

Enhancement-led Institutional Review of University of Edinburgh

Technical Report

March 2021



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About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method

The QAA website explains the method for [Enhancement-led Institutional Review \(ELIR\)](#) and has links to the ELIR handbook and other informative documents.¹ You can also find out more about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\)](#).²

Further details about ELIR can be found in an accompanying [brief guide](#),³ including an overview of the review method, information about review teams, and explanations of follow-up action.

About this review

This is the Technical Report of the ELIR conducted by QAA at the University of Edinburgh. The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 3 February 2021 and Review Visit on 22-26 March 2021. The review was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Mr Matthew Adie (Student Reviewer)
- Professor Ian Dunn (Academic Reviewer)
- Ms Emma Hardy (Student Reviewer)
- Professor Clare Peddie (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor Jonathan Scott (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Peter Watson (Coordinating Reviewer).

In advance of the review visits, the University submitted a self-evaluative document (the Reflective Analysis) and an advance information set, comprising a range of materials about the institution's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards.

The impact of COVID-19

The ELIR was originally scheduled to take place during autumn 2020. This was after the start of the national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the ELIR cycle being delayed and a number of ELIRs from spring 2020 being rescheduled to autumn. In discussion with the University of Edinburgh and the Scottish Funding Council, the University of Edinburgh ELIR was rescheduled to February and March 2021 as detailed above. QAA made some amendments to the ELIR process to accommodate the ongoing pandemic, most notable of which was that the ELIR was conducted entirely online.

The ELIR was undertaken while the pandemic, and the institution's response to it, was a key part of the context. Although this was part of the context of the review, the team considered the institution's approach to quality and standards from the time of the last ELIR in 2015. It is acknowledged that the review took place at what was a very challenging time, and the ELIR team and QAA Scotland are grateful to staff and students for their engagement in the review.

¹ About ELIR: www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review

² About QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland

³ Brief Guide to ELIR: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/brief-guide-to-elir-method.pdf

About this report

In this report, the ELIR team:

- delivers a threshold judgement on the current and likely future effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for managing academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience.

The threshold judgement can be found on page 3, followed by the detailed findings of the review given in numbered paragraphs.

Technical Reports set out the ELIR team's view under each of the report headings. Shorter Outcome Reports are provided that set out the main findings of the ELIR for a wider audience. The [Outcome Report](#) for this review is on the QAA website.⁴

ELIR Technical Reports are intended primarily for the institution reviewed, and to provide an information base for the production of thematic reports that identify findings across several institutions.

⁴ Outcome Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/University-of-Edinburgh

Threshold judgement about University of Edinburgh

The University of Edinburgh 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.

1 Contextual information about the institution, student population and the review

1.1 Summary information about the institution

1 The University of Edinburgh (the University) was founded in 1583 and is one of Scotland's four ancient universities. The University describes itself as a large and diverse research-intensive University. The University occupies an estate of more than 250 buildings organised in five main campuses spread across Edinburgh. The breadth of study offered at the University of Edinburgh is the third most comprehensive in the UK and the most comprehensive in Scotland.

2 The current Principal and Vice-Chancellor assumed their roles in February 2018 and a new strategic focus has been established. The University's strategic plan - 'Strategy 2030' launched in September 2019, established a values-led approach to teaching, research and innovation to provide a focus for the multiple strands and plans emerging from Strategy 2030. The University has seven core values relating to excellence, ambition, community, internationalism, locality and transformation. Under this revised approach to strategic development, the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2017 concluded in 2019-20. The previous role of Vice-Principal Learning and Teaching was reshaped into the role of Vice-Principal Students and a new appointment was made at the start of academic year 2019-20 to support the strategic approach to learning, teaching and the student experience. There are plans, delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, for the new Vice-Principal Students to undertake a university-wide Curriculum Transformation Programme as the University moves toward a new phase of learning and teaching.

3 Edinburgh's academic structure is based on three colleges, each led by a Vice-Principal: the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science (25,815 students in 2019-20); the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (7,250 students in 2019-20); and the College of Science and Engineering (11,445 students in 2019-20). Colleges are, in turn, arranged in 20 schools, three deaneries (in the Edinburgh Medical School), and one centre (for Open Learning). The University has collaborative agreements leading to a joint University of Edinburgh qualification with 55 international institutions and seven UK institutions. The University has recently established a new interdisciplinary centre - the Edinburgh Futures Institute - with a focus on external collaboration and new ways of working and learning. A Doctoral College was established in January 2020 to coordinate and enhance postgraduate research student activities and experience across the University.

4 The University's response to the impact of COVID-19 has been managed through the establishment of the Adaptation and Renewal Team (ART), led by the Principal, which comprises of four main strands: research; students; estates and infrastructure; and reshaping. ART reports to the University Executive and its work aligns with the work of the Senate. At the time of the review visit, the ART was completing final meetings to be replaced

by existing decision-making processes.

1.2 Composition and key trends in the student population

5 Edinburgh is Scotland's largest university and among one of the largest in the UK by student population. In 2019-20, there were 44,510 students at the University made up of 26,785 undergraduate, 11,975 taught postgraduate, and 5,750 postgraduate research students. Of the total student population: 4,300 were non-graduating and visiting students;⁵ 1,955 postgraduate students writing up; and 3,360 online students living abroad. Scottish students make up 26% of the total (11,455) with 25% from the rest of the UK (11, 215), 12% from the EU (5,380), and 37% overseas (16,375).⁶

6 The University has seen a significant and rapid growth in student population since the last ELIR in 2015. Total population has grown by 34% with a 23% growth in undergraduate numbers and 56% in postgraduate. Growth has largely been accounted for by overseas students which now make up a larger proportion of the whole student population (37% in 2019-20). There has also been a large rise in the number of online students - mostly taught master's - with a rise of 42% to 3,620 students in 2019-20. While growth has been the defining feature of the student population over the past five years, the new Strategy 2030 states that the University will not be aiming for growth for growth's sake and foresees stable undergraduate numbers, though postgraduate numbers will grow.

7 The ELIR team explored the reasons for, and impact of, the rapid growth in student numbers. The University recognise that this was to some extent unplanned and, during the ELIR, staff and students provided the team with examples where this growth negatively affected the student experience by placing strain on physical and human resources. The ELIR team noted that the University's ability to plan and control growth was made complex by the University's decentralised structure.

8 Progression rates for undergraduate students improved over the four-year period to 2018-19, rising from 84.8% progression from year one to two in 2014-15 to 91.1% in 2018-19. Within this overall picture, black and minority ethnic, and disabled students are among the groups who are less likely to progress, though the gaps have also been improving over the past few years.

9 The University's intake of Scottish domiciled students includes 11.4% from the 20% most deprived postcodes as defined in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD20) in 2019-20. Retention rates for SIMD20 students were 83.2% in 2018-19 compared with non-SIMD20 students at 91.9%.

10 The University has collaborative agreements leading to a joint University of Edinburgh qualification with 55 international institutions and seven UK institutions (in 2019-20, there were 715 students on joint programmes and 53 students on joint/dual PhD programmes).

⁵ Visiting students are students who are studying or conducting research at the University for a short period of time - for less than or up to one year. Non-graduating students (NGS) are individuals, who are not registered on a degree programme at this or another higher education institution (HEI), who take one or more taught courses (usually postgraduate) or undertake supervised research at the University.

⁶ This figure includes 85 students from the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

1.3 Commentary on the preparation for the ELIR, including contextualisation

11 The University's preparations for ELIR were led by the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance and a small team including the Students' Association VP Education. The team sought input to drafts and engaged widely with staff and students. Initially, the Learning and Teaching Policy Group provided advice and guidance to the ELIR preparation team, and agreed the contextual themes. Since that group's dissolution, Senate committees have generally overseen the preparations.

12 The University agreed five contextual themes and tested these with staff and students via consultation. The five themes are:

- teaching and academic careers
- student community and student voices
- student support
- widening participation
- student skills and employability.

13 The ELIR team explored these themes with university staff and were able to confirm that they did reflect the strategic priorities and emerging action underway at Edinburgh. The University acknowledges that assessment and feedback is also an area which needs exploration, but chose not to make it a contextual theme as it did not emerge from the consultation process as a significant priority for students. The team consider that this could have been a useful additional contextual theme for the University to recognise, and it was explored with staff and students during the review (see paragraphs 54-60).

1.4 Summary of the institution's follow-up to the previous ELIR

14 The ELIR held in 2015 set out four areas for development. The ELIR team was able to confirm that the University had addressed the development concerns expressed in relation to two of these areas: the research student experience (paragraphs 63-68), and student representation at school and college levels (paragraphs 16-24). Work has been undertaken on the other two areas for development: the Personal Tutor System (paragraphs 39-42), and assessment and feedback (paragraphs 54-60); however, in both cases work is ongoing, and the concerns identified in 2015 in both areas remain unresolved. The team explored the reasons for the delays in progress in the latter two areas identified for development, as well as the slow pace of change at Edinburgh more generally (paragraphs 97-102).

1.5 Impact of engaging students in ELIR preparations

15 The University engages fully with the Students' Association who was closely involved in preparations for the ELIR, with the VP Education a member of the key preparation team. Draft chapters of the Reflective Analysis were accessible to students and, more specifically, student focus groups were run on key areas. Comments were invited on draft chapters from staff and students via the Teaching Matters blog. The University made a particular effort to engage students in the ELIR preparations, employing a PhD intern to develop materials such as a briefing video and an ELIR Quick Facts document as well as the regular contributions to the Teaching Matters blog. The ELIR team was able to conclude that the close working with the Students' Association, and students more generally, ensured that current student concerns were well-reflected in the reflective analysis and covered in the review itself.

2 Enhancing the student learning experience

2.1 Student representation and engagement

Student representation and engagement

16 The University has effective arrangements in place to support the engagement of students in the assurance and enhancement of their learning experience. This is evidenced by the culture of partnership between the University and the Edinburgh University Students' Association, and is supported by a range of mechanisms, through which the student voice is routinely harnessed to support enhancement across the University.

17 Students are primarily engaged in university decision-making processes through the student representative system. The ELIR team was made aware of significant changes that had been made to this system to enhance its operation and ensure a consistent approach to student representation across the University. Implemented from the 2018-19 academic year, these changes have included a review of the principles underpinning operation of the Staff Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs), extending student representatives' access to data on the student experience, and a transition from a course-level representation system to a programme-level model. While recognising these initiatives were at an early stage, feedback from staff and students on the overarching structural changes was largely positive. Students who met with the team indicated that they were generally aware of who their student representatives were and how the feedback they provided influenced change within the University, although notably this tended to vary between schools, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

18 The recruitment and training of student representatives is managed by the Students' Association. The ELIR team learned that the move to a programme-based representation model had reduced the number of representatives across the University, enabling the return to in-person induction training for all representatives. Student representatives who had attended this training spoke positively to the team on its value in preparing them for their role. Further to initial induction training, student representatives are provided with a range of additional opportunities to support their continuing professional development, including skills-based training workshops. In response to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, a number of these workshops had focused on supporting effective online engagement with students.

19 Feedback from student representatives is primarily considered through the University's Staff Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs). Schools have devolved authority to manage the organisation of their SSLCs, supported by centralised guidance from Academic Services and the Students' Association. While students reported to the ELIR team that they felt listened to by staff, they indicated that effectiveness of the SSLCs tended to vary across the institution. It was generally perceived by students that while the SSLCs provided an effective forum for addressing operational issues pertaining to course and programme delivery, more substantial concerns around the student experience often went unresolved. Students and staff who met with the team were unsure on the process for escalating unresolved issues beyond the school SSLCs. Since November 2019, the University has introduced a college-level SSLC within the College of Science and Engineering, primarily to explore synergies with other college committees, such as Quality, Learning and Teaching. The team viewed this as a positive development and would encourage the University to closely monitor the effectiveness of this change and consider the value of rolling out similar committees across the other colleges with a view to establishing more effective oversight of substantial or recurrent issues.

20 Postgraduate (PG) students feel that they are included in representation at an institutional level, stating that they are made to feel welcome at meetings at all levels. The representative structure seems satisfactory for all PG students, although many PG research students expressed that they were not involved with the Students' Association as its activities are targeted to undergraduates. Postgraduate students were invited to take part in consultations for Strategy 2030, although it is not clear at this time how many and what demographics actually took part in this consultation.

21 Students studying with the University's collaborative partners are also provided with opportunities to engage in the enhancement of their learning experience, with the University embedding this as a key check within the early stages of the partnership development process. The ELIR team noted that, in specific cases, this had involved the University working with its partners to establish a representative system reflective of that in place in Edinburgh.

22 Students have the opportunity to contribute to university decision-making through membership of a college or university-level committee. Recruitment to these positions can be via university-level committees which include Sabbatical membership, whereby there is direct liaison (handover/internal induction supported by the Students' Association). In addition, the Students' Association also manage the recruitment process for some college and university-level committees which are open to both school and programme representatives. Induction is carried out by the appropriate area (including Academic Services and the Students' Association). The ELIR team noted that all students appointed to university committees receive a full induction, prior to joining, which is delivered by Academic Services.

23 Throughout the ELIR, the team saw evidence of the extent of student partnership across the institution, noting the wholesale engagement of students as partners in decision-making, including on the University Executive. Through both formal representation on key university committees, and through more novel means - such as the Pulse Surveys designed to capture the views of students on key aspects of the University's Adaption and Renewal Programme (ART); students had been enabled to make a demonstrable contribution to university strategic thinking and planning. There was also evidence that students would be involved as key partners within the University's upcoming Curriculum Transformation Programme, ensuring they were provided with the opportunity to input directly into this wide-reaching strategic change programme. To this effect, the ELIR team commended the University's commitment to working in close partnership with its student body and recognised the steps the institution and Students' Association had taken to ensure extensive student involvement across university decision-making structures and change initiatives. The team viewed student membership of the University Executive and input to the Adaption and Renewal Team, as particularly positive.

24 Academic Services and the Students' Association operate a competitive recruitment process to manage the recruitment and selection of students for participation in the University's Internal Periodic Review (IPR) process (see also paragraph 142). Students selected to participate within these reviews are provided with comprehensive training, delivered centrally by Academic Services and the Students' Association. Students who had attended these training sessions highlighted their value to the ELIR team, and staff viewed them as a very effective way to induct students in the IPR process. The team commended the institution on its highly-professionalised approach to supporting the recruitment, selection and training of students to effectively contribute to the University's IPR process. This centrally-delivered training is recognised by both staff and students as being key in enabling students to contribute meaningfully to the University's review processes.

Student Partnership Agreement

25 The University launched its current Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) in October 2017, which outlines the strategic relationship between the University and the Students' Association. The themes of the agreement are reviewed on an annual basis making use of appropriate evidence bases (including feedback from student surveys, representative forums and consultation with staff) to identify priority actions for the coming year. The University resources the delivery of these priority actions through the provision of a set amount of project-based funding to support the creation of joint staff-student projects.

26 The ELIR team learned that delivery of SPA Projects in 2019-20 - centring on the priority themes of: Community, Student Voice and Social Justice - had been suspended in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, the University and the Students' Association sought to review the overall impact of prior themes and SPA projects. Student representatives who met with the team demonstrated limited awareness of the overarching SPA, or projects delivered as part of this to date. It seemed to the team that there would be value, as part of the University's ongoing review of the SPA, to consider how thematic priority actions could be better communicated across the wider student population.

Responding to student feedback

27 The University uses a range of surveys and feedback mechanisms to gather feedback from students, including nationally-run external surveys (such as the National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)), as well as internal Course Evaluation Questionnaires (CEQs) and Mid-Course Feedback (MCF), introduced in 2016-17. Institutional management of student-facing surveys is led by the Student Analytics, Insight, and Modelling Team.

28 Students can provide feedback to the University on their learning experience at course-level through end-of-term Course Evaluation Questionnaires (CEQs). In response to declining CEQ response rates, the University has undertaken a fundamental review of the purpose and value of these questionnaires. The ELIR team learned that delivery of the outcomes of this review - which recommended the move to a decentralised end-of-course feedback model and the introduction of a new all-undergraduate student survey - had been postponed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, monthly pulse surveys operated in 2020-21.

29 The University has recently expanded its use of Mid-Course Feedback (MCF), which enables students to provide feedback directly to staff mid-way through the delivery of their course. This enables staff to respond to student feedback during the academic year to which it is relevant and address any immediate concerns. The ELIR team recognised the wide range of mediums through which MCF had previously been gathered, including postcards and electronic voting, each of which provided a novel means of engaging students. While the concept of MCF was viewed positively by the team, some students commented on its inconsistent use and value between various courses. The decentralised nature of MCF, which allows schools to decide individually how they wish to use it within their courses, prohibits the analysis of trends and recurrent themes at an aggregate level by schools, colleges, or the wider university. The ELIR team considers that there would be benefit in the University reflecting on, as part of its ongoing work around student surveys, the future positioning of MCF within the wider network of student feedback mechanisms; considering how future enhancements could be made to increase the value of MCF to staff and students, while also enabling enhanced institutional oversight (paragraphs 101-102).

30 The ELIR team learned of the work undertaken, since the 2015 ELIR, by the Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling Team to support greater staff and student

engagement with the data generated through student surveys. For staff, this has included expanding the range of data sets and visualisations provided through the University's interactive data visualisation tool. Work has also been undertaken in partnership with the Students' Association to provide school representatives with access to these data sets. While appreciative of the growing range of data now available through the institution's interactive data visualisation tool, staff who met with the team noted a requirement for further training to enable more effective use of these data sources. The team was supportive of this view and would encourage the University to consider how the provision of additional training for staff in this area could support more systematic utilisation of student survey data as an evidence base for enhancement across the institution (see also paragraph 34).

2.2 Recognising and responding to equality and diversity in the student population

Equality and diversity

31 Overall, the University is effective in its approach to addressing equality and diversity in the student population; however, several important areas for action remain, notably in developing the inclusive curriculum and detailed work around attainment gaps.

32 The University has recently appointed an executive-level, university-wide lead for equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I), replacing the outgoing Vice-Principal People and Culture - a move which is intended to raise visibility of the commitment to this agenda. The postholder is a member of the University Executive, reporting directly to Vice-Principal Students and Vice-Principal Strategic Change and Governance. A new university-level ED&I Committee contributes to strategic development, action planning and the promotion of best practice for and beyond protected groups. The ELIR team also heard of plans to establish working groups in each school.

33 The University engages positively with the Athena SWAN charter to support gender equality, has revised its policy on dignity and respect and is committed to ensuring estate accessibility. The University is continuing to develop support for black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students and has increased pre-enrolment and induction activities to both welcome and support students from widening participation (WP) backgrounds. The University has exceeded its target of recruiting 10% of learners from Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation 20 (SIMD20) and is positive about the progress it is making to welcome a more diverse student body.

34 The University has made progress in increasing the diversity of the UK student population and acknowledges that there are attainment gaps between BAME and white students. Following a review in 2018-19, relating to student support for BAME students, systems for better data collection have been established. The review resulted in recommendations relating to four areas of activity: racial literacy and awareness; sense of belonging; accessing support services; and curriculum and learning. Implementation of review action is being overseen by the Senate Quality Assurance Committee. The ELIR team heard from senior staff of improved data distribution activities, supported through the University's interactive data visualisation tool. In meetings with a range of staff during the ELIR, the team did not find evidence of systematic use of the data to indicate how attainment gaps were being addressed in an institution-wide manner. The team considered that there would be value in the University considering how to address attainment gaps in student performance, and recommended that the University considers how to address attainment gaps in student performance through the oversight, coordination and monitoring at an institutional level of school-level actions.

35 There is strong institutional commitment by senior staff, to creating an inclusive curriculum, although conversation with staff and student groups demonstrated a mixed level of awareness of this work. The ELIR team heard that the University has made recommendations for action, including the diversification of reading lists and the appointment of a senior member of staff to lead on developing a more inclusive curriculum, but that the implementation of those recommendations has been delayed by COVID-19 and will be incorporated into the Curriculum Transformation Programme (paragraphs 94-96). It was the team's view that this work is at an early stage and that the concept of the inclusive curriculum is not deeply embedded in the University. The team would therefore encourage the University to accelerate progress in this area to ensure that the speed of growth in student diversity is matched within the curriculum.

36 Students that met the ELIR team, reported positively on the work of the Students' Association in their support of the University's Equality and Diversity agenda. In turn, university staff commented on the effectiveness of the Student's Association's liberation campaigns and the approach to student representation from those diverse groups. Throughout the review, the team was able to meet students from a diverse cross-section of the University, including those entering through widening access routes, across subject areas and academic levels and from a range of backgrounds, all of whom appreciated the Students' Association's work in this area. The University has taken steps through groups that were part of the Student Experience Action Plan (StEAP) to enhance the sense of community and belonging that students feel towards their cohort and the University with specific reference made towards BAME students and WP students.

2.3 Supporting students in their learning at each stage of the learner journey

37 Overall, the University has approaches in place to support students throughout their learner journey, which are generally effective. Where areas for development have been identified, on the whole, the University has plans in place for improvement. Nevertheless, it is clear that several services have been stretched by the significant growth in student numbers since 2014.

Pre-arrival and induction

38 The University has a wide range of pre-arrival and induction activities in place as an outcome of work undertaken since the 2015 ELIR. These include webpage and app-based solutions that are well used by students. The ELIR team believe that these resources are an important start to help ensure that students are able to quickly settle into Edinburgh and would encourage the University to evaluate their impact on retention and attainment. Most student groups that met with the ELIR team expressed the view that students' sense of belonging to the University was not strong and the team would therefore encourage the University to further explore the impact of their pre-arrival and induction activities to enhance belonging.

Supporting students' learning

39 The Personal Tutor System was implemented for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students in 2012 and 2013 respectively following ELIR 2, in order to help students identify more readily with their subject discipline. In its Reflective Analysis, the University is candid in its appraisal of the Personal Tutor system, acknowledging this as an area for development highlighted in the 2015 ELIR and recognising that student satisfaction with the system has further deteriorated. The ELIR team noted that the University's response to the COVID-19 pandemic further slowed the implementation of planned changes to the system approved in principle in late 2019 by Senate Education Committee and the Service

Excellence Student Administration and Support Programme Board. These included the introduction of school-based advisor roles (wellbeing advisor and 'teaching office' advisor) with the aim of providing more consistency in response to students' questions.

40 During the review, the ELIR team met with a wide range of students and found a mixed range of views about the effectiveness of personal tutor arrangements, with a small number of students having an excellent experience of their personal tutor and many more having had a poor experience. Students talked of slow response times to questions, inconsistency in access and availability of their tutors, and of not knowing where to turn in stressful moments. The team also met with a range of academics who are personal tutors and found that they too felt unsupported and that no action was taken against tutors who failed to meet expectations. These expectations are largely unwritten, but some staff expressed the view that some of their colleagues let their tutees down by not always responding to those in need of support.

41 The ELIR team recognise that the University has a plan for change currently scheduled for implementation in the academic year 2023-24 and recommends the University accelerate work to the personal tutor support offered to students to ensure that an agreed and consistent baseline level of provision is available from academic year 2021-22.

42 The University is therefore asked to make significant progress in implementing plans to ensure an effective approach to offering personal tutor student support. In doing so, and recognising the extended period of time that the University has been developing its approach to personal tutoring, it is asked to reflect on whether the current timescale for implementation of the institutional Student Support and Personal Tutor Plan in 2023-24, is sufficiently ambitious. The University should make demonstrable progress within the next academic year in respect of ensuring parity of experience for students, effective signposting to support services and delivery of an agreed and consistent baseline level of provision. As part of its approach, the University is asked to develop an effective mechanism to monitor consistency of implementation and allow it to evaluate the impact of these changes on the student experience.

43 In the Reflective Analysis, the University comments on its investment into student counselling and wellbeing services and note a planned increase to staffing. New facilities were introduced in March 2020 (although, due to the COVID-19 lockdown, were not accessible until September 2020) and were intended to be complemented by five new posts which were being recruited for at the time of the ELIR. During the ELIR, students commented on their perception that lead times to access services could be lengthy and that there was a limited number of free sessions available (the University indicate that average number of sessions is four, but that more are available if clinically indicated). The team was informed that the University has increased funding to student counselling and wellbeing services by 45% since 2014. This corresponds to a more than 34% increase in student numbers and a significant increase in demand on such services; this upturn in demand is comparable to that seen across the sector. The team was encouraged to hear that the University was exploring models of partnership, including piloting a relationship with a third-party provider to meet student demand, and considered that there would be benefit in monitoring the impact of the development of these services with the growth in demand. During the ELIR, students who met the team who had direct experience of accessing counselling services, were positive about the support that they received.

44 Students expressed that growth was causing issues with space and student support in all of the aforementioned areas and at all levels of undergraduate and postgraduate provision. During the ELIR it was clear to the team that the student experience in general is mixed and variable. Examples included access to counselling services, personal tutor support and with access to general study space across the University estate.

Student belonging

45 The ELIR team noted the development of work to improve students' sense of belonging to the university community, notably the series of events operating during 2019-20. This work commenced as an outcome of the StEAP, and is being undertaken by the task group led jointly by the Assistant Principal Standards and Quality Assurance and the Chief Executive of the Students' Association. The team expressed the view that, when taken in conjunction with other significant activities like the ResLife scheme, these were important attempts to create the sense of community and belonging. However, in meetings with the team, students were very clear that this work has yet to impact on their sense of community and the team therefore encourage the University to further this work at pace.

46 The ELIR team explored this point with students at all levels of study and found a mixed response. Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students were clear that they did not feel that they had a sense of belonging in a university community or within their schools and colleges. Postgraduate research students had mixed perspectives on community, with most stating that it varied depending on your school or college. Postgraduate research students who operated in laboratory environments were more positive. Postgraduate taught students, in particular, expressed concern over issues of growth within the University, stating that they feel space is limited and that they have lost a personal connection with tutors due to growing student numbers (paragraphs 103-105).

Peer-assisted learning

47 The University has continued to expand the promotion of peer-assisted learning schemes (PALS), in conjunction with the Students' Association. Peer Learning and Support - through PALS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions), Peer Mentoring and Peer Support provide a range of academic and community building networks for students of all year groups, primarily targeting those at key transition points and also provide an opportunity for feedback to course organisers. Peer support is also offered for dissertations. The peer learning and support work has achieved national and international recognition including from the National Union of Students (NUS) and UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) Award for Excellence in International Student Support, sparqs Student Engagement Award for University Impact in 2019, and Advance HE best-practice case study on the report on Mapping Peer-led Student to Student Learning. In addition, the Student's Association has been asked to present at international conferences and provide sector support in relation to the peer support scheme.

48 During the ELIR, several students commented that PALS increased their engagement with their discipline area and that they had also engaged in the scheme as peer mentors in subsequent years. The ELIR team heard of plans to extend the scheme to provide more tailored support to BAME students and to include postgraduate research students which are to be encouraged.

49 The ELIR team commended PALS, noting that the promotion and expansion of the Students' Association-led and university supported, have contributed to the integration of students as they join the University. These schemes effectively deploy students who have first-hand experience of transitions to the support of new entrants.

Employability and graduate attributes

50 The University has established strength in the development of employable graduates and graduate attributes. The approach that the University takes is thoughtful and incorporates curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The ELIR team expressed the view that the University's Graduate Attributes and Employability Philosophy was a useful framework to situate work with the Students' Association and other services to

link curricular and wider activities to help map graduate attributes. The team also heard from staff who explained that consideration of graduate attributes is embedded in programme approval and review and that the University seeks professional and statutory body approval and involves advisory boards and academic partners where appropriate.

51 The University's Reflective Analysis describes the students' Change Agents project as, 'piloting curricular and co-curricular models of interdisciplinary, challenge-led experiential learning. Working with external partners from the private, public and third sectors, students across all disciplines and levels come together to tackle challenges which have a social/environmental/economic impact and address at least two of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. Examples of the challenges addressed so far included: ending violence against children, gender financial equality, youth homelessness, healthy ageing in communities and supporting the circular economy by using technology to reduce waste in the construction industry. Students receive training in complex problem solving and the value of data and in team working skills to enhance their effectiveness during and after the programme'. During the ELIR, some students commented favourably on the currency and impact of the project as well as appreciating the opportunity to achieve recognition that is adjacent to their main award. The ELIR team viewed the project as potentially important in defining distinctiveness for Edinburgh graduates and encourage the University to continue with its proposed evaluation of impact.

52 A number of students also commented positively on the University's 'Edinburgh Award', which has continued to grow since the ELIR 2015. While the doubling in numbers engaged is indeed positive, with around 1,000 students now receiving the award each year, the ELIR team considered that there would be value in the University considering how to extend the uptake of the award even more widely across the student population.

53 The University's Reflective Analysis recognised students' desire to have greater assistance from the Careers Service, particularly for postgraduate taught students. This was echoed in the Review Visit, with students feeling that they were not made sufficiently aware of opportunities from their school or from the Careers Service. A number of students commented positively on the support that they had received from the Careers Service for both internships and employment support. Some students did comment that they had chosen Edinburgh to study because of postgraduate taught courses with embedded placement opportunity and were disappointed that they did not exist in sufficient volume to cope with the growth in student recruitment.

Assessment and feedback

54 Assessment and feedback was an area for development in the 2015 ELIR. The ELIR team noted that the University highlight that student satisfaction with assessment and feedback has further deteriorated, when rated by students in the National Student Survey (NSS). The University has undertaken a significant number of reviews and initiatives since the ELIR 2015 to identify issues in more detail. The Leading Enhancement in Assessment and Feedback (LEAF) initiative highlighted five key areas for exploration to the Senate Education Committee in March 2020. These included, 'over-assessment and deadline log-jams; disparity in required workload and credit available; consistency in assessment and teaching; assessment literacy (students not always sure of what is expected of them); the dominance of exams and 'traditional' methods and sense of community: peer support and dialogue between staff and students needed'. The University intends that each of these themes will be considered by the Curriculum Transformation Programme which is due to start in semester 2 of 2021 (paragraphs 93-96).

55 Students that met with the ELIR team expressed a range of views on their experience of assessment and feedback practice. While some students commented that

they received useful and developmental feedback, a significant majority of the student representatives who met with the team were critical of both the lack of pace and timeliness of the feedback that they received and the usefulness of the feedback. This was particularly evident where some students commented that they, and their peers, received feedback on first assignments after the submission of a second, making implementing feedback for learning for the second submission impossible. Some students also commented on the imbalance of assessment load based on the subjects that they elected to study and the combinations associated with the programme pathway.

56 Postgraduate taught students that met with the ELIR team highlighted potential issues when it comes to assessment and feedback, stating their view that the quality of feedback is mixed and can often be superficial. This was reflected by students in the Review Visit, who stated that the level and quality of feedback was dependent on the marker - leading to inconsistencies. This problem has been acknowledged by the University following negative comments on the PTES, although it was not clear to the ELIR team how they intend to tackle this. During the Review Visit, the University could not offer clarity on how it would deal with this issue.

57 During the ELIR, discussions with staff about the effectiveness and timeliness of feedback provided to students during the review focused in particular on students' comprehension of their feedback and staff workload. Students commented that some of the feedback that they received was superficial and did not assist in their learning and progress either in the course or programme of study. Students and staff that met with the team also had mixed views on the timeliness of feedback provision. While most academic representatives indicated that the majority of feedback in their schools was received by students within the University's expected policy 15-day turnaround timescale, the majority of students that met with the team disagreed, with several referring to months of delay. In particular, the team considered that there would be value in the University addressing the assessment situation for joint honours students. The limited sample of these students that met with the team reported on being faced with a lack of understanding across schools of their assessment load, assessment schedules and connectedness of disciplines. This point was raised with staff and it was acknowledged that the lack of clarity in these joint honours programmes can lead to assessment imbalance. The students also reported on a lack of knowledge as to where to turn for advice regarding the feedback that they had received.

58 The University is reviewing the effectiveness of the 15-day turnaround policy and considering a new approach that takes into account the importance of subject matter and context in respect of feedback provision and this was recognised by academic staff in conversation with the ELIR team. The team was supportive of this review of effectiveness but noted that, regardless of approach taken, students must have a clear understanding of the expectations of when they will receive feedback, what form it will take and how it will be useful for their learning.

59 Conversations with staff at all levels in the institution commented positively on the work of the Adaptation and Renewal Teams (paragraph 4) in managing online assessment during the pandemic. The ELIR team encourage the University to act quickly so as to not lose any learning about assessment practice from this period, including the relevance or otherwise of formal written examinations, and to embed change thoughtfully considering student learning, attainment and authenticity of assessment. Students commented favourably that their learning had been enhanced by assessment that allowed them to reflect.

60 It was the view of the ELIR team that over an extended period of time, the University has considered a broad evidence base which has highlighted continuing concerns about assessment and feedback, and this remains an area of particular challenge for the

institution. The learning from this evaluation, along with the learning that has been gained during the COVID-19 pandemic, provides the University with a significant evidence base to develop an assessment strategy that considers the student learning journey, the authenticity of assessment, the role of feedback in supporting learning and the timeliness of feedback. The team considers the implementation of this across the whole University to be key to supporting the whole student population. The ELIR team recommends that the University makes demonstrable progress, within the next academic year, in prioritising the development of a holistic and strategic approach to the design and management of assessment and feedback. The University should also progress with proposals for the establishment of a common marking scheme to ensure comparability of student assessment processes across schools (see also paragraphs 145 and 161).

Study abroad

61 Since the last ELIR, the University has established the Study and Work Away Service (SWAY) to ensure that all students have a more consistent opportunity to access opportunities for study abroad and work experience and will ensure that they are all supported more reliably. It has also updated its Code of Practice in relation to students studying abroad and which sets out the respective responsibilities to ensure appropriate support for students studying in partner universities. SWAY received a commendation through the University's Student Support Services Annual Review (SSSAR) process for its transition to an out-of-hours service to provide an emergency response for students in distress overseas. During the ELIR, the team met with a group of students who expressed the view that they did not feel that the service prepared them effectively to study abroad and, most significantly, did not provide the level of support and communication they expected to help them get home at the start of COVID-19 pandemic. Students commented on the limited cultural understanding within the SWAY team in negotiating study abroad placements and subsequently in providing practical support to repatriate students at the start of the pandemic.

62 The ELIR team heard that the next phase of the development of the SWAY service is to enhance the linkages between academic exchange coordinators based in the schools and the central SWAY team. The University is encouraged to reflect on students' experience of SWAY in light of the pandemic, to talk with students with recent experience of study abroad and to continue progress with the development of SWAY, ensuring consistent oversight of the student experience for all students studying away from the University.

Postgraduate taught and research student experience

63 The postgraduate research (PGR) student experience was an area for development for the University in the 2015 ELIR when the University was asked to analyse the needs and experience of postgraduate research students at school, college and university level to ensure that they are effectively supported, particularly given plans to increase research student numbers. In addition, the University was asked to review the effectiveness and regularity of supervisor training and ensure that the University's Code of Practice is communicated effectively to all staff and research students, and implemented consistently. Finally, the University was asked to make certain that postgraduate research students who teach are appropriately trained and supported for the role. The ELIR team noted that, while there has been some work in the areas of student support, the consistency of uptake of supervisor training is still mixed. In addition, there has been some progress with regards to training for postgraduate research students who teach, although the University has further work to do to ensure consistency and monitoring of training provision.

64 Training for PhD supervisors has been improved following the recommendation in the 2015 ELIR, with IAD running core training regularly throughout the year and attendance

is monitored by schools. PhD supervisors are required to attend training every five years and this is monitored by the Institute for Academic Development (IAD). The Dean of Postgraduate Research (or equivalent) within each college has been responsible for organising events for sharing best practice to ensure effective supervision. Students that met with the ELIR team expressed the view that supervision was generally of good quality, although some raised issues of inconsistency when it came to the regularity of meetings. It was the view of the ELIR team that, although training provision may have improved, the way in which supervisors implement the University's requirements was found to be variable, and there could be benefit in considering how to monitor the implementation of the Code of Practice and maintain institutional oversight of the frequency of supervisor meetings.

65 Since the time of the last ELIR in 2015, the University has worked to establish a Doctoral College for postgraduate research students (PGRs), which it launched in January 2020. The Doctoral College is a structure lying outwith the graduate schools, aiming to provide a centralised, university-wide approach to issues such as student support, welfare and careers. During the visit, staff - including PhD supervisors - and students who met with the ELIR team were not aware of the existence of the Doctoral College or what it offered. The ELIR team consider the introduction of the Doctoral College is a positive move at a very early stage and would encourage the University to continue to develop it, ensuring that students and staff are aware of the role it plays and the services it provides.

66 There is an increasing range of institution-wide support for PGR students provided by the IAD which the University considers has had a positive impact on the student experience. PGRs are provided with research training through IAD within a cohort-based model intended to promote interdisciplinarity. The ELIR team considered the training to be appropriate and found that students appreciated both the training itself and the opportunities to engage as a cohort. Students are also offered the opportunity to gain accreditation through the Higher Education Academy and students that met with the team reflected that the support and training provided by the IAD was beneficial to their progression.

67 PGRs are given appropriate opportunity to teach undergraduates and master's students and the University has a dedicated policy, introduced in 2017, intended to ensure consistency in their experience. Currently schools are responsible for ensuring the delivery of training to postgraduate students who teach, with some support from the Institute for Academic Development (IAD), and this is overseen by the colleges via their researcher training committees and their teaching and learning committees. However, the review team heard of variable practice across schools from students who had experienced teaching prior to receiving any training or support in their schools. Some schools have an explicit teaching strand to their doctoral programmes and students are encouraged to apply for an Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy as part of this programme. The ELIR team felt that the provision from IAD was sufficient with most staff and students speaking highly of it and that the dedicated policy was a positive development within this area.

68 However, the majority PGRs who met with the ELIR team expressed the view that there was little oversight of the training provided for those who teach with many beginning to teach before undertaking formal training or being unaware of training streams. The University has plans to include the monitoring and regulation of teacher training for postgraduate students in the newly-established Doctoral College. The team recognised the value of the University's dedicated policy for postgraduates who teach and the range of available training. Nevertheless, the team recommended that the University ensures effective implementation of its policy for the training and support of postgraduates who teach and ensures all PGR students are trained before engaging in teaching activities.

Availability of student support services for postgraduates

69 Postgraduate students' experience with support was highlighted to the ELIR team as a potential issue by students. Postgraduate taught (PGT) students, in particular, highlighted that the experience with personal tutors was inconsistent, with many tutors lacking knowledge about MSc programmes or being unable to signpost students to support services (paragraphs 42 and 104). Students also discussed struggling to get appointments with university mental health services (paragraph 43) and, as a result, have created their own peer support networks to cope. Among other activities, the University has been piloting peer support for PGRs to help bridge this gap which has been highlighted by student surveys.

2.4 Learning environment, including the use of technology

70 The University has undertaken work to enhance the quality of learning environment available to students, through investment in physical and digital learning spaces, and a review of the governance arrangements underpinning learning, teaching and estates decision-making. The University recognises that considerable challenges remain with the availability of physical space across the university campus, noting that the need to redress these concerns would be reflected in any plans for future growth.

Physical environment

71 The University manages a vast physical estate, with each of the University's three colleges largely served by one of the University's four key campuses: Central and Moray House, the King's Buildings, Little France and Easter Bush. Staff and students access spaces for learning, teaching, research and study across a network of more than 250 buildings.

72 Development of the physical environment is guided by the University's Estates Vision 2017-2027 and underpinned by the commitment of significant resource to recognise a transformation in the University's key spaces for learning, teaching, research and innovation. Recent developments under this plan have included the refurbishment of lecture theatres and other teaching spaces, the development of a new Health and Wellbeing Centre, as well as targeted investment in spaces supporting a sense of student community.

73 In response to concerns raised by students with a declared disability, the University has undertaken a review of the accessibility of its estate. As a result of this review, the University has adopted a new Estates Accessibility Policy which provides a framework for ensuring improvements to accessibility are realised through the ongoing refurbishment and development of the University's estate. The University has also developed online access guides and mobile apps to assist students in navigating its spaces.

74 The University recognises that considerable challenges remain with the availability of physical space across the university campus, with estates issues often highlighted within the University's internal quality processes, such as Internal Periodic Review and Annual Monitoring. Students and staff who met with the ELIR team echoed these concerns, noting specifically the effect of the recent growth in student numbers in amplifying existing space constraints (paragraphs, 6, 7, 35, 37, 44, 46, 70, 90, 103-105).

75 The ELIR team learned of plans to adopt a more integrated approach in relation to learning space decision-making, primarily through closer alignment of the governance processes between estates and learning and teaching. The team considered this to be a beneficial step in supporting more unified planning across the University and has recommended that the University implement an approach to facilitate institutional oversight and the effective planning and monitoring of student numbers, in order to ensure that

appropriate and timely actions can be taken where increases in student numbers impact on arrangements for learning and teaching and student support.

76 In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University has considered - as part of its overarching Adaption and Renewal Team (ART) and in line with evolving government guidance - arrangements for the ongoing operation of teaching and research spaces across the estate. PGR students who met with the ELIR team noted that these arrangements had enabled limited numbers of staff and research students to access key buildings, such as labs and offices to ensure continued delivery of critical research and teaching activity throughout the pandemic.

Digital learning environment

77 Since the last ELIR, the University has consolidated its use of virtual learning environments (VLEs) onto one major VLE. To support more effective use of this new platform, the University initiated the Learn Foundations Project, which has sought to upskill staff and directly address prior feedback from students on inconsistent use of the VLE across the institution.

78 To support the delivery of online learning, staff are able to access the University's 'Edinburgh Model for Online Teaching' development course. The ELIR team learned of the sharp rise in uptake in this course in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as many staff sought to explore more effective means of delivering hybrid teaching. The University's 2015 ELIR recognised the University's delivery of Online Distance Learning (ODL) Programmes, particularly its work on Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), as a key area of positive practice. Since the time of the 2015 ELIR, the University has engaged in a pilot of a university-wide 'Distance Learning at Scale' project, which is exploring opportunities to enable delivery of online learning for large student cohorts in an inclusive and sustainable way. As a result of this work, the University had recently extended its portfolio to begin offering a MicroMasters - its first course to utilise micro-credentials.

79 The University has recently introduced a revised Lecture Recording Policy, which follows on from a significant programme of work to roll out lecture recording at scale, across the University since 2015. The new policy ensures the automatic recording of timetabled lectures in rooms equipped with the appropriate technology. The University shared with the ELIR team the extent of uptake in lecture recording across the institution, which has considerably surpassed initial expectations. Staff and student engagement with recorded lectures had grown, by 130% and 112% respectively since the policy's implementation in 2017-18. Students who met with the review team spoke positively about the impact of the new policy and the added value recorded lectures had brought to their university experience. The team recognised the significance of the considered and consultative approach the University adopted in successfully implementing the lecture recording policy across the University.

80 In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University has expanded the principles of this policy to encompass teaching delivered online through its Virtual Classroom Policy. The University recognises that the Lecture Recording Policy has equally supported both staff and students in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, affording students access to a wealth of study resources and enabling staff to pre-record lectures from home for later delivery and dissemination. The University recognises that a key future development in this area will be the subtitling of recorded lectures. Following a pilot project in 2018-19 to explore the feasibility of student-generated caption and transcription, the University has recognised the need to enhance the value and usability of autogenerated captions. Both staff and students who met with the ELIR team, commented on the need to improve the quality of

captioning on recorded lectures. To this effect, the team encourages the University to proceed with its planned work in this area.

2.5 Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience

81 The University has approaches in place to support students throughout their learner journey which are generally effective. Where areas for development have been identified, on the whole, the University has plans in place for improvement. The University is effective in its approach to enhancing the student experience. There is a significant investment in the physical, digital and intellectual spaces for learning. The University has a strong relationship with the Students' Association and a range of jointly developed activities. The strong commitment manifests as a range of projects, initiatives and task groups, that report through to the Senate.

82 The University's commitment to working in close partnership with the student body is commended and is exemplified by student involvement across all decision-making structures and university initiatives. Student membership on both the University Executive and the Adaptation and Renewal Team is particularly positive and has resulted in demonstrable student contribution at a strategic level.

83 Recognising the decentralised nature of university structures, it is recommended that the institution should establish a systematic approach to enable effective institutional oversight and evaluation of the implementation of policy and practice. As part of this, the University is asked to increase the range and use of institutionally-determined baseline requirements to ensure consistency and accountability.

84 The University has a positive relationship with the Students' Association and works closely with the Association in delivering a range of activities. Several of these programmes, notably the peer mentoring activity (PALS), are commented upon favourably in the RA and by students. The promotion and expansion of the Students' Association-led and university supported PALS, have contributed to the integration of students as they join the University. These schemes effectively deploy students who have first-hand experience of transitions and this is an area of commendation.

85 The 2015 ELIR drew attention to the Personal Tutor system and encouraged the University to revisit the implementation of that system. The ELIR team was made aware of significant ongoing concerns that both students and staff feel in the consistency of the Personal Tutor system. The review of that system has been further delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is recommended that the University make significant progress in implementing plans to ensure an effective approach to offering personal student support. In doing so, and recognising the extended period of time that the University has been developing its approach to personal tutoring, it is asked to reflect on whether the current timescale for implementation of the institutional Student Support and Personal Tutor Plan in 2023-24, is sufficiently ambitious. The University should make demonstrable progress within the next academic year in respect of ensuring parity of experience for students and effective signposting to support services and delivery of an agreed and consistent baseline level of provision. As part of its approach, the University is asked to develop an effective mechanism to monitor consistency of implementation and allow it to evaluate the impact of these changes on the student experience.

86 The 2015 ELIR report noted 'The University has made improving feedback on assessment an institutional priority and progress is evident. Nonetheless, further work remains to ensure the University is able to implement its feedback policy and practice in a clear and consistent manner across the institution so that all students receive timely,

relevant and high-quality feedback at key points during their programmes.' While it is clear that the University continues to make Assessment and Feedback a priority, it was not identified as a key theme for this review. It is clear that students remain dissatisfied with: the variation in assessment and feedback practice - both in feedback timeliness and quality (which further impacts on consistency where students are on joint honours and interdisciplinary programmes); the breadth of assessment methods used; and the inconsistency that leads to assessment imbalance for joint honours students. Recognising that over an extended period of time, the University has considered a broad evidence base which has highlighted concerns about assessment and feedback and that this remains an area of challenge for the institution. It is recommended that the University makes demonstrable progress, within the next academic year, in prioritising the development of a holistic and strategic approach to the design and management of assessment and feedback. The University should also progress with proposals for the establishment of a common marking scheme to ensure comparability of student assessment processes across schools.

87 Following on from the recommendation in the 2015 ELIR on the postgraduate research student experience, it is recommended that the University should ensure effective implementation of its policy for the training and support of postgraduates who teach.

3 Strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching

3.1 Strategic approach to enhancement

88 At the time of the ELIR, the University was in-between teaching and learning strategies, the previous strategy having come to an end in 2019-20. In addition, improvements are needed to lead change, to respond in a timely fashion to areas of the delivery which require improvement, and to adequately evaluate the consistency of implementation of strategic objectives across the institution.

Development of institutional strategy

89 In September 2019, the University launched an institutional strategic plan for 2030 - 'Strategy 2030' - led by the new Vice-Chancellor. This new strategy expresses the University's shift to a values-led approach and, alongside these values, articulates the vision and purpose of the University. The development of the strategy involved an iterative process of sharing early drafts in consultations with colleagues in open meetings, and by providing opportunities for staff and students to provide feedback. The ELIR team heard that this opportunity to be engaged in the consultation on 'Strategy 2030' had not reached all staff; and that some staff felt that the strategy had originated from a 'top-down' culture. Students that met with the team were aware of planning process that led to the new strategy but had not taken up the opportunity to provide feedback.

90 The institutional strategy is focused on delivering excellence with an emphasis shaped by the values on four key areas: people, research, teaching and learning, and social and civic responsibility. The teaching and learning aspects of the institutional strategy cover experience, employability and an understanding of the value of creativity, curiosity and failure. It includes a goal to maintain the recruitment and retention of students and to maximise their potential. It also outlines the University's aspirations around widening participation and creating a culture of lifelong learning and attachment to the institution. The University also includes within the strategy, its intention not to grow for growth's sake, but instead to improve the student experience and maintain the undergraduate population at a stable size while expecting to expand interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary postgraduate and digital education.

91 At the time of the ELIR, the institution had not established a systematic process to drive the implementation of these aspects of the new institutional strategy, nor to develop the mechanisms by which targets aligned to the strategic objectives would be measured. The ELIR team considered there to be value in the University establishing and setting measures of success, whether quantitative or qualitative, to enable the evaluation of progress at a senior management level, establishing clear goals for the various areas of the strategy and thereby ensuring consistency of strategic approach across the University.

Teaching and Learning Strategy

92 The Senate Education Committee (SEC) is responsible for policy development aligned to the strategic direction for learning and teaching. The Committee implements change to educational policy through the college deans and the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) which supports educational teaching and learning developments.

93 At the time of the ELIR, the University was in a transition phase between learning and teaching strategies. SEC agreed that academic year 2019-20 would be the last year of the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2017, however, there is an understanding in the Senior Management Team that the current strategy, or possibly projects arising from it, will remain in place until the conclusion of a new Curriculum Transformation Programme (paragraphs

94-96) and that the programme will then inform a new Teaching and Learning Strategy. At SEC in autumn 2019, it was agreed that a revised statement of the University's intentions around learning and teaching was needed, but this had not yet been prepared by spring 2020. The University's staff survey, conducted in autumn 2019, reflects that staff perceptions of the success of the University's approach to change management, and strategic decision making, is particularly low. Overall, the ELIR team found contradictory and confused understanding among students and staff across different levels of the institution on where the current strategic direction for change on learning and teaching can be found. As a result, it is recommended that the University should consider its strategic approach to the enhancement of learning and teaching and, in view of the current transition between the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2017 and future plans, should provide institutional oversight, and ensure clarity for staff, on the strategic direction underpinning current learning and teaching developments.

Curriculum Transformation Programme

94 During the ELIR, the Vice-Principal Students, who chairs the SEC, outlined his view that plans for the strategic development of learning and teaching will largely be guided by outcomes of a planned Curriculum Transformation Programme (CTP) (previously identified in the RA as the Curriculum Review Programme) which started in April 2021. Following the review, the University advised that the implementation and initial roll-out of the new curriculum was due to begin no sooner than 2024-25 or 2025-26, but that some aspects would be implemented at an earlier point where possible.

95 The CTP promises to deliver against this challenging timetable on a wide range of institutional issues to include personal tutoring (paragraphs 39-44); assessment and feedback (paragraphs 54-60); as well as a review of the portfolio of degrees and the level of student choice within and between programmes. Awareness of the CTP had not yet reached all students or staff who met with the ELIR team at the Planning Visit. However, staff who were aware of the CTP at the Review Visit were concerned that not all staff and students would have an opportunity to contribute.

96 The ELIR team considered that the CTP has not yet been fully scoped as described in meetings; that important areas, such as assessment and feedback, were not yet fully considered in the documented scope in place at the time of the review visit; and that the institution has placed significant reliance on the success of the programme to deliver on a wide range of institutional issues. At the time of the ELIR, work on scoping the CTP was ongoing.

Implementation of strategy - consistency and pace of change

97 Until the end of 2019, the University, through the SEC, had been working to the goals articulated in the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2017. Arising from this strategy, the University notes that several 'strategic enhancement projects' in the form of working groups were formed, largely as part of wider cross-institutional strategic change programmes. These working groups all feed into the SEC (previously the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee until 2018-19). In 2020, aspects of two of these key projects - the Service Excellence Programme (SEP) (launched in 2016 with the Student Administration and Support Stream initiated in 2017) and Student Experience Action Plan (StEAP) (initiated in 2018-19) - were either paused or modified at the request of the Adaptation and Renewal Team because of the COVID-19 pandemic, although some significant aspects of the projects were maintained (paragraph 98).

98 Most projects within the StEAP were being scaled back with only a small number continuing to be funded in 2020-21 and 2021-22, including aspects of the plan relating to implementing improvements to the student mental health and wellbeing and enhanced peer

support remaining. The Student Support and Personal Tutoring project presented the recommendations to the Senate Education Committee and the project was given approval to move to the next stage; however, the ELIR team learned that the implementation of this project has now been delayed until the academic year 2023-24 (paragraphs 39-42, 85). During the ELIR, the team heard that awareness of the StEAP had not reached students or staff and suggest that the institution considers improving the communication of institutional development projects.

99 The SEP set out a major review of key professional service functions, including the Student Recruitment and Admissions programme and the Student Administration and Support (SA&S) programme. One output of the SEP is the implementation of an institution-wide mechanism to manage the coursework extensions and special circumstances of students; this project is recognised by senior management as being an example of the successful implementation of a centralised approach.

100 Another working group aligned to the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2017, was a project on Leading Enhancement in Assessment and Feedback (LEAF) which supported using the Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA) methodology. The outcome of this project was reported to SEC and the IAD now provides support in using this methodology. However, institutional-level implementation of the recommendations from the evaluation of LEAF on programme structure, assessment expectations, assessment and feedback and using feedback to create a sense of belonging have been stalled while they are incorporated into the Curriculum Transformation Programme (paragraphs 94-96).

101 The University has effective mechanisms for self-evaluation that are able to identify issues with the student experience and which are often addressed by establishing working groups and reviews to assess the concerns and develop solutions. Overall, the ELIR team observed a recurring pattern whereby projects undertaken at an institutional level result in recommendations and suggested changes to policy but the final steps of consistent dissemination, implementation and evaluation are not achieved. The team found multiple instances where inconsistent implementation of policy and strategic approach across schools contributed to variable student and staff experience. For example, approaches to mid-course feedback (paragraphs 27-29); provision of training for PGRs that teach (paragraphs 67-68); adherence to the 15-day turnaround time for assessment feedback (paragraph 58); staff induction (paragraph 114); the level to which peer observation is utilised; and the teaching delivery response to the Covid pandemic, were all found to vary significantly across schools. There are advances in the information and data given to schools through the University's interactive data visualisation tool to enable good decision-making (paragraph 30), however, these data need to be accompanied by expected actions and follow-up to ensure completion. The team understands that the COVID-19 pandemic will have had an impact on the ability of the institution to achieve this final step. However, given this pattern was evident before the pandemic, and recognising the decentralised nature of university structures, the University is recommended to establish a systematic approach to enable effective institutional oversight and evaluation of the implementation of policy and practice. As part of this, the University is asked to increase the range and use of institutionally-determined baseline requirements to ensure consistency and accountability.

102 The University has had longstanding concerns on certain aspects of the student experience, notably assessment and feedback (paragraphs 54-60) and the Personal Tutor System (paragraphs 39-42) identified by institutional review processes, highlighted in previous ELIRs and through student feedback mechanisms such as the National Student Survey. In response to these concerns, various committees have commissioned work and set up effective working groups that typically conduct excellent research and supply evidence-based recommendations or generate action plans for the institution. As an

example, it is possible to track how the issue of the expected 15-day turnaround time is raised as an institutional theme within Institutional Period Review and referred to the University Executive; it is then considered by the Senate Education Committee and then deferred pending the Curriculum Transformation Programme. Consequently, the timeliness with which any appropriate measures are put in place to address institutional problems is slow. Staff at all levels and students also expressed the view that the pace of change, prior to the pandemic, was slow. This rate of implementing change is occasionally bypassed and extremely effective initiatives are implemented, for example, the necessary changes that were made to the educational delivery in response to COVID-19 through the Adaptation and Renewal Team (ART). The ART engaged staff through open fora and gave them the opportunity to inform key decision-making processes. The ELIR team heard that communication from the ART to key staff in schools was, in general, managed very well and much of the learning and teaching response to the pandemic was effectively devolved to schools or colleges. Staff involved in supporting the work of the ART commented on the effectiveness of the process by which change was implemented with speed and efficacy. The team took the view that the University may wish to reflect on what lessons it could learn from the noteworthy efficacy of the ART in implementing speedy and effective change. It is recommended that the University develop an effective approach to the strategic leadership and management of change that will ensure more immediate and timely implementation of identified solutions in order to support staff and enhance the student experience.

Oversight, planning and management of growth

103 The University has grown in student numbers since the last ELIR, in particular in 2020-21, due to the unpredictable consequences of the pandemic on undergraduate entrants and the expansion of international PGT students (paragraphs 5-7). Recruitment activity is largely devolved to college and school admissions teams. This decentralisation of decision-making represents a challenge for the Senior Management Team in the leadership of the central coordination and strategic management of the size and structure of the student population.

104 The ELIR team heard of some consequences attributed to the impact of student growth on the learning and teaching experience, both online where synchronous provision for PGT students was not provided, and for in-person teaching where space in lecture theatres was below expectations. Students also described instances where access to personal tutors, class sizes, support for disabled students, timeliness and quality of feedback on assignments and shortage of placements, all fell short of student expectations. These issues were present across undergraduate and taught postgraduate cohorts but were particularly acute with respect to the taught postgraduate student experience and are confirmed in the school's annual monitoring reports.

105 The Senior Management Team of the University acknowledged that there was a slow response to student growth resulting in adverse effects on the student experience. Student growth in 2020-21 was largely due to the pandemic increasing the number of students meeting conditional offers, however, over a longer period, growth has been due to the lack of institutional oversight of college recruitment practices. This unplanned growth has resulted in the need for the utilisation of additional PGR students and hourly-paid staff to provide teaching. The ELIR team noted that the IAD had provided helpful work to create virtual communities of practice for teaching staff. In respect of student numbers, counselling services and students reported a significant increase in demand for provision, mitigated in part by additional investment in mental health services (see paragraph 43). It is recommended that the University implement an approach to facilitate institutional oversight and the effective planning and monitoring of student numbers, in order to ensure that appropriate and timely actions can be taken where increases in student numbers impact on arrangements for learning and teaching and student support.

3.2 Impact of the national Enhancement Themes and related activity

106 The national Enhancement Themes are a key external reference point for the University and staff have had a sustained engagement over the last five years with recent Themes. Work on the Enhancement Themes is coordinated by an institutional team led by the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance; this team retains oversight of all Theme-related work. The RA describes a significant amount of internal work in line with the Themes and the external engagement in both Student Transitions (2014-17) and Evidence for Enhancement (2017-20) Themes. In addition, staff have engaged with QAA Scotland Focus On projects, notably the Postgraduate Research Student Experience, Assessment and Feedback, Graduate Skills, and Technology Enhanced Learning.

107 Across the institution more widely, there are tangible improvements that have arisen because of the institutional engagement with the Enhancement Themes even though the origin of these innovations is not widely recognised. For example, in its Reflective Analysis the University outlines several recent projects to increase staff and student interaction with, and confidence in using, data and institutional evidence sources and work has occurred to enhance existing student data dashboards for staff and to extend access to Annual Student Survey analysis to student representatives. At school and college level, while not necessarily linking the innovation to the Enhancement Theme, staff recognised that they are provided with more data to support work on employability, retention and widening access. Further development is required to improve reflection and engagement with the data on the University's new interactive data visualisation tool in some schools and staff in key roles identified that training will be needed to be able to engage effectively with this new resource.

3.3 Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice

108 The University of Edinburgh has an effective approach to identifying and sharing good practice. The institution identifies good practice through the themes that arise from the Internal Periodic Reviews (IPR) in an annual report to the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) and in school Annual Quality Reports. Areas of good practice are then disseminated under the leadership of Academic Services and the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) through mechanisms such as the Teaching Matters Blog, Learning and Teaching Conference, and, less formally, through the various staff and role networks that permeate the institution. Academic staff at the University of Edinburgh reported that they had abundant opportunity to share good practice.

Learning and Teaching Conference

109 The IAD has been organising a Learning and Teaching Conference since 2018; it is one of the main mechanisms by which members of the University share good practice. The conference was expanded in 2019 with 300 attendees. There was positive feedback from attendees and the ELIR team learned that the Learning and Teaching Conference is viewed by staff as an excellent way of sharing good practice. The move to delivering this conference online in 2020, allowed the University to increase event capacity, open the first day to attendees from outside the University and better meet institutional demand. The IAD has reflected upon this success and plans a conference in 2021 aligned to the core objectives of the Curriculum Transformation Programme. Increasing engagement in this event online may help to reflect the University's approach to enhancing engagement with pedagogical innovation.

Teaching Matters

110 In addition to the Learning and Teaching Conference, the IAD publishes a very good 'Teaching Matters' blog which is regularly updated with examples of innovative practice across the institution and constitutes an impressive set of resources for academic staff interested in enhancing their teaching provision. Themes for the blog are derived from good practice identified in school and college reports and quality processes. The University also actively seeks contributions from students to this blog, with such outputs often noted as being highly popular on the podcast. Teaching Matters is now being developed as part of the schools' web pages to provide local ownership of the developments. Not all staff regularly use Teaching Matters as a source of information and good practice, and the institution is encouraged to consider how enhancement of the culture of recognition of teaching excellence might generate further engagement with this excellent resource.

Networks

111 A number of networks exist where members of staff with similar roles are able to share experiences and good practice including: the Directors of Quality Network; the Directors of Teaching Network; college networks; and a recently-developed COVID-19 Welfare and Support Forum, led by the Director of Student Wellbeing. In addition, staff valued institutional networks aligned to members of Boards of Studies and the informal 'hangout' networks or fora supported by the IAD where staff are able to have more informal conversations across schools and colleges. These various formal and informal opportunities are particularly appreciated by academic and professional staff who are able to take the opportunity to share and network across the institution. The new Leaders' Forum, which brings together senior leaders of the University, has served as a valuable communication mechanism during the COVID-19 pandemic but, because of its size, it is not as widely appreciated by staff as a networking opportunity or an opportunity to share good practice.

112 The University has effective mechanisms in place for the dissemination and sharing of good practice and the ELIR team recognised the contribution to this of the commendable work of the IAD, which they viewed as pivotal to the success of this activity. As a result, the IAD is commended for providing responsive, reflective and proactive university-level support for teaching, learning and researcher development valued by staff and students. The IAD provides significant opportunities for supporting and sharing best practice and the University is encouraged to consider how to further develop the department's reach across the institution.

3.4 Engaging, developing and supporting staff

113 Overall, the institution has effective arrangements in place to both engage and support staff in enhancing learning and teaching practice. However, there are areas such as recognition of teaching and access to development opportunities that would benefit from further attention. The Institute for Academic Development (IAD) is central to the provision of staff development in learning and teaching, and the institution is encouraged to continue with the implementation of measures to recognise learning and teaching in the annual review, promotions, and allocation of workload so that engagement with the development can be increased across the institution.

Staff induction and development

114 When new staff arrive at the institution, they are typically welcomed by their school and introduced to fellow academic and professional staff. In addition, the Senior Management Team of the institution welcome new academics at regular events. The ELIR team heard, however, that staff would value more detailed information on assessment

expectations and academic policy matters and that the lack of university-wide induction has consequences in terms of variable understanding on these important matters at school level.

115 The University's Reflective Analysis states that staff support and development have been a significant focus of attention and that the University is working on reward and recognition, staff development for teaching, and parity of esteem between research and teaching. Senior staff reported improvement in the recognition of teaching demonstrated by a claimed increased uptake in teaching-related roles and staff promotions in education focused roles. The University established a Teaching and Academic Careers Task Group in 2018 and set out principles (Phase 1) to support the recognition of excellence in teaching. In August 2019, the group embarked on Phase 2 of the work which includes a review of academic promotions; a review of support/expectation for professional development in teaching; and a review of how teaching excellence is evidenced. This work has resulted in formal revision to promotion pathways and the publication of a set of 'Exemplars of Excellence' to better highlight opportunities for advancement to those primarily engaged in teaching.

116 The University has a process of annual review in which over 90% of staff participate. The Annual Review Process (AR) has been developed to contribute to the University's strategies and covers teaching, research and knowledge exchange, and has been designed to place a stronger emphasis on teaching performance. However, there is still scope for variation across colleges and schools in the implementation of the AR. Some staff reported being discouraged from focusing on teaching in their AR as this would result in a barrier to career progression. Staff believe that teaching and leadership is still undervalued compared with research performance and there remains a concern that poor performance in teaching is not consistently measured in schools.

117 During the ELIR, staff indicated that, despite the leadership of senior management to improve the recognition of teaching excellence, in practice, the emphasis on research in the promotions process remains. Staff in schools believe that teaching and leadership are not valued as highly as research and the perception was that it is very rare for the University to promote to professor on teaching or leadership performance. Staff expressed the view that excellent research is rewarded through promotion while excellence in teaching and leadership is not so highly valued.

118 The institution currently has various role titles for academic staff; for example, Teaching Fellow and Senior Teaching Fellow, as well as the traditional Lecturer, Senior Lecturer and Professor titles; in some cases, these titles provide distinction between education-focused academics and academics that have both teaching and research in their roles. Before the pandemic, schools were developing 'Professional Development of Teaching Strategies' to express the institutional commitment to increase the proportion of staff with a teaching qualification. This work is now planned for the latter half of 2021-22 and it is expected that the Curriculum Transformation Programme will provide further opportunities to reinforce this approach.

119 The ELIR team recommends that the institution progresses with work to improve the recognition of teaching excellence across all aspects of the University. In particular, the University should ensure that recognition for teaching is embedded in annual review processes, that clarity of roles and titles is established, and that a clear progression pathway providing parity of recognition for education-focused academics is developed. In addition, the institution should ensure that it has the data available to be able to evidence and evaluate the progress made in all of these areas.

120 The Institute for Academic Development is particularly effective in offering a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework through which staff and PGRs who

teach are provided with access to teaching and learning development. The framework is well understood by staff and the different scales of engagement provide staff with a choice of a wide range of programmes to develop staff expertise in teaching and learning. The CPD framework is accredited by Advance HE with alignment to the UK Professional Standards Framework through three routes: Introduction to Academic Practice; Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice; and the Edinburgh Teaching Award, and all this provision is very positively received by academic staff.

121 There is evidence of the IAD evaluating and analysing the participation of staff in these programmes and, recently, engagement has plateaued. The Senate Learning and Teaching Committee has considered the relatively low proportion of teaching staff with Higher Education Academy Fellowship or a teaching qualification or equivalent, and debated the benefits of requiring all teaching staff to hold such a qualification. The University notes that the capacity for these programmes in the IAD is frequently reached. In addition, the IAD is aware that there are institutional barriers to engagement with the framework and similar concerns were raised by staff; these barriers include lack of time due to pressures on workload and underrepresentation in school-level workload allocation models. The ELIR team was pleased to hear that the University will continue to support the IAD in increasing engagement with the CPD framework and recommend that the University takes action to remove barriers which exist that prevent some academic staff from fully engaging with its existing suite of development opportunities for the professionalisation of teaching.

3.5 Effectiveness of the approach to implementing institutional strategies and enhancing learning and teaching

122 Overall, over the last five years, the University has an effective strategic approach to the enhancement of teaching and learning. However, currently the University is between teaching and learning strategies pending the outcome of the Curriculum Transformation Programme.

123 It is recommended that the University continue to develop its strategic approach to the enhancement of learning and teaching and, in view of the current transition between the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2017 and future plans, the University should provide institutional oversight, and ensure clarity for staff, on the strategic direction underpinning current learning and teaching developments.

124 The decentralised nature of the schools and colleges at the University of Edinburgh leads to considerable variability in the extent to which many university policies and strategic approaches are implemented in schools. Recognising the decentralised nature of university structures, the ELIR team recommends that the institution should establish a systematic approach to enable effective institutional oversight and evaluation of the implementation of policy and practice. As part of this, the University is asked to increase the range and use of institutionally-determined baseline requirements to ensure consistency and accountability. The institution should ensure that mechanisms are put in place to adequately evaluate the consistency of implementation of strategic objectives across the institution and act when schools deviate from institutional expectations.

125 The University has some long-standing concerns which have been highlighted by previous ELIR reviews, are evident in student feedback, and noted in Internal Periodic Review common themes. Many projects which have set out to address these concerns over the last five to 10 years have not delivered substantial change; more recent projects were paused due to the pandemic and, additionally, most are now awaiting the outcome of the Curriculum Transformation Programme. In the meantime, the student experience could benefit from the timely implementation of some of the recommendations of working groups to address the long-term issues which are detrimentally affecting the student experience. The

University is asked to develop an effective approach to the strategic leadership and management of change that will ensure more immediate and timely implementation of identified solutions in order to support staff and enhance the student experience.

126 The University has grown in student numbers, particularly at postgraduate taught level, since the last ELIR review, and at undergraduate level in 2020-21 due to the unpredictable consequences of the pandemic. The review demonstrated that the University needs to put in place mechanisms by which it can exercise control on student recruitment and, alongside this, manage the staff and space resources needed to support the size and structure of the student population. The University is asked to implement an approach to facilitate institutional oversight and the effective planning and monitoring of student numbers, in order to ensure that appropriate and timely actions can be taken where increases in student numbers impact on arrangements for learning and teaching and student support.

127 The Senior Management Team has ambitions to improve the recognition and value placed upon excellent teaching and is encouraged to continue progress to ensure that the development and careers of education-focused staff are supported at all levels of the institution. It is recommended that the University continues to further consider the promotion of academic staff based on teaching by progressing with work to improve the recognition of teaching excellence across all aspects of the University. In particular, the University should ensure that recognition for teaching is embedded in annual review processes, that clarity of roles and titles is established, and that a clear progression pathway providing parity of recognition for education-focused academics is developed. In addition, the institution should ensure that it has the data available to be able to evidence and evaluate the progress made in all of these areas.

128 The University is also recommended to take action to remove barriers which exist that prevent some academic staff from fully engaging with its existing suite of development opportunities for the professionalisation of teaching.

129 The institution has very good mechanisms for identifying and sharing good practice. The quality assurance processes in the institution serve as a mechanism for the identification of good practice and the Institute for Academic Development, alongside Academic Services, is core to the process of dissemination through formal and informal institutional networks, the Teaching Matters blog and the annual Learning and Teaching Conference. The Institute for Academic Development is commended for providing responsive, reflective and proactive university-level support for teaching, learning and researcher development, and is valued by staff and students. It provides significant opportunities for supporting and sharing best practice and the University is encouraged to consider how to further develop the department's reach across the institution.

4 Academic standards and quality processes

4.1 Key features of the institution's approach to managing quality and academic standards

130 The University has effective arrangements for managing the quality and securing the academic standards of its awards. The University has further built on the processes that were confirmed as effective in the previous ELIRs (2015 and 2011) and has mapped its core processes against the Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). The University's policies, procedures and regulations, along with additional guidance, are comprehensive and accessible via the main Academic Services website.

131 Senate is the overarching academic body with responsibility for approving the award of degrees and for academic standards and quality. In practice, Senate delegates responsibility for oversight of quality and standards to two key committees: Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) and Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC). SQAC is chaired by the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance and has oversight of the quality assurance framework, which includes academic programmes and student support services, and is responsible to Senate for quality and standards. Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC) is chaired by the Assistant Principal Academic Support and has oversight of the academic regulatory framework including assessment. Membership of both committees includes student representation and SQAC also has an external representative from another Scottish University.

132 Significant responsibility for operational management of quality and standards is devolved to the three colleges and their constituent schools. These are said to operate 'within University-wide regulations and policies, ensuring consistency in principles but allowing some degree of flexibility in practice'. Operational oversight of the quality processes at school level is discharged by Conveners of Boards of Studies and Boards of Examiners supported by Directors of Quality and the Directors of Teaching. The team noted that institutional oversight of the core quality processes is assured through the reporting lines to the College Quality Committees and SQAC that include sign-off of action points. In conjunction with the mapping against external reference points and incorporation of externality in the processes of programme approval, periodic review and assessment, this enabled the ELIR team to conclude that academic quality and standards are effectively maintained and assured.

Programme approval

133 Responsibility for programme approval and programme modification is devolved to the colleges and their constituent schools. Each school has at least one Board of Studies which considers proposals for new programmes as well as amendments to existing programmes and proposals for closure. Membership of the Boards includes student representation and a member of academic staff from another Board of Studies. There is an expectation that students 'must be proactively involved at the earliest practicable point in programme and course design'. The ELIR team heard from staff that achievement of this aim varied and, in some cases, was only through the approval process in the Boards of Studies which have student membership. Overall, the team was able to confirm that there was student engagement in the process but that the lack of consistency was not serving students well when viewed as a whole across the University. There is also a requirement for the involvement of individuals external to the University in the approval process. Programme approval documentation reviewed by the team enabled confirmation of consideration of the proposals by external academics from other universities as part of the approvals process, as well as the inclusion of membership from other schools on the Boards of Studies. The team was also informed that the schools reached out to employers for advice - for example,

through industrial advisory boards, as well as engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) as appropriate.

134 The Boards of Studies are required to confirm that the new programme aligns with institutional strategy, is academically rigorous, aligns with the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* and takes account of Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB requirements. The team's review of submitted approvals documentation enabled confirmation that these considerations had been taken into account. The process for approval of new programmes also requires the development of a business case, demonstrating the potential sustainability of the proposed programme. Proposals for courses and programmes that do not comply with the academic year structure, those that do not comply with the Curriculum Framework and/or which have wider implications, must be approved by APRC.

135 The University has recently developed training for the convenors and administrators of the Boards of Studies along with establishment of a network for sharing of good practice. Staff that met with the ELIR team reflected positively on the networking, in particular the opportunity for sharing practice between academic and professional services staff, and the team agreed that this was a good enhancement opportunity.

Annual monitoring and review

136 The University has in place an overarching framework for the annual monitoring of programmes. Annual monitoring is undertaken for all credit-bearing provision and non-credit bearing MOOCs following a standardised process, though the schools are permitted flexibility in determining the best way to conduct their annual programme monitoring (albeit using a standard template). Following review of the quality processes in 2015-16, the University has moved from reporting at course level to programme level, in line with the change to the student representation model (paragraphs 16-23). It also brought the reporting schedule forward to enable the outcomes to feed into school planning for the coming academic year. A further enhancement is that school Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) are now considered by SQAC, rather than only at college-level, to strengthen institutional oversight, to enable the tracking of action plans and to identify common themes. The ELIR team noted that SQAC considers the reports in detail and that it identifies areas of good practice and sets out recommendations for enhancement as well as reporting on progress from previous action plans. Examples of areas of good practice identified from the monitoring reports is featured on the Academic Services website and communicated across the University through the Teaching Matters blog. The team recognised the value of the identification of good practice and the routes for dissemination, though it noted that not all staff accessed the Teaching Matters blog (paragraph 110).

137 Schools are provided with guidance regarding the sources of data available to inform the drafting of the AMRs and to inform programme reports. The reports viewed by the ELIR team were succinct, comprising commentary on progress on previous action points, what has worked well in the previous academic year, any new developments, and what areas require attention along with associated action plans. The reports varied in the levels of detail, being focused on reporting by exception, and in the evidential use of metrics to underpin the commentary. However, the team noted that they addressed all the key indicators. The team would encourage the University to consider what opportunities exist to identify and promote best practice across the University, in effective engagement with the annual monitoring and review process.

138 The school AMRs are also considered by the respective College Quality Committees with an Annual Quality Report being compiled for SQAC by the College Dean of Quality which identifies common themes arising from the reports. As with the process for the

schools' reports, the University has recently revised the timelines for the colleges' reports to bring the reporting lines forward to enable more effective input into the planning cycle.

139 In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, SQAC agreed to suspend the normal reporting processes in 2020-21 and has introduced an interim process focusing on the learning from the pandemic as well as the updates on the previous year's action plans. The team considered that this was a pragmatic approach and one that would enable effective learning from the changes that had been put in place.

140 Alongside the annual monitoring procedures for academic departments, the University also operates a Student Support Services Annual Review (SSAR) for student-facing support services. The reports provided to the ELIR team indicated that this is largely a reflective exercise on the effectiveness of service provision and implementation of change. The annual reports are considered by a sub-group of SQAC chaired by the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance and which includes external membership. Findings from the SSAR process are used to influence the selection of topics for periodic thematic review at a later date. The process contributes to the effective evaluation and evolution of themes involving multiple services and periodic review of services to date have included Support for Disabled Students, Mental Health Services, Support for Mature Students and Student Parents and Carers; and BAME Students' Experiences of Support at the University. Features of good practice have been identified, reported to Senate and shared via the Teaching Matters blogs. The ELIR team consider this approach is effective in enabling oversight of all the student support functions.

141 Internal Periodic Review (IPR) enables more in-depth investigation of the quality of academic provision on a five to six-year cycle. The University has reflected on the process since the last ELIR and has introduced several effective enhancements in response to reviews of the quality framework. These enhancements include streamlining the documentation, managing the schedule to enable more time for discussion of subject-specific aspects and improving oversight of standards and assessment.

142 IPRs are managed according to a common framework aligned to the expectations of the Quality Code and the SFC. The remit for the reviews includes undergraduate, PGT and PGR as well as collaborative credit-bearing programmes and non-credit-bearing MOOCs, and is focused around three main areas - strategic overview, enhancing the student experience and assurance, and enhancement of provision. Individual IPRs are programme-focused and can be organised to cover different levels of provision - for example, focusing only on undergraduate provision or PGT provision. Given the scale of provision in some schools, this approach appears effective in enabling sufficient granularity in the individual review exercises. The team further noted that the rolling institutional schedule ensures all aspects of provision are covered over the five to six-year cycle period.

143 The review panels include at least two external members from other universities as well as external members from related industries where appropriate, to enable greater flexibility and depth of coverage, alongside academic membership from outside the college. The review panels also include student members, who are trained by the Students' Association and Academic Services; students met by the team reported positively on their training and on their ability to participate effectively in the reviews, these positive views also being endorsed by the academic staff who commented on the quality of the students' contributions to the process. The team also heard that there is a competitive recruitment process, with interviews, for participation in IPRs. Staff participating in the panel or as members of the school undergoing review are also trained. The University is commended for the way it operates a highly-professional approach to supporting the recruitment, selection and preparation of students to contribute to the institution's IPR process. The centrally-delivered training received by students involved in these opportunities is recognised by both

staff and students as being fundamental in enabling students to contribute meaningfully within the review (paragraph 18).

144 Following publication of its IPR, the school is required to produce both 14-week and one-year responses which set out how any recommendations are being addressed along with the timelines for action. SQAC receives the review reports and summary reports on good practice and areas of development which are shared on the web pages and examples shared through the Teaching Matters blog. SQAC also receives the follow-up reports detailing the progress against the actions. The review reports viewed by the ELIR team were detailed and included areas for commendation as well as recommendations for enhancements. The team was also able to confirm the follow-up reporting and sign-off of action points and concluded that the IPR process is effective and meets its objectives.

Management of assessment

145 Management of assessment is overseen by the Academic Policy Regulations Committee (APRC) and governed by a comprehensive set of regulations which is updated annually. The Boards of Examiners have a specific handbook guiding their operation which is also supported by trained experts on regulations at school, college and university levels. Pedagogic support for assessment design and delivery is provided by the Institute for Academic Development (IAD).

146 The report of the 2015 ELIR noted that: 'There would be value in the University reviewing the information provided to students about marking schemes...', and, 'there would be benefit in the University reviewing the information provided to students on the grade descriptors for the common marking schemes in use and to consider this as part of the wider area for development around implementing feedback policy and practice in a clear and consistent manner across the University'. During the ELIR, students and staff who met the team indicated that there was still variation in understanding of the marking schemes and in assessment experience and academic staff were not aware of the discussions around the development of a common marking scheme. The University reported that it has '...reflected on options to rationalise our common marking schemes' and a paper was presented to the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) in 2018, noting that there were five common marking schemes in operation and setting out a series of proposals on the basis of which LTC recommended that further scoping work should be undertaken. A following meeting of LTC in May 2019 noted that only some of the scoping work had been taken forward and it was proposed that these discussions should be deferred to form part of the wider Curriculum Transformation Programme. The University should progress with proposals for the establishment of a common marking scheme to ensure comparability of student assessment processes across the schools (see paragraph 86).

147 Each school is currently responsible for having one or more Special Circumstances Committees (SCCs) which agree the impact of special circumstance applications that have been validated by the Extensions and Special Circumstances Services (ESC). These outcomes are binding and ratified by the Board of Examiners. The University recognised that its previous processes were inconsistent and not transparent. As part of the Service Excellence Programme (SEP) (paragraphs 97, 99) the University has redesigned the process for handling requests for extensions and special circumstances applications to establish a single process with decision-making by a dedicated central team for full delivery in 2020-21. Students were engaged in the planning and their feedback regarding the new process was very positive. In particular, the new process also includes institutional recording of the numbers of applications, to enable greater institutional oversight, as well as providing visibility for personal tutors and student support staff of their students' cases.

148 Academic misconduct is recognised as being of significant concern. There is detailed information for students provided by the Institute for Academic Development on referencing and good academic practice. Students that met with the ELIR team all affirmed that they had received guidance on referencing and good academic practice and were aware of the regulations with regards to plagiarism. The University has a network of trained School and College Academic Misconduct Officers with responsibility for investigating allegations of academic misconduct.

149 In response to the pandemic, the University has developed extensive guidance on the management of assessment and the options available to Boards of Examiners and on alternative ways of designing and delivering assessment which have been produced by IAD to support the schools. The team noted that the University had undertaken a detailed evaluation of the impact of the 'No Detriment' Policy which concluded that the changes introduced were in line with those adopted by comparator universities. The review also included feedback from external examiners, the majority of whom specifically confirmed that the policy was appropriate and had been consistently applied.

Complaints and appeals

150 The procedure for lodging an appeal or complaint and the associated guidance as to the grounds on which they will be considered and how to obtain support are detailed on the Academic Services website. Appeals are considered by the University's Student Appeal Committee, which reports annually to SQAC regarding the number and nature of appeals and identifying any emerging issues. The grounds for appeal comprise either substantial information which, for good reason, was not available to the examiners at the time of the original decision, or evidence of procedural irregularity. Appeals against academic judgement are not considered as valid grounds.

151 A review of the Student Appeal Regulations was undertaken in 2019-20 and APRC approved enhancements, including simplifying the process, in particular by clarifying the grounds for appeal and the evidential requirements and the provision of more guidance for staff and students. As a result, in 2020, the University revised its regulations with regard to the handling of appeals in partnership with the Students' Association. This coincided with a mapping against the (new) Quality Code to ensure continued adherence. The team considered that the review process was rigorous, with detailed mapping and the inclusion of additional reporting processes through to the Appeals Committee. The revised guidance is clear and comprehensive. The University also provides detailed guidance for complainants, setting out the grounds for complaint and sources of support for complainants. A new Complaints Handling Procedure was implemented in October 2020 in line with Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman requirements.

152 SQAC has also developed processes to enable oversight of the numbers of complaints and appeals, which have risen over recent academic years but remain relatively low. This enables identification of any themes to enable learning.

External examining

153 The University makes effective use of external examiners in assuring the academic standards of its programmes. The University appoints an external examiner to each course as well as to each programme leading to an award. The External Examiners for Taught Programmes Policy was reviewed in 2018-19, ensuring ongoing consistency with the Quality Code. Nominations for external examiners are made by the schools with approval of appointment being delegated to the college. The team considered that the support for external examiners was effective in that they are provided with a detailed handbook and online guidance with schools taking responsibility for providing the disciplinary induction for their external examiners.

154 The University operates an online reporting system with an overview of themes arising from the reports being considered annually by SQAC, enabling identification of any emerging themes. The most recent overviews viewed by the ELIR team showed detailed evaluation of the range of external examiners' reports with identification of areas of good practice as well as thematic issues. Schools are required to respond to the external examiners' reports with oversight by the College Quality Committee. Consideration of the feedback from the examiners is included in annual programme monitoring, AMRs and in the college Annual Quality Reports with identified actions, and follow-up on those actions reported on in the subsequent report. External examiners were specifically consulted regarding the proposed changes to arrangements of assessment in response to COVID-19.

155 There is an expectation that the external examiners' reports and associated responses will be discussed with students through the SSLCs but the sets of minutes viewed by the team did not include any reference to external examiners' reports and the student representatives met by the team were not aware of having discussed or seen the reports. Although the reports are made available to students, including through consideration at quality committees, the University is encouraged to ensure that the external examiners' reports are consistently shared with the students and discussed at the SSLCs as set out in its policies (paragraphs 17,19).

4.2 Use of external reference points in quality processes

156 The University makes effective use of external reference points in underpinning its quality processes. In 2019, SQAC set out a paper on the changes to the Quality Code which was considered by the Learning and Teaching Committee. Subsequently, SQAC approved a detailed mapping exercise against the Quality Code which is published on the Academic Services website. Based on this exercise, the University was able to confirm alignment of its policies and regulations to the Expectations of the Quality Code but also identification of two areas for development - work-based learning and partnerships. These have been subsequently developed and mapped.

157 The University engages effectively with the requirements of the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Frameworks* (SCQF) ensuring alignment of new programmes with the Framework and with the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements through the approvals processes. Alignment is also confirmed for existing programmes through the IPRs. The RA also notes that the University benefits from external engagement through the QAA Enhancement Themes and also benchmarking across national and international networks.

4.3 Commentary on action taken since ELIR 3

158 The 2015 ELIR identified four main areas for development: the postgraduate research student experience; the Personal Tutor System; student representation at school and college levels; and assessment and feedback. In its Reflective Analysis and the Additional Information Set, the University provided a commentary on the detailed sets of actions taken to address the recommendations.

159 The University has taken significant steps towards improving the experience of PGR students, in particular through review of the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students and enhanced training for supervisors through the work of the Excellence in Doctoral Education and Career Development programme and mandatory training coordinated by IAD, which was recognised and welcomed by staff. Further guidance has also been made available for PGR students by IAD (paragraphs 63-68).

160 The operation of the Personal Tutor System is a recurring issue, having been identified as requiring improvement in the previous two ELIRs. In the RA, the University further recognises that, since the last ELIR in 2015, 'There has been a steady decline in

student satisfaction with our PT system'. The University has worked to address the operation of the system through improved guidance for staff and students. In 2018-19, it initiated a fundamental review of student support across the University which included the PT system. Proposals were approved in principle in late 2019, but are currently paused as a result of COVID-19 with current plans not being scheduled for implementation until 2023-24. The team reflected on the slow pace of change in improving the support, recognising the challenges associated with undertaking extensive consultations and addressing the variability of across the schools (paragraphs 97-102).

161 Significant work has been undertaken to enhance the systems of student representation which has involved close cooperation with the Students' Association including the move from course to programme-level representation which has enabled more effective training and consideration of feedback from students through the committee structures. Students are now involved across all decision-making structures. The team particularly noted the positive contribution to the Adaptation and Renewal Team and enhancement of student representation in the IPR process (paragraph 143).

162 The Additional Information Set identifies a large number of actions put in place to address the issues identified regarding assessment and feedback but the RA recognises that this is still challenging in terms of the NSS and the team noted that there remain significant challenges in addressing consistency over feedback provision. SQAC approved changes to annual monitoring to monitor feedback turnaround times and the University has a 15-day policy. However, staff met by the team indicated that the current policy was not always workable, and students also reported that some feedback took significantly longer, and they were not informed as to when to expect the feedback. The team further noted that there are still areas where there is work to be done regarding assessment - for example, the establishment of a common marking scheme, which is now to be subsumed within the forthcoming Curriculum Transformation Programme (paragraphs 94-96). Again, the team noted the relatively slow pace of change and the long schedule for implementation of improvements (paragraphs 97-102).

4.4 Approach to using data to inform decision-making and evaluation

163 The University has an effective approach to the use of data to inform its quality assurance and decision-making processes. The 2015 ELIR team encouraged the University to develop the staff-facing 'Dashboard' project. The 2021 ELIR team noted that the recent adoption of an interactive data visualisation tool has facilitated the improved provision of data with data dashboards being launched in 2019. The AMR and IPR processes are underpinned by the data dashboards and the data provision is aligned with the expectations of SFC and the Quality Code. Access to data dashboards has also been enabled for student representatives to facilitate the work of SSLCs. During the ELIR, staff who met with the team recognised and appreciated the additional information being provided through the data management tool, though its full functionality was still in development. Some staff expressed the view that they would value more training in interrogation of the data particularly in identifying differences in student attainment, and the University is encouraged to provide more training for staff in the analysis of the data and in identifying emerging themes within their schools, in particular in relation to attainment gaps (paragraphs 30, 34).

164 Data provision and analysis at institutional level are supported by the Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling Team which manages the external student experience surveys, such as the National Student Survey (NSS), which are benchmarked against the Higher Education Statistics Agency data sets, and the internal Course Enhancement Questionnaires. In the previous ELIR report, the University was encouraged to engage in further analyses of NSS free text comments. The University initially engaged an external agency in a pilot exercise to analyse the qualitative data for production of the school reports.

Following this pilot, these data have now been incorporated for all schools via an interactive data visualisation tool which the team observed had been used to inform production of the AMRs and the identification of areas for development.

165 SQAC reviews degree-classification outcomes annually with benchmarking against the mission group and a detailed evaluation was undertaken in respect of the 'No Detriment' Policy, introduced in response to COVID-19. SQAC notes if there are any schools where the proportions of good honours awarded are significantly out of line with the rest of the University or the sector and the Schools are required to comment on these in their AMRs. In this context, the University is at the very early stages of working towards developing a single algorithm for assessing borderline classification cases, but this work has been delayed due to the pandemic and academic staff who met the team were not yet aware of this project.

4.5 Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards

166 The University has effective arrangements for securing academic standards. The quality frameworks are aligned to the external reference points, in particular through explicit mapping against the Quality Code and the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework*. The University makes effective use of external input through consideration of feedback from external examiners and external participation in programme approval and IPR. In particular, the ELIR team noted the requirement for the presence of at least two externals for each IPR. There is also effective participation by the student body with the majority of the quality processes, though the University is encouraged to ensure that external examiner reports and the associated responses are consistently discussed at SSLC meetings. The institutional policies are comprehensive and accessible, and are reviewed and updated on a regular basis; the University recognises those areas where further developments are required.

167 Although the ELIR identified some areas that would benefit from more effective institutional oversight, the ELIR team found that the core quality processes were operating effectively, and oversight is assured through the reporting lines to the College Quality Committees and SQAC.

4.6 Effectiveness of the institution's approach to self-evaluation, including the effective use of data to inform decision-making

168 Overall, the University has an effective approach to self-evaluation which is informed by reference to internal and external sources of data and feedback. The Reflective Analysis provided for the review was detailed and reflective in the insights provided to the team regarding the University's provision and its recognition of the areas where development and enhancement are still required.

169 The internal approval, monitoring and review processes are effective, with oversight being maintained by SQAC which also oversees the implementation of the action plans. External and student engagement with these processes enables the University to reflect on the perspectives of different stakeholders and it is open to regular review of the associated policies. The inclusion of Student Support Services within the cycle of internal reviews has enabled cross-cutting self-evaluation with the identification of emerging themes and good practice across the different services and development of associated actions. The University's adoption of an interactive data visualisation tool with data dashboards has led to improved data provision for both staff and students to inform the quality processes and identification of areas for action, though it is noted that this is an area with capacity for further development, in particular regarding the provision of training and enhancement of interrogation of the data sets.

170 The University is commended for the way it operates a highly-professional approach to supporting the recruitment, selection and preparation of students to contribute to the institution's IPR process.

5 Collaborative provision

5.1 Key features of the institution's strategic approach

171 The University has an effective approach to managing its collaborative provision, including its arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience. At the time of the ELIR visit, the Global Engagement Plan (2017-20) had expired and not been replaced with a specific strategy. However, the overarching global ambition is followed through in 'Strategy 2030' in which global impact is defined as core in terms of research and education. The RA sets out seven guiding principles that underpin the strategic approach to partnerships, including that they must align with the University's strategic vision, purpose and values, must meet the University's quality assurance standards and comply with the Quality Code, and must deliver a comparable quality of student learning experience.

172 At the time of the ELIR, the University managed 55 international collaborative partnerships, predominantly in Europe and China. There is a much smaller grouping of seven local partnerships, which are all at postgraduate level aside from the individual collaborative relationship with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) (see paragraph 179). At the time of the review, there were approximately 700 students on joint taught programmes and 53 on collaborative PhD programmes. The University also operates some credit-bearing and non-credit bearing online programmes delivered in partnership with online platform providers. As well as maintaining and developing its international partnerships, the University plans to further develop its regional collaborations - for example, through creation of more articulation pathways. These are aimed at facilitating greater flexibility for student pathways and associated widening participation routes.

173 A major strategic development since the last ELIR, has been the establishment of the Zhejiang University-University of Edinburgh Institute. This partnership delivers dual degree programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in the fields of biomedical sciences and biomedical informatics. All the teaching is delivered in English at the Zhejiang International Campus and is supported by 'flying faculty' from Edinburgh. As part of the establishment of this partnership, the University developed a formal policy on dual, double and multiple awards. Further recent international strategic developments include the engagement with the Una Europa alliance aimed at developing long-term cooperation across a group of research-intensive universities, with a particular focus on establishing a framework for joint PhD programmes.

174 Since the 2015 ELIR, the University has mapped its partnerships processes against the Quality Code and has undertaken internal audits of its collaborative provision. The most recent audit was in 2017 which noted the enhanced guidance in place to support effective scrutiny of proposed collaborations. A key recommendation from the audit was to enhance the liaison between schools, colleges and professional services staff regarding collaborations which has been enacted through the development of additional guidance and the establishment of the Virtual Collaborations Group to support schools in the development of new collaborations. This Group is a pan-university grouping of staff from Academic Services, Governance and Strategic Planning (GaSP), Edinburgh Global and Legal Services, enabling full breadth of support for the proposals. There was also recognition of the need for greater clarity around approval arrangements - sign-off by the Principal or the Vice-Principal International is now required to approve any international collaboration or new Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) as well as any international

student education and learning agreements. This requirement has been incorporated in the 2020 revision of the Delegated Authority Schedule.

175 Development and delivery of international collaborations are supported by the Global Partnerships team in Edinburgh Global. Oversight of existing international collaborations is maintained by the International Ventures Group (IVG), which is chaired by the Vice-Principal International and which reports to the University Executive on the status of the portfolio. IVG also has a particular role in advising on the establishment and governance of complex collaborations and in leading on their consideration by the University Executive.

176 Schools retain considerable autonomy in the development of new collaborative programmes. Where the proposal is for a collaboration with a new partner, the school is responsible for undertaking the required initial due diligence for developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Development of the MoU is informed by the guiding principles set out in the global partnerships' toolkit. Proposing schools complete a Partnership Proposal Form which includes sign-off by the Global Partnerships team at Edinburgh Global. Final sign-off of new MoUs, to confirm University oversight, is undertaken by the Principal or Vice-Principal International. Schools are subsequently also responsible for the academic due diligence processes and approval for standard partnerships can be undertaken at college level with oversight in each college by the College Quality Committee supported by the College's International Dean. Approval at college level leads to the development of a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA). Final university oversight is provided by sign-off of the MoA with review by GaSP.

177 Day-to-day management of academic collaborations is delegated to the individual schools. Boards of Studies are responsible for ensuring that the academic proposals are appropriate and that the programmes are subject to the standard quality assurance procedures and regulations including the processes of AMR and IPR. In the case of the Zhejiang collaboration, operation of the partnership was reviewed in detail, including a site visit, as part of the IPR for Biomedical Sciences.

178 As part of the approval process, confirmation is required that students will have an equivalent learning experience to those on Edinburgh-delivered programmes, including engagement with effective student feedback processes and student representative systems comparable with those operated by the University. Student feedback is collected from students on collaborative programmes and forms part of the information set for AMRs, and, for those studying internationally, is reported through Study and Work Away's Annual Review reports to SQAC. In the case of the Zhejiang partnership, this required the establishment of a student representative system, operation of which was confirmed through the Biomedical Sciences IPR in 2017-18.

179 The University manages a number of regional collaborations, in particular the doctoral training programmes which are managed at college level and reflect the strategic importance to the University of PGR training across all disciplines. The University has a long-standing single accreditation agreement with Scotland's Rural College. Oversight of the partnership is managed by the Accreditation Committee that reports to SQAC and there is academic representation on the revalidation panels. The College is also required to produce an annual report, with external examiner reports, for consideration by the Accreditation Committee. SRUC underwent its own ELIR 4 in 2019 and has set out action plans for addressing the recommendations. The University also provides Third Party Credit Rating whereby schools can allocate credit to programmes delivered by a non-academic organisation. The University's policy sets out the approaches whereby schools can develop such arrangements based on alignment with the discipline areas and a clear rationale for the partnership.

180 As part of its exercise in mapping policies against the Quality Code, the University developed the Work-based and Placement Learning Policy which covers placement provision on university programmes, with mapping against the Quality Code and also the development of graduate apprenticeships. The latter is currently of small scale, with two programmes currently approved, one at undergraduate and one at PGT level. This has, though, been identified as an emerging area of activity. In both cases, School Boards of Studies are responsible for approving the partnership arrangements. As additional support for the development of apprenticeships, the University has established a seconded post as Subject Matter Expert on Graduate Attributes.

181 Partnerships in relation to online delivery are predominantly in the area of non-credit bearing MOOCs and the development of a MicroMasters programme, which is a new initiative representing 30 SCQF credits at postgraduate level delivered in partnership with a platform provider with quality assurance oversight by the University. The RA states that the University currently delivers one such MicroMasters programme but is developing a range of them.

5.2 Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative provision

182 The 2015 ELIR report confirmed the institutional focus on academic standards and governance in relation to its management of its collaborative provision, and the team was able to conclude that the University has maintained and enhanced its effective approach to the management of its collaborative provision. The University has mapped its processes for collaborative partnerships against the Quality Code and has reviewed and enhanced those processes since the last ELIR. In particular, there has been the introduction of a more centralised, rigorous process of approval for new international collaborations with involvement of the Executive Group and sign-off by the Principal or Vice-Principal International. These are supported by the teams in Edinburgh Global that bring together academic and professional services staff through the establishment of the Virtual Collaborations Group.

183 Both international and UK-based collaborations are subject to the University's established processes of monitoring and review with oversight through the quality committee structures at college and institutional levels. In the case of the collaboration with Zhejiang, this included an onsite visit as part of the IPR enabling detailed scrutiny. In Zhejiang, the University was also proactive in developing specific quality assurance processes for the dual awards and also in ensuring that a system of student representation was put in place. While there is no specific institutional strategy in place at present, the University does plan to develop its UK-based and international collaborations and has in place effective systems for assuring the quality of its provision.

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