

University of Paisley

APRIL 2006

Enhancement-led institutional review

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE.

To do this, QAA carries out reviews of individual higher education institutions (HEIs) (universities and colleges of HE). In Scotland this process is known as Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR). The Agency operates equivalent but separate processes in Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

Enhancement-led approach

Over the period 2001 to 2003, QAA, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, Universities Scotland and representatives of the student body worked closely together on the development of the enhancement-led approach to quality in Scottish HE. This approach, which was implemented in academic year 2003-04, has five main elements:

- a comprehensive programme of review at the subject level, managed by the institutions
- improved forms of public information about quality, based on addressing the different needs of the users of that information including students and employers
- a greater voice for student representatives in institutional quality systems, supported by a national development service (known as the student participation in quality scotland - sparqs - service);
- a national programme of enhancement themes, aimed at developing and sharing good practice in learning and teaching in HE
- ELIR involving all of the Scottish HEIs over a four-year period, from 2003-04 to 2006-07. The ELIR method embraces a focus on: the strategic management of enhancement; the effectiveness of student learning; and student, employer and international perspectives.

QAA believes that this approach is distinctive in a number of respects: its balance between quality assurance and enhancement; the emphasis it places on the student experience; its focus on learning and not solely teaching; and the spirit of cooperation and partnership which has underpinned all these developments.

Nationally agreed reference points

ELIR includes a focus on institutions' use of a range of reference points, including those published by QAA:

- the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- *Guidelines on preparing programme specifications*, which are descriptions of what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. Programme specifications outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the SCQF.

Conclusions and judgement within ELIR

ELIR results in a set of commentaries about the institutions being reviewed. These commentaries relate to:

- the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards at the level of the programme or award. This commentary leads to a judgement on the level of confidence which can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The expression of this judgement provides a point of tangency between the ELIR method and other review methods operating in other parts of the UK. The judgement is expressed as one of: broad confidence, limited confidence or no confidence
- the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair
- the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students
- the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning
- the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement.

The ELIR process

The ELIR process is carried out by teams comprising three academics, one student and one senior administrator drawn from the HE sector.

The main elements of ELIR are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution in advance of the review visit
- a Reflective Analysis document submitted by the institution three months in advance of the second part of the review visit
- a two-part review visit to the institution by the ELIR team; Part 1 taking place five weeks before Part 2, and Part 2 having a variable duration of between three and five days depending on the complexity of matters to be explored
- the publication of a report, 20 weeks after the Part 2 visit, detailing the commentaries agreed by the ELIR team.

The evidence for the ELIR

In order to gather the information on which its commentaries are based, the ELIR team carries out a number of activities including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, as well as the Reflective Analysis institutions prepare especially for ELIR
- asking questions and engaging in discussions with groups of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the national reference points.

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Introduction

1 This is the report of an enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) of the University of Paisley (the University) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). QAA is grateful to the University for the willing cooperation provided to the ELIR team.

2 The review followed a method agreed with Universities Scotland, student bodies and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC), and informed by consultation with the Scottish higher education sector. The ELIR method focuses on: the strategic management of enhancement; the effectiveness of student learning; and the use of a range of reference points. These reference points include: the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)*, the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, subject benchmark information, and student, employer and international perspectives. Full detail on the method is set out in the *Handbook for enhancement-led institutional review: Scotland* which is available on the QAA website.

Style of reporting

3 ELIR reports are structured around three main sections: internal monitoring and review of quality and standards and public information, the student experience, and the effectiveness of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement. Each section contains a sequence of 'overviews' and 'commentaries' in which the ELIR team sets out its views. The first commentary in the main section of the report leads to the single, formal judgement included within ELIR reports on the level of confidence which can be placed in the institution's management of quality and standards. This judgement is intended to provide a point of tangency with the methods of audit and review operating in other parts of the UK where similar judgements are reached. In the second and third main sections of the report, on the student experience and the

effectiveness of the institution's quality enhancement strategy, there are no formal judgements although a series of overviews and commentaries are provided. These are the sections of the ELIR report which are particularly enhancement focused. To reflect this, the style of reporting is intended to address the increased emphasis on exploration and dialogue which characterises the team's interaction with the institution on these matters. The reader may, therefore, detect a shift in the style of reporting in those sections, and this is intended to emphasise the enhancement-led nature of the method.

Method of review

4 The University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA) which set out its arrangements for managing quality and standards and its view of the effectiveness of its approach. Other documents available to the ELIR team with the RA included the Institutional Profile at 8 March 2006, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook 2005-06, the Regulatory Framework 2005-06, the Strategic Plan 2005-09, undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses for 2006 entry and a selection of reports, codes, guidelines and other materials helpfully supplied on a CD-ROM. The RA provided a clear focus for the review.

5 Three case studies were submitted with the RA:

- a summary of the work and effectiveness of the Associate Deans Operations Group
- a comprehensive overview of the Centre for Lifelong Learning which has an important role in facilitating the wider access strategy of the University
- an insight into how quality and enhancement strategies are realised in the University's collaborative agreement with the Scottish Baptist College.

6 The comprehensive, open and evaluative nature of the RA enabled the ELIR team to gain an overview of the wider environment in which the University operates, the various factors

impacting on quality assurance and enhancement, and the University's strategies for managing these. The supporting material was helpful to the team in planning and conducting the review, notably the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook 2005-06.

7 The ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 15 and 16 March 2006 and the Part 2 visit took place between 24 and 28 April 2006.

8 Part 1 began with a short, informal introduction to members of the University's senior management and staff of the Quality and Enhancement Unit. This was followed by a series of presentations led by the Principal who outlined the University's strategic direction and some of the key environmental factors affecting this, including discussions about a potential merger with Bell College of Technology. Subsequent presentations highlighted a range of matters including: the changes at the University since the QAA continuation audit in 2000; the nature of the University's student population; an overview of the student support arrangements; and the University's emerging research strategy. Sabbatical officers from the Students' Association also highlighted the extent of their involvement in quality management and enhancement activities.

9 The ELIR team had three further meetings during Part 1 with groups of senior staff, student representatives, and staff who had a close involvement with the University's internal review processes. These meetings enabled the team to explore a series of overlapping topics including: particular challenges posed by the rapidly changing demographic composition of the student population; the University's strategic approach to quality enhancement; the potential of, and barriers to, cross-institution synergies; the relationship between the University and school levels; the nature and effectiveness of student representation and feedback; employability; and the use of external reference points.

10 During Part 1, the University made available a set of documentation which had been referred to within the RA and a small amount of supplementary information identified during the course of the visit. This enabled the ELIR team to develop a programme of meetings and to identify a set of documentation for the Part 2 visit in order to provide a representative view of the University's approach to assuring and enhancing quality, and maintaining the academic standards of its awards.

11 The ELIR team comprised Dr Paddy Maher, Dr Michael Hayes, Mrs Anne Hughes and Mr Christopher Gourley (reviewers), and Ms Jackie Main (review secretary). The review was coordinated on behalf of QAA by Ms Ailsa Crum, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

Background information about the institution

12 The institution was founded in 1897 to offer vocational courses, and began offering degree studies in the early 1900s. University title was conferred in 1992. In 1993 the University merged with Craigie College of Education, in Ayr. In 1996 the University established its School of Health, Nursing and Midwifery, and contracts have been awarded by the NHS Management Executive for the areas of Argyll and Clyde, and Ayrshire and Arran. In 1998 the University formed a campus at Dumfries in a joint venture with the University of Glasgow and Bell College of Technology.

13 Currently the University operates three campuses at Ayr, Dumfries and Paisley. It has seven schools: computing; education; engineering and science; health, nursing and midwifery; media, language and music; social sciences; and business.

14 In 2005-06, the University had over 13,000 students and 1,200 staff (of whom around 460 were academic). There has been significant growth in part-time student numbers in recent years and this is planned to continue. In 2004-05, over half the student population was studying part-time and more

than 60 per cent were 25 or over on matriculation. In the same year, over 86 per cent of the student population were studying on undergraduate programmes, 12.5 per cent were on taught postgraduate programmes and less than one per cent were research students.

15 The University's mission is to be 'a regional, innovative and inclusive University with strong national and international links; committed to excellence in teaching, knowledge transfer and research; and to serving the social, cultural and economic needs of the communities of the west and south-west of Scotland'.

Institution's strategy for quality enhancement

16 The University identifies two drivers behind its approach to enhancing the student learning experience: planned, strategic development through which the University aims to anticipate and respond to the needs of the students it recruits; and a structured process of continuous review and reflection on current practice and provision. Derived from the institutional Strategic Plan, the University's Strategy for the Enhancement of Quality in Learning and Teaching (SEQLT) focuses on the student learning experience (see below, paragraphs 104).

Internal monitoring and review of quality and standards and public information

Overview of the institution's internal arrangements for assuring the quality of programmes and maintaining the standards of its academic awards and credit

17 The RA stated that the University has a framework in place to ensure rigorous quality assurance, including programme approval processes, assessment procedures, annual monitoring and periodic subject health review. It emphasised that these processes entail critical self-reflection at module, programme and

subject level, and incorporate external review processes, with actions being implemented at programme, school or institutional level as appropriate. The RA also stressed that these processes form a key element of the University's approach to enhancement and that student engagement with the enhancement processes is a critical element of the institution's strategy. The ELIR team explored how these processes operate in practice.

Committee and executive structure and roles

18 University Senate, chaired by the Principal, is responsible for planning, developing and overseeing the academic work of the University. It is assisted in the discharge of its functions by a set of committees at University and school level. The Learning and Teaching Board is the key Senate standing committee in relation to internal monitoring and review of quality and academic standards. It is chaired by the Assistant Principal (Learning and Teaching) and supported by the Quality and Enhancement Unit. It meets in advance of the Senate and reports and advises on matters arising from validation, subject health review and annual monitoring as well as on the regulatory and quality assurance and enhancement arrangements. It makes recommendations on an annual basis on the revisions to the University's regulatory framework for the coming academic session.

19 The Learning and Teaching Board has four subcommittees. The Associate Deans Operations Group is also chaired by the Assistant Principal (Learning and Teaching) and is concerned with the operational matters surrounding quality assurance, the overall student experience and enhancement activities. The University regards it as particularly valuable in allowing cross-school dialogue and sharing of practice. The Quality Assurance Review Group is chaired by the vice-chair of the Learning and Teaching Board who is drawn from one of the school-based associate deans (learning and teaching). It has a precise remit to review and make recommendations to the

Learning and Teaching Board on the development of quality policy, procedures and the regulatory framework. The Collaborative Forum was established in 2005-06 following a review of one of the University's collaborative partnerships, and has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the University's agreements with its collaborative partners. In particular, it keeps under review the quality of the student experience and oversees the cycle of collaborative review visits. The Assessment Sub-Group has the specific responsibility of reviewing and recommending changes to assessment practice, procedures and regulations.

20 The current structure of seven schools was introduced in 2003 at the same time as a new resource allocation model was developed. Each school is headed by a dean who provides academic leadership and is responsible for the effective operation and management of the school. All of the subject groups and academic programmes are assigned to a school, and school boards, chaired by the dean, are responsible for the academic provision including the enhancement of learning and teaching. In addition to school boards, there are learning and teaching committees, programme assessment panels and subject assessment panels. Deans are supported by a school executive normally comprising an associate dean (learning and teaching), an associate dean (research and commercialisation), academic directors and, since 2005, chairs of school learning and teaching committees.

21 The Principal is supported by the Principal's Strategy Group which comprises the Vice Principal (vacant at the time of the ELIR), three assistant principals, the University Secretary and Registrar; Director of Finance, Director of Planning and Development, and Director of Human Resources. Since his appointment in August 2005, the Principal had been consulting internally and externally on management structures and operating mechanisms. At the time of the ELIR, the Assistant Principal (Learning and Teaching) was fulfilling the role of Acting Vice Principal.

Internal approval, monitoring and review

22 The University described itself as having robust, comprehensive and interlinked arrangements for internal monitoring and review which are informed by internal and external feedback and good practice, kept under review by the Learning and Teaching Board and its subgroups, planned for and delivered by schools, supported by the Quality and Enhancement Unit and operated at all three campuses. The University also emphasised that the involvement of students is essential to meeting the diverse needs of its student community, noting that the University of Paisley Students' Association is working with the Quality and Enhancement Unit on the implementation of the student representation strategy to enhance student involvement in academic development.

Validation

23 The University's programme approval processes are outlined in the Quality and Enhancement Unit validation booklet. Proposals are submitted to a school board in the first instance before passing to the New Programme Proposals subgroup of the Academic Development Committee for consideration. If a new programme is authorised to proceed to validation, the programme drafting team works in partnership with the school, the Centre for Learning and Teaching and the Quality and Enhancement Unit to develop the proposal for consideration by a validation panel. Validation events are held for all new proposed programmes and the process is organised and supported by the Quality and Enhancement Unit. Validation panels normally include three external subject experts, two academics and one member of an appropriate profession or industry. The University has explicit criteria for approval which include reference to subject benchmark statements, the SCQF and professional standards. Programmes are approved for a maximum of six years with re-approval being conducted within the subject health review process (see below, paragraphs 29-33). The detailed report of the validation event is received by the Learning and Teaching

Board and the relevant school board, with the latter being responsible for ensuring follow-up action is carried out, and is reported through the annual monitoring cycle. On an annual basis, the Quality and Enhancement Unit provides a report to the Learning and Teaching Board on the common themes raised in the previous year's validation reports. This forms the basis for discussion with the schools and the Centre for Learning and Teaching on areas for further training and support. The ELIR team noted an example of how this mechanism had been used to identify a need for support in drafting learning outcomes to meet the terms of the SCQF (see below, paragraph 54). The Quality and Enhancement Unit's annual report is also used to disseminate good practice identified during validation events, and the team noted examples of good practice in the design and content of student handbooks being identified and disseminated in this way.

24 Schools have delegated authority to approve new and amended modules subject to a limit of 25 per cent overall change to a single award. If cumulative changes are likely to amount to a greater than 25 per cent change overall, the case must be referred to the Head of the Quality and Enhancement Unit and the programme will be submitted to a validation panel for re-approval. There are detailed arrangements for monitoring this process within schools, supported by the Quality and Enhancement Unit, and the associate deans (learning and teaching) have responsibility for signing off the module and programme portfolio to the Registry on set dates each year. The ELIR team shared the University's view that this process is robust and well embedded in the school learning and teaching committee structures.

Annual monitoring

25 The Quality Assurance Review Group initiated a reflection on the University's annual monitoring process in 2002-03 with the intention of creating a more dynamic, enhancement-led process. After considerable debate, the revised arrangements were implemented in 2003-04, coinciding with the

establishment of the seven school structure and related changes to the University's quality systems. The aim of the current arrangements is to move away from a report-based mechanism to one that is event-based, promoting wider staff engagement. Reports in the current process map onto the learning and teaching committee structure and therefore match the arrangements for the day-to-day management of provision; they also link to the subject health review process. Each learning and teaching committee prepares a Quality of Student Experience Report (QSER), the headings of which follow the six themes used in subject health review (see below, paragraphs 29-33). These are considered at a school-based annual monitoring event, which is facilitated by the Quality and Enhancement Unit. Colleagues from the Centre for Learning and Teaching, the Centre for Lifelong Learning and Student Services also participate in these events to create an integrated approach between the schools and the support services. The ELIR team heard that some schools were developing student participation in their events. The associate deans (learning and teaching) use the QSERs to inform their school annual learning and teaching reports, which are considered in draft form at the school events before final approval at the school board. These reports confirm that proper review of student achievement, academic standards, external examiner reports and student feedback has taken place at the subject and programme levels. The reports identify action to be taken at each of the programme, school and University levels, and include a set of SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-related) targets which are forwarded to the school board.

26 Each year since 2004, the University has held an annual monitoring and enhancement event to consider the outcomes of the school events and to provide an institution-wide report with an action plan for the Learning and Teaching Board. After the 2005 event, both the Quality Assurance Review Group and the Associate Deans Operations Group considered the annual monitoring process, and it was

agreed to revise the format of the University event for 2006. The event, held in January 2006 focused on sharing the school SMART targets across the institution, and considering school progress in implementing the Strategy for the Enhancement of Quality of Learning and Teaching (see above, paragraph 16) and other University-wide objectives.

27 The ELIR team was able to consider the reports of the school and University events and discuss the operation of the arrangements with staff. It was clear that the University's aim of engaging staff in the exercise has largely been achieved. In discussion, staff commented with enthusiasm that the school events were driven by learning and teaching matters rather than a need to audit or monitor activity and, therefore, had an immediate relevance to their daily work. Staff from the schools and support units alike had a clear understanding of the arrangements, aided by an explanatory booklet produced by the Quality and Enhancement Unit. The team considered that the refocused annual University event provides a powerful tool for sharing experience and ensuring there is alignment between the schools' activities and institutional strategies.

28 In addition to the formal annual monitoring mechanisms, there are ongoing monitoring activities embedded in the schools' and learning and teaching committees' day-to-day activities. Student feedback, student performance data and external examiner reports are considered as they are received and, together with updates to subject benchmark statements and the outcomes of the national enhancement themes, are used throughout the year to ensure academic standards are being maintained and the quality of the student experience enhanced.

Subject health review

29 The RA stated that the University places particular emphasis within its quality and enhancement activities on the subject health review (SHR) process and outcomes. The process has been in place since 1999 and has been updated annually following feedback on its operation from SHR panel members and

subject teams. The RA stressed that the Quality Assurance Review Group, the holistic review process (see below, paragraph 35), and SHR panel members consistently have found SHR to be a sound, robust and effective method of review.

30 The SHR process is monitored by the Learning and Teaching Board and managed by the Quality and Enhancement Unit. The method is described in a detailed booklet produced by the Unit. All provision is reviewed as part of SHR on a six-year cycle. The process reviews academic standards and the quality of provision through scrutiny of six themes: provision; learning, teaching and enhancement; student assessment and achievement; research; strategic development; and student support. Panel membership includes a student, typically a sabbatical officer, and three external peers representing the subject area and appropriate profession or industry. Panels are chaired by the Assistant Principal (Learning and Teaching).

31 The University describes the method as an ongoing period of review. The Assistant Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Director of the Centre of Learning and Teaching attend a preliminary meeting with the subject team. The process incorporates opportunities to reflect on the method and its outcomes, including a meeting of the subject team with the SHR chair and Head of the Quality and Enhancement Unit after the event. Immediately after and one year after the SHR, the outcomes are discussed and reported on as part of the learning and teaching committee structure and school annual monitoring process. Schools use the SHR preparation and outcomes while developing their school strategic plans.

32 Detailed reports of each SHR are submitted to the Learning and Teaching Board. Common themes and key outcomes across reviews are also distilled by the Quality and Enhancement Unit for the attention of the Learning and Teaching Board, the Senate and the University Court. SHR reports are used by the Centre for Learning and Teaching to inform staff development planning and Student

Services use the reports to provide advice to the schools on matters such as employability and student support.

33 In 2005-06 the University piloted an approach to involving students in the preparatory stages for SHR, and this was set out in the SHR guidance from the Quality and Enhancement Unit. A cross-section of students from the subject area was invited to read the self-evaluation document and note their views. The process was facilitated by the Students' Association and the Quality and Enhancement Unit. The Acting Vice Principal was due to report on the pilot outcomes at the end of 2005-06. In the ELIR team's discussions with staff there was positive comment about involving students in this way.

34 From its reading of the reports and related documents, and its discussions with staff and students, the ELIR team was able to confirm the effectiveness of the SHR process which has a very clear enhancement role. Particular strengths are the mechanisms for involving students, and the extent to which SHR is linked with other processes, such as the annual monitoring arrangements and, increasingly, the strategic planning process. Currently SHR relates only to academic provision but the University plans to establish a similar method for reviewing its support services and the team would support this development.

Holistic review

35 The Quality Assurance Review Group has committed to undertaking a holistic review of the University's quality procedures every three to four years. These reviews are intended to ensure that the various elements of the University's quality assurance arrangements are coherent and to identify opportunities for improvement. The first review, in 2005, involved a full day of activities led by the Quality and Enhancement Unit and the Chair of the Quality Assurance Review Group. It confirmed that the processes were generally working effectively and also identified a range of areas where further enhancement could be achieved. An action list was developed and an overview of progress in achieving it is

maintained by the Quality Assurance Review Group, on behalf of the Learning and Teaching Board. The ELIR team noted a number of adjustments that had arisen from the holistic review, for example, the learning and teaching chairs are now included in the membership of school executives to enhance communication and the flow of information within schools.

Assessment

36 Following comments in the report of the QAA Continuation Audit carried out in 2000, and informed by practice at other institutions, the University made a number of revisions to its assessment arrangements. It has a two-tier assessment process in which marks are considered and finalised in the subject assessment panels before being transmitted to programme assessment panels for decisions relating to mitigating circumstances, progression and awards. External examiners are in attendance at both stages. The panels are formally constituted and their membership and operation are the responsibility of the dean and board of each school. These revised arrangements have been overseen by the Learning and Teaching Board and a Subject Panels Implementation Group was established to work with schools, provide staff development for the new processes and monitor their effectiveness.

37 In session 2004-05 the University developed a new Assessment Policy which draws on the national enhancement theme and aims to provide a framework for innovations in assessment practice that enhance student learning. Learning and teaching committees have a key role in the implementation of the Policy, for example in relation to the assessment loading on students and providing feedback to students on assessed work. Key points and timescales for their consideration by learning and teaching committees have been considered by the learning and teaching committee chairs, and the Centre for Learning and Teaching is supporting the implementation of the Policy through its website and through a peer network of learning and teaching committee representatives.

38 The ELIR team saw evidence of the Subject Panels Implementation Group reviewing and making adjustments to the assessment arrangements, with the approval of the Learning and Teaching Board, based on feedback obtained from external examiners, schools and the Registry. The team considered that the arrangements were well understood by staff with systematic links to the learning and teaching committee structures.

External examiner system

39 The RA confirmed that the University is committed to providing significant resources to underpin the operation of the external examiner system.

40 The University appoints two categories of external examiners, for the subject and the programme level. Subject external examiners are appointed to confirm marks and make recommendations about assessment on groups of related modules and are members of subject panels. Programme external examiners are members of programme panels taking decisions on student progression and academic awards.

41 All nominations for external examiners are approved by the relevant school board and the Learning and Teaching Board, and all external examiners are appointed following the University's criteria. School boards report to the Learning and Teaching Board in October each year that all external examiner appointments are confirmed. External examiners are notified of the confirmation of their appointment by the Quality and Enhancement Unit and provided with information on their responsibilities which are clarified in the External Examiner Handbook. The Unit also organises an induction for new external examiners.

42 External examiner reports are received by the Head of the Quality and Enhancement Unit and are posted on the staff intranet. A summary of the matters raised in the reports is prepared for each school by the Quality and Enhancement Unit and the summary is countersigned by the associate dean (learning and teaching). The full reports are scrutinised

by the learning and teaching committees and programme leaders as well as the associate deans (learning and teaching). External examiners receive a formal response to their reports from schools. Since the QAA continuation audit this has been further formalised as a pro forma which is embedded within the annual monitoring process and signed off by the associate deans and, ultimately, the Learning and Teaching Board.

43 Separate criteria are in place for the appointment of research degree external examiners with their appointment being managed by the Research Degrees Committee and overseen by the Learning and Teaching Board.

44 The ELIR team considered that the University has appropriate mechanisms in place for managing its external examiner system which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice*.

Research degrees

45 The Research Degrees Committee is a standing committee of the Senate and it makes recommendations on matters relating to research student activity and research degrees, as well as functioning as a consultative body for the University in these areas. The Committee and research student administration is supported by an office within the Quality and Enhancement Unit which publishes a Research Handbook annually for staff and students. The University offers a postgraduate certificate in research supervision which is undertaken by a significant number of staff. The ELIR team considered that offering the postgraduate certificate represents good practice.

Collaborative provision

46 The University has a comparatively small number of collaborative partnerships, most of which are mature and well-embedded in terms of practical organisation and quality assurance. While each school is responsible for ensuring the academic standards and the quality of student experience of the University's awards offered in collaboration, these are overseen

collectively by the recently established Collaborative Forum (see above, paragraph 19). This allows common themes and actions to be identified and addressed consistently; it also ensures clear and consistent reporting lines into the University committee structure for all collaborative links.

47 The RA asserted that the risk management of collaborative links is to the fore of the University's quality assurance requirements, and this is addressed in detail in the Quality and Enhancement Unit booklet associated with collaboration. The Unit provides support and information to staff proposing new collaborative initiatives and manages any subsequent validation process.

48 One of the case studies submitted with the RA related to the University's relationship with the Scottish Baptist College, which is a small, privately resourced institution located on the Paisley campus. The case study material emphasised the benefits the University considered had arisen from the collaboration, including the sharing of good practice and cross fertilisation of ideas in work based learning. The general benefits of the link were emphasised to the ELIR team in its discussions with staff of both institutions. Students of the College highlighted the benefits they gained by being part of a wider University community.

49 The ELIR team considered that the University's arrangement for managing its collaborative provision were in line with the expectations of the *Code of practice*. While the Collaborative Forum had only met on a few occasions at the time of the ELIR visit, the team considered that its formation was a positive development.

Overview of the use made of external reference points for assuring quality and standards

Code of practice

50 The RA stated that the University's approach to using the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, is to embed its good practice into existing University policies,

procedures and regulations. The ELIR team saw substantial evidence of this from the booklets and other documentation produced by the Quality and Enhancement Unit. New and revised sections of the *Code* are reviewed by the Quality and Enhancement Unit, or other appropriate officers, and drawn to the attention of the Learning and Teaching Board for required action. University staff participate in the discussions facilitated by QAA on sections of the *Code*, and the team learnt that the Quality and Enhancement Unit undertakes periodic audits of the extent to which the *Code* is reflected in institutional practice, reporting the outcome to the University Project Management Group and the Learning and Teaching Board as appropriate.

Subject benchmark statements

51 Subject benchmark statements are well embedded into the University's approach to curriculum design and programme approval and review, featuring prominently in the criteria for validation and the subject health review method.

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

52 The RA highlighted that the University was in the forefront of the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SCOTCAT) developments, operating the largest institutional CAT scheme in Scotland during the 1990s. The University's awards have, therefore, been consonant with the objectives of the SCQF for many years.

53 The criteria for validation and subject health review require the panels to ensure that new programmes and those submitted for review meet the appropriate standard of the award, and that this is articulated with reference to the SCQF, as well as with appropriate subject benchmark statements and professional standards. The Quality and Enhancement Unit provides an explicit guidance note for validation and subject health review panels on the SCQF and guidance for staff is provided in an appendix to the University Regulatory Framework.

54 Through its mechanisms for scrutinising validation outcomes (see above, paragraph 23), the University identified that, while the principles and levels for awards are now well embedded, framing module specific learning outcomes in terms of the SCQF level descriptors was more challenging in some cases. The Centre for Learning and Teaching is working with schools to provide support in this area.

55 The University has taken steps to promote the recognition of prior learning and now aims to give a credit rating to all learning imported into one of its programmes of study and to ensure that such credit has been subject to reliable and valid methods of assessment. The Centre for Lifelong Learning is at the forefront of supporting these developments nationally and within the institution.

56 It was clear to the ELIR team that the University is committed to making wide and creative use of the SCQF for the benefit of its students.

Programme specifications

57 The RA indicated that the University's standard template for programme specifications, which was introduced in 2001-02, has proved suitable for programme approval and review arrangements but that the value of programme specifications to wider audiences including students is less evident. The Learning and Teaching Board has established a review group to consider how the template could be revised in view of a number of developments including the University's planned new student information system. The ELIR team saw a range of programme specifications, some of which had been produced in a revised format to better meet the information needs of students. The team would support the University in focusing on the requirements of students as it develops its template.

Progress files

58 The RA stated that the University is progressing in the development of both transcripts and Personal Development Planning

(PDP). The introduction of progress files is included as an objective of the University Strategy for the Enhancement of Quality of Learning and Teaching and pilot projects with schools on PDP were ongoing at the time of ELIR. The University intends that all students will have PDPs by 2009. The ELIR team noted that the University is currently the lead partner in an SFC-funded project, Individualised Support for Learners through ePortfolios (ISLE).

Professional and statutory bodies and employers

59 The RA made it clear that professional accreditation is a key component of many of the University's awards. Alongside its own validation process, the University identifies professional accreditation as securing for its students a high quality of academic and professional experience and also providing enhanced opportunities for graduates entering their chosen profession, either through exemption from professional examinations or fast-tracking towards chartered status.

60 The development and drafting of documents for submission to professional and statutory bodies (PSBs) is supported by the Quality and Enhancement Unit and the Planning and Development Office. The Professional Accreditation 2005/2006 handbook, produced by the Quality and Enhancement Unit, provides guidance and information to support programme leaders and other school staff in preparing for and responding to professional accreditation. The Unit also maintains a schedule of PSB activity. PSB reports, together with the school response to them, are submitted to the Learning and Teaching Board.

61 The criteria for validation and subject health review require the panels to consider the subject teams' engagement with PSBs and other professional activity.

Commentary on the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards

62 The University has robust and comprehensive arrangements for assuring the quality of provision and maintaining the academic standards of its awards. A system of appropriate and effective delegation of authority operates within an agreed framework which is clearly understood by staff, overseen by the Learning and Teaching Board and monitored by the Quality and Enhancement Unit. The assessment arrangements are clear and are related to the school and University levels through the work of the school learning and teaching committees and the Learning and Teaching Board respectively. The University has appropriate mechanisms in place for monitoring its external examiner system which are also overseen by the Learning and Teaching Board and the Quality and Enhancement Unit.

63 Subject health review is an effective, enhancement-led and dynamic process incorporating evaluation of the method and of its outcomes. It engages students in a range of ways including full student membership of the panels. The University is seeking to involve students in the preparation of self-evaluation material, which is a positive development representing good practice. The subject health review method is closely aligned with the annual monitoring arrangements which strengthens the effectiveness of both processes. These, and the University's other key quality assurance arrangements, are supported by clear and targeted documentation produced by the Quality and Enhancement Unit. The documentation enables staff to understand the processes and provides a platform for quality enhancement.

64 The University has thorough arrangements in place for making use of external reference points throughout its Regulatory Framework, both explicitly and by incorporating elements of the Academic Infrastructure within its own policies and practices.

65 The University has identified a number of key roles at a variety of levels across the institution. Within schools, the associate deans (learning and teaching) have a pivotal role in monitoring activity and sharing good practice within and between schools, as well as providing a link between the school and University level. The Head of the Quality and Enhancement Unit and the Assistant Principal (Learning and Teaching) through their combined and individual roles have a positive impact on the University's ability to assure quality and secure academic standards.

66 On the basis of these findings, there can be broad confidence in the University's current, and likely future, management of the quality of its provision and the academic standards of its awards.

Overview of the institution's approach to ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair

67 The RA set out the different types of public information the University produces. In relation to statistical information, the University asserted that its new student information system would, in time, replace many disparate databases thus improving the provision of management information.

68 The University produces a range of promotional information, the production of which is controlled centrally through the Corporate Marketing department in conjunction with the Centre for Learning and Teaching's Graphics Unit, Printing Services and external providers. The Corporate Marketing department works with schools to update the prospectuses, the part-time guide and associated publications. Corporate Marketing also checks promotional information produced by the University's collaborative partners where reference is made to the University. The Director of Corporate Marketing is a member of the University's Collaborative Forum to facilitate this.

69 The University's website consists of a large network of interlinked documents. Corporate Marketing maintains the central site and acts in an advisory capacity to schools and other services. Around 60 staff across the institution have received training in a software package to enable them, where appropriate, to update the web pages for their school or service, with the aim of ensuring their sites are as current and dynamic as possible. The ELIR team learnt that a range of actions are in progress to ensure the enhanced management of the material on the University's website and to confirm that individuals are charged with ensuring that the information it contains is complete, accurate and fair. The recently integrated ICT Service will work with Corporate Marketing to advise and support schools and services as they develop their public web presence. The University has also planned to implement a content management system to enforce time expiry on published web information.

70 The University has established a working group to manage the institution's interface with the national Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website. The ELIR team noted that the University has been providing material in an accessible form for these purposes since the TQI site became 'live' for Scottish higher education institutions in September 2005. The team also noted that the University, through its Learning and Teaching Board, is considering how best to make programme specifications publicly available, including to prospective students.

Commentary on the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair

71 The University has adequate arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate, and fair. It has appropriate mechanisms for providing data for TQI purposes and presents this material in an accessible form.

The student experience

Overview of the institution's approach to engaging students in the assurance and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning

72 The University considers the involvement of students in quality assurance and enhancement activities to be a priority and has been working proactively with the University of Paisley Students' Association (UPSA) over the last three years to develop this. The University recognises that the diversity and demography of its student population presents challenges in securing engagement in these opportunities across the entire student population and has developed a Student Representation Strategy to address this.

Student representation

73 The University has a wide range of mechanisms for promoting student involvement and gaining feedback that operate at the institutional, school and programme levels.

74 UPSA has four full-time sabbatical officers: the President based at Paisley, the Depute President based at Ayr, and two vice presidents. In addition, there is a campus specific Student President at the Dumfries campus to represent students from all the institutions based there (see above, paragraph 12). UPSA is responsible for appointing representatives onto a range of University bodies, and it works with the University to ensure that the student voice is properly represented at all levels. The University has supported collaborative work between UPSA and the Quality and Enhancement Unit to identify mechanisms to encourage student representation and to facilitate training and guidance for those undertaking a representative role.

75 Two student representatives (normally the UPSA President and Depute President) are full members of the University Court. Students are also members of other University committees including the Senate and the Learning and Teaching Board. Within schools, students are represented on staff student liaison committees (SSLCs), learning and teaching committees and school boards.

76 SSLCs can be school-wide or programme based, but to ensure consistency in their operation a generic remit has been agreed and is outlined in the Student Representative Handbook 2005-06, which is produced jointly by the Quality and Enhancement Unit and UPSA (see below, paragraph 80). Students have been members of learning and teaching committees from session 2003-04 and, through this route, have direct involvement in reviewing all teaching, learning and assessment matters. In response to feedback from student representatives and with effect from Session 2005-06, a standing item on 'student matters' has been added to all learning and teaching committee agendas. Student representatives on these committees are drawn from each campus and from different modes of study. In addition, students studying part-time can provide feedback through the Centre for Lifelong Learning.

77 The University and UPSA have recognised that it has become difficult to secure student representation on school boards in recent years. Reasons identified for this include the demographics of the student population, in which a significant proportion of students are in full-time employment, and because students regard the business of school boards as being one step removed from their immediate module or degree experience. UPSA and the Quality and Enhancement Unit worked closely to resolve this and, as a result of this collaboration, the Student Representation Strategy was developed. The Strategy defines the student representative arrangements across the University and one of its key objectives is that all student representatives should have access to the same information, guidance and support.

78 As part of the Student Representation Strategy, a new role of student school officer was piloted in 2005-06. These officers attended school board meetings and liaised with the relevant SSLCs. Based on their evaluation of the pilot, UPSA and the University recognise that further amendments to, and support for, the student school officers are required for Session 2006-07. Proposals at the time of the ELIR were to remove the requirement for school officers

to attend school board meetings, focusing instead on communication with the SSLCs. This links with a theme emerging from the joint work of UPSA and the Quality and Enhancement Unit, and which was emphasised in discussions during ELIR, to stop trying to fit the students into the existing structures and start shaping the structures around students.

79 UPSA is working on a number of new strategies to ensure that currently under represented constituencies within the student community are represented and to encourage more of these groups to get involved. One such approach is the establishment of Students Taking Action and Representing (STAR) groups. Two STAR groups have successfully been established, one for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students, and the other for international students. By the time of the ELIR visit, UPSA had liaised with University colleagues to form a STAR group for women and one for postgraduate students, and further groups were planned.

80 The Quality and Enhancement Unit and UPSA provide support for all student representatives through the handbook for Student Representatives, which is updated annually, and through training facilitated by the national student support service, Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs). Uptake of the training has increased in each of the last three years and, in 2005-06, it was delivered on all three campuses. As part of the University's evaluation of the training, student representatives have confirmed its effectiveness in helping them to understand their role and responsibilities. Following discussions between student representatives and the Assistant Principal (Learning and Teaching) in 2004, a Student Representative site has been created on the University's virtual learning environment (VLE) to provide information and highlight key dates. In discussions during ELIR, staff and student representatives described the site as providing an effective communication route. It also emerged in discussions that students can gain a Student Representative Certificate. Details of how to gain the certificate are set

out on the University website in a publication endorsed by the institution and UPSA.

Subject health review

81 Students are full members of subject health review (SHR) panels and a pilot was carried out in Session 2005-06 to involve students in the preparation of the self-evaluation document (see above, paragraph 33). Student membership of SHR panels is positively valued by staff, and the dynamic relationship between these reviews and the University Strategy for the Enhancement of Quality of Learning and Teaching was emphasised in discussions with the staff involved. Academic staff and students highlighted that SHRs are influenced by student involvement in other ways, including through reporting of SSLC discussions during the SHR process and by SHR panels meeting groups of students.

Student feedback

82 The University conducts a detailed analysis of student feedback through the Quality of Student Experience Reports produced through the learning and teaching committees as part of the annual monitoring arrangements (see above, paragraph 25). In discussion during ELIR, students identified examples of their feedback being acted upon, but they were not always aware of the immediate impact of their feedback on developments. Staff acknowledged this and highlighted some measures that were being implemented to improve communication to students on the action taken following their feedback.

83 In discussions during ELIR, students highlighted the informal opportunities available for meeting and exchanging views with staff. They considered that informal feedback is actively encouraged within the University, indicating that they found staff are readily accessible and receptive to their views.

84 Overall, it is clear that the University is proactive in seeking to engage students from all its campuses and in all modes of study, working in collaboration with UPSA to bring this about. There is a strong culture of seeking and responding to students' views and the University is seeking to enhance its ongoing

feedback arrangements to complement the existing annual mechanisms. It is also clear that the University is committed to ongoing evaluation and enhancement of its arrangements for involving students in the management of their learning experience.

Overview of the institution's approach to the promotion of effective student learning, and to providing an appropriate learning experience for all its students

85 The University aims to strengthen its position as a multi-campus provider of higher education across the region of west and south west Scotland over the next four years, extending opportunities for accessing higher education into a number of communities which currently have records of low participation in higher education. There has been rapid growth in the University's part-time student numbers, with an increase of more than 77 per cent since 2001, such that students studying in part-time mode now comprise more than half the total student population. The University has highlighted that a student body with a broader range of educational experiences and a wider spread of previous academic achievement requires learning and teaching methods which acknowledge and support a wide range of learning styles and are capable of meeting more diverse needs. It describes itself as having an approach that is responsive to the evolving demographic composition of its study body.

Strategy for the Enhancement of Quality of Learning and Teaching

86 The University's Strategy for the Enhancement of Quality of Learning and Teaching (SEQLT) identifies a number of goals, projects and policies aimed at the promotion of an effective student learning experience for its diverse student population. SEQLT provides a framework for managing and enhancing the student experience, for monitoring progress of action and for identifying priorities. Five themes were prioritised for enhancement from 2005: flexible delivery, personal development planning, progression and retention, work

based learning and employability. The SEQLT themes are related to the annual monitoring arrangements through the collation of school SMART targets and the learning and teaching committee structures (see above, paragraph 26). The schools are responsible for engaging students and ensuring their needs are met by linking with the relevant academic services. Through the annual monitoring arrangements, and the Quality of Student Experience Reports in particular, the University has systematic means for ensuring the continual enhancement of the student experience.

Centre for Lifelong Learning

87 The University's commitment to developing systems that match students' aspirations for flexible study modes and local delivery of courses can be seen in its flexible timetable, creative use of the modular, credit rated scheme and the extent of support provided by the Centre for Lifelong Learning which enables students to identify suitable study modules, programmes and pathways to match their needs. The Centre for Lifelong Learning has responsibility for developing and coordinating access activities and part-time provision but all students are able to access its services and the Centre's work has implications for, and helps inform, the University's development of its full-time provision. A team of educational guidance advisers work within the Centre for Lifelong Learning with the primary role of providing pre-entry and ongoing guidance and support to students. Many of the University's students can change between part-time and full-time study and are advised in doing so by the Centre for Lifelong Learning. In discussions during ELIR, a number of students commented very favourably on the support they had received to complete their awards, highlighting the extent to which the Centre for Lifelong Learning had coordinated the work of other support services and liaised with staff in schools. Academic staff at a number of levels within the institution commented on the developing role of the educational guidance advisers in structuring and supporting liaison with schools to manage

the learning experience of diverse student groups. This relationship is one of the key dynamics within the University for achieving the integrated approach between student support and academic services which is central to its mission. The University recognises this and is continuing to develop the structure and functions of the Centre for Lifelong Learning.

Centre for Learning and Teaching

88 The Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) supports strategic development in relation to learning and teaching across the University. At the time of ELIR its role had recently been refocused to enable it to make strategic interventions into the development of academic provision. Examples of this included CLT leading on developments aligned with SEQLT, such as personal development planning. CLT also has a key role in developing practitioner networks which share good practice in relation to subject and external developments.

Virtual learning environment

89 The University introduced a virtual learning environment (VLE) in 2000 to support the diversity of its student population including part-time study patterns and the flexible timetable. The University is aware of the potential of the VLE to enhance student learning further and, through SEQLT, developed an e-Learning Policy (2004-2007) to promote the more effective use of the VLE. At the time of ELIR, more explicit e-learning development plans were being produced by schools. The rapid and widespread adoption of the VLE has been driven by the enthusiasm of staff and students. The University's evaluation of its use has indicated that almost half of all modules are supported in some way by the VLE, almost all academic staff are involved in using it and all students are registered to use it. In discussion during ELIR, students from programmes delivered primarily through the VLE expressed satisfaction with the academic and personal support provided. Undergraduate students welcomed the development of the VLE and supported its wider use in a blended learning environment. Some students indicated that the

variability of its usage between modules could at times pose a problem as they were not always certain how much they were expected to make use of it from module to module. The University has recognised this issue, associated with the rapid uptake in usage of the VLE, and has measures in place to address this. Through the CLT, an e-learning practitioners network has been established and a range of workshops is being offered for staff to further develop e-learning pedagogy.

Progression and retention

90 Despite the range of flexible delivery mechanisms and the specialised support provided through the Centre for Lifelong Learning, the University acknowledges the continuing challenges it faces in relation to managing retention and progression. The University has taken a number of steps to address this, including creating a retention research project. Most recently the University's approach to target setting and monitoring has been reviewed and revised by the Planning and Development Office. The new arrangements include the development of detailed statistical analyses which are used to inform the school planning processes. In addition, school plans and developments at subject level in learning and teaching committees, are informed by research being undertaken by the Centre for Lifelong Learning. Through the planning process formal targets are set, and these are monitored by the Planning and Development Office and the Centre for Lifelong Learning who are developing predictive models of student success. It is clear the University is developing a more specifically targeted approach to managing retention and progression.

Induction

91 The University aims to equip students at the start of their studies with skills to be effective independent learners. Arising from SEQLT, the Learning and Teaching Board established an Induction Working Group in 2003-04 to coordinate and develop activities in this area. An induction programme has been established which operates three times a year on all three campuses to provide initial support

to students on entry or return to their studies. Extended induction support is provided through modules developed by the Centre for Lifelong Learning and they come in a generic version, offered through the Centre, or customised within specific programmes. The modules are diversified to meet the needs of differing student groups including school leavers, wider access students and those entering from the further education sector, underlining the University's awareness of the impact of appropriate induction on student retention. The effectiveness of the arrangements in this area is monitored by the Induction Working Group and reported to the Learning and Teaching Board. In discussion during ELIR, students recognised the role of the induction modules and highlighted how useful they had found the support provided through the Centre for Lifelong Learning.

Dumfries campus

92 In 2005-06, 228 students based at the Crichton Campus in Dumfries were enrolled on the University's awards. In discussion during ELIR, and as part of the University's regular processes, students based in Dumfries emphasise the extent to which they value the local facility and the opportunities it provides. Through subject health review, the University has identified some differences in the nature of the student experience at Dumfries relating to module choice and the level of awards offered compared to that on the other campuses. In part these issues relate to the small scale of the operation and the University has identified actions to improve these aspects of the student experience. The University is aware of the need to put in place appropriate induction and staff development arrangements for the associate lecturers based at Crichton, and is encouraged to pursue its plans for addressing this.

Student satisfaction

93 Data gathered by the University identifies high levels of student satisfaction with the learning experience provided, and a large majority of students indicate in surveys that they would recommend the institution to prospective applicants. This was emphatically

corroborated during the ELIR. In discussions, students were generally very positive about their experience at the University, emphasising the opportunities it provided. The diverse composition of the student body was recognised as being beneficial to the learning environment with students indicating it tended to generate a lively atmosphere and enabled students to draw on a wide range of prior experience to enhance group discussions and activities.

Overview of the institution's approach to the promotion of employability of its students

94 The University has an established tradition of providing work-related and placement opportunities and is committed to enhancing the employability of its students. Employability is embedded in SEQLT and a set of objectives is designed to increase students' employability through: integrating career planning skills with programmes; increasing work-related learning and placement opportunities; and embedding transferable skills. The University recognises that students cite the enhancement of their employment prospects and career development as key reasons to study at the institution, indicating their belief that employability is a demonstrable outcome of the University's awards.

95 The University was an active contributor to the national Employability Enhancement Theme. This has led to an awareness of the employability agenda within the University, which will be further enhanced with the establishment of an Employability Working Group. The group will have a strategic remit to audit, monitor and review current practice across schools to help support the systematic embedding of employability in the curriculum. The group will also have a role in evaluating the University's strategies in this area.

96 The Careers Service works with schools to develop the employability of students, and careers advisers attend the school annual monitoring events (see above, paragraph 25). A number of pilots are running in partnership

between the Careers Service and particular schools to identify models for promoting employability. The University has recognised a need to provide staff development in this area and the Centre for Learning and Teaching has established an academic contact who will link with the associate deans (learning and teaching) to take this forward.

97 Through the efforts of the Work-based Learning Working Group during session 2004-05, a set of good practice guidelines and a definition of work-based learning have been developed. Although such opportunities are generally popular with students and employers, the University has identified a decrease in the take up of optional placements in recent years. A factor in this is thought to be students' reluctance to extend the length of time taken to achieve their award and, to counter this, schools are being encouraged to incorporate work-based learning opportunities into the academic credit structure of programmes.

98 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 is involved in the SFC funded project, Individualised Support for Learning through ePortfolios (ISLE) which seeks to support lifelong learning and wider participation through effective collaborations between further and higher education and to develop a shared concept of PDP supported through blended learning strategies. The University regards this as significant in informing its PDP pilots and in bringing coherence to PDP across the institution. Information relating to these ongoing developments is included in the annual monitoring documents, including the Quality of Student Experience Reports (QESR).

Commentary on the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students

99 The University is committed to its wider access mission and the extent to which it is student centred and responsive to students' views is illustrated by the way in which it is genuinely seeking to develop its systems so they fit with the needs of its increasingly diverse student population. A variety of opportunities for student involvement exists at each level of the institution and these are taken up by students studying at each of the campuses in a range of study modes. The University, through its Quality and Enhancement Unit, works in collaboration with the Students' Association to develop and enhance the representative opportunities available, and to provide support for existing and prospective student representatives. The University has a strong culture of gathering and responding to student opinion, and is seeking to develop its feedback mechanisms to engage all groups of students.

100 The University has identified action which should be taken to enhance the student experience at the Dumfries campus, associated with module choice and level of awards. The University has also recognised the need to establish appropriate induction and access to staff development for the associate lecturers based at Dumfries.

101 The University has plans in place to ensure the alignment of its student support arrangements with the changes in its student profile, in particular the recent rapid growth in part-time student numbers, and its planned continued growth in the number of international students. Through its Strategy for the Enhancement of Quality of Learning and Teaching (SEQLT), the University has identified a range of matters that need to be managed in relation to the student experience and has a means for organising and addressing these. The annual monitoring arrangements, with its quality of student experience reports and the role of the learning and teaching committees, provide a regular set of opportunities for continually improving the student experience.

A more systematic approach to managing student retention is being developed through the school planning process, supported by detailed statistical analysis and research. Particular features of the learning experience include the flexible timetable, and flexibility in study mode, coupled with the pivotal role of the Centre for Lifelong Learning in providing advice, support and personalisation of the study opportunities. Employability remains a core feature of the student experience and the University is developing an embedded approach across the institution as it addresses the priorities identified in SEQLT and the related process for implementing personal development planning.

102 Students express high levels of satisfaction with the learning opportunities provided, and recognise considerable benefits to the learning environment from the diverse backgrounds represented within the student population.

Effectiveness of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement

Overview of the institution's approach to managing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning

103 The University describes its approach to enhancement as being informed by the QAA definition of deliberate and planned steps to bring about continuous improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience of students. The University recognises two key drivers of this process: planned, strategic development through which the institution aims to anticipate and respond to the needs of the students it recruits; and a structured process of continuous review and reflection on current practice and provision. The University's intentions for the development of its provision and student recruitment, and its strategy for responding to the challenges presented by its wider access agenda are set out in its Strategic Plan. Responsibility for the strategic direction of managing improvement in the quality of learning and teaching lies with the Learning

and Teaching Board.

Strategy for the Enhancement of Quality in Learning and Teaching

104 The Learning and Teaching Board exercises its responsibility for quality enhancement primarily through overseeing the implementation of the Strategy for the Enhancement of Quality in Learning and Teaching (SEQLT) 2003-2006, which built on the previous Learning and Teaching Policy (2000). One of the stated purposes of SEQLT is a commitment to innovation and continuous improvement through development, evaluation, dissemination and staff development in order to meet the needs of students and enhance student experience of learning. SEQLT has six overarching aims: improvement in student achievement and the quality of the student learning experience; increased flexibility in the delivery of programmes; enhancement of student support through improvements in support mechanisms; enhancement of students' future employability; development of an inclusive curriculum and improvements in disability awareness; and improvement to processes for recognising, promoting and rewarding excellence in teaching.

105 Each of the SEQLT aims was originally expressed as a number of objectives, which have subsequently been reviewed and updated and are expected to be achieved through a SEQLT Implementation Plan. This Plan is developed and overseen by a Project Management Group which reports on progress to the Learning and Teaching Board. The Project Management Group meets monthly and includes the associate deans (learning and teaching), the directors of the key central services, and the President of the Students' Association. The Implementation Plan lists each of the current thirty objectives, how it relates to other University strategies and policies, the proposed activities and the members of staff who are sponsoring them. The Plan also shows the current status of previously agreed activities and nominees to progress them. The Plan, which is updated annually, is an evolving document with some objectives being deferred

for strategic reasons, others revised and others at various stages of achievement. The University expects the Project Management Group to ensure that a coordinated approach is adopted across schools and campuses, and the schools engage in a continuous dialogue on developments, with the associate deans (learning and teaching) being regarded as the interface between school and institutional priorities.

106 The first Holistic Review of the University's quality processes (see above paragraph 106) highlighted the need for the Project Management Group to prioritise the SEQLT Implementation Plan objectives. The University acknowledges that an unintended effect of the Implementation Plan was that practitioners in schools have often focused on the immediate targets or single activities within the Plan without awareness of the 'bigger picture'. Partly as a result of reflection on this, the University now intends to develop an explicit quality enhancement strategy.

107 Although the University currently does not have an explicit and overarching quality enhancement strategy, the development and implementation of SEQLT has been a significant driver in the University's agenda to improve the quality of learning and teaching. The University adopts a reflective and evaluative approach to reviewing its own quality processes and the findings of the Holistic Review have led to the recasting of the SEQLT objectives to prioritise them and to make the priorities more clearly understood across the schools. An intranet-based 'SEQLT Concept Map' is being developed to make the current status of, and progress towards, objectives more accessible to staff. Implementation of the five priority areas for 2005-06 (see above, paragraph 86) is being effectively supported by a range of activities including cross-school practitioner groups, engagement with the national enhancement themes and staff development coordinated by the Centre for Learning and Teaching, and is reflected in school plans, strategies and activities.

Links between SEQLT and school strategic planning processes

108 In the same year that the University produced SEQLT, 2003, it also put in place a new process of cross-institutional planning in which each school (and academic support service) is required to produce a strategic plan to an agreed template. The template for schools includes learning and teaching objectives. The University expects school plans to take direction from the agreed priorities within the SEQLT Implementation Plan but they are allowed some discretion in how agreed targets are to be reached and to take account of the differing requirements and cultures within the schools. The implementation of the SEQLT objectives should be reflected in the school SMART targets which are part of the annual monitoring arrangements (see above, paragraph 25). The University has identified a lack of consistent articulation between the SEQLT objectives and the learning and teaching objectives set out in the school plans, but indicated during ELIR that the production of new school plans for Spring 2006 provides an opportunity to achieve a more consistent and effective alignment. The schools have been given clear guidance in drawing up their 2006-08 plans on how to address quality enhancement issues including an explicit expectation that they would show how they were addressing the SEQLT Implementation Plan. In discussion, senior staff indicated that draft school plans would be seen and commented on by the Project Management Group, which, in updating SEQLT, would be taking account of the next iteration of the University's Strategic Plan.

109 It is clear that, through the strategic planning process, the senior staff are developing a clear vision for the future of the University and working towards it, and that a wide group of staff in schools and services are actively engaging with the change process.

Learning and teaching committees

110 Schools have primary responsibility for 'delivering improvement' in learning and teaching within their range of provision, and

the learning and teaching committees (LTCs) play a vital role in this.

111 The role of the LTCs has increased in scope with the addition to their quality assurance functions of a greater emphasis on enhancement and the fulfilment of school targets. In recognition of the increased responsibilities of LTCs, their chairs now attend the Executive Committees of schools, and are also invited, from time to time, to quality events in other schools to facilitate cross-University approaches. The increased responsibility for LTCs has led to concerns about their ability to cope with the workload and find sufficient space for strategic discussion and reflection. To address this, some schools have created an LTC sub-structure to deal with certain types of business providing the main committee with more time to consider strategic matters. LTCs are valued by staff as a forum for discussion, and staff engage positively with them.

112 In a case study prepared for ELIR, the University set out the work and effectiveness of the Associate Deans Operations Group (ADOG). ADOG was formed initially as an informal working group to support the new associate deans' role. The effectiveness of its work and, the fact that increasingly other groups were remitting matters to it, meant that it has now been integrated with the formal committee structure. Cross institutional networks play an important role within the University. Within schools they are used to inform LTCs of developments and good practice elsewhere. This extends from the work of ADOG, whose members work closely with LTC chairs, to the practitioner networks for areas such as PDP and e-learning. The Quality and Enhancement Unit plays a key role in supporting LTCs in their quality assurance and enhancement roles, and the Centre for Lifelong Learning supports schools in working with a more diverse student population.

Overview of the linkage between the institution's arrangements for internal quality assurance and its enhancement activity

113 There are strong links between the University's internal quality assurance processes and its enhancement activities.

114 In relation to annual monitoring, the Quality of Student Experience Reports prepared by each LTC have evolved from an assurance base to have clear enhancement functions as do the annual learning and teaching reports, which they inform. Schools' SMART targets are expected to articulate with concerns arising from monitoring and review, and developmental aspects of school plans as well as with the University-level SEQLT objectives. The events-based approach to annual monitoring (see above, paragraphs 25-28) at both school and University levels is itself an example of good practice.

115 The Subject Health Reviews (SHRs) have systematic enhancement functions both for the staff in the area being reviewed, who reflect on learning, teaching and enhancement activities and benefit from the involvement of external peers, and for the wider University community, which has access to the SHR reports. The Quality and Enhancement Unit reports to the Learning and Teaching Board on common themes and key outcomes (see above, paragraph 32) and the academic support services are expected to reflect these in their work with the schools. In discussions during ELIR, staff commented on the range of benefits derived from SHR, beginning with the dissemination of good practice between schools, the extent to which it allows specific issues to be addressed at school and University level, the way it is used to influence staff development, and its impact on increasing consistency between different disciplines. SHR was described as 'not an event but a process' which has a dynamic relationship with SEQLT and influences priority setting.

116 The University's simultaneous development of a new academic structure and of quality processes that take account of the national enhancement-led approach have ensured strong and productive links between its quality assurance and enhancement arrangements.

Overview of the institution's approach to recognising, rewarding and implementing good practice in the context of its strategy for quality enhancement

117 The University is committed to engaging with the national enhancement themes, as a source of information on external good practice. Three members of staff have been in membership of the Steering Committees for the national enhancement themes (Employability, Flexible Delivery and First Year Experience) and are also members of the University Project Management Group (see above, paragraph 105), thereby having direct influence on the implementation of SEQLT. The five 2005-06 SEQLT priority areas are all related to the national enhancement themes and there is evidence of the influence of the national themes on the development of policy in areas such as induction, assessment and employability. The University has also engaged actively with the Higher Education Academy (HEA), for example there is regular HEA involvement at University staff development events. Over 30 per cent of academic and related staff are members of the HEA.

118 The University considers the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT), in its refocused role (see above, paragraph 88), as more strategically linked to supporting schools. CLT has a key role in disseminating and implementing good practice through its staff development programme and annual conference, and its facilitation of practitioner networks. It provides support for schools during the processes of programme approval and SHR, and delivers a postgraduate certificate in learning and teaching in higher education which is accredited by the HEA. The postgraduate certificate is not compulsory but

all new members of academic staff are required to undertake a three-day course drawn from its first module.

119 Some of the features of the CLT's work, for example the network of CLT-school contacts and its Framework for Learning and Teaching, which is designed to provide more flexible support in key areas, are of relatively recent origin and were still becoming established at the time of ELIR. Given the importance of such support at school level to the University's enhancement agenda, with a more diverse student population on dispersed campuses, the University is encouraged to continue the process of realigning CLT support to ensure it meets school needs.

120 Academic staff are also supported by the work of the Centre for Lifelong Learning which, through its active membership of the West of Scotland Widening Access Forum, is involved in a number of projects and initiatives to fulfil the University's wider access mission and attain SEQLT objectives. A range of these initiatives, and the University's links with them, was set out in a case study prepared for ELIR. Joint research by staff of the Centre for Lifelong Learning and CLT into student demographics and progression, and the impact of this work on academic development, strategic planning and raising staff awareness of diversity issues is an example of good practice. This research is linked to the analysis and dissemination of retention statistics (see above, paragraph 90).

121 Each year lecturing staff have the opportunity to apply for Open Senior Lectureships, for which staff must be able to demonstrate outstanding performance in two of the following areas: learning and teaching; research and development; leadership and management; income generation, consultancy and external activities. Holders of Open Senior Lectureships, who have identified their performance in learning and teaching, are involved on an individual basis in enhancement activity in their own schools. There is as yet no formalised mechanism for these staff to share in a cross-University network although informal links do exist. SEQLT includes objectives to

review the processes for recognising and rewarding excellence in teaching and a working group has been established which was due to report after the ELIR visit, in spring 2006.

Commentary on the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning

122 The University has fully embraced the enhancement-led approach to quality as is evident in its development of well-integrated procedures for linking assurance and enhancement in annual monitoring and periodic review, its engagement with the national enhancement themes and the manner in which it prepared for and engaged with the ELIR process. The current academic structure has facilitated the enhancement-led focus in a number of ways: the associate deans (learning and teaching) have a pivotal role in linking institutional and school-level strategies; the learning and teaching committees are key to enhancing the student experience at the subject level; and the use of practitioner networks facilitates the sharing of good practice across the University.

123 The Quality and Enhancement Unit plays a positive role in developing and supporting institutional enhancement policy in the light of national developments, in producing accessible and clear publications, and in supporting school boards and learning and teaching committees in improving the quality of the student experience. The Centre for Lifelong Learning effectively facilitates the development of the University's wider access agenda and provides considerable support for a diversifying student population. The Centre for Learning and Teaching is developing its support for staff who are teaching this changing student population through the planned refocusing of its role, a process that the University is encouraged to continue, particularly as it develops its multi-campus provision.

124 Subject health review and annual monitoring arrangements have a clear quality enhancement function, and their link to the

school planning process ensures the engagement of a wide range of staff at all levels in consideration of enhancement. The proposed closer alignment of institutional and school planning processes should ensure that the University's intentions for enhancing learning and teaching are more effectively realised at school-level while still recognising the diversity of schools' provision and student populations.

125 The University's adoption of a process for the holistic review of its quality assurance and enhancement arrangements led to the identification of a number of key areas for development including support for learning and teaching committees and their chairs, and greater prioritisation and better communication of the University Strategy for the Enhancement of Quality of Learning and Teaching (SEQLT) objectives. The University has made good progress in these areas reflecting its willingness to review its processes as well as the outcomes of these processes.

126 In relation to the wider enhancement-led agenda in Scotland, the University has engaged actively with the national enhancement themes both in terms of senior staff participating in the steering groups and also in the extent to which the themes have been incorporated with the University's learning and teaching objectives.

Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement

127 The University does not have an explicit, overarching quality enhancement strategy but the strategic approach to enhancement has been developed and driven strongly from the learning and teaching perspective by the Learning and Teaching Board and the Quality and Enhancement Unit. The Learning and Teaching Board's strategic and operational approaches to enhancement are embodied in SEQLT and its Implementation Plan, the latter being closely monitored and reviewed on a rolling basis by the University Project Management Group, which brings together key staff from the schools, academic support services and the Students' Association. Changes

in the substructure of the Learning and Teaching Board, such as the recognition of the value of the Associate Deans Operations Group and its inclusion in the formal committee structure, and the development of the Collaborative Forum, together with annual refinements to processes and activities, such as the development of the University-wide Enhancement and Annual Monitoring Event, illustrate an evolutionary and dynamic approach to enhancement activity, which is developing a culture of reflection and commitment to improving the student experience.

128 The University has acted on the recommendations of its holistic review in classifying and prioritising the objectives of SEQLT. The current key priorities are closely aligned with the national enhancement themes. In developing its new Strategic Plan, the University is also working towards the production of an explicit quality enhancement strategy in addition to an updated learning and teaching policy, developments which should allow the University to consolidate the progress it has made in recent years through the implementation of SEQLT.

Summary

Background to the institution and ELIR method

129 The institution was founded in 1897 and University title was conferred in 1992. In 1993 the University merged with Craigie College of Education, in Ayr. In 1996 the University established its School of Health, Nursing and Midwifery, and contracts have been awarded by the NHS Management Executive for the areas of Argyll and Clyde, and Ayrshire and Arran. In 1998 the University formed a campus at Dumfries in a joint venture with the University of Glasgow and Bell College of Technology.

130 Currently the University operates three campuses at Ayr, Dumfries and Paisley. It has seven schools: computing; education; engineering and science; health, nursing and midwifery; media, language and music; social sciences; and business. In 2005-06, the University had over 13,000 students and 1,200 staff (of whom around 460 were academic). There has been significant growth in part-time student numbers in recent years and this is planned to continue. In 2004-05, over half the student population was studying part-time and more than 60 per cent were 25 or over on matriculation. In the same year, over 86 per cent of the student population were studying on undergraduate programmes, 12.5 per cent were on taught postgraduate programmes and less than 1 per cent were research students.

131 The University's mission is to be 'a regional, innovative and inclusive University with strong national and international links; committed to excellence in teaching, knowledge transfer and research; and to serving the social, cultural and economic needs of the communities of the west and south-west of Scotland'.

132 In line with the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) method, the University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA) in advance of the review. The RA set out the University's strategy for quality enhancement,

its approach to the management of quality and standards and its view of the effectiveness of its approach. The RA provided the focus for the review and was used by the ELIR team to develop its programme of activities.

133 The University submitted three case studies with its RA:

- a summary of the work and effectiveness of the Associate Deans Operations Group (ADOG)
- a comprehensive overview of the Centre for Lifelong Learning (CLL) which has an important role in facilitating the wider access strategy of the University
- an insight into how quality and enhancement strategies are realised in the University's collaborative agreement with the Scottish Baptist College (SBC).

Overview of the matters raised by the review

134 A number of overlapping themes were pursued in the review including: particular challenges posed by the rapidly changing demographic composition of the student population; the University's strategic approach to quality enhancement; the potential of, and barriers to, cross-institution synergies; the relationship between the University and school levels; the nature and effectiveness of student representation and feedback; employability; and the use of external reference points.

Commentary on the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards

135 The University has robust and comprehensive arrangements for assuring the quality of provision and maintaining the academic standards of its awards. A system of appropriate and effective delegation of authority operates within an agreed framework which is clearly understood by staff, overseen by the Learning and Teaching Board and monitored by the Quality and Enhancement Unit. The assessment arrangements are clear

and are related to the school and University levels through the work of the school learning and teaching committees and the Learning and Teaching Board respectively. The University has appropriate mechanisms in place for monitoring its external examiner system which are also overseen by the Learning and Teaching Board and the Quality and Enhancement Unit.

136 Subject health review is an effective, enhancement-led and dynamic process incorporating evaluation of the method and of its outcomes. It engages students in a range of ways including full student membership of the panels. The University is seeking to involve students in the preparation of self-evaluation material, which is a positive development representing good practice. The subject health review method is closely aligned with the annual monitoring arrangements which strengthens the effectiveness of both processes. These, and the University's other key quality assurance arrangements, are supported by clear and targeted documentation produced by the Quality and Enhancement Unit. The documentation enables staff to understand the processes and provides a platform for quality enhancement.

137 The University has thorough arrangements in place for making use of external reference points throughout its Regulatory Framework, both explicitly and by incorporating elements of the Academic Infrastructure within its own policies and practices.

138 The University has identified a number of key roles at a variety of levels across the institution. Within schools, the associate deans (learning and teaching) have a pivotal role in monitoring activity and sharing good practice within and between schools, as well as providing a link between the school and University level. The Head of the Quality and Enhancement Unit and the Assistant Principal (Learning and Teaching) through their combined and individual roles have a positive impact on the University's ability to assure quality and secure academic standards.

139 On the basis of these findings, there can be broad confidence in the University's current, and likely future, management of the quality of its provision and the academic standards of its awards.

Commentary on the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair

140 The University has adequate arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate, and fair. It has appropriate mechanisms for providing data for teaching quality information (TQI) purposes and presents this material in an accessible form.

Commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students

141 The University is committed to its wider access mission and the extent to which it is student centred and responsive to students' views is illustrated by the way in which it is genuinely seeking to develop its systems so they fit with the needs of its increasingly diverse student population. A variety of opportunities for student representation exists at each level of the institution and these are taken up by students studying at each of the campuses in a range of study modes. The University, through its Quality and Enhancement Unit, works in collaboration with the Students' Association to develop and enhance the representative opportunities available, and to provide support for existing and prospective student representatives. The University has a strong culture of gathering and responding to student opinion, and is seeking to develop its feedback mechanisms to engage all groups of students.

142 The University has identified action which should be taken to enhance the student experience at the Dumfries campus, associated with module choice and level of awards. The University has also recognised the need to

establish appropriate induction and access to staff development for the associate lecturers based at Dumfries.

143 The University has plans in place to ensure the alignment of its student support arrangements with the changes in its student profile, in particular the recent rapid growth in part-time student numbers, and its planned continued growth in the number of international students. Through its Strategy for the Enhancement of Quality of Learning and Teaching (SEQLT), the University has identified a range of matters that need to be managed in relation to the student experience and has a means for organising and addressing these. The annual monitoring arrangements, with its quality of student experience reports and the role of the learning and teaching committees, provide a regular set of opportunities for continually improving the student experience. A more systematic approach to managing student retention is being developed through the school planning process, supported by detailed statistical analysis and research. Particular features of the learning experience include the flexible timetable, and flexibility in study mode, coupled with the pivotal role of the Centre for Lifelong Learning in providing advice, support and personalisation of the study opportunities. Employability remains a core feature of the student experience and the University is developing an embedded approach across the institution as it addresses the priorities identified in SEQLT and the related process for implementing personal development planning.

144 Students express high levels of satisfaction with the learning opportunities provided, and recognise considerable benefits to the learning environment from the diverse backgrounds represented within the student population.

Commentary on the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning

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