



**QAA**

# Learning from ELIR 2003-07

## Emerging approaches to employability and personal development planning



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## Preface

In 2003 Scotland adopted a new approach to managing quality and standards in higher education. The enhancement-led approach is now attracting significant international interest. Its key features include a focus on improvement; important roles and responsibilities for students; and partnership working between Universities Scotland, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Scotland, the National Union of Students in Scotland, the national independent student development service, Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs), the Higher Education Academy and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

In addition to Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR), the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) comprises a rolling programme of national enhancement themes, institution-led review at the subject level, student engagement in quality management, including support provided through sparqs, and the inclusion of student reviewers as full members of institutional review teams.

Scottish higher education institutions have made significant progress in developing their approaches to the management of assurance and enhancement. Institutions' success is apparent in the published ELIR reports from the first cycle, 2003-07. Institutional systems continue to be judged rigorous and robust in assuring the quality of provision and the maintenance of academic standards. Individual institutions have taken the enhancement agenda forward according to their particular strategic priorities and mission, supported by a common framework which provides support for the sector. With growing insight into the management of enhancement, institutions have made very effective structural, systemic and process changes designed to encourage a culture of critical reflection on learning and teaching, and the wider aspects of the student experience.

These various changes combine to create a synergy which reinforces and strengthens the drive for enhancement. The growing focus on the student experience has led institutions to foster wider student engagement in quality and enhancement processes, with external support for the training of student representatives being provided by sparqs. The recent (2007) independent external evaluation of the QEF stated that it 'brought right to the fore the simple and powerful idea that the purpose of quality systems in higher education is to improve student experiences and, consequently, their learning' and concluded that 'the approach to quality that we review(ed) here is ambitious, distinctive and, so far, successful'.

QAA Scotland will start the second cycle of ELIR this autumn, using a revised method which will build on these achievements in a number of ways: integrating ELIR more fully with other aspects of the QEF; sharpening the focus on the enhancement of the student learning experience through the three fundamental principles of quality culture, student engagement and high-quality learning; and drawing more on good practice, not only across the UK, but internationally (including through the inclusion of an international member on future ELIR review teams).

Having excited considerable interest since its inception, both in the UK and internationally, the enhancement-led approach to managing quality in Scotland now finds resonance with approaches in a number of other countries, most notably in

Ireland, Finland, New Zealand and, increasingly, in the United States of America. QAA Scotland will continue to develop these and other international links to inform the ongoing development of the enhancement-led approach in Scotland.

This report is one of a series of six reports addressing a range of topics relating to the enhancement-led approach in Scottish higher education over the last five years. It provides an overview of evolving approaches to employability and explores a number of different aspects, including strategic approaches to employability; integration of employment skills into the academic curriculum for taught programmes and research student training; work-based and placement learning; the role of approval, monitoring and review processes in addressing employability; collaboration with public and statutory bodies and employers; support for skills development and employability; and personal development planning (PDP) and progress files.

The companion reports address evolving approaches to the management of assurance and enhancement; evolving approaches to institution-led quality review at the subject level; student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement; the impact of virtual learning environment-based and other information technologies; staff development, focusing on recognition, reward and the dissemination of good practice; and employability and PDP. An interim report on evolving approaches to the management of assurance and enhancement, based on the first 15 ELIR reports, was published in June 2007. These reports collectively provide evidence of the impact to date of the enhancement-led approach, to inform national and international debate and, more particularly, to support the embedding of a quality culture across the Scottish higher education sector.

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## Background

The Scottish Government's Lifelong Learning strategy recognises the need to develop a quality framework which is 'fit for purpose', and which puts learners' needs at the centre of educational systems<sup>1</sup>. The enhancement-led approach to quality in the Scottish higher education sector is consistent with this. For the purposes of ELIR, enhancement is defined as 'taking deliberate steps to bring about continuous improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience of students'.

The Scottish higher education sector is small but diverse, containing within it a wide range of institutions of varying missions and sizes, cultures and organisational complexity, including three designated small specialist institutions. Across the sector, institutions have approached the enhancement agenda from a variety of starting points and perspectives. The ELIR method has the flexibility to address this diversity while systematically addressing key aspects of managing provision.

ELIR reports are structured around three main sections:

- internal monitoring and review of quality, standards and public information
- the student experience
- the effectiveness of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement.

The factual evidence of the overviews is complemented by more discursive commentaries which provide deeper insight into the effectiveness of the various systems, processes and strategies, and the way in which they interact to support quality assurance and quality enhancement.

This analysis is based on an examination of the reports of 20 ELIR reviews, conducted during the first cycle of ELIR, 2003-07 (see Annex 1). It draws primarily on the evidence contained in the second and third main sections, together with the final summary. Early draft versions were circulated for comment to members of the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee, the QAA Scotland Committee, and to QAA Scotland, all of which provided valuable and constructive feedback.

While each ELIR report covers broadly the same aspects of provision, it represents the outcome of an engagement with the institution, which will necessarily address the institution's own state of evolution and particular strategic priorities to promote enhancement, with differing emphases from one institution to another. This overview is a synthesis of information drawn from ELIR reports from the first cycle, not a snapshot at a single point in time. Its primary purpose is to illustrate developments across the sector over the last five years. QAA Scotland is conscious of the ongoing evolution and development of institutional approaches to enhancement, particularly in institutions which were reviewed early in the cycle, as well as the importance of institutional context. Consequently, the particular examples of practice cited here have not been attributed to institutions, but are offered as a stimulus to reflection and further development, rather than as exemplars of good practice in themselves. However, QAA Scotland will be pleased to facilitate enquiries relating to specific examples by referring them to the relevant institution. Please contact [t.barron@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:t.barron@qaa.ac.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> *Learning to improve: quality approaches for lifelong learning*, Lawrence Howells, Scottish Executive, Edinburgh 2005.

## Executive summary

The 21 ELIR reports published between March 2004 and May 2007 show that the Scottish higher education sector has been actively engaged with the employability agenda, and that institutions are taking forward strategic initiatives in a number of different fronts. Sector-wide, and within institutions, a strategic focus on employability has given added impetus to enhancement in this area. At the end of the first cycle of ELIR, institutions have demonstrated substantial progress in the integration of employment skills into the academic curriculum, and considerable work in progress to implement a wide range of approaches to PDP. They are also beginning to address the provision of effective student support for skills development and employability, recognising the key role of careers service staff, working collaboratively with academic staff, and acknowledging variability in the student experience of some academic advisory systems. The ELIR reports collectively capture a sense of this momentum, which is evident in a wide range of projects and developments.

## General conclusions

From the evidence of the first cycle of ELIR, the following general conclusions emerge.

- Employability is a key driver in institutional strategies for enhancement and learning and teaching.
- Institutions have made significant progress in implementing coordinated strategies to support employability, which have variously addressed curricular design, support for effective learning, careers education, information and guidance and PDP.
- Academic and educational development staff are working more closely with careers service staff to support a more integrated approach to the development of the reflective learner.
- A key focus has been curricular design to foster the embedding of employability in the academic curriculum.
- Co-curricular initiatives have further supported the employability agenda in some institutions, including particular support for entrepreneurship.
- Research student training in transferable and generic skills is beginning to include career development and employability.
- Processes for approval, monitoring and review of programmes support and promote employability in the academic curriculum, with clear involvement of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and employers in relation to externally accredited provision.
- Although progress with PDP has been slower, institutions are taking forward a variety of different approaches, with several institutions planning full implementation in 2008 and 2009.
- Institutions are increasingly aware of the need for more effective student support for skills development, particularly in relation to academic advisory systems. In some cases, the implementation of PDP has itself been a catalyst for change.

## **Future development of employability and personal development planning**

Collectively, the ELIR reports identify a number of aspects where further reflection and development would serve to strengthen institutional approaches to employability. From the evidence of the ELIR reports, the following emerge as important areas for further consideration.

### **Strategic implementation of employability**

- Allowing for diversity in subject-based approaches while maintaining a coordinated institutional approach.
- Ensuring an even rate of progress in implementation across colleges/faculties/schools/departments, to avoid variability in the student experience, and enable more effective monitoring of progress.

### **Integration of employability in the academic curriculum**

- Securing the full engagement of academic staff with the employability agenda, by ensuring that employability is perceived as an integral part of the whole academic curriculum (including the subject-based academic curriculum as well as stand-alone courses).
- Considering increasing the provision of credit-rated placements.

### **Quality assurance and enhancement**

- Ensuring that PSRB accreditation reports are fully integrated into institutional quality assurance systems and, in particular, outcomes are considered at institutional level.

### **Programme specifications**

- Refining the design of programme specifications to be fully capable of serving a dual purpose, as a mechanism for verifying programme design at the approval stage, and which communicates intended learning outcomes in ways that clearly link to the assessment process, as well as providing concise and accessible information for students and other stakeholders.
- Ensuring that the relationship between module learning outcomes and programme learning outcomes is clear, especially in flexible modular frameworks.

### **Academic advisory systems**

- Reviewing the effectiveness of academic advisory systems, particularly in relation to PDP, and determining appropriate mechanisms for monitoring effectiveness.



### **Personal development planning**

- As the implementation of PDP progresses, continuing to evaluate the experiences of staff and students, to identify factors which facilitate student engagement, and disseminating good practice.
- Recognising, and taking steps to address, unevenness in the rate of implementation and variability or inconsistency in approach in colleges/schools/faculties/departments, to avoid variability in the student experience, as well as difficulties in measuring progress or determining impact, for example, on employability or student retention.

## Introduction

1 The aim of this report is to provide a general overview of evolving approaches to employability and PDP in the Scottish higher education sector. Employability has been the focus of widespread strategic activity and developmental work throughout the Scottish higher education sector during the first ELIR cycle, and subsequently. In 2004, the SFC published, *Learning to work*, a paper on enhancing employability and enterprise<sup>2</sup>. In the same year, QAA Scotland initiated an enhancement theme on Employability, the main aims of which were to raise the profile of employability; create a clearer understanding of employability; encourage and assist the Scottish higher education sector in developing institutional employability strategies; aid the embedding of employability within the curriculum; and implement the theme's strategy in parallel with work on PDP as part of the sector-wide Effective Learning Framework project<sup>3</sup>. Within the ELIR process too, employability was identified as a key topic for discussion such that all ELIR reports include an overview of the institution's approach to the employability of its students.

2 Baseline reports and updates on Higher Education in Scotland, published by the SFC (and by its predecessor bodies, the Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education) include analyses of graduate employment and employability, and more recently, the student experience, which show that Scottish higher education institutions continue to produce graduates who are well prepared for the world of work, and that former students rate their learning experience very highly<sup>4</sup>. Employability and enterprise continue to be a key strategic focus for the SFC. Institutional engagement with employability, is currently supported through the Scottish Higher Education Employability Network, a joint initiative of the Higher Education Academy, QAA Scotland, the SFC and Universities Scotland, as a continuation of the work of the Enhancement Theme. The topic of graduate skills has been revisited more recently through the Enhancement Theme, Research-teaching linkages: enhancing graduate attributes<sup>5</sup>.

3 Although most institutions had begun to engage with employability prior to the enhancement theme, the evidence of the ELIR reports suggests that the theme was timely in providing support for institutions as they developed and refined their strategic approaches to employability. The ELIR reports confirm that a majority of institutions were actively engaging with this theme; indeed, among the case studies submitted with institutions' Reflective Analyses, 10 institutions chose to include a case study relating to employability. The reports also foreshadow the significance for employability of the above-noted Enhancement Theme, Research-teaching linkages: enhancing graduate attributes.

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<sup>2</sup> *Learning to work: enhancing employability and enterprise in Scottish further and higher education*, Helen Gibson and Lawrence Howells, Scottish Funding Council, Edinburgh 2004.

<sup>3</sup> For published outcomes, see the Enhancement Themes website at [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/)

<sup>4</sup> Analyses of the first destinations of graduates from higher education institutions in Scotland show that, of students who obtained a qualification, the percentage of those entering work or further study rose from over 80 per cent in 2001-02 to 89 per cent in 2005-06. Of those leaving Scottish higher education institutions with postgraduate qualifications, the proportion entering work or further study over this period increases by 5 per cent. The Scottish Funding Council's Higher Education in Scotland: 3rd update report, published in March 2008, makes reference to Futureskills Scotland's Skills in Scotland 2006, which shows that 81 per cent of employers thought that graduates were well prepared for work.

<sup>5</sup> For published outcomes, see the Enhancement Themes website at [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/)

4 The following sections explore a range of different institutional contexts for the promotion and support of employability and PDP which emerge from the ELIR reports. These include strategic approaches to employability, through enhancement and learning and teaching strategies as well as wider institutional initiatives; the coordination of careers advice and guidance with academic curricular developments and PDP, to support the development of the reflective learner at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels; developments in institutional approaches to work-based and placement learning; the key role of programme approval, monitoring and review processes in addressing curricular design and evaluation, and in facilitating involvement of careers service staff, PSRBs and employers, and the need for these processes to be supported by detailed programme specifications which clearly define intended learning outcomes and provide a link to assessment; the collaborative role of PSRBs and employers both in terms of accreditation, and in relation to institution-led quality reviews and advisory panels; the provision of student support for skills development and employability through academic advisory systems and careers services; and finally, the ongoing implementation of PDP through a variety of different approaches, stand-alone or integrated, online or combined with face-to-face tutorial support, and the emerging implications for academic and pastoral support.

### **Strategic approaches to employability**

5 The ELIR reports demonstrate that employability requires a coordinated institutional approach in which curriculum design, support for effective learning, and careers education, information and guidance, each play a complementary role in developing the reflective learner, supporting in turn the implementation of PDP. The reports show that institutions have been particularly proactive in integrating employment skills into the academic curriculum, with careers services becoming more closely involved in academic development matters. In contrast, progress in the implementation of PDP has been much slower, although a promising start has been made in many institutions, with a wide variety of approaches being adopted.

6 The ELIR reports confirm that employability is a key driver in institutional strategies for enhancement. In most cases, employability is operationalised as a component within learning and teaching strategies and related initiatives and projects, although it also features as a key headline in overarching enhancement strategies, where they exist. Four principal elements of employability emerge: integration of employment skills into the curricula; extension of opportunities for work-related learning; the development of careers education, information and guidance; and the development of PDP. At the time of their ELIR, seven institutions had developed a separate employability strategy in order to provide a particular focus on this area. One common theme linking these strategies, albeit in widely differing institutional contexts, was an interest in vocational programmes and work-related learning.

7 No less than 10 of the case studies submitted with institutions' Reflective Analyses address employability, affirming the prominence of employability in institutional strategies, and illustrating different approaches to implementation (see Annex 2). Of particular interest is a case study which focuses on the current and ongoing

development of a strategy for 'employability and professional career readiness'. In this instance the institution prepared the ELIR case study as part of the formulation of the employability theme in its Learning and Teaching Strategy, using the ELIR process as a strategic enhancement opportunity. The case study, which included examples drawn from across the University, set out the institution's ethos of professional career readiness, and the milestones for the finalisation and embedding of employability and professional career readiness, as a key theme in the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and Strategic Plan. The ELIR report notes, 'The University recognises that changes in the employment market, employment practices, and changing employer and student expectations require the University to review its approach to developing student employability, and to develop new approaches to meeting the needs of both graduates and employers', and that 'the main aim of the strategy is to produce institutional graduate employment rates above the University's benchmark and above Scottish and UK averages'. The ELIR team viewed this as a very positive development, which represented a holistic and cohesive approach to promoting graduate employability, and which had much potential.

8 In this strategy, the term 'professional career readiness' has been adopted by the institution to capture a broader, more student-focused concept of employability, defined as 'set of skills, competencies, knowledge and attitudes that make graduates likely to gain professional employment and contribute to society, their profession and their own personal development'. While professional career readiness includes development of 'doing skills', the institution highlighted that much of the approach concerns the development of professional values that relate to 'being' a professional individual in the relevant subject field. The strategy therefore addresses embedding skills in the curriculum, research-informed teaching, personal development planning and external employer links.

9 The majority of institutions have taken a multifaceted approach to employability which, alongside the integration of employment skills in academic curricula, variously includes the development and delivery of effective careers education, information and guidance; the creation of jobshops; the extension of work-related learning (for example, through internships and placements, as well as through case studies and problem-based learning); the development and implementation of PDP; and the continuing development of academic support and guidance. All these elements contribute to the preparation of students for work by seeking to equip them with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required for professional employment, and the ability to succeed in a lifelong learning context. Notably, in the ancient universities, the strategic approach to employability also includes research students (see paragraphs 24 to 27).

10 The ELIR reports include two striking examples of high profile institution-wide projects which aim to promote a number of key elements of the employability agenda. First, the Partners in Delivery project, which was initiated in 2003, reflects the 2010 Vision of the institution, with the aim of developing graduates who will be 'dynamic, confident, innovative, inclusive, responsive, and entrepreneurial and valued by employers'. The project aims are to be realised through the establishment of new and innovative methods of increasing student engagement with the University, and the formation of a new and effective partnership with students and the Students'

Association. Its effectiveness in taking forward the University's employability agenda has been monitored by the Learning and Teaching Sub-committee. Secondly, the overarching quality enhancement implementation project, White Space, was developed as a vehicle for linking a number of institutional strategies, and was formally launched towards the end of 2005. The ELIR report describes how 'the project aims to include a mixture of pedagogy, new learning spaces, staff development, enterprise and other generic skills, student engagement, and research', noting that 'the University envisages it will act as a catalyst for the development of new pedagogies and new curriculum design'.

11 At least five ELIR reports highlight the importance of institutions' strategic engagement with employers, PSRBs and industry in informing the ongoing development and updating of vocational programmes. One of these institutions has formalised this engagement through the development in 2000, in conjunction with local employers, of 'a conceptual model of student employability skills and attributes that are required by students and valued by employers', which, the ELIR report notes, forms part of a new draft policy and strategy for developing student employability. The same report also describes a more recent initiative, 'Confident Futures', still in the early stages of development, supported by external funding and delivered in collaboration with external consultants. Like the 'Partners in Delivery' project, described in paragraph 10 above, this initiative 'aims to produce confident graduates who will be likely to show practical intelligence; have strong self belief; be resilient; can take risks; are adaptable; and can be creatively reflective'. The institution intends that 'the initiative will complement personal development planning, fit with the University's personal development tutoring scheme, link to the wider higher education sector's employability agenda, and build peer support mechanisms'.

12 Another of these institutions considers its employability strategy has a further impact as a driver for staff development: 'The employability strategy promotes the updating of the professional experience and practice of staff. That staff have such current experience and practice is likely to impact directly on the student experience, and in discussion during ELIR, students expressed the view that many staff demonstrated the applicability and relevance of their professional practice and research through their teaching, for example, in the use of case studies'.

13 The ELIR reports demonstrate the importance of a collaborative approach to employability within institutions, in particular the collaborative working between careers services, academic staff, centres for academic practice, and employers. However, at the level of faculties/schools/departments, the need for flexibility in implementation is also clear to accommodate a diversity of approaches in different subject areas. As one ELIR report comments, 'The ELIR team gained a strong impression of purposeful collegiate engagement with a strategy that the University believes to be of fundamental importance. The team also formed the view that the trialling of diverse models sensitive to different needs in different faculties has provided the University with a very positive opportunity to enhance the process by sharing emerging good practice'.

14 The desirability of fostering diverse approaches is particularly relevant in the context of large institutions with devolved quality management systems, but is equally evident in much smaller institutions, as the following two examples demonstrate:

'There have been a number of employability pilot projects at the departmental level, and the University plans to progress a number of initiatives to promote employability, linked to the development of Personal Development Planning (PDP).'

'Schools are responsible for generating new initiatives to enhance the student learning experience and to improve student retention. They are involved to variable extents, in a range of pilots aimed at changing the nature of the first year of study towards a more formative experience; enhancing higher level skills; and increasing the employability of the students. As yet these relatively new projects are confined to small numbers of students but they are intended to include others, as appropriate to the discipline, and to inform pedagogical change.'

15 However, while diversity in approach is clearly important in the context of different subject disciplines, institutions need to guard against such diversity leading to variability in provision, and therefore variability in the student experience. One report, commenting on a collaborative approach within a highly devolved quality management system, warns of the risk of enhancement progressing at different rates in different parts of the institution, thus preventing the full realisation of the institution's aspirations or the students' expectations. Although the institution confidently affirmed that a minimum standard of provision was maintained across its schools, the ELIR report points to 'evidence of variability between schools, for example, in taking forward the mentoring initiative, developing PDP and employability-related activities', while acknowledging that, 'Nevertheless, there is strong student support for the University's devolved approach to enhancement'.

16 To support the strategic development of employability, two institutions are reported to have appointed employability officers, while a third at the time of its ELIR was planning to do so. In the first of these examples, a large ancient university, the employability development adviser is responsible for the coordination of the actions taken to implement the strategy and for supporting departments in the process. In the second, a small specialist institution, the employability adviser was charged to conduct an audit of careers and employability related provision as a prelude to developing an institutional employability strategy. In the third example, a new and developing institution's Employability Plan identifies as a key objective the appointment of an employability officer to support the development of employability and PDP profiles for programme teams.

17 Twelve ELIR reports make reference to the employability enhancement theme as a resource which has helped to support strategic approaches to employability in individual institutions. In many cases, the active involvement of institutions with the theme (for example, through membership of a member of staff on the Steering Committee, or through liaison between the Steering Committee and institutional contacts) has supported or encouraged strategic initiatives at institutional level.



## **Integration of employment skills into the academic curriculum: taught programmes**

18 The ELIR reports confirm that institutions are using curriculum design in a variety of ways to support the development of employment skills. In the majority of cases, the academic curriculum is the primary focus of development, with a clear acknowledgement of the need for preparation for employment to be central to all programmes and courses, coupled with the development of career aspirations. It is clear that curricular development to support employability is considerably further advanced than the implementation of PDP, and is relatively independent of PDP. In contrast, the level of implementation of PDP is variable, both within institutions and across the sector. In those institutions where provision is largely vocationally oriented and accredited by PSRBs, the integration of employment skills into the academic curriculum is characterised by extension of work-based learning, placements, and increasing use of case studies and problem-based learning as pedagogical tools. Such approaches are in some cases allied with specific initiatives to promote entrepreneurship, for example, through co-curricular activity. In these institutions in particular, the portfolio of programmes is seen to be closely related to the needs of the professions, the economy and the community, resulting in a high level of graduate employment.

19 In institutions with a more mixed portfolio, including non-vocational subjects, there appears to have been a greater focus on the development of stand-alone elective courses to support employability, including career planning modules. In some cases this is reinforced by embedding the development and assessment of key skills within the PDP process. However, one ELIR report counsels that an overemphasis on stand-alone elective courses may have unintended consequences. Where employability is perceived as a separate, rather than an integral, part of students' curricula, this may lead to a limited engagement of many academic staff with the employability agenda. Equally, students may not perceive modules designed to develop generic skills as being related to employability, but may rather tend to view employability as concerned with curriculum vitae writing and interviewing techniques.

20 In the small specialist institutions, where professional practice and studio-based learning are key elements of the curriculum, and most staff are themselves professional practitioners with links to the creative industries and professional networks, the challenge relates more to the ongoing development of transferable skills in the curriculum, and the development of PDP.

21 The following extracts from three different ELIR reports illustrate successful approaches to curricular and co-curricular activity to develop entrepreneurship through Centres for Entrepreneurship and Business Schools.

'Within the University's framework of regulations every degree programme should include at least 20 credits obtained through taking elective classes, which can be selected from across the institution's provision. As part of this, students are encouraged to take elective classes in entrepreneurship.... The Centre [for Entrepreneurship] seeks to develop students' ability to seize entrepreneurial opportunities as their careers progress and, in doing so, the Centre uses participative and practical learning approaches.'

'The University's...Centre for Entrepreneurship was created to give students across the University the opportunity to gain valuable experience and knowledge of business by establishing and running their own enterprises. The...Centre provides small-scale facilities, support and advice for students who wish to establish an enterprise while studying, and, additionally, offers modules on entrepreneurship as options within programmes such as Music.... The...Centre represents an innovative and successful example of institutional support for the promotion of student employability.'

'Entrepreneurship is integrated into many courses, particularly in the...Business School. The University has identified that students from across the institution have shown enthusiasm for participating in national enterprise competitions. Accordingly, the University intends to provide access to entrepreneurship development for students across the institution, initially through co-curricular activity. The University is encouraged in this proposed enhanced opportunity for students.'

22 The use of stand-alone elective modules to support employability is illustrated by the introduction at one institution of a suite of 'Active Learning in the Community' modules. Described as a bottom-up initiative arising from collaboration between two academic departments, the Careers Development Centre and the Academic Development Centre, this initiative involves three modules, each of which seeks to enable students to acquire a variety of employability skills through practical volunteering experience and reflection. From 2006-07, students have been encouraged to use an online PDP resource to support their reflection. The ELIR report comments that, 'While the modules have had limited take-up and limited impact to date, this local initiative has considerable potential for delivering aspects of the University's enhancement agenda'.

23 At another institution, where the enhancement strategy is encapsulated within the multifaceted institution-wide project, White Space, a key objective of the employability strand is to develop 'higher skills', identified as including autonomous learning; enterprise; interdisciplinarity; creativity; teamwork; confidence; and reflection. The ELIR report describes the development of a suite of modules 'designed to engage first year students with a learning experience aimed at equipping them with the skills needed to meet the challenges of creativity and innovation at the interface between traditional disciplines'. At the time of the ELIR, some of the approaches to learning, teaching and assessment associated with these modules and the White Space project were being piloted in the School of Computing and Creative Technologies.

## **Integration of employment skills into research student training**

24 The integration of personal transferable, employment-related and generic research skills into postgraduate research training is discussed in four ELIR reports. One relatively recent driver for developments in this context is new funding provided since 2003-04 by the Research Councils to support the implementation of the training recommendations of the Roberts Review for research students and staff, which in some institutions has provided the means to support a step change in the provision of personal and professional development support. This skills training is clearly valued by students as having a positive impact on their study environment and experience.



25 The evidence shows that the delivery of generic skills training to research students has been further refined to address career development and the employability agenda, involving variously careers services and centres for learning and teaching, in addition to information and library services. In at least one case, the institution was piloting an integrated academic doctoral development initiative with students who are funded by the Research Councils, but planned to extend this to all research students in due course. In addition to key skills, the training offered in this case includes language tasters and intercultural relations.

26 In another institution, the programme draws strongly on student feedback in its continuing development and is negotiated in liaison with the schools. The ELIR report explains, 'A key element of the University strategy is to identify students' needs at the beginning of the session, and to track their acquisition of appropriate skills. This is achieved through the use of a logbook which is adapted by the schools from a central template. The intention of the logbook to promote a reflective dialogue between supervisor and student as the basis for the required annual report to the faculty, is regarded by students as a positive development, although this was recognised as more meaningful in those schools where it was integrated with progress reviews'. The use of logbooks as a reflective tool for research students is discussed in one other ELIR report, in which the institution is encouraged to standardise its approach and make this a compulsory activity: 'The learning experience of research students might be further improved by the University introducing a more systematic approach to the skills agenda for research students as currently being promoted by the national research councils, and by making the research students' logbook a compulsory activity'.

27 One research-led institution was reported to have been running a transferable skills programme for doctoral students and a professional development programme for research staff since 1997. The ELIR report goes on to note, 'The University has since built a reputation in the area of transferable skills training and career development for researchers, as recognised in the 1998 research Careers Initiative report and by the UK GRAD Programme inviting the University to host its Scottish Hub in 2002'.

## **Institutional approaches to work-based and placement learning**

28 The ELIR reports confirm that, in general, students on placement consider they are well supported. Although they provide very limited evidence of practical approaches to work-based and placement learning, the reports do provide some insight into how the more vocationally oriented institutions are developing provision in this area, as well as some of the issues they face.

29 One emergent theme is the development of placement policy, good practice guides and guides for students, which is perhaps indicative of a greater focus on the student experience. For example, one institution has recently introduced a placement learning policy which includes a checklist for placement coordinators and handbooks for students and placement providers. Another had developed a definition of work-based learning and a set of good practice guidelines. Yet another is commended for its innovative practice in developing web-based placement guides for students and

staff: 'For example, in the Faculty of Health and Social Care, web-based placement guides have been developed to help students derive maximum benefits from their placement, and for staff to help them enhance the placement experience'. In this example, good practice is shared through the recently established Placement Coordinators' Forum. The report continues, 'In discussions during ELIR, students said that they valued their placements, and other work-based activities, as a significant part of their learning experience, and felt well supported by their placement tutors and on-placement mentors. A substantial number of the students obtain employment on graduating with the same organisation in which they completed their placement, which highlights both the added value of the placement and the achievement of the students during their placements'.

30 Another emergent theme is a need for more credit rated placement provision. One institution, seeking to counter an identified decrease in the take-up of optional work-related and placement opportunities in recent years, has been encouraging schools to incorporate work-based learning opportunities into the academic credit structure of programmes and, to this end, has developed a definition of work-based learning and a set of good practice guidelines. The decrease in the take-up of optional work-related and placement opportunities was attributed in part to the students' reluctance to extend the length of time taken to achieve their award. The need for credit rated placement provision is echoed in a second ELIR report, which affirms that 'One of the key components of the University's Employability Strategy is making extensive use of work-based learning opportunities and, in particular, placements most of which are credit-rated'.

31 In the small specialist institutions, where the provision is by nature highly vocational, there are well-established approaches to learning and teaching which promote employability. For example, one such institution uses studio-based learning as the primary mode of learning and teaching. The studio-centred approach is described as one 'that promotes independent and collaborative learning and uses projects that lead to self-reflection and support experimentation and risk-taking'. The ELIR report observes that 'In exploring the intended shift...from a teaching to a learning culture, senior staff also stressed the central role of studio based education, which of its nature encourages independent learning'. The ELIR team noted that although students were not aware that the culture shift was a strategic objective, they did make a link between studio-based projects and taking responsibility for their own learning, and they emphasised the value of 'learning by doing'.

32 In another small specialist institution the curricula of all degree programmes are reported to contain elements addressing key subject-specific skills, transferable skills, and knowledge and understanding of the vocational context and professional practices. The ELIR report describes how 'The curricula are structured to equip students with the necessary skills, understanding and knowledge, to pursue careers in the creative industries. Professional placements are included in many programmes and most programmes include a professional practice module which enables students to gain knowledge and experience in areas such as business skills and legal matters'. It is of particular interest that 'The curriculum is often delivered in the form of live briefs or projects, creating a learning environment that prepares students for the conditions of professional life'. The ELIR report also makes the important observation

that while a high proportion of the institution's graduates pursue careers in the creative industries, significant numbers do not. Therefore, the curricula need to have a range of transferable skills embedded within them, to ensure that students are provided with the skills they will require to pursue a wide range of employment possibilities.

33 In a similar example, employability is said to be a key part of the institution's taught programmes which are vocational in nature and are designed to sustain and develop the land-based sector. Employability is effectively promoted through programme content and approaches to learning and teaching that are informed by the institution's knowledge transfer activities, with close links to land-based industries. In this case too, live case studies are embedded in a range of programmes across the institution, combining vocational focus and generic/transferable skills to maximise employability. The ELIR report notes '...approaches to learning and teaching that encourage independent learning and facilitate interaction between students and representatives of appropriate industries, for example, by means of "live" case studies, visits and guest lectures'. One of the case studies submitted by this institution for its ELIR describes the use of live case studies within the curriculum, involving students solving problems and/or developing proposals in relation to real-life businesses.

### **Approval, monitoring and review processes addressing employability**

34 Closely allied with curriculum design and development, processes for approval, monitoring and review provide an important platform to support and promote employability. The ELIR reports show this happening in a variety of ways, including the strategic highlighting of employability for consideration inter alia in curricular design and evaluation; consultation between the programme team and the careers service; and the inclusion of employer/PSRB representatives among the external members of the approval and review boards (a number of reports note that approval events may conjointly include PSRB approval/accreditation).

35 For institutions with vocationally orientated provision, where PSRBs have a very significant role in the recognition and accreditation of academic programmes, this provides a range of national benchmarks and professional standards against which programmes are regularly considered, in addition to QAA subject benchmark statements. As one ELIR report observes, 'Given its vision to seek excellence in professional education a relatively large proportion of the University's academic programmes lead to recognition or accreditation by PSRBs in a number of areas, including using appropriate PSRB benchmarks and competency frameworks in the process of course development, and enabling joint validation or review activities where this is possible'. The report further notes the involvement of employers in the University's quality processes, particularly as panel members for approval and review events and in a range of advisory capacities.

36 Across the sector, the ELIR reports confirm programme specifications are an integral part of the approval process, often with a standard institutional template as well as a basic item of documentation for institution-led subject review, in accordance with SFC guidance. During the earlier part of the cycle, the ELIR reports show a

number of institutions seeking to address the issue of how to make programme specifications more accessible to students and, in particular, how to communicate intended learning outcomes clearly, in ways which linked effectively to the assessment process, as a means of clarifying standards, and which could be readily understood by assessors and students. Some institutions recognised the usefulness of programme specifications in the specific context of programme approval and review, but considered they were too technical to be of benefit to a wider audience, including students.

37 Early uncertainty over how to use programme specifications to best effect appeared in some instances to lead to inconsistent links between intended learning outcomes and assessment, and to undermine the focus on enhancement in programme design. This is exemplified in one of the earliest ELIR reports, where 'The ELIR team found that the University is working to achieve a comprehensive set of programme specifications for its portfolio of taught provision, and would encourage the University to expedite this development, both to make more secure the link between academic standards and external reference points and because clear specification of ILOs is an essential feature of its Code of Assessment'.

38 Over the period of the ELIR cycle, the ELIR reports demonstrate considerable evolution and progress in institutional approaches to programme specifications, with later reports highlighting the revision of institutional templates, to enable a more standardised approach, in which programme specifications become more central to the programme planning process, as well as more user friendly. However, while programme specifications appear in general to be less problematic in the later reviews, issues of detail, clarity and linkage with the assessment process continue to be highlighted in some cases. In particular, achieving a balance between a document that provides brief and accessible information for students, and yet is sufficiently detailed to be a mechanism for verifying programme design, appears to represent a continuing challenge.

39 For example, in one case the ELIR team was critical of the limited range of information specified, the absence of specific reference to external benchmarks or other aspects of the Academic Infrastructure, lack of clarity as to the intended audience(s) or what use might be made of the programme specifications beyond the programme approval process. In another case, where a simpler, more accessible programme specification had been developed, the ELIR team noted 'the University's continuing reservations about its new template for programme specifications' and 'confirm[ed] and support[ed] the University's intention to keep under review its template, in particular with respect to its appropriateness as a mechanism for verifying coherent programme design at approval stage'. The team also reported significant variations in the extent to which departments, through handbooks or module outlines, sought to explain to students the relationship between the overall aims and outcomes of a programme and the particular modules that were available within the programme, attributing this in part to the simplified template for programme specifications.

## Collaboration with PSRBs and employers

40 The ELIR reports provide clear evidence of PSRB/employer involvement in programme approval and review panels in institutions with a large proportion of externally accredited programmes. However, moves to harmonise PSRB validation and accreditation requirements with institutions' own periodic programme review procedures remain elusive in practice, although it appears that such dovetailing is more systematic within the small specialist institutions. While most institutions appear willing to facilitate coordination of the internal and external processes where appropriate, there were relatively few examples of joint PSRB/institutional reviews having been held.

41 The majority of institutions with a significant proportion of externally accredited programmes are seen to have effective internal processes to consider and follow-up accrediting body reports at the level of the school or faculty, and to report outcomes at institutional level. At the subject level, engagement with PSRBs appears well integrated into quality processes and is centrally monitored, sometimes with central support for the preparation of submissions or accreditation. One ELIR team in particular 'noted the procedures for interaction with PSRBs contained in the Academic Quality Handbook, and that responses to the outcomes of accreditation visits were compiled at school level and approved by the appropriate dean of faculty. At an institutional level, the [Quality and Enhancement] Committee is advised of engagements with PSRBs through the Annual Report...'.

42 Three ELIR reports highlight the fact that accrediting body reports are not considered at institutional level. In one such example where the institution has relationships with over 30 PSRBs, the ELIR report states, 'The University does not consider the outcomes of PSRB accreditation and review reports at institutional level as it considers that the process rarely provides feedback that can be shared widely across disciplines. Schools summarise any key points raised in PSRB reviews through the annual monitoring process'. However, the ELIR team regarded this as an opportunity lost in not making the best use of links with professional bodies and in the external scrutiny of courses.

43 For those institutions with vocationally oriented provision, links with employers are seen to be beneficial in providing student placements, and indeed in some cases close collaboration with employers is articulated as a strategic aim, which is effected through the introduction of employer/careers advisory panels in the relevant subject areas.

44 In addition to close links with particular PSRBs, the small specialist institutions have very well developed relationships with the professions, through the extensive use of part-time teachers (for example, practising artists, designers, architects, musicians, actors), the involvement of professional practitioners in the assessment of students' work, and the involvement of graduates in monitoring and review processes. This kind of interaction with the professions is highlighted by staff and students as providing extra depth to the preparation of students for employment. One ELIR report comments positively on the engagement of representatives from the industries to offer advice and support to the students, or to work with them on specific projects and competitions: 'Students identify this as very valuable in providing first hand knowledge of their chosen fields, as well as adding a further perspective to that offered by their tutors'.

## Support for skills development and employability

45 Support for skills development and employability is provided mainly through academic advisory systems and careers services. From the ELIR reports, the increasingly prominent role of careers services in supporting institutional strategies for employability, and their active involvement in academic developments is clear. In one or two institutions, the introduction of PDP has acted or is acting as a catalyst for change in academic advisory systems, which are evolving, with some operating alongside emergent PDP, and others linking to, and supporting, PDP.

46 The evidence of the ELIR reports shows that institutions are increasingly aware of inadequacies in traditional academic advisory systems, and are taking steps to address the issues and provide more effective student support. A common problem identified in the ELIR reports is variability in the level of support provided and inconsistency of practice across institutions. Possible contributory factors suggested by ELIR teams include the past failure of institutions to evaluate the work of advisers in a systematic way, for example, through routine feedback from students regarding the operation of the systems, a lack of central oversight of advisory systems, and lack of adequate induction and training.

47 For example, one ELIR report noted the absence of any committee responsible for the institution's advising system, and the consequent lack of monitoring: 'Although chief advisers meet regularly, and issues raised and outcomes discussed appear to be routed appropriately within the University, there is no individual or committee responsible for the advisory system across the University as a whole, with a consequent lack of institutional-level monitoring of the system'. Other reports highlight variation in the student experience of advisory systems. For example, one report states, 'Informed by the views of the Students' Association, and a recent review conducted by the Academic Registry, the University is aware of significant variation in the implementation and effectiveness of the mentoring scheme across schools, and, thus, significant variation in the student experience of mentoring. This view has been confirmed by staff and students'. In similar vein, another report notes, 'Discussions with students during ELIR highlighted the variability of the operation of the current arrangements [for directors of studies] in which some students were very satisfied with the support provided by their director of studies while others considered they had received limited or no support from that source.... In particular, staff highlighted that variability in the nature of the pastoral role and in the number of students individual directors were expected to support required further debate'.

48 A few institutions have come to view the introduction of student PDP as a possible catalyst for revising existing academic and pastoral support mechanisms, while one or two have already revised their personal tutor systems to link them with PDP. For example, one institution is reported to have introduced a revised personal tutoring system 'to address a variable student experience of the previous personal tutoring arrangements, coupled with the perceived need to strengthen personal tutoring as a means of improving student retention'. The report continues, 'The new system also seeks to integrate personal tutoring arrangements with the introduction of the University's personal development planning (PDP)'. Another institution, acting largely in response to student feedback, is reported to be asking schools 'to consider the development of personal tutor schemes which would help students to engage



with employability, develop study skills and address issues of performance'. The ELIR team concurred that such a development would be likely to facilitate the development of PDP. In another case, in response to the institution's acknowledgement that the successful implementation of PDP was contingent upon revision of the advisory system, the ELIR team encouraged the institution to establish a clear understanding of the director of studies role, and to ensure that adequate training and ongoing support is provided.

49 In one case, changes to the institution's advisory system were prompted not by PDP but by the development of an online registration process, which had freed advisers from purely administrative tasks and allowed time for a genuinely advising role. Noting that the revised advisory scheme, which has departmentally based advisory teams, is not so far linked to the institution's online PDP provision, the ELIR report describes how, 'There is a varied approach to the organisation of advisers across the departments; in some departments small teams of advisers are allocated to cohorts of students throughout their time in the institution, while in others teams support students in one year'. The report goes on, 'The use of teams of advisers reduces the burden on individuals and makes it easier for students to access informed support and expertise more quickly'. The report concludes, 'The success of the advisory system will depend on teams developing their ability to share information, and continuing to engage with the Student Support Services, so that students can be effectively referred on when this is required'.

50 The ELIR reports demonstrate that in the majority of institutions careers services are playing a key strategic role in supporting the employability agenda, which often combines skills development with professional careers information and advice. Working closely with academic subject areas, they are helping to foster the development of personal skills to enable students to meet employers' needs and embed careers education in programme delivery. Evidence of this closer working includes involvement of careers services in programme development and in other quality assurance processes, such as institution-led review at the subject level. In at least two institutions, the careers service has been responsible for the implementation and delivery of career planning modules, and more widely, careers services have played an increasingly important role in the development of PDP.

51 There is evidence, too, that institutions which historically have not had strong support for careers education, information and guidance, have recognised the need to strengthen that support in order to achieve employability objectives. One ELIR report where the institution's careers centre is characterised as an area of 'measurable improvement', notes that final-year engineering students commented positively on a two-day residential programme to help them prepare for employment. Another ELIR report notes that while student support is a positive feature at the module and programme level, the central student support, particularly the careers service, requires to be strengthened: 'There may be benefit from the University undertaking regular reviews of the work of central student support services as part of its overall quality enhancement strategy. Specifically, the careers service lacks a clear vision of its own role, as well as lacking visibility among the student community, and there would be benefit in the University considering how the careers service can better support, and engage with, the institution's employability agenda'.

52 Yet another ELIR report describes how the careers service and the schools have a complementary role in skills development. The institutional policy on careers education, information and guidance highlights the role of the careers and appointments service in providing guidance to students and individuals on career management skills, while schools specialise in the development of transferable skills that are particularly relevant to the discipline and to future employment. At the time of its ELIR, the institution was reported to be piloting an employability survey in two schools in different colleges to increase awareness of what is meant by employability to collect examples of good practice, and to identify gaps in provision and areas for future action.

### **Personal development planning and progress files**

53 From the evidence of the ELIR reports, it is clear that the majority of institutions are in the process of implementing PDP within the context of a wider employability agenda, and sometimes in response to student demand. However, many institutions have not been able to progress the implementation as quickly as originally anticipated, and indeed one or two did not yet have an institution-wide approach for the implementation of PDP. In two institutions, at the time of their ELIR, PDP had been successfully implemented for research students, but had yet to be rolled out to undergraduates.

54 The ELIR reports illustrate the progress of institutions' implementation of PDP. In 2003-04, at the beginning of the ELIR cycle, institutions under review were either at an early stage in their deliberations on PDP, having established working groups to develop the approach, or had not yet begun to address it. By 2004-05, there is evidence of institutions piloting approaches to PDP in particular subject areas, or beginning a staged introduction. In 2005-06, there is more evidence of pilot PDP schemes in operation, although some institutions were still developing their approach. In 2006-07, implementation appears more widespread, although in one case the successful implementation of PDP initiatives at faculty/school/department level is in the absence of an institution-wide arrangement and, in another case, the implementation of an institution-wide PDP mechanism was subject to considerable variability in practice across and within schools.

55 Four institutions benefited from involvement in the cross-sector SFC funded project, 'Individualised Support for Learning through e-Portfolios (ISLE)' which sought to develop a shared concept of PDP for the further and higher education sectors, supported through blended learning strategies, and from which the outcomes were published in autumn 2007<sup>6</sup>.

56 In some institutions, devolved local implementation was found to be sensitive to the internal and external dynamic of particular programmes, and there was evidence of a variety of approaches in different faculties/schools, with PDP sometimes being embedded in the curriculum, sometimes implemented within discrete, credit bearing modules. However, devolved approaches still require careful management at institutional level to be fully successful. In a few cases, devolved approaches were seen

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<sup>6</sup> 'ISLE: Individualised Support for Learning through e-Portfolios, may be found at [www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/elearning/sfc/sfcbookletisle.pdf](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/elearning/sfc/sfcbookletisle.pdf)



by ELIR teams to result in variability in the student experience, and also made it difficult to measure progress, or to determine the impact, for example, on employability or student retention.

57 A number of institutions had adopted online arrangements for PDP, which in some cases formed part of an integrated approach to employability, linking to academic advising arrangements and curricular developments. In other cases, PDP appeared to be more of a stand-alone development, less obviously linked with the promotion of employability. However, the evidence suggests a gathering momentum towards the end of the cycle, as institutions move towards full implementation of PDP, some looking to achieve this in 2008 and 2009.

58 Two ELIR reports mention the significant strategic role of the Students' Association in the development and implementation of PDP. In the first example, the ELIR report describes the establishment in 2003 of a Key Skills and Progress Files Group, which later became known as the Student Personal Development Planning Group. The remit of the Group was, with the involvement of [the Student Association], to take forward the introduction and promotion of personal development files. Following endorsement by the Senate, separate pilot projects ran in all faculties during 2003-04. The ELIR report comments, 'In discussion with staff and students, it was apparent to the ELIR team that the different parts of the University are variously but very actively engaged in PDP implementation. This momentum was also evident indirectly in some of the case studies presented during the Part 1 visit which severally demonstrated considerable innovative practice connected with professional development'. In the second example, the ELIR report particularly notes the involvement of a number of key services together with the Students' Association in the development and implementation of PDP, and comments, 'The University's current policy on personal development planning (PDP) was implemented in 2004. The University's PDP programme has a particular focus on employability; it aims to ensure that students develop both subject-specific and generic skills, and that students can relate these to their career choice, and market these skills successfully. The development of a PDP policy, combined with a careers policy, has involved a broad spectrum of University groups, including the Learning and Teaching Board; the Educational Development Unit; the Careers Advisory Service, Academic Counselling; Academic Registry; schools; and the Students' Association'.

59 The evidence of the ELIR reports indicates that students in the early years of most courses have yet to be completely convinced of the value of PDP, and that there is variable engagement at this level, but that students in the later years testify to the value of the process in their own development and its likely impact on their future employability. One ELIR report emphasises the importance for institutions moving towards the full implementation of PDP to continue to evaluate carefully the experiences of students and staff, to identify those factors that appear to facilitate student engagement in the process, and disseminate examples of good practice in embedding employability in schools and programmes.

60 Overall, the ELIR reports demonstrate a considerable variety of approaches to PDP, some relying more on a virtual learning environment-based e-portfolio approach, combined with stand-alone academic modules, while others have, or plan to have, a more integrated approach combining e-PDP, academic advisory arrangements, and career planning support. The following extracts, illustrate some of the diverse approaches being taken.

'The University has chosen to introduce personal development plans (PDPs) that are intended to be resource effective, flexible and appropriate for both vocational and non-vocational subjects.... The VLE provides a platform for the development of PDPs using an e-portfolio approach.... The University is piloting this approach to PDP in a number of departments.... All programmes were expected to consider the introduction of PDP during the programme review cycle, with a view to full implementation at undergraduate level within two to three years.'

'As part of their PDP activity, students are expected to plan, record and reflect on their learning and career development. This PDP activity is delivered through a variety of mechanisms such as the University's academic mentoring scheme and a programme of PDP/careers workshops.'

'There has been a staged introduction of PDP and it is planned to be in operation for all students by 2008.... Students are supported by academic staff such as personal tutors or module leaders in the creation of a progress file that allows students to reflect upon and improve their own learning.'

'...It is possible that a web-based approach will be adopted but the University has indicated that this is likely to be combined with face-to face contact. The University has expressed its intention to implement PDP in phases, with career development providing an initial focus.'

'The University's Personal Development Planning (PDP) Policy and Framework identifies a commitment for students to have the opportunity to engage with PDP by 2009. A number of professional courses in health and education have established PDP mechanisms in place and the remaining schools are operating pilot schemes.'

'The University established a working group on PDP in 2004. A "twintrack" model for student PDP has been proposed, whereby students have the opportunity to choose from a small number of specialist modules, coupled with a process of personal reflection and monitoring of career and learning development.'

61 To further support institutional reflection on the implementation of PDP, QAA Scotland has commissioned the development of a toolkit which is due to be published in April 2009<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> *Enhancing Institutional PDP Activities through Effective Strategy, Policy and Practice: a Toolkit*, Kirsty Miller, Jonathan Weyers, Stuart Cross, Lorraine Walsh, Eric Monaghan, University of Dundee, due to be published, April 2009.

## Conclusion

62 The ELIR reports confirm the substantial engagement of the Scottish higher education institutions with the employability agenda. Employability is a key driver in institutional enhancement strategies, which are variously supporting a process of change in four key areas: the integration of employment skills into the academic curriculum; the extension of opportunities for work-related learning; the strengthening of support for skills development through careers education, information and guidance, and academic advisory systems; and the implementation of PDP. The challenges in taking forward this complex agenda are considerable, but the ELIR reports testify to wide-ranging developments undertaken and significant progress already made. The combined impact of these initiatives on the student learning experience has yet to be fully appreciated, but will become clearer as institutions complete their implementation of PDP, and are better able to evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches, and how best to support them.

## Annex 1

This interim report draws on the evidence of the following ELIR reports.

Bell College of Technology, Hamilton*	January 2004
The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama	March 2004
University of Glasgow	April 2004
Queen Margaret University College**	May 2004
University of Dundee	November 2004
The Glasgow School of Art	February 2005
Edinburgh College of Art	March 2005
University of Strathclyde	April 2005
University of Aberdeen	April 2005
The Scottish Agricultural College	May 2005
Bell College of Technology, Hamilton (Follow-up review)*	November 2005
Glasgow Caledonian University	December 2005
Heriot-Watt University	February 2006
University of St Andrews	March 2006
Napier University	April 2006
University of Paisley*	April 2006
University of Edinburgh	November 2006
University of Stirling	November 2006
University of Abertay Dundee	May 2007
The Robert Gordon University	May 2007
UHI Millennium Institute	May 2007

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Note:

\* The University of Paisley and Bell College of Technology, Hamilton, have subsequently merged to form the University of the West of Scotland.

\*\*Now Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh.

## Annex 2

### Case studies related to employability/PDP

As part of their preparation for ELIR, each institution was asked to submit with its reflective analysis an annex including one or more case studies to illustrate the linkages between the institution's enhancement strategy and its operational management of enhancement. The case study was to outline the good practice itself (which might be generic or subject-related) together with the ways in which the example illustrates the institution's approach to supporting enhancement. Institutions had flexibility in deciding the form of the case study and method of presentation. The purpose of the case studies was principally to inform the discussions during the ELIR visit.

The case studies addressed the enhancement of learning and teaching, from a variety of perspectives, and at different levels within institutions, ranging from strategic initiatives at institutional level to practice within faculties, schools and departments. Many of the case studies resonated with the sector-wide Enhancement Themes at the time, including topics such as wider access, the first-year experience, student transition, student retention, student support, student feedback, student engagement in quality processes, assessment, employability, flexible delivery, blended and e-learning. Others addressed mechanisms for quality assurance and enhancement, including institution-led review at the subject level and the development of programme specifications. Of the wide variety of case studies submitted by institutions to demonstrate their approach to the management of enhancement, 10 related to employability and/or PDP. By way of illustration, the relevant case studies are listed below.

- 1 Portfolio of practice undertaken by all students on preregistration programmes in School of Health Studies
- 2 Work placements in History of Art
- 3 External benchmarking project in School of Architecture relating to development of programme specifications
- 4 Employability project in Faculty of Biomedical and Life Sciences
- 5 Partners in Delivery project
- 6 Elective course in Artists and Designers in Education - devising and implementing a project for and with school children
- 7 Development of a strategy for employability and professional career readiness and milestones for final realisation and embedding of employability and professional career readiness as a key theme in the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy
- 8 Enhancing student employability
- 9 Designing programmes that combine vocational focus and generic/transferable skills to maximise employability
- 10 Module 'Active learning in the community', incorporated into the developing employability strategy

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