



Abertay University

Follow-up Report to the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)

April 2023

Preface

One year after publication of their ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to submit a Follow-up Report to QAA Scotland. These reports are also submitted to the Scottish Funding Council. Follow-up Reports are written in the institution's own words and require to be endorsed by the institution's Governing Body prior to publication on the QAA website. Guidance on the content and structure is provided by QAA Scotland.

Institutions are asked to focus on the action they have taken since the review and to include an indication of the effectiveness of that action. ELIR reports highlight positive practice as well as areas for development, and institutions are encouraged to comment on key areas of activity relating to good practice that they have prioritised since the ELIR.

Follow-up Reports are discussed with institutions as part of the ELIR annual discussion meetings.

Enhancement-Led Institutional Review: Follow-up Report

1. Introduction

QAA Scotland conducted an Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) of Abertay University during November and December 2021, with the QAA's reports of this review being published in April 2022. The overarching judgement was that the University has effective arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience. This is a positive judgement, which means that the University meets sector expectations in securing the academic standards of its awards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience it provides, currently and into the future. This judgement confirms there can be public confidence in the University's awards and in the quality of the learning experience it provides for its students.

Following receipt of the ELIR reports, the University's ELIR Steering Group¹ drew up an overarching action plan (with named individuals identified as responsible for progressing each component of the plan) in response to the recommendations made in the ELIR reports. Part of the process of creating the action plan was informed by a University-wide seminar on 'Why effective isn't enough: Looking at the ELIR outcomes', held on 4 May 22, organised and facilitated by the Abertay Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy. Academic and professional services staff from across the University participated in this seminar and made suggestions on how we could respond to the recommendations. These suggestions influenced thinking about the recommendations and some suggestions have been incorporated into the action plans where appropriate.

The ELIR Steering Group has responsibility for maintaining oversight of the action plan. Each recommendation has been allocated to a member of staff on the ELIR Steering Group to lead on its implementation and they have produced more detailed action plans. These are reviewed by the ELIR Steering Group every 6 months which reports progress to the following University's Teaching and Learning Committee. The work of the Teaching and Learning Committee is then reported to Senate.

¹ The ELIR Steering Group membership includes the Deputy Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor; Vice Principal (Strategy and Governance) and University Secretary; Deans of the Graduate School, Abertay Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy and the Schools of Applied Sciences, Design and Informatics, and Business, Law and Social Sciences; Director of Student and Academic Services; Chair of the Partnerships Committee; Head of Governance; CEO of the Abertay Students' Association; President and Vice-President of the Abertay Students' Association; and Head of Teaching Quality and Learning Enhancement (AbLE Academy)..

This Follow-up Report has been prepared by the ELIR Steering Group. It has been submitted and discussed at Teaching and Learning Committee and Senate. Final approval was given by Court in April 2023.

2. Main areas in which action has been taken since ELIR

The University received both an Outcome Report and a more detailed Technical Report. The detail within the Technical Report was used to give a steer to the ELIR Steering Group of the context behind the recommendations and therefore helped main actors to develop action plans that effectively answered the recommendations.

2.1 Effective implementation of University strategies

The ELIR Outcome Report stated that the University should:

building on its broadly effective approach to strategic planning in relation to learning and teaching, with a particular strength being the widespread consultation with staff and students during the formulation of the University Strategy and its underpinning strategies, including the Learning Enhancement Strategy. The ELIR team recommends that the University should undertake work to ensure that among all staff there is a clear understanding and ownership of these strategies, and how they inform institutional priorities and actions. In support of this, the University is asked to enable effective and systematic implementation, supported by appropriate monitoring and evaluation of impact to ensure the achievement of strategic goals.

A programme of work has commenced in relation to this recommendation. Institutional KPIs are being reviewed during 2022-23 alongside the development of a framework of supporting indicators, which are aligned to the new supporting strategies. Significant improvements have been made to our business intelligence to improve the monitoring of progress against our outcomes. This is initially focussed on student data but will be expanded to other areas and to include all of the KPIs in time. An engagement framework was agreed by the Senior Management Team in October 2022 which included a series of regular meetings between senior management and staff, in different formats, throughout the year. This is part of our response to the Staff Engagement Survey and the meetings are intended to build on existing good practice and to improve two-way communication between the senior team and staff. A University Staff Engagement and Wellbeing Action Plan has been developed and a new University Staff Engagement and Wellbeing Group monitors these actions. This framework will be kept under review and the impact will be evaluated through the next staff engagement survey.

In addition, the sub-strategies that are currently being developed have a clear consultation and dissemination strategy. For example, in September 2022, People Services ran a number of open sessions (both online and on campus) for staff to gather views on the draft People Strategy and the Principal's Address to all staff (which was on-campus but also live-streamed online) on the 8 March 2023 included details of where we are with the various strategies, including those currently being developed. Updates on progress relating to strategies are also published in our staff Community Updates which are a fortnightly newsletter keeping staff informed about Abertay news and events.

Sub-strategies that have been, or are being developed, include a new People Strategy (approved November 2022), Civic Engagement Strategy, Sustainable Development Strategy, International Strategy, Estates Strategy, Financial Strategy and Integrated Digital and IT Strategy. Progress on existing strategies are reviewed regularly. For example, the Learning Enhancement Strategy is reviewed yearly and updated and discussed at Teaching and Learning Committee. Through 2023, the process for the 2025-30 Strategic Plan is being devised ensuring that appropriate engagement is built in.

2.2 Student retention

The ELIR Outcome Report stated that the University should:

build on its emerging plans aimed at improving student retention, by developing an evidence-based institutional approach to identify, implement and regularly evaluate the impact and effectiveness of interventions on its retention performance”

A plan has been created with specified timelines to oversee a programme of work which is scheduled to run until September 2024. This work includes identifying the appropriate data to review student retention. A key aspect of this, undertaken by the University’s Planning team, has been to create a bespoke business intelligence board that all staff can interrogate to get detailed information about the retention and progression on their modules or programmes. This was launched as the Retention, Progression and Achievement BI app in January 2023 and provides staff with interactive visualisations and data on retention rates, progression rates and module performance, broken down by various characteristics (such as young/mature student, declared disability, stage, contextual entrant, new or returning student). The data within the app covers from the 2018-19 academic year up to the 2021-22 academic year. This can offer year on year comparisons to gauge improvement and allow staff to interrogate the data by student characteristic. The Senior Management Team, Head of Division, Heads of Teaching Quality and Learning Enhancement and some colleagues in admissions, marketing, careers and student services have automatic access. Other members of staff can request access. This data set has been utilised to produce the latest retention and progression data for SMT in January 2023 and for Court in February 2023. The data set was also used to look at all programmes in February 2023 for retention over the past three years. This is being followed up by developmental workshops and programme level action plans in April 2023.

Part of our retention work has been the creation of microcredentials which launched in September 2022 and are mandatory for all first year students (except those on BSc (Hons) Mental Health Nursing due to accrediting body requirements). These microcredentials, known as “[MySuccess modules](#)”, all touch on different elements of success for a successful university career and beyond, therefore supporting students in making the transition into university and enhancing retention. There are 9 modules available, covering topics such as wellbeing, developing academic writing skills, digital skills and thinking about the employability. All students take a core MySuccess module called “Being Successful at Abertay” which sets the foundations for academic and personal success at university. Students then choose between 1-3 other microcredentials, depending on their programme structures, and this choice is informed by a diagnostic taken during “Being Successful at Abertay”. Work has

been ongoing to evaluate the impact of this first year of microcredentials and this work will be reported to Teaching and Learning Committee in May 2023.

2.3 Feedback on assessment

The ELIR Outcome Report stated that:

the University should continue to work with staff and students (across all modes of study), to address the improvements that students would like to see around consistency in the quality of the assessment feedback they receive, ensuring the impact of changes in feedback practice can be appropriately evaluated.

An institutional Assessment Short Life Working Group was convened for 2022-23 with feedback on assessment being one of the work strands. A small sub-group of the Working Group has been tasked with looking at feedback practices across the institution and beyond (with a focus on UK comparator institutional practice) to provide clarity on what “good” feedback practice should look like for Abertay. Guidance on feedback design will be one of the key outputs from this sub-group. The key members of the sub-group include a student and academic and professional staff from across the university with a remit to bring in more stakeholders as part of its work. For example, the student on the group took the work of the group to the Student Representative Council in February 2023 for discussion and support in organising a student focus group to discuss the student experience in relation to assessment feedback and gather evidence on what a good Abertay student experience of feedback would look like. The work from this sub-group will result in a preliminary paper with recommendations which will be discussed at Teaching and Learning Committee in May 2023 for implementation in the 2023-24 academic year. The work of the full Assessment Short Life Working Group will also incorporate developing an evaluation plan using the work of Jones-Devitt and Austin (2021)², Keale et al (2016)³ and Guskey (2000)⁴ as a framework.

The Abertay Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy are updating their resources relating to all aspects of assessment and feedback throughout 2022-23, using the work of the Short Life Working Group. The AbLE Academy will also be holding feedback workshops from May 2023 onwards to support the implementation of any recommendations to come out of the project group. Initially, this will focus on staff in how to create good assessment feedback but will also move into work with students on feedback literacy. This is being supported by an AbLE Seminar in late 2023-23 facilitated by David Nicol on students generating their own feedback.

2.4 Review of professional services

The ELIR Outcome Report recommended that the University should:

continue with its plans to revise and implement a process for reviewing student-facing professional services to ensure a continuous, systematic review of services from academic year 2022-23. The University should ensure that the new processes link effectively to the

² Jones-Devitt, S. & Austin, L (2021) *A guide to basic evaluation in higher education (Why needed and how to do it)*. Glasgow: QAA Scotland.

³ Keale, P., Winter, J., Turner, R., Spowart., L. & Muneer, R. (2016) *Evaluating teaching development activities in higher education. A toolkit*. York: Higher Education Academy.

⁴ Guskey, T.R. (2000) *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oakes: Corwin Press.

existing institution-led review process for academic areas, allowing for institutional oversight, fully engages students, and incorporates appropriate externality.

A group comprised of professional services staff, academic staff and Students' Association staff attended the QAA Focus On event around "Enhancing Professional Services Partnerships" in April 2022 and used the afternoon workshop session to start considering what the future of professional services review could look like for the University. This was a very useful event which allowed us to reflect on the key aspects that we want to incorporate into the new process.

The Professional Services Review scheduled for 6 May 2022 took place as scheduled using the process which had been devised for the previous Professional Services Review. No professional services review activity was scheduled for 2022-23 as all professional services had been reviewed by the end of 2021-22 in the current cycle of institutional review.

Teaching and Learning Committee approved a Short Life Working Group who will take on the lessons learned from the 2021-22 Professional Services Review activity, the materials from the Focus-On event, especially the reflective prompts, as well as practice across the sector in developing the revised method. It is anticipated that the approach of Professional Services Reviews will have a thematic focus, in line with a number of other institutions in the sector, with greater input from academics and students in the self-evaluation process and panel meetings. The Short Life Working Group has met twice with discussion taking place asynchronously using digital tools such as Miro outside of the formal meetings. The Group will make its recommendations to Teaching and Learning Committee in May 2023. Once the process is agreed it will then go through Senate with implementation taking place in 2023-24 as part of our wider quality arrangements. As there was no Professional Services specific review activity in 2022-23, the University can confirm that all Professional Services reviews from 2022-23 will be taken in accordance with the new process. The University also confirms that the new process effective links to the existing institution-led review process for academic areas. The process will also allow for institutional oversight, fully engage students and incorporate appropriate externality.

2.5 Adjustment of student marks

The ELIR Outcome Report stated that the University should:
introduce an appropriate and consistent policy for the scaling of student marks before the start of the 2022-23 academic year. This policy should be appropriately communicated to staff, students, external examiners and collaborative partners.

A paper outlining the policy, its context and its implementation was discussed at Teaching and Learning Committee in March 2022 and the subsequent Senate with the final version completed in April 2022 for implementation in the 2022-23 academic year. A communications strategy to promote this policy to key stakeholders was developed which was shared with the ELIR Steering Group. As part of the dissemination strategy, the policy was included in the 2022-23 Term 1 Subject and Programme Board Teams sites where all the board output, agenda and minutes are available to Board members which includes External Examiners and collaborative

partner staff. This meant the policy was very visible to Board members and easily accessible if required. The same will be done for the Term 2 and Term 3 assessment boards taking place in 2022-23.

The intranet pages relating to assessment policies was updated to include the policy on scaling student marks and these pages are visible to staff, students and External Examiners. Information was disseminated to staff and students using our fortnightly Community Update newsletter. External Examiners and university collaborative partners were sent an email which contained a link to all our assessment policies noting the addition of the scaling student marks policy.

Finally, the Students' Association sent out a communication through the Students' Association President's all-student email update to make students aware of the updated assessment policies intranet page which also invited students to submit suggestions for an assessment FAQs. This is still live at the time of the report but will be used by the Students' Association and university to produce a student-facing assessment FAQ section on the intranet.

This recommendation is now complete and after the 2022-23 Boards have completed, the University will gather data on whether the policy was invoked and if so, the circumstances surround this. Abertay will continue to monitor the usage of this policy on an annual basis.

2.6 Other developmental related matters identified in the Technical Report

The University identified a number of additional matters that the ELIR review team drew attention to in their detailed [Technical Report](#) and has incorporated these into the overarching action plan discussed in section 1 of this Follow Up report. Where applicable, these matters have been included in the more detailed action plans for each of the areas. For example, paragraphs 124 and 126 of the [Technical Report](#) on how the Learning Enhancement Strategy is disseminated, monitored and evaluated and how it intersects with the Digital Strategy are being considered through the action plan for "*Effective implementation of university strategies*". Where the matters are not covered by the recommendations from the ELIR review team, these have been allocated to actors who report back to Teaching and Learning Committee on progress when the overarching action plan is discussed.

One matter identified in paragraphs 33 and 40 of the [Technical Report](#) was around enhancing arrangements for students in collaborative partners to provide feedback to the University. Abertay's Teaching and Learning Committee in January 2023 discussed student feedback at module and programme level more generally with a view to how this works across all our provision, including that within collaborative partners and online. A series of options was proposed, and a decision was made to convene a Short Life Working Group to take this work forward. The work of the group will include providing templates and an implementation schedule for the 2023-24 academic year.

Additionally, the [Technical Report](#) (paragraph 81) suggested we reflect upon and evaluate the effectiveness of our current approach as there is potentially "a

disconnect between the extensive suite of employability activity on offer to students and the impact of this activity in driving progress towards the desired graduate outcome metrics". A programme of work around employability activity has been ongoing since the publication of the ELIR 4 report with a paper focusing on practice in embedding employability in programmes discussed at the University's Academic Leadership Group in October 2022. This led to the creation of an Employability Steering Group, chaired by the Deputy Principal. This Steering Group meets quarterly and reports to Senior Management Group who act on any recommendations. Teaching and Learning Committee also receives updates on the Steering Group's activities. The Steering Groups work also feeds into the new Employability Strategy which will be developed over the next couple of years for implementation in 2025. The first phase of this is a series of forums bringing together members of the university including academics from across the Schools, Professional Services, the Graduate School and also the Students' Association and students.

Work on employability has also included engaging staff with a series of workshops in 2023, including one on Enterprise and Entrepreneurship as part of our Teaching and Learning Enhancement Conference (13 January 2023) and the launch, by the AbLE Academy, of an Embedding Employability Initiative in January 2023. The Embedding Employability Initiative includes interactive practical sessions for staff on tools for employability and designing an employability approach for students within programmes. The Employability Steering Group liaises with the Embedding Employability Initiative to coordinate work in this area and to share examples of good practice across the university.

3. Developments in areas of good practice

The [ELIR 4 Outcome Report](#) identified a number of areas of good practice in its commendations which the University has continued to build on over the past year. A few examples of these are given below.

The Outcome Report noted our "embedding [of] opportunities for student partnership in enhancement". We were very pleased to have a number of students attend the internal January 2023 Learning Enhancement Conference as well as the Abertay Students' Association co-delivering the welcome keynote and hosting a drop-in session as part of the event, further evidencing the close partnership working and collaboration between staff and students at Abertay. The University continues to employ student consultants within the AbLE Academy to work on a variety of partnership projects as well as fund student researchers who work as full members of the research teams on student experience research projects (funded through the QAA Enhancement Themes) and our Assessment Short Life Working Group project groups include students and student representatives.

An inclusive and accessible learning environment is a key value for Abertay University, so we were very pleased to see this being commended in the ELIR report. This area has been further enhanced by the two year secondment of a member of academic staff to the AbLE Academy to lead on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). This EDI work of this member of staff has included the creation of a "Anti-racism in professional communications" microcredential which is an optional

module for second year students which has been chosen by 237 students which is around a third of all second year students. The second year is working collaboratively with the whole Abertay community to consider EDI in its widest form but also to push forward work at Abertay on anti-racism and decolonising the curriculum, shaped by the sector work going on in this area. We also have an EDI Steering Group to support this work across the institution.

Employment is a key element for the University and it has been recognised by the ELIR team that employability is embedded in programmes across the university, including the connections that we have to employers not only in the local area but across the country. The university has well established links with industry partners throughout Scotland, including Police Scotland, NHS Tayside, Dundee City Council, BEAR Scotland and the Scottish Business Resilience Centre. In addition to these organisations, the university has regular contact with industry partners, and it is gratifying that many of the contacts in these companies are former students who still keep in contact and help us ensure the continued currency of our programmes.

The positive practice in Abertay in staff development and support was also highlighted. The AbLE Academy, Technology Enhanced Learning Support team, People Services and the Graduate School continue to offer a responsive suite of development and support opportunities for staff. The University's Advance HE Fellowship offering was re-accredited in February 2023 and has a bespoke route to Associate Fellowship for postgraduate students who teach as well as including taught programme and experiential routes for academic and professional services staff to attain Associate, Fellow and Senior Fellowships. The Graduate School has recruited a Head of Research Grant Development to support staff in this area and the Technology Enhanced Learning Support team have played a pivotal role in working with staff on our new online provision.

4. Conclusion

The University has made good progress in addressing the recommendations made by the ELIR 4 Review team and will continue to work through the issues, led by the ELIR Steering Group and reporting to the University's Teaching & Learning Committee and thence to Senate.

Further information is available from the University by contacting Professor Alastair Irons, Deputy Principal: a.irons@abertay.ac.uk.

QAA2803 - April 23

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18 Bothwell Street, Glasgow G2 6NU
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 0141 572 3420

Website: www.qaa.ac.uk