

# Thematic Report on Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) Reports 2013-15: Employability and Graduate Attributes

## Introduction

As part of the ELIR 3 method, QAA Scotland produces regular Thematic reports to support learning from the outcomes of individual ELIR reports. The purpose of the Thematic reports is to inform future development work in the sector and, in particular, to inform future QAA activity including work carried out in collaboration with the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC).

## Scope and structure of this report

This report identifies material relating to employability and graduate attributes within the first eight reports published in the ELIR 3 cycle. The institutions included in this report are: the University of Aberdeen; the University of Dundee; Glasgow School of Art; the University of Glasgow; Queen Margaret University; the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland; Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and the University of Strathclyde.

This report includes the areas of positive practice and the areas for development identified in the ELIR Outcome Reports. It goes on to summarise the more detailed findings included within the ELIR Technical Reports. Please note this report draws on the ELIR reports from these eight institutions only. It is possible that good practice or areas of development are present in other institutions. It is also possible that additional practice takes place in these eight institutions, but only those elements of practice included within the ELIR reports is included here. The paper also briefly outlines the next steps in the ELIR process, following the publication of the reports.

The annex includes references to employability and graduate attributes within the ELIR Technical Reports. The paragraph numbers used in the annex are taken directly from the reports.

## Employability and graduate attributes: activity to promote good practice

This section identifies positive practice at the eight institutions as identified in the ELIR Technical Reports.

**Policy and strategy:** The ELIR reports recognise that many higher education institution (HEIs) have developed policies and strategies on employability and graduate attributes. The University of Aberdeen has Employability Action Plans at school and discipline level, with course approval processes now requiring the explicit identification of graduate attributes. The University also has an Employability Framework in place which aligns with their Learning and Teaching Operational Plan. The University of Dundee has employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship as one of the two cross-cutting themes in its University Strategy to 2017. Glasgow School of Art has recently appointed a Student Employability and

Enterprise Manager, who is likely to support the development of a strategic approach to employability. At the University of Glasgow, their Learning and Teaching Plan includes graduate attributes as a high-level project and there is a reference to graduate attributes in each college learning and teaching plan. SRUC has developed a Learner Engagement Strategy which aims to improve students' employability and to support the development of graduate attributes.

**Embedding graduate attributes:** Seven of the eight institutions are identified as having taken a proactive approach to embedding a clear set of graduate attributes in their curricula or within wider practice. The University of Aberdeen has developed 19 Aberdeen Graduate Attributes (AGAs), which staff receive training on, and all new programmes at the University have to demonstrate how they will aid the development of AGAs. The University of Dundee has developed workshops for support staff that provide information on graduate attributes. The University of Glasgow has a Graduate Attributes Champion in each college to ensure the attributes are embedded within the curriculum. Queen Margaret University encourages students to engage with placements and community activities to promote specific graduate attributes. Strathclyde University calls its graduate attributes the 4Es, which stands for engaged; enterprising; enquiring; and ethically, culturally and globally aware. SRUC and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland have also made steps to embed graduate attributes into their curriculum.

**Employer engagement:** Several institutions have innovative methods of engaging with employers that has been recognised in the ELIR reports. Queen Margaret University uses employers on programme review and validation panels. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland enables students to participate in modules that involve collaboration with peers and professionals in other disciplines. In addition, where students in their third year of study have been offered employment in their chosen profession, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland has taken active steps to enable the students to complete their academic award. At SRUC, programme teams have close links with industry throughout the development of the curriculum and in its delivery. At the University of Aberdeen, employers are able to make a significant contribution to the development of the curriculum through their membership of programme approval boards.

**Careers services:** The University of Dundee is planning to establish a new employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship hub which will be a physical centre comprising the Careers Service, and aspects of Research and Innovation Services. The hub would also include Dundee' Enterprise Gym, an enterprise programme running at the University which brings students and successful businesspeople together throughout the academic year. The SRUC report highlighted that it holds a successful annual careers convention for students.

**Work-based learning opportunities:** The ways in which the institutions facilitate placements and other work-based learning opportunities are recognised. The University of Dundee has a Placement Base, which is a 'one-stop-shop' for work experience. At the University of Glasgow, the development of a work placement policy was informed by successful initiatives in response to the Graduates for the 21st Century (G21C) Enhancement Theme, including a work placement initiative in the creative industries introduced by staff in one school. At Queen Margaret University, academic staff encourage students to engage with placements and community activities. Placements are also built into many of Queen Margaret University's programmes, with their careers service providing support for students applying. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland treats its students as professional practitioners upon their arrival, and many of their programmes include work placements or similar opportunities.

**Learning and teaching approaches:** The University of Strathclyde promote Vertically Integrated Projects, which provide students at all levels of study with an opportunity to work with staff in multidisciplinary teams on research and development projects. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland also offers opportunities for vertical learning as students from different years often perform alongside professional practitioners, for example as members of an orchestra.

**Co-curricular activities:** The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland has recognised the value of providing guidance to help students in their selection of co-curricular activities to ensure they are able to gain as much benefit as possible from the rich variety of opportunities that are available. Students graduating from the University of Aberdeen from 2014 onwards will receive an Enhanced Graduate Transcript which will record their co-curricular achievements.

## Employability and graduate attributes: areas for development

This section sets out areas for development identified within the ELIR Technical Reports for the eight institutions.

**Careers services:** SRUC currently has no central careers guidance services and its ELIR report advised the exploration of options for providing generic careers support to students and keeping this under review to ensure the effectiveness of arrangements for students on all campuses.

**Policy:** Students at Glasgow School of Art were not able to articulate the transferable skills they were developing as a result of the practice-based curriculum. At the time of the ELIR, Glasgow School of Art was currently working with Buckinghamshire New University on a Higher Education Academy (HEA) funded project. It was intended that final outputs from the project would be delivered during 2014, and it was envisaged that the project outcomes would lead to the articulation of a Glasgow School of Art employability strategy.

**Graduate attributes:** While almost all institutions had made efforts to embed graduate attributes, a number of ELIR reports identified that students were not always aware of their institutions' graduate attributes. Glasgow School of Art, SRUC and the University of Strathclyde have identified a need to raise awareness of graduate attributes and to further embed them within the curriculum.

**Postgraduate:** Postgraduate students at Glasgow School of Art commented that they received very little employability training. The School was asked to ensure it has sufficient capacity for the support and enhancement of the research student experience and to provide sufficient opportunities for research students to gain teaching experience.

## Areas highlighted in the ELIR Outcome Reports

In ELIR 3, Outcome Reports identify areas of positive practice and areas for development.

### Positive practice

Positive practice relating to employability and graduate attributes was identified in seven of the eight Outcome Reports. Specific points were:

Glasgow School of Art

**Employability:** Since the 2010 ELIR, Glasgow School of Art has made significant progress in bringing together a number of projects to embed employability across the institution. The recently appointed Student Employability and Enterprise Manager is likely to support the development of a strategic approach to employability.

Queen Margaret University

**Employability:** There is a strong commitment to promoting student employability. Work-related learning is embedded within the curriculum, and there is positive employer engagement. Support and opportunities for developing employment-related skills are provided by the Careers and the Student Employability services.

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

**Graduate attributes and employability:** Students are encouraged in the development of graduate attributes through the range of opportunities for them to engage in professional settings within and outside the formal programmes, and by being treated as professionals from their arrival at the institution. The Conservatoire is highly supportive of students who gain relevant employment during their study, adopting a variety of flexible approaches to ensure students can complete their intended awards.

SRUC

**Holistic approach to developing employability skills:** Students are supported to develop vocationally relevant skills and awareness of employability, drawing on staff consultancy, professional practice and research. Student employability is also promoted through the applied nature of the curricula and the provision of work experience opportunities.

University of Aberdeen

**Promoting employability and graduate attributes:** The arrangements for promoting employability and delivering the Aberdeen Graduate Attributes in the undergraduate curriculum are systematic and have brought about a range of enhancements to the student experience. Development of the Aberdeen Graduate Attributes was central to the new curriculum and it is evident that considerable thought has been given to their careful embedding. Support for this is provided through a range of measures, such as staff support provided by the Centre for Academic Development. A clear focus on employability is achieved through the systematic contribution of the programme advisory boards, through which employers can influence and engage with the graduate attributes and programme design and delivery.

University of Dundee

**Employability:** The University provides a comprehensive range of opportunities for students to develop their employability skills. During the review, students commented positively about the range and relevance of the initiatives provided, including the Enterprise Gym and the Placement Base.

University of Glasgow

**Graduate attributes:** The University's arrangements for delivering graduate attributes are systematic and the role of Graduate Attribute Champion in each college is an effective mechanism for ensuring that graduate attributes are embedded into the curriculum. There is effective monitoring of the embedding of graduate attributes through the annual monitoring and periodic subject review processes.

### **Areas for development**

Development areas relating to employability and graduate attributes were identified in two of the eight reports. Specific points were:

Glasgow School of Art

**Employability:** Continue to develop, implement and embed a strategic approach to employability across the institution, ensuring that students can articulate a range of employability skills when they graduate.

University of Strathclyde

**Embedding graduate attributes in curriculum design:** Make more explicit reference to the University's redefined graduate attributes (the 4Es - engaged; enterprising; enquiring; and ethically, culturally and globally aware) in the development of the new online Course and Class Approval Process. This would ensure that the graduate attributes are embedded in the curriculum and would promote student awareness of their importance in learning and teaching.

### **What happens next?**

QAA Scotland follows up the ELIR outcomes with institutions individually through annual discussion visits and each institution is required to produce a Follow-up Report indicating how they have addressed their own ELIR outcomes. QAA Scotland also promotes collaborative working between institutions to share good practice and to find collective solutions to common areas for development. Each institution is invited to participate in a Follow-up event to engage with the ways other institutions who were reviewed at around the same time have addressed their review outcomes.

In relation to employability and graduate attributes, the current QAA Enhancement Theme, Student Transitions, will allow institutions to carry out research and development work focused on enhancing the experience of students transitioning from higher education into employment. Further information on the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme can be found at the Enhancement Themes website - [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk)

## References to employability and graduate attributes in the ELIR Technical Reports

The paragraph numbers below refer to those in the original ELIR Technical Reports for each institution.

### University of Aberdeen

8 The progressive and successful implementation of CREF [Curriculum Reform] has had a transformational effect on the design and delivery of undergraduate courses and programmes, and has driven a range of supplementary initiatives including the revised personal tutor scheme (see paragraphs 30-32) and the employability resources available through the ACHIEVE framework on the virtual learning environment, MyAberdeen (see paragraphs 42 & 45). The availability of distinctive enhanced study options, such as the 6th Century Courses (6CCs) and language courses, has expanded in response to student demand. Course approval forms and processes now require the explicit identification of graduate attributes. This emphasis on enhanced employability has resulted in the development of programme advisory boards and Employability Action Plans at school and discipline level. Good practice identified in the Employability Action Plans is disseminated through reports from school and college level to the Careers Service and to the University Committee on Teaching & Learning (UCTL).

36 The University's virtual learning environment (VLE), MyAberdeen, is used to enhance the student experience in a range of imaginative ways. Since 2011, the University has recruited student interns to support the enhancement and development of the VLE, ensuring that developments take student ideas and perspectives into account. The range of information and the form of its presentation is responsive to student opinion. It incorporates a variety of useful tools, such as the Peer Assessment Module and a Frequently Asked Questions section relating to points arising from the student survey. Student engagement with graduate attributes is promoted through the VLE with the inclusion of a class blog, reflective journal and e-portfolio which enable students to document and collate evidence of their self-evaluations, work experiences, and reflections on their learning from work. The School of Medical Sciences developed student retention support using the VLE, an approach which the ELIR team heard is now being rolled out across all schools. In discussion with the team, undergraduate students, in particular, were very positive about the range of material available through MyAberdeen and staff emphasised its benefits in support employability.

41 The University has placed considerable emphasis on employability through the Curriculum Reform activity and has a wide ranging and systematic approach to its promotion. The University has enhanced its student experience through the introduction of the Aberdeen Graduate Attributes (AGAs) which are a core element of the new undergraduate curriculum. The 19 AGAs are grouped into four main categories: academic excellence; critical thinking and effective communication; learning and personal development; and active citizenship. The review and revalidation of programmes during CREF involved explicit consideration of AGAs and all new programmes now have to demonstrate how they will aid the development of AGAs through the approval forms (SENAS) and related process. During ELIR, staff reported that review of the AGAs had become more thorough and detailed over time, a view which was confirmed by the supporting materials.

42 The explicit achievement of AGAs is not assessed but the University aims to assist students to articulate the skills and attributes they develop in addition to their academic

awards, for example through the tools available on the VLE (see paragraph 36) and through discussion with their personal tutors. To support staff understanding, and therefore student development, the Centre for Academic Development embeds AGAs in all of its staff training. Students indicated that they found information on AGAs and the related area of the VLE, known as ACHIEVE, easily accessible. Students were particularly positive about the ACHIEVE resource. Some students indicated that they would appreciate more focus on AGAs in class time to support their reflection. The University provided examples of courses which explicitly support student reflection on the AGAs, such as the Learning to Work course provided by the School of Education and the Biotechnology course Working Out: Placement and Career Skills. The University also indicated that AGAs for postgraduate taught and research students have been developed and will be launched in 2014-15.

43 The University has an Employability Framework in place which aligns with the Learning & Teaching Operational Plan and AGAs. The Framework comprises five employability strands: AGAs, Curriculum Development, Employer Engagement, Co-curricular Activities, and Career Planning.

44 Employer engagement is a priority for the University and the development of the AGAs was underpinned by an analysis of employer views. A review of employer engagement across the institution led to the establishment, in 2011, of the Careers Service Employer Board, chaired by the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) and a supporting network of programme advisory boards (PABs). The Board acts as a steering group for the Careers Service and a discussion forum for employer groups and University staff, as well as reviewing PAB work annually. PABs enable students, academic staff, alumni and employers to exchange ideas and experiences on employability-related topics. PABs, along with schools, are responsible for producing Employability Action Plans that highlight how schools are approaching employability and create action lists of how they can improve further.

45 Students are able to discuss matters relating to their employability with their personal tutors and have access to Student Employability Action Plans and other resources through ACHIEVE, available on the VLE. All students graduating from summer 2014 will receive an Enhanced Graduate Transcript which will record their co-curricular achievements.

51 Overall, the University's engagement with the national Enhancement Themes is broadly in line with sector expectations. There is good engagement with the Themes at institutional level with staff contributing to the Themes' development and the Themes being used to influence institutional activity. Engagement with the Themes at school level is more variable, although teaching staff did demonstrate awareness of topics such as graduate attributes, employability, responding to student needs, and assessment, while often being unaware that these related to national Enhancement Themes or that there was such an initiative. However, the ELIR team considered that this is because much of the school engagement with the Themes is embedded within the suite of CREF initiatives. These topics are part of normal business for staff in schools and, as such, that represents a positive approach.

53 The previous Enhancement Theme, Graduates for the 21st Century, aligns closely with the University's development of Aberdeen Graduate Attributes (see paragraph 41) and the University submitted four case studies for the Theme: The University of Aberdeen's Sixth Century Courses: The Natural World; The University of Aberdeen's Learning & Teaching Enhancement Programme; The University of Aberdeen's Sixth Century Courses: The Mind Machine; and The University of Aberdeen's Sixth Century Courses: Science and the Media. The University Centre for Academic Development (CAD) website has a database, Spotlight on Good Practice, which categorises the examples using the Enhancement Theme headings.

77 The University's approach to the use of external reference points in self-evaluation has many positive and effective features, but there are also areas for potential improvements. The positive features include the extent to which the University considers the practice of its comparator institutions in the context of significant transformational projects, such as curriculum reform and the academic year restructure. Particularly positive is the University's use of external members on programme advisory boards (PABs). The University has a well established record of working with employers who, through their membership of PABs, are able to make a significant contribution to the development of the curriculum, especially in relation to graduate attributes. External members of PABs act as 'critical friends' to programme areas and their contribution to programme design and development provides a valuable source of external advice and expertise on an ongoing basis.

### University of Dundee

12 The University Strategy to 2017 is underpinned by nine component strategies, with three top-level categories (learning and teaching, research, and wider impact), two cross-cutting themes (internationalisation, and employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship) and four enabling elements. As noted above (paragraph 9) the Metastrategy for Enhancement of the Student Experience is in the early stages of development.

50 Teaching provision at the University has a strong focus on the professions, with approximately half of students graduating with professionally accredited degrees. The percentage of the University's graduates in employment or further study has declined over the past five years, although the University outperforms the UK and Scottish averages. The University recognises this as a priority area and the University Strategy to 2017 includes employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship as one of the cross-cutting, enabling strategies, and the Learning and Teaching Strategy to 2017 details the importance of embedding graduate attributes into curricula.

51 Students are very positive about the Careers Service which provides support and advice on a range of employment and career related issues including: help with CV writing; finding placements and internships; volunteering through the Placement Base, which is a 'one-stop-shop' for work experience; and finding work through the Careers Service JobShop. Subject advisers located within the Careers Service provide an effective careers advisory service to each of the schools.

52 The University provides a range of employability initiatives including: postgraduate modules which contribute to the Scottish Internship Graduate Certificate (with a placement in Scotland) and the Global Internship Graduate Certificate (with a placement in India); the Dundee Graduate Skills Award, which provides recognition for extracurricular activities such as volunteering and student representation; employability modules; the Enterprise Gym, which helps students from all disciplines to develop their entrepreneurial skills; and the Greenhouse, a business pre-incubator facility for students and staff with ideas for business start-ups. The University is also planning to set up an employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship hub which will be a physical centre comprising the Careers Service, the Enterprise Gym and aspects of Research and Innovation Services.

63 The Library and Learning Centre (Educational Development) also organises the 'inspirED' educational development programme which comprises a range of workshops and lunchtime meetings to support staff in learning and teaching and academic practice. Topics include designing flexible curricula, employability and graduate attributes, and giving effective feedback on assignments. The workshops provide continuing professional



development opportunities for new and experienced academic staff, and facilitate networking and the sharing of good practice.

### Glasgow School of Art

34 Postgraduate research students who met the ELIR team commented that they received very little formal employability training, and they would value the opportunity to gain teaching experience. GSA confirmed that teaching opportunities are available for PhD students, however, in discussion with the ELIR team students indicated that they were unaware of these opportunities. In the context of planned growth in postgraduate research student numbers, GSA should ensure sufficient capacity for the support and enhancement of the research student experience.

35 GSA places great emphasis on preparing graduates for practice through the academic curriculum and the studio practice through which it is delivered, and the curriculum is underpinned by industry-led projects and live professional projects to support work-related learning. GSA did not take the approach of developing a list of Graduate Attributes as an outcome of the Graduates for the 21st Century Enhancement Theme, stating that graduate attributes are embedded into its practice-based curricula, which provides opportunities for students to develop the skills required for success in their discipline and for future employability.

36 Students who met the ELIR team, however, were not able to articulate the transferable skills they were developing as a result of the practice based curriculum. They stated that the careers service delivered some interesting talks and workshops about professional skills and preparation for employment, but that this was a generalised approach and they commented on the need to have enterprise and employability skills integrated into the curriculum.

37 In order to address this GSA is currently working collaboratively with Buckinghamshire New University on a Higher Education Academy (HEA) funded project, An Anatomy of Employability: articulating graduate capabilities for the creative arts. Initial outcomes from the project include a curriculum map enabling a comparison of approaches to the integration of employability skills in the curriculum across GSA. The final outputs from the project will be delivered during 2014, and it is envisaged that the project outcomes will lead to the articulation of a GSA employability strategy.

38 GSA has also recently appointed a Student Employability and Enterprise Manager whose remit is to consider employability and enterprise skills provision across the institution, and this appointment is likely to support the development of a strategic approach to employability. GSA should continue to develop, implement and embed a strategic approach to employability across the institution, ensuring that students can articulate a range of employability skills when they graduate.

### University of Glasgow

5 The strategic approach to learning and teaching is embodied in the University Learning and Teaching Strategy (2010-15) which is being delivered through an action plan comprising nine high-level projects: Assessment and Feedback; Graduate Attributes; Infrastructure; Campus Solutions; Retention; Equality and Diversity; Innovation in our Provision; Staff Development; and Process Improvement. Each learning and teaching project has been assigned to a senior member of staff and there are key performance

indicators in place to test the delivery of the strategic objectives. Progress is monitored by the University's Education Policy and Strategy Committee, which reports to Senate.

34 The University's arrangements for delivering graduate attributes are systematic and the role of Graduate Attribute Champion in each college is an effective mechanism for ensuring that graduate attributes are embedded into the curriculum. There is effective monitoring of the embedding of graduate attributes through routine monitoring in annual monitoring and periodic subject review processes.

35 Staff are aware of graduate attributes and understand how they are embedded in the curriculum. However, while the University recognises that there is a lack of awareness among students of the term graduate attributes in itself, students who met the ELIR team were able to talk about the associated skills they were developing through their courses and programmes and through co-curricular activities. The Graduate Attributes Student Handbook, which was developed as a result of a student-led project in 2010-11 and which has recently been updated, is designed to address this lack of awareness by providing an overview of how graduate attributes are developed within the context of the University. The handbook is to be supplemented by a student-produced video which is intended to provide an accessible overview of how students develop graduate attributes through their academic and co-curricular activities.

41 Engagement with the national Enhancement Themes has been significant in enabling the University to take forward aspects of its strategic vision, and this engagement has had a demonstrable impact on policy and practice. The University has had a longstanding and positive engagement with the Enhancement Themes, and the impact of activity carried out under the auspices of the Themes is recognised and acknowledged by staff. For example, the development of a University work placement policy was informed by successful initiatives in response to the Graduates for the 21st Century (G21C) Theme, including a work placement initiative in the creative industries introduced by staff in one school.

42 Since the 2010 ELIR the University's engagement with the G21C Theme has led to the development of a strategic approach to embedding graduate attributes across the institution. There is reference to graduate attributes in each college learning and teaching plan, and monitoring of graduate attributes is embedded within standard University processes (see paragraph 33). Staff who met the ELIR team stated that graduate attributes have had a major impact on the institution, although they would not necessarily be recognised as being linked to the Enhancement Themes.

### [Queen Margaret University](#)

37 Graduate attributes were introduced in 2008 and then developed further through the University's work around the Graduates for the 21st Century national Enhancement Theme. The Student Experience and QELTA strategies map the University's approach to embedding graduate attributes. Academic staff also encourage students to engage with placements and community activities to promote specific graduate attributes. The ELIR team found that students were aware of graduate attributes but terminology meant that students did not easily recognise their acquisition of the designated skills and attributes.

38 The University's portfolio of programmes demonstrates a strong commitment to vocational and work-based learning and employability appears as a theme in both the Student Experience and QELTA strategies. Approaches to the promotion of employability for all students include the use of employability champions; entrepreneurship modules; volunteering opportunities and the World of Work week. The Futurefocus website also

provides information for students about employability and personal development. Placements are built into many of the University's programmes and CASES provides support for students applying for placements.

39 Programme teams work closely with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) with a high proportion of the University's programmes having PSRB accreditation. There are also strong formal and informal links with employers for example through employer panels and the use of employers on programme review and validation panels. The Business Innovation Zone, operated in conjunction with East Lothian Council and housing the Business Gateway, is located on the University's campus. It operates as a one-stop-shop for small businesses and individuals, including the University's graduates, and there are good examples of graduates utilising this facility effectively. The University is also collaborating with another local University to meet the needs of local employers as part of its response to the SFC's regionalisation agenda. The University is a lead partner in a SFC-funded project aimed at placing interns in community, voluntary and charitable organisations.

### Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

16 Students typically leave the Conservatoire on completion of their undergraduate degree and move into employment as professional practitioners. On some programmes, most notably Modern Ballet, Drama, and Musical Theatre, where students in their third year of study have been offered employment in their chosen profession, the Conservatoire has taken active steps to enable the students to complete their academic award. A proportion of students, notably in Music, progress onto a postgraduate programme immediately after completing their undergraduate award.

22 A powerful learning experience is delivered through the use of 'vertical' learning opportunities in which students are provided with regular opportunities to learn and perform alongside professional practitioners and students from different levels of study. The new undergraduate curriculum has been successfully developed. The core specialist curriculum includes opportunities for students to make choices which develop interdisciplinary working. This broadens the student experience and provides opportunities for students to become co-creators of their own learning.

30 The Conservatoire emphasised the importance of Transition Tutors and Learning Contracts to the success of the new curriculum. These elements are likely to further strengthen the arrangements for identifying and meeting the support needs of all students. In discussions with staff and students, it appeared to the ELIR team that there was some lack of clarity about the extent to which Transition Tutors were intended to provide advice to students on their choice of modules in the undergraduate curriculum. The Conservatoire has introduced a structure in which Transitions Tutors receive training and support from Transitions Coordinators. There would be benefit in the Conservatoire ensuring that the purpose and role of Transitions Tutors is made clear to all staff and students. Related to this, there would be value in the Conservatoire providing guidance to help students in their selection of co-curricular activities to ensure they are able to gain as much benefit as possible from the rich variety of opportunities that are available.

31 The Conservatoire has an effective approach to the promotion of graduate attributes which is communicated clearly to students.

32 The majority of staff are actively engaged in relevant professions and significant numbers of visiting artists routinely work with the students. This, together with the highly vocational nature of the programmes, creates an environment in which students are treated

as professional practitioners from their arrival at the Conservatoire. In addition, many programmes include work placements and the Conservatoire is highly supportive of students who gain relevant employment during their study. Students spoke positively to the ELIR team about this approach and the wider opportunities it gives them in terms of their outlook, learning experience and employability.

33 The Conservatoire has identified a set of graduate attributes which are embedded in the new undergraduate curriculum. Students take specific modules which are aimed at preparing them for their chosen profession, and spoke positively to the ELIR team about the practical benefits of this approach. The ELIR team recognised the clear positioning of research skills and practice-based research within the identified set of graduate attributes and in the learning outcomes which are set out in student handbooks. As the Conservatoire develops its research strategy, there would be benefit in considering how best to further develop research-teaching linkages.

34 Choice Modules in the new undergraduate curriculum provide a positive opportunity for students to develop their graduate attributes through collaboration with peers and professionals in other disciplines. As a further enhancement, the Conservatoire is encouraged to consider ways of enabling students to become aware of the attributes they are gaining in this particular context.

35 Senior staff indicated that the institution is engaged with other conservatoires in tracking student cohorts over a 10-15 year period, which has the potential to provide rich data in relation to graduate destinations. There would be benefit in the Conservatoire introducing additional approaches to student tracking, for example analysing student journeys within programmes and student selection of Choice Modules (see paragraph 64).

## **SRUC**

29 Overall, SRUC has an effective approach to engaging and supporting students in their learning with a number of further developments planned or in progress. SRUC has developed a Learner Engagement Strategy which aims to be inclusive of all learners and covers all taught, distance learning and work-based provision offered by the College including all modes of delivery and courses offered on a commercial basis. The Strategy seeks to: proactively develop students as reflective learners which not only enhances their learning at SRUC but also beyond; improve students' employability; support the development of broader capacities and graduate attributes; and recognise and value the contribution learners can make to enhancing the quality of provision and to the broader life and work of SRUC.

37 Through the legacy colleges two systems operated for providing student support. The adviser of studies role operated at the former SAC and provided the interface between students and the pastoral support services. At the Barony, Elmwood and Oatridge campuses this role is known as course tutor. Regular meetings are held between students and these members of staff. As part of a personal development plan (PDP) project, a common agenda was developed for the meetings between students and their adviser of studies to encourage discussion on exploring progression opportunities, and provide curriculum and pastoral support collectively with the aim of embedding graduate attributes including employability. At the Barony, Elmwood and Oatridge campuses, PDPs are developed and monitored jointly by the course tutor and students. At those campuses, personal learning support plans are compiled by Learning Support staff to record additional support requirements, arrange support and monitor progress. During the ELIR visits, the ELIR team learned that benefits from the two legacy systems were being combined to produce a SRUC year tutor scheme.

The team considered this was a positive example of the institution drawing on good practice across the legacy colleges to the benefit of students.

47 Employability is one of SRUC's five graduate attributes which were developed as an outcome of the former SAC's engagement with the Enhancement Theme, Graduates for the 21st Century. Since the formation of SRUC, these graduate attributes have been cascaded to staff and students across all campuses with the intention of raising awareness and seeking feedback on their relevance to the new, merged organisation. The Reflective Analysis indicated that, based on staff and student focus groups during ELIR preparation, there is a general acceptance that the graduate attributes are fit-for-purpose across SRUC. SRUC has also identified the need to continue embedding the graduate attributes in the curriculum, for example explicitly referencing them in module descriptors and in the standard agenda for student meetings with their adviser of studies. In discussions during ELIR, students demonstrated limited awareness of the graduate attribute terminology but, once the underlying principles were explained, were able to identify examples of having engaged in activities and experiences that indicated the attributes were, in fact, forming part of the student experience. There would be benefit in SRUC developing with its students a common language for understanding and promoting the concept of graduate attributes.

48 The former SAC had an Employability Strategy which, the Reflective Analysis stated, is in the process of being revised as part of the development of the SRUC education strategies, policies and procedures. SRUC is continuing the SAC practice of holding an annual careers convention for students. The convention is evaluated carefully and, although the formal student feedback was mostly positive, a number of areas for development have been highlighted for future events, demonstrating responsiveness on the part of the institution.

49 SRUC does not have a central careers guidance service and acknowledged that current provision in this area varies across the different campuses. There would be benefit in SRUC continuing to explore options for providing generic careers support to students and keeping this under review to ensure the effectiveness of arrangements for students on all campuses.

50 SRUC emphasised its strong and specific vocational links, with significant employer engagement in the curriculum and wider activity including the work of the Consulting Division. Programme teams have close links with industry throughout the development of the curriculum and in delivery, for example through the involvement of guest lecturers who are based in industry. Staff are encouraged to maintain their industry knowledge and skills in a variety of ways including through the Return to Industry programme which is part of the staff development fund. Current practice (from the former SAC) is for a member of the programme team to take responsibility for industry liaison and providing career advice to students. In the new curriculum structure it is proposed to establish Curriculum Advisory Panels for each department with representation from industry and the further and higher education sectors. In addition, the procedures for annual programme review, institution-led subject review and revalidation provide systematic checks on professional relevance. It was evident from discussions during the ELIR that students are very aware of these industry and employer links, including through research and consultancy undertaken by staff who teach them.

53 Students are supported to develop vocationally relevant skills and understanding of their employability, drawing on staff consultancy, professional practice and research, applied curricula and the provision of work experience opportunities. This holistic approach to the development of employability skills is a positive feature of the SRUC arrangements.

67 SRUC has identified four priority areas: graduate attributes; assessment and feedback; support for transition or progression; and increasing engagement with quality enhancement and associated Enhancement Theme activity across the six campuses. Funding in 2013-14 has been directed at four pedagogic research projects linked to the Enhancement Themes, which is positive, but the ELIR team considered it was too early to evaluate the potential impact of this work.

### University of Strathclyde

9 The University has clearly defined its vision to be a 'leading international technological university' through benchmarking work with international comparator universities. This vision underpins the University's approach to innovation in learning and teaching, and can be evidenced through initiatives like the development of the Technology and Innovation Centre (TIC). The aim of the Centre, which is currently being built, is to bring together research, education and knowledge exchange activity from all four faculties and allow students to work with leading global industry partners. A further example of this approach can be seen in the provision of Vertically Integrated Projects, which provide students at all levels with an opportunity to work with staff in multidisciplinary teams on research and development projects.

32 The University has a culture of encouraging and supporting teaching initiatives that enhance the student learning experience. This is underpinned by the University's use of innovative and active experiential learning environments which enable students to learn in live or simulated 'real-world' contexts. The ELIR team highlighted this as an area of positive practice. Experiential learning opportunities are embedded in the curriculum across all faculties, evidencing the University's aspiration to be a 'Place of Useful Learning' and illustrate the University's commitment to the graduate attributes it has developed. Examples of this approach include: Vertically Integrated Projects (see paragraph 9); the 'Dragons' Den' scheme, which offers a further opportunity for staff and students to pitch research and knowledge exchange ideas to a panel consisting of senior University staff, academics and external partners; and 'Interns@Strathclyde', which provides undergraduate students with research-based summer placements involving 'one-to-one' mentorship from academic staff.

48 The University has an effective approach to the promotion and development of graduate attributes, including employability, that could be enhanced further by better communication and promotion of the attributes to students.

49 The University calls its graduate attributes the 4Es, which stands for engaged; enterprising; enquiring; and ethically, culturally and globally aware. The University is now seeking to embed the 4Es in the curriculum. Graduate attributes are evidenced in the curriculum through a wide range of opportunities that allow students to be involved in 'real-life' projects, many with credit-bearing elements. One example is where students from the Business School develop marketing strategies for external clients (who are actual employers). It is important that all students have equal opportunity to develop these attributes and are able to access these opportunities (see also paragraphs 32-33).

50 Graduate attributes and employability skills are embedded in the delivery of postgraduate research student programmes, chiefly through the credit-bearing Research Development Programme. The success of the collaborative PhD model is evidenced by the number of Strathclyde's PhD students who gain employment outside academia following graduation.

51 The ELIR team's discussions with students indicated a lack of awareness with the 4E terminology, but students said that the concepts included in the graduate attributes resonated with their experience of being a student at the University.

52 The ELIR team considered that the University has been proactive and successful in providing opportunities for students to develop employability skills. The team also considered that the University could develop this further by making more explicit reference to graduate attributes in curriculum design, for example through the newly-introduced procedures and online tools for its Course and Class Approval Process. This would ensure that graduate attributes are explicitly embedded in the curriculum and in course documentation. Communicating the graduate attributes clearly to students would also serve to underline the importance of the attributes themselves.

106 The University currently has one collaboration with an industrial partner to provide research degree programmes for the partner's employees through a combination of work-based learning and joint professional and academic research supervision. This collaboration currently has 29 employees of the partner plus 33 newly-recruited research students. The University is discussing the initiation of similar programmes with other industrial partners.

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