Quality Enhancement and Standards Review

Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh

Review Report

November 2022

Contents

Introduction

This is a report of a review under the [Quality Enhancement and Standards Review](#) (QESR) method conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) as part of Phase 1 of the Scottish Quality Enhancement arrangements at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh.

The review took place in November 2022 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Mr Zachary Davis (Student Reviewer)
- Dr Maggie King (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Paul Probyn (Coordinating Reviewer)

QESR is Phase 1 of a two-phase approach that enables the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to fulfil its statutory obligation under Section 13 of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005* to ensure that provision is made for assessing and enhancing the quality of fundable higher education provided by fundable bodies for academic quality and enhancement between 2022-24. The second phase of QAA's external quality review arrangements starts in 2024-25 to coincide with the implementation of new tertiary quality arrangements.

The main purpose of this review was to:

- provide assurance about the provider's management of its responsibilities for academic standards to inform an enhancement-led full institutional review in Phase 2
- provide assurance about the provider's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities for students to inform an enhancement-led full review in Phase 2
- report on any features of good practice
- make recommendations for action.

About Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh

Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh (QMU) has around 560 staff and 6,525 (full-time equivalent) students. The University is dedicated to subjects that provide a range of degrees in: healthcare; social sciences; creative arts; business, management and enterprise; and primary and secondary education. It was granted University Title in 2007 and, in the same year, relocated to a modern, purpose-built campus, east of Edinburgh city centre, in Musselburgh. The University has several UK and international collaborative partners in Greece, Egypt, India and Nepal, with approximately one-third of its students studying with these partners.

Findings

From the evidence presented, the review team is confident that Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

Good practice

The QESR team found the following **features of good practice**.

- **Student-centred approach to developing and implementing strategy** - the University has continued to cultivate a student-centred approach to strategy development and implementation, as particularly demonstrated by its overarching Student Experience Strategy (SES). The alignment of learning and teaching-related strategies such as the Employability and Graduate School strategies with the SES and its accompanying delivery plan, provides a dynamic and embedded student-centred framework for transforming the student experience. Student engagement is highly valued by the University and students are active partners in strategic development and decision-making, implementation and evaluation, with the role of Student Champions having been established specifically to support the delivery of the Student Experience Strategy and QMU's Enhancement Themes work.

- **Embedded Student Partnership** - the University has developed a strong and active collaborative partnership with students, achieved through the implementation of the Student Partnership Agreement which is co-created and actions prioritised collaboratively. There is an embedded co-creation approach to partnership - for example, institutional change is consistently managed through staff and student-informed engagement including the developing approach to blended learning and evaluation of the student representative system. The strength of the partnership is valued by staff and students at all levels of the institution.

- **Focus on professional learning** - the extensive focus on professional learning within programmes, and at university level, is exemplified in the University's Employability Strategy and institution-wide initiatives such as the Career Management Skills Framework and the Review of Graduate Attributes.

- **Reflective and enhancement-focused approach to annual programme monitoring** - the design and implementation of the University's Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) process provides a strong data-informed and explicit enhancement-focused approach to encourage reflection, enhancement and evaluation by programme teams and to enable sharing of good practice.

- **The effective use of the Learning and Teaching Panel in supporting institutional enhancement** - the University's Learning and Teaching Panel's primary role is to provide institutional oversight of the Institution-led Review (ILR) process. The review team viewed this panel as a particularly effective mechanism for identifying topics for university-wide consideration and action which support enhancement of the student experience while also supporting enhancement-led development of the ILR process itself, and supporting staff involved in programme development and preparation for validation and review.

Recommendations for action

The QESR team makes the following **recommendations for action**.

- **Assessment feedback** - in building on its Consistency of Assessment Feedback project and the positive steps taken to implement improvements in feedback practice following ELIR 4, the University is asked to draw upon existing good practice at programme level to develop an institutional approach which sets out

the expectations for students across all modes and locations of study regarding the quality and timeliness of the feedback they receive on assessments.

- **Review of student-facing professional services** - in reviewing its approach to student-facing professional services, the University should develop a systematic institutional approach and consider how to enable a more explicit enhancement-focus that facilitates consideration of institutional priorities. Building upon the successful example of academic ILR processes, student-facing professional review processes should systematically and consistently engage students and external expertise.

- **Student engagement in surveys** - drawing on existing good practice at programme and module level, the University, in collaboration with the student body, should seek to understand barriers to, and implement mechanisms which will increase student engagement with internal surveys.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Strategic approach to enhancement

1   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor, review and enhance its strategic approach to enhancement. The team considered a range of documents, including the Student Experience Strategy (SES) 2021-26 and associated Delivery Plan, Outcome Agreement report to Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Learning Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Guidance for 2022-23, outcomes of the Court Effectiveness Review, and minutes from meetings of Senate and the Student Experience Committee (SEC) - the key committees with responsibilities for enhancing and monitoring, learning and teaching, and the wider student experience. In addition, the team met with staff and students.

2   The QESR team found in the documents and heard from staff that the University has effective and established systems in place to promote the strategic enhancement of learning and teaching. In addition to the aforementioned documents, there is clear evidence of widespread engagement in their development, evaluation of progress and phasing of priorities. Aligned to the SES, the University has a revised Employability Strategy, a Graduate School Strategy, and plans are in progress for a refreshed Widening Participation and Student Retention Strategy and Evaluation Plan. There are three overarching themes of the SES - one of which is Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - and, in this way, the SES provides the overarching framework for all student-related strategic developments. The review team found a clear process for linking institutional strategies to implementation and monitoring through annual operational plans which are overseen by the School Academic Boards (SABs) and annual monitoring reports, which are overseen by SEC and SABs, and staff spoke positively about their engagement in a range of strategic initiatives.

3   The University's strategic plans for learning and teaching are embedded within the SES, with a focus on transforming the holistic student experience and a key theme of 'Students as Partners'. In meeting with students, the QESR team found that students were very positive about their opportunities to engage in strategic developments, such as the recent reviews of Taught Postgraduate Framework, Personal Academic Tutoring (PAT) and of Graduate Attributes. The University's commitment to a student-centred approach is also evident in its digital and blended learning developments (paragraphs 10 and 29). This student-centred approach to developing and implementing strategy was viewed by the team as a feature of **good practice**, as particularly demonstrated by the overarching Student Experience Strategy (SES). The alignment of learning and teaching-related strategies - such as the Employability and Graduate School strategies with the SES and its accompanying delivery plan - provides a dynamic and embedded student-centred framework for transforming the student experience. Student engagement is highly valued by the University and students are active partners in strategic development and decision-making, implementation and evaluation, with the role of Student Champions having been established specifically to support the delivery of the Student Experience Strategy and QMU's Enhancement Themes work (paragraph 13).

4   The revision of the Employability Strategy has afforded the University the opportunity to revisit its approach to recognising and recording student skills and achievement. A Career Management Skills Framework has been developed, linked to the QMU Graduate Attributes, and the QESR team heard from staff about a variety of ways in which Graduate Attributes are incorporated into programmes and assignments (paragraph 47), such as the development of a wider range of placements. A pilot is currently underway of a Graduate Attributes Toolkit to enable students to track skills and personal development gained through the curriculum. External engagement with employers and professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) enabled the institution to put in place a dynamic

range of adaptations in response to the global coronavirus pandemic, including simulated placements, and so ensuring that students acquired an equivalent professional learning experience. External examiners reports highlight professional relevance of programmes as an area of good practice and the University is continuing to enhance its arrangements for engaging with industry experts, and is establishing within one School, Industry Advisory Panels to inform curriculum development. The team identified as a feature of **good practice**, the extensive focus on professional learning within programmes, and university level, as exemplified by the Employability Strategy and institution-wide initiatives such as the Career Management Skills Framework, the Review of Graduate Attributes.

5   Implementation of the SES has been accompanied by investment in the learning and teaching environment, including the establishment of the Learning and Enhancement and Development (LEAD) Centre, increased staffing for technology-enhanced learning, a replacement virtual learning environment (VLE) and redesign of student spaces. The LEAD Centre brings together strategic leadership for enhancement, including continuing professional development of academic and teaching-related staff, and leadership and support for teaching and learning innovation. Academic staff without the requisite level of teaching experience will be expected to complete the forthcoming Introduction to Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Tertiary Education course. Academic staff have allocated scholarship time and an allocated minimum of 10 days' staff development time per year (pro rata). Staff whom the QESR team met, were positive about the range of support provided by the LEAD Centre and by the Technology-Enhanced Learning team.

6   The Graduate School offers two annual Supervisor Development days for research supervisors and encourages further development through observation and support for applying for UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) accreditation. A team-based approach is adopted to research supervisor criteria rather than requiring each supervisor to meet the same standard criteria. Doctoral student feedback indicates broad satisfaction with supervision.

7   The University has a variety of approaches to sharing good practice, including through its established quality process such as good practice trends and resilience factors in Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) (paragraph 36), thematic analysis of commendations from validation and review events (paragraph 38) and via the Programme Leaders Network. The SEC acts as a central forum for two-way dissemination of good practice.

8   Since ELIR 4, sector Enhancement Themes have continued to impact positively on institutional policy and practice, including using learning from the 'Evidence for Enhancement' theme to enhance the module evaluation process and the presentation of data. Engagement with the 'Resilient Learning Communities' theme enabled the institution to explore student experiences of isolation and loneliness, the outcomes of which informed the focus of a further review of the PAT system, and to the strategic intention to develop learner journey maps for different cohorts to enhance signposting to support, resources and facilities.

Student partnership

9   The QESR team is confident in the University's approach to developing and maintaining student partnership. The team considered the institution's Student Partnership Agreement (SPA), key committee minutes, and met with staff and students. The SPA was refreshed in September 2022, and themes identified include communications, student life, addressing assessment and feedback. The SPA was co-developed by the University and the Students' Union, with priority areas initially identified by students. Additionally, QMU senior management and the Students' Association have a partnership group to help prioritise issues, enabling a balance between institutional and student priorities. The team found the approach to developing the SPA particularly effective and a positive example of a strong working relationship between staff and students.

10   Student representative roles are in place for all taught and research students. Elected student representatives are members of all key institutional committees and working groups, at all levels of operation, including Court, Senate, School Academic Boards and Student-Staff Consultative Committees (SSCC), providing opportunities for the student body to give feedback to the University and support the development of policy. Research students are represented at the Research Strategy Committee and at SEC. The QESR team found that both students and staff considered these arrangements effective for enabling student engagement in strategic and operational decision-making. In addition, the team learned in meetings with students that student representatives were fully engaged as student partners, were involved in the institutional priorities, engaged and aware of the strategy, and participated positively with the review process. As an example, the QESR team viewed the University's approach to the development of blended learning positively, particularly the design and implementation in collaboration with students. In meeting with staff and students, it was evident to the team that both have a collective responsibility for providing and responding to feedback to enhance the blended learning approach.

11   The Students' Union runs a class representative survey for staff and students which enables enhancement of the student representation structures through the identification of good practice and recommendations which had led to the development of enhanced training for class representatives with relevant case studies.

12   Class representatives are involved in APM, Institution-led Review (ILR) and validation processes, and each ILR panel contains a student reviewer. The QESR team viewed positively the direct involvement of the Students' Union in Personal Academic Tutoring (PAT) training for new staff, further enhancing the role of student partnership at QMU.

13   The University has developed a Students as Partners group for which four Student Champions have been recruited. The Student Champions are focused on developing and delivering the priority work identified by the SES and the Enhancement Themes topic on loneliness and isolation. Champions lead on different SES themes in collaboration with relevant staff, and the wider staff and student community, with initial work focusing on learner journeys. While still a new initiative, the QESR team found the approach to the Student Champions' role and their work effective in supporting both student partnership at all levels of study and the wider institutional strategy (paragraph 13).

14   In response to ELIR 4, the University is developing mechanisms for recognising and recording student skills and achievement. The QESR team viewed positively the student engagement in the development of a new graduate attributes toolkit as a significant part of this work, where student representatives have been appointed as members of the Graduate Attributes Review Steering Group, joined focus groups to provide feedback, and have been given the opportunity to pilot the toolkit software directly.

15   The QESR team identified as **good practice**, the strong and active collaborative partnership with students, achieved through the implementation of the Student Partnership Agreement which is co-created and actions prioritised collaboratively. There is an embedded co-creation approach to partnership - for example, institutional change is consistently managed through staff and student-informed engagement including the developing approach to blended learning and evaluation of the student representative system. The strength of the partnership is valued by staff and students at all levels of the institution.

Action taken since ELIR 4

16   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review actions taken in response to ELIR 4. The team considered the ELIR 4 Recommendations Update, Follow-up Report, the SFC Quality Report and minutes from key institutional committees, and followed up on key areas in meetings with staff and students.

17   ELIR 4 identified seven recommendations, on each of which it is evident that the University has taken action, although progress has been variable due to the impact of the pandemic in relation to recognising and recording student skills and achievement. However, the team was confident that plans are in place to continue to address the recommendation and developments in this area form part of the broader area of good practice in respect of professional learning (paragraphs 4 and 14).

18   Following the 2019 review of Personal Academic Tutoring (PAT), enhanced induction, training and support for PATs, and more formal reporting of meetings emerged as key actions. As a result of a further PAT review in 2021-22, revised, mandatory introductory and refresher training has been introduced for PATs, and a planned online meeting tracking system. The QESR team found that students were generally very positive about the PAT system, although there was variability in experiences and in levels of awareness regarding routes for raising issues related to PATs. The team learned that institutional oversight and ownership is currently being considered as part of the ongoing review of the PAT scheme. Building on practices, the University is also considering the most effective institutional approach to recording PAT meetings.

19   The Consistency of Assessment Feedback Project has enabled the University to make significant progress in this area, including with its partner institutions, as evidenced by external examiner reports and School/Programme APM reports, and as highlighted in meetings with students and staff; albeit the feedforward initiative was paused due to the pandemic. Quality of feedback, and timelines, are recurring themes in student surveys and the Student Partnership Agreement projects include enhancing approaches to assessment and feedback. The University has included within the LTA Guidance for 2022-23, its standard deadlines for return of feedback. Through the Learning and Enhancement and Development (LEAD) centre, further initiatives in assessment feedback (such as formative feedback strand, Advance HE workshops) are being taken forward. In meeting with staff, the team heard about examples of good practice at a programme level, such as setting expectations around feedback and raising awareness around other forms of feedback; however, issues with feedback remain consistent in student surveys. Students had a positive understanding and awareness of developments. The QESR team **recommends** that, building on its Consistency of Assessment Feedback project and the positive steps taken to implement improvements in feedback practice following ELIR 4, the University is asked to draw upon existing good practice at programme level to develop an institutional approach which sets out the expectations for students across all modes and locations of study regarding the quality and timeliness of the feedback they receive on assessments.

20   A centralised system was agreed for tracking Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) skills development. The University plans to enhance its GTA training provision further

through the introduction of an Introduction to Learning, Teaching and Assessment in Tertiary Education micro-credential. Additional resources to support GTAs are available on the VLE Good Practice Hub pages. Postgraduates who teach are required to complete training prior to undertaking any teaching role and records are maintained. Students whom the QESR team met were positive about the effectiveness of training and the resources available, although the team noted that further support could be provided to GTAs beyond the initial training.

21   The University has made significant progress in supporting staff to use data to understand, and address, variability in the student experience across disciplines, with key development including the simplified presentation of data (paragraphs 49-54) and the introduction into APM of a Red-Amber-Green (RAG) rating for KPI performance (paragraphs 36 and 54).

22   The QESR team noted improved student performance following changes to English language support for the university programmes delivered in Greek through collaborative provision at Metropolitan College, but that further evaluation had not been undertaken due to the pandemic. The University is encouraged to continue to monitor the impact on student performance affected by the shift from a standalone English language module to integrating English into one subject-based module per year.

23   The QESR team viewed positively the arrangements put in place by the University for the risk management of its collaborative partners, and noted that periodic reviews had been undertaken, with resulting action plans, through the Portfolio Development Group (since reconfigured as the Academic Planning Board). Other collaborative partner monitoring and enhancement mechanisms include: Partner Organisation Student Survey, the Collaborative Operations Group, and reporting to SEC.

24   The evidence submitted allowed the QESR team to conclude that the University has continued to enhance and embed the nine commendations made during the last ELIR. An example is the refreshed Employability Strategy, and associated developments such as the Career Management Skills Framework and the new Graduate Attributes Toolkit, all demonstrating the institutional commitment to preparing students for employment and providing work-related experiences (paragraph 4).

Sector-wide enhancement topic

25   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering. The team considered the institution's Tertiary Enhancement Topic Reflective Summary, the LTA Guidance for academic year 2022-23, minutes from key institutional committees, and met with staff and students.

26   The University's monitoring and review processes, including external examining, enable the institution to maintain oversight of the quality and standards of its digital/blended learning provision at institutional, School and programme levels, with this being a specific area of focus during the pandemic, including in student surveys.

27   Prior to the new SFC tertiary enhancement topic - 'The future of learning and teaching: defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering' - the University had been developing further its online and blended learning approaches as a result of digital developments accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, viewing 2022-23 as a transition year between the pandemic-related adaptations and a refreshed approach to blended and online learning. The University has developed significantly in its approaches to digital learning, having drawn on external, sector-level expertise, and is investing in its digital

future, with a replacement VLE imminent and new fully online postgraduate programmes validated (paragraph 42). The University's approach is articulated within the 'innovation in learning, teaching and assessment' action strand within the Student Experience Strategy, with details specified further in the Delivery Plan, and is managed via SEC.

28   The University has introduced a range of measures to support the digital experience for students, including a laptop loan scheme, access to a range of e-learning materials, and VLE and general IT induction materials. Digital coursework submission, marking and feedback had been in place prior to the pandemic.

29   Students are actively engaged as partners in developing future uses of digital/blended learning, as evidenced by their collaboration in the replacement VLE. This approach builds on the engagement of students throughout the pandemic, with the outcomes of student views on their digital learning experiences during the pandemic shaping the transition arrangements. The QESR team learned that the institution is very aware of the differing student views on their experiences of blended learning, and has been responsive to student feedback, adapting in order to provide a balance between on-campus and online provision as appropriate to each subject area.

30   Staff development and support are provided by HR, the LEAD Centre and the Technology-Enhanced Learning Team through regular workshops, with plans in place for an in-house 'Inclusive Learning, Teaching and Assessment' continuing professional development programme commissioned from and delivered by Advance HE. The first cohort of this programme, comprising academic, professional service and Student Union representatives, will revise the Inclusive LTA policy and will become LTA Champions for the institution as a whole.

31   It was evident to the QESR team, from annual and periodic review reports, external examiner reports and student surveys, as well as from discussions with students and staff, that the university-wide developments in digital/blended learning have had largely a positive impact on the student experience, including improvements in summative assessment due to access to recorded lectures and in providing more flexibility in time and location of study.

32   Although the University does not have a separate Digital and Blended Learning Strategy, there is an Inclusive LTA Policy, which is scheduled for revision. The QESR team noted that this was an opportunity to develop a set of minimum standards or protocols for its strategic approach to digital/blended learning in order to promote a consistent student experience and to articulate its institutional direction, thereby achieving alignment across its provision and ensuring that there continues to be a strong institutional community, which is highly valued by staff and students.

Academic standards and quality processes

Key features of the institution's approach to managing quality and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards

33   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements for the monitoring and review of its approach to managing quality and to setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards. The team considered the University's framework for programme monitoring and review; Institution-led Review reports; annual programme monitoring reports, including school-level composite reports; student feedback; papers and minutes from institutional committees; and met with staff and students. There was a high level of consistency between the sources of evidence considered by the team, which demonstrated processes that were well understood and had clear outcomes.

34   The QESR team found that the University's arrangements for managing quality and setting standards meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and align with the guidance issued by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). (paragraphs 44-47). Procedures for the management of academic quality and standards are comprehensive and detailed, while retaining elements of flexibility. Flexibility is demonstrated, for example, by the provision for some major programme changes to be considered by correspondence. Procedures apply across the institution, and to all forms of provision; their effectiveness is monitored and processes are developed accordingly.

35   During the COVID-19 pandemic, the University adjusted its regulations and procedures to enable learning and teaching to continue while maintaining quality and standards. From the evidence of external examiner reports, the review team considered this had been done appropriately and effectively. From 2022-23, all pre-COVID-19 regulations were reinstated with the provision that consideration could be given to the continuation of Interim Regulations in overseas partners where local COVID-19 restrictions necessitated.

36   The University's quality assurance processes include Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) and Institution-led Review (ILR). APM requires programme teams to reflect on comprehensive data sets, including: progression and achievement data; feedback from students, external examiners and other stakeholders; and report progress against key performance indicators (KPI) and previous years' action plans (paragraphs 50 and 54). The APM process incorporates School-level summary reports which draw out significant cross-programme learning points. An Annual Monitoring Report for the Graduate School is considered by the Graduate School Academic Board. Sharing of good practice is facilitated through the design of the APM form, which requires programme teams to highlight three things to celebrate; three to improve; and three to bring to the attention of the School or University for possible action. The QESR team identified as **good practice,** the reflective, and enhancement-focused approach to annual programme monitoring, and that the design and implementation of the University's Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) process provides a strong data-informed and explicit enhancement-focused approach to encourage reflection, enhancement and evaluation by programme teams and to enable sharing of good practice.

37   ILR is conducted by panels that include internal and external academic peers and student members. Where appropriate, these are carried out in conjunction with PSRBs. ILR reports reviewed by the QESR team demonstrated a robust, assurance-focused process, resulting in clear recommendations and conditions of validation or revalidation.

38   The outcomes of the full set of ILRs are considered annually by the Learning and Teaching Panel of the Student Experience Committee and institution-wide topics such as the currency and accuracy of programme and module information are identified. The review team identified as **good practice**, the effective use of the Learning and Teaching Panel in supporting institutional enhancement. The University's Learning and Teaching Panel's primary role is to provide institutional oversight of the Institution-led Review (ILR) process. The team viewed this panel as a particularly effective mechanism for identifying topics for university-wide consideration and action which supports enhancement of the student experience while also supporting enhancement-led development of the ILR process itself, and supporting staff involved in programme development and preparation for validation and review.

39   The University reviews and monitors student-facing support services - both individual services and themes such as personal tutoring - through a wide range of methods. In some instances, such as the reviews of Student Services in 2010 and the Graduate School in 2017, these reviews follow a similar process to the ILRs of academic areas, but in other instances, including IT and the Careers Service, there is greater reliance on internal

audit processes or external accreditation respectively and accordingly may not as explicitly employ enhancement-led approaches. Although there is often student input to these reviews, it is not systematic. The extent of external specialist input to these review processes is also variable. The QESR team learned that university guidelines for professional services and thematic review were due for review in 2022-23. The team **recommends** that in reviewing its approach to student-facing professional services, the University should develop a systematic institutional approach and consider how to enable a more explicit enhancement-focus that facilitates consideration of institutional priorities. Building upon the successful example of academic ILR processes, student-facing professional review processes should systematically and consistently engage students and external expertise.

40   Assessment policies are reviewed on a maximum six-year cycle, and examination regulations were refreshed in 2021-22. External examiners are required to comment on alignment with the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF) and comparability with provision at other institutions and are positive about the University's management of assessment (paragraph 47).

41   Distance learning and collaborative programmes are subject to the same quality processes as on-campus provision, and follow the same regulations. Prior to the QESR, recruitment to one of the University's overseas programmes had been suspended because legislative changes locally meant that the programme was no longer accredited in that country. The QESR team considered that the University was continuing to address this challenge appropriately, in accord with its policies and procedures.

42   The University had recently engaged a commercial organisation to support the expansion of its distance-learning provision. The University was working with an external quality organisation specialising in online provision to ensure that online learning materials were of high quality and accessible. The first programmes under this arrangement are due to commence in March 2023. The QESR team was assured that the University would continue to exercise full responsibility for the quality and standards of these programmes, using normal quality management processes.

43   The University is currently developing its offering of micro-credential courses. A section of the quality framework has been created to ensure that these courses are subject to equivalent but proportionate quality processes.

Use of external reference points in quality processes

44   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to the use of external reference points in quality process. As part of the review, the team considered the mapping of quality process against the Quality Code, minutes from key committees, external examiner reports, annual SFC reporting and met with staff.

45   The QESR team found that the University makes effective use of external reference points in the development of its policies and procedures in order to meet and maintain academic standards. The institution has a clear and detailed mapping of its policies and procedures to the Quality Code. While the mapping is not updated on a fixed timescale, updates to policies and procedures are checked against the Quality Code to ensure continued compliance, and remapping exercises are undertaken when the Quality Code is refreshed.

46   The University's programme development, monitoring and review processes make use of external reference points including the Quality Code. The institution has embedded the Subject Benchmark Statements, Quality Enhancement Framework and SCQF into its

validation and review procedures, and, as a result, all programmes align with external academic reference points. Programmes are also expected to align with PSRB requirements where appropriate. The QESR team saw evidence of the use of these reference points in APM processes.

47   External examiners comment on the academic standards, and alignment with SCQF and Subject Benchmark Statements, in addition to drawing comparisons with provision at other institutions, providing ongoing assurance on the use of external reference points. A collation of all external examiner reports is used to identify good practice and issues for consideration at an institutional level. Feedback from external examiners, in addition to industry experts and other key external stakeholders, is gathered as part of programme development and review. The QESR team learned from meeting with staff how external examiner reports are effective in helping to inform changes for improving the student experience - for example, in addressing feedback on quality of assessments (paragraph 19). In meetings with staff, the team learned of examples of external engagement as part of programmes to support innovation in learning and teaching, such as client-based assessments (paragraph 4).

48   QMU engages directly with external bodies within the higher education sector including QAA and Universities Scotland. The QESR team learned of student engagement with sector-wide projects, such as the Enhancement Themes, Focus On events, the Scottish Graduate School, and Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee. The Enhancement Themes are considered a key reference point for the University (paragraph 8). Focus On events are used to drive internal discussions, such as exploring methods for using student feedback to support the development of professional services. The team learned in meeting with students, that students are informed of and provided with opportunities to support student partnership and engagement on a sector level.

Use of data and evidence to inform self-evaluation and decision-making

49   The QESR team has confidence that the University effectively manages and analyses the data that it gathers and uses this to inform its decision-making and the development of policy and practice. In reaching this decision, the team considered a range of evidence including student survey data, outcome agreement report, KPIs, external examiner feedback, validation and review outcomes, and reports on appeals and academic misconduct cases, in addition to meeting with staff.

50   At an institutional level, the University makes use of KPIs reported to Senate to monitor progress and identify actions. The APM process uses KPIs at a school level, and the data sets used in these indicators is comprehensive and comparable across programmes, allowing effective self-evaluation.

51   The University has a clear process for considering student survey results from the National Student Survey, Postgraduate Research Survey, QMU Entrants Survey and QMU Students Survey. This data is benchmarked against the sector and compared with previous results. Issues arising from these surveys are identified and discussed at SEC and the Graduate School Academic Board along with action plans and disseminated to school level via programme leaders. In the context of low completion rates for internal surveys, the QESR team learned in meeting staff, about programme-level examples of good practice to encourage student completion of these surveys - for example co-developing questions for a programme survey. The team **recommends** that drawing on existing good practice at programme and module level, the University, in collaboration with the student body, should seek to understand barriers to, and implement mechanisms which will increase student engagement with internal surveys.

52   SEC considers an analysis of external examiner reports identifying common themes and actions to be taken to enhance the learning and teaching experience. In addition, SEC is responsible for oversight of academic appeals, fitness to practice, and student discipline cases. It was evident to the QESR team that such overview reports are used to identify and action areas to enhance the student experience. An example includes the consideration of the academic appeals report which identified in 2021-21, a return to 2017-18 and 2018-19 levels of the number of student appeals against the requirement to withdraw. Such increase was reported as reflecting the removal from the emergency COVID-19 assessment regulations of the automatic right to a first diet reassessment.

53   Student outcomes are monitored throughout the committee structure. The Equality and Diversity Committee has strategic oversight of maintaining equality outcomes, and analyses attainment gaps. The institution has recently established a Race Equality Steering group. The QESR team considers that the University uses an evidence-based approach to assessing widening participation and retention, and regularly reviews performance through the WISeR (Widening Participation and Student Retention) Board.

54   The QESR team learned that programme leaders are provided with comprehensive data sets ahead of exam board and ILR and APM processes. This data is used effectively to monitor progress and highlight priority areas for development. Data sets are standardised to enable cross-programme comparisons, which is overseen by SEC as part of the Annual Monitoring process and by the Academic Planning Board as part of portfolio review - for example, analysing overall programme performance in terms of graduate outcomes and recruitment. The APM process requires consideration of KPIs and other data points - such as module evaluation forms, module data (including year-on-year trends) (paragraphs 36 and 50).