

# Enhancement-led Institutional Review of University of the Highlands and Islands

Technical Report

November 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.<sup>1</sup> You can also find out more about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\)](#).<sup>2</sup>

Further details about ELIR can be found in an accompanying [brief guide](#),<sup>3</sup> 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 University of the Highlands and Islands. The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 7 October 2021 and Review Visit from 22 to 26 November 2021. The review was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Professor Liz Bacon (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Steve Barnett (Academic Reviewer)
- Dr Maggie King (Academic Reviewer)
- Emeritus Professor Diane Meehan (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Edward Pollock (Student 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 spring 2021. This was after the start of the national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the ELIR cycle being delayed. In discussion with the University of the Highlands and Islands and the Scottish Funding Council, the University of the Highlands and Islands ELIR was rescheduled to October and November 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. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> About ELIR: [www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review).

<sup>2</sup> About QAA: [www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland).

<sup>3</sup> Brief Guide to ELIR: [www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/brief-guide-to-elir-method.pdf](http://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.<sup>4</sup>

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.

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<sup>4</sup> Outcome Report:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/University-of-the-Highlands-and-Islands](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/University-of-the-Highlands-and-Islands)

## Threshold judgement about the University of the Highlands and Islands

The University of the Highlands and Islands 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 the Highlands and Islands (UHI) originated as a proposal first explored in 1991 to create a federal institution, based on existing further and higher education provision in the region. This led to an incorporated institution with validated degrees in 1998, known from 2001 as the UHI Millennium Institute. The UHI Millennium Institute received its Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP) in 2008 and University Title in 2011; Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP) were granted in 2017. The University of the Highlands and Islands is a partnership of colleges and research institutions. The 12 colleges and research institutions that form UHI remain as separate autonomous institutions, but have entered into an academic partnership agreement with the University which covers their further education (FE) and higher education (HE) provision. UHI refers to the 12 colleges and research institutions as Academic Partners (APs). With its coverage both of FE and HE, UHI is a tertiary institution, the first in Scotland and one of only a few in Europe.

2 The 12 Academic Partners range in size, discipline and focus and each has its own character and strong local identity. Many APs have multiple sites and satellite learning centres. In total, in addition to the main campuses, UHI encompasses delivery at over 70 centres spread across the Highlands and Islands as well as extensive online provision. The University employs the senior management team and provides administrative and executive functions across the partnership. However most staff, including academic, administration and professional staff are employed by APs and work together to deliver programmes (which are often offered in more than one AP) and cross-partnership services.

3 UHI is organised academically into two faculties, each headed by a Dean, with Subject Networks within each faculty (Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Business and Faculty of Science, Health and Engineering each have three Subject Networks). In addition to the six Subject Networks, UHI has one further entity within the Faculty of Science, Health and Engineering: the Department of Nursing and Midwifery. The Graduate School covers the interests of all PGR students and supervisory staff in all research areas, and is also headed by a Dean. The Subject Networks operate across APs and are the key University structure for the management of quality, academic standards and enhancement, overseen by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). Within the devolved quality management framework, a designated AP and programme leader have responsibility for the operation of academic programmes, and have first line responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement.

4 At the time of the ELIR, the University had recently been through some significant changes, including the appointment of a new Principal and Vice-Chancellor, a senior

management reorganisation, and the development and launch of the new University Strategic Plan 2021-25, 'Daring to be Different'. The Strategic Plan is organised around four Strategic Pillars: tertiary education; research impact; enterprise; and engagement. The Strategic Plan is supported by eight Operational Plans in areas such as student recruitment, research and digital enhancement. In addition there are five Enabling Plans in areas such as international, Gaelic language, and the Student Partnership Agreement with HISA (Highlands and Islands Students Association). A key focus now is on a Strategic Curriculum Review, initiated in late 2020 (paragraph 97).

## **1.2 Composition and key trends and in the student population**

5 As a tertiary institution enrolling both further and higher education students, UHI's total headcount in 2019-20 was 35,517 students, with HE accounting for 10,220 by headcount (7,309 full-time equivalent (FTE)). Of these students, 92% were studying on undergraduate (and PGDE) programmes, 6% were postgraduate taught (PGT) and 2% were postgraduate research (PGR); 87% of students were UK national, 9% EU and 4% international. These proportions have been maintained but overall numbers have grown by 15% since 2015-16. Undergraduate study includes a significant proportion of students on Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), although recent years have seen a decline from 49% of all students in 2015-16 to 38% in 2019-20 with more students taking, or transitioning, to bachelor's study. The three largest APs (Perth College, Inverness College and Moray College) enrolled 66% of the total student FTE in 2019-20.

6 UHI has a distinctive profile, and there have been some noticeable trends over the period from 2015-16 to 2019-20, including growth in part-time study (36% of total headcount in 2015-16 to 42% in 2019-20) and an increase in the proportion of mature students (46% of total headcount in 2015-16 to 52% in 2019-20). While the overall population of students has been largely stable, UHI has seen a growth of over 400 full-time students studying on campus. The numbers of both PGT and PGR students have increased since 2015-16 from a headcount of 429 to 1,033 for PGT and from 119 to 151 for PGR.

7 UHI's data shows a slight rise in non-continuation of all full-time degree entrants over the four year period from 2014-15 to 2018-19 from 12.2% to 13.3%. For other undergraduates (forming a significant proportion at UHI) the data shows an improvement over the same period from 21.7% to 15.6%. For students undertaking part-time degrees, the figures show a slight reduction from 42.3% to 39.5%.

8 The University's profile includes a significant proportion of students taking HNC/Ds (paragraph 5), many of whom progress to bachelor's study, but of those who continue, approximately a third leave with an ordinary degree and do not continue to honours. Of those enrolled on the third year of an honours programme in the 2020-21 cohort, 383 departed with an ordinary degree and 901 progressed to the honours year. There are some particular factors influencing these decisions including professional accreditation to practice on some degrees at ordinary degree level in areas such childhood practice. In addition to this internal progression from HN to degree, many UHI students articulate directly to degrees outwith UHI and the overall proportion of articulating students is the highest in Scotland (74% of degree entrants in 2018-19).

## **1.3 Commentary on the preparation for the ELIR, including contextualisation**

9 Preparations for the current ELIR were led by a steering group comprising largely of members of the University's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). Focus groups were held with staff and the draft Reflective Analysis was shared widely with staff and students via publication on the University website and promotion in newsletters.

Preparation also used a 'Getting Ready for ELIR' infographic which set out the context and importance of ELIR to UHI.

10 The University identified four contextualised themes:

- Use of data to enhance the student experience
- Student voice
- Employability and employer engagement
- Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy development, implementation and impact.

11 The ELIR team explored these themes with University staff and students and were able to confirm that they did reflect the strategic priorities and action underway at UHI; all are areas where the University acknowledges there are enhancement opportunities and were used by the ELIR team to enable discussions with staff and students.

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

12 The 2016 ELIR identified 10 areas for development. The institutional response to ELIR 3 has been overseen by QAEC and actions are embedded into the committee's enhancement priorities. The ELIR team was able to confirm that the University had taken action in all areas, many of which had been addressed or ongoing action was in progress (paragraphs 151-152). However in two areas the team found that the matters identified in 2016 remain unresolved in relation to institution-wide strategic approach to student retention to address the challenges of non-continuation, (paragraph 156) and the development of an overarching staff development policy in support of delivering the University strategies (paragraph 113). In another three areas, the ELIR team made recommendations for additional supporting actions associated to previous areas for development in relation to support for postgraduate students who teach (paragraph 70), approach to the development of collaborative partnerships (paragraph 172) and student feedback (paragraph 158).

#### **1.5 Impact of engaging students in ELIR preparations**

13 The University works closely with HISA and has an effective and valuable partnership approach (paragraphs 14-16). The HISA Vice-President was a member of the ELIR Steering Group and students were involved in early discussions through an engagement event to discuss the themes held in June 2019. Drafts of the reflective analysis were available to all students, as was the infographic (paragraph 9) but student input was primarily progressed through HISA. The ELIR team was satisfied that the views of students were effectively represented in the Reflective Analysis, including in the choice of themes.

## **2 Enhancing the student learning experience**

### **2.1 Student representation and engagement**

14 The University has an effective strategic approach to student partnership both centrally and within APs through the focus on 'Our Students' as part of the Strategic Plan 2015-20 and 'Tertiary Education' in the Strategic Plan 2021-25. Students who met the ELIR team reflected that the institution listens to their views and that the University works in partnership with them.

15 The commitment to partnership is evidenced in the development of the Student Engagement Vision and Strategy designed in partnership with students on the Student Engagement Group which has raised the visibility of student engagement activities. This strategy maps activities to the Strategic Plan 2021-25 and key areas of student engagement

work including implementation of the Student Partnership Agreement (SPA), activities of the Class Representative Group, delivery of student surveys and development of the student-led teaching awards.

16 The University has a SPA which details how the student voice is heard across the institution as well as identifying enhancement themes. This has resulted in developments in a number of areas including student funding, online learning resources, videoconferencing, and mental health. Since ELIR 3, the University has continued to enhance its approach to the SPA and the enhancement themes are decided collaboratively between students and staff and have taken on a new format, moving away from distinct annual projects to capturing the wider range of partnership working, with University staff and HISA student officers and staff meeting monthly to review progress. Annual action plans are created and progress on the plans and student generated targets set at the 2020 HISA Conference are reported in the annual HISA impact report.

### **Student representation**

17 The University has an embedded class representative system with representatives appointed or elected to cover each year group for programmes across most of the provision (paragraph 18). The representative system is overseen by the Class Representative Group and Student Engagement Group which report into QAEC. This oversight and the increased role of HISA in running the representation system has resulted in greater equivalency across the partnership evidenced through the development of shared resources such as standardised training and a Class Representative Toolkit.

18 Over 600 representatives were elected or appointed in 2020-21, although this is a decrease compared to over 800 in 2019-20, which is partly attributable to the pandemic, and includes students studying on FE provision. Staff reflected that recruiting representatives can be challenging and that evidence from the class representative exit survey suggests the majority of representatives are full-time FE students studying on-campus. The University has recognised that postgraduate students are underrepresented by the formal structures and staff highlighted that, whilst traditionally online student representation had been poorer, the pandemic had resulted in improvements. HISA has not been able to identify the gaps in representation due to a lack of data, but the Class Representative Group is exploring the possibility of conducting a gap analysis as well as ways of improving postgraduate representation.

19 The University has undertaken activity to improve the parity of experience in the implementation of the representative system including consistent terminology, registration, and guidelines around representative meetings, although there remains some variability across the partnership in how class representative meetings are held. Class representatives reflected that they also have opportunities to attend board meetings at their APs, which include a student business item, and that they were valued in the process. Staff highlighted positive practice in working in partnership with students including inviting representatives to weekly faculty meetings which also supported the management of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ELIR team considered that there would be value in the University continuing to build on the good practice identified in the implementation of the representative system to increase formal representative engagements at all levels of provision.

20 Class representatives are offered training locally by academic partner staff, HISA staff, or HISA officers and an online training module, developed initially for online learners, was opened up to all students as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Training has been enhanced in response to student feedback including shorter sessions and restructured workshops. Class representatives reflected that their experience of the training was mixed, with some finding it useful, while others had not received any. Students reflected that there

were barriers to becoming a representative, citing the training and volume of material as potentially deterring representatives. There would be benefit in the University continuing to develop its approach to class representative training to ensure it is accessible to students at all levels of study and that monitoring takes place to ensure all representatives are trained. The ELIR team recommends that the University work in partnership with HISA to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms in place to monitor and address vacancies in student representative structures and to promote the value of the student representative role to students and staff across the University and with collaborative partners.

### **Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA)**

21 The University has invested in enhancing HISA with the staff team growing from three to 30 in five years with a staff member in each AP. Each AP has a local HISA officer who sits on the HISA Executive Committee with elected regional officers.

22 The value of HISA to the University is evident in the HISA President and Chief Executive Officer being invited to take part in the Crisis Management Group as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure their voices could feed into decision making. Also, staff recognised the value of HISA representatives attending faculty meetings to share the student voice.

23 The value of HISA to the student body is variable with staff and students noting that students often go directly to their tutors or Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) instead of HISA. The students use of informal mechanisms is evidenced by the National Student Survey results for 2021 which show all student voice questions on opportunities to feed back, staff valuing the student voice and feedback being acted on being marginally above the Scottish benchmark, while when asked about the Students' Association representing students' academic interests, this scored 49% satisfaction compared to a Scottish benchmark of 52%. The institution has recognised this challenge around awareness of HISA and the ELIR team encourages the University and HISA to continue to raise the profile of HISA and articulate its value to the wider student body.

### **Student surveys and feedback mechanisms**

24 The institution makes use of a range of student survey mechanisms, end-of-module or unit surveys at the end of each semester, a Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES), an Early Student Experience Survey (ESES) and external methods such as National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES). These mechanisms are clearly embedded, (paragraphs 123 and 158) however, response rates in particular for the end of module or unit survey remain low at less than 30% in 2020-21. The University is encouraged to explore methods to improve the response rate for surveys to ensure the widest perspective of the student experience is captured in formal mechanisms.

25 The University makes use of additional feedback mechanisms in particular the Red Button web system that allows students to report issues or positive practice. Students were aware of the Red Button and staff highlighted it as a useful tool for getting a wide picture of the student experience with comprehensive reports produced. The impact of the Red Button has included investigations being conducted into issues, students being signposted to support services and provision of resources. Furthermore, the University introduced a student panel in partnership with HISA to gather feedback during the COVID-19 pandemic on issues ranging from student communication to assessment and exams; however, the University does not plan to continue to use the panel beyond the pandemic due to variable student engagement.

26 The ELIR team considers that the University has effective processes for identifying areas of concern and taking action in response to student feedback data from each individual survey or mechanism such as the NSS action planning process, which involves the Faculty Dean, programme team, and student representatives and has resulted in either increased or maintained scores as a result. Staff have highlighted that this process is effective and had been used to design changes. The University does not require the same approach for PRES and PTES in view of consistently high levels of satisfaction although areas for enhancement are identified following analysis of the outcomes. There is less evidence of a similarly well-developed action planning process for the SSES and ESES. The University has acknowledged that while survey outcomes are effectively explored individually, there is a challenge in triangulating the evidence and building a collective view of the student experience. To help address this challenge, the University is developing new dashboards and data visualisation to collate and present data to staff (paragraphs 154-156).

### **Closing the feedback loop**

27 The University produces effective action plans in response to student survey data; however, it has acknowledged that improvements could be made to the communication of actions to students as highlighted in the 2016 ELIR. Staff described a range of variable practice in sharing the outcomes of feedback including 'You Said, We Did' campaigns, posters on notice boards, information in handbooks, sharing information about changes or presenting proposed improvement actions and designing these with students in class. The University set up a 'Closing the Feedback Loop' Group to deliver enhancements including an 'Achieved in Partnership' campaign and a toolkit of staff resources, but this work was paused during the pandemic and has since resumed.

28 While students highlighted that they did feel listened to, often through informal relationships with course staff, many stated that they did not see the impact or results from formal survey mechanisms, in particular postgraduate students stated they did not know the actions taken from their feedback. The University has been collaborating with HISA in enhancing both student representation and student surveys, although the direct engagement with PATs remains the most effective route for change for many students. The University acknowledges that there is still action to be taken in promoting the value of student representation and in closing the feedback loop in relation to student surveys. The institution is encouraged to ensure the mechanisms for closing the feedback loop to students is formalised in particular in relation to student surveys to achieve greater equivalency of the student voice across the academic partnership (see also paragraph 158 on the University's approach to using data to inform decision-making and evaluation).

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

29 The University has in place effective mechanisms to recognise and respond to equality and diversity across its diverse student population. These mechanisms include the development and implementation of a range of initiatives and projects to support equality and diversity such as the STEM Femmes and Minority Men initiatives, the development and implementation of appropriate policies and procedures including its Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Policy and provision of a range of targeted student support for the identified priority groups. Recent developments have included the steps being taken to develop a more standardised approach to EDI across the APs. The University's approach to widening access is embedded in its policies and practice and it has in place a number of activities to support its work in this area including its work with schools and colleges.

## **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

30 The University's strong commitment to equality of opportunity, inclusion and non-discrimination is reflected in its Strategic Plan 2021-2025 and in its Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Policy. The EDI Policy was developed by the UHI partnership in 2019, and can be contextualised by all academic partners to take account of the different locations and circumstances through which students study.

31 Proactive and effective steps are being taken by the University to develop a more standardised approach to EDI across the APs. This has involved the appointment of an Equality and Diversity Adviser, replacing individual University and partner Gender Action Plans (GAPs) with a single partnership report, increasing the number of partners participating in Athena SWAN, forming a senior partnership EDI committee (EDICT) and an Inclusive Practitioner Network, cross-partnership projects and moving towards more shared reporting. Staff confirmed that training on equality, diversity and inclusion is also in place. Access and inclusion is one of the current QAEC enhancement priorities, with regular updates provided to QAEC on the identified activities.

32 The University's comprehensive 2019 Public Sector Equalities Duty (PSED) report demonstrates that the institution has made good progress towards achieving the equality outcomes and in embedding EDI in its day-to-day activities. The University has recognised the need to improve its collection and use of protected characteristics data and has trialled a new reporting dashboard, with the intention of future implementation of a student services data management system. The University's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion is further evidenced by a range of initiatives and projects including providing support through the Learning and Teaching Academy (LTA) for female staff to undertake the Advance HE Aurora Leadership Development programme. The appointment of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) champions (UHI STEM Femmes) to encourage women in STEM subjects and UHI Minority Men champions to encourage male participation in under-represented areas was viewed positively by staff and students in relation to the aim of increasing the participation of under-represented groups. A dedicated website outlines the University's work on gender-based violence including the setting up of an Equally Safe Group. The University also led the development of an online gender-based violence staff development resource, jointly funded by Scottish universities, and offered free to all Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs) and colleges.

33 A number of priority student groups are identified by the University including care experienced students, student carers and estranged students. The University provides a range of useful, targeted support for these groups including corporate parenting plans for the University and the APs, mandatory online training for staff to support care experienced students, dedicated webpages and the signing of a Standalone Pledge relating to estranged students and online staff guidance regarding student carers with additional training being offered to staff through external organisations such as the local Connecting Carers Centre and the Carers Trust Scotland. A cross-partnership Priority Groups Forum supports and allows staff to meet to discuss issues relevant to these student groups and a survey of care experienced students in 2020 has led to the identification of areas for further support and action which are monitored through the forum.

## **Disabled students**

34 The University has experienced a growth in disability disclosures from 16% in 2015-16 to 27% in 2019-20. The University has established effective processes to identify the support needs of students who declare a disability and keeps these under review. The range of support available to students who declare a disability is detailed on the University's website, with support also provided through the APs. Students and staff

confirmed that students who declare a disability are invited to have their needs assessed and to set up a Personal Learning Support Plan (PLSP) and students were very positive about the proactive approach taken to addressing their specific needs. Staff highlighted the plans as a valuable tool. The ELIR team viewed positively the support provided to disabled students and those in the University's other priority groups.

### **Mental health and counselling support**

35 The University has taken a strategic approach to expanding resources in this area following increased student demand and a service review of student support for mental health in 2018. Since the review, the University has created a regional post of a Mental Health and Counselling Manager (MHCM), developed a Student Mental Health Strategy, partnered with HISA on a Student Mental Health Agreement, launched a Green Button online counselling service, launched a mental health toolkit, invested in an online mental health support platform TogetherAll, co-invested with HISA in an out-of-hours crisis telephone service, produced new resources for postgraduate researchers on mental health, created two part-time student mental health officers and used additional Scottish Funding Council (SFC) investment to recruit 6.4FTE counsellors.

36 The MHCM supports staff across the University and has responsibility for implementation of the key themes in the Student Mental Health Strategy (2019-2022). Actions arising from the strategy are coordinated and taken forward by steering groups and each AP has a local implementation plan. Counselling is provided online by the MHCM; this complements local AP provision and is accessible to students through the Green Button. The University has received positive feedback from students, although there was still limited awareness of the Green Button amongst students who met with the ELIR team. In meetings with the ELIR team, staff highlighted how the investment in mental health has helped increase support in each AP and has been transformational for staff and students. The impact of this development can be seen in the NSS 2021 COVID-19 related questions where the University scored 21% higher than the Scottish average in students' confidence that the institution had taken steps to support their mental health.

37 The University's strong commitment to providing support for student mental health is demonstrated in its various initiatives referenced above which are supported by additional mental health training and support for staff as well as several practitioner networks which include HISA representation. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, relevant resources were moved online, and TogetherAll was introduced (paragraph 35). The ELIR team commends the University's strategic approach to developing its student mental health provision which has resulted in an effective, well utilised and highly valued set of resources embedded at both University and AP levels.

### **Widening access**

38 The University's strong commitment to widening access is reflected in its role as a tertiary institution and recognising its diverse student population. The ELIR team found that this commitment manifests itself in the University's recruitment and admissions policies and practices, pedagogical approaches, flexible curriculum structures, use of technologies and student support structures.

39 The Widening Access Framework sets out the University approach to widening access and identifies seven priority target groups. The University has in place a range of activities with schools and colleges to support widening access including its Virtual Schools Programme which allows senior secondary school pupils across 29 schools to access a range of online courses, and the provision of online vocational courses and work experience opportunities for young people, in response to the Scottish Government's

Developing the Young Workforce programme which aims to increase engagement between employers and young people and reduce youth unemployment. Following admission, support is provided for students in a number of ways including targeted support for priority student groups (paragraph 33), student support services and through the PAT system (paragraphs 50-51).

40 Contextual admissions is a key part of the University's admissions policy and practice and aims to mitigate the effect of contextual factors which could act as barriers to progression to HE. The University sets entry requirements at the minimum required for success on a programme but also encourages applications from prospective students who may not have standard entry qualifications and now receives more than 500 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) applications each academic year which are managed through its comprehensive RPL procedures.

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

41 The University has a comprehensive and effective approach to supporting students at all stages of their learner journey with support provided both locally at each AP and institutionally through central teams. Students felt well supported and mechanisms such as the PAT system are well embedded and effective.

#### **Admission and entry**

42 The University has a distinct learner journey, providing tertiary education to a student community across the highlands and islands of Scotland with a commitment to widening access both through geographical factors and teaching and learning design. The institution undertakes effective outreach activities including the award-winning 'Virtual School' programme (paragraph 39). The University makes use of a contextual admissions process (paragraph 40) and the institution's admissions requirements offer accessible entry routes and pathways for students from a range of backgrounds and experiences.

43 As a tertiary institution, the University is able to offer flexible learning pathways through all levels of the SCQF and aims to provide progression pathways from FE to postgraduate levels in all curriculum areas. Articulation routes are well established across the University's own provision and with other Scottish colleges with the intention to develop additional arrangements with the latter to provide more students with routes to higher education (paragraph 176). The institution has implemented a range of shared resources on bridging arrangements for those articulating as part of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme (paragraph 100).

#### **Induction**

44 Induction is delivered by each AP and each programme team with variability across the University. The AP is responsible for providing induction and orientation to services available which may be delivered virtually or physically. Staff and students highlighted a range of practice from longitudinal induction over an extended period, to a residency, to dedicated sessions. Students broadly indicated that the induction was valuable which is evidenced in feedback from ESES 2020 results which found 96.3% of students were made to feel welcome in their first week and 83.7% found the induction a useful preparation.

45 HISA coordinates and organises annual freshers' week events to welcome students. While activities were moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University and HISA recognise that engagement with social activities has been challenging and the ESES shows only 5% of those responding attended freshers' events. The ELIR team

considers that there would be value in the University reflecting on the ways in which activities can build community and help students integrate with the University.

### **Essential student skills**

46 The University has developed an online Essential Student Skills (ESS) resource which is available to all students prior to enrolment and can be accessed throughout their studies either in their own time or as part of academic teaching. Staff highlighted the value of the resources and how they had used them in inductions while students had mixed responses with some having never used the resources and others speaking positively about them and highlighting how graduate attributes were embedded in the materials. The resources have been accessed widely with 170,000 views in the first three months of term for 2020-21 and 93,500 views for the first three months of term in 2021-22.

### **Student support**

47 The responsibility for providing student support is delivered through each AP with a small central student support team who work together as part of cross-partnership practitioner groups and the Student Support Group (SSG) to share best practice and improve equivalency. Examples of practitioner groups include groups focused on student hardship funds, gender-based violence or mental health. Staff highlighted that there is a designated staff member with oversight of student support in each AP and support is coordinated to ensure effective oversight of the support network. Students who met with the ELIR team were generally positive about the range of support services provided. Students recognised the presence of local support within their AP and highlighted the PAT as the gateway to seeking support. Awareness of student support services is high with 87% of respondents to the ESES in 2020 stating they knew how to access support.

48 As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University took an active approach to student hardship and digital poverty with a Hardship Practitioner Group retaining oversight of initiatives across all APs. The University secured a range of funding to support its diverse community and issued hundreds of laptops to students as well as mobile broadband devices to support students to connect to the internet and effectively engage with their studies.

49 The University has taken proactive steps to enhance mental health student support including conducting a service review in 2018, reflecting on feedback from students and responding to a rise in demand (paragraphs 35-37). This strategic approach to mental health support has ensured that each AP was able to enhance mental wellbeing provision with staff and students positive about the changes (paragraph 37).

### **Personal Academic Tutor system**

50 The University has an embedded Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) system in place at both undergraduate and postgraduate taught levels, the PAT role being to signpost students to services for support, advise on the academic programme and study methods, and support the production of a personal development plan. Each student is contacted by their PAT at least once per semester and the staff providing this support have access to online resources and training through a PAT Development Day. Staff reflected that the PAT system was integral to the University and a critical intervention for students at risk of non-continuation; however, the University recognises the need for a more integrated institutional support in addition to the PAT system (paragraph 156). Implementation of the PAT system includes varied practices including some staff holding group sessions, some offering a scheduled meeting time, and some holding drop-in sessions.

51 Students were highly supportive of the PAT system regularly referring to PATs as their first contact point for a broad range of matters, often beyond academic issues including

sharing feedback, seeking careers advice or looking for wellbeing support. A review of the PAT system is planned, and the ELIR team encourages the University to explore the responsibilities and expectations of PATs. The ELIR team commends the University for the Personal Academic Tutor system embedded across the University academic partner network which provides an identified point of contact for students, an effective referral mechanism to other University services and results in the effective delivery of an accessible and personalised approach to student support. The system is highly valued by students, provides a fundamental support connection point and is viewed as being integral to their student experience.

### **Assessment and feedback**

52 The University's Assessment, Feedback and Feedforward Policy outlines the institutional approach to assessment and feedback as well as a commitment that feedback shall be returned within 15 working days. The institution's performance in student satisfaction with assessment and feedback has improved with a score of 77% satisfaction in the NSS in 2021, higher than the sector average of 66%, and the SSES satisfaction being at 82.6% in 2021.

53 Students reflected that assessment briefs are clear, a comprehensive marking grid is provided, staff are accessible for help, and feedback is comprehensive and helpful. Students provided examples of practice including receiving video feedback and the use of cover sheets which invited students to reflect on previous work and align assessment to graduate attributes, which were viewed positively by the ELIR team (paragraph 141).

54 Students broadly agreed that the 15-day turnaround policy is adhered to, although some PGT students confirmed that this had not been followed. The University states that expectations outlined in the Assessment, Feedback and Feedforward policy are monitored through Subject Network Leaders and annual self-evaluation documents (SEDs); however, the University should explore whether sufficient monitoring processes are in place to enact the policy. In further developing its positive approach to assessment and feedback, the ELIR team encourages the University to consider the introduction of an institution-wide process for monitoring its policy of a 15-day turnaround for returning feedback on assessment in order to facilitate consistency in supporting students' future learning.

### **Communication**

55 The University makes use of a range of communication channels for engaging students including e-mail, poster boards, social media and the MyDay app. In particular, MyDay acts as a central portal and dashboard for students with news updates, links to services such as the library, Red Button feedback tool, ESS modules, HISA support and wellbeing support through the TogetherAll service. This platform is an effective mechanism with 97% of students in the 2020 ESES being aware of MyDay and an average of 4,800 users per day in 2021-22. Students reflected that they had been well communicated with around the transition of the virtual learning environment (VLE) and the changes implemented because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Sense of community**

56 The University's diverse student community studies across multiple APs covering a vast geographical area with students often studying online and therefore the institution recognises that building a sense of belonging and community is an area for development. Staff reflected that students on networked degrees where a programme is offered at multiple APs may struggle to find an identity with the programme while students had a mixed sense of identity with some associating community with their AP and others with the University

overall. Student feedback regularly highlights a sense of community scoring lower, with learning community scoring below the sector average at 64% satisfaction in the 2021 NSS and the 2020 PTES analysis recognising that students would like more opportunities to build learning communities with their peers. Initiatives developed include those relating to student engagement (paragraph 15), HISA and freshers' events and student engagement through sport. Acknowledging the University's challenges, the ELIR team encourages the University to continue to develop initiatives to build a sense of belonging in the student body.

### **Graduate attributes**

57 The University has defined academic skills, self-management, social awareness, communication, and interpersonal skills as its five graduate attributes which were designed in consultation with staff, students and employers. Since ELIR 3, the institution has taken action to extend and further embed the graduate attributes including through integrating them as part of the programme approval process and developing a dedicated webpage as part of the cover sheet for assessment submission (paragraph 141). Staff noted how graduate attributes were often explicitly mentioned in programmes and integrated into learning outcomes but that awareness remains low among students. Students had mixed awareness of graduate attributes with some having never heard of them, to others having seen them used in their course. The ELIR team encourages the University to continue with its plan to work in partnership with HISA to improve awareness of and share best practice around the use of graduate attributes.

### **Employability and careers**

58 The University has identified employability as a strategic enhancement priority for QAEC and one of the identified contextualised themes for ELIR 4, having noted 74.5% of UHI graduates were in employment compared to a Scottish average of 84% in 2017-18 with the institution's score falling to 72% in 2018-19. As part of the strategic curriculum review, the provision offered by the institution will be evaluated with employability as a specific dimension.

59 The University's Careers and Employability Centre (CEC) offers some support centrally together with local provision through the academic partners. The comprehensive services offered by the Centre include one-to-one meetings, personalised CV and application support, interview preparation, career development workshops and online employability resources such as the Future Me platform. The platform is a gateway to student participation in self-directed career development pathways. Students had limited awareness of the careers support offered and stated they would be more likely to speak to their PAT or course staff. The University has identified enhancement actions through the student support service review of Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) that took place in 2019-20 including developing a new communication approach and implementing a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme for staff such as PATs in relation to careers advice. The University is encouraged to progress the actions from the service review and improve awareness and use of the careers services provided to create a seamless offering across the AP network.

60 The University coordinates placements through the CEC with a Placement Practitioner Network providing additional support. The University provided a list showing placement activity on 49 higher education programmes out of approximately 240 named awards. Students had mixed experiences of placement with some having to find their own placement while others had their place arranged for them by the University. Those who had undertaken a placement confirmed that they were supported during the process. The University has developed effective policies and recently underwent an audit to validate the effectiveness of the placement processes. Aligned with the curriculum review, the ELIR team

considers that the University may find value in exploring and expanding the range of courses which include placement or work experience and providing greater consistency in supporting students in securing opportunities.

61 The University has identified Enterprise as a theme in the Strategic Plan 2021-25 and provides student-facing enterprise support through the CREATE (Creating Entrepreneurship and Innovation) team which develops skills training and events for aspiring entrepreneurs. The University runs programmes such as the Catalyst online small business training programme, the Scottish Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Educators 'train the trainer' programme and initiatives such as UHI Business Competition by offering prize funding to those submitting business ideas. Students noted that entrepreneurship skills had been gained as part of teaching on their modules.

62 The University has a 'UHI for Work and Enterprise' employer engagement strategy overseen by a programme board and a Business Development practitioners' group, which builds connections between the curriculum and employers and identifies local and regional skills gaps. The impact of this strategy has been demonstrated with the introduction of Curriculum Development Employer Engagement Officers (CDEEOs) as part of the Careers and Employability team which work as a single point of contact for external organisations resulting in the development of 26 new courses, increased student exposure to industry and increased placement and work experience opportunities. Staff reflected that the new CDEEO roles had been valuable in building links with industry and finding new placement opportunities. Staff shared examples of how employability is embedded in the curriculum including skills outlined in Module Information Packs, developing industry-aligned assignments and engaging industry guest speakers.

## **2.4 Postgraduate taught and research student experience**

63 The University has an effective approach to managing and enhancing the postgraduate student experience. Feedback from both PGT and PGR students is generally positive as evidenced by the outcomes of the most recent PTES (2021) and PRES (2019) surveys. The University has recognised the need, and is taking steps to engage more PGTs in the class representation system and to promote the work of the careers service. Since gaining RDAP in 2017, the University has taken a number of steps to enhance the resources available to PGRs and has developed and implemented its own PGR monitoring and review processes. The University continues to take action to further develop and embed its research culture.

### **Postgraduate taught students**

64 The University offers a growing number of Postgraduate Taught courses that may be studied on a full or part-time basis, with much of the provision being fully online. The number of PGT students has increased significantly from 429 (159 FTE) in 2015-16 to 1,033 (412 FTE) in 2019-20, with further growth planned focusing on online provision. The majority of PGT students study part-time. Support for PGT students is managed and provided on a similar basis to that for undergraduate students, and PGTs who met the ELIR team confirmed that they are registered at one of the APs and are able to access the resources of that AP or associated learning centre including staff support. PGT students who met the team also commented positively on the support they received through their PATs, course leaders, tutors and local support services but a small number were less positive about the support received from the wider University and in particular noted the lack of social and networking opportunities available to them (paragraph 56).

65 Feedback is gathered from PGTs through PTES which shows generally high satisfaction, although PGTs who met the ELIR team were largely unaware of the

survey and any actions taken as a result. Overall satisfaction in the 2021 survey was 9% above both the national and Scottish sector average at 87% (compared to 85% in 2020 and 87% in 2019); the response rate in 2021 was also above the sector average of 23%, having risen to 32% from 14% in 2020. PTES outcomes are shared with programme leaders, quality managers and senior staff through the annual report to QAEC and Academic Council and actions are followed up at the appropriate level. The 2020 Programme Leaders' Forum, organised to share good practice and ideas for enhancement, led to the identification of careers provision and course-level communications as areas that needed enhancement and the ELIR team heard that action had been taken to promote the work of the careers and employability services which resulted in improved satisfaction in 2020.

66 PGT students are represented through the University's system of class representatives who attend class committees, or equivalent fora (paragraphs 17-18). The University acknowledges that PGTs are under-represented in the class representative system and the ELIR team found that some PGTs were unaware of their class representatives. To address this issue, HISA and the Class Representative Group are exploring ways to engage more PGTs as student representatives.

### **Postgraduate research students**

67 Since 2017, following its successful RDAP application, the University has offered its own research degrees with the final Aberdeen registered students under the previous validation arrangement nearing completion and the majority of PGR students now registered on a UHI award. The University offers both MRes and PhD programmes in a number of its specialist fields. The number of Postgraduate Research students has increased from 119 (57 FTE) in 2015-16 to 157 (132 FTE) in 2019-20.

68 The Dean of Research has overall responsibility for PGR students and works with Research Degrees Committee (RDC) and its sub-group, Graduate School Committee which oversees student progression and monitoring. The Graduate School Office (GSO) administers the PGR student experience, supervisor support training and development, policy and guidance development on behalf of RDC and organises PGR student induction. PGR students commented positively about their experience of induction and of the role of the GSO in communicating with, and providing support for, PGRs across the AP network.

69 PGR students are enrolled and located at an AP, or in some cases, the Executive Office, through which supervision, facilities and resources are provided. PGR students are appropriately supported by supervisory teams consisting of at least two research active members of staff led by a Director of Studies; supervisors may be external to the University, often utilised to strengthen specific subject expertise, but cannot be appointed as Directors of Studies. Staff and PGR students confirmed that a wide range of student and supervisor development and training opportunities are offered by the University including mentorship and compulsory training for new supervisors and regular refresher training for existing supervisors. Students also confirmed that they have access to financial support for attendance at conferences and training events and have regular opportunities to present their work at internal seminars and other events. The annual two-day PGR student conference, linked in alternate years to the University-wide Staff-Student Research Conference (which was cancelled in 2020 due to COVID-19), allows PGR students to present their work and to network with other PGR students.

70 The University has endorsed and adopted the principles in QAA's Statement of expectations for the support of postgraduates who teach. In response to recommendations in the previous two ELIRs, a standard training course for PGR students to engage in teaching is in place. This was initially provided by the GSO, and in some cases supplemented by the APs, and is now incorporated in the LTA programme of events

thereby allowing monitoring of participation. The University acknowledges that not all postgraduate students will get opportunities for teaching; however, all students involved in formal teaching activity are required to undertake relevant training. The ELIR team found that not all students who were undertaking teaching had undergone the standard or other formal training course, with some students describing more informal support mechanisms provided by academic staff. In addition, the outcomes of PRES 2019 showed that of those who had been offered opportunities to teach, only 53% indicated that they had been given appropriate support (compared with 61% across the sector) and only 56% said they had received formal training (compared to 70% across the sector). The ELIR team recommends that the University should ensure that all current and future postgraduate research students undertaking teaching roles complete the University's standard training course prior to commencing teaching and that an appropriate monitoring mechanism is developed to ensure completion of this training is recorded and monitored to enable institutional oversight.

71 Due to the growth in PGR student numbers, the University has kept space and resources for PGRs under review, articulating a minimum baseline provision aimed at ensuring a broadly equivalent student experience regardless of location or discipline area. Although PGRs who met the ELIR team were largely unaware of this requirement they confirmed that their resources were generally adequate. The University has also invested in system developments to enhance the PGR student experience including the recently implemented PGR management software, a new online system for ethical approval and a Graduate School site within the University's document management system.

72 The University reviewed its processes for PGR quality assurance, monitoring and student progression following attainment of RDAP in 2017. A quinquennial internal re-validation programme for research degree areas takes place. As the final Aberdeen registered students complete, the University has moved to its own annual quality reporting process involving routine reporting to RDC, an annual report from the Graduate School to QAEC and Academic Council and, from 2020 biennial engagement with the quality monitoring dialogue process. The comprehensive PGR Code of Practice, which provides the framework through which the University delivers its postgraduate research degrees, is reviewed annually and any significant changes or updates are reported and approved through RDC. Available within the Code of Practice, the Postgraduate Structured Management Framework (PSMF) helpfully sets out the milestones relating to PhD study, the activities and support to enable these milestones to be achieved, related training and development, the role of the supervisory team and the timing of monitoring and review processes. To better align with sector expectations and practice the University has also changed to an annual formal review point for PGRs, with a thesis and progression panel instead of having biannual formal reviews from the second year onwards, and PGR students met by the team were aware of these requirements for review and progression.

73 Feedback is sought from PGR students through the University's participation in PRES on a biennial basis. Overall satisfaction in the 2019 PRES was 85%, 1% higher than the 2017 outcomes, 7% higher than the 2015 outcomes and 4% higher than the sector average; the completion rate in 2019 was 46.4%. Two areas scored less positively than the overall sector average: research culture and research skills. The results, and a development and action plan, are considered through the committee structure, with actions followed up through RDC, and PGR students confirmed that the results are shared with them. Due to COVID-19 the University will next participate in PRES in 2022 to allow the action plan from 2019 to be more fully developed.

74 Staff and students confirmed that PGR student representatives are included in the membership of RDC and are supported through an induction and handover facilitated by the Dean of Research who also meets regularly with the PGR student representatives,

although PGRs noted that no formal training is in place (paragraphs 17-20). Some representatives are also members of their local AP committees. PGR representatives communicate with students via email and PGR students confirmed that, overall, their voices are heard.

75 Further support provided to PGRs during the COVID-19 pandemic included a move to viva by video conference, student and supervisor surveys to gauge impact on planned research, facilitating dialogue with internal and external budget-holders regarding additional funding for those students with registration and funding due to end in 2020-21, and scheduled weekly drop-in sessions with the Graduate School Manager.

## **2.5 Learning environment, including the use of technology**

76 The University has effective arrangements in place for managing the quality of the learning environment. The student learning environment is managed collaboratively across the University partnership. APs are responsible for providing students with an appropriate physical learning environment and resources, with ICT, Library Services and online resources being offered on a cross-partnership basis. All students have access to the University's networked facilities and services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a COVID campus planning group was established, for the purposes of coordination and information-sharing across the different AP campus locations. The ELIR team learned in meetings that students had raised issues in relation to access to physical resources during the pandemic due to restrictions in relation to access times and student numbers and communication of availability of online resources. These topics were discussed and addressed through the Student Panel set up in partnership with HISA to gather and respond to student feedback on changes made during the pandemic resulting, for example, in improvements to communications with students during that period (paragraph 25).

77 The University has considerable experience of providing a digital learning environment for delivery of blended learning. The Educational Development Unit (EDU) promotes the use of core learning and teaching technologies using the Benchmarks for the Use of Technology in Learning and Teaching and its development standards to underpin curriculum development projects. The University's experience in this area supported its response to the COVID-19 pandemic including support for those programme teams (paragraph 112) and to address the issue of digital poverty (paragraph 48).

78 A new virtual learning environment (VLE) has been in operation since August 2019. The transition to the new VLE was effectively overseen by a project board. The ELIR team heard in meetings with staff that an operational group allowed the project team to respond to operational matters quickly and is now a permanent practitioner group reporting to QAEC, with an expanded learning technology remit and student membership. Staff were also supported during the transition to the VLE by EDU and through a group of 'Champions' from each AP who enabled staff across the partnership to ask and receive timely answers to their queries. In addition, an AP communications group was set up, the members of which had responsibility for disseminating news and updates to staff at their own AP to secure improved staff engagement. To support the effective implementation and subsequent use of the new VLE in terms of learning, teaching and assessment practice, the University updated its VLE checklist, originally developed to help address student feedback about consistency.

79 Students who met with the ELIR team were extremely positive about the transition to the new VLE, although they noted and the University acknowledges that there are still enhancements to be made. The project team held a 'lessons-learned' event to reflect on the successes and challenges of the transition and the University is undertaking an internal evaluation of the VLE to determine future needs. The ELIR team commends the University

for the effective planning, communication and implementation of the VLE project which ensured that a smooth transition was effectively achieved by working collaboratively across the University academic partner network. In particular, the approach was well communicated, provided staff and student support, and retained a focus on the use of the VLE as a tool for learning and supporting the student experience.

80 The student support service review of ICT services in 2017 led to a range of enhancements including the establishment of the regional ICT committee aimed at improving coordination and planning. Student feedback has also prompted enhancements to provision including upgrades to Wi-Fi and improvements to MyDay, the student portal which provides a common interface to all students. Although the 2021 NSS outcomes showed a lower score than previously for IT resources at 73.4% down from 80.7% in 2020, the ELIR team found that all students they met were broadly positive about the IT resources available to them.

81 A cyber incident in March 2021 was handled through the University's cyber incident procedure. While the majority of student-facing resources were unaffected and all students were able to complete assessments on time, some core and all on-campus services, such as Wi-Fi, telephones, access to computers and printing were taken offline. The ELIR team concluded that the University had handled this incident appropriately.

82 Library services are provided collectively by a central team with a regional remit, together with the AP teams. All library staff are part of the Library Practitioner Group (LPG) which responds to staff and student feedback and strives to ensure that the needs of all staff, students and researchers are met in a consistent and seamless manner regardless of their location or mode of study. APs are responsible for the purchase of physical library resources and for providing designated library spaces. A joint Library Management System is used across the University through which physical resources can be accessed across the partnership. Inter-Site Loans, and the British Library Inter-Library Loan scheme are also in place to support access to resources for all students. As a result of the increased dependency on e-resources because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University increased its expenditure on e-books by 68% during this period. There are high levels of satisfaction with the online library services with a score of over 90% satisfaction in SSES. Library resources for PGRs and researchers have been enhanced since RDAP was achieved and PGR and PGT students spoke very positively about the available resources and the responsiveness and helpfulness of library services across the University, for example citing the ability, often from remote locations, to access the live chat service, staffed across the APs on a rota basis, and receive an immediate and helpful response. During the COVID-19 pandemic a free click and collect and postal service was available to, and valued, by staff and students.

83 The student support service review of the library in 2015 led to a number of effective enhancements including the re-establishment of the post of University librarian, setting up of the LPG, formalisation of the role of Subject Network librarians, adoption of a variety of technologies, a Live Chat service to respond to student queries and the abolition of late return fines. NSS scores relating to library resources improved from 69% in 2016 to 82% for the years 2019 and 2020, although they dropped to 73.2 % in 2021. Positive free text comments related to the help and support received from library staff with less positive comments around library space. In the 2021 PTES, physical library resources achieved a low score (55%, just below the Scottish sector average of 57%), while access to online library resources scored highly (88%, above the Scottish sector average of 85%) PRES scores for resources have increased steadily since 2015 and are now above sector average. The library service is responsive to student feedback and, for example, the LPG has formulated an action plan to address the issues arising from these surveys which, as noted above, mainly relate to library space.

84 All students who met the team were extremely positive about the responsiveness of, and the help and support they had received from, the library services team no matter their location, the usefulness of the live chat service which supports the seamless service offered by the team, the availability of electronic library resources and the additional support received during the pandemic. The ELIR team commends the Library Services which delivers an integrated, helpful, and responsive team-based approach which operates effectively as a seamless single service across the University academic partner network and provides support to students across all locations. The service provides parity of provision to all students through its use of digital resources and the targeted support provided during COVID-19, such as the free click and collect and postal service available to both staff and students.

## **2.6 Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience**

85 The University has an effective approach to enhancing the student learning experience with a strong and clear commitment to mainstreaming equality and diversity in all its activities and to widening participation. This is demonstrated through the development and implementation of policies and procedures and the provision of a wide variety of support and initiatives aimed at ensuring that all students achieve successful outcomes. Student Mental Health support has been significantly enhanced and the ELIR team commends the University's strategic approach to developing its student mental health provision which has resulted in an effective, well utilised and highly valued set of resources embedded at both University and academic partner levels.

86 Students on taught programmes are effectively supported through the Personal Academic Tutoring system. The ELIR team commends the Personal Academic Tutor system embedded across the University academic partner network which provides an identified point of contact for students, an effective referral mechanism to other University services and results in the effective delivery of an accessible and personalised approach to student support. The system is highly valued by students, provides a fundamental support connection point and is viewed as being integral to their student experience.

87 A new VLE is in place supporting learning and teaching and the ELIR team commends the University for the effective planning, communication and implementation of the VLE project which ensured that a smooth transition was effectively achieved by working collaboratively across the University academic partner network. In particular, the approach was well communicated, provided staff and student support, and retained a focus on the use of the VLE as a tool for learning and supporting the student experience.

88 The University has effective arrangements in place for managing the quality of the student learning environment. Reviews of services have resulted in enhancements to provision in these areas. The ELIR team commends the Library Services who deliver an integrated, helpful, and responsive team-based approach which operates effectively as a seamless single service across the University academic partner network and provides support to students across all locations. The service provides parity of provision to all students through its use of digital resources and the targeted support provided during COVID-19, including the free click and collect and postal service available to both staff and students.

89 The University has a strategic approach to student engagement and representation. The University provides students with a range of opportunities to provide feedback on their experience and there is clear evidence of partnership with HISA including the Student Partnership Agreement. In support of this approach, the ELIR team recommends that the University works in partnership with the Highlands and Islands Student Association to ensure

that there are appropriate mechanisms in place to monitor and address vacancies in student representative structures and to promote the value of the student representative role to students and staff across the University and with collaborative partners.

90 The support provided for postgraduate students meets external reference points. The University acknowledges the ongoing challenges of developing a research community across the University and has taken a number of actions to address this issue. While the University offers postgraduate students a range of development opportunities, the ELIR team recommends that all current and future postgraduate research students undertaking teaching roles complete the University's standard training course prior to commencing teaching and that an appropriate monitoring mechanism is developed to ensure completion of this training is recorded and monitored to enable institutional oversight.

### **3 Strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching**

#### **3.1 Strategic approach to enhancement**

91 The University has effective and well established systems in place to promote the strategic enhancement of learning and teaching which is underpinned by educational research and scholarship submitted to Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021. QAEC has overall responsibility for delivery of the strategic aims and direction of enhancement priorities supported by the LTA and EDU. The LTA leads on embedding the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy (LTES), professional development and recognition, and educational scholarship and research. The EDU leads on curriculum development projects, use of technologies, development of digital learning materials and a range of curriculum design and development interventions. The LTA and the EDU identify good practice and offer opportunities to share these more widely to enhance learning and teaching practice. Both work closely with the Head of Academic Development who leads on a range of projects which have directly informed teaching practice. Examples include the current learning analytics work (paragraphs 154-156) and support for the first educational research submission to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2021 with 53 articles being considered for inclusion in the submission.

92 The QAEC has a wide and inclusive remit. In 2021 six enhancement priorities were identified and monitored by QAEC: using student data for monitoring and evaluation, professional development and support, student engagement, employability and employer engagement, access and inclusion, and curriculum/portfolio review, each with a number of sub-themes. QAEC is used to share information and ensure efficiency and oversight and its broad remit is achieved through the support of 19 groups which provide regular reports and updates to the committee (paragraph 120).

#### **Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy**

93 The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy (LTES), which identifies 12 core values (based on the 3E Framework - Enhance, Extend, Empower), is the central focus for driving strategic enhancement in learning and teaching. The purpose of the LTES is to establish a 'common language' between APs as not only a mechanism to think about, recognise and share good practice, but to enable a single unified Learning and Teaching Strategy which is the ambition of the University and identified as an objective of the LTES. The LTES was adopted by five of the APs. Ten of the 12 LTES's objectives are complete or nearing completion and all curricula are required to demonstrate how LTES values are met. An evaluation of the impact of LTES is underway and due to conclude within the academic year, alongside a consultation focused on delivering the final objective to achieve a single unified LTES, which works at both the University and AP levels.

94 The LTES values are high level and although they have not been formally adopted by all APs, there are some core touch points for all staff, for example through the Accredited Learning, Professional Development and Innovation in Education (ALPINE) programme (paragraph 107); however, the University does not formally monitor engagement with the LTES as it has not been adopted across all APs. A new LTES is under development alongside the new University Strategic Plan. The University acknowledges that barriers remain to achieving a common LTES across all the APs as some have their own teaching strategies; however, a single LTES remains the University ambition. The ELIR team strongly encourages the University to build on the current strategy and develop a common LTES which works for all partners, and to monitor its implementation (paragraph 99).

95 The implementation of the University's strategic approach to enhancement is supported by a number of initiatives and frameworks and drawn from key external standards and Benchmark reference points (paragraphs 142-148) including the Advance HE Professional Standards framework. Internal reference documents include Benchmarks for the Use of Technology in Learning and Teaching which provides evidence-based examples for use by staff to encourage LTES values to be embedded.

96 There is clear evidence of a range of strategic enhancement initiatives and a culture of reflection, learning and quality monitoring. For example, the impact of the move to the new VLE offers features not available in the previous VLE, and facilitates the development of new teaching and learning practices and delivers the LTES values (paragraphs 78-79). The move has also supported the introduction of Learning Analytics to improve the use of data, overseen by the Learning Analytics Steering Group. This has also been identified as a core QAEC enhancement priority. Other enhancements include updates to Graduate Attributes (paragraph 57), and a Framework for the Development of Open Educational Practices which has developed an Open Educational Resource (OER) bank, directly supporting one of the LTES values and provides a roadmap for delivery including advice on policy, legal aspects, copyright and accessibility.

### **Curriculum review**

97 The focus of the curriculum review, initiated in late 2020 as part of a change management plan, comprises a revised curriculum structure, a curriculum plan and revised curriculum planning arrangements. The strategic curriculum review framework sets the planned approach to reviewing the curriculum portfolio and a series of clear objectives, several of which will be taken forward in tandem with the development of the next LTES. The objectives include a range of rebalancing initiatives such as agreeing targets and mechanisms to reduce the total number of modules and units to support the curriculum, enabling initiatives such as increasing the levels of articulation from colleges outside of UHI partners, and futureproofing initiatives such as optimising the use of OERs and reviewing curricula for equality and diversity. Noting the challenges of a diverse and tertiary curriculum, the University focus is to find a balance between homogeneity and celebrating differences. The ELIR team noted how differences can make consensus building and establishing equivalency across the institution challenging.

### **Implementation of strategy**

98 The University has effective mechanisms for self-evaluation and enhancement. Initiatives may arise in a variety of ways for example through committees' activities, and all policies are formally approved through appropriate mechanisms and actions are taken to embed new policies across the APs. Given the diversity of APs and approaches, considerable time is spent in consultation and consensus building. Recognising the partnership nature of the University structures and the diversity of the UHI academic partner network, the University sets out its approach to assuring quality and academic standards in

its Equivalence Policy (paragraph 122) which recognises differences in student experiences but sets out criteria to ensure equivalency in the student experience relating to areas including programmes, credit, module evaluation, monitoring and information for students. This approach is, however, not applied across all aspects of University policy and strategy and outside of the Equivalence Policy, there are a number of areas which the University has not considered or has been unable to achieve consensus, including the lack of a consistent or equivalent approach to implementation of the LTES (paragraphs 93-94) universal grading scheme (paragraph 139), staff development (paragraph 113) or approach to enhance teaching through peer review (paragraphs 105 and 113). The ELIR team reflected that the consensus building approach had impacted on the ability of the University to implement University-wide policies in these areas to advance the strategic ambitions of the institution articulated through its strategic initiatives such as the LTES and that there would be benefit in extending the equivalency approach through articulation and embedding of institutional expectations.

99 Building on the University's achievements of effectively and consistently embedding its quality framework and its Equivalence Policy, the ELIR team recommends that the institution should establish a systematic approach to articulating and embedding institutional expectations for other policy and practice across the University academic partner network to support integration and implementation of University initiatives. As part of this, the University is asked to increase the setting and monitoring of institutional expectations to ensure equivalency and to support the achievement of the University's ambitions and strategy. In developing this approach, for example, the University is encouraged to develop a common Learning Teaching and Enhancement Strategy adopted across the University academic partner network.

### **3.2 Impact of the national Enhancement Themes and related activity**

100 The national Enhancement Themes are a key reference point for the University and have had a substantial impact on its activities at all levels. Engagement with the national Enhancement Themes is coordinated through LTA and overseen by a steering group which reports to QAEC Projects and reports are evaluated by the staff theme lead. The benefits of this approach have been wide engagement with activities and the ability to align with LTA events, reaching a wide University audience across the APs and raising their profile. It also addressed the issue prior to 2017 where impact had been limited to specific subject areas as the focus had been projects within Subject Networks. As a result of this new approach, the impact of the Enhancement Themes has resulted in a range of good practice case studies, such as those in Student Transitions. These focused on transitions in the UHI context such as from HN to degree study. Results of a number of small-scale projects were disseminated internally and promoted via the Transition Champions in each AP, as well as externally via a number of mechanisms such as a contribution to the national Student Transitions Map sector resource. Another example from the Evidence for Enhancement Theme is the Student Engagement Indicators where the LTA worked closely with HISA on learning analytics and how to use data for student support. This resulted in joint events, including a world café session for students where they articulated their views about learning analytics and student engagement indicators for student support purposes, which have now been taken forward through the Learning Analytics Steering Group. There are also opportunities through the LTA to undertake funded research on teaching practice in relation to the QAA enhancement themes.

101 There is clear engagement with the themes and evidence of outcomes. The University's reflective analysis provides clear evidence of a range of activities across all enhancement themes as well as the activities, projects and outputs which have resulted from embedding the enhancements in programmes to providing outputs for the sector, including the open toolkit, on how to develop a sense of belonging in online distance learning. Key

outputs of the enhancement themes work include a Class Representative Summit in 2019, a Class Representative Toolkit to help staff better understand how to support and harness student representation and an annual Assessment and Feedback Symposium.

### **3.3 Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice**

102 The University has an effective approach to sharing good practice through a range of processes and structures and the approach is delivered through a matrix of initiatives including groups, events and networks. The LTA, led by a Professor of Pedagogy, and the EDU are key structures which support staff to share and develop good practice through a range of mechanisms such as quarterly Learning and Teaching newsletters and a rolling programme of events including webinars, conferences and symposia. Other mechanisms include the annual Student Support Initiative Awards which highlight and share good practice. A range of sources such as student and external feedback and Key Performance Indicator (KPI) data drive reflection in the annual and periodic review processes to continually enhance practice.

103 QAEC coordinates and leads a range of cross-partner practitioner groups, and short life working groups which facilitate the sharing of expertise and resources, and feed into policy and practice. It is recognised that dissemination to the wider group of staff needs further work; however, Subject Networks and faculties hold a range of themed events in support of this agenda. An example of sharing good practice, informed by research, is the engagement of staff publishing in the area of open education to facilitate a workshop related to this topic.

104 The University has a range of approaches to identify and share good practice in learning and teaching. For example, reflection on a number of data sources, such as student feedback, external feedback (for example from external examiners' reports), and KPI data, to inform practice. Practice is shared at a range of levels, including module, programme, Subject Networks and University. Self-evaluation document pro formas are structured to identify and draw out areas of good practice for sharing. Example reports from subject reviews clearly show how good practice is evidenced and how actions are documented to ensure they are shared. All reports are presented to QAEC and published internally, providing additional mechanisms to showcase areas of good practice (paragraphs 134-135). In addition, there are a range of committees at Subject Network and Faculty level which also facilitate the sharing of good practice such as networking events themed around pedagogical approaches and curriculum review. Practice is also shared through ALPINE work, the EDU, and the annual Subject Network Leaders' dialogues. While the University has a good range of mechanisms to share good practice, it is unclear how widespread engagement is with these across all the APs given the different workload models across the APs which, depending on resources, can have issues for parity and equity in terms of time for CPD (paragraph 98). As a result, core staff development opportunities are provided centrally as much as possible. The approach would be enhanced if engagement by staff was tracked to ensure wide reach and impact across all APs.

105 The University does not have a scheme for peer review of teaching; however, teaching reviews do occur, for example in the taught route of the ALPINE scheme and in the University mentoring schemes and some APs such as Argyll College run an opt-in scheme. In 2018-19 some APs piloted a mandatory approach, the evaluation of which showed it worked well and the approach continues in some APs. In developing a strategic approach to enhancement and recognition of learning and teaching practice, the ELIR team encourages the University to consider including processes for ongoing peer review of learning and teaching (paragraph 113).

### 3.4 Engaging, developing and supporting staff

106 The University has effective approaches and mechanisms in place for engaging, developing and supporting staff in the continued development of their pedagogic practices. The LTA has a core remit to support staff development and share good practice, providing a central hub and framework of interlinked activities to help develop staff, share and recognise best practice. It is valued by staff and acts as a central point of coordination across the University offering an annual series of professional development workshops, events, symposia and webinars, guided by the LTES (paragraph 110). Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic engagement by staff has increased (including 1,600 attendees registered for the programme of LTC webinars) further evidencing the value and impact. In addition, APs also offer a range of development opportunities such as conferences and other events. The work of the LTA is highly valued by all staff who recognise the unifying support and enhancement-led and developmental approach. The ELIR team commends the LTA for providing an engaging learning and teaching community hub which is highly valued by staff as an effective connection point across the University academic partner network for academic development and enhancement.

107 Since ELIR 3, the range of development opportunities for staff has been substantially enhanced, resulting in more staff achieving professional recognition. ALPINE is the University's institutional framework for recognising good practice in learning and teaching and supporting learning and teaching for educational leadership in HE through awarding HEA fellowships. Since ALPINE was launched in 2016, 162 HEA fellowships (Associate Fellow through to Principal Fellow) have been supported across the APs. All APs encourage staff to obtain a higher education teaching qualification or professional recognition although it is not mandated. The number of staff qualified to teach at HE level is not tracked and no targets are set and therefore the ELIR team encourages the University to develop an approach to enable tracking (paragraph 113).

108 Peer support is part of the University culture and is fostered in a variety of ways including through ALPINE, applications for National Teaching Fellow (NTF) and Collaborative Awards for Teaching Excellence (CATE). Scholarship development became the fourth strand of the University's mentoring activities from 2019-20, the others being Learning and Teaching Enhancement, Professional Recognition and Research. The University Mentoring Scheme is evaluated annually and results from the range of activities, which include creating effective relationships and networks, sharing news, resources and reflections, indicate the scheme is considered beneficial and meets the needs of staff.

109 A range of additional, supportive schemes includes the development of leadership capacity promoting engagement in external higher education specific development programmes, such as those offered by Advance HE. Staff attending external courses are then encouraged to share their learning, and in 2020 the University held its first Educational Leadership Symposium. The University also participates in the Aurora Programme, Advance HE's Leadership Programme for Women and, since 2018, 21 participants have completed the programme (paragraph 32). Through the pandemic, UHI has shared practice with the sector in how to support professional development at a distance. Staff have subsequently been supported to share their learning through a variety of mechanisms such as webinars, conferences, mentoring activities and the establishment of action learning sets. All staff have access to a Development Fund, overseen by a panel, which, in 2019-20 contributed to the development of 50 staff and ensures alignment with strategic priorities, and explicitly the LTES values.

110 The ELIR team considered the support by the LTA for colleagues to engage in pedagogic research an example of sector good practice. The LTA provides a range of opportunities, and support includes guidance on how to carry out research, how to publish,

the provision of scholarship and small grant funding, a learning labs facility hosting a range of configurable tools and equipment, and writing retreats. Benefits not only include strengthening the link between teaching and research but outputs from this initiative have supported the University's first education REF submission in 2021. A specific project on research-teaching linkages was initiated in 2017 and is now working with programme teams in 15 different disciplines and has resulted in resources including case studies, literature reviews and module changes.

111 EDU supports staff to embed the LTES values in teaching. Key support includes staff digital literacy relating to the design and development of learning resources. The in-house developed tool, Forge, designed to facilitate the creation, editing and publishing of high-quality interactive learning resources now has 550 users, and national recognition for the developer in the 2020 'Learning Technologist of the Year' ALT (Association for Learning Technology) awards.

112 The EDU team is responsive to staff needs, offering a range of professionally developed resources and support including webinars for staff in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Webinars focused on a range of upskilling, for example implementing virtual field trips and how to create a sense of belonging for online learners. More recently they have supported the delivery of a blended learning experience for students. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Head of Academic Development coordinated and collated a teaching continuity plan to address the needs of different disciplines and programmes with regard to teaching and assessments, supporting home working for staff, and home learning for students. Each Subject Network was assigned a specific member of the EDU team to work with. Advice, webinars and drop-in sessions were also available to support staff. The EDU team is held in high regard by staff for the range of services and support they offer to staff.

113 An ELIR 3 recommendation was to establish an overarching staff development policy. Since the last ELIR, the University has appointed a senior cross-partnership Director of Strategic Organisational and HE Development who has the remit to establish an overarching workforce strategy that aligns with UHI's strategic aims. The ELIR team considered that recognising the challenge of staff on different AP contracts, the impact of not having an overarching staff development policy may result in inequality of development opportunities including access to a range of promotion routes. Academic staff were clear regarding progression routes through research or into management but stated that they were unclear how to achieve a professorship through a teaching route. The ELIR team recommends that in support of the University's aspirations, and in the context of the academic partnership model, the University should develop and articulate an institution-wide staff development approach which supports the enhancement of teaching practice, appropriately values and recognises teaching practice and ensures parity of esteem between teaching and research. In developing this strategic approach, the University is encouraged to consider learning and teaching sector practice including: learning and teaching career development pathways; setting a clear institutional expectation around teaching qualifications and professional recognition for all staff teaching on higher education programmes; and processes for ongoing peer review of learning and teaching.

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

114 The University has an effective approach to implementing institutional strategies and enhancing learning and teaching. The ELIR team commends the LTA for providing an engaging learning and teaching community hub, which is highly valued by staff and acts as an effective connection point across the University academic partner network for academic development and enhancement.

115 In support of the University's ambitions and building on the University's achievements of effectively and consistently embedding its quality framework and its Equivalence Policy, the ELIR team recommends that the institution should establish a systematic approach to articulating and embedding institutional expectations for other policy and practice across the University academic partner network to support integration and implementation of University initiatives. As part of this, the University is asked to increase the setting and monitoring of institutional expectations to ensure equivalency and to support the achievement of the University's ambitions and strategy.

116 The University has some good approaches to staff development offered centrally; however, in support of the University's aspirations and in the context of the academic partnership model, the ELIR team recommends that the University develop and articulate an institution-wide staff development approach which supports the enhancement of teaching practice, appropriately values and recognises teaching practice and ensures parity of esteem between teaching and research.

## **4 Academic standards and quality processes**

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

117 The University has effective arrangements in place for managing quality and for setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards. Its principles, procedures and regulations, as set out in the Academic Standards and Quality Regulations (ASQR), are clear, comprehensive, well understood and meet the expectations set out in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and the guidance of the SFC to institutions on quality. There is a demonstrable enhancement focus to quality processes from modular to strategic levels and across all modes of study.

118 The University makes systematic use of its quality processes to maintain and enhance quality and academic standards across APs, and its Executive Office provision is fully integrated into quality monitoring processes. There is clear evidence of all quality-related matters being considered at multiple levels: institutional; Subject Network; programme and module levels.

119 The University has made a robust, measured and proportionate response to mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on quality and standards. Decisions on adjustments to assessment and award criteria have been taken collaboratively across the partnership and in conjunction with students and with external examiners, and have been supported by clear, accessible and widely communicated information. Quality processes have been adapted flexibly and have provided a model for enhancing their future operation (paragraph 132).

#### **Approaches to managing academic quality and standards**

120 The Academic Council has delegated responsibility to QAEC for institutional oversight of the quality framework and of quality assurance agendas and priorities, as well as for quality enhancement, in relation to taught and research provision. QAEC has an extensive remit, which it discharges effectively and primarily through a number of established sub-groups, such as the Quality Forum, the Quality Monitoring Group and associated Subject Network Leaders/Quality Managers (SNLQM) Forum. Additionally, short-term project-based groups also report to QAEC, such as the Dashboard Reporting Project and the Learning Analytics Steering Group. QAEC coordinates a number of practitioner groups including the Student Engagement Group and the Placement Practitioner Network. Each AP has its own Academic Partner Quality Committee and a designated Quality

Manager.

121 The University's key reference point for setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing quality and academic standards is the ASQR, which is underpinned by related procedural guidance and pro formas. Staff who met the ELIR team expressed a clear understanding of how the institutional quality framework enables academic standards to be secured and quality to be enhanced. Staff are made aware of changes to quality-related regulations, policies and procedures through regular communications, briefing sessions and standing items on the agendas of local committees.

122 The overarching framework for assuring quality and academic standards in multi-location, multi-mode provision is set out in the Equivalence Policy, which specifies that the learning outcomes of a programme are identical, regardless of location, mode of delivery or mode of study. The policy recognises that student experiences are not identical, but sets out criteria which all programmes must adhere to in order to ensure equivalence of experience and identical learning outcomes. Such criteria include arrangements for assessment, external moderation, module evaluation and the core quality processes of approval, annual monitoring and periodic review. There was clear evidence of the Equivalence Policy in relation to quality and standards throughout the ELIR documentation and in discussions with staff as well as its contribution to the development of well defined institutional expectations (paragraph 98).

123 Minutes of meetings demonstrate that QAEC uses outcomes of institutional monitoring processes, student surveys and institutional strategic priorities such as curriculum review to shape its enhancement priorities.

124 The ELIR team commend the effective approaches to support the dissemination, implementation and embedding of the institutional quality framework across the network of 12 academic partners. The approaches, including well defined institutional expectations, which are supported by clear and accessible information and guidance, are well understood, valued by staff and provide a model for the implementation and integration of other University initiatives.

### **Programme design and approval**

125 Procedures for programme design and approval are outlined in the ASQR - framework for curriculum development, programme development and programme approval, reflecting the key stages in the development of a new programme and demonstrating a clear, comprehensive and effective integration between business and academic approval.

126 The process comprises three stages and approval is needed at each stage. The Advisory Group process whereby a panel collaborates with the programme team in developing the programme and documentation provides support for programme teams prior to the formal approval event. The Advisory Group reports seen by the ELIR team demonstrate an effective robust process, highlighting where programmes were not yet ready to go forward for approval. Additionally, there is a clear enhancement function, as the process supports programme teams in developing the curriculum and documentation prior to approval events and provides an effective opportunity for sharing good practice through internal and external expertise. Approval event and reapproval event reports provided show variability in format, with the reapproval reports being more detailed than the approval event reports, as the latter are preceded by the Advisory Group process. Staff whom the ELIR team met highly valued the process, including the engagement with externals. The ELIR team viewed positively the use of the supportive Advisory Group process as a formal part of programme development and approval.

127 Programmes are approved initially for four years and thereafter subject to one reapproval unless specifically requested by the Faculty Board. The University has highlighted that it is considering the introduction of an ongoing periodic reapproval process of programmes, recognising that multiple changes over time can impact on overall programme coherence. The ELIR team would encourage the institution to continue with its plans to introduce an ongoing periodic reapproval process of programmes, particularly in the context of issues related to programme coherence and oversight identified through a Scottish Concerns Scheme initial inquiry and in view of plans to roll out a risk-based approach to programme annual monitoring (paragraphs 131-2). Additionally, the ELIR team suggests that the introduction of a periodic process for programme reapproval would provide institutional, holistic oversight of programme currency and adaptation to institutional change and would facilitate the intended alignment between quality processes and the planned regular curriculum review process.

### **Annual Quality Monitoring (AQM)**

128 The established Annual Quality Monitoring (AQM) process is extensive in its range of levels of review: each degree module, programme and Subject Network produces a self-evaluation document (SED). There is a clear process of sequencing so that reports inform each other, demonstrating triangulation throughout. The key themes from Subject Network reports and Annual Quality Monitoring Dialogues are considered by QAEC. Reports show detailed consideration of the impact of and adaptations as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting both positives and challenges, and therefore exemplifying the self-evaluative aspects of the process.

129 The Subject Network SEDs are comprehensive reports and are structured according to common thematic areas, reflecting institutional priorities, such as employer engagement and skills development. Due consideration is given to KPIs, student voice and student population data. Appendices show tracking against previous actions as well as a forward-looking action plan. The module and programme reflection and reporting are comprehensive, featuring a narrative evaluation and detailed KPI dashboard information, as well as an update on actions from the previous year.

130 The AQM process is augmented by the annual Quality Monitoring (QM) dialogues which are conducted by the Quality Monitoring Group. Students whom the ELIR team met confirmed their participation in, and usefulness of, these dialogues. Outcomes and key themes from dialogues are considered at the annual SNLQM Forum which provides opportunities for sharing practice and for discussing and informing QAEC enhancement priorities, including the dashboard reporting project and optimising use of student survey data.

131 Various adaptations have been made to the process including introduction of PGR student experience in the dialogues, and piloting a shorter SED pro forma for programmes underpinned by programme-level dialogues. The revised approach was welcomed by programme teams, particularly the opportunity for constructive discussions and for linking with NSS. Staff also confirmed that the shorter SED resulted in more effective action planning. The University is continuing to review its approaches with a view to increasing the use of KPI and student survey data (paragraphs 154-156). The revised process intends to provide a risk-based process concentrated at the programme level, and to replicate the NSS action planning process, linking quality and performance and maintaining the benefits of self-evaluation while measuring progress against strategic objectives. As part of the piloted approach, module and programme SEDs were not mandatory for 2021-22, nor were Subject Network QM dialogues held. The University highlights that there will continue to be overview reports to QAEC and opportunities for networking and sharing good practice events within Subject Networks.

132 The University has shown itself to be responsive and adaptive in keeping the AQM process under review and ensuring that it remains fit for purpose. The process is very thorough, robust and well understood, with alignment at all levels. There is a clear assurance and enhancement function at each level, and staff value in particular the opportunity for dialogue. The modifications to reduce the reporting burden and to expand the dialogues were viewed positively by the ELIR team. The University is encouraged to continue its plans to redevelop its approaches, including introducing a risk-based approach in alignment with the NSS action planning process and discontinuing programme and module SEDs. In doing so, the University is encouraged to reflect on ways to ensure that the beneficial aspects of the process related to enhancement and dialogue are not adversely impacted.

### **Periodic review**

133 The University's internal periodic review process - Subject Review - evaluates provision on a six-year cycle in accordance with SFC guidance. The review is conducted at the SN level and informed by the AQM SEDs for all taught programmes.

134 Subject Review reports reviewed by the ELIR team provided evidence of an effective thorough process featuring clear action plans and subsequent updates on progress with consideration of institutional developments, such as the transition to the new VLE, as well as a focus on quality-related matters such as assessment. The reports feature commendations, requirements and recommendations, with the latter being differentiated for the SN and the University. QAEC minutes demonstrate that Subject Review reports action plans and follow-up reports are effectively considered and actioned at the institutional level. The ELIR team viewed positively the involvement of employers and alumni in the process.

135 The University highlights that Subject Reviews facilitate the sharing of good practice and developing networks and communities of practice. Subject Network Leaders whom the ELIR team met confirmed the value of the process, particularly the reflection involved in producing the SED and while acknowledging that the unit of review was large (for example, 60 programmes), emphasised that the broader scope allowed common issues to be identified. Programme teams valued the process in its preparatory stages, providing an opportunity for self-evaluation, dialogue and sharing practice. The ELIR team encourages the University to consider the effectiveness of the SN as the unit of review in enabling the institution to have a detailed oversight at the programme level of the curriculum, teaching, learning and the student learning experience. This is in light of the programme-related matters highlighted through the Scottish Concerns Scheme initial inquiry, adaptations to AQM and the planned roll-out of a risk-based approach to programme monitoring (paragraph 127).

136 The University operates a separate Student Support Service Review process. A service or thematic area might be prioritised in light of student feedback and KPI data, following discussion at QAEC and in consultation with HISA. Since ELIR 3, service-level reviews have been conducted for ICT, mental health support and careers. QAEC minutes demonstrate that service review recommendations are effectively considered and actioned at the institutional level. Staff whom the ELIR team met confirmed the value of the process, highlighting in particular the positive outcomes of the Mental Health Review in 2018-19 and students were appreciative of the positive impact of these reviews (paragraphs 35-37 and 83).

### **PGR provision**

137 The University has adapted, rather than radically changed, its approval, monitoring and review processes for PGR provision following RDAPs (paragraph 72). Processes are specified in the PGR Code of Practice and aligned with the ASQR. Annual monitoring

includes: reports to the RDC; annual report by the Graduate School to QAEC; and biennial PGR Quality Monitoring Dialogues. The Graduate School Annual Report summarises a diverse range of PGR-related matters such: new programmes approved; conditions of re-approval; annual review of the PGR Code of Practice and Regulations; process review changes; PGR programme changes; fees; staffing; enrolments and outcomes.

## Assessment

138 The University's arrangements for the management of assessment are outlined in ASQR and supported by a range of policies, including the Assessment, Feedback and Feedforward Policy (paragraphs 52-54). Assessment is considered as part of the AQM process and by Examination Boards. Examination Boards are supported by standardised data reports and the annual evaluation meetings provide an opportunity for operational and policy review. A central Exam Centre provides cross-partnership management of all aspects of exams across APs.

139 The University is proactive in reviewing and adapting its approaches to assessment, as demonstrated by the review of academic misconduct and academic integrity, leading to an increased focus on student engagement. Policies and procedures related to academic integrity are well understood by staff and students, and the students whom the ELIR team met were positive about advice and guidance provided on avoiding academic misconduct. A review of Honours classification regulations was undertaken in response to feedback including from external examiners. The new policy of basing classification only on Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) level 10 did not result in significantly different performance to the three previous years, demonstrating the effectiveness of the modelling of predicted results undertaken prior to its introduction. Since the 2016 ELIR, the University has considered, but not introduced, a universal grading system due to subject differences; the focus instead has been on standardising marking criteria and approaches to moderation and second marking. In light of its aspirations for increased alignment across the partnership, the ELIR team noted that there may be benefit in the University reflecting on its decision regarding a universal grading system (paragraph 98).

140 The University has demonstrated an effective, responsive approach to assessment throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, as evidenced by its proactive development of remote invigilation guidance and its advice and support to staff and students. The University has shown due regard for academic standards throughout, with COVID-19 approaches being reduced or phased out as the impact lessened. The assessment-related response was underpinned by a series of over-arching objectives, developed in collaboration with HISA, and was coordinated by the specially established Faculties Group. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic the University introduced Ungraded Credit for compensation and 'No Detriment' for Honours classification and has continued to monitor the impact.

141 The University's processes for the management of assessment are robust, effective and responsive, as confirmed by external examiner reports and were viewed positively by the ELIR team. Since the 2016 ELIR, the University has enhanced its processes as evidenced by the development of institution-wide policies on marking criteria, moderation, academic integrity, feedback and feedforward. Students receive timely, informative feedback, which is supported by the use of institution-wide assessment coversheets, examples of which encourage reflection by students to support future learning or reflection on progress towards Graduate Attributes. The ELIR team commends the positive steps taken by the University since the 2016 ELIR to enhance its approaches to assessment and feedback as demonstrated by the development of institution-wide policies on marking criteria, moderation, academic integrity, feedback and feedforward.

## **4.2 Use of external reference points in quality processes**

142 The University makes effective use of external reference points in the management of its quality assurance and enhancement processes.

### **UK Quality Code**

143 Regulations and policies are aligned to the UK Quality Code and a detailed mapping, which is monitored by QAEC, has been undertaken to demonstrate this alignment. The mapping demonstrates that the University has adopted the Scottish sector's comprehensive approach of mapping to all of 12 Advice and Guidance themes. There is an established process in place for reviewing and responding to the UK Quality Code and other sector guidance. The issues highlighted in the mapping document are likewise covered in the Reflective Analysis and are being addressed, such as consistency around second marking and technical difficulties with the approvals workflow.

### **Curriculum design, approval and review**

144 The process of making use of external reference points including SCQF, qualifications descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements in curriculum design, approval and review is outlined in the detailed procedures, guidance and templates which support approval, annual monitoring and periodic review. SCQF is used additionally for credit transfer, RPL and articulation. Several programmes require professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' (PSRB) accreditation, which provides further external verification of quality and standards.

145 There are external members on the panels for core quality processes, as well as on the pre-approval Advisory Groups, demonstrating effective externality. Also positive is the extent of external membership of academic committees such as Faculty Boards, Subject Network Committees and RDC, which enables the institution to benefit from their expertise in progressing developments such as reviewing processes and timescales for PGR progress monitoring (paragraph 72). There is clear evidence of engagement and collaboration with employers and industry in programme delivery, development and modification. The CDEEO have a pivotal role in effecting this academic-employer collaboration (paragraph 62).

### **External examiners**

146 The University has a two-tiered system of external examining for taught provision, at module and award level, which mirrors its two-tiered Examination Board process. External examiners are appointed in accordance with ASQR, the checklist used by Faculty Officers ensures consistency and appropriate nominations, and the Joint Faculty Executive minutes demonstrate due consideration of nominations. PGR external examiners are approved by the RDC and reports are reviewed by a sub-group of RDC.

147 HISA Officers confirmed that they had access to external examiner reports, but students who met the ELIR team were unaware of the reports. The University has confirmed that it has made available external examiner reports to students in response to the ELIR 3 recommendation through its quality landing page, but recognises that there is further work to be done in raising awareness among students of this data set. The ELIR team encourages the University to continue in its collaboration with HISA to raise awareness among students of availability and usefulness of external examiner reports.

148 External examiner reports are considered by programme teams and Examination Board Chairs, with further consideration through the AQM process at programme and Subject Network levels. Responses to reports are overseen by Examination Board Chairs.

Each Faculty produces a summary of external examiner reports, both of which are considered together by the Joint Faculty Executive and then by QAEC, providing institutional oversight.

149 The University's actions related to second marking and moderation demonstrate institutional responsiveness to issues raised by external examiners, who highlighted operational differences at module level, but not significant concerns. Following a review conducted by a working group, operational guidance on second marking and moderation was produced, which included advice on resolving discrepancies between markers. These developments were received positively by external examiners. External examiner reports also demonstrate active involvement in assessment design and staff viewed external examiners as critical friends.

### **Enhancement Themes**

150 The University makes use of the national Enhancement Themes in quality processes, with the development of student engagement indicators and activity to improve the accessibility of survey data both being influenced by participation in the Evidence for Enhancement Theme (paragraphs 100-101).

### **4.3 Commentary on action taken since ELIR 3**

151 The University has taken a range of actions in response to the outcomes of the 2016 ELIR, although there remain areas for development which have been highlighted again by the current ELIR team (paragraph 12). The University has continued to enhance areas identified as positive practice.

152 The 2016 ELIR identified 10 areas for development and the current ELIR team explored the action taken in respect of: realising the benefit of the student partnership agreement (paragraphs 14-16); student feedback (paragraphs 20, 27-28 and 158); graduate attributes (paragraphs 46, 53, 57 and 141); student retention (paragraph 156); assessment (paragraphs 52-54 and 138-141); availability of external examiner reports (paragraph 147); staff development policy (paragraph 113); support for postgraduates who teach (paragraph 70); mapping policy and practice against the Quality Code (paragraph 143); and strategic approach to developing collaborative partnerships (paragraph 164).

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

153 The University has an effective approach to using data to inform decision-making, evaluation and for enhancement purposes embedded in its key quality processes, which are themselves subject to evaluation and adaptation. KPI data used in monitoring and review is provided at module, programme, SN and institution level, with thresholds within the data identified for commentary and action. There is a clear, well understood process from strategic to module levels, and staff confirmed the range of available data and were positive about the emerging reporting functionality. There is clear evidence of the University effectively using data for action at the institutional level, such as the detailed modelling and data analysis which informed the policy related to minimum average mark for entry to level 10, and the pilot of the BRAG (blue, red, amber, green) based tracking system in one AP to track student engagement across networked programmes in one Subject Network.

154 At the time of the current ELIR, the University is at a key stage in further enhancing access to, and use of, data. This includes the establishment of a Learning Analytics Steering Group and the development of student engagement indicators to enable early intervention to improve learning and teaching practice, and to support PATs. The University has also highlighted its intentions to link more effectively its annual and periodic planning and quality processes through evaluation of common data sets. Initial progress in effecting this linkage

has been demonstrated through the Curriculum Review, which is focusing on programme performance and viability.

155 The University is progressing its plans to enhance and integrate data currently held in different areas, with live data dashboards. The Dashboard Project, which was overseen by QAEC as one of its enhancement priorities, represented the initial stages in a more strategic, tertiary-focused approach to data. The data management reporting system has been enhanced and staff were particularly positive about the functionality within the data management reporting system and its ease of use, with minimal training and support required, and were keen for further developments in relation to student survey data. Student access to quality-related data has been provided through a student-facing quality landing page site, but awareness and access remain areas for further action. The ELIR team encourages the University to continue with its positive plans to provide more accessible data to students through the visual reporting functionality within the data management reporting system. The University acknowledges the challenges of disparate data, including limitations in awareness and use of survey tools; volume of data and difficulties of access; and each AP having its own approaches for storing and using data. The need for further awareness raising, staff development, resourcing and a strategic approach to data have been acknowledged. The ELIR team encourages the University to continue in its positive steps to enhance its data management functionality and to address the issues which it has already identified.

156 The University has been developing its learning analytics functionality with regard to student engagement and non-continuation. The University has taken steps towards an institution-wide approach to address the challenges of non-continuation by commissioning external research (which confirmed the need for a strategic approach) and establishing a non-continuation strategic working group and by developing over an extended period of time, a series of student engagement indicators in collaboration with HISA. Recognising the University's diverse student population and that its student non-continuation data is above the institution benchmark, the ELIR team recommends that the University should make demonstrable progress, within the next academic year, to implement an institution-wide strategic approach to managing retention. In addressing this, the University should consider steps beyond the planned introduction of student engagement indicators and its developments in learning analytics, in order to ensure a more consistent, managed and monitored approach to student non-continuation.

157 A review of the Module Survey is planned and will consider reasons for low response rates and the balance between a standardised format and different approaches. Many students who met with the ELIR team did not regard the Module Survey highly due to perceiving there to be little action taken although other students gave clear examples of actions being taken in response to module and other surveys and then being communicated back to students.

158 The Quality Forum coordinates institution-wide surveys and summary reports which are provided to QAEC, with key actions informing QAEC's enhancement priorities. There is clear evidence of action planning (paragraph 26) and actions at multiple levels being progressed from NSS, SSES and ESES such as dissertation support guidance for students and developing student learning communities. The University's improved NSS scores in assessment and feedback demonstrate positive practice in taking an institution-wide approach to addressing issues in this area. There is alignment of internal and external surveys, but there is no integration across NSS, SSES and ESES surveys to provide an overarching suite of analysis and action, as identified by the institution. The ELIR team recommends that the University develop a process to consolidate and analyse the outcomes of all student surveys, so this information can be used to support cross network enhancements to the student learning experience. In support of a consolidated approach,

the University is asked to ensure student survey outcomes are integrated, data made more accessible to staff (paragraph 155), and the mechanisms for closing the feedback loop to students formalised (paragraph 28).

#### **4.5 Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards**

159 The University has effective arrangements in place for managing quality and securing academic standards. Procedures are robust, well established, widely understood and comprehensive, and meet the expectations set out in the UK Quality Code and the guidance of the SFC to institutions on quality. The University makes effective use of a range of external reference points. The ELIR team commends the effective approaches to support the dissemination, implementation and embedding of the institutional quality framework across the network of 12 academic partners. The approaches include well defined institutional expectations, which are supported by clear and accessible information and guidance, are well understood, valued by staff and provide a model for the implementation and integration of other University initiatives.

160 The ELIR team commends the positive steps taken by the University since the 2016 ELIR to enhance its approaches to assessment and feedback, as demonstrated by the development of institution-wide policies on marking criteria, moderation, academic integrity, feedback and feedforward.

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

161 The University has effective arrangements for self-evaluation, including effective use of data to inform decision-making. The University is developing its approach to data through a suite of dashboards. As the data-driven approaches develop further, the University is encouraged to ensure that the highly valued enhancement focus of quality processes remains in place.

162 There is a clear, widely understood process for analysing, synthesising and responding to action plans emerging from quality-related procedures, and the University is engaged in an extensive series of initiatives to enhance this further. The ELIR team recommends that the University address further areas for enhancement in relation to development of a process to consolidate and analyse the outcomes of all student surveys, so that this information can be used to support cross network enhancements to the student learning experience. In support of a consolidated approach, the University is asked to ensure student survey outcomes are integrated, data made more accessible to staff, and the mechanisms for closing the feedback loop to students formalised.

163 Recognising the University's diverse student population and that its student non-continuation data is above the institution benchmark, the University should make demonstrable progress within the next academic year to implement an institution-wide, strategic approach to managing retention. In addressing this, the University should consider steps beyond the planned introduction of student engagement indicators and its developments in learning analytics, in order to ensure a more consistent, managed and monitored approach to student non-continuation.

## 5 Collaborative provision

### 5.1 Key features of the institution's strategic approach

164 Collaborative provision is a core element of the University's strategic plan 2021-2025 'Daring to be Different'. In response to the ELIR 3 recommendation, the University has chosen not to develop a separate strategy for collaborative partnerships and its plans for international collaborative partnerships are instead integrated into its Strategic Plan as an enabling plan. Within the strategy, the University is seeking to increase international recruitment to UHI programmes (in Scotland and overseas) and to promote HE participation through increased articulation with FE colleges, joint delivery initiatives with Scottish Colleges and the development of Graduate Apprenticeships to meet local, regional and national needs. The University is now commencing work on an International Strategy to help support its ambitions and is seeking to align its international activities with internal developments such as curriculum review and key external developments (including climate change and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic). The University acknowledges that the exit of the UK from the European Union will impact upon its short-term international activities, with the recent Change Management Plan including a workstream to consider this aspect in more detail.

165 Strategically, the responsibility for collaborative activity has, until recently, been vested with the Vice Principal (International and External Engagement), who acts as the Chair of the External Partnerships Steering Committee (EPSC). Under the revised management structure of the University, it is expected that this function will be undertaken by the Deputy Principal - Tertiary Education. Operationally, the responsibility for each specific collaborative partnership rests with the individual APs who are required to advise the University of any significant or material changes to the partnership.

166 The University exercises institutional oversight of its collaborative provision via EPSC, which reports directly to Academic Council. The terms of reference for the EPSC are clearly defined within the ASQR as are the principles that the University has established for collaborative activity. The full scope and scale of collaborative activity is captured within a Collaborative Register that is maintained by the EPSC on behalf of the University.

167 Outside of Scotland, the University's current collaborative activity is focused on a small number of partners in both China and Europe. Transnational education programmes currently operate with three partners in China, which are all based upon dual award arrangements. Within Europe, the University is a key partner in an established joint postgraduate award with two European universities. To date, UHI has opted not to enter into franchising or validation arrangements, instead electing to retain direct control of its collaborative provision to better manage risk associated with collaborative provision.

168 The University's quality assurance procedures are common across all taught awards, regardless of location or delivery mode. This means that QAEC retains oversight of academic standards, which is clearly articulated within the memorandum of collaboration that is signed with each collaborative partner. Should a partnership be subject to early termination, the EPSC is required to ensure that the closure of a programme is appropriately managed by the AP.

169 To support the development of partnerships, the University has an established due-diligence process which is used to review the standing of potential new partners with the exact process followed determined by the level of risk associated with the activity. The initial due diligence work is overseen by the EPSC and uses guidance developed by UHI which reflects the expectations of the Quality Code. However, the University acknowledges that, at the institutional level, further work is required to ensure that ongoing due diligence of its

partners is undertaken in a more structured manner and at more frequent intervals.

170 For all partnerships, the University has opted to retain the same approach to programme development and approval as used across the rest of the institution. This means that new course proposals are considered by Faculty Boards of Study, with further consideration undertaken by the Partnership Planning Forum on the strategic impact of new collaborative partners on student numbers, curriculum planning, scheduling and HR implications for the University. Once a partnership has been approved and is operational, the AP is responsible for undertaking annual monitoring in accordance with the procedures outlined in the ASQR, with each partnership allocated a Link Tutor to act as a main point of contact.

171 As part of the ELIR 3 review, the Collaborative Handbook produced by the University had been identified as positive practice to support quality processes. However, during this review, the ELIR team found that this document was not maintained or in use by the University. Consequently, the ELIR team was concerned that operational detail on the processes, roles and responsibilities for collaborative provision to support the established processes was not documented beyond the individual memorandums of collaboration and that further guidance including, for example, articulation of how staff development was supported and the specific responsibilities of the Link Tutor would enhance the processes in place. Noting that the University does not currently engage in validated or franchise provision, but given that UHI are continuing to seek opportunities for growth in collaborative provision, the ELIR team found that enhancing the existing processes with guidance would help improve management of risk and process implementation. In particular, the ELIR team identified that there would be benefit in establishing regular institutional-level partnership or planning reviews or formal processes for monitoring academic standards and staff expertise of partners beyond the AQM process.

172 The ELIR team recommends that the University improve oversight of collaborative activity, ensuring that effective arrangements are in place for identifying and addressing potential operational and strategic risks and concerns. In particular, within the current academic year, the University is asked to strengthen existing processes and develop guidance for the operational management of collaborative provision, along with the development of a review and monitoring process through which the University can more effectively maintain a systematic oversight of collaborative provision.

### **Transnational Education Provision (TNE) - Hunan Institute of Engineering, Henan University of Urban Construction and Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics**

173 At the time of the current ELIR, the longest established TNE partnership is with Hunan Institute of Engineering (HIE). Initially, this provision was based on a joint delivery model, with the University retaining sole responsibility for the final awards. However, the University has now adopted a dual award model for this partnership. Using the same dual award model as HIE, the University has also established partnerships with two further Universities in China, Henan University of Urban Construction and Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics. As part of the programme structures, the students have the option to progress to Honours via study in Scotland; however, to date, only a limited number of students have chosen to exercise this option.

174 All of the delivery for the TNE programmes is based in China, with the University providing lectures and tutorials via both flying faculty and online delivery. Upon joining the programme, all students receive an induction that includes details on the partnership and signposting to the support that is available. Bespoke material is provided via the VLE and students are able to access all online library resources and support services that the University offers. All students based in China are also full members of HISA although it

is acknowledged that engagement is limited.

175 Although the University applies its standard ASQR requirements to its TNE provision (including the appointment of external examiners for each programme) no further procedures are specified, nor are any specific UHI operational responsibilities documented beyond the memorandum of collaboration. Each of the TNE partners are permitted significant levels of autonomy in the recruitment of students and verification of English language standards. Although the ELIR team did not identify any specific concerns with current TNE provision, the University should ensure that its operational guidance and oversight of the programmes (including confirmation of English language competence) is also strengthened (paragraphs 171-2). This would also extend to the process to obtain student feedback, which is partly collected and collated by the student representatives on behalf of the University. Although some variance to feedback collection may be necessary, the University is asked to reflect on this process to determine if this approach is reliable and sufficiently inclusive (paragraph 20).

### **Joint delivery partnerships and articulation partnerships**

176 To support the University's aims of serving diverse groups of learners, UHI currently offers jointly delivered programmes with two Scottish partners. In each case, the partnerships provide an articulation between HND and bachelor's level programmes, with an opportunity for students to progress to an Honours degree also available. In addition to the joint delivery partnerships, the University has formal articulation arrangements in place with four Scottish FE colleges which aligns with the UHI strategy.

### **Graduate apprenticeships and work-based learning**

177 The University currently offers three Graduate Apprenticeship programmes delivered at SCQF levels 9 and 10. Other work-based learning programmes offered by the University include programmes developed in conjunction with industry, once again highlighting UHI's commitment to serving the needs of the Scottish economy. In common with all other UHI programmes, all Graduate Apprenticeship and work-based learning programmes are subject to extant University quality assurance procedures for approval, monitoring and review (paragraphs 125-136).

## **5.2 Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative provision including arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience**

178 Overall, the University has effective arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience in relation to its collaborative provision. In order to enhance the effectiveness of its arrangements, the University should improve oversight of collaborative activity, ensuring that effective arrangements are in place for identifying and addressing potential operational and strategic risks and concerns. In particular, within the current academic year, the University is asked to strengthen existing processes and develop guidance for the operational management of collaborative provision, along with the development of a review and monitoring process through which the University can more effectively maintain a systematic oversight of collaborative provision.

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