



# Enhancement-led institutional review

**University of the West of Scotland**

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## Enhancement-led institutional review

### University of the West of Scotland

#### Introduction

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

#### ELIR method and report

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

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

#### Method of review

4 The University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA), which provided the focus for the review. The RA was supported by a number of accompanying documents, including two case studies relating to: greater college to university articulation; and the implementation of the University's common 20-point tariff. The ELIR team also received the most recent ELIR reports of the two former institutions which merged to form the University: the ELIR follow-up report on Bell College of Technology of November 2005, and the University of Paisley 2006 ELIR report.

5 The University established two working groups to assist with ELIR preparations: the ELIR Drafting Group and the ELIR Overview Group. Both groups were chaired by the then Vice Principal Learning & Teaching and included student representation. A series of focus group meetings were held with a wide range of staff in early 2010 and a consultation paper, based on the focus group outcomes, was distributed to all staff for comment. This consultation provided background information to inform the drafting of the RA. In August 2010, following the retirement of the Vice Principal Learning & Teaching, the Vice Principal (Learning and Teaching)/ Executive Dean of Business and Creative Industries assumed responsibility for ELIR preparations. At that time, the University appointed an Academic ELIR Coordinator on a 50 per cent secondment to assist with the process, working closely with staff in the Quality Enhancement Unit. The University Learning, Teaching & Assessment Board had overall responsibility for developing the RA, and drafts were considered by a number of faculty and University committees. The final version of the RA was approved by the Senate in December 2010.

6 The ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 9 and 10 February 2011 and the Part 2 visit took place in the week beginning 28 March 2011.

7 The ELIR team comprised: Professor Liz Deane, Professor Mick Healey, Professor Maggie Kinloch, Mr Steven Kirschbaum, Professor Paddy Maher and Mr Paul Probyn. The review was managed on behalf of QAA by Ms Ailsa Crum, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

## **Background information about the institution**

8 The University of the West of Scotland was formally established on 1 August 2007 with the merger of the University of Paisley and Bell College of Technology. The two former institutions can trace their histories back to 1897 and 1972 respectively. In 2009-10, the University had around 18,000 students studying across three faculties: Business & Creative Industries; Education, Health & Social Sciences; and Science & Technology. Working alongside the faculties, the University's Lifelong Learning Academy facilitates access to a wide range of part-time study opportunities. The University described itself as 'creating a unique, regional University that will work closely with communities and key stakeholders to deliver internationally-recognised Higher Education'. It has four campuses: Ayr, Dumfries, Hamilton and Paisley. The University has a relatively modest number of collaborative partnerships, the majority of which are with colleges in the West of Scotland.

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

9 The University indicated that its Enhancement Strategy is facilitated by two key drivers: planned, strategic development through which the University aims to anticipate and respond to the needs of its students; and a structured process of continuous review and reflection on practice and provision.

## **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 17,508 students (by headcount), of whom 15,755 were undergraduate, 1,488 were postgraduate taught, and 265 were postgraduate research students. The University's total student population declined between 2008-09 and 2009-10 from 18,345 to 17,508. The University explained that this was due to the increase in the number of undergraduate students studying full-time, particularly at the Paisley campus. Given the limits on funded student places, this impacted on the number of students the University could recruit onto modular part-time study. In recent years, the University has had an approximately fifty-fifty split in the number of students studying full and part-time. In 2009-10, the proportion of part-time students reduced slightly to just over 44 per cent of the total student population.

11 Between 2008-09 and 2009-10 there was a slight shift in the campus populations, with some growth in numbers at Ayr and Dumfries and a relative decline at Paisley. In 2009-10, the campus numbers were: 2,938 students at Ayr (around 17 per cent of the total student population), 906 at Dumfries (around 5 per cent), 4,701 at Hamilton (around 27 per cent) and 8,246 at Paisley (47 per cent).

12 In recent years the University has had a consistently large proportion of mature students. In 2009-10, more than 70 per cent of the student population was aged 21 or over on matriculation and more than 40 per cent of the student population was aged over 30 on matriculation. In the same period, the University had substantially more female than male students (63 per cent in 2009-10), although the proportion of male students engaged in postgraduate study is higher, with female students accounting for around 57 per cent of the postgraduate taught population and around 46 per cent of the research student group. The University indicated that the high proportion of female students was partly due to the large number of nursing students, with the School of Health, Nursing & Midwifery accounting for more than 25 per cent of the total student population in 2009-10.

13 In line with the targets set out in the Strategic Plan, there was a marked increase in postgraduate research student numbers between 2007-08 and 2009-10 from 151 to 265, with

plans to increase the research student population further. During the current ELIR, there was evidence to suggest that this pace of growth was placing considerable pressure on learning resources within schools (see paragraph 35).

14 In 2009-10, over 90 per cent of the student population was from Scotland and a significant majority of these students (84 per cent) were from the immediate region. The University plans to increase the number of international students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In 2009-10, international students accounted for under 3 per cent of the total student population.

15 A significant proportion of students enter the University with advanced standing from a range of local colleges, and the South West Articulation Hub provides a focus for monitoring this activity. In 2009-10, the University was working with 20 colleges as part of the Hub. Of the 824 students who joined UWS with advanced standing in 2009-10, 788 were from one of the Hub partners.

16 Information about the student population is gathered, collated and maintained by a team of staff in the Planning & Management Information Systems department. The two former institutions used different student information systems and a key challenge for the University has been merging these. This work was coordinated by the Student Information System Project Board to ensure that the chosen software was customised to suit the University's needs. Although the new system is yet to become fully embedded, it has already enhanced the University's management of information about the student population. Staff reported a significant improvement in the data available to them for monitoring admissions targets and student progression.

17 Progression and retention is good among students on the programmes which lead to professional registration. The University recognises that the data is more variable among other programmes, with some low rates of progression recorded. Trends in progression and retention are monitored through the subject development groups within the faculties, and the University produces an annual Student Progression and Retention report. At the time of the current ELIR, the University was reviewing its Retention and Progression Strategy for 2011-12 and had identified four projects to assist with improving the rates in this area. It is positive that the University has developed a proactive approach to analysing the data and is seeking ways of improving progression and retention, which it is encouraged to continue pursuing.

18 Overall, the University's student information management system is used effectively and extensively by staff across the institution to monitor the student population.

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

### **Student representation**

19 The University has continued to build on the infrastructure for student engagement that was in place at the time of the University of Paisley 2006 ELIR. The Student Representation Strategy, which was jointly developed by the Students' Association of the University of the West of Scotland (SAUWS) and the Quality Enhancement Unit, indicates that an active student representation system is essential for the University. It sets out a vision for student representation as well as outlining the main representative opportunities available. There is student representation on a range of University committees, including the University Court; the Senate; the Learning, Teaching & Assessment Board; the Student Experience Group; and the Research & Knowledge Transfer Board. There is extensive student representation at faculty and school level, including on student/staff liaison groups, subject development groups, faculty academic management groups, and faculty learning and teaching fora.

20 Students are involved in chairing meetings, for example: the Student Experience Group is co-chaired by the SAUWS President and the Dean of Students; the recent Module Evaluation Questionnaire Review Group was chaired by one of the SAUWS sabbatical officers; and the student/staff liaison groups are normally chaired by a student, which allows for the meetings to focus on student-led agendas. The University highlighted its commitment to fitting its systems around the particular needs and profile of its students, for example by holding some meetings in the evenings.

21 SAUWS, which has five student sabbatical officers, has a presence on all four of the University campuses, although this is more significant on the Ayr, Hamilton and Paisley sites, each of which has a campus president. A full-time member of staff, the Student Representation Coordinator, has been in post since 2006 and works collaboratively with the sabbatical officers and staff in the Quality Enhancement Unit to carry out a range of activities including developing tailored training for student representatives.

22 SAUWS and the Quality Enhancement Unit have developed a Student Representative Handbook, which has been highlighted as good practice by the national body, Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs). This is supplemented by the student representative site on the University virtual learning environment (VLE), which contains key information including the University Regulations and the complaints and appeals procedures. A student involvement and engagement report is produced annually by the Quality Enhancement Unit for the attention of the Student Experience Group to highlight key matters from the past year and to provide an evaluation of student engagement more generally. In March 2010, SAUWS and the Quality Enhancement Unit jointly organised a student conference on the theme of Student Learning in the 21st Century. The conference was well received and resulted in a report which was considered by the Student Experience Group. At the time of the current ELIR, work to develop student representation further was being scoped in the Improving the Student Experience Action Plan.

23 The University has a 'You said - We did' initiative aimed at engaging students in shaping institutional policy and practice. Students spoke positively about their experiences of working with staff on the student/staff liaison groups. Students also spoke positively about the support they receive from staff on an ongoing basis, commenting that there was a real rapport between students and staff.

24 It is clear that SAUWS has an excellent and trusted relationship with the University staff, including the senior managers and the Quality Enhancement Unit. It is also evident that SAUWS has had a positive impact on the student experience.

### **Learning Manifesto**

25 Linked to the University's work in relation to the Graduates for the 21st Century national Enhancement Theme, SAUWS and the Centre for Academic & Professional Development have been engaged in an interactive project on Transforming Learning. From this, a student-led Learning Manifesto has been prepared. Although it was in draft form at the time of the current ELIR, the University indicated that the principles and priorities of the Learning Manifesto would inform the development of the new Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (see paragraphs 88 and 89). Students and staff spoke enthusiastically about the Learning Manifesto and its likely contribution to institutional strategy and practice. The University's support for the production of the Learning Manifesto represents good practice.

### **Admissions and induction**

26 A number of students who joined the University through direct articulation routes from the college sector, from overseas or via Erasmus exchanges expressed dissatisfaction with the pre-

admission processes, which had caused some difficulty for them in identifying module choices. These groups of students also expressed dissatisfaction with the induction they were offered, where there appears to be a range of practices across the institution. The University is developing an Applicant Experience Strategy, which is designed to address many of these concerns. The implementation target is currently September 2012, and there would be benefit in the University considering quicker options for addressing some of the immediate concerns, to ensure that students can have an improved pre-admission experience for 2011-12.

### **Student support**

27 The Centre for Academic & Professional Development (CAPD), in addition to providing support to staff, has established a team of effective learning tutors following the receipt of support from the Scottish Funding Council through the Wider Access Retention Premium. The tutors provide support across all campuses in a range of study skills to complement the work of staff in the schools and in Student Services. Students were widely aware of, and positive about, the tutors and the work of the Effective Learning Team more generally.

28 Following a review of Administrative and Academic Support functions, which was carried out in 2008, the University integrated a number of functions into a single point of contact known as the Student Link. These functions include Student Services, Student Administration Services, Admissions and the Lifelong Learning Academy. Student Services provides support in areas such as careers advice, counselling, finance and welfare. At the time of the current ELIR, the University was still in the process of establishing a physical presence for the Student Link service and this appeared to be most developed on the Paisley campus, where students were positive about the single enquiry point. A web presence has been developed for Student Link, including a recently-developed live chat service aimed at extending the provision of advice available to students. In general, students on all campuses indicated that they were able to get support when they needed it.

### **Personal development planning**

29 The original University policy on personal development planning (PDP) was agreed by the Senate in 2005, and this was updated in 2008 to reflect developments within the institution and at national level. In September 2008, the University introduced an ePortfolio-based model of PDP to all taught programmes to coincide with curriculum restructuring to a 20-credit system. The introduction of PDP was facilitated by a substantive staff development programme, which was delivered to staff in all of the schools and other key operating areas by the Centre for Academic & Professional Development. The PDP model includes comprehensive resources which are available through the VLE, including user guides and access to external events and information on good practice. In designing the PDP system, the University drew on developments and research in the sector, such as the Effective Learning Framework, as well as internal practice from the education and nursing & midwifery disciplines, where PDP is well established.

30 In addition to the ongoing evaluation of the PDP policy which occurs through the regular programme of Subject Health Reviews (see paragraph 60), the Centre for Academic & Professional Development carried out evaluations of the first and second years of ePortfolio implementation. Staff responses to the 2009 evaluation suggest that, while there was a high recognition of the importance of PDP to student learning, there was only a low level of engagement for staff and students with the ePortfolio model. Student responses did, however, show very positive views on the accessibility and usability of the ePortfolio package. A number of changes were made following that evaluation, including producing revised support materials, staff development packages and induction support for students. The 2010 evaluation indicated better engagement of staff and students with PDP. The University recognises that, while



implementation of PDP is progressing, it is not yet fully embedded in the delivery of programmes. This is supported by the outcomes from Subject Health Reviews.

31 Evidence from the current ELIR indicates that there are varying attitudes towards PDP, with some enthusiasts and some sceptics among staff and students alike. In particular, where PDP is not an assessed activity within academic programmes, there are low levels of student engagement with it. The University intends to conduct further evaluations of its PDP implementation, which it is encouraged to progress. There would also be benefit in disseminating the examples of good practice in using PDP which already exist around the institution.

### **Work placement learning**

32 The University stated that it is committed to offering all of its students the chance to learn through work placement experience and to be given credit for this as part of their programmes of study. Placement is embedded into the professional registration programmes, and placement and/or work-based learning opportunities are provided in all other programmes. The Employability Link service, launched in 2008-09, works with employers to identify placement opportunities and promote these to students. It also provides support to faculties and programme teams in the development of new placement and work-based learning opportunities.

33 Staff and those students who had participated in placements considered that they provided invaluable experience. However, some students reported that they had been discouraged by staff in schools from undertaking placements. Given that the University's stated position is to offer placement opportunities to all students, there would be benefit in clarifying student entitlement in this area.

### **Research students**

34 The Innovation & Research Office is the central point of contact for all research activity in the University. The Office is responsible for the administration of research student recruitment, progress monitoring and training. The University offers an extensive research student training programme, with components of the programme being targeted at specific phases of students' learning and with possibilities for students to construct an individualised programme of short courses, combined with access to credit-bearing modules. Each year, linked to their progress monitoring, students are encouraged to identify any gaps in the training programme. Students spoke positively about the provision of training and about the support provided by the Innovation & Research Office more generally.

35 There has been a significant increase in postgraduate research student numbers over the last three years (see paragraph 13) and the University intends to continue pursuing a strategy of rapid growth in this area. In support of this expansion, the University offers a number of funded research studentships, as well as admitting students who are in receipt of industry funding and those who are self-funding. Responsibility for delivering the University strategy rests with the schools, where there appears to be some difficulty in resourcing the increased numbers. Students identify significant concerns relating to the lack of study space and access to other learning resources including access to laboratory facilities. The University is aware of this and has sought to address the matter in the first instance by being clear with students at the start of their studies about the facilities that are available. While it is important to provide clear information to students, the University must, as a matter of priority, give serious consideration to the adequacy of the facilities it has available for its current and intended future research students. In reviewing its research environment, the University should pay close attention to the relevant section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* published by QAA and ensure it is able to meet all of the precepts.



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

36 The University indicated that its framework for the development of graduate attributes is embedded in the Regulatory Framework, programme specifications and module descriptors. The Strategy for the Enhancement of Quality in Learning, Teaching & Assessment (SEQLTA) includes specific objectives related to the development of high-level attributes and employability. As part of the restructure of the University's module portfolio in 2007-08, programme teams used key external reference points, such as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the Higher Education Academy Employability profiles, to assist them in documenting where employability skills were being developed in their programmes and modules. The University highlighted that this provided an institution-wide opportunity to ensure that graduate attributes and employability, along with research-informed teaching, were placed at the centre of the student experience. It acted as a significant developmental exercise, in addition to achieving the harmonisation of the credit framework that was required following the merger. The University described this significant update of programmes as a step change in the design of its academic portfolio. Further work aimed at embedding the development of graduate attributes across all programmes has been guided by a Steering Group which was established to promote engagement with the national Enhancement Theme, Graduates for the 21st Century (see paragraph 98).

37 In 2008-09, as part of the development of Student Services, and aimed at stimulating the concept of employability more generally, the University launched the Employability Link. While the service is available on all campuses, the Paisley Campus benefits from a physical presence. The service is provided to all students to help them identify and document their developing graduate skills. Students who had been able to use it were positive about the Employability Link service.

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

38 The Strategic Plan 2008-15 outlines significant redevelopment of the estate and upgrading of learning and teaching accommodation across the campuses of the merged University. The Estates Strategy details the proposed development of all four campuses. Recent significant developments include a new campus at Ayr due to be opened for 2011-12 in partnership with the Scottish Agricultural College; upgrading of computing, sports and leisure facilities at the Hamilton campus; and upgrading of teaching space and other facilities at the Paisley campus.

39 The University has identified that one of its key challenges following the merger is delivering an equivalent student experience across all four campuses, while fostering the distinctive cultures of each. The University emphasised that each campus has its own distinctive characteristics, with some unique provision and established links with local communities. Students are based on one campus and, as a result of the distances between sites, do not generally travel to other campuses for their studies. Each campus has a Campus Director, responsible for liaising with a range of stakeholders including the heads of school and support units and the Students' Association, to consider development needs in terms of space and the learning environment. This appears to be an effective mechanism, providing opportunities for good communication between the directors.

40 The University has recognised that the largest building on the Hamilton campus is aging, although the campus benefits from two newer buildings: the Caird Building (opened in 2000) and the Centre for Engineering Excellence (opened in 2008). There are aspirations to redevelop the campus, as outlined in the Estates Strategy 2010-19. Until the Strategy is implemented fully, the University plans to make short-term investments to improve the teaching accommodation and social space. As the University is aware, students who are based in certain parts of the Hamilton campus express dissatisfaction with the built infrastructure and general environment.

The University is, therefore, encouraged to monitor the student experience on the Hamilton campus carefully and respond appropriately to ensure that the student experience is broadly equivalent across the institution.

41 The University's Future Learning Spaces project is seeking to develop the use of new technologies in learning and teaching through two custom-built 'classrooms of the future' on the Hamilton and Paisley campuses. Technologies under development include multi-campus videoconferencing which allows the synchronous integration of other devices; use of audience response systems; and use of interactive whiteboards. The University is evaluating the use of the 'classrooms of the future' and has already identified a need to promote the use of technology in learning and teaching more widely.

42 A range of IT resources are provided across the University to support the learning and teaching environment. However, students and staff identify a number of problems with the provision across all four campuses, including slow log-on times, insufficient IT support, variable availability of computers and variable entitlement to personal laptops. There is an ICT Strategy which identifies a number of intended developments in the provision, and the University should ensure that these issues are addressed.

43 Since the merger, the University has adopted a single virtual learning environment (VLE) across all campuses. The SEQLTA requires all modules to have a presence on the VLE to assure equity of access to module materials and information for all students. The Centre for Academic & Professional Development has coordinated an extensive staff development programme over the past five years to support and promote the use of the VLE, and an e-learning users' group has been established to evaluate and disseminate good practice. Student feedback on the VLE is gathered routinely as part of the annual monitoring process (see paragraph 58). The University has also appointed an eLearning Developer to assist schools in enhancing the use of learning technologies. It is clear that the University has adopted a strategic and coordinated approach to embedding the use of the VLE, and students clearly value it as a helpful tool in assisting their learning. The University also makes effective use of videoconferencing in communicating between the campuses.

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

44 The University highlighted its commitment to providing higher education to enable people of all backgrounds to realise their full potential. Since 2006, the University's equality and diversity work has been driven by an overall strategy, linked to the Equality Schemes for Disability, Gender and Race. Building on this positive approach, the University has now developed a single Equality Scheme. The University evaluates its approach through a range of mechanisms, including joint work with the Students' Association. There is evidence of very good practice in the University's track record of responding to equality and diversity issues.

45 In 2009-10, over 16 per cent of the total student population came from the most deprived areas of Scotland, as defined within the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. Students from these areas are studying at all levels at the University, although the proportions are lower at postgraduate than undergraduate level. However, it is notable that the proportion of research students coming from the most deprived areas had risen from 7.5 per cent in 2007-08 to over 11 per cent in 2009-10.

46 The University offers part-time, full-time, distance and blended delivery options in an effort to ensure its provision is as accessible as possible. The Lifelong Learning Academy coordinates part-time study, and students enrolled with the Academy can study for degree awards or pursue continuing professional development programmes. In 2009-10, 4,676 students were studying through the Lifelong Learning Academy. Students and staff highlighted the effectiveness of two modules aimed at supporting the transition from school (Step Up to

University) and further education colleges (Next Steps at University) which are delivered by the Lifelong Learning Academy. Students from a range of ages and backgrounds spoke very positively about their experience of the Academy.

47 Overall, the University has made a significant contribution to widening participation. It is clear that the role of the Lifelong Learning Academy in providing support, guidance and advice to students is a particular strength.

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

48 The University emphasised that it has a strategic commitment to developing all of its staff. There are two formal programmes for academic staff: the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, which is organised and delivered by the Centre for Academic & Professional Development; and the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Degree Supervision, which is organised by the Innovation & Research Office. Since 2008, the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education has been compulsory for all new academic staff.

49 Following merger and the development of new academic structures, new line managers have undertaken management training and the Corporate Management Team members have undertaken leadership training. In addition to the institutional budget, staff development is supported through faculty and school budgets. The University highlighted that the Centre for Academic & Professional Development has staff who are embedded in the faculties, strengthening the link between the Centre and teaching staff. The University has identified stimulating research activity across a wider range of staff as a significant focus, with the Innovation & Research Office having a key role. For example, staff have specific activity plans for scholarly activity and research and there has been encouragement from the University for staff to register for higher degrees by research.

50 Training and support is available for postgraduate research students and research assistants involved in teaching. However, the University is aware that there are limited opportunities for research students to be given paid teaching duties and is currently reviewing this matter.

51 Overall, the University has an appropriate range of policies, procedures and initiatives relating to staff development, with the intention to undertake further work in this area, for example to engage a wider cross-section of staff.

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

52 The University has a number of collaborative arrangements with a range of providers including local colleges, other Scottish higher education institutions, the Scottish Baptist College, and a small number of international institutions. The Collaborative Provision & Student Exchange Handbook outlines the main systems and processes, which the University indicated are designed to ensure that students on collaborative programmes have a similar high quality learning experience to students studying on campus.

53 For each collaborative agreement both the University and the collaborating partner has a named point of contact who is responsible for ensuring the effective operation of the collaboration. Students on collaborative programmes have access to the University's VLE and, where they are undertaking programmes of study that are also offered at the University, have access to equivalent learning resources and are assessed in the same way as students studying on-campus.

54 All staff delivering University awards in partner institutions are recognised teachers of the University. The Centre for Academic & Professional Development has delivered induction

programmes for staff in partner colleges, with the aim of engaging staff in a peer-to-peer dialogue illustrating key aspects of the University's way of operating. In addition, Student Services delivered an information session for partner colleges in September 2010 to discuss the provision of student support and further develop links with college staff. The University highlighted that the strategy for student feedback now being taken forward by the Student Link (see paragraph 28) will facilitate the disaggregation of feedback from students based at collaborative sites to enable the University to analyse, understand and enhance the collaborative student experience. Students on programmes delivered by collaborative partners expressed satisfaction with their experience and with the University's management of the relationship.

## **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**

55 There are four key elements in the University's quality assurance and enhancement framework: validation, Enhancement & Annual Monitoring, external examiner involvement, and Subject Health Review. These elements are managed and reported through subject development groups and faculty academic management groups.

56 The Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU), within the Academic Office, is responsible for the administration of the University's quality procedures. Academic support to school staff engaging with these processes is provided by the Centre for Academic & Professional Development. From the start of 2009-10, as part of the restructuring which established the new faculties, devolved arrangements were put in place for elements of the University's quality assurance arrangements. Validation and annual monitoring activities are now devolved to the faculties, but with clear frameworks provided by the QEU. Subject Health Review and collaborative quality assurance continue to be facilitated by the QEU. Associated with the devolution of responsibilities to the faculties was the establishment of the role of Faculty Quality Officer. The officers work closely with the faculty managers and the subject development group chairs but report directly to the Assistant Academic Registrar (Faculty Relationships) in the QEU. The University evaluated the change at the end of the first year of its operation and is working through the outcomes. The introduction of faculty quality officers has proved to be an effective way of linking faculties with central services and ensuring cross-institutional consistency in the implementation of University policies and procedures.

57 The University's validation procedures are well established and take full account of the *Code of practice*. Proposals for new provision are developed through the appropriate subject development group(s) and approved at the relevant faculty executive group before being considered by the University Portfolio Oversight Group. Preparation for validation requires programme teams to develop programmes and modules in the context of subject benchmark statements and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, taking account of University policies and procedures as appropriate.

58 The Enhancement & Annual Monitoring arrangements provide the opportunity for programme teams and subject development groups to reflect on the previous session's activity. Programme leaders prepare a Programme Annual Report that is based on the module review forms and covers the six areas evaluated in Subject Health Review (see paragraph 60). The University reflects on the effectiveness of the process each year, for example through an Enhancement & Annual Monitoring seminar. As part of that annual evaluation, a number of modifications have been introduced aimed at strengthening the connection between the subject development group and faculty enhancement plans, as well as achieving a consistent approach across faculties. This is another example of the University's effectiveness in embedding reflective practice in its quality assurance processes.

59 Annual external scrutiny of the academic standards of the University's awards is achieved through external examiners, who are appointed to the subject and/or progression and award board. There is a well-defined system for the appointment of external examiners, with new external examiners invited to attend an induction event prior to carrying out their examining duties. At subject panel level the confirmation of academic standards is achieved by verifying that subject-level attainment is appropriate for each module cohort. The University emphasised that this function is particularly important in a multi-campus environment where a module may be delivered at more than one site.

60 Subject Health Review (SHR) is the mechanism by which the University assures itself that the integrated elements of its enhancement-led approach to quality work across all subject areas and campuses to enhance the student experience. All provision (undergraduate, postgraduate and research student experience) is reviewed on a six-year cycle to explore how a subject area, as defined by the relevant subject benchmark statement, manages the activities, policies and procedures that define the University's approach to learning and teaching. The SHR process is structured around six areas: provision; learning, teaching and enhancement; student achievement and assessment; strategic development of the subject; research; and student guidance and support. The process takes full account of the Academic Infrastructure. SHR panels include at least three external reviewers and a student member. The SHR process is refined each year; for example, from 2009-10 the University has required subject areas to develop an action plan as part of the process of drafting a self-evaluation document. The University has also committed to extending the involvement of support services in SHR, which would be an important development in line with the current Scottish Funding Council guidance.

61 The University has high aspirations for student engagement with the SHR process. There is a dedicated QEU facilitator charged with supporting student engagement in quality, including all stages of the SHR cycle. Students are invited to contribute to, and comment on, the self-evaluation document, as well as meeting the SHR panel, and the outcomes of SHR are communicated to students through the VLE. Despite the coordinated efforts of the QEU, the Students' Association and the Centre for Academic & Professional Development, the University has recognised that the effectiveness of student engagement in SHR varies across subject areas, and a report to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Board in September 2010 made a number of recommendations aimed at strengthening this area.

62 Overall, SHR is a robust process and an effective element in the University's quality assurance and enhancement framework.

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

63 The University has a diverse student population with a high level of part-time attendance and a significant number of mature students (see paragraphs 10 and 12). The University emphasised that a central tenet of its approach to delivering its academic programmes is that there should be equity of experience, as far as this is attainable, across all campuses, regardless of the student cohort, mode of delivery or pattern of attendance. Subject Health Review includes consideration of all levels and modes of study. The University recognises that issues around variability in the student experience and performance can be difficult to track through module data, but it has introduced module evaluation questionnaires and module review forms which are intended to enable this by providing opportunities to analyse student comments on particular aspects of module delivery. From 2010-11, the questionnaires specify the campus of delivery, which is likely to be a useful addition in managing the student experience.



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

64 A good indication of the University's commitment to self-evaluation is that it takes the opportunity every four to five years of undertaking a Holistic Review of its quality procedures. The last Holistic Review took place between June and September 2009. This review concluded that the key elements of the University's quality assurance processes were fit for purpose. An action plan was developed to guide improvements in each of the elements, particularly in relation to strengthening annual monitoring and providing additional support for preparing self-evaluation documents for Subject Health Review.

65 The formation of the University through the merger of two different institutions involved a significant amount of evaluation and development, as evidenced in the post-merger self-evaluation report. In particular, the University highlighted three areas in which self-evaluation and the use of external reference points had been particularly notable: the revalidation of all programmes in a 20-credit framework, the subsequent portfolio review exercise, and academic restructuring. The development of a common academic credit system presented both significant challenges and opportunities. The extensive development activity required meant that all areas of the new University were engaged in a similar programme design and validation process in a short timeframe. It is clear that this work brought staff from the two former institutions together, supported by the QEU and the Centre for Academic & Professional Development, to form a sense of a shared culture. Not surprisingly, given the amount of change which has occurred in the University in a short period of time, there are issues around the effectiveness of communication and engaging all staff in the process. Senior staff are aware of this, highlighting that the University has effected structural change and must now focus on cultural change. There would be benefit in the University pursuing this.

66 Overall, a strength of the University's approach is the extent to which it has embedded an evidence-based approach to reflective practice in the operation of its quality assurance and enhancement processes.

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

67 There have been significant improvements in the University's management of information about the student population (see paragraph 16). Staff highlighted the enhanced availability of key information to support annual monitoring and Subject Health Reviews. They also appreciated the blog which has been developed to support liaison between academic staff and the student information system development team. The University is continuing to make improvements in this area.

68 The University has taken the decision to join the National Student Survey (NSS) from 2010-11. However, because of the diversity of the student population, the University intends to continue using a wider range of opportunities for gathering student feedback, which is positive. In preparation for joining the NSS, the University worked with an external organisation to produce a customised student survey. The outcomes were considered by the University Student Experience Group and presented to schools, who were asked to identify areas for improvement.

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

69 The Senate has overall responsibility for the setting and maintenance of academic standards. It is supported in this by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Board (LTAB), whose remit includes putting in place and reviewing procedures to safeguard the academic standards of awards. On the advice of its Assessment Sub-group, LTAB makes recommendations for changes to assessment practices, procedures and regulations to the Regulations Committee, which also reports to the Senate. Through its wide-ranging membership, the Assessment Sub-group provides

a forum for the discussion and consideration of assessment issues and the development of a cross-university approach.

70 The faculty executives report to the Senate on the various processes by which academic standards are being set and monitored. These are encapsulated in the reports of validations, assessment panels, external examiners, annual monitoring and Subject Health Reviews, all of which are monitored by subject development groups and distilled into overall faculty-wide reports for the faculty executives by the faculty academic management groups. This linear reporting structure is a key feature of the University's decision to devolve elements of its quality assurance arrangements to the faculties. Academic staff were positive about the devolved processes, which they regard as more inclusive and relevant to the programme level.

71 The University's two-tier examination panel system is designed to check the maintenance of academic standards at module and programme level. External examiners' reports are scrutinised at faculty level and within the QEU, with the latter producing an overview report for LTAB on the themes which external examiners have raised. Significant issues are followed up by the QEU and all programmes are required to respond to external examiners, with the responses being tracked through the Enhancement & Annual Monitoring process. The overview report to LTAB is also used in the induction of new external examiners to illustrate the types of issues that have been raised previously.

72 The University's Assessment Policy sets out a number of principles to which its assessment practices are expected to adhere, including the provision of constructive and timely feedback to students on their assessed work. The University has identified that there is variability in practice in relation to assessment feedback and acknowledges that assessment practices could be developed further, with more effective sharing of good and innovative practice. A number of approaches have been adopted, aimed at promoting consistency in assessment practice; for example, the Centre for Academic & Professional Development was charged with developing an Assessment Handbook. A draft of the Handbook, which had been produced by the Centre and the QEU, was being considered at the time of the current ELIR. The Handbook is an accessible, comprehensive, and well-referenced document drawing together existing guidance (which had been published by the University in a variety of places) and reflecting best practice within the sector. Academic staff who had seen the draft indicated that it was well pitched and useful.

73 The University asserted its confidence in its management of assessment, and evidence from the current ELIR supports that view. There are well-established and well-documented processes in place which are rigorously implemented and regularly reviewed and updated with due regard to external reference points. The University recognises that there are inconsistencies in assessment feedback in some subject areas and is taking steps to address this.

### **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**

74 Information about quality and academic standards is published on the University's website in accordance with its Publication Scheme, which is overseen by the Corporate Marketing Department and maintained and updated by a freedom of information officer. The website of the Academic Office, which includes Academic Administration, the Court Office and the QEU, has links to the University's Regulations and all of its key quality assurance documents. The University has well-established and thorough procedures, coordinated by Corporate Marketing and involving faculty-based staff, for ensuring that publicity materials such as the Prospectus and web-based entries are accurate.

75 The University noted that, because the merger had required two different sets of management information to be brought together into a single system, the Scottish Funding Council had agreed that the institution would not publish performance indicator data via HESA



on areas such as widening participation and non-continuation for two subsequent academic years. Normal HESA reporting arrangements resumed in 2009-10.

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

76 The University has a well-established, enhancement-led approach to its monitoring and review processes, and has reviewed and refined these processes on a regular basis. As a result of the most recent review to align Annual Monitoring & Enhancement with the new faculty structure, evaluation and reflection at module and programme levels focuses on the quality of the student experience and how it can be enhanced. The review included consultation with programme leaders about moving from the previous subject-based annual reports to a programme-based reporting system. The subsequent introduction of this system in 2010-11 met with general support.

77 In the new faculty-based structure, the results of programme-based monitoring and enhancement are collated and considered at subject level by subject development groups. Each subject development group is required to hold an annual monitoring event to review all the quality assurance-related documentation and to identify required actions, staff development needs and examples of good practice, which are then brought to the attention of the faculty academic management groups. The faculty quality officers play a key role in facilitating this process. To augment the links from subject development groups to faculties and to promote communication between subject development groups, each faculty has established a forum for subject development group chairs to discuss enhancement and to advise their respective faculty academic management group.

78 The faculty enhancement action plans, which are derived from discussions at subject development groups and faculty academic management groups, are expressed as a set of targets and submitted to LTAB. The three faculty action plans are also considered at the Enhancement & Annual Monitoring Seminar organised by the Student Experience Group. The report of the 2011 seminar demonstrated an effective and comprehensive university-level overview of the Enhancement & Annual Monitoring process focusing on key issues relating to the quality of the student experience and providing material to extend and update the Improving the Student Experience Action Plan (ISEAP). The report also noted the increasing number of action plans that were being generated across the University, including those from subject development groups, faculties, Subject Health Reviews, the Student Experience Group, the ELIR preparation team and the Strategy for the Enhancement of the Quality of Learning, Teaching & Assessment (SEQLTA). This was resulting in confusion among staff and the report recommended the prioritising of strategic targets and the streamlining of action plans across the University. There would be considerable benefit in the University rationalising the action plans to gain full benefit from the otherwise well-integrated procedures for linking assurance and enhancement.

79 The University highlighted that it uses a range of external reference points in its quality assurance procedures which inform what it described as a 'robust and outward-looking approach to quality enhancement'. In common with all higher education institutions, the University has a number of staff who act as external examiners at other institutions. It is positive that the QEU consults with these staff periodically to ensure that the University is able to capture and learn from best practice in the sector.

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

80 The Collaborative Forum, which reports to LTAB, maintains oversight of all aspects of the University's collaborative agreements. Most of the University's collaborative partnerships are with colleges in the West of Scotland. The University has overseas collaborations in Germany and Greece, although the partnership in Greece was being concluded at the time of the current ELIR, with appropriate arrangements in place for the support of the remaining students.

81 The annual monitoring of collaborative provision is integrated as far as possible with the arrangements for internal provision. For validated programmes, the partner institution completes a programme annual report for discussion in the relevant subject development group. Where University programmes are delivered at another institution, the partner submits a collaborative annual report to the relevant University programme leader, who incorporates any issues raised into the programme annual report. The University requires that module coordinators are always members of University staff.

82 Faculties identify any significant issues arising from collaborative annual reports and from the collaborative sections of programme annual reports to produce faculty collaborative annual reports, which also incorporate information gained from annual visits to the partners. The faculty reports are considered by the Collaborative Forum.

83 Periodic review of collaborative programmes operates on a three to four-year cycle, which is overseen by the Collaborative Forum, with administrative support from the QEU. The reviews focus on the implementation of the collaborative agreement and result in the production of a report and action plan, which are submitted to the Forum. Collaborative provision is also included in the relevant Subject Health Review.

84 The formal monitoring and review arrangements are supplemented by strong continuing links between staff of the University and its collaborative partners. The Collaborative Forum provides a mechanism for sharing information and disseminating good practice, as well as exercising oversight of the partnership agreements. The Forum works well with the relatively small number of partnerships the University currently has in place. If the University were to expand this area of activity in the future, it would need to consider whether its current arrangements were sufficient to provide effective oversight of a more complex pattern of collaborative provision.

## **Strategic approach to quality enhancement**

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

85 The Strategic Plan 2008-15 articulates a mission to deliver higher education opportunities to the regions of the West of Scotland, and the University identified the principal theme of the planning period as excellence in the student experience. The key strategies for promoting quality enhancement across the University are the Quality Enhancement Strategy 2009-11 and the Strategy for the Enhancement of the Quality of Learning, Teaching & Assessment (SEQLTA) 2007-11.

86 The Quality Enhancement Strategy was developed following the University of Paisley ELIR in 2006 and revised in 2009 to take account of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education guidelines on quality and the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee Indicators of Enhancement. The University indicated that the Strategy is broadly facilitated by two key drivers: planned, strategic development through which the University aims to anticipate and respond to the needs of its students; and a structured process of continuous review and reflection on practice and provision.

87 The current SEQLTA represents a development of a strategy and a strategic approach that was in place at the time of the 2006 ELIR. Like the original strategy, the SEQLTA identifies a number of goals, projects and policies aimed at promoting an effective student learning experience. The SEQLTA provides a framework for enhancing the student learning experience and is also informed by the outcomes of a range of evaluative processes including Holistic Review, Subject Health Review and the outcomes of the Enhancement & Annual Monitoring process (see paragraphs 64, 60 and 58). It has formed a key element in what was described at the time of the 2006 ELIR as the University's 'dynamic approach to enhancement activity'. Formed on the basis of evaluation, both the SEQLTA and the Quality Enhancement Strategy are themselves evidence of a reflective and analytical approach to enhancement.

88 Notwithstanding the success of the strategic approach, the University is committed to reviewing and revising the SEQLTA during 2010-11, describing the production of a new Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS) as critical to the University's development as a single merged entity. The process of developing the LTAS has commenced with a review of progress in achieving the targets set out in the SEQLTA, accompanied by wide staff and student consultation. It is intended that the LTAS will be informed by an extensive range of other evaluations, including the University's preparations for the current ELIR. An electronic discussion board has been established to facilitate staff and student engagement with the draft LTAS document. Staff and students were positive about this initiative and the opportunity to contribute.

89 The University emphasised that it recognises a key role for learners in formulating and implementing its strategic approach to quality enhancement. Systematic mechanisms are in place for student views to inform institutional strategy and policy, such as the recently introduced Student Experience Group, which is co-chaired by the Students' Association President, and the annual student conference, in addition to the extent to which student views are considered in the regular quality assurance and enhancement processes. The University has also expressed its intention to assimilate the principles and priorities of the emerging student-led Learning Manifesto (see paragraph 25) into the new LTAS and, therefore, institutional practice. The Learning Manifesto sets out core values and a set of principles to underpin future approaches to learning and teaching support at the University. Students at all levels of study and from all campuses expressed the clear view that their voice is heard, and student representatives considered that they have an active role in helping to shape and implement University strategy.

90 The process of producing the Learning Manifesto has clearly been important in engaging and enthusing students and staff. The development of the new LTAS has similarly been a strongly reflective and consultative process. The University is encouraged to capitalise on the energetic engagement of staff and students in the development of the Learning Manifesto and the early stages of developing the new LTAS, to ensure that the LTAS can be finalised and delivered by the target date.

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

91 The University has a devolved model of ownership and responsibility guided by the Quality Enhancement Strategy and SEQLTA, which are supported by a set of policies and guidelines for implementation at the faculty and subject levels. These include the Assessment Policy; Student Progression and Retention Strategy; Personal Development Planning Policy; Student Representation Strategy; and guidelines on Work-based and Placement Learning. There is evidence that these policies and guidelines are constantly under review and revision, for example the current work being carried out on assessment (see paragraph 72).

92 Following the academic restructuring, responsibility for the implementation of these strategies and policies lies within the faculties, supported in particular by the QEU and the Centre for Academic & Professional Development. Staff confirmed that these units fulfil a significant and valued role. Staff and students highlighted the crucial role of the subject development groups, whose remit includes both teaching and research, in facilitating cross-institutional discussions. These groups have a key role in preparing for Subject Health Reviews and in the Enhancement & Annual Monitoring process, particularly in formulating and monitoring the action plans arising from these activities. The faculty academic management groups receive reports from the subject development groups and take an overview of policy implementation within their respective faculties. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Board (LTAB) has an overarching role in relation to the formulation and implementation of institutional policy. The Student Experience Group also plays an important role in forming an overview of matters impacting on the student learning experience across the University.

93 Despite the number of committees and groups aimed at promoting cross-institutional communication, the University remains conscious of the continual challenge of ensuring that staff are aware of institutional policies. Following evaluation of the first year of operating the new academic structures, the faculties have introduced forums to promote discussions on learning and teaching with a view to sharing good practice and ensuring consistent approaches to implementing policy and practice across disciplines and campuses. In discussions during ELIR, staff and students indicated considerable positive engagement with the mission of the University, highlighting a positive experience of working with colleagues across the institution.

94 Internationalisation is identified as an important thematic strategy in the Strategic Plan. The University recognises that activity in this area to date has primarily been focused on international student recruitment. The University is encouraged to develop a more holistic approach to internationalisation, in line with the broad vision set out in the Strategic Plan. In particular, there would be considerable benefit in the University pursuing the strategic intention to internationalise the curriculum.

95 The University has established a culture of evaluating its policies and practice and revising its approaches on the basis of its findings. This culture is supported by the number of committees and groups in place to promote cross-institutional communication for students and staff. The positive developments in the student information systems (see paragraph 16) will help to underpin the extent to which the University's strategic approach to quality enhancement is supported by data.

### **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**

96 A wide range of national and international external reference points are used to inform the University's quality assurance and enhancement policies and practices. The University has been an enthusiastic and active partner with the Higher Education Academy since its inception, engaging across a broad range of the subject centres as well as a number of other initiatives. A variety of subject areas engage with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). Depending on the nature of the PSRB, this engagement may be at the point of programme development and validation or in review and monitoring activity, and is particularly strong where programmes carry PSRB accreditation. In addition, staff in the QEU, the Centre for Academic & Professional Development, and the Student Link are actively engaged with a wide variety of external enhancement activities that are regularly disseminated throughout the University.

97 The University stated that it is creating a unique regional institution that will work closely with communities and key stakeholders. It is evident that staff on each of the campuses have established links with their local communities, employers, local authorities and other education providers. This is regarded as a mutually beneficial arrangement, for example links with employers providing work opportunities for students, and the development of agreements with all of the local authorities aimed at sharing Library resources. It is clear that this is a strength of the University's approach.

98 The national programme of Enhancement Themes has had a strong influence on University strategy and policy in the past, as noted in the 2006 ELIR report. In common with the approach adopted across the sector, there is a University steering group to link with the current Graduates for the 21st Century Theme and this has had a positive impact, for example leading to the production of the Learning Manifesto. In addition, the Centre for Academic & Professional Development has begun to produce a review of the University's interactions with the national Enhancement Themes to date, with an analysis of how the institution has benefited from them. This has the potential to be a useful resource, incorporating links to examples of good practice. There is a sense, however, that the University has been less vigorous in this area recently than in some of its other activities; for example, activities relating to the Themes have tended to involve a

small number of staff. There would be benefit in the University engaging more proactively with the national Enhancement Themes to facilitate greater opportunities for the institution to learn from practice in other higher education institutions, and to provide important opportunities for the University to share its good practice with the sector.

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

99 The University indicated that the Quality Enhancement Strategy provides the framework for its approach to using good practice to improve the student experience. All staff are encouraged to reflect upon their practice to ensure it meets the needs of students, and to look externally to learn from successful practice elsewhere. This reflective approach is clearly evident in the University's quality assurance and enhancement processes.

100 The University has a range of structures and mechanisms that it uses to identify and disseminate good practice. This includes but is not limited to: the successful operation of the subject development groups; Subject Health Reviews; Enhancement & Annual Monitoring; initiatives coordinated by the Centre for Academic & Professional Development, such as staff forums and seminars; the annual Learning and Teaching event; and the work of the QEU in producing leaflets and guidance for academic staff and students. In addition, the Student Experience Group provides a mechanism for identifying and addressing issues related to the student experience across the institution. Its membership brings together staff from central services as well as academic staff and students, facilitating a holistic approach.

101 As part of the new Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS), the University intends to identify key themes which will provide a focus for enhancement activity across the institution. This may also assist in the identification and dissemination of good practice relating to those themes.

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

102 The University emphasised that it views its collaborative provision as an integral part of the institutional portfolio, and therefore the institutional approach to enhancement applies equally across all provision. The Collaborative Forum has a central role in promoting and sharing good practice amongst collaborative partners, which it discharges by identifying good practice in events that are held, in reviews and in the annual reports. The Centre for Academic & Professional Development and Student Services provide update sessions to college staff involved in teaching and supporting students on the University's collaborative programmes. University staff who are responsible for collaborative partnerships gave good examples of the initiatives that are taken to promote articulation between further education colleges and the University, including students spending one day each week on a University campus and University staff visiting the college partners.

## **Conclusion**

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

103 The Students' Association has an excellent and trusted relationship with University staff, including senior managers. The Association's engagement with a range of policies and processes is supported and facilitated by the Quality Enhancement Unit, and it is clear that the Association has had a positive impact on the student experience. The student-led Learning Manifesto is a reflective document and the University's support for its production represents excellent practice in student-staff partnership working.



104 In line with its mission, the University is making a positive contribution to widening participation in all levels of study. The role of the Lifelong Learning Academy in supporting part-time students is a particular strength of the institution's approach. The University has recognised that some groups of students have expressed dissatisfaction with their pre-admission experience, and intends to develop an applicant experience strategy. While this is welcomed, the University is encouraged to accelerate work in this area to ensure that all applicants receive appropriate pre-admission information and advice from 2011-12 entry.

105 There have been significant improvements in the availability and use of student management information, with further developments planned. The University is aware of the importance of monitoring its progression and retention rates, and is encouraged to continue to explore ways of improving student achievement in this respect.

106 The University has made positive progress over a relatively short period of time in achieving the merger of the two former institutions, with mechanisms in place to promote good communication between campuses and a broadly shared sense of identity among students and staff. It is recognised that the University has a long-term ambition to redevelop the Hamilton campus. Until that can take place, the University is encouraged to monitor the student experience on the campus closely, and respond appropriately to ensure that the student learning experience at Hamilton is broadly equivalent to that in the rest of the institution.

107 The use of a virtual learning environment has been embedded across the University, supported by an extensive programme of staff development. The University is asked to develop other aspects of its ICT provision, where a range of issues and inconsistencies in student experience appear to persist.

108 Linked to curriculum restructuring, the University took the decision to introduce personal development planning (PDP) across all programmes. As the University's own evaluations have shown, staff and students' attitudes to PDP continue to vary. The University is encouraged to promote its effective implementation, building on the examples of good practice in PDP use. The University has also made a commitment to offering all students the opportunity to learn through work placement experience. However, some students believe they have been discouraged from undertaking a work placement, and there would be value in the University clarifying student entitlement in this area.

109 The University is pursuing a strategy of rapid expansion in the number of postgraduate research students. The Innovation & Research Office coordinates an extensive and flexible research student training programme, and students are positive about the training and the general support provided to them. Within schools there is evidence of a shortfall in the availability of learning resources to support the increased number of students. The University must, as a matter of priority, ensure that its decision to expand the student numbers is matched by the availability of adequate learning resources to support current and future students. The University is strongly encouraged to pay close attention to the relevant section of the *Code of practice* published by QAA to ensure that it is adhering to all of the precepts.

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

110 The University has rigorous and effective arrangements for the approval, monitoring and periodic review of its programmes. It has an integrated set of enhancement-led quality assurance processes, which have been successfully modified to reflect the University's new academic structure. The devolution of the majority of quality assurance and enhancement procedures to faculties has been successful. In particular, the embedding of quality officers from the Quality Enhancement Unit in each of the faculties has proved to be effective practice. The establishment of subject development groups has promoted the engagement of programme-level staff in quality assurance and enhancement processes. The University is encouraged to continue to refine

its assurance and enhancement processes, particularly above the subject level, where the need to rationalise the number of action plans is recognised.

111 The University has well-established and rigorous processes for setting and maintaining academic standards, incorporating the appropriate use of external reference points. One example of the University drawing on external good practice is the proactive approach taken to learning from the experience of its staff who are external examiners in other institutions. In general, the assessment process is well managed. A range of approaches has been adopted aimed at achieving greater consistency in the provision of feedback to students on their assessed work. This includes the development of an Assessment Handbook, which is comprehensive, scholarly and accessible.

112 The University has embedded an evidence-based approach to reflective practice in the operation of its monitoring and review systems, which have been regularly reviewed either as individual components or within the periodic Holistic Review process. The formation of the University through merger involved a significant amount of evaluation and development work. The extensive development activity associated with the establishment of the common academic framework has helped to form a sense of a shared culture in the merged University.

113 The Collaborative Forum undertakes an effective monitoring and coordinating role of the University's current collaborative provision. If the University were to expand its collaborative activity, particularly with international partners, it would need to consider whether its current arrangements were sufficient to oversee a more complex pattern of collaborative provision.

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

114 The University's Strategy for the Enhancement of the Quality of Learning, Teaching and Assessment, and the evaluative work underpinning its implementation, has had a positive impact on the institution. Systematic mechanisms are in place for student views to inform institutional strategy and policy, such as the recently introduced Student Experience Group, which is co-chaired by the Students' Association President, and the annual student conference. The development of the new Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS), along with the new Learning Manifesto, has been a strongly reflective and consultative process. The University is encouraged to capitalise on the energetic engagement of staff and students in the development of these documents to ensure that the LTAS can be finalised and delivered by the target date.

115 The University has established a culture of evaluating its policies and practice, and revising its approaches on the basis of its findings. This culture is supported by the wide range of structures and mechanisms for identifying and disseminating good practice, and for promoting cross-institutional communication for students and staff. The positive developments in the student information systems will facilitate the University's evidence-based approach to enhancement.

116 In line with its mission, the University has been successful in establishing and maintaining productive relationships with professional, business and local communities. The University draws on these links and a wide range of national and international reference points to inform its enhancement policies and practices. There is engagement with the national Enhancement Themes, and there would be benefit in the University engaging more proactively to facilitate greater opportunities for the institution to learn from practice in other higher education institutions, and to provide important opportunities for the University to share its good practice with the sector.

117 Internationalisation is identified as an important theme in the Strategic Plan. The University recognises that activity in this area to date has primarily been focused on international student recruitment and is encouraged to develop a more holistic approach. In



particular, there would be considerable benefit in the University pursuing its strategic intention to internationalise the curriculum.

### **Overarching confidence judgement**

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

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