Enhancement-led institutional review

University of St Andrews

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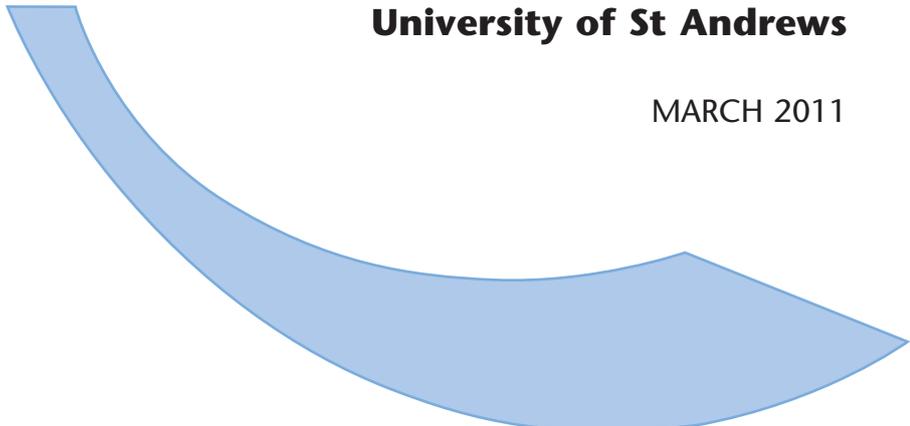
1   This is the report of an Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) of the University of St Andrews (the University) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). QAA is grateful to the University for the cooperation provided to the ELIR team.

ELIR method and report

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

3   ELIR reports are structured around three main sections: the management of the student learning experience; institution-led monitoring and review of quality and academic standards; and the strategic approach to quality enhancement. Each of these three sections leads to a 'commentary' in which the views of the ELIR team are set out. The three commentaries, in turn, lead to the overarching judgement on the level of confidence which can be placed in the institution's management of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. A summary report is also available in printed form (from QAA) and from the QAA website.

Method of review

4   The University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA), which provided the focus for the review. The RA was accompanied by a number of documents, including a case study relating to curriculum revisions aimed at enhancing the student experience. The ELIR team also received the report of the University's previous ELIR which took place in 2006.

5   The University's preparation for ELIR was led by the Enhancement Sub-Committee of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC). The Sub-Committee was chaired by the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) and comprised academic staff, student representatives and key University officers. The task of drafting the RA was partly delegated to a sub-group including one of the student sabbatical officers. A draft of the RA was considered by TLAC in September 2010, resulting in a second draft which was submitted for approval to the Academic Council. The University emphasised that written comments and additional suggestions for inclusion were invited at all stages, and were used to shape the final draft.

6   The ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 16 and 17 February 2011 and the Part 2 visit took place in the week beginning 21 March 2011.

7   The ELIR team comprised: Professor Graham Caie, Mr Murray Hope, Professor Martin Oosthuizen, Mr Tony Platt, Professor Geoff Smith and Professor Andrew Walker. The review was managed on behalf of QAA by Ms Ailsa Crum, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

Background information about the institution

8   St Andrews is the oldest university in Scotland, officially dating from 1413 and located entirely within the town of St Andrews. The University has extensive collaborative links in a number of countries to support its study abroad opportunities. It has a small number of collaborative agreements relating to joint or validated awards. The University describes itself as an

institution where tradition sits alongside modern technology, highlighting that it has an outward-looking approach to engagement with the key issues facing the world today, notably in the fields of: sustainability, medical advances and international relations. The University recognises that its portfolio of subjects has been shaped by the institution's past, with a strong historic bias towards the humanities, complemented by more recent developments in the sciences and medicine. Students are taught in 18 schools across four faculties: Arts, Divinity, Science, and Medicine. The University seeks to deliver high quality teaching set within a strong research environment.

Institution's strategy for quality enhancement

9   The University's Quality Enhancement Strategy is structured around the Scottish Funding Council's vision for higher education in Scotland. It identifies three strategic ambitions to:

•   develop in its students the understanding and knowledge, skills and attitudes, and creativity needed in an ever-changing and increasingly global twenty-first century society

•   develop in its students a desire for life-long learning, both for self-fulfilment and for professional development and the enhancement of employability in a world where jobs change and evolve more frequently than ever before, and where most graduates may have several quite different jobs in the span of their future careers

•   assure and enhance standards of excellence in learning and teaching.

Management of the student learning experience

Key features of the student population and the effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing information about its student population

10   In 2009-10, the University had 7,380 full-time equivalent (FTE) students, of whom 5,900 FTE were undergraduates (around 80 per cent). Of the 1,480 FTE postgraduate students, 800 FTE were taught postgraduates (around 11 per cent of the total student population) and 680 FTE were research students (around 9 per cent of the total student population). In 2009-10, around 40 per cent of the total student population was from outside the UK, around 25 per cent of whom were from outside Europe. In the same year, around 30 per cent of the student population was from Scotland and 30 per cent from the rest of the UK, predominantly England.

11   Between 2005-06 and 2009-10, the University's international student population increased by 40 per cent to 2,215 FTE, with indications that this is continuing to rise. The University has a diverse student community, with 122 countries represented in 2009-10. The majority of the University's international students are from the USA (over 42 per cent) with significant proportions coming from Canada (over 7 per cent) and China (over 18 per cent). Nearly a quarter of all undergraduate students coming from the USA to study in the UK are enrolled at the University.

12   The total student population has remained constant since the 2006 ELIR, but the proportion of postgraduate students has increased. In particular, there has been an increase in the number of taught postgraduate students, with a high proportion of international students. In 2010-11, 66 per cent of the taught postgraduate students were located in three of the University's schools: Management (over 33 per cent), Economics and Finance (19 per cent) and International Relations (over 13 per cent). In the same year, international students accounted for 64 per cent of the total enrolments in taught postgraduate programmes across the University. They accounted for 85 per cent of the taught postgraduate enrolments in the School of Management and for 74 per cent of the taught postgraduate enrolments in the School of Economics and Finance. In 2010-11, half of all postgraduate research students were enrolled in four schools: Chemistry (around 19 per cent); Biology (over 12 per cent); Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies (around 10 per cent); and Physics and Astronomy (over 8 per cent).

13   The University does not plan any significant growth in its total student population, but it has made the increase of postgraduate students (both taught and research) a high strategic priority. This will lead to changes in the relative percentages of undergraduate and postgraduate students. In particular, the University plans to increase the percentage of postgraduate research enrolments to 12 per cent of the student population in the medium term. Furthermore, the University intends to achieve a more even distribution of taught postgraduate students across the institution, with no more than 25 per cent of the postgraduate cohort enrolled in any one school.

14   The vast majority of students study full-time (98 per cent). The University currently has a small number of students studying on specific distance learning programmes and plans to expand this area of activity. In addition, in 2010-11, 182 students were enrolled on the part-time Evening Degree Programme.

15   Since the 2006 ELIR, the University has reviewed its student data arrangements with the aim of ensuring that the central student records system and the institution's administrative processes can support the entire student lifecycle. The Registry and Student Recruitment & Admissions work closely to develop expertise and experience in managing the administrative data relating to the student lifecycle. The central student record system provides access to individual student records and aggregate comparative statistics, which are available in routine formats as well as in response to special requests. Staff and students also have access to the in-house Module Management System, which supports the administration of a variety of learning and teaching activities, such as enabling students to upload coursework, view grades and access a range of learning resources. It is used by staff for uploading and calculating module grades, monitoring attendance and for issuing 'Academic Alerts' (see paragraph 41). The University highlighted the potential of its Module Management System in a range of ways, including as a motivational tool for students, enabling them to view their transcript as it evolves each semester.

16   Students were generally positive about their interaction with the Module Management System. Staff confirmed that the accessibility of student data more generally has improved significantly and that it is appropriate to meet their needs. This has clearly been an area of positive development since the 2006 ELIR, and the University has expressed its commitment to a continued strategic focus on enabling and developing self-service access to data both for staff and for students.

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

Student representation

17   The University described the Students' Association as the overarching body for undergraduate and postgraduate student representation. It brings together student volunteers, full-time members of staff, and four sabbatical officers: the President, the Director of Representation, the Director of Student Development and Activities, and the Director of Events and Services. The Students' Association oversees the activities of the Students' Representative Council (SRC) and the Student Services Committee. The SRC is the statutory representative body, comprising 30 student volunteers who are elected annually. At the time of the current ELIR, the Students' Association was reviewing the structure of its sabbatical team, and there was also an ongoing review focused on improving postgraduate representation.

18   The Students' Association President is a member of the University Court and the Senate, and there are two further student Senate representatives elected from the faculties of Arts and Science. Students have membership of a range of the University's standing committees and working groups. The President meets the University Principal on a monthly basis and the Director of Representation meets the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) at least every two to three weeks, in addition to having regular interactions with other senior University staff. Student

representatives are involved in a variety of quality assurance and enhancement activities, such as the review of module feedback questionnaires (see paragraph 32).

19   The Students' Association is a member of the Coalition of Higher Education Students in Scotland (CHESS). However, CHESS has not been active for a number of years, and this has limited the extent to which the Students' Association has been informed by practice at other institutions. In addition, the University has not engaged with the work of the national development service, Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs) during the last two years, although it had done so previously. The Students' Association has taken a number of steps aimed at promoting its external engagement, such as introducing the role of External Campaigns Officer within the SRC and appointing a student intern to review national representation. These initiatives have led to improved communication links with the Dundee University Students' Association, which is a positive development.

20   The Students' Association considered that the training provided for new sabbatical officers had improved significantly, with a longer handover period (around two months) followed by a two-week intensive training programme. The sabbatical officers receive extensive training from the University on the appeals and complaints process, and have requested more involvement from the University in wider aspects of their training, including sessions on the University structure and student academic representation. Student members of the Court and its committees receive a comprehensive induction, although the University recognises that this is not currently provided for student members of the Senate.

21   Every school has at least one student staff consultative committee (SSCC) which meets once or twice each semester. SSCC composition varies between schools but they all include class representatives both from undergraduate and postgraduate programmes as well as academic staff, such as the director of teaching and module coordinators. In some cases they include Library representatives. The University described SSCCs as the main formal forum for students and staff to communicate and to raise issues relating to teaching, learning and assessment. Students and staff indicated that many of the issues raised are practical matters that are swiftly resolved. SSCCs can also be used to raise issues beyond the module level, such as Library redevelopment, or assessment and feedback policies. These matters are usually referred to the school teaching committee or school council. SSCC meetings are held regularly and clearly provide a useful forum for discussion. However, the University and the Students' Association have recognised that the system could be improved. For 2010-11, the Students' Association prepared revised guidelines aimed at improving the effectiveness and consistency of SSCCs across the University. This is a positive development and there would be benefit in the University keeping the effectiveness of the SSCCs under review.

22   Initiated by the current Director of Representation, school presidents were introduced for 2010-11. The initiative is aimed at strengthening student representation within and across schools by promoting communication and partnership between students and staff. School presidents are elected annually and chair the relevant SSCC(s), providing a leadership and support role for the class representatives and other students in their school. They are responsible for training the class representatives and are required to convene a school class representative forum at least twice every semester. School presidents serve as permanent members of school teaching committees and they meet with the school directors of teaching on a regular basis.

23   A School President Forum has been introduced and will meet twice each semester. Membership of the Forum includes a number of senior University officers: the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching), Proctor and the deans. It is intended that the Forum will promote consistency through identifying common matters raised by a number of SSCCs. Once the new system is fully operational, the University intends to investigate the possibility of questionnaire results being made available to staff and students online.

24   Senior staff have provided strong support for the school president scheme, as a result of which there are school presidents in each school despite initial reluctance in some. Student representatives are enthusiastic about the arrangements, providing examples of benefits already being experienced in some schools. Although the scheme has been introduced recently, it clearly has the potential to make a significant contribution to effective communication between staff and students. One area that may present a challenge is securing the continuity of the scheme. Currently, the Director of Representation is responsible for training and supporting the school presidents. While the University is able to attract high calibre sabbatical officers, the Director of Representation may only be in post for one year and will require training and support themselves before developing and delivering training to the 18 school presidents (who, in turn, are responsible for training the class representatives). This has clearly been achieved in the current year but, to ensure the continued success of the scheme, the University and the Students' Association are encouraged to work together to identify ways of ensuring this will be sustainable for future years.

Student societies

25   The University highlighted, as one of its greatest strengths, the unique range of student societies which are coordinated and funded by the Students' Association. Over 140 societies are affiliated to the Students' Association, providing a wealth of activities to cater for a broad range of interests and talents. The University emphasised that involvement in these societies is key to engaging students and to creating rounded, self-aware graduates who will be attractive to employers. Student representatives confirmed this positive view, emphasising the support available from the Students' Association and the University for new societies to be established.

Approach to learning and teaching

26   The University indicated that it is able to attract high achieving students who have the opportunity to learn, and to perform academically, to the best of their ability during their time at St Andrews. The University identified as a key strength the level of research intensity informing teaching at all levels. Students are encouraged to adopt a dynamic and curiosity-led approach to their learning, and to understand the varying methodologies by which a knowledge base is constructed. Students and staff confirmed that, from their first year, students are engaged in small research projects and staff are able to develop modules relating to their research topics. The University's Strategic Enhancement of Learning Fund (SELF) (see paragraph 76) has provided support for a variety of projects relating to research-teaching links over a number of years.

27   The Undergraduate Research Internship Programme funds 20 undergraduates each year, who are selected on a competitive basis, to conduct research on independent projects under the guidance of academic staff during the summer vacation. In addition, a number of the schools provide similar opportunities for their students to participate in summer research programmes. Such programmes provide students with an opportunity to participate in research activities that are linked to their fields of study, and to form a clearer understanding of how research informs the curriculum.

28   The St Andrews Award scheme was launched in 2010-11 to provide all undergraduate students with an opportunity to engage in a structured developmental programme relating to four strands: contributing to university life (for example through involvement in student societies); giving to others (for example volunteering); extending your horizons (such as studying abroad or learning a new language); and working for your future (for example work experience or skills development). While registered for the Award scheme, students have access to personal support through the University Careers Centre to help guide their selection of activities. Students are expected to gather a portfolio of evidence during their second and third years which is assessed during their fourth year. If a student's performance is strong enough, as determined by an assessment interview focusing on the portfolio, they will receive the Award, and this

achievement will be recorded on their transcript. In addition to the merits of the Award in itself, the University expects that it should promote greater engagement with personal development planning (PDP). To date, over 150 students have registered interest in the Award and the University is encouraged to continue promoting wider involvement among the student population.

29   The University has a number of other awards aimed at promoting and celebrating high achievement. The Deans' Lists are compiled annually to recognise outstanding academic achievement by undergraduate students in each faculty. The Principal's Medal is awarded to final year undergraduate or postgraduate students in recognition of exceptional achievement across a broad range of activities, including academic and co-curricular projects. Inclusion on the Deans' Lists is recorded on students' transcripts.

Student feedback

30   The University indicated that module questionnaires provide all students with an opportunity to comment anonymously on various aspects of their modules, and allow the institution to collect data on student satisfaction together with specific comments and suggestions for improvement. The questionnaires consist of two sections: one on the module as a whole, and the other on the individual performance of teaching staff. The University has provided a set of recommended questions, including some that are compulsory for each module and for individual lecturers. Each school chooses from a pool of questions which are then to be used for every module in that school. The questionnaires also provide students with the opportunity to include qualitative, free-text comments.

31   The University's SALTIRE (St Andrews Learning and Teaching Innovation, Review and Enhancement) centre coordinates the process of preparing and issuing the paper-based questionnaires and analyses the results, which are scrutinised by the deans, heads of school and directors of teaching. The directors of teaching forward the results to module coordinators and general matters are discussed at teaching committees and/or school councils, and are incorporated into school annual academic monitoring reports (see paragraph 87). Specific data on lecturers can be used as evidence for probation or promotion. Any support required for individual staff to address identified issues is provided by the school and/or SALTIRE.

32   The University acknowledged a number of challenges associated with the current module feedback arrangements, including delays in the analyses being produced and technical difficulties in preparing longitudinal reports, which limit the effectiveness of feedback to staff and students. A working party of the University Academic Monitoring Assurance Group has been exploring software solutions to improve the design and delivery of the questionnaires, and to provide flexible analysis and rapid feedback. As a result, the University has invested in a new system for 2010-11. Once the new system is fully operational, the University intends that the questionnaire results will routinely be made available to students and staff online. This is likely to have a positive impact.

33   Under the current arrangements, it is not clear whether the statistical analysis of module feedback is compared within schools, faculties and the University as a whole. There is evidence, from the student staff consultative committees, that staff sometimes have difficulties in interpreting all of the outcomes. Students and staff indicated that the module feedback outcomes were not always communicated effectively to them, with practices varying substantially between schools. In particular, it is unclear how feedback is provided to students on the qualitative, free-text element of the questionnaires.

34   As part of the revised system, there would be benefit in the University developing a clear protocol around the provision of information on module feedback to its students. The intention of this being to clarify the action taken in response to student feedback, and to facilitate a greater understanding by students of the purpose of the questionnaires in enhancing their learning experience. There would also be benefit in the University considering the design and analysis of the questionnaires to ensure the module feedback outcomes can be used effectively to inform the University's regular monitoring, review and enhancement arrangements.

Feedback on assessed work

35   The 2006 ELIR Report asked the University to draw upon existing good practice to ensure that all students would receive appropriate feedback on their coursework and examination performance. The University indicated that, in 2006 and 2007, prompted by the national Enhancement Themes, it had undertaken strategic reviews which included consideration of the ways in which feedback mechanisms could be improved. In 2009, a policy document was approved, Feedback to Students on Work Submitted for Assessment, which relates to both formative and summative assessment, and provides guidelines on various forms of assessment feedback. The document also sets out a number of basic principles for feedback which require that: schools must have a stated policy on the provision of assessment feedback; there should be an explicit relationship between feedback, assessment criteria and intended learning outcomes; and feedback should be understandable, credible and sufficiently detailed.

36   In October 2010, a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee Open Forum event explored the new initiatives schools had implemented to improve students' perceptions of feedback provision. The event considered how the initiatives might be adopted more widely, and also considered the correlation between the practices implemented and student views of schools as expressed in the National Student Survey outcomes. The University stated that, while it would like even more improvement, evidence from the 2009-10 annual monitoring cycle indicates that the quality and consistency of feedback has improved. This is supported by comments from external examiners on the high quality feedback they see being provided to students in some schools.

37   While it is clear that the University has taken a number of positive steps to improve feedback to students on their assessed work, there is still evidence of considerable variation in practice between schools. From a sample of 10 school handbooks, only two had detailed policies on assessment feedback, although the University indicated that this information is sometimes included in module, rather than school, handbooks. The school handbooks also illustrated a variety of approaches to the provision of formative feedback, with some making no explicit reference to the practice at all. Students indicated that, while some schools provide helpful feedback in a timely manner, in other cases feedback is very limited or provided too late to be of assistance in helping to improve future performance. The University is, therefore, encouraged to continue its efforts to ensure that the Feedback to Students policy is applied consistently across all schools.

Academic advisers

38   Every student has an academic adviser, appointed from their faculty and often from the school(s) in which they are studying. The advisers are coordinated and supported by the pro-deans (advising) and are provided with training by these pro-deans and by staff in the Registry. A key role for the advisers is to discuss and ratify student module choices through the online advising system. Following the 2006 ELIR, the University conducted an in-depth review of the adviser system and has introduced a number of adjustments including: revising the adviser remit; introducing a more favourable adviser to student ratio; allowing for longer meetings at the start of each academic year; encouraging an increased frequency of meetings throughout the year as needed; providing clearer mechanisms for ensuring students know how and when to contact their adviser; and identifying a named contact to provide support in the event of the main adviser being unavailable.

39   There are a number of differences in the operation of the adviser system across the University. In some schools, advisers are supplemented by personal tutors at honours level and, in the Faculty of Medicine, there is a personal tutor system rather than advisers. Students and staff confirmed that, in most cases, the adviser system is limited to an initial engagement at the start of the academic year to check registration details and confirm module selection. However, at least one school makes more extensive use of the adviser system as a mechanism for providing ongoing academic guidance and support. Students and staff also indicated that the adviser

system is complemented by a variety of academic support systems within the schools, such as module coordinators, and by the central support services.

40   The University intends to review the changes to the adviser system again during 2010-11 and to discuss the arrangements with the Student Forum. This will provide a useful opportunity to ensure that the system is operating effectively to support the students. There would be benefit in the University considering whether the various academic support systems it has in place are sufficiently integrated to ensure that all students engage systematically in planning their learning and their involvement with the wide variety of co-curricular opportunities that are available to them.

Academic Alert system

41   The University implemented the Academic Alert system from September 2010 to provide for the early identification of students who may be experiencing difficulties with some aspect of their academic work. It operates through the Module Management System (see paragraph 15). Academic Alerts, issued through emails from the module coordinator or the school administrator, have been used to draw students' attention to specific problems, such as incorrect referencing techniques, poor progress in a module, or the late submission of an assignment. The Alerts also provide guidance on what the student is required to do and direct them to sources of support, such as their adviser or central support staff. The Academic Alert system is a helpful initiative which should provide a more supportive approach to assisting students in meeting the requirements of their academic programmes.

Student support services

42   The provision of student support services has been remodelled and can now be accessed by students in a 'one stop shop' format, known as the Advice and Support Centre (ASC), which was launched in September 2010. ASC allows students to access information and advice relating to a wide range of areas, including: accommodation, finance, academic support and advice, health, and disability services. ASC was introduced following student feedback and an internal review, both of which were complimentary about the services provided by the former individual support units. Students expressed appreciation for ASC and its provision of an integrated point of access to support services. The University has adopted a proactive approach to addressing student views and has indicated that usage of the service will continue to be monitored.

International students

43   The University indicated that provision from the English Language Teaching (ELT) service continues to expand in support of the diverse international student community. Residential pre-sessional induction courses are offered in the summer and are open to all undergraduate and postgraduate students who are not native English speakers. These induction courses comprise a social programme and an academic programme relating to language development, oral presentations and writing skills. During the academic year, there are longer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for students whose first language is not English. The undergraduate programmes can be tailored for study in business, social sciences and law, with specific foundation programmes available for science and medicine. The programmes also include a social skills component, giving students from other cultures an introduction to Scottish and British traditions, from opening a bank account to ceilidh dancing. In addition, the ELT team provides discipline-specific workshops that are integrated with a number of the schools, as well as offering support for any student referred to them, for example through the Academic Alert system, or those who approach ELT themselves. In September 2010, prompted by ELT staff, the University Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee introduced a policy which provides guidance on the levels of assistance (from staff or peers) it is appropriate to offer international students with written work that is to be submitted for assessment. This is likely to be a useful development.

44   International students spoke highly of the support they had received from ELT and of their experiences on the induction programme in particular. The support provided by the University for its international students is systematic and responsive to student and staff needs and, as such, clearly represents good practice.

International study exchanges

45   The University provides a number of opportunities for students to study abroad for part of their degree programme. In most cases, students gain credits and grades that contribute to their final degree outcome, with grades being converted onto the University's 20-point scale (see paragraphs 47 and 103-105) on receipt of the transcript from the host institution.

46   The Exchanges & Study Abroad team was created in July 2009 to enhance the opportunities and experience of international student mobility. The team provides central management and administration for all University exchange and study abroad programmes, working with a designated study abroad coordinator in each school to ensure that students receive adequate pre-departure briefings, and that regular contact is maintained with students while they are abroad. The University has well-developed protocols for exchange and study abroad programmes, including a policy on collaborative agreements for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and a remit for the study abroad coordinator role. Following the required site visits and discussions, all proposals for exchanges are submitted to the relevant faculty business committee for academic scrutiny, giving particular attention to the breadth and depth of the curriculum within the proposed exchange. All students going on exchange are required to complete a Learning Agreement in consultation with their study abroad coordinator and the host institution. Students who take part in a work placement abroad complete a Work Placement Agreement under the direction of placement advisers in the relevant school.

47   The University has a policy on credit and grade conversion, which is updated regularly. The Exchanges & Study Abroad team facilitates the maintenance and regular updating of the credit and grade conversion tables. When students return, conversions of overseas marks are undertaken by the relevant school and approved by the relevant dean. Students indicated that they are not always clear how the grade conversion works (see paragraphs 103-105).

48   While students are abroad, contact with the University is maintained, normally through email interactions with the relevant study abroad coordinator or placement adviser, but also with any relevant academic staff or with Student Services. The School of Modern Languages, originally supported by a Fund for Initiatives in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (FILTA) bid (see paragraph 76), initiated social network activity and internet phone contact with students who were on the integrated year abroad programmes in one country. The initiative was successful and has been extended to students from the School who are studying in all countries, and has been offered as a model of good practice for other programmes and exchanges.

49   Students and staff confirmed the effectiveness of the University's arrangements for supporting students who undertake exchanges, and were enthusiastic about the benefits of such activity. Although the level of student participation in Erasmus exchanges has increased in recent years (with 90-100 students each year), the number of students going on exchange overall is relatively small compared to the total student population. The University has expressed the intention to work with schools to develop new mobility opportunities, particularly in subjects with low participation rates. Given the benefits that can be obtained through study abroad, the University is encouraged to pursue this intention and to consider ways of promoting these valuable opportunities more widely.

Research students

50   The University emphasised that developing research, generic and career-related skills is a crucial part of undertaking a research degree at the institution. All students are required to undertake induction and training on arrival, and there is also a wide range of optional courses and workshops which are organised centrally and in tailored form within schools. Students are required to complete a Development Needs Analysis table at the outset, which they discuss with their supervisors so they can decide jointly on the most appropriate research and skills development plan.

51   The University's GRADskills programme has been acknowledged outside the institution for its success in developing generic skills. It seeks to develop personal, professional and career-management skills in all early stage researchers at the University. It offers an extensive range of training and development opportunities, and encourages students and staff to take a proactive and creative approach to generic skills training. The programme has been adapted over the years to take account of feedback from students and staff, ensuring it continues to address the needs and aspirations of the students, Research Councils UK and the wider skills community.

52   At the school level, the supervisory system acts as the principal method of support to research students. Postgraduate handbooks provide core information and links to external events, resources and possible funding opportunities. Through a variety of mini-conferences, seminars and postgraduate forums, schools provide a support and social network for research students, as well as a structure for the progressive development of research competence. Postgraduate research students are also encouraged to attend external conferences and some financial support is available.

53   Research students indicated that they generally feel they are part of the research endeavour in their school. They were also largely positive about the opportunities provided through the GRADskills programme for developing generic research and employability skills. Some students were unclear about the focus on generic skills within the Development Needs Analysis table and the GRADskills programme, and expressed disappointment that neither was focused more on discipline-specific research skills. There would be benefit in the University ensuring that all students have a clear understanding of the role and purpose of these elements of the induction and training. Overall, the University provides a good level of support for its postgraduate research students with an effective combination of compulsory and voluntary elements, incorporating generic and discipline-specific skills in its induction and training.

Variability between schools

54   A particular feature of the University's operation is the variability that exists between the 18 schools in the way in which policies and practices are interpreted and implemented. It is clearly desirable that schools should have sufficient flexibility to develop approaches that reflect the characteristics of the different academic disciplines and which promote innovation, as well as accommodating the particular requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. However, different approaches can also lead to differences in the student experience which may disadvantage some groups of students. The University should ensure that key institutional policies are implemented consistently to ensure there is greater equivalence of student experience across the institution.

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

55   The University's Employability Strategy is reviewed and approved annually by the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee. Responsibility for the Employability Strategy and the coordination of the various employability activities lies with the Director of the Careers Service, the Employability Coordinator and the Enterprise and Employability Adviser, in collaboration with the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching). The Careers Centre has been

substantially reorganised since 2006, and the University indicated that the Centre has taken a lead in highlighting the need to embed the full spectrum of graduate attributes into all of the institution's learning and teaching practices.

56   Linked to its Employability Strategy, and initially prompted by the Research-Teaching Linkages national Enhancement Theme, the University has developed an explicit set of graduate attributes. These have been built into the programme specifications for all undergraduate programmes, and postgraduate programmes were being updated along similar lines at the time of the current ELIR. To promote student awareness of graduate attributes, the University intends to record them in the course catalogues, link them to assessment practice and adapt the student transcript so that it reflects student attainment of specified graduate attributes.

57   A core principle of the Employability Strategy is to embed employability activities within schools. Each school has a careers representative who serves on the Careers and Employability Sub-Committee of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee. In addition to the employability workshops which are offered to all second year students, some schools present further workshops, run specific work placement initiatives, and provide opportunities for their students to participate in summer internships relating to the school's research programme (see paragraph 27). The Undergraduate Ambassador Scheme, which is a 15-credit module available to all students in the Faculty of Science and several schools in the Faculty of Arts, involves students assisting in the design of teaching and revision material for pupils at primary and secondary schools.

58   In October 2009, a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee Open Forum identified examples of good practice among the University's employability initiatives, and also identified the need to promote existing employability initiatives more consciously among students and staff. Currently, a variety of approaches towards graduate attributes is apparent across the University. In some schools, graduate attributes are clearly regarded as integral to the curriculum and are embedded in programme structures. In other schools, the attributes are considered to relate primarily to co-curricular activity. Students, while not always familiar with the 'graduate attributes' term, were able to identify a range of ways in which their programmes and co-curricular activities were helping them to develop attributes and skills that would contribute to their personal development and employability. The University indicated that it is working hard to improve the ways in which graduate attributes are promoted to and understood by students. It is clear that a wide variety of good practice exists and the University is supported in its commitment to strengthen the engagement of all schools in this area.

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

59   Management of the learning environment is coordinated by the Teaching Infrastructure Strategy Group, which is convened by the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching), and the Planning and Resources Committee, which reports to the University Court. The University indicated that substantial areas of its estate had been transformed in the last four years, with significant refurbishment projects in teaching spaces and new buildings such as: the acquisition of the new Museum of the University of St Andrews (MUSA); the new-build Medical and Biological Sciences Building; the Arts Building; and the refurbishment of a listed building to accommodate Art History.

60   The University's Library is one of the oldest in the UK, combining heritage and more current collections, both of which, the institution emphasised, contribute to learning, teaching and research. The University acknowledged that, over the last decade, there have been some challenges in ensuring the Library is as effectively linked to the academic and student community as the institution would wish. In an effort to address this, the University has prioritised the need to invest in the Library to improve both its estate and its service delivery. A number of changes have been instigated which are aimed at ensuring the service will be responsive to user needs and will improve its communication with students and staff. Three specialist academic liaison librarians have been appointed whose responsibilities include the development and regular

delivery of a range of information skills courses across all subject areas. In addition, a recent Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee Open Forum focused on strategies to enhance the collaboration between the academic liaison librarians and the schools.

61   A significant new library building project is planned but, more immediately, work to refurbish existing space with the main Library is due to begin during 2011, with completion planned for late 2012. The University has upgraded the facilities in a number of its satellite libraries, such as the JF Allen Library located in the Physics & Astronomy Building, to provide more flexible study space and more space for social interaction. The opening hours have also been extended. The funds that are available for purchasing library materials in both electronic and hardcopy have been increased on a year-on-year basis, and there has been a substantial increase in the availability of digital resources. Access to library materials has been improved through the acquisition of software for searching electronic databases, as well as a revision of the library catalogue interface. It is clear that the University is taking a systematic approach to the improvement of the Library.

62   The ICT Strategy and Planning Group oversees the provision of information, media and other services relating to educational technology. Since 2006, a number of improvements have been made to the ICT environment, including the expansion of wireless coverage, the refurbishment of all computer classrooms, and the appointment of computing officers in a number of schools in the Faculty of Arts. There are plans to develop ICT services further, following the appointment of the new Chief Information Officer in January 2010.

63   The University operates two learning management systems: the in-house Module Management System; and a virtual learning environment (VLE). The decision of which system to use rests with individual schools and module coordinators. Training and support in the use of the learning management systems is provided for staff by the Learning Technology Consultant based in SALTIRE and by the Module Management System team. Students are able to access the online learning systems through the student portal (iSaint), as well as the recently introduced portal for the use of mobile devices (mSaint). While all modules now have a VLE site, the University recognises that there is more significant engagement in some schools than in others. Students indicated that the use of VLE facilities varies considerably, from their use largely as a repository for school and module handbooks to a far more extensive integration into learning and teaching activities. While some variation in uptake is inevitable, there would be benefit in the University ensuring that the VLE is being used effectively across the institution.

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

Equality and diversity

64   The University confirmed its commitment to operating in line with equalities legislation at all times and, beyond that, with best practice to embrace equality and diversity issues for all students and staff. Following the appointment of the institution's first dedicated Equality and Diversity Officer in April 2009, the University is reviewing its existing range of policies and action plans to ensure they meet current legislative requirements, and to ensure that individual and institutional responsibilities are clearly defined. The institution plans to publish a new Single Equality Scheme during 2011, and to progress with Equality Impact Assessments in the schools and administrative units using the toolkit which it has developed. Since February 2010, equalities and diversity awareness training sessions have been offered as part of staff induction and similar sessions have been provided for existing staff. The Equality and Diversity Officer is working to identify further staff training needs. The University is encouraged to continue with these developments.

Support for disabled students

65   The University created its Disability Equality Scheme in 2006 to monitor and review all arrangements for disabled students. The Disability Advisory Group, which includes teaching and support staff as well as student representatives, meets three times each year to discuss disability-related issues affecting developments within the University. Student Services also uses an annual survey to gather opinion from disabled students about any academic or other issues. There is a disability coordinator in all schools and in a number of support units, such as the Library and IT Services. The coordinators provide a contact point for students and staff to address queries or offer advice on legislation. They also ensure that reasonable adjustments are put in place, following advice from the Disability Team located in Student Services. As the outcomes of internal and external surveys confirm, students express high levels of satisfaction with the provision available for disabled students. During the current ELIR, students also expressed their appreciation for the effective assistance provided by the disability coordinators.

Support for students with particular needs

66   The University has identified a number of groups of students who it regards as having particular needs. In addition to disabled students and students studying abroad (see paragraphs 45-49), the University has identified: distance learning students, international students, mature students and commuter students, defining the last group as those who do not live in a University hall of residence (currently this group comprises around 7 per cent of the first year intake). In September 2010, the University opened a Commuter Student Learning Room which provides kitchen and shower facilities, space to store personal belongings and quiet study areas. In 2008-09, a joint review between Student Services and the Students' Association led to the establishment of the Townsend Society, which has a formal representative function for commuter students as well as a role in overseeing the Commuter Student Learning Room and organising social events. Mature students have access to the Learning Room and have a formal representative, linked to the Students' Association, who meets University staff on a regular basis.

67   The University emphasised that most of its international students are distributed across the institution and are integrated with their peers in the schools. In addition, an International Students Working Group has recently been established with the aim of improving and expanding the provision both by the Students' Association and the University for the international student community.

68   Distance learning students are able to engage with online tutorials and receive support by email, as well as being offered dedicated help sessions by Library liaison staff. Students indicated that additional pastoral support for distance learners would be appreciated. The University is aware that it can be challenging to provide its distance learning students with support systems that are equivalent to the on-campus experience, and is drawing on its existing study abroad arrangements in an effort to address this. The University is clearly taking a proactive approach to identifying, and addressing the needs of the student groups it has identified.

Evening Degree

69   The University has a part-time Evening Degree Programme which allows students to gain an MA General degree or a BSc General Science degree. It is aimed at students who are not able to study full-time and who may not have traditional or recent school-leaving qualifications. In general, students were positive about the opportunity provided but highlighted a number of challenges relating to their learning experience, including difficulties around access to University facilities and the late provision of module handbooks. In particular, students commented that they did not feel as if they belonged to the University. While these views may only reflect the experience of some students, there would be benefit in the University ensuring that those studying on the Evening Degree Programme receive an equivalent experience to the rest of the student population.

Widening participation

70   The University confirmed that it is committed to widening access, highlighting that this represents its biggest recruiting challenge. The University identified a number of potential barriers to access, including the geographical isolation of the town, its relatively poor public transport links, a shortage of local part-time employment and the cost of living. In addition, there is fierce competition for admission to the University's full-time degree programmes. The University is also aware that, despite employing a range of initiatives, the proportion of state school pupils entering the institution has remained consistent at around 60 per cent since 2005-06 and the proportion of students coming from the most deprived areas has been falling steadily over the same period. In an attempt to address this, the Dean of Science chaired a working party to develop a coherent programme for widening participation and to increase awareness of the role the University plays in raising aspirations and engaging people from diverse backgrounds in lifelong learning.

71   During 2009-10, the working party ran three workshops at the University with representatives from the Scottish Funding Council, all of the other Scottish higher education institutions and a number of institutions from the rest of the UK. The workshops identified several areas of good practice from across the sector, including tracking the performance of students from entry to exit and providing learning and financial support. The working party also reviewed all of the outreach and access projects operating within the University, identifying over 50 of these, and gathered comments from students and staff in schools to determine the relative success of these projects. In addition, the working party conducted research into the performance of students who entered the University on access programmes. It is intended that all of the information obtained from these sources will be used to produce a final report to the Principal's Office during the current academic year, along with a recommended strategy for widening access to the University.

72   Since 2010, the University has operated the Gateway to Physics and Engineering project jointly with Heriot-Watt University. This initiative provides places to students from local and/or relatively disadvantaged Scottish schools who do not meet the required admission grades but who are offered a place following interview. The students are given substantial extra tutorial support throughout their first year and can continue to honours in physics at St Andrews or in engineering at Heriot-Watt. Feedback from the first cohort is positive and the University hopes to expand the project to include other disciplines. The University is also involved in a significant joint initiative with the local authority which will lead to the co-location of the local secondary school on one of the University's sites. The educational benefits of the project have been discussed from the outset through a cross-institutional committee convened by the Dean of Science.

73   The University expressed the hope that the widening participation activities it is carrying out will be more sustainable and productive in the medium to long term, and that they will help in raising aspirations and attainment. The University is clearly taking a strategic and systematic approach to its work in this area.

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

74   The University emphasised that it takes 'very seriously' the need to offer all staff the opportunities and encouragement to develop their teaching skills and to adopt new and innovative approaches where appropriate. The Staff Development Strategy is coordinated by SALTIRE (for academic skills), Staff Development (for other professional skills) and the GRADskills unit (for research skills). The University indicated that it was currently reviewing the interactions of these three groups to avoid duplication and enhance efficiency. A Head of Organisational Development has recently been appointed, in part to oversee the coordination of this provision.

75   SALTIRE runs a one-day induction for academic staff who are new to teaching, and the Academic Staff Development Programme which covers: key policies, procedures and responsibilities relating to learning and teaching and research supervision; the use of educational technology; and the student experience more generally. Certain elements of the Programme are compulsory for newly appointed staff with teaching responsibilities. Academic staff were positive about the Programme, emphasising that it is updated regularly in response to participant feedback.

76   The University operates two specific schemes aimed at promoting innovation in pedagogy. The Fund for Initiatives in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (FILTA) has been made available annually since 2001-02 to encourage the development of new patterns of learning and teaching. Funding is awarded on the basis of bids by project teams. In the four years to 2009-10, 39 applications were made to the FILTA scheme and a total of 18 projects received funding, indicating strong staff support for the scheme. The Strategic Enhancement of Learning Fund (SELF) makes grants available annually to support initiatives which link to specific national Enhancement Themes. Over the past four years the scheme has funded 21 projects.

77   In early 2010, in response to a proposal from a group of teaching fellows based in three schools, the University established the Centre for Higher Education Research (CHER). It aims to support staff in their pedagogical research and has hosted a series of open meetings which have provided opportunities for sharing information on existing research projects, as well as establishing new small research groups to explore particular themes. The CHER activities have engaged academic and support staff. The University expressed the hope that CHER would allow the institution to attract new kinds of funding for pedagogical research.

78   Directors of teaching fulfil an important role in the promotion of effective teaching at the school level. The directors of teaching all serve on the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee and, therefore, provide a key communication link between schools and the institutional level. Many schools hold away days to focus on matters relating to the curriculum and learning and teaching. In addition, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee holds an Open Forum event each semester. Recent topics have included: enhancing the feedback provided to students on assessed work, employability, and research-teaching links.

79   In 2009, and in response to the 2006 ELIR report, the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) conducted a review of workload models to ascertain the extent to which schools have transparent and equitable procedures for workload allocation. The resulting report noted that a number of schools would consider the reformulation of their workload models and that schools' workload models would be scrutinised during the regular Internal Review of Learning and Teaching process. This approach is to be encouraged as the ongoing refinement and review of workload models is an important mechanism for valuing and enabling good teaching.

80   In common with a number of other Scottish higher education institutions, the Students' Association introduced Teaching Awards to recognise academic staff for good teaching practice according to various award categories on the basis of student nominations. The Awards were introduced at the University for the first time in 2009-10.

81   Overall, the University has a range of systematic mechanisms in place to develop, promote and recognise good practice in learning in teaching.

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

82   While the University has a range of partners with which it provides student exchange and study abroad opportunities (see paragraphs 45-49), it has a relatively small number of collaborative partnerships involving formal validation agreements or joint awards. The vast majority of these relate to master's or doctoral awards with other Scottish universities. There is a formal agreement with the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama to award research degrees (see paragraph 116).

83   In 2011-12, the University will recruit students for the first time to a new collaborative programme with the College of William and Mary (Virginia, USA). A new Pro-Dean in the Faculty of Arts has been appointed to oversee the degree, advise students and liaise with their counterpart in the College. The agreement involves reciprocal recognition of the learning and assessment provided by the partner institution. Students will spend two of their four years of study at each institution. The University hopes that the provision of joint degrees will be accompanied by other forms of collaboration between the two institutions, such as staff exchanges and research projects.

Institution-led monitoring and review of quality and standards

Key features of institution-led monitoring and review at the institution, and the extent to which these arrangements meet sector-wide expectations

84   The University emphasised that it seeks to adopt and implement the best practices that inform development in the sector and that are detailed in the QAA Academic Infrastructure. The University also highlighted that all teaching staff share responsibility for the delivery of quality and academic standards.

Programme approval

85   All proposals for new programmes, and for new and amended modules, require initial scrutiny within the schools. The proposals require the support of the relevant head of school and external examiner. Deans of faculty have delegated authority to approve new modules and significant changes to existing modules and programmes. This authority is discharged through faculty business committees, whose decisions are reported to the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC). Responsibility for approving new programmes, or for withdrawing existing programmes, rests with the Academic Council, on the recommendation of TLAC. There is evidence of systematic consultation with external examiners on curriculum development, and of proposals receiving detailed scrutiny at faculty business committees.

Annual Academic Monitoring

86   The University indicated that the Academic Monitoring Assurance Group (AMAG) is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the whole learning and teaching process in each school. It is convened by a member of the University Court and reports to the Court Audit & Risk Committee. Its membership includes a senior member of staff from another Scottish university.

87   The Annual Academic Monitoring (AAM) process provides a structured opportunity to reflect on learning, teaching and assessment. All schools submit an annual report to AMAG following institutional reporting guidelines, including the use of a pro forma and a standard dataset. The pro forma requires schools to comment on a range of matters, including the actions taken in relation to the previous AAM report. Heads of school and directors of teaching from a sample of schools are interviewed by AMAG. Staff from schools that have undergone their Internal Review of Learning and Teaching in the previous year are always interviewed in the AAM process to ensure that any recommendations have been addressed, and all schools are interviewed at least once every two years. Following the interviews, each school receives a letter from the relevant dean highlighting AMAG's view on their AAM report. In addition, the Learning & Teaching Quality Officer (located in SALTIRE) and the AMAG Convener produce an overview report highlighting areas of good practice and those requiring attention. Schools are encouraged to discuss the dean's letter and the overview report at school staff councils, and relevant matters are disseminated to other units such as the Library or the Careers Service. AMAG takes forward action on broader strategic matters and progress is reported to the Academic Council via TLAC.

88   The AAM process is well established and understood by staff at all levels. There is evidence of the various elements being undertaken thoughtfully and rigorously. However, the 2008-09 overview report had not been completed due to the long term absence of a key member of staff. The University should ensure that important elements of its quality assurance processes continue to be implemented and are not over-reliant on individual members of staff. The University highlighted that schools should include matters relating to quality enhancement within the AAM process. There is considerable variation in the extent to which this occurs and there would be benefit in the University adjusting the AAM pro forma for future years (see paragraph 111).

Internal Review of Learning and Teaching

89   The Internal Review of Learning and Teaching (IRLT) process was reviewed and extensively redesigned in 2007-08. It provides an opportunity for the in-depth consideration of each subject area, with external participation, every five to six years. Central units associated with learning and teaching (such as the Library, Student Services and SALTIRE) undergo their own IRLTs. The process can also be adapted to review areas as requested by the Academic Monitoring Assurance Group (AMAG) or the deans, for example activities that are new for the University.

90   IRLT teams typically include two external subject specialists (at least one from a Scottish higher education institution) and two students: the sabbatical Director of Representation and a postgraduate representative. The teams also include the appropriate dean and a senior member of staff from a cognate discipline within the University. The Learning & Teaching Quality Officer has the main responsibility for coordinating the IRLT process and is a member of every review team. Schools and central units submit a self-evaluation document that follows a standard template. The template requires schools to address matters of assurance and enhancement, drawing on previous IRLT and external examiners' reports, any accreditation documentation and the current programme specification.

91   Following the one-day review event, an evaluative report is produced by the IRLT team identifying areas of good practice and recommendations for action. The final version of the report is submitted to AMAG, which also considers the response from the school. The IRLT outcomes are followed up in the subsequent year's Annual Academic Monitoring (AAM) process. The IRLT process meets the Scottish Funding Council guidance on institution-led quality review and there is clear evidence of IRLT being undertaken diligently with careful deliberation at each stage.

Research students

92   The University has a well-established system for monitoring and reviewing the progress of postgraduate research students. Students and their supervisors independently complete annual progress reports, which are discussed with the student by a small panel. The University indicated that the panel should not include the supervisor but, in at least one school, it does include the internal examiner. The outcome of the meeting is reported to the school postgraduate committee, and the relevant director of postgraduate studies submits a School Annual Progression Report for each student to the Registry. The process works well, although some students commented that they would welcome more detailed feedback. Through a separate process, each student completes a confidential Research Postgraduate Student Annual Report form which is submitted directly to the Registry. It includes information relating to the student's progress as well as providing an opportunity for the student to raise any issues independently from the school. As a result of discussions in the Postgraduate Sub-Committee, the University intends to streamline the progress review process through the use of a single electronic form. Linked to this change, there would be benefit in the University considering improvements in the feedback provided to students following their completion of the progress form.

93   The University's arrangements for research student supervision are generally secure, but there would be benefit in clarifying the role of the internal examiner in the annual progression meeting to ensure the examiner's objectivity and independence in the examination process.

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

94   The University's approval, monitoring and review processes include explicit reference to students with particular needs. Module and programme approval forms explicitly require staff to consider aspects of the proposal that may present difficulties for particular groups of students. The AAM process requires schools to report on learning and teaching activity at all levels, drawing on data and comparative analyses that consider achievement by level, mode of study and gender. Schools are also required to include reference to any matters relating to disabled students and students studying abroad. The University recognises that the performance of students from different backgrounds, with different abilities and support needs, could usefully be considered as part of the AAM process. The supporting data would need to be refined in order to facilitate this comparative analysis.

95   The IRLT process includes discussions with a cross-section of students studying at all levels to include the equality strands and mode of delivery as well as home and international students. The University provided examples of curricular changes being made in order to ensure the accessibility of delivery and/or assessment.

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

96   The University asserted that it is keen to have a self-evaluating approach at subject and institutional level, highlighting that this is provided at the subject level by the international profile of its staff and the fresh insights provided by new staff. In common with practice elsewhere, the University has identified comparator institutions, within the UK and beyond. The University emphasised that its preparation for ELIR had helped it to reflect widely and to focus on certain areas to refresh or consolidate its quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures at all levels. The effectiveness of the AAM and IRLT processes is reviewed regularly, and the University identified a number of enhancements that have been introduced since the 2006 ELIR.

97   The University aims to align its practices with the QAA Academic Infrastructure and to consider the five elements of the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework. The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, has been a key reference point for the University's policies. All sections of QAA's *Code of practice* were issued to schools and appropriate support units. Experienced staff were selected to consider QAA's *Code of practice* and compare practice at the University against its precepts, highlighting any areas of divergence and approving those or referring them back to schools for amendment. In 2009-10, the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) undertook a further review to take account of recent revisions to QAA's *Code of practic*e and developments in University practice.

98   Alignment of provision with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is considered during the module and programme approval process. The University uses its own terminology for describing levels of study, but these correspond to the SCQF levels. Reference to relevant subject benchmark statements is also required as part of the approval process. External examiners are explicitly asked to confirm the alignment of awards with national benchmarks, and the alignment is checked periodically as part of the IRLT process. Programme specifications identify relevant reference points including any required professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) accreditation.

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

99   There have been significant improvements in the University's data management systems since the 2006 ELIR, with plans in place for further improvements (see paragraph 15). The data supplied by the Registry to inform the AAM process comprises module-level information on enrolment numbers, grade profiles in comparison with the previous two years, plus cohort analyses by gender and year of study, and by gender and degree classification. Taking account of the nature of the student population, there would be value in the University undertaking further analysis of student achievement, for example by nationality and background. There would also be benefit in the University including longitudinal data on student destinations by programme area within the monitoring and review processes.

100   Given the strategic priority placed on graduate attributes and employability (see paragraph 58), there would be considerable value in the University systematically gathering information about schools' activity in this area as part of the AAM and IRLT processes, in line with the intention expressed in the Employability Strategy.

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

101   Since the 2006 ELIR, the University has drawn a number of its existing policies and guidelines relating to assessment into one single document, the Policy on Assessment: Marking and Standard Setting and Policy on Assessment Policies and Procedures 2009. The document covers a range of matters including: setting and marking assessments; procedures at module and degree classification boards; the role of the external examiner; and reassessments.

102   Summaries of the assessment criteria and methodologies are built into the module and programme approval documentation. When designing new modules, academic staff are required to align their proposed assessment styles with the intended learning outcomes, and with graduate attributes, linking these to the programme specifications. Schools are expected to review the portfolio of assessments used across the modules within a programme of study, so that it contains enough variety and complementarity of assessment. Support for this is provided by the directors of teaching. In some schools, the review of assessment styles has been carried out using a 'skills map' approach, and the University intends to undertake a project in the summer 2011 to produce a 'skills map' overview of all schools. There is evidence of good practice in a number of schools where staff have been active in implementing a wide range of assessment methods which link to the intended learning outcomes and, where appropriate, address the University's graduate attributes, such as group work, oral presentations, and peer and self-assessment of coursework. Other schools have been less proactive in this area, and therefore students do not all have the same opportunity to experience a variety of assessment methods. The University's intention to produce a 'skills map' across schools is likely to be beneficial in beginning to address this.

103   The University operates a process where student work may be marked directly onto the 20-point Common Reporting Scale. Equally permissible is the use of percentage scales to mark particular types of work, or cumulative scores out of any number, which are then converted to grades on the 20-point Common Reporting Scale. The choice of marking method is left for individual schools to determine, but the University Policy states that it should be in line with best practice in the subject discipline.

104   School examination officers make statistical analyses of marking and report any unusual distributions to the relevant module board. Histograms of final module results are displayed via the University's Module Management System and any unusual distributions, if not already identified at school level, will be referred to the relevant dean by the Registry. Grade and degree classification distributions are considered during the AAM process, with action taken to address

'outliers'. The University provided examples of this careful analysis and follow-up action occurring, which represents good practice.

105   The University's 20-point Scale has much to commend it in terms of clarity and the opportunity it provides for comparability. It has also been in place for many years, and has been refined over that period in consultation with external examiners. Despite the benefits of the Common Scale, a number of schools persist in using a variety of marking approaches which require to be converted onto the 20-point Scale. At least one school uses different marking scales for different levels of study. In another school, 'bonus points' are awarded to address severe marking by staff, or where the overall distribution of marks has been considered to be too low. There would be considerable benefit in the University addressing the issue of marking practice, rather than adjusting marks in this way. The University recognises that some students continue to report that they find the dual marking/grading arrangements confusing, and the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) has worked with two schools in the past in order to clarify the University's arrangements. In particular, exchange students indicated that they are unclear about the grade conversion system and North American students expressed concerns about the effective translation of their grades into the US context. It is evident that the University has undertaken positive work to promote greater consistency in assessment practice across the institution, and there are examples of very good practice. The University is encouraged to continue with its efforts to promote the more consistent adoption of the 20-point Scale as an initial marking scale, to provide greater clarity for all students.

106   The University has introduced standard criteria for progression into honours, although schools can relax the criteria in special cases at the head of school's discretion. In some schools, notably in the Faculty of Science, there is a 'second chance route', where students who narrowly fail to meet the criteria are nonetheless permitted entry to honours. The University indicated that it has supported and promoted this approach as good practice. The University is encouraged to introduce this opportunity for all students, in the interests of equity and fairness.

107   The University has a policy on external examining for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes; this was revised in 2007, with further updates added in 2010 to take account of various factors, including changes in UKBA requirements. The policy is provided to all external examiners on their appointment, and schools provide further information relating to their specific programmes, including the reports of previous examiners. External examiner reports are submitted to the Deans' Office and a summary annual report prepared by the deans is presented to TLAC. The Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) writes to all examiners each year, commenting on any issues that have arisen and highlighting any changes in University policy or practice. Overall, the procedures for external examining are robust and effective.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing public information about quality and academic standards, including the linkage with the institution's monitoring and review arrangements

108   During 2008-09, in response to the 2006 ELIR report, the University established a Publications Working Group to consider the range of institutional publications and to propose new updating and archiving policies. As a result, the University has reviewed and updated its learning, teaching and assessment policies, and made them more accessible on its website. The University indicated that this approach could be used as a pilot for the future publication of other institutional policies.

109   The Publications team manages the production timetables for the prospectuses, recruitment leaflets and course catalogues, in close liaison with the schools and a number of central units. The prospectuses and subject leaflets are available in accessible formats on request. The University introduced a Content Management System in 2008 to assure the accuracy of the ever-increasing volume of material published on its website. Editorial access is limited to trained content authors and editors, and all changes are carefully tracked. At the time of the current ELIR,

the Content Management System was being used by all service units and by six of the schools, with plans in place to migrate the remaining schools.

110   In 2009, the University made the decision that its web pages and the institutional Student Handbook would be the sole sources of information about key academic matters, such as honours classification and the Common Reporting Scale. The University Student Handbook is updated annually and published on the web during August. Only school-specific information has to be published in the school handbooks and schools are provided with a summary of the required headings early each summer. Because there is variation in policies between schools, for example in relation to the late submission of coursework, it is important that such school-specific information is clearly signalled to students.

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

111   The University indicated that the Academic Monitoring Assurance Group (AMAG) has a key role to play in linking quality assurance and enhancement, primarily by identifying good practice through its engagement with the Annual Academic Monitoring (AAM) and the Internal Review of Learning and Teaching (IRLT) processes and disseminating the outcomes widely. Reconsideration of the current AAM pro forma would be beneficial in ensuring the University's aspirations for the quality enhancement role of AMAG are achieved more fully (see paragraph 88). Linked to the work of AMAG, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC) Open Forum events provide a regular opportunity for the dissemination and promotion of good practice.

112   The SALTIRE unit was identified as promoting links between quality assurance and enhancement through the dual role of its team of staff. The Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) is the Director of the unit and the Deputy Director is the University Learning and Teaching Quality Officer (see paragraph 87). The Learning and Teaching Quality Officer is responsible for managing the AAM and IRLT processes, and has an important role in identifying good practice arising from those processes. Other SALTIRE staff are engaged with a range of activity to support the development of academic skills, such as academic induction and coordination of the FILTA and SELF schemes (see paragraphs 74-76). There is an opportunity, therefore, for matters arising from the quality assurance processes to inform the range of development activities offered by SALTIRE.

113   The University highlighted that its external examiners and reviewers are increasingly contributing to quality enhancement, for example through their role in commenting on curriculum design. There are many examples across the University of this taking place, notably through external examiners' involvement with module boards in schools.

114   Overall, the University has a number of systematic mechanisms aimed at linking quality assurance and enhancement. These generally operate as intended but there is evidence of greater engagement in some schools than in others.

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

115   The University has expanded the number of its collaborative arrangements since the 2006 ELIR, but still has a relatively modest number of agreements involving joint awards or the validation of awards taught by other institutions. In the current academic year, the University has established a small specialised Collaborations Working Group, chaired by the Proctor and reporting to the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC).

116   The University has a significant collaborative agreement with the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD) in which the University validates the research degrees provided by RSAMD. The research degree programmes are managed by the RSAMD Research Degrees Committee, of which the University's Postgraduate Pro-Dean (Arts) is a member. Since 2006, the

two institutions have worked to harmonise their regulations and policies relating to postgraduate research students, largely in line with the University's practice. For example, RSAMD has begun to adopt the University's programme of research supervisor and student skills training. Each student has an annual progress review meeting, the report of which is considered by the RSAMD Research Degrees Committee.

117   The collaborative agreement is overseen through an annual validation meeting, normally attended by the University's Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching), Deans of Arts and Science, Provost, Postgraduate Pro-Dean (Arts), Learning & Teaching Quality Officer and representatives from the University Registry. The University's Academic Monitoring Assurance Group (AMAG) has collaborative provision as a standing item on its agenda but, because matters relating to RSAMD were rarely raised through that route, it was more recently suggested that RSAMD should report to the TLAC Exchanges, Collaborations & Admissions Sub-Committee. The formal memorandum between the two institutions indicates that the effectiveness of the collaboration would be reviewed on a regular basis, and there would be considerable benefit in the University conducting such a review, taking the opportunity to reflect on the reporting mechanisms which would best serve each institution and the students.

118   In 2011-12, following two years of preparation in relation to teaching and assessment policies and regulations, a new collaboration is due to begin with the College of William and Mary (Virginia, USA). The University described this as a model for potential future collaborative agreements, emphasising the care with which the University selects partner institutions. In the case of this College, the University had a long-standing cooperation with the institution before commencing discussion on the current agreement.

119   The University has a significant number of agreements relating to its study abroad and student exchange opportunities. The University emphasised that it has undertaken significant work since the 2006 ELIR to improve the management of its collaborations and exchanges, with all exchanges now fully recorded and monitored. The approval of new exchange schemes requires a bilateral exchange agreement proposal which is scrutinised in the relevant faculty business committee before being considered by the TLAC Exchanges, Collaborations & Admissions Sub-Committee. All schemes are reviewed through annual bilateral agreement reports, which include a range of data and information, including student numbers and feedback. These reports are also considered by the TLAC Sub-Committee. Site visits must take place at least every three years and the visit outcomes are reported through a pro forma which is considered by the Exchanges & Study Abroad team. The procedure is secure and carefully followed through.

Strategic approach to quality enhancement

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

120   The University's Quality Enhancement Strategy (QES) was developed from the institutional Strategic Plan and is linked with the Learning and Teaching and the Employability Strategies. Development of the QES was informed by the Scottish Funding Council's vision for higher education in Scotland, and by outcomes of the University's work on two of the national Enhancement Themes: the First Year Experience and Research-Teaching Linkages. The QES is currently being integrated with work the University is carrying out in relation to the Graduates for the 21st Century national Theme.

121   Since 2008, the QES has been revised annually. The 2010-11 QES notes that quality enhancement includes all efforts to improve the quality of learning, building upon a backbone of best practice. It recognises that much of the initiative for the improvement of learning and teaching originates with individuals and groups of academic staff, and is not solely dependent on direction from senior management. The QES emphasises the need both to foster the active engagement of students in the learning process and to create a culture that supports schools in their attempts to promote enhanced practices appropriate to their disciplines.

122   The University confirmed this view stating that, although quality enhancement is promoted, coordinated and integrated from the centre (with responsibility resting with the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) working through TLAC and the Academic Council), it ultimately depends on the work of the individual schools. Schools produce their own strategic plans within the overall framework established by the University. Although schools are encouraged to retain their discipline-related identities and individual missions, they are required to engage with key enhancement agendas. Heads of school and directors of teaching are responsible for disseminating quality enhancement policies from TLAC within their schools. The University indicated that the implementation of institutional policies is routinely monitored through the Deans' Office, and that an overview is also taken by the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) and the Learning and Teaching Quality Officer.

123   The QES identifies eight quality enhancement priorities derived from the University's Strategic Plan, and each includes a number of activities through which these priorities might be achieved. However, the extent to which schools are expected to implement any or all of these activities is not made clear: the QES, therefore, is largely a set of aspirations rather than providing a clear strategic direction for the schools. In this way the QES appears to reflect a tension between the need to have strategic direction from the centre and the wish to preserve schools' autonomy. It is important that this tension is managed so that there is broad equivalence in the extent to which the student learning experience is enhanced across the University, regardless of school or programme of study. The effectiveness of the QES as an agent for change, therefore, depends on the way in which it is translated into enhancement activities via the school strategic plans. This, in turn, is influenced by the success with which the University has achieved its stated aim of creating a quality enhancement culture.

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

124   The University stated that its strategies for promoting quality enhancement are implemented through the coordinated operation of its management and monitoring structures, including the regular reviews of progress within schools. The University has streamlined its committee structure as a result of previous and current reorganisation. The new structure is intended to provide a better focus for review and reflection, with the aim of ensuring explicit and effective linkage of quality assurance and enhancement. At the same time, the link between the QES and the University's other strategies is intended to ensure a coordinated approach to strategy implementation and to the associated allocation of resources.

125   The TLAC Enhancement Sub-Committee has a specific remit to encourage engagement with the national Enhancement Themes, which it clearly fulfils and routinely reports to TLAC. All staff have access to the TLAC minutes on the intranet and receive a résumé of TLAC decisions by email. Within the schools, the school teaching committees provide forums at which policies and guidance initiated by TLAC can be considered by academic staff. However, this does not appear to happen in a systematic way. Even topics that have relevance across schools, such as assessment feedback, may not be considered by all schools. Less formal arrangements, such as away days, directors of teaching lunches and TLAC forums, provide alternative opportunities for discussion.

126   The Academic Monitoring Assurance Group (AMAG) has an important role in monitoring the implementation of the QES through its oversight of the AAM and IRLT processes. This is a potentially effective mechanism but, as noted earlier, the extent to which schools identify enhancement-related activity within the AAM pro forma varies considerably (see paragraphs 88 and 111).

127   The University indicated that activities related to research-teaching links and employability had helped to broaden the range of staff and students who were actively involved in quality enhancement, for example drawing in research active staff who had limited teaching roles.

Harmonising the QES with the Graduates for the 21st Century Enhancement Theme is intended to have a similar impact, as well as raising the awareness of students and staff of graduate attributes and employability skills. There are several positive examples of activities in these areas (see paragraphs 56-58). Other developments which further the University's strategic aim of fostering a quality enhancement culture within schools include the establishment of the Centre for Higher Education Research (CHER), the Teaching Awards and the FILTA and SELF schemes (see paragraphs 76, 77 and 80).

128   The University has adopted a strategic approach to enhancing the learning experience of students in the first year. This approach was developed following a review, conducted in 2006, which recognised the potential for increasing students' engagement during their first year at the University. As part of a more structured approach towards student induction, a session was added in 2009-10 which invites students to reflect on why they have come to University, what they wish to achieve from the experience, and how they might organise their time to achieve those aspirations. In 2009, with the proactive support of the Students' Association, the University raised the pass mark for first year students. This was intended to make the first year more challenging and to promote good study and learning patterns. This was supported by the introduction of two specific study skills modules offered to all first year students. From 2010-11, new interdisciplinary modules have been introduced, which are designed to give breadth to the first year experience and to encourage innovative teaching styles and group-based, peer-supported learning. The University's approach in this area is particularly positive because it has resulted in a series of enhancements that have been introduced across the institution to the benefit of all first year students.

129   The considerable autonomy enjoyed by the schools means that implementation of the QES depends to a large extent on decisions taken at school level about the enhancement activities to be undertaken. There is significant variation in the extent to which schools address institutional enhancement priorities, such as employability, in their strategic plans. The school plans themselves tend to be retrospective rather than forward-looking. In some cases an operational plan is derived from the school strategy, but with limited information about individual responsibilities or timescales. There would be considerable benefit in the University making clear the relative importance attached to quality enhancement achieved through institution-wide strategic direction and that derived from initiatives at school and individual level. At present, the QES reinforces the view that decisions about how to advance quality enhancement are best left to the schools, noting that the University does not 'seek to prescribe best practice from the centre'. Although the QES is revised annually, it does not give a clear indication of the areas that schools should concentrate on each year. Providing such clarification would improve the implementation of the QES, as would the production of an annual operational plan to accompany the higher-level, longer term strategy.

The effectiveness of the institution's use of external reference points in its approach to quality enhancement, including the extent to which the institution's approach is informed by national and international practice

130   The University has actively engaged with the national Enhancement Themes since their inception and this is reflected in the QES (see paragraph 120). In line with the integrating nature of the Graduates for the 21st Century Theme, and the aim of the QES to promote the active engagement of students in learning, the focus of the University's activities is on the promotion of confident learning and critical attitudes, and a decreased emphasis on learning driven by assessment. A variety of activities have resulted from this broad aim including: a workshop for staff on 'developing the confident learner'; and student-focused initiatives within schools, such as reading parties, autonomous learning groups, mini-conferences, increased problem-based learning, and student-led extra-curricular activities. Given its strategic aim to promote a culture of quality enhancement, there would be benefit in the University making use of the other reference points developed for the sector under the auspices of the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee. These include indicators of enhancement and international benchmarking. In

particular, the international benchmarking of research degrees could be of interest as the University pursues its intention to develop the St Leonard's College Graduate School.

131 Academic staff are encouraged, in some cases with SALTIRE funding, to participate in Scottish and UK enhancement-related conferences and workshops, with attendance monitored through the use of a common calendar system and participants asked to feed back their findings to SALTIRE or the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) directly. Practice at other institutions can be identified through University staff acting as external examiners, although the extent to which any good practice is captured at school or institutional level will depend largely on the individual's inclination. A number of the TLAC Open Forum events and workshops relating to the Graduates for the 21st Century Theme have involved invited external participants, providing opportunities for the University to learn from practice elsewhere.

132 External examiners and the external members of AAM and IRLT panels are valued sources of ideas for quality enhancement, and the University provided several such examples of enhancement at school level. In this context, the University is making effective use of the 'consultancy' role of the external examiners.

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

133 The University has a range of mechanisms in place for identifying and disseminating good practice, and there is clear evidence that academic staff are committed to seeking ways of enhancing the student learning experience. Staff are enthusiastic advocates for the formal and less formal opportunities within schools for the sharing of good practice, such as teaching committees, discussion groups and away days. At institutional level, TLAC Open Forums and the publicity given to SELF and FILTA-funded projects are an effective means of disseminating good practice and sharing experience. Clearly, the staff development activities organised by SALTIRE are directly concerned with the dissemination of good practice. The establishment of the Centre for Higher Education Research (CHER) to support and encourage innovation and focused pedagogic research is a particularly positive development which the University is, understandably, eager to promote (see paragraph 77).

134 School engagement with the routes of communication provided by the formal committees could be more effective. For example, although schools report good practice through the AAM and IRLT processes, and this is recorded in the Deans' Letters and the AMAG overview reports, there is little evidence that this information is captured more widely within the schools. Doing so would help to reinforce and spread existing examples of good practice. In addition, school teaching committees are not consistent in the extent to which they formally consider TLAC discussion documents. It is recognised that informal routes can be very effective in spreading awareness of good practice. There would be benefit in these being captured, for example through formal records of away days, discussion groups and directors of teaching lunches, to ensure that examples of good practice are made available to all.

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

135 Most of the University's efforts in enhancing collaborative provision have been to improve the management of collaborations and exchanges: by standardising approval, monitoring and review; improving communication routes for students; and ensuring robust support for staff and students. There is no specific reference to collaborative provision in the QES, and no reference to quality enhancement in the remits of either the TLAC Exchanges & Admissions Sub-Committee or the TLAC Collaborations Working Group.

136 A help and advice point has been established within the Exchanges & Study Abroad team to support academic staff who are interested in establishing a collaborative agreement. The University intends to use this link as a means of sharing the good practice which exists in relation to exchanges to all new and ongoing collaborations. The University is encouraged to pursue this intention.

Conclusion

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

137   The University is able to attract high-achieving students and aims to provide them with the opportunity to learn and to perform academically to the best of their ability. Students are encouraged to adopt a dynamic and curiosity-led approach to their learning, as well as developing academic and graduate skills through a range of successful approaches to promoting research-teaching links. Systematic mechanisms are in place for promoting and rewarding students' academic and co-curricular achievement. Through an extensive and carefully managed network of partners, the University is able to offer student exchange and study abroad opportunities. The University is encouraged to consider ways of promoting these exchange opportunities more widely across the whole student population.

138   International students represent a significant proportion of the student community and the University has excellent arrangements for meeting their pastoral and academic support needs. There is also a thorough approach to the induction and training provided for postgraduate research students, covering generic and discipline-specific skills development. In relation to equality and diversity, the University has taken a proactive approach to identifying groups of students who have particular characteristics and has worked to find ways of addressing their support needs. The University is encouraged to continue reviewing its existing policies and action plans to ensure they meet legislative requirements and are in line with good practice established in the sector.

139   In an initiative led by the Students' Association, the University has introduced school student presidents from the start of the current academic year. This arrangement has the potential to promote student engagement within the schools and between the schools and the centre. The University and the Students' Association are encouraged to work together to secure the continuity of the scheme.

140   Since the 2006 ELIR, the University has adopted a coordinated strategy for the enhancement of the learning environment and is implementing a systematic strategy for addressing the challenges relating to the Library, while various improvements have been made to ICT facilities and services. There is a steady uptake of VLE capabilities and the University is encouraged to promote its effective use across all schools.

141   The University has implemented a variety of mechanisms to strengthen the support that it provides to academic staff for their learning and teaching practice. There are two, established schemes for promoting innovation in pedagogy, which attract strong staff support and which provide positive opportunities for cross-school collaboration and dissemination of good practice: the Fund for Initiatives in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (FILTA) and the Strategic Enhancement of Learning Fund (SELF). More recently, the University has established the Centre for Higher Education Research (CHER) which aims to support and promote pedagogical research. CHER has already attracted support from a range of staff and has been active in hosting meetings and establishing small research groups.

142   A particular feature of the University is the autonomy of the individual schools. While a certain amount of flexibility is important to take account of different academic disciplines, the University should ensure that its key policies are implemented consistently to provide greater equivalence in the student experience across the institution.

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

143   The University's Internal Review of Learning and Teaching (IRLT) process adheres to sector guidelines, is diligently implemented and promotes thoughtful responses from the schools. The

Annual Academic Monitoring (AAM) process is well established and understood by staff at all levels. In general, it is systematically implemented, although the University should avoid relying on one individual for the operation of key parts of the process. The University has also emphasised AAM's intended role in linking quality assurance and enhancement activity. However, the extent to which schools engage with that element of the AAM process is subject to considerable variation and there would be benefit in the University revising the AAM pro forma to provide clearer direction for the schools. There have been significant developments in the University data management systems since the 2006 ELIR and the University has identified further improvements that are planned. Related to this, there would be benefit in the University differentiating between groups of students in the data considered as part of the AAM process, for example to provide information on the progression of students with different characteristics.

144   There are well-established arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the progress of postgraduate research students. As a matter of detail, the University is asked to consider the role of the internal examiner during annual progress meetings and, in particular, to ensure that their objectivity and independence in the examination process is not compromised by their earlier involvement with the annual meetings.

145   Since the 2006 ELIR, the University has undertaken a great deal of valuable work aimed at promoting greater consistency in assessment. There are many examples of good practice in schools where intended learning outcomes are aligned with assessment practices. There are also examples of schools paying detailed attention to the range of assessment methods used across modules and programmes to ensure that students can engage with an effective variety, including approaches aimed at developing and assessing students' graduate attributes. Although, following a number of positive developments, there is greater clarity surrounding the use of the Common Grading Scale, there remains confusion amongst some groups of students in relation to the process for mapping marks onto the Grading Scale. There would be considerable value in the University reflecting on the marking practices adopted in some schools as it continues to promote the more consistent adoption of the Common Grading Scale.

146   In relation to collaborative provision, the University is asked to review the effectiveness of its partnership with the Royal Scottish Academic of Music and Drama, including giving consideration to the most effective reporting links between the two institutions.

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

147   The University has been successful in its aim to establish a culture that encourages schools and individuals to enhance the quality of the learning experience. It acknowledges the need to draw more staff into this endeavour, and is encouraged to continue with the approaches that it is currently taking which have achieved some success in engaging groups of students and staff in enhancement activities. In addition, given the extent to which responsibility for quality enhancement is devolved, there would be considerable value in providing a clearer indication of institutional priorities to the schools. The University should, therefore, consider developing its Quality Enhancement Strategy so that it has long-term currency, and is supplemented by annual statements providing clear guidance on institutional priorities in order to inform the production of school strategic plans.

148   Revisions to the committee structure and to institutional policies and practice over recent years have simplified the academic organisation of the University. This has established clear lines of communication throughout the institution, together with mechanisms by which implementation of the Quality Enhancement Strategy can be monitored and good practice disseminated within and among schools. The University is encouraged to ensure that the systems it has put in place are used more consistently in practice so that these potential benefits can be fully realised.

149   The University has engaged positively with the national Enhancement Themes; in particular, the First Year, Employability and Research-Teaching Linkages Themes have all influenced strategy and activity at the institution. More recently, the University has re-visited aspects of these earlier Themes, linked to the integrative nature of the current Graduates for the 21st Century Theme. In responding to the First Year Theme, the University adopted a strategic approach across the whole institution, resulting in a suite of initiatives designed to promote early engagement of students in the learning process. There would be benefit in the University considering the adoption of a similar model in relation to future enhancement activity.

Overarching confidence judgement

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