



Enhancement-led Institutional Review of the University of Edinburgh

Early draft Outcome Report

November 2015

About this report

This is an early draft of the Outcome Report of the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Edinburgh.

This Outcome Report, when finalised, will be accompanied by a Technical Report detailing the ELIR team's findings under each of the set headings in the ELIR 3 method. The content of this early draft report may be adjusted as the ELIR team reflects on its findings to produce the Technical Report.

Drafts of both the Outcome and Technical Reports will be shared with the University, and the University will have the opportunity to comment on any matters of factual accuracy. The purpose of providing the early draft Outcome Report is to give an indication of the key themes arising from the ELIR one week after the visit has concluded.

Overarching judgement about the University of Edinburgh

The University of Edinburgh has **effective** arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience. These arrangements are likely to continue to be effective in the future.

This is a positive judgement, which means the University has robust arrangements for securing academic standards and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

Areas of positive practice

1 The ELIR has identified a number of areas of positive practice and these are summarised below.

2 **Strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching** - the University's current strategy to prioritise learning and teaching has been embedded across the institution and communicated effectively to staff. Continuing commitment to the strategy is demonstrated by the recent re-shaping of the senior management team to target strategic priority areas including assessment and feedback, academic support and researcher development. A clear focus on learning and teaching is further demonstrated by the University's development of a flexible CPD framework for learning and teaching, mapped

against the UK Professional Standards Framework. Linked to its aim of recognising learning and teaching achievement in performance management and promotion processes at all levels, the University has developed an agreed set of 'Exemplars of Excellence in Student Education'. These Exemplars provide an agreed reference point for recognising good practice and, as such, form a particularly effective development.

3 **On-line/distance learner student experience** - the University has a progressive and effective approach to online distance postgraduate taught programme development and delivery. There has been significant growth in student numbers in this area with students commenting positively on their experience, which they considered to be at least equivalent to that of on-campus students. The University's approach has been informed by the Distance Education Initiative, which provided resources to over 30 academic projects across 17 of the University's 22 schools, to develop programmes and support services.

4 **Internationalisation of the student learning experience** - the University has a strong commitment to internationalisation of the student experience, and has developed effective approaches to study abroad, on-line distance learning, and collaboration with international partners. Students described themselves as members of an international community, where opportunities to have an international experience were available both on campus and through a variety of flexible study abroad opportunities including the Principal's Go Abroad Fund, aimed at encouraging students to undertake short term international experiences.

5 **Peer-assisted learning** - the University has an extensive and growing number of Peer Assisted Learning Schemes for students that provide both a valued source of support for mentees and an effective opportunity for mentors to develop transferable skills.

6 **The Edinburgh Award** – the Edinburgh Award provides a flexible framework for all University of Edinburgh students to record, and be recognised for, achievements in a range of co- and extracurricular activities. Prompted in part by the development of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), the award, which has grown significantly to reach students in all schools, helps to highlight and promote graduate attributes. Staff and students commented positively on the value of the award, which is supported by a range of academic and professional services staff.

7 **Institute for Academic Development** – the Institute for Academic Development continues to provide varied, flexible and tailored support to staff and students that underpins and supports strategic priorities and contributes to a culture of continuous enhancement of the student learning experience.

8 **The External Examiner Project** – although in the early stages of implementation at the time of the current ELIR, the External Examiner Project, which involves external examiners reporting online, is facilitating a more consistent and informed reflection on external examiner reports and responses to them at University, college and school level. The system has been designed by the University to ensure easy identification and reporting on issues arising at local and institutional level and to help share good practice by allowing staff at all levels easy access to external examiner comments.

9 **Quality monitoring and review for academic and support services** - the University continues to have comprehensive and detailed arrangements for the annual monitoring and periodic review of courses and programmes. It is evident that both academic and support staff are committed to the effective implementation of these arrangements. Annual monitoring and periodic review of student services helps to ensure that individual services make a full contribution to enhancement of the student learning experience, and

ensure that key themes, such as student mental health, are addressed in a cross-university context.

10 **Approach to the use of data to enhance the student learning experience** – the University is making good progress towards introducing an integrated approach to the use of data in decision making and performance monitoring in order to identify and implement enhancements to the student learning experience. Key examples include the student-initiated PATH Project, which is an effective tool for assisting students and Personal Tutors in planning programmes of study within an increasingly complex pattern of course choices; the developing Dashboard Project, which aims to enhance the provision of key student, programme and benchmarking data to support monitoring and review processes; and the roll-out of automated annual course monitoring to streamline the process in schools and maximise opportunities to effectively use outcomes derived from the data.

11 **Approach to self-evaluation and reflection** – the University makes effective use of a variety of self-evaluation methods and involves a range of internal and external stakeholders to reflect on institutional policy and practice in order to enhance the student learning experience. For example, using the University Internal Audit team to review academic areas such as personal tutoring, assessment feedback and academic collaboration, has provided additional independent insight for senior management into the effectiveness of these areas.

Areas for development

12 The University is asked to consider the areas summarised below.

13 **Postgraduate research student experience** - analyse the needs and experience of postgraduate research students at school, college and university level to ensure that they are effectively supported in the context of the University's plans to increase the research student numbers. The University should review the effectiveness and regularity of supervisor training and ensure that the University's Code of Practice is communicated effectively to all staff and research students and implemented consistently. The University should also make certain that postgraduate research students who teach are appropriately trained and supported for the role (including in the provision of assessment and feedback) and are made aware of the career development resources available through the Institute for Academic Development.

14 **Personal tutoring system** - build on the positive progress made in the implementation of the personal tutor system by ensuring that all personal tutors meet agreed expectations and that the experience of all students meets the minimum threshold identified by the University. There would be value in providing additional clarification of the aims of the personal tutor system for students, and signposting alternative avenues of student support, in order to align expectations of students and staff undertaking the personal tutor role.

15 **Student representation at school level** – building on the existing constructive relationship with Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA), ensure there is more effective coordination of student representation at college and school level. The University should review processes for appointing students to college and school committees and provide more effective training and preparation for the roles, ensuring that staff also understand them and are able to support students to contribute effectively. There would be further benefit in the University considering the best ways of providing feedback to the wider student body about the action that is taken in response to matters raised through school and college level committees.

16 **Assessment and feedback** – implement feedback policy and practice in a clear and consistent manner across the University to ensure that all students receive timely, relevant and high quality feedback at key points during their programmes. Particular attention should be paid to the provision of formative feedback opportunities that help students progress. There would be benefit in working in partnership with students at school level to understand specific issues and to tailor feedback provision more closely to the needs of particular student groups. There would be value in the University reflecting on the positive experiences of assessment and feedback reported by online/distance learning students.

17 **Staff engagement in learning and teaching activity** - progress plans to develop an approach to staff workload allocation that recognises contribution to priority areas such as personal tutoring and assessment and feedback, and contribution to other enhancement projects. This is likely to promote greater transparency, consistency and understanding of the allocation model amongst staff, as well as ensuring that academic staff are able to support the University's strategic priorities for learning and teaching more effectively.

What happens next?

18 QAA Scotland will continue to engage with the University through the annual discussion visits which, amongst other matters, consider the ways in which the institution is responding to the ELIR outcomes. One year after publication of the Outcome and Technical reports, the University will be asked to provide a follow-up report, and to engage in a follow-up event with other institutions.