

University of Glasgow

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Enhancement-led institutional review

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

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk

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Linney Direct
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Mansfield
Nottinghamshire NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788
Fax 01623 450629
Email qaa@linneydirect.com

Preface

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

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

Enhancement-led approach

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

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

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

Nationally agreed reference points

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

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

Conclusions and judgement within ELIR

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

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

The ELIR process

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

The main elements of ELIR are:

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

The evidence for the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review

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

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

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Introduction

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

2. The review followed a method agreed with Universities Scotland, student bodies and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), and informed by consultation with the Scottish higher education (HE) sector. The ELIR method embraces a focus on the strategic management of enhancement; the effectiveness of student learning; and the use of a range of reference points. These reference points include the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)*, the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by the Agency, subject benchmark information, and student, employer and international perspectives. Full details of the method are set out in the *Handbook for enhancement-led institutional review: Scotland* which is available on the Agency's web site.

Method of review

3. The University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA) which set out the University's strategy for quality enhancement, its approach to the management of quality and standards and its view of the effectiveness of its approach. The RA had been approved by the University's Senate Education Committee following consultation and dissemination among staff and student representatives. Its production was overseen by a working group which included student representation. Other documents available to the ELIR team with the RA included the institutional profile at 20 February 2004, the University Calendar 2004 and the 2004 Undergraduate Prospectus and Postgraduate Prospectus. The RA provided the focus for the review and was used to develop a programme of activities by the team to provide a representative illustration of the way the University approaches the management of quality, enhancement and academic standards. The self-critical nature of the RA greatly assisted the review.

4. The RA provided four case studies that, among other things, demonstrated how enhancement activities could grow from individual initiative or a departmentally recognised need, as well as from university-wide ventures. They were:

- a virtual classroom - BAccChat - developed in the Department of Accounting and Finance;

- the employability project in the Faculty of Biomedical and Life Sciences;
- the University's Student Information Technology (IT) Literacy Programme;
- interactive handsets introduced as a teaching aid in the Departments of Computing Science and Psychology and currently being used by eight departments.

5. The ELIR team visited the University on two occasions. The Part 1 visit took place on 11 and 12 March 2004, and the Part 2 visit took place between 19 and 23 April 2004.

6. During the Part 1 visit, officers of the University gave a presentation to the ELIR team on a number of strategies and current developments intended to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. These presentations included information about the University strategic plan, the Quality Enhancement Strategy (QES), the Postgraduate Research Strategy (PRS), the Employability Strategy (ES), the Widening Participation Strategy (WPS) and recent teaching and learning initiatives. The University also demonstrated to the team the University's use of interactive handsets in lectures, one of the case studies outlined in the RA. Following the presentations, the team met a group of senior staff with responsibility for managing quality and enhancement activity across the institution, and with staff who had been involved in review at the subject level in English literature, Scottish literature, English language, mathematics and chemistry. The team met a group of student representatives comprising members of the Students' Representative Council (SRC) and students who had participated in recent reviews at the subject level. These meetings enabled the team to explore with staff and students a range of matters, many of which had been raised by the RA, including learning in a research-led university; the ways in which the University measures the effectiveness of the student learning experience; the role of staff development in the quality enhancement process; the role of students and its effectiveness in decision-making; and the development of the University's Code of Assessment (see below, paragraph 32).

7. In addition to its discussions with these groups of staff and students, during the Part 1 visit the ELIR team was able to consider a focused set of documentation which had been identified in the RA. This enabled the team to develop a programme of meetings and to identify a set of documentation for the Part 2 visit in order to provide a representative

view of the institution's approach to assuring and enhancing quality, and maintaining the standards of its awards.

8. The ELIR team comprised Professor G Chesters, Mr D Cockburn, Professor B Gower, Dr F C Quinault, reviewers, and Mr P Probyn, review secretary. During the Part 1 visit and on the final day of the Part 2 visit, the team was accompanied by an independent observer, Professor D Swinfen. The review was coordinated on behalf of the Agency by Dr D J Buckingham, Assistant Director.

Background information about the University

9. The University of Glasgow was established by Papal Bull in 1451 and its modern constitutional framework is derived from a series of Universities (Scotland) Acts between 1858 and 1966. In all academic matters its supreme authority is the Senate which has statutory responsibility for regulating teaching and promoting research. There are more than 100 academic departments, interdisciplinary centres, schools and institutes. They are grouped together into 10 faculties: arts; biomedical and life sciences; education; engineering; information and mathematical sciences; law and financial studies; medicine; physical sciences; social sciences; and veterinary medicine. The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine is located at the Garscube Campus, three miles to the northwest of the main campus. Part of the Faculty of Arts is located at the Crichton Campus on the outskirts of Dumfries. At the time of the review visit, the University had 19,400 undergraduate students and some 3,900 postgraduate students (of whom 1,400 were research students). In addition, some 1,750 students were studying on validated programmes in accredited and associated institutions.

10. The mission of the University is to be a major research-led university operating in an international context with the following fundamental aims:

- to provide education through the development of learning in a research environment;
- to undertake fundamental, strategic and applied research;
- to sustain and add value to Scottish culture, to the natural environment and to the national economy.

11. The RA stated that the Principal and Vice-Chancellor 'is regarded as Chief Executive, responsible for the effective oversight and management of the University'. The Principal is supported by five vice-principals (VPs) with functional responsibilities, three of whom have additional territorial faculty responsibilities (see below,

paragraph 15). The University is planning a restructuring of its senior management, implementing a fully devolved budgetary system, and with faculty deans joining the most senior executive group.

12. The Senate is responsible for academic quality in its broadest sense, providing final approval for developments in academic policy across the University. This responsibility is delegated to a number of senior committees, notably the Education Committee (EC) and the Academic Regulations Committee (ARC). The duty of the EC is to advise the Senate and the University Court (the Court) on strategic and resource issues relating to taught provision, including matters of strategy for maintaining academic standards and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning; it is a joint committee of the Senate and the Court. The duty of ARC is to advise the EC on matters relating to academic regulatory processes. It is responsible for operational aspects of academic policies and procedures, including consideration of proposals for new curriculum developments as well as amendments to existing provision. It contributes to quality enhancement through the work of its subcommittees and other groups, such as the Code of Assessment Working Group. The Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) was described in the RA as 'a forum for debate and advises EC on all aspects of the development and delivery of learning opportunities for students'. The chair of LTC is the Director of the Teaching and Learning Service (TLS).

13. The Clerk of Senate, has long held significant responsibility for the academic management of the University. In recognition of the expansion of the Learning and Teaching field, in 1998 the University also appointed its first Vice-Principal (VP) (Learning and Teaching (LT)). However, areas of duplication emerged, and in 2002 the posts of VP (LT) and Clerk of Senate were combined (VP (LT)/Clerk of Senate).

14. Described by the University as making a 'significant step forward in the Quality Enhancement process' the Student Support and Development Committee (SSDC) was formed in 2002. The RA explained that the SSDC is 'intended to be student-focused and, to a large extent, student driven by four SRC senior officers, working with the heads of all the student academic, well-being and administrative support services'. As a joint committee of the Senate and Court chaired by the VP (LT)/Clerk of Senate, the SSDC is intended to serve as a forum to identify, discuss and advise at a strategic level on any matters of mutual student and support service interest, and to take these forward to other committees, and the Senate and the Court as appropriate.

15. Responsibility for defining, promoting and implementing strategy and policy relating to research students rests with the Research Planning and Strategy Committee (RPSC), a committee reporting to the Senate. It is advised by three 'territorial' subcommittees: one for the Faculties of Medicine, Veterinary Science, and Biomedical and Life Sciences; a second for the Faculties of Arts, Social Sciences, Law and Financial Studies, and Education; and a third for the Faculties of Physical Sciences, Information and Mathematical Sciences, and Engineering. Each subcommittee is chaired by its relevant territorial VP.

16. The University collaborates in the provision of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes with other Scottish universities, with well-established Scottish HE institutions, and with a small number of partners elsewhere in the UK (see below, paragraph 35). The EC is responsible for overseeing the assurance of academic standards and quality in these partnerships.

17. In January 2004 the administration of the University had been restructured as a result of the bringing together of two former resource units (Central Administration and Information Services) to form Administration, Information and Management Services (AIMS). AIMS comprises eight divisions: Academic Planning and Support; Compliance and Operational Risk Management; Estates and Facilities Management; External Relations and Marketing; Finance and Planning; Information Services; Staff and Student Resources; and Research and Enterprise.

The University's strategy for quality enhancement

18. The University's QES has two overriding aims which are:

- to maintain and develop attractive, flexible, appropriate and viable programmes of study;
- to provide an environment in which all staff and students are valued and supported in their development and innovation in learning and teaching.

Internal monitoring and review of quality and standards and public information

Overview of the University's internal arrangements for assuring the quality of programmes and maintaining the standards of its academic awards and credit

19. Taken together with the information provided to the ELIR team by the RA, and other documents,

including recent minutes of meetings of the EC and the ARC, meetings with students and staff during both visits enabled the team to establish a clear picture of the University's internal arrangements for assuring quality and maintaining standards.

Internal approval, monitoring and review

20. Formal mechanisms for the approval and monitoring of courses and for the periodic review of programmes have been in operation at the University for 10 years or more but each has been restructured within the last three years. The RA stated that these mechanisms 'provide a rigorous, thorough and effective system' for monitoring academic quality. Because of their central importance and the recent changes, the ELIR team explored each of these mechanisms in depth.

Programme and course approval

21. Major changes to programmes must be approved at faculty level (board of studies or higher degrees committee), and this approval process is itself subject to scrutiny by the ARC which sets up small scrutiny groups that are able to act quickly, but also to review particular proposals in depth when necessary. External examiners are formally consulted on proposals for the introduction of a new course or changes to an existing one.

Annual course monitoring

22. The RA emphasised that the 'key unit of currency in the University's taught provision and for quality assurance purposes is the course or module'. It explained that annual course monitoring (ACM) 'begins at the end of each session and is followed by a full reporting process', through departmental and faculty levels to ARC and Senate, with responses 'being made, as appropriate, at each level'. ACM reports are considered at faculty level by the faculty quality assurance officer (FQAO), who provides a composite report to ARC. These reports are also considered collectively by the group of FQAOs meeting with senior Senate Office staff. The ELIR team noted that reports are sent, not just 'upwards' within the University but also to external examiners, to any professional and statutory body (PSB) involved in the course, and to staff-student liaison committees.

23. The RA acknowledged some past shortcomings in the process, including the absence of any formal guidelines before 2002-03, and variation in the level of reflection and effort put into the completion of the reports. The ELIR team asked the University to provide it with a selection of ACM reports which illustrated the level of variation. It also studied the new Code of Practice on Annual Course Monitoring as well as the internal report on the ACM which

gave rise to the new code, and noted that the new code should address effectively the problem of variation in quality of ACM reports. The FQAOs, who met the team, confirmed that they do remit ACM reports to departments for amendment if they consider them inadequate. They also confirmed that the University does respond to their reports, and improved feedback of this kind was cited as one reason why the ACM process is now more securely embedded, and better regarded by staff in general.

Internal review of programmes

24. The current internal review process, whose specific focus is reflected in its title, Review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (DPTLA), is only in its second year of operation, although it builds upon previous systems for reviewing departments. Senior staff explained to the ELIR team that the DPTLA process is still evolving. DPTLA reviews are planned to take place over a six-year cycle. The University's plans for an interim, three-year follow-up have yet to crystallise. Each review panel is led by a VP or the VP (LT)/Clerk of Senate, and includes at least one external subject specialist. Review panels receive, *inter alia*, a self-evaluation report from the department under review, meet staff and students, and submit a report to the EC.

25. The ELIR team's reading of the RA gave rise to a number of questions about the DPTLA process, some of which it had an opportunity to explore with staff who had been involved with DPTLA reviews. The team noted that DPTLA panel visits typically occupy only one day, and questioned whether a single day was sufficient to allow a panel to complete its work satisfactorily in all cases. It heard that much work can be done prior to a full panel meeting, and the evidence available from DPTLA reports suggested that such prior engagement had, indeed, enabled panels to complete their work satisfactorily within a one-day visit. As it gains experience of operating the DPTLA process, the University might, nevertheless, wish to reflect on whether it is satisfied with the way that the present arrangements address joint programmes that involve more than one department.

26. Staff who met the ELIR team welcomed the inclusion in a review panel of a member of TLS, an external subject specialist and a member of staff from a cognate University department. They particularly welcomed the involvement of a member of the TLS in providing assistance in preparation for the review. Overall, staff expressed the view that internal DPTLA reviews were more helpful than the Agency subject review had been, and that they

encouraged 'self-analysis rather than self-promotion'. Students who met the team also spoke positively about the DPTLA process, stating that matters raised by students were acted upon, with the possible exception of those constrained by resources. The team noted that the University remains open to the possibility of including a student member in a review panel (see below, paragraph 78).

27. The DPTLA process is of central importance to both quality assurance and quality enhancement, and the ELIR team therefore explored its implementation and effectiveness at meetings with different groups of students and staff during the Part 1 and Part 2 visits. The team heard from course leaders that the University's QES was already having a positive influence on the preparation of the self-evaluation reports for the DPTLA process, and formed the view that there would be advantage in making this link more explicit. The team studied documentation relating to completed and ongoing DPTLAs, and was particularly interested to read the University's own assessment of how the process has been operating. The reports of the DPTLA reviews themselves include detailed recommendations, and the team took particular note of the robust way in which responsibilities for action were allocated and then monitored by the EC.

External examining

28. The RA stated that 'the University considers the role of external examiner to be crucial in relation to quality assurance, to the maintenance of academic standards...and to ensuring that student performance is judged properly'. It acknowledged the late receipt of reports and backdated nominations as occasional problems but the Senate Office intervenes actively in such cases. The RA recognised the need to develop guidance on the appointment of external examiners for research degrees that is as clear and robust as that already in force for taught courses.

29. The ELIR team studied the Note of Guidance for external examiners of all taught courses, and noted that this specifies their terms of appointment and the responsibilities of both the examiner and the department. An external examiner is required to submit an annual report to the Principal. The RA explained that reports are 'scrutinised by the Senate Office and then copied to the relevant department'. Departments are required to respond to any concerns or specific recommendations within three months. The response is copied to the external examiner, and the report and all related correspondence is copied to the dean of the faculty.

In the event of comments giving cause for serious concern, the Senate Office copies the report to the VP (L&T)/Clerk of Senate for action.

30. Consideration of the reports of external examiners forms part of the ACM process. The RA explained that in the ACM process 'departments reflect on external examiner comments'. The ELIR team considered that this was an effective way of allowing the faculty to check that departmental responses to external examiners' comments are appropriate. The team was interested to learn that ACM reports are sent to the external examiners to provide information on the action taken in response to their comments, a practice which supported the team's confidence in the effectiveness of the University's engagement with its external examiners.

31. In 2001-02, ARC established a working group to compare its practice in the use of external examiners with the principles set out in the *Code of practice Section 4: External examining*, and to consider the implications for the University. Some matters were referred to the FQAOs' group for further consideration. Representatives of that group who met the ELIR team confirmed that the matters referred to them had been addressed to the satisfaction of ARC, and that other relevant matters had been addressed through the development of the University's Code of Assessment.

32. The Code of Assessment, which was introduced in 2002-03 and now applies to all undergraduate programmes, takes account of recent developments in assessment practice, including the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of Students*, and brings the University's regulations together in one place. It is supplemented by an extensive Guide, which gives detailed advice on such matters as the writing of intended learning outcomes (ILOs), the proper means of aggregating scores to produce an overall grade or degree classification, and the role and conduct of examination boards. The ELIR team studied the Code of Assessment and its associated Guide, saw ACM reports which exemplified their relationship to examiners' reports, and saw examples of external examiners' reports themselves, including some for courses delivered under validation arrangements (see below, paragraph 34 *et seq*).

33. All the examiners' reports seen by the ELIR team used the University's standard report form, which requires the examiner to answer a series of questions about, or comment upon, the aims and methods of assessment, the standard of student work, the examination procedures and the taught course itself. Examiners in their last year are asked to add an overview of the progress that has been made

during their period in office. From its studies of the documentation, and from its meetings with staff and students, the team was able to confirm the view expressed in the RA that the University has effective external examining systems for ensuring that student performance is judged properly and for the maintenance of academic standards.

Validated provision

34. The RA differentiated between 'validated' and 'collaborative' provision. The University uses 'collaborative provision' to refer to programmes that are taught jointly with one or more other degree-awarding institutions. One of the collaborating institutions is identified as the 'administering' university. It is responsible for subsequent course approval and for ACM and, from now on, following the replacement of subject review by ELIR, will be responsible for internal programme review using its own procedures.

35. Validated provision refers to validation by the University of provision in institutions that do not have degree awarding powers. Two institutions, Glasgow School of Art and the Scottish Agricultural College, with which the University has mature partnerships, are identified by the University as 'accredited' in respect of provision validated by the University. The University receives an annual report on all programmes in each institution through a liaison committee. Programme approval and annual monitoring procedures must be comparable to those used by the University. The external examiners of accredited institutions are external examiners of the University, and their reports are sent to both the institution and the University. The accredited institution is responsible for taking action on these reports, and for informing the University on the operation of these procedures in its annual report. Internal programme review is not required because each programme must undergo full revalidation every five years.

36. Other institutions that have their awards validated by the University are described as 'associated institutions'. There are two such associated institutions at present: the Free Church of Scotland College and Christie's Education, London. Each associated institution has a joint board through which the University's oversight of the validated provision is closer than for its accredited institutions. External examiners of the validated provision in the associated institutions are external examiners of the University, and their reports are treated in the same way as for the University's own taught courses.

37. The RA stated that the University considers that its 'validation procedures are appropriate for the

maintenance of quality and standards', and expressed the view that its caution in developing collaborative arrangements has helped to ensure that these are 'effective and appropriate'.

38. The ELIR team examined the Memoranda of Agreement governing the University's relations with each of its validated partners, as well as the minutes of recent meetings of its joint boards and liaison committees. The Memoranda confirmed the distinction between accredited and associated institutions, with different procedures governing, for example, the appointment of external examiners. Both sets of documentation gave rise to a number of questions which the team was able to discuss with a group of University staff who had responsibility for one or more of the validation arrangements.

39. Staff who discussed these matters with the ELIR team echoed the RA's emphasis on the maturity of the University's partnerships with Glasgow School of Art and the Scottish Agricultural College, and its cautious approach to undertaking any new validation agreements. They were able to give examples of the identification and resolution of problems that had arisen in the past and left the team in no doubt that, were it ever necessary for the University or one of its partners to withdraw from one of these agreements, the interests of students who might still be on course would be protected. Staff also expressed their readiness to look for examples of good practice in the partner institutions that the University might emulate. However, the team did encounter some cases where practice in the partner institution (for instance, the absence of resit examinations) differed from that of the University itself, and it was not entirely clear why such discrepancies in equity of treatment of students were permitted. The University informed the team that there is no separate resit examination diet in the case of the Free Church of Scotland College due to the small numbers of students, but stressed that students do have the opportunity to resit in the following session. From its discussions, and from its reading of relevant documents, the team formed the view that the University's validation procedures would benefit from some clearer definition of the division of responsibilities for the assurance of quality and security of standards between the University and its partner institutions.

Research degrees

40. Each faculty has a graduate school which is responsible both for monitoring academic standards and for the annual monitoring of individual student

progress. The RA recognised that this devolution has led to some inconsistency which is being addressed by means of a PRS, for implementation during the period 2002 to 2007. The PRS is informed by external reports on postgraduate training, including that produced by the Economic and Social Research Council following a successful site visit in 2002, and the *Code of practice*. A key requirement of the PRS is that each postgraduate research student should have a supervisory team, consisting of at least two supervisors and a mentor.

41. The ELIR team discussed monitoring and review processes at a meeting with heads of graduate schools, and examined the University's draft Code of Practice which details the minimum standards expected across all faculties in respect of postgraduate support and supervision. The heads of graduate schools confirmed that the University's DPTLA reviews of teaching do not currently include postgraduate research students, and that quality assurance of provision for this category of students is conducted through annual reviews of overall research activity.

42. Postgraduate research students who met the ELIR team expressed the view that the PRS was already having a beneficial effect upon supervision and monitoring although they did emphasise the need for close cooperation and communication in cases where a student's two supervisors are drawn from different parts of the University. The team was satisfied that the University is following its own strategy, and formed the view that this will enhance the quality of the student learning experience by spreading good practice.

The use made of external reference points for assuring quality and standards

43. The RA covered each of the elements of the academic infrastructure separately, so this report will follow that approach.

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

44. During its meetings with staff, particularly those with experience of DPTLA review, the ELIR team explored the role that the SCQF plays in programme approval, monitoring and review. A recent review of all degree programmes in respect of adherence to the SCQF disclosed just two areas which required the University to reconsider its policy in this matter. Staff gave the team illustrations of the implementation of policy, including a case of a postgraduate degree that had been terminated because it did not align sufficiently with the SCQF. Staff expressed the view that the SCQF is an indispensable part of programme approval and review.

45. The ELIR team was satisfied that staff were well aware of the SCQF and that the University is following its guidance in relation to credit rating. What was less clear to the team, however, because of the limited progress towards the preparation of programme specifications, was how the level descriptors of the SCQF are being used to ensure that individual courses are appropriately located against academic level (see below, paragraph 53).

Subject benchmark statements

46. The RA explained that all faculties were invited, at the beginning of session 2002-03, to report on their use of subject benchmark statements, and a report on the responses from all faculties was considered by ARC in January 2003. The RA commented that the report 'revealed a wide engagement' with subject benchmark statements in the academic departments, with all departments having reviewed the statements relevant to their disciplines, and 'the majority having gone on to use them for other activities such as programme review, programme design and the drafting of programme specification material'.

47. Relevant subject benchmark statements are among the information sent routinely to external examiners, and the standard external examiner report form asks the examiners whether they consider that the standards set are appropriate by reference to 'published national subject benchmarks, the national qualifications framework, institutional specifications and other relevant information, where available'. Commentary by the external specialist on the appropriateness of programme aims and curriculum in relation to the relevant subject benchmark statement(s) is required as part of the DPTLA process.

Code of practice

48. The ARC established five working groups to review sections 2, 4, 6 and 7 of the *Code of practice* and the *Guidelines on the quality assurance of distance learning* against University procedures. Working groups were established by EC to consider sections 8, 9 and 10 of the *Code*. Sections 3 and 5 of the *Code* have been considered by other processes, and Section 1 was considered as part of the development of the PRS. The RA reported that 'the University is largely compliant with most of the precepts but has identified some necessary development work to address certain precepts and supporting guidance and examples of good practice'.

49. The RA summarised the findings of the reviews of the sections of the *Code of practice*, and the actions being taken as a result. The ELIR team was not entirely clear about the level of rigour of all

these reviews from its reading of the RA. It considered the response to the section of the *Code* on careers education, information and guidance to have been particularly positive, and this impression was borne out by one of the University's presentations during the Part 1 visit. The team also looked at the report on the review of the recruitment and admissions section of the *Code* and found this to be very thorough. The team noted the University's acknowledged variance from aspects of the section of the *Code* on academic appeals and student complaints. Students who discussed this with the team reported that they were satisfied with the University's procedures, although they expressed the view that the procedures were sometimes susceptible to bureaucratic delay.

Programme specifications

50. The RA acknowledged that this is an area in which 'the University has delayed progress' on the grounds that the national position was unclear. The University had prepared programme specifications for Agency subject reviews, but considered that they had been 'too technical and/or too general' to be of benefit to the intended users. However, the University reviewed its position in November 2003 in the light of SHEFC circular HE/19/03, and EC agreed that programme specifications would be required for all taught programmes as each programme was put forward for initial approval, or came up for DPTLA review. The RA reported that a 'non-prescriptive template and supporting guidelines will be introduced', and that programme specifications would be 'written from a student-centred perspective'.

51. Staff who discussed these matters with the ELIR team were not able to give a clear account of what the University means by a 'student-centred' programme specification. Instead, they referred the team to the Agency's guidelines on programme specifications, adding that it was sometimes 'difficult to avoid being technical'. The team noted that notwithstanding the emphasis on student-centred programme specifications, the RA stated only that programme specifications are 'likely' to be issued to students in future. In discussion of the benefits of establishing programme specifications, staff tended to refer to difficulties such as duplication with existing documentation and the system of faculty entry, which means that many undergraduates are not required to commit to a particular programme during their first two years of study.

52. Clarity of information, especially for students, was seen as the ultimate goal of programme specifications, and recent work with staff at the

Crichton Campus was said to have been productive in this respect. The ELIR team saw the programme specifications that had been developed in preparation for the DPTLA of programmes delivered at the Crichton Campus. Crichton staff who met the team reported that the production of programme specifications had been helpful to them, but the specifications had not yet been seen by students. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the programmes taught at Crichton Campus, the team considered that these particular programme specifications were not an adequate basis on which to judge the relationship between the University's programme specifications and key external referents such as subject benchmark statements and the SCQF. Faculty staff located on the main campus who met the team offered differing views on the potential value of programme specifications, and not all were aware that the University now has a template for their production.

53. Programme specifications are an important vehicle for communicating ILOs to students and staff. The RA stated that 'the Code of Assessment establishes a clear focus on the role of ILOs' and that 'the assessment of students' performance should be measurable against those objectives, understood by students and assessors'. The Guide to the Code of Assessment gives detailed advice on the preparation of ILOs, but the evidence available to the ELIR team indicated that not all departments are using ILOs, either at programme or course level. While the team also found examples of detailed and proper attempts to link assessment of specific course learning outcomes with layers of criteria, honours classification descriptors and Code of Assessment definitions, it appeared to the team that students might find these local attempts at clarification confusing and difficult to follow. The team would encourage the University to expedite its introduction of programme specifications and programme-level ILOs, not simply as a matter of compliance, but more importantly because of their value for the University, as a means of clarifying standards, and for students, as an aid to understanding what they must do to achieve these standards. Within this programme-level framework, the University may wish to consider how it might systematically enhance students' understanding of standards at the level of course learning outcomes.

Progress files

54. These were not treated as a separate topic in the RA. However, the introduction of Personal Development Planning (PDP) is one of the key strands of the University's ES, which itself is a central

element of its approach to quality enhancement. The strategy was described in some detail in the RA, and featured as one of the University's presentations to the ELIR team (see below, paragraph 92).

Professional and statutory bodies and employers

55. The RA welcomed moves to harmonise PSB validation and accreditation requirements with universities' own quality assurance procedures, but considered, on the basis of the experience of other universities, that this aim may remain 'elusive in practice'. The RA also stated that close collaboration with employers is one aim of the University's ES, and that employer/careers advisory panels are being introduced in some subject areas. From the start of session 2003-04, all reports of PSB reviews have been received by ARC. The ELIR team learnt from its meeting with staff who had been involved in internal reviews of a particular example of successful coordination between a DPTLA review and a PSB review visit.

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

56. The University's procedures for programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review have all undergone significant change within the last three years. Although they are still evolving, they were sufficiently well established at the time of the review visit for the improvements resulting from these changes to be observable. The variability to which annual course monitoring has previously been subject has been recognised by the University, and is being actively addressed.

57. The ELIR team considered the DPTLA system of periodic review to be robust, particularly in its approach to identification of recommended action points and the subsequent monitoring of their implementation. It is clear that the self-evaluation reports that form part of the DPTLA process have been positively influenced by the formulation of the University's strategy for quality enhancement, and the team would encourage the University to make the link between quality assessment and enhancement more explicit in periodic review. In considering how the DPTLA process might evolve, the team would invite the University to give further thought to how joint degree programmes are to be covered most effectively in periodic review. The team noted the University's new procedures for taking oversight of the reports of PSBs, and its increased collaboration with employers, and considered that these would

make useful contributions to periodic review of relevant programmes.

58. The University has established a Code of Assessment. The Guide that supports the Code states that 'there cannot be a scheme of assessment without written and thereby explicit Intended Learning Outcomes'. The University has also committed itself to the introduction of programme specifications in which ILOs are an essential component. The ELIR team found that the University is working to achieve a comprehensive set of programme specifications for its portfolio of taught provision, and would encourage the University to expedite this development, both to make more secure the link between academic standards and external reference points and because clear specification of ILOs is an essential feature of its Code of Assessment.

59. The academic standards of the University's awards for all its taught programmes, both undergraduate and postgraduate, are further secured by its close involvement with its external examiners. The University considers that it has effective external examining systems for ensuring that student performance is judged properly and for the maintenance of academic standards, and the ELIR team endorses that view. The University recognises a need to develop procedures for the appointment of external examiners for research degrees that mirror those already in use for taught provision, and the team noted that this matter was being addressed through a working group established by ARC.

60. The University's PRS makes clear its intention to strengthen the supervision and training of postgraduate research students. The DPTLA process does not, at present, cover provision for research students so that, in some cases, there is no external and independent review of provision for such students. This would benefit the University considering how it could ensure systematic periodic review of provision and support for research students, incorporating external input, whether through the DPTLA process or through another process, with a particular focus on postgraduate research.

61. The ELIR review included the University's validation agreements which are few in number and in some cases long established. A target for the University's QES is stated as 'the wholesale review of policies and procedures for collaborative activities'. As part of this review, the ELIR team would encourage the University to consider the benefit of ensuring there is clearer definition of the division of responsibilities for the assurance of quality and

security of standards in validated provision between the University and its partner institutions.

62. The University's RA included a detailed and self-critical account of its internal systems for the maintenance of quality and standards. While recognising and identifying areas for development, it judged the overall system to be 'rigorous, thorough and effective'. From its meetings with staff and students, and from its reading of relevant documentation, the ELIR team was able to endorse the University's view. However, the RA also acknowledged that pressures on the Senate Office had delayed the introduction of some planned changes to the University's quality assurance procedures and the maintenance of its Guide to Good Practice for the Quality Assurance of Teaching. The University might usefully consider how in future it could ensure that the planned operation of its quality management procedures is less sensitive to such pressures.

63. Overall, the ELIR team's study of the implementation and effectiveness of the University's internal review systems confirms that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's procedures for the present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

Overview of the University's approach to ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of provision is complete, accurate and fair

64. The RA expressed the view that 'in general, the University does fulfil the SHEFC guidance in respect of information provided to prospective and current students'. The University anticipates further developments, including improved navigability of the on-line Calendar, and the creation of an Internet support team as part of the University's Information Strategy. Reviews of the information provision for other user groups, such as employers, had not been undertaken at the time of writing the RA, which was soon after SHEFC issued its *Public information on quality: further guidance*.

65. Difficulties in the provision of statistical information for management purposes were acknowledged by the RA in connection with annual course monitoring and periodic programme review. The team therefore asked to include in its Part 2 visit a short meeting on the use of management data. At this meeting the team heard how certain technical problems had been, or were being, overcome. Helping academic staff to articulate the data that they need for quality management purposes and

marrying those needs with the data requirements of external agencies were also discussed as ongoing themes. Providing meaningful progression statistics is a complex matter because of the system of faculty entry and the flexibility many students have in their subsequent choice of subjects. The University shares this difficulty, which is recognised by SHEFC, with a number of other Scottish universities, and is hoping they may learn from each other's experience.

66. The RA outlined various ways in which pre-entry information might be improved. These may include the creation of a Student Charter, although discussion of this is still at a very early stage. Students who were asked by the ELIR team about the quality of the information they received from the University commented that some departments were more careful than others to consult students about the information that could, or should, be supplied through the University's web site. They also suggested that the particular demands of joint honours programmes could be made more explicit in pre-entry information, but otherwise, were broadly satisfied with the information available to them. The team asked the University to provide it with a selection of course handbooks, one from each faculty. It found the handbooks to vary widely in style and content. The team was not clear to what extent handbooks were subject to any central oversight or guidance on what should be included in a handbook, but it did see evidence that handbooks are reviewed as part of the DPTLA process, resulting in recommendations for improvement or dissemination of good practice.

67. The validated programmes offered by the two accredited institutions are included in the University's Undergraduate Prospectus. Accredited institutions are otherwise responsible for the accuracy of their own published information, whereas publicity materials produced by associated institutions are subject to approval by the University. Notwithstanding these safeguards, staff with whom the ELIR team discussed the University's validated programmes expressed the view that more rigour may be necessary when monitoring the information published by partner institutions. All parties to the discussion acknowledged the difficulty of checking the accuracy of web sites.

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

68. In its reading of publicity materials, and from its meetings with students, the ELIR team found no

instances of misleading information, either for internal or for external purposes. The University recognises, however, that the information is currently incomplete and has experienced some difficulties with the provision of statistical information for the purposes of internal monitoring and review. In respect of published material for its validated arrangements, the team would invite the University to consider whether it is confident that the arrangements for approving information published by its partner institutions are appropriate and reliable.

69. Overall, the ELIR team considered that the University is taking appropriate steps to ensure that its published information is accurate and fair, while noting the University's awareness of current weaknesses in the management of data. At the time of the review visits, SHEFC had not yet specified exactly what information it would expect to be published about student progression and completion. The University is aware that when this has been determined, delivery of the required information may have resource implications for its Planning Office.

The student experience

Overview of the University's approach to engaging students in the assurance and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning

70. The RA explained that in assuring and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching the University recognises the value of consulting its students. At University level, elected officers of the SRC are members of almost all committees, including Court, Senate, EC, ARC, LTC and SSDC. These elected officers also serve on working groups appointed to report on specific matters, for example, to report to the EC on the development and content of the RA. In the faculties and departments, liaison committees provide opportunities for academic staff to seek the opinions of students and for student representatives to raise matters of concern. Almost all courses have at least one class representative to provide liaison between the students undertaking the course and the academic staff directly responsible for it. Some, but not all, departments have undergraduate representatives on departmental committees. Students also serve on a variety of faculty committees - some elected to the SRC as faculty representatives, others chosen from among the class representatives. The RA explained that research students are members of each of the three territorial postgraduate research (PGR) committees that report to RPSC.

71. The ELIR team heard that for some large first and second-year undergraduate courses, there has been difficulty in recruiting class representatives. One reason for this, according to the RA, is that students sometimes lack the confidence needed to negotiate successfully with academic staff on behalf of their class. To address this concern the SRC introduced a training course for class representatives, and the RA explained that the SRC also has plans to introduce an on-line training package. The Senate has approved guidelines for the operation of liaison committees and the class representative system. In its meetings with students, the team learnt that not all class representatives were aware of the training course. This, it was suggested to the team, was because departments were not always implementing the agreed guidelines by providing the SRC with the names and contact details of all class representatives. The guidelines permit considerable variation in the ways in which students are able to participate in quality management and enhancement. For example, with regard to support for class representatives, the team heard that some departments provided briefing for student representatives before meetings of liaison committees. This practice, however, did not appear to be widely disseminated. The team also found evidence of resistance on the part of some convenors of liaison committees to accept requests that faculty representatives be permitted to attend and contribute to discussions.

72. The three territorial PGR committees vary in their mechanisms for selecting the postgraduate representatives. In most cases, postgraduate representatives for graduate schools are elected by their fellow students, but the ELIR team was informed that it can happen that representatives are chosen by academic staff rather than by students. The territorial PGR committees also vary in their committee practice, with one allowing representatives from all graduate schools to attend all meetings of the committee, while another has adopted the practice of alternating the three graduate school representatives between meetings of the committee.

73. At University level, both the evidence available from minutes of meetings and the views expressed by students who met the ELIR team indicated that the contribution of SRC representatives to the development of policy for maintaining and enhancing students' learning experience was limited. Thus, although the SRC was represented on the working group that oversaw the development of the University's preparations for the ELIR visit, including the drafting of the RA, there was little evidence that student views

had been actively sought. It also appeared to the team that SRC involvement in the development of the University's QES had been limited. The team noted that the Court and the Senate have received and accepted representations from the SRC about the damaging effects on students' learning experience of the declining level of financial support for their studies. Although at the time of the review there was little evidence of cooperation between the University and the SRC in exploring ways of ameliorating some of these effects, the team noted that the QES has explicitly identified as a concern the implications of students' personal economic circumstances for their engagement with the learning experience, and has asked the VP (LT)/Clerk of Senate to investigate and make recommendations to address this concern (see also below, paragraph 89). The team formed the view that although the University has provided opportunities for student participation in quality assurance and enhancement, and some students clearly do make a contribution, there is scope for improved consistency and effectiveness in the ways in which views of the wider student body are sought and considered. In particular, the University and the SRC might wish to reflect upon how they could most effectively work together to help sustain a partnership that actively contributes to the development of policy for the enhancement of student learning.

74. In addition to student representation, the University has a variety of approaches to engaging students in quality assurance and enhancement. Questionnaires are widely employed to elicit student views on support facilities, as well as on the content, delivery and management of courses. The ELIR team noted that many of the examples of questionnaires that it saw focused more on the teaching that students received than on their experience of learning. The University later commented to the team that its current questionnaires 'grew up out of traditional quality assurance practices, and were intended to seek student views on teaching rather than on their experience of learning, which is a much more recent concept'. The RA acknowledged that the value of questionnaires is limited if their overuse leads to poor return rates. One attempt to address the problem of poor return rates has been to provide questionnaires in an electronic format, so that there can be a prompt response to concerns and suggestions. The RA included a case study of the interactive virtual learning environment, BAccChat - (see above, paragraph 4) enabling such feedback, and reported that this system is being introduced by some departments and considered for wider adoption. Another approach has been to use focus groups with student members to inform the

development of policy and practice relating to students' experience of the University's support for their learning. Some departments are supplementing the information provided by liaison committees by using focus groups of students studying a particular course, and academic staff teaching it; according to the RA, use of such groups facilitates informed discussion and 'appears to result in swifter and more meaningful modification or change'. The team learnt from its meetings with student representatives that some meetings of liaison committees have the capacity to generate discussion of matters of students' experiences of learning as opposed to teaching and resource matters.

75. The RA reported that not all research students are offered feedback mechanisms that meet their circumstances. To address this and improve consistency across faculties, a review of those mechanisms is to be undertaken as part of the development of the University's PRS. The aim of the review is to 'ensure that the institution has adequate and transparent procedures that allow confidential feedback from research students, supervisory teams and review panels, and external parties including examiners, funding agencies and employers'. The data generated by this feedback will be used to inform a regular review of standards in postgraduate research.

76. The University's framework for quality assurance requires that students are consulted when there are proposals for new programmes and courses, or for amendments to existing programmes and courses. The advice they provide is used to inform judgements about such matters as workload, teaching methods and assessment regimes. The ELIR team met students who had participated in such a consultation, and who expressed their appreciation of the opportunity to participate in the approval process.

77. The ACM process provides faculties with an overview of student feedback from questionnaires, focus groups and liaison committees, and the ACM report, including responses to concerns and suggestions, is often provided to the liaison committees for comment. The RA recognised, however, that there is 'variation in the consistency of the level of reflection and effort put into completing the reports', and that there is a need to develop means for discouraging 'unconsidered responses'.

78. The RA indicated that departments are encouraged to involve students in the preparation of the self-evaluation report which is submitted as the core document for DPTLA reviews of undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. During the review itself, there are discussions between representative groups of students and members of

the review panel. In meetings with staff, the ELIR team heard that these discussions have played an important part in the process, although it noted that the guidelines on questions that panels might wish to address to students in these discussions again suggested an emphasis on teaching rather than on the learning experience. The EC has considered the question of student membership of review panels. For the time being, it has decided not to appoint students to panels but to work with the SRC in determining how the University can obtain the best input from the students of the departments under review. The RA explained that the EC will review its position on student membership of internal review panels as more experience of this aspect of the University's quality assurance framework becomes available, and in the light of the experience of other institutions which may have introduced student membership of internal review panels.

79. With regard to validated provision, the RA stated that feedback mechanisms are expected to be similar to those in use in the University. It is a requirement of approval as an associate or accredited partner that the processes in place for assuring the quality of students' learning experience are agreed by the University and harmonised with the University's own quality assurance procedures. As a consequence, student feedback mechanisms would normally include questionnaires and staff-student liaison committees. In the case of collaborative activity, the mechanisms used will be those of the administering institution. The RA commented that associated and accredited partners, in common with the University's own departments, have sometimes had difficulty in persuading students to provide feedback. These difficulties have been discussed at joint boards/liaison committees, and attention drawn to examples of good practice in this area.

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

80. The RA stated that the University takes seriously the provision of an environment which promotes effective learning. It drew attention to ways in which the academic needs of learners are met, with examples given of general and specific support given to students in the faculties of science and arts. There was also reference to the importance in promoting effective learning of formative feedback to students, and an account given of the contribution of the TLS to a Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) Generic Centre project, developed by Scottish HE institutions, on enhancing learning through effective feedback.

81. The RA also explained that, in terms of curriculum development and teaching, the University's approach is based on its reputation as a 'research-led university where scholarship in all its guises is valued'. The benefits to student learning of being taught by staff who are research active are emphasised, and some examples were provided of opportunities for student learning directly or indirectly related to the research interests of academic staff. The ELIR team's discussions with academic staff and with students illustrated the University's view that the research interests of staff are widely used to promote learning, even in the early years of undergraduate study. It is plain that in order to sustain this approach to promoting learning, the University is able to rely on the initiative and professionalism of its academic staff. However, the examples provided, together with these discussions, show that there are various understandings of what is meant by research-led, or research-informed, teaching. The RA acknowledged that the 'belief in the particular value of learning in a leading research institution...has perhaps not been as well articulated as it should have been'. The team noted that although the University has not systematically collected the data which would assist it in assessing the success of its approach, it is intended that as part of the strategy for quality enhancement the benefits of learning in a research environment will be studied. In particular, the University wishes to 'identify and, where appropriate, promote within the curriculum the key skills and attitudes that are developed in a research-led learning environment'. The team would endorse the University's intention to pursue that study, in the interest of providing a firm platform on which to develop teaching and learning in an active research context.

82. A principal means of providing support for effective student learning is the well-established system of advisers of studies which 'offers students advice and guidance on programmes of study and coherence of option choices'. Advisers also provide pastoral support to students. They are expected to meet the students for whom they are responsible two or three times in each of the first and second year, and thereafter as required. In the majority of faculties, advisers meet regularly as a group to discuss issues of common concern and to share good practice. Each faculty has a chief adviser of studies with responsibility for supporting and coordinating the work of advisers in his or her faculty. Chief advisers are represented on a territorial basis on the SSDC and meet termly with the VP (LT)/Clerk of Senate to discuss matters of general interest and share good practice.

83. The ELIR team enquired about the training opportunities for advisers. It learnt that in some cases newly-appointed advisers are able to 'shadow' an experienced adviser and a short counselling skills course is made available by the TLS. In general, the team formed the view that care was taken by chief advisers to provide appropriate induction and training. The team was, however, unable to find evidence that the work of advisers, including the effectiveness of induction and training, was evaluated in a systematic manner. In particular, there was little evidence of routine collection of feedback from students regarding the operation of the adviser system. The team's discussions with students showed that students' views varied widely, and the team considered that there would be advantage in investigating the reasons for this variety. It also showed that some students would welcome the opportunity to contribute to an evaluation of a system which is regarded as making an important contribution to promoting effective learning. The team found no university-level mechanism for gaining a clear central oversight of the system. Although chief advisers meet regularly, and issues raised and outcomes discussed appear to be routed appropriately within the University, there is no individual or committee responsible for the advising system across the University as a whole, with a consequent lack of institutional-level monitoring of the system. The team noted that the VP (LT)/Clerk of Senate shared some of its concerns in this respect.

84. Other means of support for student learning noted in the RA include a Student Network designed to provide informal peer support and advice for students in their first year. The RA noted that a recent development of the Student Network 'has been the introduction of a scheme involving peer assisted learning (PAL)'. The scheme has not yet been used widely, and the RA commented that 'the pilot scheme had only moderate success', although the ELIR team recognised that it is too early to evaluate such a recent development. The University takes the view that the Student Network and PAL have contributed to understanding and serving the needs of individuals, and that the Student Network plays a role in improving retention rates.

85. Part of the activity of the TLS is the provision of the Student Learning Service (SLS) staffed by effective learning advisers (ELAs), operating with specific faculty remits, who work with advisers of studies, and with faculties and departments in helping students develop their study-skills. ELAs give guidance on time management, note taking, effective reading, essay writing and revision strategies. In general, they aim to improve the study skills of students and thereby assist them in becoming more effective learners. The work

of the SLS is complemented by other support services meeting specific personal needs of students, including the Special Needs Service, the Student Counselling and Advisory Service, the Chaplaincy Centre, the University Health Service, the Nursery, the Student Information Desk and Accommodation Services. The RA observed that there is a continuous process of reviewing and refining its student support services. From its discussions with some members of the SSDC, representative chief advisers and ELAs, the ELIR team was able to confirm that useful progress is being made in providing an integrated service for the provision of academic and personal support for students.

86. The RA reported that the recent formation of the SSDC had been a significant step forward in the quality enhancement process, and the ELIR team noted that the University's QES charges the Committee with overseeing the reorganisation of the Student and Staff Support Division's management and structure. During the review visits, the University and the team agreed that the Committee was student-focused rather than student-driven, as had been suggested in the RA (see above, paragraph 14). The Committee has established a number of working groups to consider such matters as arrangements for students with high-level sporting obligations and additional support for international students. Although it lacks regular systematic information about the work of advisers of studies, the SSDC does receive regular reports from the support departments. While the team acknowledged that the QES was in an early stage of its development, it did appear to the team from its discussions with members of SSDC that the Committee was unclear about its role in the delivery of the QES, particularly in respect of the targets that it had been given to oversee over the course of the academic year.

87. The RA provided examples of student engagement with the assurance and enhancement of learning and support facilities provided centrally. In particular, feedback arrangements for the Careers Service, the University Library, and the Counselling Service were outlined. Questionnaires and focus groups are used, and there are examples of provision being enhanced as a consequence of students' views. The ELIR team was interested to learn that a questionnaire about the work of the Careers Service was administered by students. However, some support services, including the SLS, seemed to have few mechanisms for involving students in the evaluation of their effectiveness. In general, evidence gathered from documentation, and meetings with staff and students, indicated to the team that the University had not yet found effective means to capture students' opinions of the

full range of centrally provided support departments, or the full extent of the contribution these departments are making to an effective learning environment.

88. Notwithstanding the lack of student participation in the evaluation of some aspects of the support services, the RA and other documents studied by the ELIR team illustrated the strong focus of these services on students' needs. This was confirmed in the team's meetings with students, which clearly showed that students value the contribution made by the support services to the promotion of effective learning.

89. The University's QES refers to the need 'to enthuse' students (see below, paragraph 111). Other documentation seen by the ELIR team indicated that the lack of engagement with their studies displayed by some students is an increasing concern for the University. As part of the QES, the VP (LT)/Clerk of Senate is to investigate and make recommendations to promote student engagement with the learning experience, not least through improving attendance levels. At the time of the team's visit the QES had only recently been approved, and the University had as yet made little progress in this area. The QES recognises that the economic circumstances of many students, necessitating part-time employment, affect their attendance at classes and consequently the quality of their learning experience. These circumstances were mentioned by most of the groups the team met, and had been a subject for discussion at recent meetings of the EC, Senate and Court.

90. The ELIR team spoke with students regarding this issue and about what in their learning and teaching enthused them. It was clear from their responses that where the University structured and supported out-of-class and flexible learning, and where there was innovation in learning and teaching, there was enthusiasm among students. These views were particularly prominent when the team met a group of staff and students from the Crichton Campus, where innovations in learning and teaching are having a demonstrable influence on enthusing students. The team also met a group of course leaders, and through discussions with them it was apparent that assistance from the TLS in terms of restructuring courses has had a positive effect on student enthusiasm and motivation. The team formed the view that there was useful information to be gained by the University from student perceptions of their experience of learning, both positive and negative, that would contribute to an improved understanding of the reasons for success or difficulty in retaining students' commitment to learning.

91. The ELIR team was interested to learn that the University had commissioned a report (see below, paragraph 105) on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning. The report recommended the development of a corporate strategy to coordinate current initiatives and to help the University take greater advantage of this technology to enhance the scope of students' learning opportunities. The team found evidence of student enthusiasm for the use of ICT, although discussions with staff indicated a cautious approach to a potentially important part of the University's support for effective learning. Although caution is appropriate, the University may wish to consider whether in developing a corporate strategy for ICT it should take into account changes in the way in which students would like their learning to be supported.

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

92. To provide a focus for its approach to employability, the University has developed an Employability Strategy. Its main themes were explained to the ELIR team as part of the presentation at the beginning of the Part 1 visit to the University. The strategy calls for the integration of employment skills into academic curricula; the introduction of PDP; the provision of further opportunities for work-related learning; the delivery of effective careers information and guidance; and the preparation of students for work in local and global economies. To support this strategy, the Careers Service is collaborating with TLS and working with departments and employers. There has been a university-wide employability audit using student focus groups and interviews with key personnel in faculties. The ES includes research students, and attention is being given to the provision of generic skills training to all research students, no matter what the source of their funding, although there are problems in identifying the financial resources which this will entail.

93. The ES is ambitious in its aims, but is at an early stage in its development. There has been an employability audit which will be used to identify examples of good practice as well as aspects of provision needing attention. The Learning and Teaching Development Fund (LTDF) (see below, paragraph 100) is being used to support pilot studies of aspects of the strategy in a number of areas of the University. The RA provided some information regarding progress in providing opportunities for work-related learning, and the preparation of students for work. At the time of the ELIR visit, the University had recently appointed an employability development adviser who is responsible, in

conjunction with LTC, TLS, the Careers Service and academic departments, for the coordination of the actions taken to implement the strategy and for supporting departments in this process.

94. The ELIR team noted that although the strategy 'has been shaped by a desire to enhance student employability as part of the education process', and includes integrating employability within academic curricula, it does not anticipate profound curricular change. A presentation during Part 1 of the ELIR visit made clear to the team that ownership of the strategy by faculties is regarded as a high priority, and that monitoring progress in securing this ownership and making it sustainable have been identified by the University as significant elements in the successful implementation of the strategy.

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

95. The University provides opportunities for student participation in quality assurance and enhancement, and some students make good use of those opportunities. The ELIR team formed the view, however, that cooperation at University level between staff and student representatives in maintaining and enhancing the quality of students' learning experience, is limited in its extent and that there is scope for improved consistency and effectiveness in the ways in which students' views are sought and considered. The University might see some advantage in providing improved guidance and support to give encouragement to students to contribute to the work of the University's deliberative structures at all levels, although the team considered that improved guidance and support alone will not necessarily increase a sense of partnership between the University and its students. In this respect, the team would suggest that enhancement of the partnership between the University and its students might benefit from establishing clear channels of communication in the critical links between the University and the SRC, and between the SRC and the student body that it represents, which are sufficiently clear and open so that all undergraduate and postgraduate students can be confident that they have an effective voice in promoting an effective learning experience. Undoubtedly, increasing pressures on students make for difficulties in the creation of an effective partnership between the University and its students. In the context of those pressures, a strong sense of partnership will be important in helping to dispel doubts that some students may have about the student voice being well received by the University, and in encouraging the body of students, as well as their representatives, to

take an active role in the good management of their learning environment.

96. Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement was often described by staff and students who met the ELIR team principally in terms of student representation on various committees. While representation by some students is undoubtedly a significant aspect of the partnership between students and the University, the promotion of an effective learning experience is critically dependent on the University's ability to engage the wider body of students in this partnership. It was clear to the team that the University has several examples, from academic departments on the Crichton and main campuses and from the work of its service departments, that can provide it with illustrations of how students are enthused by well-designed approaches to active learning. The team would encourage the University to consider how it might improve the scope and focus of the information available to it about students' perception of their experience of learning, and how different approaches to teaching impact upon engagement with learning.

97. Activity in research and scholarship is a distinguishing feature of the University, and the University emphasised the positive influence that such activity has on taught provision for undergraduate and postgraduate students. The ELIR team shared the University's view that a study of the benefits of research-led teaching and learning, as seen by both staff and students, would assist the development of a central aspect of its approach to promoting effective student learning. Such a study will be of value to the University in securing and strengthening its research-led approach, but a necessary precursor will be clarification of the perceptions of staff and students of what they understand by research-led teaching and learning, and establishing effective instruments for evaluating the benefits it brings to learners.

Effectiveness of the University's strategy for quality enhancement

Overview of the University's approach to managing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning

Definition and management of quality enhancement

98. Within the RA, the University emphasised an interpretation, found in the QES, of quality enhancement in a broad sense, and identified the

University's Strategic Plan as the place where its full definition of quality enhancement is addressed. At that high level of definition, the management of quality enhancement converges with the management of the institution as a whole. Within that definition, the University has identified a narrower quality enhancement focus in terms of improving the outcomes of the student learning experience. The strategic framework which guides the management of quality enhancement in this sense is the QES itself. Those responsible for the formulation, approval, implementation and monitoring of the QES are therefore central to the management of quality enhancement. They include the VP (LT)/Clerk of Senate, who has specific responsibility for the QES, senior members of the Senate Office with operational responsibilities for the implementation of the QES, and members of the LTC, as the body with delegated responsibility for monitoring the QES.

99. The RA articulated a two-pronged approach to the management of quality enhancement. Firstly, there is the approach based on a belief in delegating power and autonomy to individual members of academic staff whose professionalism is taken to mean that they are committed to the advancement of their discipline, are self-reflective practitioners and are constantly seeking to improve their practice through major or minor refinements. Secondly, there are university-wide policies and strategies, and associated units, which provide support for, and facilitation of, enhancing activities. Examples of the strategic approach to managing enhancement, driven by top-down policies, strategies and initiatives, were much more in evidence in the RA and the QES. Even so, in discussions with academic staff, the ELIR team heard how, in practice, high-level policies and initiatives do not simply emerge, but are themselves the product of iterative, collegial debate that embraces all levels within the University. The distinction as drawn between the two approaches, individual and strategic, is therefore not sharp. It was nevertheless put to the team that there was indeed a distinction to be made, with the individual approach being reliant upon proactivity on the part of academic staff, and the strategic approach being reliant upon reactivity, recognising that reactivity could also be creative.

100. The University emphasised the levels of engagement with enhancement as a major theme in its presentations to the ELIR team, demonstrating its role within the larger corporate strategy, its realisation in particular strategies (the PRS and the ES), and its implementation through particular projects supported by the LTDF. The team noted the good practice demonstrated in the development of

the WPS, which was highlighted in a presentation to the team during the Part 1 visit. The team explored the management implications of the two-pronged approach throughout meetings with University staff, seeking to understand better how consistent a University-level approach to managing enhancement was with a strongly held view that the prime vehicle for enhancement was embodied in the autonomous professionalism of academic staff. The team also explored with senior managers the way in which quality enhancement had been built into the University's revised Strategic Plan for 2003 to 2006.

101. The RA stated that enhancement is 'primarily attained by "bottom-up" means', although examples of individuals 'acting reflectively upon his or her students' learning' were not strongly featured in the RA. Among staff who met the ELIR team, there were differing views on how the impact of proactive and instinctive individual engagement with enhancement could be managed, or indeed whether it could be managed. One argument was that evidence of impact could easily be adduced from, for example, student feedback or assessment outcomes. Another expressed the view that that one would have to 'dig deep' to find evidence, although the team understood that the ACM and the DPTLA processes, as modified to reflect an increased emphasis on enhancement, would be useful tools for this purpose.

102. The ELIR team found that, in fact, there was convincing evidence that the two approaches both drew strength from mediating initiatives and processes. For example, the team was persuaded that the LTDF gave opportunity for individual members of staff to pursue ideas born of their individual reflection on the learning experience of their students. Individuals who met the team and who had benefited from the fund were keen to stress what an efficient and effective driver for change it could be, allowing a great deal to be achieved with little resource. These staff also emphasised how the award gave recognition to what might be seen as risk-taking innovation, and how the community of award holders, supported by the TLS, found it easier to share good practice. The LTDF, together with the Chancellor's Fund and, in a very limited way, the VP (LT)/Clerk of Senate's discretionary fund, enabled individual and corporate ambitions to converge. The team noted evidence of a strategic approach to scoping areas for support (such as e-learning, the national enhancement themes and employability) being married to individual and departmental concerns, an example being the focus on the year one student experience in the Faculty of Arts, facilitated by the TLS but prompted by the Faculty itself. The team formed the

view that this convergence is likely to increase as the TLS develops further its policy of establishing support level agreements with faculties.

103. These support-level agreements might also play a part in addressing the ELIR team's observation that, in terms of enhancement, faculties appeared to be relatively inactive in mediating the gap between the individual and the University level. The team found the illustration given in the RA of how the Faculty of Arts uses its delegated discretionary funds to support student learning to be less than compelling as an example of an explicitly articulated strategic approach, but it recognised that the QES, as it came to influence planning at all levels, would impact positively on faculty decisions. The team considered that the planned implementation of a fully devolved budgetary system, with faculty deans joining the most senior executive group, is likely to present the University with opportunities to optimise the strategic management of its resources to support quality enhancement at faculty level.

104. Further agents of mediation at faculty level are to be found in faculty committees. It was explained to the ELIR team that the University's top-level committees were replicated at faculty level in order to provide a coherent linkage between policy and practice. The team noted that the recent approval of the QES meant that this model was not yet fully in place with respect to quality enhancement. The RA expressed confidence in the boards of studies system as a key component in ensuring clear and integrated mechanisms and support for enhancement, stating that 'the boards of studies system requires that initiatives emerging from departments are reconciled with the overall practice in the relevant cognate area'. Yet, in its meetings with staff in different faculties, it was difficult for the team to discern anything sufficiently consistent in what it heard about the operation of different boards of studies to be persuaded that there was indeed such a 'system'. While the team recognises the key role played by the FQAOs as 'interpreters' of university-level policies and initiatives that increasingly embrace quality enhancement, it would encourage the University to consider how it might assure itself that there is in place a reliable mechanism to drive forward the quality enhancement agenda at faculty level.

105. The general lively engagement with the debate on enhancement and its management was clear to the ELIR team, and the team would encourage the University to sustain and broaden this engagement. One significant area where debate will clearly be engaged relates to the recommendations of a report for the University produced by the

Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) on e-learning. The commissioning of the report was initiated by the past Principal. Discussion at LTC had also identified a risk that uncoordinated, individual developments, such as the proliferation of local virtual learning environments, might not bring the University the full benefits of innovation. The commissioning of the report is, itself, an indicator of the University's awareness of the benefit of taking a university-level coordinated view of new approaches to teaching and learning.

106. The University at its most senior levels has built approaches to enhancing quality into various objectives in its revised Strategic Plan, so that, for example, its human resource and estates policies cohere with the major objectives of the QES. As the corporate-level objectives are taken to faculty level with the intention that faculties propose how they will deliver the University's Strategic Plan, the management of improvement in the quality of learning and teaching at faculty level will sit within a clear strategic framework that should strengthen the coherence of, and accelerate the convergence of, the University's two-pronged approach towards quality enhancement.

Quality enhancement strategy

107. The QES, approved in December 2003, gives the background to the need to produce a strategy, proposes a definition of quality enhancement and asserts with confidence the University's traditionally keen pursuit of quality enhancement. The two overriding aims of the QES are:

- to maintain and develop attractive, flexible, appropriate and viable programmes of study;
- to provide an environment in which all staff and students are valued and supported in their development and innovation in learning and teaching.

108. Within these two broad aims the University has identified particular initiatives under the following headings:

- flexible, attractive and viable provision, including measures to promote student engagement with their learning experience;
- the new Code of Assessment, including further guidance on the development of ILOs;
- the research base and enhancement of provision, including evaluation of benefits to students of learning in a research environment;
- student placements, including completion of the actions taken in response to Section 9 of the *Code of practice*;

- quality assurance and quality enhancement, including a review of quality assurance systems and of the QES in the light of the Agency's ELIR;
- collaborative activity, including a review of policy and potential for collaborative links;
- international perspective, including the development of PhD programmes with international partners;
- responding to new technologies, including monitoring and disseminating appropriate Information Technology (IT) initiatives for teaching and learning;
- employability strategy, including the introduction of PDP;
- a diverse and broadening range of student needs, including the development of a charter setting out agreed student and University expectations;
- staff development matters, including the introduction of structured continuing professional development in learning and teaching for experienced academic staff, using elements of the New Lecturer Programme (NLP).

In each case, the University has identified specific actions and targets.

109. The QES attributes the successful outcomes of TQA and subject reviews in the University in large part to the natural commitment by academics to the enhancement of learning. The University identifies in its QES a 'deeply rooted culture of improvement', constrained only by availability of resources and the balancing of priorities that such constraint implies. It argues that the approach to quality enhancement has to be seen in a context of underfunding and 'quality standards in the sector...already at a high level', and has to be based on an expectation that 'specific quality enhancements are likely to be relatively modest, and of an incremental nature'.

110. The framing of the QES is seen as an opportunity to gather together a number of recent and new strategic initiatives, including through cross-reference those that are deemed more autonomous: postgraduate research, continuous professional development, employability, widening participation and the section of the Information Strategy that relates to e-learning. The QES takes care to develop a narrower quality enhancement focus in terms of improving the outcomes of the students' learning experience. It stresses the University's desire to 'provide students with an enriching and vital learning experience' based at first-degree level on access to fully flexible programmes of study and on the fact that students are learning in a research

environment. It highlights specific needs in the areas of employability and new technologies.

111. Under the heading of 'Enthusing Students', the QES recognises the challenge of dealing with the 'increasing apathy [that] has begun to feature in the reports emerging from the University's QA process'. Students who met the ELIR team expressed the view that responsibility for enthusing students lay with the lecturing staff, and were keen on any process, such as student feedback or peer observation, that identified and remedied poor quality teaching. While agreeing, the team was unable to confirm the existence of a systematic peer review of teaching or of any sustained reflection at university level on making students enthusiastic learners. The team formed the view that there is a risk of students being seen as less than fully active partners both in the learning process and in their engagement with the QES.

112. The QES was approved by the Senate in December 2003 and was, therefore, at the time of the ELIR visits, relatively new. This was recognised by the ELIR team in considering the reception and impact of the strategy. The University accepts that this first QES is largely built up from existing initiatives and strategic approaches. This approach to developing the QES is realistic, and brings with it a straightforward pragmatism and persuasiveness. The fact that the development of the QES coincided with the revision of the University's Strategic Plan has made it possible for the University to ensure that the objectives and spirit of the former are embraced by the latter, so that, as the emerging Strategic Plan permeates all levels of the University, the link between QES objectives and, for example, faculty actions will be more evident.

113. The formulation of the QES, through the EC and its subcommittees, has brought its own benefits. The ELIR team saw that it has caused groups, particularly support services such as the Senate Office and the TLS, to be drawn together to focus on a common agenda. The formulation has helped to integrate various initiatives, to codify what was already happening and to make explicit what was implicit. It has provided the University with a management tool capable of sharpening prioritisation of resource allocation, and a monitoring tool capable of showing evidence of progress. Nevertheless, the team arrived at the view that student involvement in the formulation of the strategy appeared somewhat limited beyond student representation on EC and the Senate.

114. The ELIR team saw evidence that, as well as providing a catalyst for support services to work together the better to support student learning, the

QES had given impetus and status to the work of those services, and had already helped them to work even more productively with departments. It appears to have had an immediate impact on the quality of the self-evaluation reports of departments preparing for a DPTLA event, by giving pointers to what should be addressed in terms of enhancement-related strategies and policies. The FQAOs who met the team offered the view that the QES endorsed and gave value to their efforts to spread good practice. The team heard that, even in the short time since its approval, the very existence of the QES could be seen as an institutional incentive to academic staff to pursue their proactive enhancement of quality. It was argued to the team that it is this increased visibility of quality enhancement that is new rather than the practice of enhancing quality. While acknowledging the strength of this argument, the team considered that it might not give sufficient weight to recognising the benefits of the QES that go beyond merely raising the visibility of quality enhancement within the University.

115. The RA stated that prime responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the QES rests with the Senate Office which advises the University on the resources needed and their prioritisation. Executive responsibility for the QES is borne by the VP (LT)/Clerk of Senate although, in practice, responsibility is variously delegated to committees, units and individuals. A notable feature of the QES is the identification of particular actions and targets, although it is not always made clear who has responsibility for carrying out the actions, or the timescale for their completion. The evaluation of the QES will be the responsibility of the EC, conducted through its Convenor with the help of the Senate Office and the LTC. Each element of the strategy will have its own metrics, and it was evident to the ELIR team that some pre-existing initiatives already had monitoring and evaluation tools in place. The University's expectation that change would be modest and incremental (the seven-year process of change in the medical curriculum was cited as an example) might be confirmed or challenged by its own monitoring. The team formed the view, from the evidence of enthusiasm and commitment that it saw in certain areas, that the pace of change might be less modest than envisaged; the innovations taking place on the Crichton Campus (see above, paragraph 90) did not, for example, appear to the team to be either modest or incremental. Senior staff of the University described the Crichton Campus to the team as a research and development site for learning and teaching, and explained that the University is already considering how it can evaluate the careful

developments there and interpret them into good practice more widely.

116. The ELIR team noted that the University intends its QES to be reviewed annually, a positive indication of a dynamic agenda. The University's review of the QES will be informed by the outcome of this ELIR process and by an assessment of the merits of the ELIR system generally. It was partly for this reason that the team, during its Part 2 visit, engaged explicitly in brief discussions with most of those groups it met on the experience of the ELIR process. The discussions usefully added to the team's understanding of the way in which the University was tackling the new emphasis on quality enhancement, and consistently demonstrated the extent of that engagement at different levels in the University.

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

117. The RA identified deliberate actions taken by the University in order to increase the enhancement focus within quality assurance processes. These included modifications to the ACM process, adaptation of DPTLA arrangements and more active consideration of findings of internal and external quality assurance reviews by senior central committees. The ELIR team benefited from a presentation by the Head of the Senate Office on the key culture changes implicit in the QES, in particular, the relationship between internal quality assurance processes and enhancement activity.

118. The University identifies as a key QES objective the bringing together, as much as possible, of quality assurance processes and the deeply held responsibility that staff have for teaching and learning. Its intention is to arrive at a position where quality assurance, often perceived as a formal, externally driven process, and quality enhancement, or the taking of deliberate steps to achieve it, converge to the benefit of the management of programmes and thus to students' experience of learning. As the emphasis on quality management moves towards enhancement, there is an expectation that quality assurance will become internalised at the level of the individual, consistent with the intuitive academic search for improvement. The aspiration is that, rather than assurance and enhancement being large 'system' terms, they will be lived at the level of the individual. The QES aspires to a situation in which 'formal quality assurance becomes much more the channel and vehicle to which staff turn in managing programmes of study'.

119. The RA stated that the University is already beginning to achieve consistency between its belief

in the primacy of the individual member of staff in quality enhancement and its evolving internal quality assurance arrangements. The latter are evolving so as to provide sharper means to facilitate 'bottom-up' enhancement and the dissemination of good practice. The RA explained that they aim 'to be less simply diagnostic and more therapeutic and prospective in their emphases'.

120. Through its reading of DPTLA-related documents, the ELIR team was able to confirm the deliberate steps taken by the University to secure greater linkage between quality assurance and quality enhancement processes. The whole of the DPTLA process has been designed to elicit evidence that enhancement is happening, and has been further revised to focus less on matters of process and more on issues that affect student learning directly. The team recognised the enrichment of the DPTLA process that is provided by its engagement with representatives of the TLS: firstly, as critical friends in the department's preparation for review; secondly, as full members of the DPTLA panel; and, thirdly, as collectors of emerging issues, to be disseminated in the case of good practice, or to be addressed in the case of areas for development through future support-level agreements with the relevant faculty. Scrutiny of the minutes of the EC and the ARC confirmed to the team the extent of senior level committee involvement in the review and enhancement process.

121. The ELIR team heard from staff and students examples of transparent feedback on internal review events and of action following (for example, on issues of teaching accommodation). It was persuaded that this transparency had already demonstrated the benefits of enhancement-led processes, and had increased confidence in a view of quality assurance processes as being a step along the path towards quality enhancement, rather than an audit system complete in itself.

122. The ELIR team was not able to find the same level of integration of quality assurance and quality enhancement approaches in the University's approval processes. Past hesitations about the need to produce programme specifications and the inconsistent links between ILOs and assessment have, in the team's view, not helped to secure a robust focus on quality enhancement at the heart of programme design.

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

123. The University outlined in its RA a variety of approaches towards reward, recognition and

implementation of good practice: recognition through internal mechanisms; reward through accredited qualifications, promotion criteria and the availability of developmental funding; and internal dissemination to support the implementation of good practice. In order both to recognise good practice and to give it recognition, the University relies on reporting chains from departments to senior central committees, on less formal departmental and faculty focus groups, and on the activities of the TLS.

124. The QES explains in more detail how the University wishes to support the professional development of its staff through the NLP (see below, paragraph 126); NLP's extension to engage more experienced staff; funding sabbaticals to promote learning and teaching development; encouraging sustained engagement with LTSN centres; the continued refinement of formal training for graduate teaching assistants and postgraduate research students; pressing for the establishment of a national Teaching Fellowships Scheme for Scotland, and through monitoring the progress of the University Teacher and Senior University Teacher categories.

125. The ELIR team was interested to understand the perceived status of a recently introduced category of staff, the University Teacher and the Senior University Teacher, noting that such appointments and designations are more common in some parts of the University than others. University Teachers and Senior University Teachers are expected to deliver research-informed, if not research-led, teaching. The equivalence of their status to that of research-active academic staff was not questioned by any staff who discussed these matters with the team. The University's human resources documentation refers to broad criteria for promotion, with a clear commitment by the University to reward excellence in teaching, and the team was informed that opportunities are being explored to allow personal chairs to be awarded in the area of student learning. Nevertheless, in its meetings with faculty staff the team came across the view more than once that staff still perceived research as taking precedence over teaching.

126. The NLP, overseen by TLS, received positive comment from a variety of sources. This gave further confirmation to the ELIR team of the esteem which TLS enjoys in the University. In matters of policy, professional development of staff and curriculum development, a good deal clearly depends on the activities of TLS, its resources and recognition of its expertise and authority. Staff who met the team reported that the NLP enhances the competence of new lecturers as well as making them critically reflective practitioners. Through the production of a

portfolio that is peer-reviewed, new probationary lecturers have evidence of their achievement, and of the University's recognition of this achievement. Staff who met the team stressed more than once the dynamism of young colleagues, their appreciation of the NLP, and their ease of engagement with quality assurance and enhancement processes. Enhancing the quality of student learning through a series of CPD events for experienced staff is, however, proving more problematic. Attempts to build in a mandatory amount of time spent on CPD have not been supported widely by staff.

127. The University anticipates that a steady change in attitudes towards CPD will follow the imminent introduction of a performance management scheme, replacing a staff appraisal scheme on the effectiveness of which the RA was silent. The ELIR team noted that the second central objective of the QES was 'to provide an environment in which all staff...are valued and supported in their development and innovation in learning and teaching', yet the report commissioned from the OBHE noted 'a general sense that teaching was undervalued, and did not contribute sufficiently to promotion/reward'. This observation was discussed at meetings with various levels of staff, including newly appointed lecturers as well as senior professors. The team learnt from its discussions that this perception was not uncommon, and formed the view that such a perception, whether or not well-founded, could have a negative impact on the achievement of the primary objectives of the QES.

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

128. It was clear to the ELIR team from the RA and from discussions with staff and students during the visits that, prior to the formulation of its QES, the University was engaged in activities that sought to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Evidence of this is manifest in features such as the LTDF (recognised by staff as a productive use of resource), the establishment of the posts of University Teacher and Senior University Teacher, the ES, and the beneficial impact of the NLP on approaches to learning. What was less clear to the team was how the combined effect of these activities had made a measurable impact on the quality of teaching and learning. As the QES becomes more established, the gathering of evidence in the monitoring process will in itself help towards an evaluation of these activities both singly and collectively.

129. The ELIR team considered that the commissioning of a report by the OBHE on e-learning was a good indicator of the University's awareness of a need to explore new approaches to teaching and learning that will undoubtedly have an impact upon all faculties and support units. The commissioning of the report also indicated the University's recognition of the importance of securing maximum benefit from new approaches to teaching and learning by their coordination at university level.

130. It appeared to the ELIR team that, while there were clearly examples of individually driven enhancements and equally clearly significant University-driven initiatives that predated the QES, what was less evident was significant involvement at faculty level. The University will wish to assure itself that there is in place a mechanism at faculty level to drive forward its quality enhancement agenda, so that it can have confidence in the way enhancement is managed and overseen at its middle management tier. Such a process might also include a review of the terms of reference of all relevant committees and role descriptions, to ensure that responsibilities for quality enhancement are clear. The team recognised the key role played by the FQAOs as 'interpreters' of university-level policies and initiatives, reflecting their increasing engagement with quality enhancement alongside quality assurance.

131. As the University restructures its senior management, bringing faculty deans onto the most senior executive group and implementing a fully devolved budgetary system, it will no doubt wish to exploit the opportunities to optimise the strategic management of its resources to support quality enhancement at faculty level where the combined effect of policies and practices for ensuring improvement will have the most immediate impact on the students' learning experience. In so doing, the ELIR team would encourage the University to reflect further on how it can best establish and maintain, in its research-intensive environment, a culture in which initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning will continue to thrive.

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

132. The ELIR team found that, although the QES is new, it is already having an effective role as a codifier of existing activity and a catalyst for change. In particular, the actual formulation of the QES is having a significant impact on the evolution of the University's Strategic Plan, as well as a practical effect on collaborations between support departments and on their engagement with academic departments.

The team observed a correlation between involvement in the QES formulation and subsequent sense of ownership. Where involvement was weak (for example, among the student body and in some committees), the team observed occasional confusion about certain parts of the QES. Where involvement was strong (for example, in the TLS), the commitment to delivery was self-evident.

133. Delivery itself might be aided by the production of an implementation plan which makes responsibilities for action clearer and which also proposes measures for gauging success. Since enhancement, by definition, will involve an element of risk where innovation and resource are involved, there may be an argument for including some appropriate assessment of the risk that might be associated with each action of the QES.

134. While some staff argued that the main impact of the QES lay in the visibility it gave to quality enhancement rather than in any effect on the practice of enhancement itself, the ELIR team was persuaded of benefits already simply recognised by the University that go beyond just raising visibility. The University might see merit in gaining some measure of how the existence of the QES adds value to policies, procedures and initiatives in order, firstly, to provide an evaluative dimension to inform the management of resources for supporting the QES and, secondly, to promote the effectiveness of the QES among its own staff. The challenge to the University is how it is going to evaluate the impact of having a QES, as distinct from the impact of initiatives and actions contained in the QES. If the QES is to maintain its credibility with staff as a strategy then the mechanisms by which the evaluation are to take place, whether formative or summative, might benefit from greater clarity.

135. The dual aim of strategising quality enhancement while making quality assurance instinctive is acknowledged by the ELIR team as being ambitious. The VP (LT)/Clerk of Senate has undertaken to engage in structured dialogues with faculties with the aim of increasing the value of quality assurance systems in terms of quality enhancement. The FQAOs have a key role here as interpreters and persuaders in developing an internalisation of quality assurance processes, the success of which is bound up with the achievement of an increased emphasis on quality enhancement. Examples of transparent feedback on reviewing events, and of action following them, have been persuasive in demonstrating the benefits of enhancement-led processes that add impact to quality assurance. As it implements its QES, the

University has the opportunity to build upon this important step towards realising its ambition of making quality assurance an inherent feature of interactions between staff and students.

136. As it seeks to realise this ambition, the University will wish to reflect upon the careful balance to be struck between its wish to promote institutional-level enhancement policies and its emphasis on the individual academic as the principal and autonomous agent of enhancement. In that context, the University might also reflect upon whether it has a recognition and reward strategy that is appropriate for engaging staff fully in the implementation of the QES, and for creating a culture of approaching quality enhancement strategically as well as instinctively. The team supports the University's attempts to accelerate the CPD of its experienced staff and to become a flagship institution in this regard.

137. Despite the efforts made by the University to put excellence in teaching on a par with excellence in research, the ELIR team still gained the view that a significant number of staff see research as taking precedence over teaching in career progression, a view echoed in the report commissioned from the OBHE. Such perceptions among academic staff, whether or not well founded, could have a negative impact on the achievement of the primary objectives of the QES. In order to counter these perceptions, and to diminish their possible negative impact, the University might see merit in reaffirming its determination to establish overt parity of career progression for teaching specialists. On the other hand, teachers are only one party in the partnership, and the team would therefore encourage the University to reflect, overall, whether its QES has an appropriate emphasis on learners, as distinct from teachers, for improving the learning experience of its students.

Summary

Background to the institution and the ELIR method

138. The University of Glasgow (the University) was established in 1451, and its modern constitutional framework is derived from a series of Universities (Scotland) Acts between 1858 and 1966. In all academic matters, its supreme authority is the Senate which has statutory responsibility for regulating teaching and promoting research. There are more than 100 academic departments, interdisciplinary centres, schools and institutes. They are grouped together into 10 faculties: Arts; Biomedical and Life Sciences; Education; Engineering; Information and Mathematical Sciences; Law and Financial Studies; Medicine; Physical Sciences; Social Sciences; and Veterinary Medicine.

139. The mission of the University is to be a major research-led university operating in an international context with the following fundamental aims:

- to provide education through the development of learning in a research environment;
- to undertake fundamental, strategic and applied research;
- to sustain and add value to Scottish culture, to the natural environment and to the national economy.

140. The Principal is supported by five vice-principals (VPs) with functional responsibilities, three of whom have additional territorial faculty responsibilities. The VP (Learning and Teaching) is also the Clerk of Senate. The Senate is responsible for academic quality in its broadest sense, providing final approval for developments in academic policy across the University. This responsibility is delegated to a number of senior committees, notably the Education Committee (EC) and the Academic Regulations Committee (ARC).

141. The University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA) which set out the University's strategy for quality enhancement, its approach to the management of quality and standards and its view of the effectiveness of its approach. The RA provided the focus for the review and was used to develop a programme of activities by the ELIR team to provide a representative illustration of the way the University approaches the management of quality assurance, quality enhancement and academic standards. The RA provided four case studies that, among other things, demonstrated how enhancement activities could grow from individual initiative, a departmentally recognised need, as well as from university-wide ventures. The self-critical nature of the RA greatly assisted the review.

Overview of the matters raised by the review

142. The University's Quality Enhancement Strategy (QES) has two overriding aims which are:

- to maintain and develop attractive, flexible, appropriate and viable programmes of study;
- to provide an environment in which all staff and students are valued and supported in their development and innovation in Learning and Teaching.

143. The University has a process of review of departmental programmes of teaching, learning and assessment (DPTLA). The ELIR team was interested to explore the effectiveness of the DPTLA process as a mechanism of central importance in quality assurance and quality enhancement. Its enquiries into quality management structures extended to the University's validated provision delivered through its accredited and associated institutions. Other themes pursued in the review included the student experience of learning in a research-led university; the ways in which the University measures the effectiveness of the student learning experience; the role of staff development in the quality enhancement process; the role of students and its effectiveness in decision-making; and the development of the University's Code of Assessment.

144. The University's management of quality enhancement takes a two-pronged approach, based on delegating power and autonomy to individual members of academic staff who seek to improve their practice through major or minor refinements, and on university-wide policies and strategies and associated units that provide support for, and facilitation of, enhancing activities. The ELIR team explored the management implications of the two-pronged approach, seeking to understand better how consistent a university-level approach to managing enhancement was with a strongly-held view that the prime vehicle for enhancement was embodied in the autonomous academic acting with 'inherent' professionalism.

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

145. The University's procedures for programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review have all undergone significant change within the last three years. Although they are still evolving, they were sufficiently well established at the time of the review visit for the improvements resulting from these changes to be observable. The variability to which annual course monitoring has previously been

subject has been recognised by the University, and is being actively addressed.

146. The ELIR team considered the DPTLA system of periodic review to be robust, particularly in its approach to identification of recommended action points and the subsequent monitoring of their implementation. It is clear that the self-evaluation reports that form part of the DPTLA process have been positively influenced by the formulation of the University's strategy for quality enhancement, and the team would encourage the University to make the link between quality assessment and enhancement more explicit in periodic review. In considering how the DPTLA process might evolve, the team would invite the University to give further thought to how joint degree programmes are to be covered most effectively in periodic review. The team noted the University's new procedures for taking oversight of the reports of professional and statutory bodies, and its increased collaboration with employers, and considered that these would make useful contributions to periodic review of relevant programmes.

147. The University has established a Code of Assessment. The Guide that supports the Code states that 'there cannot be a scheme of assessment without written and thereby explicit Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)'. The University has also committed itself to the introduction of programme specifications, in which ILOs are an essential component. The ELIR team found that the University is working to achieve a comprehensive set of programme specifications for its portfolio of taught provision, and would encourage the University to expedite this development, both to make more secure the link between academic standards and external reference points, and because clear specification of ILOs is an essential feature of its Code of Assessment.

148. The academic standards of the University's awards for all its taught programmes, both undergraduate and postgraduate, are further secured by its close involvement with its external examiners. The University considers that it has effective external examining systems for ensuring that student performance is judged properly and for the maintenance of academic standards, and the ELIR team endorses that view. The University recognises a need to develop procedures for the appointment of external examiners for research degrees that mirror those already in use for taught provision, and the team noted that this matter was being addressed through a working group established by the ARC.

149. The University's Postgraduate Research Strategy makes clear its intention to strengthen the supervision and training of postgraduate research

students. The DPTLA process does not, at present, cover provision for research students so that, in some cases, there is no external and independent review of provision for such students. There would be benefit in the University considering how it might ensure that there is systematic periodic review of provision and support for research students, incorporating external input, whether through the DPTLA process or through another process with a particular focus on postgraduate research.

150. The ELIR review included the University's validation agreements which are few in number and in some cases long established. A target for the University's QES is stated as 'the wholesale review of policies and procedures for collaborative activities'. As part of this review, the team would encourage the University to consider the benefit of ensuring that there is clearer definition of the division of responsibilities for the assurance of quality and security of standards in validated provision between the University and its partner institutions.

151. The University's RA included a detailed and self-critical account of its internal systems for the maintenance of quality and standards. While recognising and identifying areas for development, it judged the overall system to be 'rigorous, thorough and effective'. From its meetings with staff and students, and from its reading of relevant documentation, the ELIR team was able to endorse the University's view. However, the RA also acknowledged that pressures on the Senate Office had delayed the introduction of some planned changes to the University's quality assurance procedures and the maintenance of its Guide to Good Practice for the Quality Assurance of Teaching. The University might usefully consider how in future it could ensure that the planned operation of its quality management procedures is less sensitive to such pressures.

152. Overall, the ELIR team's study of the implementation and effectiveness of the University's internal review systems confirms that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's procedures for the present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

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

153. In its reading of publicity materials, and from its meetings with students, the ELIR team found no instances of misleading information, either for internal

or for external purposes. The University recognises, however, that the information is currently incomplete, and has experienced some difficulties with the provision of statistical information for the purposes of internal monitoring and review. In respect of published material for its validated arrangements, the team would invite the University to consider whether it is confident that the arrangements for approving information published by its partner institutions are appropriate and reliable.

154. Overall, the ELIR team considered that the University is taking appropriate steps to ensure that its published information is accurate and fair, while noting the University's awareness of current weaknesses in the management of data. At the time of the review visits, SHEFC had not yet specified exactly what information it would expect to be published about student progression and completion. The University is aware that, when this has been determined, delivery of the required information may have resource implications for its Planning Office.

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

155. The University provides opportunities for student participation in quality assurance and enhancement, and some students make good use of those opportunities. The ELIR team formed the view, however, that cooperation, at University level, between staff and student representatives in maintaining and enhancing the quality of students' learning experience is limited in its extent, and that there is scope for improved consistency and effectiveness in the ways in which students' views are sought and considered. The University might see some advantage in providing improved guidance and support to give encouragement to students to contribute to the work of the University's deliberative structures at all levels. The team considered, however, that improved guidance and support alone will not necessarily increase a sense of partnership between the University and its students. In this respect, the team would suggest that enhancement of the partnership between the University and its students might benefit from establishing clear channels of communication in the critical links between the University and the Students' Representative Council (SRC), and between the SRC and the student body that it represents, which are sufficiently clear and open so that all undergraduate and postgraduate students can be confident they have an effective voice in promoting an effective learning experience. Undoubtedly, increasing pressures on students make for difficulties in the creation of an

effective partnership between the University and its students. In the context of those pressures, a strong sense of partnership will be important in helping to dispel doubts that some students may have about the student voice being well received by the University, and in encouraging the body of students, and their representatives, to take an active role in the good management of their learning environment.

156. Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement was often described by staff and students who met the ELIR team principally in terms of student representation on various committees. While representation by some students is undoubtedly a significant aspect of the partnership between students and the University, the promotion of an effective learning experience is critically dependent on the University's ability to engage the wider body of students in this partnership. It was clear to the team that the University has several examples, from academic departments on the Crichton and main campuses, and from the work of its service departments, that can provide it with illustrations of how students are enthused by well-designed approaches to active learning. The team would encourage the University to consider how it might improve the scope and focus of the information available to it about students' perception of their experience of learning, and how different approaches to teaching impact upon engagement with learning.

157. Activity in research and scholarship is a distinguishing feature of the University, and the University emphasised the positive influence that such activity has on taught provision for undergraduate and postgraduate students. The ELIR team shared the University's view that a study of the benefits of research-led teaching and learning, as seen by both staff and students, would assist the development of a central aspect of its approach to promoting effective student learning. Such a study will be of value to the University in securing and strengthening its research-led approach, but a necessary precursor will be clarification of the perceptions of staff and students of what they understand by research-led teaching and learning, and establishing effective instruments for evaluating the benefits it brings to learners.

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

158. It was clear to the ELIR team from the RA and from discussions with staff and students during the visits that, prior to the formulation of its QES, the

University was engaged in activities that sought to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Evidence of this is manifest in features such as the Learning and Teaching Development Fund (recognised by staff as a productive use of resource), the establishment of the posts of University Teacher and Senior University Teacher, the Employability Strategy, and the beneficial impact of the New Lecturer Programme on approaches to learning. What was less clear to the team was how the combined effect of these activities had made a measurable impact on the quality of teaching and learning. As the QES becomes more established, the gathering of evidence in the monitoring process will in itself help towards an evaluation of these activities both singly and collectively.

159. The ELIR team considered that the commissioning of a report by the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) on e-learning was a good indicator of the University's awareness of a need to explore new approaches to teaching and learning that will undoubtedly have an impact upon all faculties and support units. The commissioning of the report also indicated the University's recognition of the importance of securing maximum benefit from new approaches to teaching and learning by their coordination at university level.

160. It appeared to the ELIR team that while there were clearly examples of individually driven enhancements, and equally clearly significant University-driven initiatives that predated the QES, what was less evident was significant involvement at faculty level. The University will wish to assure itself that there is in place a mechanism at faculty level to drive forward its quality enhancement agenda, so that it can have confidence in the way enhancement is managed and overseen at its middle-management tier. Such a process might also include a review of the terms of reference of all relevant committees and role descriptions to ensure that responsibilities for quality enhancement are clear. The team recognised the key role played by the faculty quality assurance officers (FQAOs) as 'interpreters' of university-level policies and initiatives, reflecting their increasing engagement with quality enhancement alongside quality assurance.

161. As the University restructures its senior management, bringing faculty deans onto the most senior executive group and implementing a fully devolved budgetary system, it will no doubt wish to exploit the opportunities to optimise the strategic management of its resources to support quality enhancement at faculty level, where the combined effect of policies and practices for ensuring

improvement will have the most immediate impact on the students' learning experience. In so doing, the ELIR team would encourage the University to reflect further on how it can best establish and maintain, in its research-intensive environment, a culture in which initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning will continue to thrive.

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

162. The ELIR team found that although the QES is new, it is already having an effective role as a codifier of existing activity and a catalyst for change. In particular, the actual formulation of the QES is having a significant impact on the evolution of the University's Strategic Plan, as well as a practical effect on collaborations between support departments and on their engagement with academic departments. The team observed a correlation between involvement in the QES formulation and subsequent sense of ownership. Where involvement was weak (for example, among the student body and in some committees), the team observed occasional confusion about certain parts of the QES. Where involvement was strong (for example, in the Teaching and Learning Service), the commitment to delivery was self-evident.

163. Delivery itself might be aided by the production of an implementation plan that makes responsibilities for action clearer, and which also proposes measures for gauging success. Since enhancement, by definition, will involve an element of risk where innovation and resource are involved, there may be an argument for including some appropriate assessment of the risk that might be associated with each action of the QES.

164. While some staff argued that the main impact of the QES lay in the visibility it gave to quality enhancement rather than in any effect on the practice of enhancement itself, the ELIR team was persuaded of benefits already recognised by the University that go beyond just raising visibility. The University might see merit in gaining some measure of how the existence of the QES adds value to policies, procedures and initiatives in order, firstly, to provide an evaluative dimension to inform the management of resources for supporting the QES and, secondly, to promote the effectiveness of the QES among its own staff. The challenge to the University is how it is going to evaluate the impact of having a QES, as distinct from the impact of initiatives and actions contained in the QES. If the QES is to maintain its credibility with staff as

a strategy, then the mechanisms by which the evaluation, whether formative or summative, is to take place might benefit from greater clarity.

165. The dual aim of strategising quality enhancement while making quality assurance instinctive is acknowledged by the ELIR team as being ambitious. The VP (LT)/Clerk of Senate has undertaken to engage in structured dialogues with faculties, with the aim of increasing the value of quality assurance systems in terms of quality enhancement. The FQAOs have a key role here as interpreters and persuaders in developing an internalisation of quality assurance processes, the success of which is bound up with the achievement of an increased emphasis on quality enhancement. Examples of transparent feedback on reviewing events, and of action following them, have been persuasive in demonstrating the benefits of enhancement-led processes that add impact to quality assurance. As it implements its QES, the University has the opportunity to build upon this important step towards realising its ambition of making quality assurance an inherent feature of interactions between staff and students.

166. As it seeks to realise this ambition, the University will wish to reflect upon the careful balance to be struck between its wish to promote institutional-level enhancement policies and its emphasis on the individual academic as the principal and autonomous agent of enhancement. In that context, the University might also reflect upon whether it has a recognition and reward strategy that is appropriate for engaging staff fully in the implementation of the QES, and for creating a culture of approaching quality enhancement strategically as well as instinctively. The team supports the University's attempts to accelerate the continuing professional development of its experienced staff and to become a flagship institution in this regard.

167. Despite the efforts made by the University to put excellence in teaching on a par with excellence in research, the ELIR team still gained the view that a significant number of staff see research as taking precedence over teaching in career progression, a view echoed in the report commissioned from the OBHE. Such perceptions among academic staff, whether or not well founded, could have a negative impact on the achievement of the primary objectives of the QES. In order to counter these perceptions, and to diminish their possible negative impact, the University might see merit in reaffirming its determination to establish overt parity of career progression for teaching specialists. On the other

hand, teachers are only one party in the partnership, and the team would therefore encourage the University to reflect, overall, whether its QES has an appropriate emphasis on learners, as distinct from teachers, for improving the learning experience of its students.

