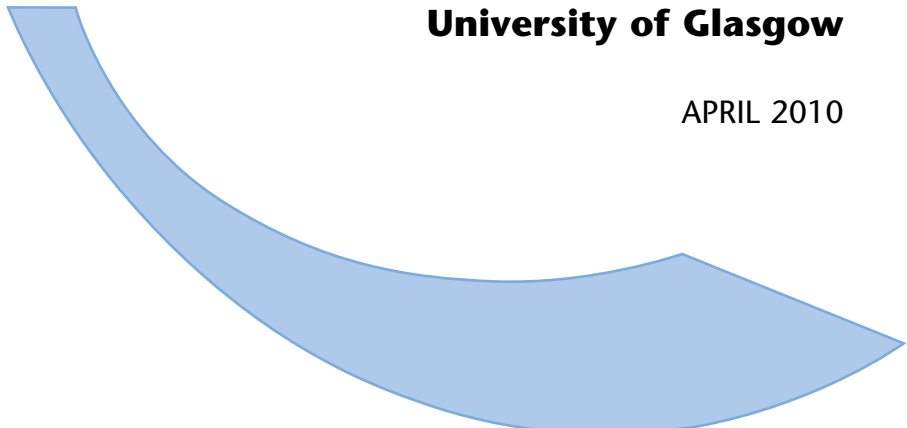




# Enhancement-led institutional review

**University of Glasgow**

APRIL 2010



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## **Report on the Enhancement-led institutional review University of Glasgow**

### **Introduction**

1 This is the report of an Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) of the University of Glasgow (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.

### **ELIR method and report**

2 The ELIR method was revised during 2007-08 following extensive consultation with the Scottish higher education sector. Full details on the method is set out in the *Enhancement-led institutional review handbook: Scotland (second edition) 2008* which is available on QAA's website.

3 ELIR reports are structured around three main sections: the management of the student learning experience; institution-led monitoring and review of quality and academic standards; and the strategic approach to quality enhancement. Each of these three sections leads to a 'commentary' in which the views of the ELIR team are set out. The three commentaries, in turn, lead to the overarching judgement on the level of confidence which can be placed in the institution's management of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. A summary report is also available in printed form and from QAA's website.

### **Method of review**

4 The University submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA), which provided the focus for the review. The RA was supported by a number of accompanying documents including four case studies, which set out the University's approach in the following areas of activity: improving student retention; assessment and feedback; revising and implementing the University's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees; and internationalisation and partnership development. The ELIR team also received the report of the University's previous ELIR, which took place in 2004.

5 The RA was drafted by a core group of staff, and a steering group undertook detailed reading, providing feedback on all aspects of the document. The full draft RA was circulated widely, and key groups of staff were directed to particular sections of the RA for contributions and feedback. The Students' Representative Council (SRC) was fully involved in developing the RA, with particular input from the President and the Vice-President (Learning and Development). Additionally, through the SRC, a range of student representatives were consulted. A near-final draft RA was circulated to key committees, the Senate and University Court for feedback.

6 The ELIR team visited the University on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 20-21 October 2009 and the Part 2 visit took place in the week beginning 23 November 2009.

7 The ELIR team comprised: Emeritus Professor Graham Chesters; Professor Elizabeth Deane; Professor David Heeley; Professor Marianne Howarth; Dr Maggie King (part 2 visit); Mrs Carol Morris (part 1 visit); and Mr Chris Pirie. The review was managed on behalf of QAA by Dr Janice Ross, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

### **Background information about the institution**

8 The University of Glasgow is a large institution and one of the oldest universities in the UK, having been established in 1451. The University's ambition is to be 'one of the best universities in the world, by being an outstanding place for research, teaching and learning'. In 2008-09, the University had approximately 21,000 students, of whom some 16,000 are undergraduates and 5,000 postgraduates. In addition to its main campus in the city of Glasgow,

the University has a small campus on the outskirts of Glasgow (the Garscube Estate), and also shares a campus in Dumfries with a number of other Scottish higher education institutions.

9 The University is currently organised into nine faculties, within which are located academic departments. At the time of the ELIR, the University had recently announced its intention to reorganise its academic structure, with the intention of replacing faculties and departments with a structure of four colleges, with each college comprising a small number of academic schools.

10 The University offers collaborative and validated provision in partnership with a relatively small number of institutions. The University offers some 35 degree programmes in collaboration with five UK universities. The majority of the University's collaborative provision is with the University of Strathclyde. The University also validates provision in four institutions that do not have their own degree awarding powers. Two of these partnerships are with 'associated institutions' (Christie's Education, London and the Free Church of Scotland College); two are with 'accredited' institutions (The Glasgow School of Art and the Scottish Agricultural College).

### **Institution's strategy for quality enhancement**

11 The University states that enhancement in the institution is strongly driven from the 'bottom-up'; it identifies that the period since the 2004 ELIR is characterised by the use of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy, and the Postgraduate Research Strategy to drive the focus of enhancement activity within a defined framework.

## **Management of the student learning experience**

### **Key features of the student population and the effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing information about its student population**

12 In 2008-09, the University had approximately 21,000 students, comprising some 16,000 undergraduates and 5,000 postgraduates. The majority of the students are engaged in full-time study (89 per cent), with 11 per cent studying part-time. The majority of the full-time undergraduate student population comprises students who enter with school qualifications (75 per cent). The gender balance of the total student population is 44 per cent male and 56 per cent female. Approximately 7 per cent of students have a declared disability, and 14 per cent are from an ethnic minority background.

13 A small number of students are registered on distance-learning programmes (some 370 students), and approximately 1,230 students are studying on collaborative programmes (mainly on joint programmes with other Scottish higher education institutions). There are approximately 182 University students based on the Dumfries Campus. There are also 350 full-time equivalent students studying part-time in the University's Department of Adult and Continuing Education.

14 The University's Strategic Plan (2006-2010) (see paragraph 123) outlines a commitment to expand the international student community. The actions taken by the University to grow this community have been successful, and are ongoing, with the international student population having increased from some 2,400 students in 2003-04, to approximately 3,900 students in 2008-09. At the time of the current ELIR, some 120 countries were represented in the student population, with students from the European Union comprising 41 per cent of the total international student community. The most significant growth in international students has been at postgraduate level.

15 In 2006, to support its planned international student growth, the University entered into partnership with the private education provider Kaplan International Colleges to establish the Glasgow International College (GIC). At the time of the ELIR visit, some 390 students were

registered with the GIC, and it is anticipated that the majority of these students will progress to the University's degree-level programmes (both undergraduate and postgraduate) in science, engineering, business, and social sciences.

16 The University's Senior Management Group (SMG) has responsibility for setting the strategy relating to the student profile, and for determining student target numbers. SMG's strategic role is supported by regular institutional-level reporting on the student profile, and the monitoring of progress through the University's committee structure and groups.

17 Since the 2004 ELIR, the University has taken a number of steps to improve its student records system, including through the continuous development of its online student records. In early 2009, in order to further improve the provision of student management information, the University committed to develop a new Student Information System (SIS), through the vehicle of its Student Lifecycle Project. The Project seeks to transform the ways in which the University administers, manages and utilises student information, from the point of enquiry, through to graduation and beyond. In doing so, the University intends that the new SIS will deliver greater operational efficiency, and also lead to a significant improvement in the quality of service offered to students and staff. These anticipated improvements cover a range of areas including: advice to students; the provision of integrated, high-quality information for staff and students; and support for students at risk. In achieving these improvements, the University believes that the Student Lifecycle Project will contribute to the harmonisation of its approach to managing the student learning experience across the institution. Implementation of the SIS is planned for completion in 2011.

18 The Student Lifecycle Project represents a significant investment by the University, including a considerable investment of staff resource. At the time of the ELIR visit, 15 staff secondments had been made to the Project, and a number of staff had been identified as 'subject experts' to support the Project's work. The University's approach to developing its new SIS is comprehensive, and includes a systematic approach to implementation (for example, through the review of a range of related processes, and identifying a programme of staff development and training). Overall, the Project's intended outcomes are ambitious, and have the clear potential to deliver greater control of management information to support strategy and policy, and to support the enhancement of the student learning experience.

## **The effectiveness of the institution's approach to engaging and supporting students in their learning**

### **Partnership with the Students' Representative Council**

19 Since the 2004 ELIR, the University has reflected systematically upon its approach to partnership working with the Students' Representative Council (SRC), and its engagement with the wider student body. As part of this, the University has considered the most effective ways in which to work with the SRC, and how to sustain a partnership that actively contributes to policy development and the enhancement of the student learning experience.

20 The University and the SRC recognise that they share a number of aims and objectives, and that there is a clear benefit in joint working on a range of issues. The value the SRC place on this relationship is demonstrated in its Strategic Plan, where aspects of its Plan align with the University's strategic objectives, and where its relationship with the University is identified as a strength of SRC activity. The SRC describes itself as the University's 'critical friend'.

21 Students are widely represented by the SRC throughout the University. The SRC is represented at the Senate and at the University Court, on almost all University committees and working groups, and on a range of faculty and departmental-level committees and groups.

22 It is evident that the partnership approach between the University and the SRC has been productive in delivering a range of enhancements to provision and practice. The many benefits of this constructive partnership approach were confirmed by SRC sabbatical officers during the ELIR visits. Examples of the successful outcomes of this partnership approach include: work on a Code of Practice on Student Representation and Guidance for the operation of staff:student liaison committees (see paragraph 23); the review of the Advisers of Studies system (see paragraphs 36 to 38); the development of policies on a range of matters, including late submission of coursework and a text messaging service for students; a Harassment Policy and Maternity, Paternity and Carer Policy for students; and a Student Diary. Students confirmed that they were aware of the role of the SRC in representing their views. Students also indicated that the SRC was accessible and 'easy to get to know', and that they could bring matters of concern to the SRC, including issues raised through the class representative system (see paragraphs 23 to 26).

### **Student representation**

23 Since the 2004 ELIR, the University and the SRC jointly have taken steps to improve the student representative system. This has been overseen by a working group, with the key outputs being the Code of Practice on Student Representation, Guidance on the operation of staff:student liaison committees; and the development of resources for academic departments to use in promoting and supporting students in their representative roles. The Code of Practice on Student Representation sets out a number of key principles, such as the recognition that all students have the right to representation through the liaison committees; the centrality of student representative training; and University recognition of class representative activity through recording information about such activity on students' transcripts.

24 The staff:student liaison committee mechanism is a longstanding cornerstone of the University's student representative system. In recent years, the numbers of class representatives has grown significantly, from 175 in 2006 to 575 in 2009. In 2009, to extend and enhance representation, it was agreed that faculty and departmental committees with a learning and teaching remit should also include student representative(s) in their membership. The University considers that this embeds in policy previously widespread practice.

25 While the University and the SRC jointly promote the role of student representative, responsibility for the organisation and delivery of training for student representatives rests with the SRC. Training is currently delivered by associate trainers from the student participation in quality Scotland (sparqs) development service.

26 Student representatives confirmed that they felt well-prepared for their role, through sparqs training and University and departmental support, and considered that their contributions were valued. Some students also gave examples of how the student representative system had made a difference at a departmental level, for example with issues such as access to computing facilities.

### **Student participation in institution-led quality reviews**

27 Since 2007-08, students have participated as panel members in reviews of Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (DPTLA) (see paragraphs 92 to 95). The University identifies that review panels consider that the student members provide a greater focus on the student experience, and on issues from the student perspective. Staff view student reviewers in DPTLA as making a high-quality contribution, and student reviewers confirm that they see their involvement as meaningful. Students and staff agree that a key factor in effective student participation has been the high quality training and support provided by sparqs, and by the University.

28 Since 2006, the University has operated a cycle of University Services Administrative Reviews (see paragraph 77), and a student member is now included in panels reviewing student-facing services, such as the Library and Registry. This is a positive development, which builds upon the experience gained from student participation in DPTLA panels.

### **Student feedback and engaging with the wider student body**

29 Since the 2004 ELIR, the University has focused on how to systematically capture feedback from the wider student body, and on developing questionnaires which focus more on students' overall learning experience, as well as on the teaching they receive.

30 In 2007-08, the University and the SRC reviewed existing student feedback mechanisms, and developed a strategic approach to obtaining feedback from the student body. The review of student feedback mechanisms led to the development of a Code of Practice on Obtaining and Responding to Feedback from Students, as well as a standard student feedback questionnaire for use at course level. Both these developments have been informed by the outcomes of the national *Enhancement Theme, Responding to Student Needs*.

31 Since 2006, in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the student experience the University has participated in a wide range of institutional-level surveys focusing on different sections of the student population. The surveys employed are: the National Student Survey (NSS); the International Student Barometer (ISB); the University's First Year Student Learning Experience Survey (FYSLES); the Higher Education Academy's (HEA) pilot Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey; and the HEA's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). Student participation in these surveys is rising, with participation rates currently as follows: NSS, 70 per cent; ISB, 37 per cent; PRES, 36 per cent; and FYSLES, 25 per cent. The University views joint working with the SRC to be a significant factor in achieving the increase in participation rates.

32 The findings of these surveys are reported through the University's committee structure and a summary of these reports, the Student Voice Report, is submitted annually to the Senate and Court. Findings identified in the reports are used to inform the development of strategy and policy, and to monitor progress against objectives.

33 Students are aware of the mechanisms used by the University to obtain their feedback, and confirm their involvement in surveys and questionnaires at both departmental and institutional levels (see paragraph 31, for participation rates in University-level surveys). Students report that it is easy to participate in surveys, including through the University's virtual learning environment, although they identify that not all students choose to respond.

34 The University recognises the significance of reporting back to students on actions taken in response to survey findings, and has taken a number of steps to address this challenge. In 2008, the University, working in cooperation with the SRC, launched its Student Voice website, intended as a tool to enable students and staff to see the ways in which student feedback is used, as well as actions taken, and progress made. Some students are unaware of the Student Voice website. and this is confirmed by data on low usage levels of the website, arising from the University's monitoring of usage since August 2008. Those students who are aware of the website suggest that it is difficult for students to locate, and that its presence could be better promoted. The University is aware of the need to promote the website further and, working with the SRC, has taken a number of steps to do so, for example, through reference to it in both the First Year Student Learning Experience Survey, and in feedback to students on the 2008 and 2009 National Student Survey outcomes. The University is to be encouraged in its ongoing reflection on how to enhance the visibility of the Student Voice website, in order to promote the use of this innovative and potentially powerful tool for student engagement.

35 The University's drive to consult more systematically with students has also generated a greater impetus for the SRC to engage directly with different student groups. For example, a new SRC Postgraduate Forum has been established, with a post of Postgraduate Convenor created to support this work. The SRC has also established a Polish Students Forum to address issues identified through the International Student Barometer Survey (see paragraph 31) affecting the Polish student community.

### **Review of students' advisory needs**

36 Academic support for students, and some elements of pastoral support, is provided through the University's Advisors of Studies system. In 2007, the University and the SRC undertook a review of the Advisory system, having identified significant variability in students' experience of its operation. The working group established to undertake this work investigated provision in other institutions, both across the UK and internationally, as well as considering internal factors such as developments within Student Services, students' views expressed in the NSS, and an SRC Advisers of Studies Research Report.

37 The working group's final report to Senate contained a set of 21 recommendations, and these were agreed in 2009, following widespread discussion. The recommendations included enhancements to provision such as establishing a realistic adviser:student ratio; establishing an agreed set of functions and responsibilities for advisers of studies to ensure consistency in students' advisory experience; establishing a training scheme for advisers; ensuring the provision of consistent and up-to-date web-based information to students; and building advisory systems around each programme of study. The implementation of the revised Advisory system will be phased over a three-year period, to dovetail with the implementation of the new SIS (see paragraph 16).

38 Students are generally positive about the Advisory system, finding their advisers accessible, helpful and supportive. Some students indicated that their adviser would be a first point of contact, should they have any problems. Additionally, some students suggested that advisers could have a more proactive role in promoting opportunities such as personal development planning (PDP) (see paragraphs 50 to 53).

### **Supporting students through improved services and processes**

39 The University has taken a number of significant steps to enhance its services to better support students. This includes recent investment in the Fraser Building (see paragraph 59), which provides the first point of contact for all Student Services and provides a centralised and integrated delivery point for students seeking to access services such as Registry, the Recruitment and International Office, and the Careers Service. A 'front line' enquiry desk is now the first point of contact for all Student Services.

40 In 2006, research undertaken by the University's Retention Working Group (see paragraph 127), indicated that the institution was performing below its own targets for undergraduate retention and completion rates. As part of its resultant Retention Action Plan, the University has taken a number of steps to improve information for students, prior to entry, to promote better engagement with their subject areas. In 2007-08, the University introduced parents' information evenings, to provide opportunities to ask questions about the University and receive information from staff and students. University research has shown also that the first-year courses in which success rates are poorest generally have a high mathematical content. In response, numeracy, mathematical and statistical support has been made available to undergraduate students, though a new 'NUMBER: Student Mathematical Support' service provided, since 2008, by Student Learning Services.



41 In 2008, through its Administrative Services review process (see paragraph 77) the University undertook a review of its Student Counselling and Advisory Service. The review generated a number of improvements in the service, including an increased number, and variety, of counselling sessions available to students, as well as changes to the gender balance and skills mix of the counsellors.

### **Managing the research student experience**

42 The main strategy supporting postgraduate research student activity is the Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy, most recently updated in 2006. This Strategy recognises the need to maintain and enhance the quality of the research student experience, and identifies a range of priorities to promote research student growth, training and development.

43 The University's first institution-wide Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees was published in 2006, in response to a number of external and internal factors, including the recognition by the University that a common set of principles were required for the equitable treatment of research students across different faculties and disciplines. The University, having recognised variation in the dissemination and use of the 2006 edition, undertook further revisions to the Code in 2008. The re-drafting of the Code included wide consultation with staff and students, and consideration of other sources such as the Postgraduate Research Experience Surveys of 2007 and 2008.

44 The revised Code is intended to act as a key reference point for both staff and students, and sets out what is expected of both groups in the management, delivery and undertaking of postgraduate research degrees. The Code also has a stronger emphasis on training and development, and this has helped contribute to an increase in the number of research students who are satisfied with the opportunities offered for research and transferable skills development. The revised Code has been disseminated to staff and students in hard copy and is also available online. In addition, the Code has become embedded in elements of staff development such as the New Lecturer and Teacher Programme (see paragraph 69).

45 The Heads of Graduate School Forum has also identified the need to enhance arrangements for research students' progress reviews, to ensure that different departmental practices do not lead to variations in the equity of the postgraduate experience. To address this, in 2009-10 a working group is being formed to develop a common model for these progress reviews.

### **The effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting the development of graduate attributes, including those relating to employability, in all of its students**

#### **Employability development**

46 The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy includes the strategic objective to 'embed and make transparent within...programmes the skills and learning opportunities that encourage entrepreneurship and enhance employability and enterprise'. Below this strategic objective sit a number of supporting secondary objectives. These align with, and build upon, the University's existing Employability Strategy. The University recognises that, to date, implementation of the Employability Strategy has been uneven; however it also considers that, with increased momentum achieved over the last two years, a new stage of development has been reached and that this is reflected in the work around developing graduate attributes (see paragraphs 56 to 58).

47 The University has promoted the implementation of the Employability Strategy through the appointment of an Employability Development Adviser, who is located in the Careers Service. The Adviser supports academic staff in developing curriculum-based approaches to employability, and has supported the development of the University's Employability and PDP website.

48 In 2006, the University appointed a careers adviser for international students in direct response to the outcomes from the external International Student Barometer Survey, as well as feedback from international student focus groups and interviews. The University believes that the positive impact of this development in provision is evidenced through the results of the International Student Barometer Survey for 2008.

49 Students expressed varying levels of understanding of, and engagement with, employability. Some students were aware of how employability skills were developed through their programmes of study, and this was most apparent in the case of professionally-orientated programmes. Other students were less clear about how employability directly related to their discipline, and how their degree would equip them with the skills and attributes for employment. In the ongoing implementation of its Employability Strategy, the University is encouraged to continue to reflect on the levels of awareness amongst students of how employability is embedded in their programmes of study, particularly in non-vocational subject areas.

### **Personal development planning**

50 The University recognises that its Employability Strategy did not make explicit to staff and students the process by which personal development planning (PDP) would be implemented. Following discussions in 2006-07, in which the SRC played a key role, in 2008 a separate PDP Policy was approved. Prior to approval of the Policy, implementation of PDP had occurred within some, but not all, faculties. The Policy states that all students should be offered structured and supported PDP opportunities from 2008-09 onwards.

51 The University has invested in enhancing central support for PDP, provided by the Careers Service through the appointment of a PDP/Employability Project Officer, to promote faculty-level activity.

52 The University's PDP policy states that all students are to be given the opportunity to record their PDP activity online and, in addition to the University's supported PDP tool, some students also have the opportunity to use subject-specific specialist e-portfolio tools (for example, dental students use the NHS e-portfolio tool to record their progress). Students indicated limited awareness of PDP and the University's PDP tool to support this activity. While some students had heard of the tool, very few were aware of its purpose or had made use of it. University data also indicates that the number of students using the University's PDP tool is low.

53 The University has identified that one of the key barriers to student uptake of PDP is students' limited awareness of its benefits. Accordingly, in the medium term, the University intends to promote PDP proactively to students. Recent evidence from the University's First Year Student Learning Experience Survey is encouraging, and suggests that awareness of PDP opportunities is increasing among first-year students. Nevertheless, the University is encouraged to continue to reflect upon its approach to implementing PDP, and to ensure that students are clear about its purpose and benefits.

### **Employer engagement**

54 The University states that employer engagement features strongly in its approaches to developing employability. One initiative is the Club 21 Business Partnership Programme, which offers structured work experience to students, and which, at the time of the ELIR, has just over 100 member organisations, offering placements to some 93 students. Students are both supportive and critical of the Club 21 Programme. While they recognise the range of opportunities offered through the Programme, they also perceive that these tend to be focused on certain subject areas and consider that there could be a better distribution of opportunities across disciplines.

55 More generally, students do not view work-related opportunities as being actively facilitated by the University, and they perceive that, outside of professional programmes (where such opportunities are often sourced by students at employment fairs), there are limited structured opportunities for internships and in-programme employment. The University is encouraged to reflect on the benefits of a more systematic approach to making such opportunities available for students.

### **Graduate attributes**

56 The University has identified that articulating employability in terms of graduate attributes is an effective means of integrating approaches related to a number of key initiatives such as employability, PDP, the first-year student experience and internationalisation. A Graduate Attributes Working Group has been formed with the remit of progressing work in these areas. The work of the Group is informed by the national Enhancement Theme, Graduates for the 21st Century: Integrating the Enhancement Themes. The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy currently identifies some eight desired graduate attributes for the student body, and during 2009-10, the Group intends to expand the set of graduate attributes, in consultation with staff, students and employers, and to make explicit reference to these in the revised Learning and Teaching Strategy.

57 A number of students demonstrated considerable awareness of the University's promotion of graduate attributes, and gave examples of how such learning opportunities are provided through their programmes of study. This suggests that the use of graduate attributes is well-embedded in some academic departments and faculties. Staff highlighted the use of a skills matrix, described as a tool to map key skills onto a range of both academic and extra-curricular activities (such as student representation, participation in student societies and volunteering activity), in addition to the identified skills set out in programme specifications.

58 The Graduate Attributes Working Group is overseeing a significant programme of activity to develop and promote graduate attributes, and the University is to be supported and encouraged as it progresses this work to enhance the student learning experience.

### **Effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing the learning environment**

59 The University's estates developments are aligned to its overall Strategic Plan and their prioritisation is the responsibility of the Senior Management Group. Particular emphasis has been given to: spaces used by large numbers of students; the creation or refurbishment of dedicated postgraduate study space; and the refurbishment of the Fraser Building to provide a central location for 'one-stop-shop' student support services. The University emphasises its ambition to maintain the pace of investment in the learning infrastructure, spaces and environment, and a medium-term priority is the provision of student social space in each building, including for postgraduate research students. Students confirm that the overall learning environment has benefited significantly from the University's strategic investment. They are particularly appreciative of the new, accessible environment for student support services, and the ongoing improvements to the main Library, where additional social and learning space has been created. Some students also expressed the view that improvements to the learning environment at the Garscube Campus would be desirable, which the University has already recognised, and that more resource might be devoted to more routine refurbishment of learning and teaching spaces on the main campus.

60 In response to needs identified by the Learning and Teaching Committee, the University has upgraded all centrally-bookable teaching space and made available on-line the detailed facilities in each bookable room. Other technology-related improvements include the enhancement of student computer clusters, and comprehensive Wi-Fi coverage in all major buildings. Students recognise the improvements that have been made and confirm the good level of availability of computers for study. The University undertook a survey of incoming first-year

students in 2007, and again in 2009, in order to assess their expectations, and usage, of various technologies, and will use the results to develop further support for learning and teaching.

61 Since the 2004 ELIR, the University has continued to invest in its virtual learning environment (VLE), and VLE user numbers have increased by several hundred per cent in the last few years. Academic staff explained that much of their learning on the use of the VLE came from interaction with more confident VLE users among their colleagues, and learning technology staff confirmed that academic colleagues tended to determine their own level of VLE usage according to their teaching needs. Students were enthusiastic about the use of the VLE for teaching and learning, but considered that there could be a more consistent use of the VLE across the University, and suggested that they would appreciate a University-wide policy that set a minimum level of expectation for academic staff engagement with the VLE.

62 Overall, it is clear that the learning environment has been significantly enhanced since the last ELIR, arising from the University's deliberate strategic investments, a focus on the student experience, and a systematic process of listening to the student voice.

### **The effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting equality of opportunity and effective learning for all of its students**

63 The University emphasises its proactive approach to equality and diversity issues and in 2007 established a dedicated Equality and Diversity Unit, to promote and embed all aspects of equality and diversity within the University community. The University's Equality and Diversity Strategy Committee (EDSC) takes responsibility for oversight of this area, and six working groups report to it (covering six strands: age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation); the University has policies in place to address all six areas. All the working groups are chaired by members of the Senior Management Group, and the Principal, as chair of EDSC, is the overall champion of this agenda. The first Equality and Diversity Annual Report (2008) is a comprehensive document. An Equality Impact Assessment was piloted during 2008-09, and at the time of the current ELIR, the evaluation of this pilot impact exercise was anticipated.

64 The University emphasises the extent of the training offered to academic and support services staff on equality and diversity, and that such training is increasingly subject to a strategic approach. The EDSC has identified three themes as a focus for training: internationalisation; embedding equality within learning, teaching, research and curriculum planning; and disability awareness.

65 In its annual report, the Equality and Diversity Unit has identified the relative lack of engagement by academic staff with the ways in which the Equality and Diversity Strategy may impact upon their teaching and at the time of the ELIR, academic staff appeared more aware of the disability agenda than the other strands of the Strategy.

66 One objective of the Learning and Teaching Strategy is to increase the University's reach and standing in learning and teaching internationally, and to develop the University as a culturally diverse learning community. The activities of the University's Race Equality Group are viewed as central to the internationalisation strategy. The Group's work considers ways in which the integration of international students can be enhanced, and four priorities have been identified in the light of the results of the International Student Barometer Survey: communication; integration; embedding the values of equality and diversity within the curriculum and classroom; and improving the generic academic skills of students. At the time of the ELIR, a prioritised plan for taking this work forward was being considered by the Equality and Diversity Unit and the University's race equality champion. International students acknowledged the helpfulness of specialist staff support and advice; the recent transfer of specialist staff from the Recruitment and International Office to Student Services is an early step in the integration and embedding of such knowledge.

67 Overall, substantial work has been carried out on setting the policy and management framework for student equality and diversity matters. Work remains to be done across the range of equality strands to embed practice, particularly with regards to learning, teaching and curriculum planning.

### **The effectiveness of the institution's approach to supporting and developing staff to promote effective learning for their students**

68 The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy includes a strategic objective to ensure staff have excellent skills in teaching and in motivating and supporting student learning, and that staff excellence in these areas is recognised, celebrated and rewarded. One of the major drivers in this area is the Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC), a central unit established in 2005 that aims to promote innovation and good practice, and to bring about change through working collegially. The LTC organises the University's Annual Learning and Teaching Conference; hosts an annual research seminar series (involving national and international speakers); promotes and disseminates the results of internally-funded projects; and offers continuing professional development workshops on a range of topics relating to learning and teaching, including those related to the use of technology in teaching. It is also the home of three (0.2 full-time equivalent) academic secondees who serve as Academic Development Fellows. In facilitating these activities, the LTC fulfils an influential and appreciated role in supporting the Learning and Teaching Strategy and is a positive feature of the University's approach to promoting effective learning for its students.

69 The LTC also offers the New Lecturer and Teacher Programme (NLTP), and a Diploma/MEd in Academic Practice. The NLTP is mandatory for all probationary University teachers and University lecturers. Responsibility for Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) training, a University requirement, is devolved to the LTC and the GTAs' own departments or faculties; it is unclear how systematically the University monitors the effectiveness of this delegation beyond the opportunity offered periodically through Departmental Programme of Teaching, Learning and Assessment reviews (see paragraphs 92 to 95). The LTC provides a statutory three-hour training session for GTAs. Beyond this, the LTC also offers, in semester 2, an optional module to support the development of GTAs as teachers, but only a small percentage of GTAs have undertaken this module (graduate teaching assistants suggested that places were often over-subscribed), and the timing of the optional module means that some GTAs may already have been teaching for some 12 weeks. Students indicated that their experience of teaching delivered by GTAs is mixed. The University recognises that support for GTAs within academic departments is variable and, with the encouragement of the the Students' Representative Council, plans to address this during 2009-10. The University is encouraged in its intention to review the effectiveness of its arrangements for GTA support.

70 Support for experienced staff is organised in various ways, including through the University's annual Learning and Teaching Conference (see paragraph 141), which the University considers to be a key continuing professional development opportunity for staff. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is considered through the University's performance review and development process (which is devolved to faculties), and participation by individual staff in CPD activity is voluntary for non-probationary staff, except for staff in professional faculties. University data on staff uptake of such opportunities show varying levels of participation across the University. The University has already identified the provision of more CPD opportunities as an important element of its strategy to increase academic staff engagement, and is encouraged to monitor the extent to which the performance review process leads to more widespread engagement of experienced staff in events and workshops.

71 The University operates a twin-track system for recognising excellence in teaching and learning through academic promotion. Staff who seek to maintain a balance between research and teaching are required to demonstrate strengths in teaching in order to obtain promotion. Staff who wish to specialise in teaching and learning can make a case for promotion in which scholarship replaces research as a criterion. The University promulgates a view of scholarship in

learning and teaching which recognises the value of publication and peer leadership in the area of teaching. To support this, there has been an annual symposium on scholarship, the development of a dedicated website, and the launch of an electronic journal. Generally, academic staff confirmed that teaching excellence is recognised and rewarded in terms of promotion, and University statistics demonstrate that significant progress has been made in the promotion of academic staff to professorial level based on strengths in teaching and learning. However, some staff perceive that there are difficulties in identifying criteria by which to judge excellence in teaching; further promulgation of the University's view of scholarship in learning and teaching, beyond the existing references set out in promotion criteria, could usefully address this perception.

72 The University has not taken steps to make peer observation a part of its mandatory staff development processes; rather, its policy is to encourage the dissemination of peer review beyond the small number of departments that operate it. The exceptions to this are the NTLP and the optional GTA module, where peer review is a routine, and much appreciated, practice for probationers and participants.

73 The University does not have a Staff Development Strategy and its approach is largely based on the activities of staff development providers within its support departments, and the performance and development process (see paragraph 70). While it is clear that this provision is broadly aligned to the University's major strategies, it is less clear how the University monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of these activities. The University is encouraged to develop a cohesive oversight of the way in which its multiple providers of staff development meet the needs of its strategic direction.

### **The effectiveness of the institution's management of the student learning experience on collaborative programmes**

74 The University emphasises the importance it attaches to partner institution approval as a means for assuring itself that the new partner has in place an appropriate ethos and environment; an appropriate regulatory framework, policies and procedures; and processes of accountability for academic quality. It uses the approval process to confirm a range of features including: the level of student support; teaching, learning and assessment practices; and teaching accommodation, equipment and learning resources.

75 Monitoring of the management of the student learning experience in partners is achieved through the normal annual monitoring processes. Joint boards (associated institutions) or liaison committees (accredited institutions) of the University and its partners receive and consider an annual report covering all of the collaborative provision, including matters relating to the student experience (for example, estates issues or staff development support). Other collaborative arrangements are monitored through joint committees which vary in remit and size according to the nature of the collaboration. The relevant collaborative programmes are considered within the normal annual monitoring process of the 'host' faculty. Annual reports from jointly taught or awarded programmes are submitted to the Academic Standards Committee. The University acknowledges that there is scope for improvement in the monitoring of matters relating to graduate attributes and employability in validated partner institutions and, to address this, intends that the outcomes of the University's Graduate Attributes Working Group will be shared with joint boards and liaison committees.

### **Institution-led monitoring and review of quality and standards**

#### **Key features of institution-led monitoring and review at the institution, and the extent to which these arrangements meet sector-wide expectations**

76 The University states that the primary responsibility for upholding academic standards and the quality of its provision lies with the academic and academic-related staff who deliver the programmes of study. More formally, the University's expectations are set out in the Quality

Framework, which contains statements of the overall philosophy for quality management, the regulatory framework, operational policies and detailed guidance on implementation. Overall, the University's Quality Framework is comprehensive, well-designed and understood by staff at all levels.

77 The key features of the University's approach to monitoring and review centre around course and programme design and approval; the system of external examiners for undergraduate and taught programmes at master's level; the system of external examiners for research degrees; the process of annual monitoring of courses and programmes; the periodic review of student-focused services; and the six-yearly cycle of review of department activity in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment (departmental programmes of teaching, learning and assessment (DPTLA) ). The University has also implemented a six-yearly cycle of review of research degree provision at the level of the faculty-based graduate schools, and a parallel review method for University Administrative Services. In many subject areas, there is also interaction with professional and statutory bodies through accreditation and other processes.

78 Overarching responsibility for monitoring and review of academic programmes is exercised on Senate's behalf by the Education Policy and Strategy Sub-Committee (EdPSC), and the Academic Standards Committee (ASC). The ASC has a number of subgroups reporting to it on such matters as the analysis of annual reports from faculty quality assurance and enhancement officers and the programme approval groups. Reports of graduate school reviews are considered by the Research Planning and Strategy Committee. The reviews of administrative units are commissioned by, and report to, the Secretary of Court.

### **Faculty structures**

79 Academic delivery centres around faculties which have oversight of the provision delivered by those departments within a faculty unit. Faculties are led by deans, who are supported in their role by a number of associate deans with responsibilities for such matters as learning and teaching, postgraduate studies and research. Faculties exercise their responsibility for postgraduate students through the operation of graduate schools, with associate deans as heads of the graduate schools.

80 The University describes two broad types of faculty: one that delivers programmes that are highly focused and broadly of a vocational and professional nature; and the others which it classifies as 'general'. In the general faculties, BSc, MA and MA (Social Sciences) students are admitted to the faculty, rather than to a named programme.

81 Each faculty has an underpinning committee structure with bodies responsible for such areas as research degrees, learning and teaching on undergraduate programmes and taught postgraduate programmes. There is considerable variation between the faculties in their committee structures for the management of different constituencies of provision.

### **Programme and course approval**

82 The University has developed a detailed set of processes for course and programme approval. Guidance for staff on these processes is made available on the University's Senate Office website.

83 Changes to courses are approved at faculty level under delegated authority from the ASC. Programme approval proposals are scrutinised by faculty boards of studies. In most faculties, these boards are not separate committees, but are meetings of the faculty learning and teaching/undergraduate teaching committee, specially convened or prorogued to consider the proposal. Following approval by the faculty committee, the proposals are forwarded to a programme approval group (PAG) of the ASC. The PAG's role is to ensure that the faculty has scrutinised the proposal thoroughly, and that the programme specifications conform to University guidelines; in doing so, the PAG is given overview documentation to consider. Approval for a programme to operate is given for an indefinite period, subject to satisfactory recruitment and established quality assurance mechanisms, notably including the DPTLA reviews.

84 The University has also instituted a 'fast-track' process that may be employed occasionally to enable a programme to be approved out of term time, if a clear recruitment advantage can be demonstrated in doing so. This process may only be used with the explicit approval of the Chair of ASC and the Clerk of Senate, but in other respects follows the broad approach adopted for the routine approval of new programmes, and approval of major changes to existing programmes.

85 There is clear evidence that, in undertaking their role, faculty boards of study and the programme approval groups give close attention to programme approval submissions. Academic staff have a clear understanding of the cycle of events that constitute the programme approval process, and gave examples where both the faculty boards and the programme approval group had referred proposals back to departments for revision.

86 A review of the programme approval process was undertaken during 2008-09, as part of the University Court's rolling programme of internal audit. The review report made a number of recommendations; these were mainly procedural in nature, but the report did note a lack of consistency across faculties in the initial review of new proposals, and the level of authorisation required for a proposal to proceed. The University has begun to address these issues through its ASC.

87 The University requires that, as part of the programme approval process, advice is sought from external individuals or groups, such as existing or prospective external examiners, professional bodies or employers. University guidance on the selection and collation of external views in programme approval is not comprehensive and this, alongside the variations in faculty committee structures (see paragraphs 80 to 82), has the potential to lead to inconsistencies in the use of external advice when approving programmes. The guidance offered by the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (code of practice)*, published by QAA, advises institutions to make use of external contributions of an appropriate kind, and highlights the potential for compromising impartiality when the external contribution comes predominantly from an existing external examiner. The University has been piloting revised arrangements for managing information relating to programme and course approval (see paragraph 102). Linked to this, the University is encouraged to review the guidance provided to faculties on programme approval, and to ensure that faculties adhere to *Section 7 of the Code of practice*.

### **Annual monitoring**

88 The University has a comprehensive system of annual monitoring for all taught programmes, and a system of annual progress review for research students. The annual monitoring process is coordinated at faculty level by the faculty quality assurance and enhancement officers (faculty officers). Faculty officers prepare an annual overview of the annual monitoring reports for which they have oversight, and these summary reports are considered at both faculty level and by the Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Officers Group, a subgroup reporting to the ASC. There is clear evidence of both the detailed analysis of the annual monitoring reports undertaken by the faculty officers, and of the effective oversight of annual monitoring outcomes exercised by the ASC.

89 In addition to providing regular institutional reassurance on the maintenance of academic standards and quality, the annual monitoring process is intended to have a clear enhancement focus. The emphasis on enhancement is supported centrally through workshops offered by the Senate Office, aimed at bringing consistency to the reporting process, and maximising the efficiency and usefulness of the reports. Resulting from these workshops, action points for the development of the annual monitoring process have been identified (such as increasing student involvement in the process), and these have been reported to the faculty officers' group with the specific aims of enhancing the usefulness of the annual monitoring process and disseminating good practice.



90 Overall, the annual monitoring system, with the clear oversight, scrutiny and analysis undertaken by the faculty officers, and the enhancement emphasis of the process, represents excellent practice, and a clear reflection of the University's stated commitment to quality enhancement.

### **Reviews of departmental programmes of teaching, learning and assessment**

91 Periodic review takes place on a six-yearly cycle, centred on DPTLA. The University has developed clear policies and guidance on the purpose and procedures for these reviews, which have an explicit developmental and enhancement dimension, in addition to a focus on the effectiveness of student learning, and consideration of mechanisms for the quality assurance of provision.

92 The University highlights that, central to the DPTLA process, is a self-evaluation report (SER), prepared by the department under consideration. In the preparation of the SER, departments are supported by the Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC) (see paragraph 68), and receive guidance both in preparing for the review and in analysing and understanding the recommendations made in the review report. Staff involved in DPTLAs view this support and guidance as particularly effective and valuable, and confirmed that the preparation of the SER was considered to be a very beneficial process, encouraging reflection on pedagogy and on improving educational practice.

93 The DPTLA reports are submitted to the ASC which, in turn, monitors actions taken in response to the recommendations made. Recent examples of DPTLA reports confirm the University's view that the process is robust and developmental in its approach. The reports have a well-developed narrative content that clearly specifies areas of good practice and areas for development, as well as identifying focused recommendations.

94 The procedure for programme approval (see paragraphs 83 to 88) effectively permits a programme to be run indefinitely, and the University is explicit that the DPTLA is not a re-approval or revalidation event for the programme(s) under review. The DPTLA reports, while very detailed and comprehensive in a number of respects, often lack a specific and explicit evaluation of the continuing validity and relevance of the programmes under review. The University is encouraged to review the alignment of the DPTLA process with regard to *Section 7 of the Code of practice*, in order to ensure greater prominence and consistency in how such matters are considered, and reported.

### **The extent to which the institution's monitoring and review arrangements include consideration of all students**

95 The University considers that its monitoring and review arrangements are inclusive and that opportunities are available for all students to participate or contribute. The major opportunities for student involvement are through the processes for course and programme design and approval (see paragraphs 83 to 88); annual monitoring (see paragraphs 89 to 91); and reviews of DPTLA (see paragraphs 92 to 95). For example, course and programme approval procedures explicitly require departments to consider the diversity of the potential student body, and student consultation is a regular feature of the approval process for any course or programme changes.

96 All these processes draw upon student feedback elicited through course evaluation questionnaires, and the staff:student liaison committee system. The University has undertaken an analysis of its class representative population, in relation to their status as home, international, undergraduate, postgraduate, male, female and full or part-time students. The University is conscious of the challenge of incorporating into its monitoring and review arrangements student feedback from research, international, part-time and distance-learning students, and believes it has mechanisms in place to deal successfully with this.

## **The effectiveness of the institution's approach to self-evaluation including the use made of external reference points**

97 The University reflects on the effectiveness of its policies and procedures on a proactive and ongoing basis, and this includes benchmarking against external reference points. Reflection on monitoring and review activity takes place in a number of ways, including: DPTLA panel members feeding back on their experiences; the dissemination of good practice in monitoring and review activity through the work of committees, such as the faculty-level undergraduate studies committees; and the role of faculty quality assurance and enhancement officers in synthesising and disseminating information arising from annual monitoring processes.

98 Arising from this process of reflection, recent developments and enhancements have included: the introduction of generic regulations; a Code of Assessment (see paragraphs 106 to 109); revised approaches to programme design and review (see paragraphs 83 to 88; 92 to 95); and revisions to the annual monitoring process (see paragraphs 89 to 91). Additionally, the Senate committees undertake an annual review of their own operation and remit.

99 A clear illustration of the University's approach to self-evaluation is University's development of its approach to the management of postgraduate research degrees, and the resultant revised Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees (see paragraphs 43, 44). In the University undertaking work in this area, there is evidence of substantial engagement with external reference points, internal consultation and student feedback. The University's approach to enhancing the research student experience, through the development and implementation of the revised Code, represents good practice.

100 The ELIR visits revealed a strong institutional culture of analysis and self-evaluation. The RA prepared for the ELIR provided a clear overview of the operation of the University-level arrangements for the oversight of quality management and it is apparent that, since the 2004 ELIR, the University has systematically embraced the concept of quality enhancement, and incorporated it into its strategies, policies and procedures. The RA provided less detail about the equivalent arrangements for quality management at the faculty level, where the day-to-day operational responsibilities in these matters are discharged. Nonetheless, the RA was a well-structured, informative and open introduction to a large and complex University.

## **The effectiveness of the institution's approach to the management of information to inform the operation and evaluation of its monitoring and review activity**

101 At the time of the current ELIR, the University had recently implemented a new approach to managing information, in the form of the Programme Information Project (PIP). This comprises an electronic document management system (based around programme specifications, and structured course and programme documentation), which will link to online course information, and to the University Course Catalogue. The Project's overall objective is to make the programme and course approval processes more efficient and timely. A pilot (undertaken in two faculties) indicated significant improvements had been achieved in efficiency, accuracy and work flow management. The University introduced further refinements to the new system before universal adoption during 2009-10. This is clearly a positive development.

## **The effectiveness of the institution's approach to setting and maintaining academic standards including the management of assessment**

102 The University's framework for setting and maintaining academic standards, including its regulatory approach, is published in the annual University Calendar, and is supported by a well-designed and accessible web-based series of documents and papers published by the Senate Office. There are separate regulatory frameworks for undergraduate, taught master's and research degree programmes.

103 Overall responsibility for academic standards and quality assurance is exercised on Senate's behalf by the ASC. Operationally, the main focus of quality and standards matters rests at faculty level. All faculties operate a system of boards of studies with oversight of curricula matters at subject level, broadly focused on departments. Additionally, there are faculty-level committees covering a number of areas of activity (see paragraph 82).

104 External examiners are appointed, for a fixed term, to all taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. New external examiners are inducted into their duties by departments, and are provided with a copy of the University's Code of Assessment. External examiners are required to attend assessment boards and submit formal written reports to the Principal; external examiners' reports are then analysed by the Senate Office. The commentary contained in their reports, including any issues raised, are reported through into the annual monitoring process (see paragraphs 89 to 91). External examiners' reports are widely circulated at departmental and faculty level, with the ASC receiving an annual overview report highlighting any institutional-level matters. The University's use of external examiners provides security to its approach to assessment, and meets the expectations of the *Code of practice*.

105 One component of the generic regulations, particularly for undergraduate programmes, is the University's Code of Assessment (introduced in 2002-03), the development of which represents a major undertaking by the institution. The design of the Code seeks to bring greater consistency to the University's approach to the assessment of students' work, and the classification of student achievement. The University considers this to be a significant progression from previous practice, and the Code is clearly important in promoting harmonisation of the approaches adopted by the different faculties.

106 A key element of the Code has been the introduction and universal adoption of a University-wide criterion-referenced grading scale, which is applied to students' work. The Code also defines the approach to be adopted for aggregating course grades obtained at stages 3 and 4 (SCQF levels 9 and 10) for the classification of honours degrees. The Code clearly defines the grade point average needed to result in an award that lies within the centre of a classification band, but permits discretion to be exercised by departmental-level boards of examiners in their consideration of the award classification when a student's grade point average lies within a discretionary band that bridges two degree classes.

107 The Code of Assessment is supported by a set of guidance notes, published by the Senate Office, which are useful and wide ranging. However, there is limited University guidance provided to boards of examiners on how discretion may be exercised, notably on how the distribution of a student's grades may be characterised to guide the discretionary process; and on the criteria to be used to inform the award recommendation in borderline cases. Responsibility for providing such guidance is devolved to faculties, and there are significant variations in the extent to which faculties have explicit policies on the operation of boards of examiners. Some faculties have developed very clear policies and procedures while in other faculties, discretion resides with the boards themselves. In some cases, where clear criteria are lacking, the final decision on degree classification may be passed to the external examiner for adjudication.

108 The lack of systematic guidance to boards of examiners on the exercise of their discretionary powers for borderline candidates does not guarantee a process that ensures equity of treatment for degree candidates, both within boards and between boards in the same or in different faculties. For joint honours students, whose component courses are delivered by departments in different faculties, there is also potential for contradictory approaches to the characterisation of the grade distribution. The University is strongly encouraged to review this aspect of its Code of Assessment within the context of *Section 6* of the *Code of practice* to ensure the consistent application of existing good practice.

### **The effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing public information about quality and academic standards, including the linkage with the institution's monitoring and review arrangements**

109 The University increasingly makes information available on the web via both the internet and intranet. The University states that it adopts an open approach to publishing information, and only a limited amount is restricted to the intranet or available through the virtual learning environment. A wide range of information on quality and academic standards is published online, including: the University's prospectuses; the University Calendar; the catalogue of programme specifications; and a course catalogue. The University's academic policies and procedures are publicly available on the Senate Office's web pages, as is information on the University's quality processes, including the reports of its DPTLA and University Administrative Services reviews. A Student Voice website has also been established to disseminate the outcomes of student surveys and actions taken in response to such student feedback (see paragraph 34).

110 The Web team within the University's Corporate Communications service has responsibility for the University's home page, and other University-level pages on the website, including the marketing information contained within those pages. Corporate Communications is also responsible for producing the prospectuses, with editorial boards having oversight of their contents.

111 Detailed information for current students on their programmes and courses is mainly provided through handbooks produced within departments or faculties. Central guidance on student handbooks is provided by the Senate Office, and handbooks are reviewed periodically as part of the DPTLA process. The Senate Office also undertakes occasional checks of the information provided on departmental web-pages.

112 Overall, the University's approach to the management of information on quality and academic standards is effective.

### **The effectiveness of the institution's approach to linking its monitoring and review processes to its enhancement arrangements**

113 Since the 2004 ELIR, the University has taken a number of significant steps to make the links between quality assurance and quality enhancement more explicit in its monitoring and review processes. Some of these steps include promoting enhancement through: the annual monitoring process (for example, developing templates which promote the reporting of good practice and maximise the usefulness of the reports); the role of faculty quality assurance and enhancement officers in reporting upwards the outcomes of annual monitoring; the DPTLA review process (for example, the role of the self-evaluation report in encouraging reflection, and the reporting template which encourages specifying good practice and areas for development); and disseminating good practice through the faculty and institutional-level committees (for example, the undergraduate studies committees and the ASC) (see paragraphs 89 to 91, 92 to 95). Looking forwards, the University has identified the links between annual monitoring of taught postgraduate programmes and enhancement activity as an area for future development.

114 The University has recently expressed its intention to restructure to form four colleges (see paragraph 10). In doing so, the University is encouraged to exploit the opportunities that academic restructuring will offer to promote greater consistency of practice across the institution. While greater harmonisation will have many benefits for the assurance and enhancement of the student experience, it will also be important for the University to recognise and retain the many aspects of good practice that are demonstrated within the current structure.

## **The effectiveness of the institution's approach to monitoring and reviewing its collaborative activity**

115 The University's current collaborative provision is predominantly based on a model of validation, where programmes offered by accredited or associated institutions lead to a University award (see paragraph 10). Accredited institutions are those with longstanding experience in assuring, monitoring and evaluating the quality of courses and programmes, to the extent that the University can be assured that its academic standards will be maintained through the extensive delegation of authority. Associated institutions are those with relatively little history or experience of higher education; accordingly, devolution of responsibility is relatively limited.

116 As part of the University's internationalisation strategy (at the time of the ELIR visits, in near-final draft form), collaboration is increasingly focused on joint and dual or multiple awards, articulation arrangements and franchise. Overseeing this development is a recently formed Collaborations Group (a subcommittee of the Senior Management Group), which agrees 'in-principle' approval for collaborations where there is a novel aspect, for example, a new partner, or in a new country, or where there are broader strategic, policy or resource implications, through an efficient documentary process. Thereafter, formal scrutiny by the Education Policy and Strategy Committee or the Research Planning and Strategy Committee, is undertaken in advance of formal approval by Senate. The planned increase in international collaborative provision will be supported by a the Collaborations Unit located in Senate Office.

117 Validated partnership approval is granted by Senate, following the operation of a process set in the current Code of Practice for Validated Provision. While, in practice, validation and other partner approval panels do include external panel members, currently the validation process does not stipulate this as a requirement in all instances. As it keeps its processes for collaborative provision under review, there would be merit in the University giving consideration to establishing as a requirement the inclusion of an external member on partnership approval panels, particularly where risk might be judged to be significant, and might be mitigated through the addition of external cultural, as well as academic, expertise.

118 Collaborative programmes with validated (accredited and associated) institutions are revalidated periodically. However, there is no formal documented process for the periodic review and renewal of partnership arrangements. Since the memoranda of agreement relating to the collaborations do stipulate a requirement for review and renewal of partnerships, the University is encouraged to include a formal partnership renewal process both in its Code of Practice for Validated Provision and in its new Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision, which is due to be completed for the start of 2010-11.

119 The University states that the principles underlying the monitoring and review arrangements for collaborative (validated) provision are the same as those which govern the operation of programmes delivered on campus, and these are set out in the current Code of Practice for Validated Provision. In detail, there are some differences in the programme approval processes: programmes are scrutinised through a validation event; the event involves a panel (including an external assessor); and the period of approval is time-limited. Revalidation is a formal process that replaces the normal programme approval process. Links with the validated partner are considered through the University's DPTLA process. Annual programme monitoring reports, and external examiners' reports (and the responses made to these) from accredited and associated institutions are subject to scrutiny by a joint board (or equivalent) that oversees the partnership. It is evident that joint boards, which then report onto the Academic Standards Committee (ASC), consider these reports seriously. The University's strategic oversight of quality and academic standards in its partnerships is supported by the Clerk of Senate, who chairs all joint boards.

120 The requirement for effective management of public information in relation to collaborative provision is set out in memoranda of agreement. In a recently established arrangement with a new overseas partner, it had been agreed that the partner institution could use the University's logo on certificates of awards which were not those of the University. This creates the potential for confusion amongst students and future employers, and the University should review this aspect of its agreement with the partner.

121 The University considers that its planned expansion in international collaborative activity has been undertaken in a measured and well-managed way. It has undertaken a number of deliberate steps to support this expansion including: the Senate's review of the institution's approach to partnership; the establishment of a high-level Collaborations Group; and the establishment of a Collaborations Unit. At the time of the ELIR, there was no University Code of Practice governing franchised or articulated provision. A major innovative partnership had recently been established with an overseas partner, based on a new hybrid model combining articulation and franchising, but in the absence of any detailed guidelines in place. The Memorandum of Agreement had required to be renegotiated (due to legislative changes in the partner country), and there was no apparent operational plan in place for the first year of the partnership. In order to minimise risk, the University is encouraged to take early steps to finalise and implement its planned Code of Practice for all intended forms of Collaborative Provision, and to strengthen the first-year monitoring arrangements, particularly for new and complex overseas collaborations.

## **Strategic approach to quality enhancement**

### **Key features of the institution's strategic approach to quality enhancement**

122 Since the 2004 ELIR, the University has undertaken a significant number of initiatives designed to strengthen its strategic approach to quality enhancement. Principal among these is the implementation of the University's Strategic Plan, Building on Excellence 2006-10, with its emphasis on a high quality student experience at the core of the University's mission. As set out in Building on Excellence, the University's strategic approach to quality enhancement derives from its core strategic objectives of building an academically excellent, and financially sustainable, future for the University and the community it serves. The key tools developed by the University to achieve these objectives are the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy, both of which were approved in 2006.

123 Described as a 'framework for development' and as 'a tool to focus prioritisation and decision-making', the Learning and Teaching Strategy provides the over-arching framework for promoting quality enhancement. In doing so, it sets out a number of principles, strategic priorities and key objectives against which performance is measured and reported to the University Court on an annual basis. The Learning and Teaching Strategy's key objectives are grouped into three themes: shaping the University learning community; excelling in learning and teaching; and enhancing the student experience.

124 The Learning and Teaching Strategy has been developed in a collaborative and consultative manner across the University, notably including the involvement of the Students' Representative Council as well as staff. In consequence, there is widely shared ownership of the Strategy and its key initiatives, and an extensive commitment on the part of staff to realise its objectives.

125 The Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy sets objectives for the development of research in the University; particular priorities for development since the 2004 ELIR has been: updating the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees; training and development support for research students; improving engagement with the postgraduate student community; and increasing the research student population. The re-drafting of the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees was also informed by wide consultation with staff and students, including analysis of the outcomes of recent postgraduate student surveys (see paragraph 31).

## **The effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategies and policies for promoting quality enhancement across the institution**

126 The University's approach to implementing its strategies for promoting quality enhancement incorporates a range of activities and mechanisms including: the establishment of working groups; the development of action plans; the use of surveys and reviews; identification of good practice at departmental and faculty levels; the role of faculty quality assurance and enhancement officers in dissemination of good practice; and training and development for staff.

127 The University's implementation of its Learning and Teaching Strategy can be illustrated through the example of its approach to the core objective of improving student retention and success (see paragraph 40). A Retention Working Group has played a key role in driving the University's retention agenda, and has facilitated the wider adoption across the University of activities and projects originating at departmental and faculty levels. The success of these 'bottom-up' approaches has ensured a positive response across the institution to the University's Retention Action Plan, which sets out the responsibilities of academic and professional staff for action in some 29 areas. In early 2009, the Retention Action Plan was adopted by all faculties, and by the University Services Management Group.

128 During 2007, the University agreed a suite of key performance indicators (KPIs) for both the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy. These are intended to support implementation, and to facilitate the measurement and reporting of progress towards strategic objectives. Progress towards objectives is reported annually to the University Court in the form of a reflective account which provides both quantitative evidence (comparative statistics and benchmark data) and qualitative evidence (examples of initiatives), and an indication of areas for specific attention during the year ahead. The annual report to the University Court provides clear evidence of the widespread use of internal and external benchmark information, including the National Student Survey and the performance of other Russell Group institutions. The University's use of this benchmark information has evolved over the lifetime of the current strategies, and the University intends to continue to refine and develop its use of performance indicators to evaluate the impact of its strategic objectives.

129 In 2008, the University undertook a mid-term review of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The review demonstrated that the University is on a successful trajectory towards achieving its core strategic objectives for enhancement, and also identified ongoing areas for development.

## **The effectiveness of the institution's use of external reference points in its approach to quality enhancement, including the extent to which the institution's approach is informed by national and international practice**

130 The University makes extensive use of a range of national and international reference points to determine and measure the performance goals and outputs of its quality enhancement strategy, and these have also been used to establish the KPIs against which progress in implementing the Learning and Teaching Strategy is measured (see paragraphs 128 to 129).

131 Key strategic priorities for quality enhancement have been the broad theme of student engagement (see paragraphs 29 to 35) and the overall area of student retention, progression and completion (see paragraphs 40, 128). The University's approach to such matters is informed by data available, at both an institutional and national level, which relate to measurable aspects of the student experience. Such data are drawn from the outcomes of a wide range of internal and external surveys, which seek feedback from a number of different student groups (see paragraph 31).

132 In developing its strategic approach to student retention the University has drawn upon data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, and has benchmarked itself against the performance of other Russell Group institutions. From these benchmarks, the University has been able to set and monitor targets for student retention which seek to move the University to a completion rate in the middle of the range for comparator institutions.

133 A comparable approach has also underpinned the University's on-going work on the strategic priority of improving the student learning experience in the areas of assessment and feedback. The University places particular value on the results of the NSS in monitoring its ongoing progress in this area.

134 The University's engagement with external reference points, in particular those of a quantitative nature, has had a demonstrably beneficial effect on its strategic approach to quality enhancement and has provided the University with a dependable methodology for measuring and monitoring performance against key strategic objectives.

135 In qualitative terms, the University has also engaged with both national and international reference points to inform, support and develop its strategic approach to enhancement. In the international context, the University has drawn on its involvement with Universitas 21, of which it is a founder member, to address issues relating to the enhancement of the postgraduate research student experience, as well as to inform its thinking on internationalisation, the first-year experience, and the enhancement of the student learning environment.

136 At the national level, the University has engaged principally with those national Enhancement Themes which align with its own strategic priorities for enhancement, including: the First Year Experience, Integrative Assessment; Research-Teaching Linkages: Enhancing Graduate Attributes (where the steering group was convened by the Senior Vice-Principal); and Graduates for the 21st Century: Integrating the Enhancement Themes. The University has also engaged with the indicators of enhancement, produced in association with the national Enhancement Themes, including using the indicators in the development of its RA for ELIR, to help benchmark the University's progress.

137 Dissemination of the outcomes of the national Enhancement Themes to the wider University community is undertaken formally through the Learning and Teaching Committee, where the Enhancement Themes are a standing agenda item, and through the work of the Learning and Teaching Centre in various ways, including through its seminar series. Staff affirm the positive impact of engaging with national Enhancement Themes on the University's overall enhancement strategy, and in supporting its enhancement priorities. Overall, the outcomes of the Enhancement Themes are being used to inform policy and practice in strategic areas in a beneficial and effective manner. As it continues to develop its strategies for quality enhancement, the University is encouraged to continue its work to secure greater interaction with the national Enhancement Themes across the institution.

### **The effectiveness of the institution's approach to identifying, disseminating and implementing good practice in the context of its strategic approach to enhancement**

138 The University states that its approach to identifying, disseminating and implementing good practice is characterised by three broad areas of activity: 'bottom-up' enhancement; promoting enhancement 'top-down'; and facilitating the dissemination of enhancement. In relation to 'top-down' enhancement activity, the University's Learning and Teaching and Research and Knowledge Transfer strategies provide the primary means for coordinating and leading enhancements (see paragraph 123).

139 The University views 'bottom-up' enhancements to be those that arise through the professionalism and creativity of academic and other staff. The University identifies two main ways of capturing such activity. The first means is through monitoring and review processes, and through the meetings of the faculty quality assurance and enhancement officers (see paragraphs 89 to 91, 92 to 95). The second means is through the role of central activities, such as the work of the Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC), and the University's Teaching Excellence Awards (see paragraph 142).



140 The LTC (see paragraph 68) is a key focus for identifying and supporting innovation across the University. Since 2008, the LTC has organised the University's Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, with presentations by University staff and keynote speakers, all linked to strategic priorities. The University also operates a Learning and Teaching Development Fund (LTDF) to promote enhancement activity. The outcomes of LTDF-funded projects are promoted through the annual conference, and also through the LTC's website and seminar series. Overall, staff are very positive about the work of the LTC, and aligned initiatives such as the LTDF, in identifying and disseminating good practice.

141 The University's Teaching Excellence Awards, introduced in 2006, promote the good practice of individuals and teams. Each year the University bestows Teaching Excellence Awards on staff whose teaching is considered to be excellent. The judging panel includes student representatives and lay members of the University Court. Staff achievements are recognised at graduation ceremonies and films of these are provided on the LTC's website, at a corporate event involving employers and, in the future, through activities of the Students' Representative Council.

142 In the sharing of information on good practice, the University identifies its committees as important channels for communication, as well as the University's websites as a means of dissemination of information. Staff confirmed the important role of committees; in particular, they identified the faculty undergraduate studies committees as an effective conduit of information in both directions, and for sharing good practice.

### **The effectiveness of the institution's approach to enhancing collaborative provision**

143 The University requires that its validated (accredited and associated) institutions (see paragraph 10) make explicit the link between their monitoring and review arrangements, and enhancement, in their annual reports. The University emphasises the responsibilities of the accredited institutions to develop and implement appropriate enhancement strategies for those institutions. These strategies are discussed at liaison committee meetings which, in turn, report to ASC.

144 Currently, the focus of the joint boards and/or liaison committees' attention is principally on monitoring and review. Partner institutions' engagement with the University's strategic priorities for enhancement, or with the national Enhancement Themes, is not always reported in a systematic manner. The University acknowledges the scope for greater articulation of the links that could be made by its partner institutions between monitoring and review, and strategies for enhancement, and is taking steps to achieve this. These steps include revisions to the annual reporting requirements, in order to elicit more information on enhancement activity undertaken or planned. In line with this, the Code of Practice for Validated Provision has been revised to include a new appendix on the contents of annual reports, which includes an explicit section on quality enhancement. The development of the annual reporting requirements will greatly assist the University in informing itself of the steps taken by its partner institutions to enhance the quality of their provision.

## **Conclusion**

### **Effectiveness of the institution's management of the student learning experience**

145 Over recent years the University and the Students' Representative Council have developed a strong and effective partnership. This partnership has been very productive, and has delivered significant enhancements in provision and practice to enhance the student learning experience. The University and the Students' Representative Council jointly have taken a number of steps to improve the student representative system. Student representation is now more embedded, and, overall, is effective in addressing students' issues. The participation of student reviewers in the reviews of Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment is a recognised

success, and the more recent participation of student panel members in University Administrative Services Reviews is a positive development.

146 The University is taking significant steps to improve its student records systems, through the development of a new student information system (the 'Student Lifecycle Project'). The Project seeks to transform the ways in which the University uses student information, and will enable greater strategic use of data to achieve institutional goals, and to support strategy and policy. The Project also aims to improve significantly the quality of information, advice and support provided for staff and students, and has the clear potential to contribute to the enhancement of the student experience.

147 Substantial work has been undertaken on setting the policy and management framework in relation to student equality and diversity. The embedding of equality practices across a number of areas remains work in progress, particularly with regards to learning, teaching and curriculum planning, and the University is encouraged to continue to progress its programme of activity in these areas.

148 The University has well-established mechanisms for gathering student feedback. Since 2004, the University has sought to develop a more strategic approach to obtaining feedback from the wider student body, including a broader focus on the student learning experience. The University has constructively engaged in seeking students' views through the extensive use of both internal and external surveys, and has made effective use of the outcomes of these to inform the development, implementation and monitoring of objectives within its Learning and Teaching Strategy. The University has recently established a Student Voice website, intended as a means of communicating, to students and staff, key findings from student surveys, and information on actions taken, and progress made. The website is an innovative and potentially powerful tool for promoting student engagement, but there is currently a low level of student awareness of it. The University, working with the Students' Representative Council, is taking a number of steps to promote the website, and is to be encouraged in these ongoing activities.

149 The University's ongoing work to develop and promote graduate attributes and employability is a significant programme of activity. The University is encouraged to continue to reflect on students' awareness of how graduate attributes and employability is embedded in their programmes of study, especially in non-vocational subjects. The University is also encouraged to develop a more coordinated approach to identifying and promoting work experience opportunities for students. There is currently limited student awareness of the University's provision for personal development planning (PDP) and PDP's supporting ePortfolio tool. The University has recognised the need to promote proactively the benefits of PDP to students, and is supported in its intention to embed a more structured approach to the implementation of PDP, including ensuring students are clear about its purpose and benefits.

150 The University's learning environment has been significantly enhanced in recent years. Key focuses for enhancement have been: the main library, the Fraser Building (which provides the first point of contact for all Student Services) and the University's virtual learning environment. These developments have resulted from the University's deliberate strategic investments, a focus on the student experience, and a systematic process of listening to the student voice.

151 The University's LTC plays a very significant and positive role in the provision of support and development activities for staff in order to promote effective learning for their students. The University is encouraged to continue to monitor the extent of experienced staff engagement in staff development activity, including that engendered through the staff performance review process. The University, with the encouragement of the SRC, intends to review the effectiveness of arrangements for graduate teaching assistant training and support, and this is to be encouraged. There has been clear progress in the University's promotion of academic staff to professorial level, based significantly on strengths in learning and teaching. The University does not currently have an overarching staff development strategy, and is encouraged to develop an oversight of the way in which its multiple providers of staff development address its strategic priorities.

## **Effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for institution-led monitoring and review of quality, and academic standards of awards**

152 The University's Quality Framework is comprehensive, well designed and understood by staff at all levels. Overall, the processes for approval, monitoring and review are robust and promote reflection and development. The underpinning philosophy demonstrates clear evidence of careful attention to benchmarking against a wide range of external reference points. Aspects of these processes represent excellent practice, particularly the approach adopted to annual monitoring, which has been progressively developed to promote enhancement activity, and where the faculty quality assurance and enhancement officers have played a pivotal role in maximising the assurance and enhancement benefits of the process.

153 The University's programme approval process includes close scrutiny of proposals at the faculty and institutional level, and the process is well understood by staff. The University has instituted a flexible 'fast track' programme approval process to enable it to respond to recruitment demands. The University is encouraged to review the guidance provided to faculties on the inclusion of external views in programme approval.

154 The University's periodic (six-yearly) review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (DPTLA) is a robust and developmental process, which clearly identifies areas of good practice and areas for development. The University is encouraged to ensure that the DPTLA process gives sufficient prominence to the continuing validity and relevance of the programmes under review.

155 The University has a Code of Assessment, supported by guidance notes on its implementation. The University is strongly encouraged to provide clear guidance to faculties on how board of examiners may exercise discretion when classifying honours level awards.

156 The University has recently expressed its intention to restructure to form four colleges. In doing so, the University is encouraged to exploit the opportunities that academic restructuring will offer to promote greater consistency of practice across the institution while also retaining the many aspects of good practice that are demonstrated within the current structure.

157 Overall, the University's approach to monitoring and reviewing its collaborative activity is effective. In order to further strengthen its arrangements for validated provision, the University is encouraged to consider stipulate as a requirement the inclusion of an external expert on partner approval panels, and to also consider introducing a formal process for the periodic review of partnerships. The University is also asked to review the use of its logo on academic certificates that are not its own.

## **Effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategic approach to quality enhancement**

158 In recent years, the University has undertaken a significant number of initiatives designed to strengthen its strategic approach to quality enhancement. The key drivers of the University's quality enhancement agenda are its Learning and Teaching Strategy, and its Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy. The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy has been developed in a collaborative and consultative manner across the University. In consequence there is a widely shared ownership of the strategy and its key initiatives, as well as an extensive commitment on the part of staff to realise its objectives.

159 The University makes widespread use of internal and external benchmark information and reference points to establish goals and measure performance; these have been used to establish an effective and robust set of key performance indicators against which progress in implementing the Learning and Teaching Strategy is measured. In this context, the University is using the outcomes of the national Enhancement Themes to inform policy and practice in strategic areas in a beneficial and effective manner.

160 The University's approach to identifying, disseminating and implementing good practice is characterised by both 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' activity, and by effective communication channels for disseminating good practice. Particularly notable in this context are: the ways in which quality assurance processes support the University's quality enhancement agenda (including the role of the faculty quality and assurance officers in this regard); and the importance of central activities such as the Learning and Teaching Centre's Annual Learning Conference and the University's Teaching Excellence Awards.

### **Overarching confidence judgement**

161 The findings of the ELIR indicate that there can be **confidence** in the University's current, and likely future, management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of the student learning experience it provides.

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