice-President (Education and Welfare) in consultation with the Education and Welfare Manager, and approved by the Students' Association Student Council. The process of preparation of the RA was overseen by a Steering Group comprised of the Vice-Principal, a member of the Planning and Management Executive, a representative of the Students' Association, and the writing group. Drafts of the RA were considered by the University's Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee, its Learning and Teaching Board and by the University Court. The RA was formally approved by the Planning and Management Executive. The clear and open nature of the RA provided a helpful starting point for the review. While the RA was succinct, it provided links to supplementary material which the team found helpful, particularly in respect of collaborative activity and overseas provision, given the significance of these in the University's portfolio of activities.

7 The ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 18-19 January 2006 and the Part 2 visit took place between 20-24 February 2006.

8 During the Part 1 visit, senior staff gave presentations to the ELIR team concerning recent developments including how the University was learning from the process of preparation for ELIR, and the University's approaches to internal periodic review and to quality enhancement. There was also a presentation on the case-study, and a presentation from the Students' Association on their work with the University to improve the student experience. In the remainder of Part 1, the team met senior staff with responsibility for managing quality assurance and enhancement activity across the University, a group of staff involved in internal review, and a group of students including those who had a

representational role at course, school and University levels. These meetings enabled the team to explore a range of matters, many of which had been raised by the University in the RA.

9 During the Part 1 visit, the University made available a set of documentation which had been identified within the RA and supplementary information identified during the course of the visit. This enabled the ELIR team to develop a programme of meetings and to identify a set of documentation for the Part 2 visit.

10 The ELIR team comprised: Mr Alex Gilkison; Professor Neil Keeble; Ms Rowena Pelik; Mr Benjamin Reilly (reviewers); and Ms Lesley Rowand (secretary). The review was coordinated on behalf of the QAA by Dr Janice Ross, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

Background information about the institution

11 The University was established by Royal Charter in 1966, having evolved from the Edinburgh School of Arts (1821), the Watt Institution and School of Arts (1851) and the Heriot-Watt College (1885). In 1998, the University merged with the Scottish College of Textiles. The University is based mainly in Edinburgh on a custom-built campus, with additional campuses in Galashiels (the Scottish Borders Campus), Orkney and Dubai (the latter established in September 2005).

12 The University's mission is to: 'provide the highest quality education and training to suit the professional employment sector; meet the aspirations of students and help them realise their potential; deliver world class innovative research in the fields of business and industry; exploit knowledge for the benefit of society'.

13 Following a major restructuring in 2001-02, the University is organised into eight schools: Built Environment; Engineering and Physical Sciences; Life Sciences; Management and Languages; Mathematical and Computer Sciences; Textiles and Design; Institute of Petroleum Engineering (postgraduate only); and Edinburgh Business School (postgraduate only).

14 The University has a significant number of collaborative arrangements with a range of partners, including: 23 programmes delivered in collaboration with other higher education institutions in the UK and European Union; 52 Approved Learning Partners; and 103 exchange agreements with European Union and overseas institutions. In addition, the University is currently the validating body for the majority of degree programmes of the Edinburgh College of Art (by mutual consent, the arrangement is outgoing and due to terminate in 2007-08).

15 At the time of the ELIR visit, the University had a student population of about 8,200 full-time equivalent students, of which some 5,500 were undergraduates and some 2,700 were postgraduates. Approximately 20 per cent of students (1,650 full-time equivalent or 9,424 registered students) study 'off-campus' as distance or distributed learning students.

University's strategy for quality enhancement

16 The University's strategy for quality enhancement is embedded in its Learning and Teaching Strategy, which currently has four key themes: sustainable growth; enhancing learning and teaching; employability; and the student learning experience. Each theme has associated key performance indicators, targets, objectives, projects and monitoring processes. Individual schools' strategies are aligned with the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the Students' Association has aligned its strategy with that of the University.

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

Committees and responsibilities

17 The University Senate is responsible for academic standards and programme quality. The key committees of the Senate for the oversight of quality and standards are the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee, the Undergraduate Studies Committee and the Postgraduate Studies Committee. The Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee has the function of ensuring that the awards made in the Senate's name are of an appropriate standard and that the programmes of study and the student experience are of an appropriate quality. The Undergraduate Studies Committee and Postgraduate Studies Committee are responsible for programme approval and modification, the appointment of external examiners, and advising the Senate on undergraduate and postgraduate academic matters respectively. The Postgraduate Standards Committee has both taught and research programmes within its remit.

18 The Learning and Teaching Board has institutional responsibility for the setting and implementation of all strategic matters related to learning and teaching. Its main function is to develop and implement the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and to monitor, evaluate and review the Strategy's implementation. It is responsible for responding to, and engaging with, national developments in learning and teaching. The Learning and Teaching Board reports to the University's Planning and Management Executive, which includes in its membership the Principal, the Vice-Principal, Secretary, the Director of Finance, the deputy principals and the heads of school. The Learning and Teaching Board also reports to the Senate and its committees on academic matters, and refers academic quality assurance matters to the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee which has responsibility for considering and developing academic policies and procedures. The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) chairs both the Learning and Teaching Board and the Quality Enhancement and Standards

Committee, and the University considers this as important to facilitating a shared understanding and ensuring the responsibilities of the two groups are properly integrated.

19 In addition to the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), two elected deans have quality and standards responsibilities at institutional level. One dean chairs the Postgraduate Studies Committee and the other chairs the Undergraduate Studies Committee. Together the deans and Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) provide institutional level oversight and scrutiny of key areas. Additionally, each dean has lead responsibility for four of the University's eight schools. The ELIR team considered the role of the deans to be effective. As senior colleagues elected by the academic staff, they were able to exercise institutional oversight from the basis of experience, knowledge and familiarity with quality assurance processes, and thus had credibility and authority.

20 The University's committee structure is mirrored in individual schools, where committees approve and review courses prior to consideration at University level. The University regards this as the schools sharing responsibility for programme quality and academic standards. Each school has a director of learning and teaching or equivalent. Directors of learning and teaching are members of the Learning and Teaching Board, and are responsible for ensuring that strategy and policy are carried forward appropriately within their schools. They also chair school learning and teaching committees (or the equivalent). Edinburgh Business School does not have an internal committee structure; it is managed by a Board and its Chief Executive Officer, and vests specific responsibilities relating to programme development, quality assurance and learning and teaching to members of its management team. Nominated representatives of the management team report to the University's committees.

Quality framework

21 The University retains its collegiate tradition and a strongly devolved culture.

It seeks to reach consensus and broad ownership by the schools in the development of strategy. The University's schools have flexibility in the implementation of strategy, policies and procedures. The devolution of certain responsibilities for assuring programme quality and academic standards is discharged by the schools' directors of learning and teaching. This devolution is balanced through a series of checks by the deans and the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) to ensure that schools' responsibilities are carried out effectively.

22 The University has a range of guidelines and procedures, codes of practice and internal handbooks. In general, these are detailed, thorough documents, often supported by a number of templates, forms and coversheets. In order to ensure that information is accessible and up-to-date, quality assurance policies and procedures are set out on the University's website. The University tries to ensure that information on individual policies and procedures is self-contained for ease of access, without cross-referencing.

Course approval and re-approval

23 Course design and development is the responsibility of the schools. The University provides detailed guidance and templates for module and course approval, and for the design of programme specifications. Developments must be formally considered and agreed at school level before being passed to the Undergraduate Studies Committee or the Postgraduate Studies Committee for approval; minor modifications may be made at school level. External input to course or modules approval is encouraged to take place at the course design and development stage. At the approval stage, 'internal externality' is incorporated through the cross-University membership of the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies Committees.

24 The RA stated that new courses are approved without time limit, and that periodic monitoring and review ensures that courses are kept up to date. In addition, major changes to courses require formal approval of the

undergraduate or postgraduate studies committees. The ELIR team saw clear evidence that the University, through its Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee, had given extensive consideration to the implications of its 'in perpetuity' course approval system. The team noted that the current arrangements provided limited opportunities for matters of course structure or the currency of the curriculum to be considered beyond approval. The University is, therefore, encouraged to give consideration to how these matters could be more explicitly considered as part of its review arrangements.

Monitoring and review

25 The University has developed a set of underlying principles in relation to monitoring and review: that such activity should only be carried out once and should have clear purpose; it should be devolved as far as possible where it is secure and efficient to do so; it should add value to the operation being monitored or reviewed; and should be carried out by qualified peers.

Annual monitoring

26 The University has recently revised its arrangements for annual programme monitoring and review. The RA stated that since the restructuring of the University in 2002, it had become clear that the process required modification to reflect schools having formal responsibility for the management of courses and programmes. Monitoring by the University was seen to duplicate the schools' own internal review processes. Prior to 2004-05, monitoring was carried out using a University-determined template with a series of headings including admissions, graduate employment, collaborative programmes, off-campus activities, and feedback from external examiners, from staff and from students. A revised process for annual programme monitoring and review was agreed by the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee in 2005 and used for the monitoring of programmes delivered in 2004-05. The revised

process offers more flexibility for schools to set a process, or processes, based on their particular needs. The University provides guidance on the underlying expectations such as consideration of the views of students, statistical information and possible areas for improvement, and encourages the consideration of longer term and strategic developments. Responsibility for conducting the monitoring is explicitly placed with schools, with the outcomes reported to the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee. While the monitoring of 2004-05 programmes was not complete at the time of the ELIR, the change in arrangements was widely regarded by staff as beneficial, providing the opportunity for a more reflective approach.

27 The ELIR team considered that a number of schools had implemented the revised process effectively, and that the process had, as staff highlighted, encouraged greater reflection and engagement within these schools. The team saw evidence of the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) raising with schools incomplete or insufficiently reflective annual programme monitoring review reports, in particular in relation to the reporting of off-campus provision and research students' learning experience, or where the objectives and expectations of the process had been misunderstood by the schools. The team came to the view that, while it was too early to see full evidence of the revised processes, it had the potential to be effective. The University should continue to both closely monitor the implementation of annual programme monitoring and review at the school level, and consider how to ensure more consistency of approach across the schools.

Internal review of schools and programmes

28 The RA stated that, following institutional restructuring in 2002 and the introduction of the national Quality Enhancement Framework in 2003, the University came to the view that its existing procedures for periodic review did not take into account the quality assurance

responsibilities of the schools nor all the Scottish Funding Council guidelines for internal review at the subject level. In late 2003-04, the University introduced a revised review process which includes all programmes of study (undergraduate, taught postgraduate, postgraduate research), delivered by all methods (full-time, part-time, distance and distributed learning, joint programmes and collaborative provision), with provision being reviewed over a five-year cycle.

29 The RA identified a key feature of the University's approach to internal review as its flexibility. Most schools are sufficiently large and with several disciplines to justify a series of reviews rather than a single review, and schools can negotiate the groupings of programmes with the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching). Reviews may be organised at two levels: programme level, which covers all undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses; and school level, which covers postgraduate research students and other courses organised at the school level (for example, combined studies). For the School of Textiles and Design, the Institute of Petroleum Engineering, and the Edinburgh Business School, review at programme and school levels are undertaken as a single activity. For the remaining schools, programme level review and school level review may be undertaken separately. The process does not consider individual awards (courses), however, it does require that schools confirm that programme specifications for all courses are complete, accurate and up to date, and that all course regulations are consistent with University codes of practice and guidelines.

30 Internal review panels comprise two University staff members (including the convener) who are selected from another school, two external members and two students (see below, paragraphs 82-83). The documentation for internal review consists of a reflective analysis, copies of the relevant programme specifications and the annual programme monitoring reports for the previous two years. Until recently, reviews have tended to

last one day, but as more schools opt to undertake a review combining school level and programme level activity, reviews are lasting one and half to two days. Reviews include meetings with students and with staff. The review panel makes a judgement on quality and academic standards and prepares a report. The school is required to prepare an action plan in response to the report, including specific targets, with identified completion dates and designated responsibilities. The panel report and school action plan are considered by the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee, which confirms the recommendations and also seeks to confirm that the review has been carried out according to University guidelines. Where the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee considers that an action plan contains insufficient detail, it is referred back to the school and a revised plan brought to the next meeting of that committee. Schools submit a progress report on actions within a year of the original review. An executive summary is submitted by the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee to the Planning and Management Executive and the Senate for confirmation that the process has been properly completed.

31 Following the first five reviews conducted by the University, minor modifications were made to the process, the chief of which was that the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) should attend all reviews to ensure consistency of operation, including in the process for agreeing judgements. The ELIR team considered that the University, through its Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee, can confirm that the process is thorough and effective, although it concurred with the University's analysis that there is scope for improving the means to identifying good practice across the University (see below, paragraph 127).

Research degrees

32 The University has over 600 research students both on and off-campus. Practices and expectations have been codified with the production of the University's Postgraduate

research student code of practice introduced for 2003-04. Schools appoint research student coordinators, who are normally an academic member of staff, and who are appointed to oversee the operation of the code of practice in the school. Research student support and progress are monitored as part of the annual monitoring which reports to the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee, and evaluated through the periodic internal review process. Monitoring of arrangements for research students is overseen by the Research Student Co-ordinators Group, a committee of the Research Co-ordination Board, which in turn reports to the Planning and Management Executive. External examiners for research degrees are supported by a Code of practice for external examiners for higher research degrees. Research students met by the review team were aware of the code and had a good understanding of the key stages of their doctoral programme and how their progress was monitored through it.

Assessment

33 The RA stated that there is a common assessment and progression system which has been in use since 1999-2000 for undergraduate provision and since 2003-04 for postgraduate provision. The University has identified the need for guidelines on assessment and is developing a code of practice. The University has been aware for some time of the diversity of practice regarding re-assessment on taught postgraduate courses across the institution, an issue which has been the subject of active discussion in both the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee and the Learning and Teaching Board. The ELIR team would endorse the University's desire for resolution of this matter and would encourage the University to take early steps to ensure consistency and the equitable treatment of students regardless of their course of study.

External examining

34 In the RA, the University confirmed that external examiners are regarded as an integral part of the process by which the University assures itself that its degrees are of a comparable standard to awards of other universities. External examiners for taught programmes are appointed by the Undergraduate Studies Committee or the Postgraduate Studies Committee, and by the Postgraduate Studies Committee for research awards. On appointment, external examiners are issued with either the External examiner handbook for taught courses, or the Code of practice for external examiners for research degrees. Responsibility for the briefing of external examiners rests with schools. The University intends to introduce training for exam board convenors.

Distributed and distance learning

Nature, extent and range of provision

35 In total the University has some 9,450 (part and full-time) students who study off-campus. Within the University, these are subdivided into two different categories: students who receive a Heriot-Watt programme with tutoring and other support provided through an Approved Learning Partner ('distributed learners'); and 'distance learners' who study independently without support from an Approved Learning Partner. Independent or distance-learning programmes include the MBA and a web version of the BA Management programme, and some distance-learning PhD students.

Procedures - general approach and partner approval

36 In the RA, the University identified that it has a number of external partners who help deliver some of the courses to off-campus students. During 2004, the University undertook a review of its arrangements for collaborative provision and identified a number of concerns relating to its management of off-campus provision, some of which had not been addressed for some time. As a result of these

concerns, changes to procedures were introduced including the formal recording of visits to Approved Learning Partners prior to approval; periodic quality assurance visits; formal annual monitoring to include student feedback; and the explicit requirement that the University's internal review process include programmes delivered off-campus.

37 As a consequence of the 2004 review, in October 2005 the University published Guidelines on the introduction of collaborative agreements, which reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, and provide a user-friendly source of information for staff involved in the preparation of an agreement. There is a range of related procedures including those for Approved Teachers and Approved Tutors (see below, paragraphs 48-49) and for visits to Approved Learning Partners as well as a University template for drawing up the formal memorandum of agreement.

38 In the RA, the University stated the view that 'the shared responsibility for different aspects of learning ensures that academic standards are not at risk'. The University's Guidelines state that the arrangements for assuring the quality and standards of provision delivered through collaborative arrangements should be as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programmes provided wholly within the responsibility of a single institution. It does not require the adoption by the partner of its regulations or standard quality assurance procedures of the University, but sets out the criteria which must be considered. Each agreement has to cover detailed arrangements regarding external examining, discipline, complaints and appeals.

39 The University's arrangements for the approval of a new Approved Learning Partner now involve a negotiation stage, which includes the completion of the memorandum of agreement and an approval visit and visit report (for which there is a University template). At the approval stage, the head of school, the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the Legal Service Manager and the Vice-Principal considers the proposal. The panel should not

normally have been involved in the negotiation stage. The procedures for the approval of a partner must be completed prior to operation of any activity within the Approved Learning Partner. Agreements are normally subject to review after three years. Re-approval is a formal process with similar preparation and approval stages. A record of all flexible and distance-learning programmes and Approved Learning Partners is maintained by the Academic Registry. There are some differences for Approved Learning Partners working with the Edinburgh Business School, reflecting different business partnership arrangements.

40 Considerable responsibility is devolved to the relevant course director and school staff, and this is counterbalanced by the support provided by the Academic Registry which has responsibility for ensuring that any proposal conforms to the University ordinances and regulations and the *Code of practice*. There is flexibility within the University guidelines, for example, the University requires schools to consider the arrangements for annual or support visits, but does not prescribe how these should be carried out.

41 The University has developed a parallel code of practice for flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning) in response to the *Code of practice*. It is designed to cover all aspects of learning delivered, supported and/or assessed through flexible and distributed arrangements, including e-learning, whether in collaboration with a partner organisation or Approved Learning Partner or relating to independent learners. The University's code states that it is seeking to ensure 'equivalence of outcomes'.

Academic standards and assessment

42 As most courses offered through Approved Learning Partners are also offered on-campus, assessment tasks are normally the same, allowing the direct monitoring of the standards of student performance across all modes of delivery. The University has responsibility for summative assessment, and the majority of this is marked by Heriot-Watt staff, although assessment (including formative assessment)

may also be undertaken by Approved Teachers at Approved Learning Partners. To ensure the security of the examination process, the University has established an International Centre for Examinations, which is administered by the Edinburgh Business School. The Centre uses some 650 independent examination centres, most of which are arranged through the British Council. This arrangement ensures that examinations are independent of the Approved Learning Partners. Independent invigilators submit reports on each examination to the University. The performance of students at individual Approved Learning Partners is considered as part of annual monitoring reporting to the schools. External examiners are appointed for each course for which the University makes an award and, where applicable, external examiners will also have responsibility for courses delivered off-campus and/or in a language other than English.

43 There are specific arrangements for the assessment of courses delivered in languages other than English. The University established a working group to review arrangements in 2004-05. In particular, the working group considered whether appropriate arrangements were in place for the proposed delivery of the MBA in Spanish and Arabic (at that time, the MBA was delivered in English, Hebrew and Chinese). Under these arrangements, external examiners approve examination papers prior to translation, and a sample of examination scripts are translated into English to enable external examiners to comment specifically on the performance of the students, and related matters, in their reports. Given the large cohorts of students studying on the MBA programme, this sample size was deemed to be appropriate to allow external examiners to confirm comparability of standards. The working group was satisfied with the arrangements for the MBA, but recommended that future proposals should be considered for approval by the Undergraduate Studies Committee or the Postgraduate Studies Committee on a case-by-case basis, for each course offered in each language.

Programme/course level - approval, monitoring and review

44 University policy states that academic programmes offered to distance and distributed learning students must be specifically approved for that mode of delivery by the relevant Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Committee. Schools are required to demonstrate that they have considered the learning needs of distance/distributed learning students in their course development, and must consider the needs of distance and distributed learning students when designing the course syllabuses. Responsibility for contextualisation of Heriot-Watt material lies with local Approved Tutors (see below, paragraphs 48-49).

45 Each Approved Learning Partner is required to complete an annual programme monitoring and review report on a University pro forma. This covers numerical data and qualitative information in the form of staff and student feedback. The report is scrutinised first at school level; the report and the school's draft response letter are then considered by both a dean and the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching). The ELIR team studied a number of examples of completed reports and considered that they represented a thorough procedure which was usually undertaken carefully by all participants. Many Approved Learning Partners were clearly comfortable raising issues, and scrutiny of school responses by the relevant dean and Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) ensured that matters were picked up and that responses were appropriate. Through scrutiny by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the University was also able to identify generic matters and, through the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee, to respond at a strategic level. Many reports from Approved Learning Partners indicated that the University had established positive and valuable partnerships.

46 Schools are expected to incorporate annual reports from Approved Learning Partners into their own annual programme monitoring reports, and to respond appropriately to issues raised in the former.

The University has identified that some school annual programme monitoring reports have contained inadequate consideration of off-campus provision (see above, paragraphs 26-27). The ELIR team came to the view that, while it is clear there is effective scrutiny by deans and the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) of how annual reports from Approved Learning Partners are progressed, there is a need for more consistent consideration of these reports at the school level.

Course materials and learner support

47 In the RA, the University said that its model for student learning at Approved Learning Partners is based on the development of high-quality teaching materials being used by local tutors who interpret and contextualise the materials and provide support for students. Through annual monitoring reports to the schools, and through external examiners' reports, the University had become aware of shortcomings, including the late delivery of course materials (especially with new partnerships) and that some courses designed for on-campus delivery had not been adapted for off-campus delivery. The University is seeking to address these shortcomings in a range of ways, including through its recent code of practice on flexible and distance learning (see above, paragraph 41), which states that core learning materials should be checked and signed off by a qualified member of staff.

48 Support for students at Approved Learning Partners is provided by local tutors or teachers. The University has procedures for the approval of Approved Teachers and Tutors in order to ensure that staff engaged in delivering or supporting students off-campus are appropriately trained and qualified for the role. There are two levels of approval: Approved Teachers (who may make academic decisions associated with curriculum content and development, student entry qualifications, and summative assessment of student work), and Approved Tutors (who provide academic support, but do not make other academic decisions). The University's Academic Registry

maintains the authoritative record of all off-campus approved teachers and tutors.

49 Individual applications for Approved Tutors status are accompanied by a CV and supporting statement from the programme director. The head of school or school director of learning and teaching is responsible for confirming that the applicant has appropriate experience to deliver the specified modules. Individual applications for Approved Teacher status have to be authorised by the head of school or school director of learning and teaching before being forwarded for consideration by the designated dean who is responsible for confirming that the applicant has appropriate experience to deliver the specified modules and to make academic decisions. The ELIR team considered the scrutiny and approval on a time-limited basis of all individuals acting as Approved Tutors or Teachers off-campus to be a key mechanism by which the University was able to assure itself about the quality of the learning support offered to its students off-campus, and considers that this constitutes good practice.

50 In general, the University's updating of its arrangements in relation to courses delivered through Approved Learning Partners has produced a set of appropriate procedures which are aligned with its general approach of devolving considerable responsibilities to schools. The procedures are designed to assure quality and comparability of standards and to safeguard the University from undue risk.

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

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

51 The RA stated that during 2003, the University undertook a review of all its courses in relation to the guidelines of the SCQF and that, following some minor modifications (for example, to some master's conversion and MEng courses) could confirm that all its courses met the SCQF guidance. All new modules and courses are approved by the Undergraduate Studies Committee or Postgraduate Studies Committee (see above, paragraphs 23-24), where reference to the SCQF is required and reviewed. Continued compatibility with the SCQF is also monitored through annual and periodic review processes. On the basis of evidence available, the ELIR team was able to confirm the University's view that its modules and courses are consistent with the SCQF guidance.

Code of practice

52 The RA identified that it is the University's practice to take the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, into account in the formulation of its policies and procedures. A number of policies and supporting guidelines make direct reference to the *Code*, for example, those on collaborative provision. Revisions to the *Code*, and resultant modifications to the University's policies and procedures are considered by the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee. In some cases, for example, the provision of off-campus courses, the University has used the *Code's* precepts to further develop its own code of practice.

Subject benchmark statements

53 The appropriate subject benchmark statements are recorded on the programme specification through the course approval process, and the way a school uses benchmark statements is considered through the internal review process.

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

54 The University regards public, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) as important in the maintenance of quality and standards. A considerable proportion of courses offered at the University are accredited by PSRBs and the University has relationships with over 30 such bodies. The University does not consider the outcomes of PSRB accreditation and review reports at institutional level as it considers that the process rarely provides feedback that can be shared widely across disciplines. Schools summarise any key points raised in PSRB reviews through the annual monitoring process. The ELIR team noted that the 1999 QAA Continuation Audit had recommended the advantages of PSRB reports being considered at University level for the purposes of monitoring and enhancement. The current team would reiterate this, regarding it as an opportunity lost in not making the best use of links with professional bodies and in the external scrutiny of courses.

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

55 Overall, the University has comprehensive procedures in place for the approval, monitoring and review of its courses. These procedures make effective use of external reference points, including subject benchmarks, the SCQF, and the *Code of practice*. The University makes good use of external examiners to ensure the comparability of the academic standards of its awards, and a common framework for assessment helps to ensure equity and a consistency of decision-making for its students. The University has significant research degree provision and the arrangements for the management of the quality and standards of this provision is generally effective and well understood by staff and students.

56 The University has recently revised its processes for annual course monitoring. The University intends to monitor the effectiveness of these changes and, in doing so, it is encouraged to continue to consider how this process might be more comprehensively embedded at the school level to ensure greater consistency. The University has also reviewed its processes for the internal periodic review of schools and programmes, to better reflect its devolved organisation and the expectations of the Scottish Funding Council. Overall, the revised arrangements for annual course monitoring and for periodic review are effective.

57 The University has recently taken a number of significant steps to strengthen its arrangements relating to 'distributed learning', including the approval of off-campus centres (Approved Learning Partners) and the management of the quality of its courses delivered through these partners. In addition, the University demonstrates good practice in its well-established and thorough processes for the approval of individual Approved Teachers and Approved Tutors. The University is strongly encouraged to continue to keep under review the effectiveness of its arrangements for the management and oversight of its Approved Learning Partners provision because of the potential risk inherent in this type of provision.

58 On the basis of these findings, broad confidence can be placed 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

59 In the RA, the University set out its commitment to the principles of open, fair, accurate and up-to-date public information.

Teaching Quality Information

60 Overall responsibility for overseeing Teaching Quality Information data, and accompanying qualitative information, lies with the Director of Planning, on behalf of the Planning and Management Executive. Responsibility for checking the accuracy of the original data rests with the relevant central services: Recruitment and Admissions, Academic Registry and the Careers Advisory Service. To date, the University has met all the publication deadlines required by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and the Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the United Kingdom.

Publicity and promotional materials

61 The primary public information sources are the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectus and related on-line information, together with leaflets and other course information. The University has a clear system for checking published material, including that published on its website. The Press and Public Relations Office is responsible for the production of publicity and promotional materials, and schools (through their directors of learning and teaching) and the relevant support services have responsibility for confirming the accuracy of information on taught courses and student facilities respectively.

62 For collaborative provision, University guidelines require that responsibility for the accuracy of information is stated within the memorandum of agreement, and that promotional information on programmes prepared by Approved Learning Partners is approved by the University prior to publication.

Student handbooks

63 Individual schools are responsible for the academic and school-specific content of student handbooks and other core student information. As part of its preparation for ELIR, the University identified inconsistencies in its student handbooks with differences in content and level of detail. As a result, the University has developed a standard template to be used from 2005-06 to ensure consistency of style and accuracy of standard information. Approval

of student handbooks now rests with the school directors of learning and teaching.

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

64 The University takes an effective approach to 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

65 The University's approach to engaging with students in the assurance and enhancement of quality is based on two key processes: feedback (in relation to students' own experiences, particularly their learning experience at the subject level), and representation (students contribution to the quality of institutional activities).

University-level representation and feedback

66 Students are represented on the majority of the University's key academic decision-making bodies, from the subject level within schools, up to the University Court. The Students' Association sabbatical officers sit on the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee, the Learning and Teaching Board, the Support Services Board, Senate and the University Court. The Students' Association communicates on academic matters with the student body through its own Academic Committee, which meets regularly to discuss institution-wide matters, and through its Student Senate, which comprises all elected representatives, with an open invitation to the entire student body. These two forums provide a mechanism for sharing views and discussing institution-wide issues such as those identified by the

University's Learning and Teaching Board. The Students' Association Academic Committee and the Student Senate have been effective in facilitating student representatives to make cross-school comparisons, for example in the implementation of mentoring arrangements for first year students, and in enabling them to make informed judgements on consistency and comparability across the University.

67 The University conducts periodic surveys of the whole student body through an institution-wide student satisfaction survey. The first student satisfaction survey was conducted in 2002, covering a broad range of topics including the quality of learning and teaching, and a follow-up survey is scheduled for 2006-07. The University has recently participated in a survey of international students, in order to better understand the needs of this student group. The University acknowledges that while the findings of the 2002 survey, in relation to mentoring and feedback have been incorporated into its Learning and Teaching Strategy, the process of responding to the issues emerging from such surveys needs to be more systematic.

68 Students' Association sabbatical officers and school officers were not familiar with the student satisfaction survey, nor with enhancements to the student learning experience arising from it, partly as a result of the time elapsed since the survey. The University is encouraged to consider the benefit of undertaking such institutional surveys more frequently, both in order to achieve a regular cohort analysis, and also to facilitate wider student understanding of the potential benefits of gathering such information.

69 The University has a designated 'Student Champion' whose role includes progressing, at a senior level, institution-wide issues identified by students (see below, paragraph 96).

School-level representation and feedback

70 The University's processes for student representation and feedback at the school level include informal mechanisms, student-staff committees, and school officers.

71 Informal mechanisms at the school level, for example, 'open door' policies, classroom interaction, and email communications, are seen as a particularly important and effective means for students and staff to identify and resolve matters. Students regard staff to be approachable, and informal arrangements to be generally good.

Student-staff committees

72 Each school has a range of student-staff committees, which consider matters of a mainly academic nature. Given the devolved organisation of the University, these representative structures may vary between schools, for example, students may be grouped by year or by subject, reflecting factors such as student numbers and discipline diversity in schools.

73 For undergraduate students who study on the University's campuses, committees include elected class representatives and school officers (see below, paragraph 75). Training for class representatives and school officers is delivered by the Students' Association in conjunction with the national Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs) service.

74 Class representatives and school officers view their role in schools as effectively integrated into school quality assurance structures, and are able to identify how matters raised through student-staff committees are being addressed. Some schools use student-staff committees to discuss collated student feedback and, where this happened, students regard this to be very valuable. Not all students are aware of the role and purpose of class representatives, or of how these arrangements might contribute to enhancing the student experience. The University is encouraged to continue to consider the ways in which student representation at school level could be more effective, for example, by closing 'feedback' loops, so that more students feel engaged in, and value, the process.

School officers

75 In order to promote effective student representation within the multidisciplinary schools, the Students' Association, schools and

the University have established the position of School Officer. The position seeks to bridge the gap between the institutional level activities of the Students' Association and the work of the class representatives. Students are appointed to the position of school officers, and are supported by an agreed role specification, training and an honorarium. The role is still evolving as schools consider the most effective means of utilising their officers; in some cases the school officer is a formal member of school learning and teaching committees. School officers are also members of the Students' Association Academic Committee and the Student Senate, thereby promoting communication between local and institutional matters. Student representatives and student officers view the role as dynamic, necessary and beneficial, given the University's devolved structure. The school officer role is an innovative approach to addressing the challenge of linking local and institutional representation, and represents good practice.

Representation and feedback: postgraduate research students

76 There is provision for postgraduate student-staff committees to function at programme level, as either discipline-based or school-wide forums. The Research Student Co-ordinators Group (see above, paragraph 32) is currently considering mechanisms for research student representation and participation at the institutional level.

77 Individual feedback from postgraduate research students is sought through individual annual reviews at the school level and, at institutional level, through the Research Student Co-ordinators Group.

78 In discussion, research students, and staff who support research students, expressed their belief that there is an effective relationship between postgraduate research students and staff, and that the University provides a generally good postgraduate environment. These staff and students, however, expressed little knowledge of the mechanisms for collective representation for postgraduate students, confirming the University's own

recognition that the role of these forums is still developing.

Representation and feedback: distributed and distance-learning students

79 The arrangements for the establishment of Approved Learning Partners include provision for student representation and feedback, and the University encourages these partners to hold student-staff meetings and to pass the student view to the University through the annual monitoring process or during periodic visits. The University recognises that this is not always effective and, in the University's view, is determined, in part, by the culture within the partner institution. This unevenness in implementation of student representation arrangements was confirmed during the ELIR, with student-staff meetings operating very effectively in some Approved Learning Partners, but being absent in others. Currently, the Students' Association does not have contact with partner staff or class representatives, in order to provide training or support for representation activities, as is the case for class representatives based on the University campuses.

80 The opportunity for students to also provide direct feedback is, consequently, important for Approved Learning Partner students, and direct feedback provides the only means of ascertaining the views of off-campus independent (distance) learners. For learners who study at partner centres, feedback is collected through an annual monitoring form. However, there has been some concern amongst these students about providing comment directly to local tutors, and the University intends that a more anonymous system, as currently used for independent distance learners, will be extended to students at partner centres. The collection of feedback from independent distance learners is particularly well developed by the Edinburgh Business School (for example, through an on-line message board system), and this good practice is now being considered by other schools, with coordination being provided by the Flexible and Distance Learning Forum (see below, paragraph 119).

81 The University recognises that there remain a number of concerns relating to student representation and feedback arrangements for distance and distributed learning students. The University is currently keeping the issue of off-campus representation under review, and is working with the Students' Association to consider ways of enhancing representation, and ways in which the Students' Association might provide general guidance and assistance to partner centres (particularly in the case of student appeals and complaints). The University is currently developing a code of practice on student feedback, which is intended to establish a common set of minimum requirements, based on a broad range of good practice, to ensure coherence and equity through a devolved approach. It is intended that this will benefit both on and off-campus students.

Student involvement in internal reviews

82 Students participate as team members for the University's internal reviews of programmes and schools (see above, paragraphs 28-31). There are normally two student members of the panel; students are selected by the Students' Association and are normally school officers. Student review team members are supported in their role by a member of staff from the Students' Association, who also acts as an observer on the reviews. The Students' Association, collaborating with sparqs, also provides training for student review team members.

83 The engagement of student review team members has been effective. Demand for student places on the review is considerable, and the Students' Association operates a selection process. University staff confirm that student representatives have discharged their responsibilities professionally and have generally been very well informed. Students who have taken part in internal reviews consider that they have been treated as full members of the team, and that their views had been heard, including in the finalisation of the review report.

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

84 The University is committed to ensuring an appropriate learning experience for all of its students, recognising the diversity of this experience arising from the range of provision offered by the institution, across course and programmes, different campuses, and through the different modes of delivery, including full-time, part-time, distributed and distance learning.

85 The University recognises that students relate primarily to their subject discipline, and engage more with the school and subject than with the University as a whole. Accordingly, the University sees its role as one of supporting schools in the development of an effective learning experience for students. It offers a range of central services which support students with particular learning or other needs, and also support staff in schools.

Learning and teaching strategy

86 A key driver of the promotion of effective student learning is the development and implementation of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy (see below, paragraphs 120-124). Two of the Strategy's themes impact directly on the quality of the student experience: 'enhancing learning and teaching'; and the 'student learning experience'. Within these two strategic themes, the University has established a number of projects, including: the introduction of an institution-wide virtual learning environment; implementing a restructured academic year; the review of mentoring schemes; and the development of a progression (retention and completion) strategy.

Virtual learning environment

87 The University is in the process of developing a University-wide virtual learning environment (VLE), building on an established history of e-learning and blended learning innovations within the institution. The University VLE is intended to benefit both on and off-campus students and aims to provide the learner with a flexible and accessible

environment which supports student-centred, resource-based learning and personal development planning. University staff view the introduction of the VLE as a particularly positive example of institutional strategy building on expertise and good practice originating from within the schools. The Students' Association has also been extensively involved in its introduction, through briefing the student body, and collating their views. The cooperative approach to the VLE project between the University and the Students' Association is seen by both staff and students as important in ensuring the widespread ownership of the VLE project across the University. The VLE is scheduled for implementation during 2006-07.

Structure of the academic year

88 The University has recently completed a comprehensive review of the structure of its academic year, with the objective of enhancing student learning. The revised arrangements will include a two-block structure with longer study periods and larger modules which aim to provide increased scope for student development of skills, and to facilitate a broader range of teaching and assessment methods. Students have been consulted on the restructuring of the academic year, and the new arrangements are scheduled for implementation in 2008-09.

Academic support

University-level academic support

89 Primary responsibility for supporting the academic development of students rests with the schools (see below, paragraphs 90-94). In addition, at the University level, there are two academic counsellors (one at each of the Edinburgh and Borders campuses) who offer one-to-one sessions for students requiring academic skills support. The academic counsellors also collaborate with schools in designing and delivering personal development planning sessions which are integrated into the curriculum.

School-level academic support

90 Academic support for students is provided primarily at the subject level. Such academic

support takes a number of forms including tailored learning skills support; tailored support for exchange students (outgoing and incoming) and students embarking on work placements; and mentoring. Learning skills support provided at the subject level may include: skills development modules integrated into the curriculum; one-to-one tutorials; local resource and support centres; flexible learning materials; and generic skills-development modules available to the study body as electives.

Mentoring

91 A significant element of the academic support infrastructure is the University's personal tutoring system, termed 'mentoring' by the University, which operates through the subject or school level. All undergraduate, on-campus students are allocated a mentor, who is a member of academic staff and provides a first point of contact for students on both academic and non-academic matters. Formal meetings between students and their mentor are normally held once each term, at least in the earlier stages of a student's course of studies. The aim of mentoring is to provide students with a wide range of support, including monitoring their progress; assisting with academic difficulties; advising on module choice (including generic skills modules); and pastoral support (including linking students with specialist staff at the University level).

92 Mentor training for staff is provided informally within schools, and provision for mentoring is specified in the 'student support' section of the University's quality assurance guidelines and procedures. In addition, there is some guidance on mentoring included in the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PgCAP) course, which is a probationary requirement for new academic staff. Informed by the views of the Students' Association, and a recent review conducted by the Academic Registry, the University is aware of significant variation in the implementation and effectiveness of the mentoring scheme across schools and, thus, significant variation in the student experience of mentoring. This view has been confirmed by staff and students. In

response to these concerns, and in consultation with schools, support services and the Students' Association, the University has recently developed a code of practice on mentoring which draws on both internal good practice and external reference points, including the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, and the national 'Responding to Students Needs' enhancement theme. In addition, it is planned that the Educational Development Unit will develop a mentor training programme, expanding on current provision for new lecturers. There are also designated staff-student support coordinators in some schools whose role is to link the activities of schools, central support services and the Students' Association. There are plans to formalise and extend this role to all schools through the establishment of a student support coordinators forum. As the University continues its important work to address variability in mentoring practice, it is encouraged to monitor the implementation of these new arrangements at the school level, and across schools, to ensure a more equitable, appropriate and consistent student experience of mentoring.

Academic support for postgraduate research students

93 In 2005-06, the University introduced an integrated training programme for research students which aims to provide all such students with generic and transferable skills training. Individualised support for on and off-campus research students is provided primarily by the two supervisors appointed for each student. Within schools, support similar to mentoring is provided by course directors and supervisors. In discussion, postgraduate students expressed general satisfaction with the levels of academic support provided by schools but commented that the quality of support could vary between supervisors, and between schools. Staff with supervisory responsibilities also acknowledged that there were inconsistencies across the institution. Some schools are considering the introduction of a more formal mentoring scheme for research students, and there may be benefit in

introducing such arrangements across the whole institution. There would also be value in the University reviewing staff development provision available for postgraduate supervisors, including enhancing their knowledge and understanding of the University's postgraduate research student code of practice.

Academic support for distance and distributed-learning students

94 The University seeks to provide the same level of academic support to all students, irrespective of their location of study, but recognises that the way in which this academic support is delivered will vary. For off-campus students studying at Approved Learning Partners, approaches to promoting effective learning are integrated into the curriculum and course materials (which are developed by the relevant University's schools), and academic and non-academic support are provided by local Approved Teachers and Approved Tutors. The level of support varies from centre to centre and is negotiated on a case-to-case basis to meet student needs.

Pastoral and other support

95 The University provides a range of support and other services for on-campus students. These include accommodation services; the career advisory service (see below, paragraphs 99-100); chaplaincy; student welfare services; international students advisors office; wider access unit; library and computing services. Students are generally satisfied with the range and quality of non-academic support available to them, and staff in these services are highly committed and skilled in their dealing with students. The University's services are complemented by the Students' Association Advice and Support Centre which offers advice on a wide range of issues and runs awareness-raising campaigns. Students identify strongly with the Students' Association as an initial source of advice on pastoral and related matters.

96 The University has designated a 'Student Champion' to progress, at a senior level, institution-wide issues identified by students,

and to take forward equality and diversity matters. The role, which is currently undertaken by the University's Librarian, also includes convening the Equal Opportunities Committee, the Disability Advisory Group, and the Welfare Forum. The Student Champion role is that of a locus of support for student representatives, for example, by introducing new sabbatical officers to members of University staff, and to give advice and guidance on how to progress matters of importance to student representatives. A recent example of a successful initiative due, in part, to help from the Student Champion, is the establishment of a new Muslim prayer room. The role is viewed as important by both students and staff, in that the Champion is outwith the University's executive but has considerable institutional knowledge. The success of the current, and first, Student Champion in progressing institutional issues identified by students is clearly evident, reflecting the hard work and commitment of the current Champion, and the University is encouraged to consider how to embed this good practice to ensure effective succession planning for any future postholders.

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

97 A defining characteristic of the University is the extent to which all academic programmes are closely linked to professional career opportunities. Most students undertaking a course at the University do so in the expectation of graduate level, professional employment. Preparation for employment is central to all courses, and most undergraduate provision is accredited by PSRBs.

98 The University is aware that it has not maintained its market or ranking position in Scottish and UK graduate employment. The University recognises that changes in the employment market, employment practices, and changing employer and student expectations require the University to review its approach to developing student employability, and to develop new approaches to meeting the

needs of both graduates and employers. In order to address these challenges, the University has prioritised employability as a strategic objective, and is in the process of developing an employability and professional career readiness strategy (see below, paragraphs 104-107). Employability is also one of the four key themes of the University's wider strategy for quality enhancement.

Careers Advisory Service

99 The Careers Advisory Service has an increasingly important role in shaping and implementing strategic change within the University. For example, the Service is seeking to collaborate with schools to embed career and personal development planning into the curriculum, and plays an important role in the development of the University's employability strategy.

100 The service offers a wide range of facilities to students including a job shop; subject-based advice (including an e-guidance service); on-line personal development planning; a student-alumni mentoring programme; and on-campus employment events. A careers adviser is assigned to each school to assist in the design and delivery of career planning activities. University staff recognise the important role of the Careers Advisory Service, along with the Educational Development Unit (see below, paragraphs 130-131) in supporting the University's employability strategy, and implementation of related policies.

Personal development planning

101 The University's current policy on personal development planning (PDP) was implemented in 2004. The University's PDP programme has a particular focus on employability; it aims to ensure that students develop both subject-specific and generic skills, and that students can relate these to their career choice, and market these skills successfully. The development of a PDP policy, combined with a careers policy, has involved a broad spectrum of University groups, including the Learning and Teaching Board; the Educational Development Unit; the Careers Advisory Service; Academic Counselling;

Academic Registry; schools; and the Students' Association. As part of their PDP activity, students are expected to plan, record and reflect on their learning and career development. This PDP activity is delivered through a variety of mechanisms such as the University's academic mentoring scheme and a programme of PDP/careers workshops.

102 At the time of the ELIR, the University indicated that PDP pilots (including internet-based progress files) were operating in approximately 60 per cent of undergraduate programmes.

The University plans to extend PDP to all taught programmes (including postgraduate programmes) during 2005-06.

103 As the University recognises, to date, the implementation of PDP across the schools has been uneven, although there are recognised examples of good practice (for example, in the postgraduate town planning course in the School of the Built Environment, and the student-alumni mentoring programme organised through the Development and Alumni Office). Staff and students recognise that the implementation of PDP through a range of different mechanisms leads to significant variation in the opportunity for students to benefit from the PDP strategy. The University is, therefore, encouraged to continue to monitor and review its arrangements for the implementation and embedding of its PDP strategy.

Employability and professional career readiness

104 At the time of the ELIR, the University was in the process of finalising its strategy for a employability and professional career-readiness strategy. This strategy, which has been evolving for some time, has as its key aim 'to produce institutional graduate employment rates above the University's benchmark and above both Scottish and UK averages'. At the time of the ELIR visit, preparation of the strategy was well advanced, and was due for formal approval by the University in June 2006.

105 The term 'professional career readiness strategy' has been adopted by the University to capture a broader, more student-focused concept of employability. Professional career readiness is understood as a set of skills, competencies, knowledge and attitudes that make graduates likely to gain professional employment and contribute to society, their profession and their own personal development. The University highlighted that while professional career readiness includes development of 'doing' skills, much of the approach concerns the development of professional values that relate to 'being' a professional individual in the relevant subject field. The scope of the strategy will embrace embedding skills in the curriculum, research-informed teaching, personal development planning and external employer links.

106 The framework for the implementation of the employability and professional career readiness strategy involved setting five institutional objectives, with associated targets and timescales, and key projects. Implementation of the strategy will be through the schools and support units (Academic Registry, the Educational Development Unit and the Careers Advisory Service). Key performance indicators and qualitative measures will be identified to measure the success of the strategy, and monitoring and evaluation will be undertaken through the wider monitoring and evaluation arrangements of the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

107 The development of the University's employability and professional career readiness strategy is an important cross-institutional development, which builds on a strong history and ethos of commitment to graduate employability. The strategy includes a clear articulation of the professional employment market, and the University's need to respond to that changing context. The strategy represents a holistic and cohesive approach to equipping students with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required for professional employment. There is good knowledge and understanding among University staff of the strategy and its drivers. The employability and professional career readiness strategy has much potential; a key challenge for the University will be to

assure its appropriate implementation across the University's devolved structure.

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

108 The student community is effectively represented in the University's academic decision-making structures and there is a successful partnership between the Students' Association and the University. It is acknowledged that significant student involvement in initiatives can reduce risk and improve on the successful delivery of initiatives, as has been the case with the introduction of the University's VLE. The University's arrangements for student representation and feedback are generally effective. The University recognises that there remain a number of concerns relating to student representation and feedback for distance and distributed learning students, and is working with the Students' Association to consider ways of enhancing opportunities for these students. In order to promote effective student representation within schools, and to improve the linking of local and institutional representation for students, the posts of student school officers has been established. The role, which is still evolving, is an innovative approach to addressing student engagement, with much potential, and represents good practice.

109 Primary responsibility for student academic support rests with the schools, and a significant element of this support is provided through the University's mentoring arrangements. The University is taking systematic steps to address the current variability in mentoring practices across the University, and is encouraged to monitor the implementation of these new arrangements. As part of its arrangements for pastoral support, the University has designated a senior member of the University staff as a 'Student Champion', to promote institutional issues raised by students, and progress equality and diversity matters. The success of this role is clearly evident and the University is encouraged to consider how to further embed this good practice to ensure effective succession planning for any future postholders.

110 The emergence of the University's employability and professional career readiness strategy is a very positive development; it embraces a number of existing employability policies and practices and represents a holistic and cohesive approach to promoting graduate employability. The draft strategy has much potential, and a key challenge for the University will be to oversee its successful implementation across the devolved school structure.

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

Management responsibility for quality enhancement

111 Institutional responsibility for quality enhancement lies ultimately with the Senate. The Learning and Teaching Board's principal function is to develop and implement the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy in consultation with schools, support services and the Students' Association, and so is a key driver of enhancement within the University (see above, paragraph 18). For example, discussion at recent meetings covered recruitment statistics, the implementation of PDP, the development of a VLE, semesterisation, and key performance indicators in relation to learning and teaching. The Learning and Teaching Board hosts a series of drop-in lunches at which members can informally discuss issues, at least one of which was attended by school officers (see above, paragraph 75). In June 2005, it established a programme/course leaders forum for the discussion of common issues in teaching, and the sharing of good practice, such as employability, student diversity and managing large groups. The Board plays a key role in the allocation of resources for implementing enhancement initiatives, and monitors and promotes University engagement

with the sector-wide enhancement themes. Through the school directors of learning and teaching, the Board has a direct line of communication to schools and a means by which to ensure its priorities are included in school agendas.

112 The Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee is responsible for the formulation of policy and establishment of procedures and practices (see above, paragraph 18). Its membership includes the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), Academic Registrar, deans, and representatives elected by the Senate and nominated by schools. Its remit includes promoting enhancement throughout the University, in addition to its assurance functions. Through its membership there is an effective means of ensuring that current matters of business are relayed to the schools and that the Committee is informed of issues and practice at school level.

113 The Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee's title suggests the potential for conflict of interest by locating both assurance and enhancement roles within the same body, but this is not the case in practice. The University views the Learning and Teaching Board and Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee as contributing in different, but complementary, ways to the overall enhancement process. The Learning and Teaching Board has responsibility for setting the University's strategic academic context and driving enhancement strategy. The Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee's remit includes the development of the University's academic structure and related policies, and has the role of monitoring and evaluating projects arising from the Learning and Teaching Board.

114 Communication and liaison between the two committees depend essentially upon their common Chairing by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the key figure in the institution's management of quality. The chair helps to ensure that enhancement and assurance activities complement rather than contradict by providing high level oversight of the two processes, and integrating them where

appropriate. There is the potential that having a single chair for these two committees could jeopardise the independence needed to secure the assurance process. In practice, however, the relationship between the two committees is very effective and the role of the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) supports both assurance and enhancement processes.

115 The business of the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee is confined to academic matters, and specifically those associated with learning, teaching and student support. The Support Services Board, which reports to the Planning and Management Executive, and to Senate, is responsible for developing, implementing and monitoring strategy in relation to welfare services. The Welfare Services Forum, which is a subgroup of the Support Services Board and has specific responsibility for matters relating to the student experience, reports to the Court through its Chair, and the Student Champion is an ex officio member of Court (see above, paragraph 96). Both the Welfare Services Forum and the role of Champion are very positive initiatives in supporting the enhancement of the student experience.

116 There is currently no formal stage for identifying generic issues raised by external examiners. Through their role of scrutinising all external examiners' reports, and internal monitoring and review reports (see above, paragraphs 19; 26 to 31), the two deans and the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) have responsibility for ensuring that matters are appropriately pursued at school level and that examples of good practice are taken to the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee. This arrangement is effective, but it is a considerable responsibility for three individuals to discharge across the institution and the University should keep under review the possibility of introducing a more distributed and formal monitoring mechanism to place institution-wide issues on the University's enhancement agenda. It is clear, however, that the deans have a key role to play in linking institutional and school enhancement

initiatives. They have the authority of elected officers, and detailed command of both high-level strategic issues and of operational matters.

117 Responsibility for supporting the implementation of improvements in academic practice, such as the development of programme specifications and indirectly, the student learning experience, lies to a large degree with the Academic Registrar and the Academic Registry. The Academic Registry collects data and conducts reviews that can promote changes in practice that directly affect students.

Quality and enhancement of off-campus provision

118 With some 9,450 students studying for University awards away from the main campus, assuring and enhancing the quality of their learning experience presents a considerable challenge. The University aims to provide a comparable experience to all of its students, although it recognises that this cannot always be achieved. The extent and nature of acceptable variation from the experience and expectations of campus-based students is a key issue for the University which it is well aware of. Approved Learning Partners must supply evidence of their quality assurance system's explicit reference to continuous improvement. While enhancement is not a contractual issue, the three-yearly renewal process for Approved Learning Partner Status is expected, by reporting on quality assurance, to ensure that University developments such as the introduction of PDP are also made available to off-campus students.

119 In 2005 the University introduced a detailed and thorough code of practice on flexible and distributed learning, and established a Flexible and Distance Learning Forum in 2004 to support activity in this area and to spread good practice. These initiatives are focused and identify deliberate steps to address a recognised need. However the code of practice, which has many benefits, is focused upon standards and quality assurance, with no explicit reference to enhancement or to promoting continuous educational improvement.

Quality enhancement strategy

120 The University's Quality Enhancement Strategy is embedded within its Learning and Teaching Strategy. The Learning and Teaching Strategy, which was approved by the Learning and Teaching Board in June 2003, and thereafter integrated into the institutional Strategic Plan, is a composite document comprising six sections: a record of the process of strategic development; the outcomes of a Learning and Teaching Board away day in June 2003; and reports from working groups on scoping exercises conducted in 2003 on each of the key themes - 'sustainable growth', 'enhancing learning and teaching', 'student learning experience' and 'institutional environment'. These reports form the core of the Strategy, setting out key aims, objectives and targets for each theme. Following a review of the current Learning and Teaching Strategy in March 2005, the Learning and Teaching Board agreed that, in the next version of the Strategy which it is anticipated will be finalised in June 2006, the 'institutional environment' theme should be discontinued, since most objectives had been fulfilled through the completion of academic restructuring, and should be superseded by the theme of 'employability'.

121 The reports that constitute the present version of the Strategy demonstrate dynamic and innovative thinking. Key objectives under 'Enhancing Learning and Teaching' are the establishment of an Educational Development Unit and a programme of learning and teaching conferences, both of which have been successfully achieved. Further examples of enhancement activity in the other key objectives include policies on PDP (see above, paragraphs 101-103) and introducing a VLE (see above, paragraph 87). However, as a document the overall Strategy does not have a clear or coherent identity. The first section, 'A vision for the Learning and Teaching Strategy', is essentially an account of the context within which the Strategy is to be developed rather than providing a vision statement; it does emphasise the benefits of flexible delivery of teaching, of innovation, and the need for

academic and support services to work together, but it says little about the University's commitment to the enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience, or the qualities of a Heriot-Watt graduate.

122 Each of the reports that make up the Strategy includes a section on targets and timescales. The Learning and Teaching Board keeps progress under review and holds an annual away day to support the Strategy. The University notes that the Higher Education Funding Council for England has observed that it takes approximately five years from evolution to implementation and evaluation of a Learning and Teaching Strategy. Ahead of this timetable, the University intends to update the Strategy by the end of 2005-06, when 'employability' will be incorporated as a key theme.

123 Implementation of this Strategy is, to a considerable extent, devolved to schools, each of which has its own learning and teaching strategy. The institutional approach to quality enhancement is one of collaboration between the central University and the schools. The ambition is for close alignment between the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and school strategies. Heads of school, through directors of learning and teaching, are responsible for developing, executing and monitoring school strategies which follow the four-part structure of the institutional Strategy. The Learning and Teaching Board also has a role in ensuring alignment between schools' and the University's strategies. School strategies were reviewed thoroughly at a Learning and Teaching Board Strategy away day in 2004. Key points arising from the relationship of the school strategies to the four themes of the institutional strategy were noted and discussed, and each school strategy was rated against these themes. The school strategies are to be updated following the revision of the institutional Strategy in 2006. As part of this process, heads of school were to present their revised strategies at the Planning and Management Executive's Strategy away day in March 2006. The school directors of learning and teaching provide an additional (and

constant) route by which the Board is able to ensure that the priorities of the institutional Strategy are recognised by school learning and teaching committees.

124 This collaborative approach between the University and the schools is a strength. In bringing this about, the University seeks to work with academic colleagues, rather than impose upon them arrangements and there is a high level of awareness and understanding of the institutional strategy and its themes among staff. However, there is also the risk that with enhancement progressing at different rates in different parts of the University, neither the University's own aspirations, nor student expectations, can be realised equally. The University is confident that its policies and procedures ensure that a minimum standard of provision is maintained across the institution. However, there is evidence of variability between schools, for example, in taking forward the mentoring initiative (see above, paragraphs 91-92), developing PDP and employability-related activities. (see above, paragraphs 101-103). Nevertheless, there is strong student support for the University's devolved approach to enhancement.

Quality enhancement themes

125 The University engages with the national programme of enhancement themes in a meaningful manner. Responsibility for overseeing and coordinating the University's engagement lies with the Learning and Teaching Board and the Educational Development Unit. There are clear examples of the national themes informing institutional discussions and the development of the innovative School Officer role (see above, paragraph 75) was influenced by the Responding to Students' Needs theme. A number of members of academic staff at the University have been involved in devising and arranging enhancement events, for example, as members of the themes steering committee. Although good practice exists, the University recognises that reporting from enhancement events back into the institution has not been as consistent or effective as it might be.

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

The enhancement focus within the University's quality assurance processes

126 The University describes its internal monitoring and review processes as enhancement-led because it considers they provide an opportunity for enhancement as part of the quality assurance process and for the identification of good practice. The University's annual monitoring guidelines require schools to consider possible areas for improvement and identify good practice, resulting in an action plan for the school (or one for each programme) and suggestions for action at University level. This enables issues identified at school level to be addressed by the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee. Following their consideration by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the deans, who pass matters of institutional significance to the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee, the annual monitoring reports are circulated to all schools, thereby assisting the dissemination of good practice and discussion of common issues across schools. This constitutes an effective set of arrangements to ensure that the annual quality assurance processes feed into the enhancement agenda at both school and institutional level.

127 Periodic internal review is conducted at the school level (for research and combined studies programmes) and programme level (see above, paragraphs 28-31). Consideration of the panel report by the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee allows matters of interest to be transmitted from the school to the institutional level. It also ensures that matters are progressed through action plans produced by the school, and subsequently monitored annually by the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee. This set of arrangements enables development and improvement to result from the assurance process. The Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee has

resolved to identify key features of good practice for dissemination throughout the University and this is a positive development.

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

Policies for appraisal and promotion of staff

128 Promotion and career advancement is overseen by the Vice-Principal. The promotion criteria have been revised recently to allow promotion on the basis of leadership and achievement in teaching and pedagogical research, and there is recent evidence of cases where promotion has been achieved primarily on grounds of teaching excellence. The University's annual Learning and Teaching Award, awarded in part on the basis of student feedback and presented at a graduation ceremony, is a very visible demonstration of the institution's commitment to teaching excellence. Applications for the award are considered against three core criteria (course design, teaching and student support) and a range of additional criteria (for example, research student supervision; and engagement with the national enhancement themes). Applications are judged by a panel of senior staff, with external representation, and chaired by the Vice-Principal. Applications include a statement of how the sum awarded will be invested to improve learning and teaching at the University.

129 There is currently no system of staff appraisal or career development review. In common with other higher education institutions, the University is working towards implementation of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff Framework Agreement, for the modernisation of pay structures. The Framework includes a requirement for the implementation of appraisal schemes in higher education institutions. The requirement will provide the University with the opportunity to introduce a

staff appraisal scheme which, as well as meeting the needs of the Framework Agreement, could be more widely reflective and developmental.

Support for educational and staff development

130 Underlying the University's enhancement strategy is a concern to ensure that staff are properly prepared and supported for their learning and teaching activities. This is chiefly the responsibility of the Educational Development Unit which promotes and facilitates innovative approaches to learning and teaching, and the development of academic staff through a range of continuing professional development courses, training in particular skills (such as using a VLE or managing large groups) and tailor-made support for specific developments. The Unit participates with schools in managing a Learning and Teaching Development Fund to support individual school-based pedagogical projects.

131 Staff on probation are required to complete the University's Higher Education Academy-accredited PgCAP run by the Educational Development Unit. This programme covers both pedagogical theory and practical strategies, and it includes peer observation of teaching. Over 100 staff have now completed the programme (including a number of more experienced staff). This in large part explains the commitment to, and interest in, teaching innovation which has permeated the University's culture. Through consultations and advice on the application process, the Educational Development Unit encourages registration of staff with the Higher Education Academy, and around half the University's academic staff are registered practitioners of the Academy. This is convincing evidence of institutional and staff commitment to quality and innovation in teaching. In this context, it was unexpected to find that supervisors of research postgraduates are not required to undergo training, though supervisory training is an element in the PgCAP programme. The Educational Development Unit

also runs a nine-week Introduction to Teaching Skills course for research students who are tutors, and for Approved Tutors and Teachers (see above, paragraphs 48-49). Staff are positive about the range of courses and opportunities offered by the Educational Development Unit, and their relevance and effectiveness. The Educational Development Unit has made an impressive contribution to the University's approach to quality enhancement. In the short period of its existence, it has driven a process of cultural change so that learning and teaching are genuinely valued activities. Around one third of all academic staff attend biannual learning and teaching conferences, and staff volunteer initiatives to the Unit for support and development. It is clear that pride in teaching and in pedagogical scholarship are encouraged.

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

132 The development of the University's academic infrastructure by the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee, the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy by the Learning and Teaching Board, and the Educational Development Unit's promotion of pedagogical and staff development, combine to create a dynamic culture of educational improvement and innovation. Current initiatives such as the development of a code of practice for mentoring, the introduction of a VLE, and the cross-institutional implementation of PDP, are clearly projects which are likely to improve the student learning experience. Particularly notable is the part played by students in formulating policy in this area.

133 There are an effective set of arrangements in place to ensure that quality assurance processes, such as annual course monitoring and internal review at programme and school levels, enable improvement, and contribute to the enhancement agenda at both school and institutional levels.

134 The University has approached its ELIR as an enhancement opportunity, and the preparation of its case-study was deliberately undertaken as part of the formulation of the employability theme in its Learning and Teaching Strategy. In its reflections and preparations for ELIR, there was a clear demonstration of honest and critical self-reflection, accompanied by a clear determination to address weaknesses and to enhance the quality of the student learning experience.

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

135 The University is committed to an internally collaborative approach to enhancement; the University considers that there must be a strong central steer and oversight, but it regards school autonomy as a real strength and is wary of imposing uniformity of practice. Its firm belief is that allowing schools the scope to develop their own procedures, to initiate from their own experience, progress at their own rate, and implement institutional policy in the way that is most effective at the local level, secures from staff the commitment that is essential if enhancement is to be a cultural fact rather than a procedural exercise. There is clear evidence that this approach does result in commitment, and staff demonstrate awareness of the key themes of the Learning and Teaching Strategy and of current institutional priorities.

136 An inevitable consequence of this devolved approach is that enhancement proceeds in different ways and at different rates across the University. The University recognises and welcomes this differentiation as the condition of genuine enhancement. The clarity and firmness of the institution's decision to proceed in this way is to be respected, but it is an approach that requires vigilance since discrepancies in both the pace and the form of implementation of institutional initiatives from school to school could lead to inconsistencies that affect the student experience. The University is confident that it has regulations and codes to ensure a threshold quality of

provision across the University and that its approach to enhancement will steadily raise that threshold. While the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee establishes minimum requirements and the Learning and Teaching Board encourages the best to excel, there is an equal need to encourage the weakest to improve and to reduce the gap between the two. In particular, the University should consider agreeing implementation timelines with schools to ensure that all students benefit as far as possible from enhancement initiatives.

137 Underlying the University's enhancement strategy is a commitment to ensure that staff are properly supported in their learning and teaching activities. This support is chiefly the responsibility of the Educational Development Unit, and the Unit's work in pedagogic development has been very successful in generating a genuine interest in enhancing learning and teaching among academic staff.

Summary

Background to the institution and ELIR method

138 Heriot-Watt University (the University) was established by Royal Charter in 1966, having evolved from the Edinburgh School of Arts (1821), the Watt Institution and School of Arts (1851) and the Heriot-Watt College (1885). In 1998, the University merged with the Scottish College of Textiles. The University's mission is to: 'provide the highest quality education and training to suit the professional employment sector; meet the aspirations of students and help them realise their potential; deliver world class innovative research in the fields of business and industry; and exploit knowledge for the benefit of society'.

139 The University is organised into eight schools: Built Environment; Engineering and Physical Sciences; Life Sciences; Management and Languages; Mathematical and Computer Sciences; Textiles and Design; Institute of Petroleum Engineering (postgraduate only); and Edinburgh Business School (postgraduate only). At the time of the Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) visit, the University had a student population of about 8,200 full-time equivalent students, of which some 5,500 were undergraduates and some 2,700 were postgraduates. Approximately 20 percent of students (1,650 full-time equivalent or 9,424 registered students) study 'off-campus' as distance or distributed learning students. The University is based mainly in Edinburgh on a custom-built campus, with additional campuses in Galashiels (the Scottish Borders Campus), Orkney and Dubai (the latter established in September 2005).

140 In line with the ELIR method, the University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA) in advance of the review. The RA outlined 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 RA provided the focus for the review and was used by the ELIR team to develop its programme of activities. The

University submitted one case-study with the RA which focused on the University's current and ongoing development of a strategy for graduate employability and professional career readiness.

Overview of the matters raised by the review

141 The University's strategy for quality enhancement is embedded in its Learning and Teaching Strategy which currently has four key themes: sustainable growth; enhancing learning and teaching; employability; and the student learning experience. Each theme has associated key performance indicators, targets, objectives, projects and monitoring processes. Individual schools' strategies are aligned with the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the Students' Association has aligned its strategy with that of the University.

142 The particular themes pursued in the review included institutional oversight of quality at Approved Learning Partners; the learning experience of distance and distributed learning students and postgraduate research students; the University's strategy for promoting student employability; and quality enhancement through staff development, recognition and reward.

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

143 Overall, the University has comprehensive procedures in place for the approval, monitoring and review of its courses. These procedures make effective use of external reference points, including subject benchmarks, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA. The University makes good use of external examiners to ensure the comparability of the academic standards of its awards, and a common framework for assessment helps to ensure equity and a consistency of decision-

making for its students. The University has significant research degree provision and the arrangements for the management of the quality and standards of this provision is generally effective and well understood by staff and students.

144 The University has recently revised its processes for annual course monitoring, so that the schools have more flexibility to set processes based on their particular needs. The University intends to monitor the effectiveness of these changes and, in doing so, it is encouraged to continue to consider how this process might be more comprehensively embedded at the school level to ensure greater consistency. The University has also reviewed its processes for the internal periodic review of schools and programmes to better reflect its devolved organisation and the expectations of the Scottish Funding Council. Overall, the revised arrangements for annual course monitoring and for periodic review are affective.

145 The University has recently taken a number of significant steps to strengthen its arrangements relating to 'distributed learning', including the approval of off-campus centres (Approved Learning Partners) and the management of the quality of its courses delivered through these partners. In addition, the University demonstrates good practice in its well-established and thorough processes for the approval of individual Approved Teachers and Approved Tutors who have responsibility for the delivery of the University's courses at the partner centres. The University is strongly encouraged to continue to keep under review the effectiveness of its arrangements for the management and oversight of its Approved Learning Partners provision because of the potential risk inherent in this type of provision.

146 On the basis of these findings, broad confidence can be placed 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

147 The University takes an effective approach to 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

148 The student community is effectively represented in the University's academic decision-making structures and there is a successful partnership between the Students' Association and the University. It is acknowledged that significant student involvement in initiatives can reduce risk and improve on the successful delivery of initiatives, as has been the case with the introduction of the University's virtual learning environment (VLE). The University's arrangements for student representation and feedback are generally effective. The University recognises that there remain a number of concerns relating to student representation and feedback for distance and distributed learning students, and is working with the Students' Association to consider ways of enhancing opportunities for these students. In order to promote effective student representation within schools, and to improve the linking of local and institutional representation for students, the posts of student school officers has been established. The role, which is still evolving, is an innovative approach to addressing student engagement, with much potential, and represents good practice.

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University, and is encouraged to monitor the implementation of these new arrangements. As part of its arrangements for pastoral support, the University has designated a senior member of the University staff as a 'Student Champion' to promote institutional issues raised by students, and progress equality and diversity matters. The success of this role is clearly evident and the University is encouraged to consider how to further embed this good practice to ensure effective succession planning for any future postholders.

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

151 The development of the University's academic infrastructure by the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee, the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy by the Learning and Teaching Board, and the Educational Development Unit's promotion of pedagogical and staff development, combine to create a dynamic culture of educational improvement and innovation. Current initiatives such as the development of a code of practice for mentoring, the introduction of a VLE, and the cross-institutional implementation of personal development planning are clearly projects which are likely to improve the student learning experience. Particularly notable is the part played by students in formulating policy in this area.

152 There are an effective set of arrangements in place to ensure that quality assurance processes, such as annual course monitoring and internal review at programme and school

levels, enable improvement, and contribute to the enhancement agenda at both school and institutional levels.

153 The University has approached its ELIR as an enhancement opportunity, and the preparation of its case-study was deliberately undertaken as part of the formulation of the employability theme in its Learning and Teaching Strategy. In its reflections and preparations for ELIR, there was a clear demonstration of honest and critical self-reflection, accompanied by a clear determination to address weaknesses and to enhance the quality of the student learning experience.

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154 The University is committed to an internally collaborative approach to enhancement; the University considers that there must be a strong central steer and oversight, but it regards school autonomy as a real strength and is wary of imposing uniformity of practice. Its firm belief is that allowing schools the scope to develop their own procedures, to initiate from their own experience, progress at their own rate, and implement institutional policy in the way that is most effective at the local level, secures from staff the commitment that is essential if enhancement is to be a cultural fact rather than a procedural exercise. There is clear evidence that this approach does result in commitment, and staff demonstrate awareness of the key themes of the Learning and Teaching Strategy and of current institutional priorities.

155 An inevitable consequence of this devolved approach is that enhancement proceeds in different ways and at different rates across the University. The University recognises and welcomes this differentiation as the condition of genuine enhancement. The clarity and firmness of the institution's decision to proceed in this way is to be respected, but it is an approach that requires vigilance since discrepancies in both the pace and the form of implementation of institutional initiatives from

school to school could lead to inconsistencies that affect the student experience. The University is confident that it has regulations and codes to ensure a threshold quality of provision across the University and that its approach to enhancement will steadily raise that threshold. While the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee establishes minimum requirements and the Learning and Teaching Board encourages the best to excel, there is an equal need to encourage the weakest to improve and to reduce the gap between the two. In particular, the University should consider agreeing implementation timelines with schools to ensure that all students benefit as far as possible from enhancement initiatives.

156 Underlying the University's enhancement strategy is a commitment to ensure that staff are properly supported in their learning and teaching activities. This support is chiefly the responsibility of the Educational Development Unit, and the Unit's work in pedagogic development has been very successful in generating a genuine interest in enhancing learning and teaching among academic staff.

