



University of the
Highlands and Islands
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd
agus nan Eilean

Enhancement-led institutional review 2015-16 Reflective analysis

Sgrùdadh leasachaidh na buidhne 2015-16 Anailis meòrachail



CONTENTS

Section 1			
Institutional Context and Strategic Framework	6		
1.i			
Key features of the institution's context and mission	6		
Strategic Vision and Plan 2015-20	6		
Governance and Management	8		
Academic Staffing and Profile	11		
Growth in our Student Population	11		
Growth in our Curriculum	12		
Participation in NSS and PRES	13		
Research Degrees and rDAP	13		
Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 Outcome	13		
Major Infrastructure Developments	14		
1.ii			
Strategic Approach to Enhancing Learning and Teaching	14		
Senior Academic Committee Structures and Remits	14		
Learning and Teaching Strategies	15		
Learning and Teaching Academy (LTA)	16		
Student Engagement	17		
Engagement with Enhancement Themes	17		
Role of Faculties and Subject Networks	17		
Practitioner Groups	17		
Major Projects	18		
Improved Use of Data	18		
1.iii			
Effectiveness of the approach to implementing strategies	18		
Section 2			
Enhancing the student learning experience	20		
2.i			
Composition and key trends in the student population	20		
2.ii			
Supporting Equality and Diversity in the Student Population	22		
Introduction	22		
Flexible Curriculum	22		
Widening Access	24		
2.iii			
Engaging and Supporting Students in their Learning	25		
Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA)	25		
Student Partnership Agreement	25		
Student Representation on Committees and Working Groups	26		
Subject Network Officers (SNOs)	26		
Fostering a Sense of Belonging	27		
Student Surveys and Feedback Channels	27		
Student Support	29		
2.iv			
Approaches to promoting the development of graduate attributes, including employability	32		
Careers and Employability Support	32		
Graduate Attributes	34		
Skills and Employability Award	34		
Engagement with HEAR	34		
2.v			
Effectiveness of the Approach to Enhancing the Student Learning Experience	34		
Section 3			
Enhancement in Learning and Teaching	36		
3.i			
Approaches to Identifying and Sharing Good Practice	36		
Programmatic Initiatives	36		
Systematic Evaluation and Review Processes	37		
Specific Initiatives	38		
3.ii			
Impact of the National Enhancement Themes and Related Activity	38		
Developing and Supporting the Curriculum	38		
Transitions	39		
Research Teaching Linkages (RTL)	40		
3.iii			
Engaging and Supporting Staff	41		
3.iv			
Effectiveness of the Approach to Promoting Good Practice in Learning and Teaching	42		
Section 4			
Academic Standards	44		
4.i			
Approach to Setting, Maintaining and Reviewing Academic Standards	44		
Academic Standards and Quality Regulations	44		
Curriculum Development and Approval	45		
Curriculum Monitoring and Review	45		
External Examiners	45		
4.ii			
Management of Assessment	45		
Exam Boards	46		
Progression Boards for SQA Provision	46		
Exam Centre	46		

CONTENTS

4.iii	Use of external reference points in managing academic standards	47		
	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)	47		
	Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)	47		
	Externality in Curriculum Design, Approval and Review	47		
	Other Awarding Bodies – SQA	48		
	Other Awarding Bodies – University of Aberdeen	49		
4.iv	Effectiveness of the Arrangements for Securing Academic Standards	49		
Section 5				
	Self-evaluation and Management of Information	50		
5.i	Key Features of the Institution's Approach	50		
	Annual Quality Monitoring	50		
	Subject and Student Support Service Review	53		
	Links between Annual Monitoring and Subject/Service Review	54		
	Emerging Themes and Priorities Identified and Assigned by QAEC	54		
	Improving Use of Data and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	55		
	Student Surveys	56		
5.ii	Commentary on the Advance Information Set (AIS)	60		
5.iii	Use of External Reference Points in Self-evaluation Sector Engagement	60		
5.iv	Management of Public Information	60		
	Programme Information	61		
	Key Information Sets (KIS)	61		
	Development of Module Database	61		
5.v	Effectiveness of the Approach to Self-evaluation and Management of Information	62		
Section 6				
	Collaborative Activity	64		
6.i	Key Features of the Institution's Strategic Approach	64		
	Introduction	64		
	External Partnerships Steering Committee (EPSC)	64		
	Models of Collaboration	65		
6.ii	Securing Academic Standards of Collaborative Provision	65		
	Joint Masters Degree in AquaCulture, Environment and Society (ACES JMD)	66		
	Transnational Education Partnership – Engineering	67		
	Joint Delivery with Scottish FE College – BA (Hons) Drama and Performance	67		
	International Articulation Agreements	68		
	Articulation and Progression Agreements in Scotland	69		
	Student Exchanges and 'Study Abroad'	70		
	Academic Credit from Student Mobility	70		
6.iii	Enhancing the student learning experience on collaborative programmes	70		
	Student Engagement and Representation	70		
	Student Support	71		
6.iv	Effectiveness of the Approach to Managing Collaborative Activity	71		
	ELIR2 Report Outcomes	74		
	List of Abbreviations	76		



University of the Highlands and Islands,
Ness Walk, Inverness, Scotland, IV3 5SQ.

Tel: (01463) 279000
Email: info@uhi.ac.uk
www.uhi.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION



Introduction

We welcome the ELIR process, and look forward to meeting with the ELIR team in spring 2016 and participating in a constructive and helpful dialogue. We have found the process of preparing the Reflective Analysis (RA) highly valuable in taking stock of how much has been achieved in recent years. In particular, it has provided an opportunity for focussed reflection on student feedback, both formal and informal, and engagement with the new students' association. Our self-reflection and discussions with the ELIR team will inform our thinking about how best to target and prioritise our enhancement initiatives over the next period. We also hope to highlight some of our areas of good and innovative practice more widely, demonstrating our strategic approach to enhancing the student experience in our unique context, and with reference to our specific student population. There have been significant changes in our operating environment, both internally and externally driven, and we aim to maintain our focus on student experience and opportunity when planning and implementing change. We regard ourselves as a critically reflective institution, which seeks actively to learn from its student and staff communities, as well as from others within higher education and beyond. Our RA and associated documentation are intended to demonstrate this ethos.

Since achieving university title in February 2011, there have been significant developments which reflect our maturation as a university and our capacity and confidence to pursue our mission and vision.

- > Appointment of our Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Clive Mulholland, in June 2014
- > New constitution and governance structure implemented in 2014, reinforcing our unique position as an integrated university, encompassing both further education (FE) and higher education (HE)
- > Substantial growth in overall HE student numbers, in the order of a 25% increase in the last four years
- > Expansion of the curriculum portfolio – we now offer over 50 undergraduate degree programmes and around 30 taught postgraduate programmes
- > Success in research activities, as reflected in the Research Excellence Framework 2014 outcome
- > Application for research degree awarding powers (rDAP) submitted to the Privy Council in December 2014



SINCE THE LAST ELIR REPORT

The engagement in, and outcomes of, our last ELIR were highly valuable in providing us with points of reflection. The report (published in August 2012) identified many areas of good practice, as well as some areas for development and monitoring, often phrased as 'continue to develop'. Therefore, while providing an endorsement of our direction of travel, the last ELIR report was a useful reference point in prioritising our refocused strategic objectives, as evidenced in our year-on follow-up report.¹ We continue to evaluate the benefit and impact of specific work strands through our normal self-evaluation processes and structures. Where these link to areas discussed in the last ELIR, they are referenced within relevant sections of the RA, so that the developmental trajectory may be seen. For ease of reference, a summary of the main points from ELIR2 is appended, mapped against relevant developments, and where these are discussed within the RA.

HOW THE REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS WAS PREPARED AND APPROVED

An ELIR Steering Group was convened in 2015, reporting to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC), and mostly comprised of QAEC members. There were two student members; one Subject Network Student Officer (SNSO) in 2014-15, and the Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA) Vice President (Higher Education) in 2015-16. The Steering Group was responsible for drafting the RA and other evidence to be submitted, as well as overseeing communications with stakeholders, and preparing for the visits. A member of the Steering Group took the lead on drafting each section of the RA, drawing on contributions from a wide range of staff across the partnership. Focus groups were held with students at an early stage of drafting, to ensure that student views formed the foundation of the first draft. Overall editorial control rested with the Steering Group.

The first draft of the RA was published internally via the university website and virtual learning environment (VLE) in September 2015, and all students and staff were actively

encouraged to provide comments and feedback using a dedicated email address, with the option to remain anonymous if they preferred. A group of student reviewers, including the HISA President and students studying at different levels and at different Academic Partners, met in October 2015 to provide further feedback, specifically focussing on Sections 2 'Enhancing the Student Learning Experience' and 3 'Enhancement in Learning and Teaching'.

All feedback was collated and informed the second draft of the RA, which was formally considered at the HISA HE Regional Council in November 2015, and broadly endorsed. A near final draft RA was presented to Academic Council in December, and endorsed for submission to QAA Scotland, subject to final approval by the Steering Group.

CASE STUDIES

We have selected two case studies to support the RA; the Learning and Teaching Academy (LTA), and the regional student representation project. Both are significant and ongoing developments within the university, and relate to strategic enhancement priorities for student engagement, learning and teaching, and staff development. The case studies illustrate how we have devised approaches in these areas which take account of: our unique context and structure; the tertiary nature of the university partnership; the diversity of the Academic Partners (APs); and our geographically dispersed academic communities.

We hope that the case studies will demonstrate our capacity for self-evaluation, and provide two more detailed examples of major change initiatives, with change being initiated based on evidence from internal and external review processes (including ELIR) and feedback from students and staff. In each case there was wide stakeholder consultation to build consensus as a key element within the change management approach, and the studies show how this has influenced developments to date, as well as looking to the future.

¹ ELIR2: one year follow up report (August 2013)

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

1.i KEY FEATURES OF THE INSTITUTION'S CONTEXT AND MISSION

1. The University of the Highlands and Islands is a collegiate federal partnership of the Executive Office and 13 Academic Partners (APs). Each of the APs is an institution in its own right, with a distinctive focus and mission, which has entered into an academic partnership agreement with the university. The APs include colleges of further and higher education, research institutions and specialist colleges.² We are Scotland's newest university, having achieved university title in February 2011, and the only university based in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. A brief history, development milestones and key facts are provided.^{3,4,5} Geographically we cover half of the land-mass of Scotland, including areas and communities in which there are no other post-compulsory education providers.
2. The university partnership provides access to study at further and higher education level, as well as research opportunities, and aims to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners and other stakeholders. Each AP serves local, regional, national and international needs, and makes a distinctive contribution to the university partnership. Some are relatively large colleges in urban centres. Others are smaller institutions, including some whose primary focus is on research. All, however, have a student-centred culture. In addition to the main campuses, the university partnership provides educational opportunities through a network of more than 70 learning centres located throughout the Highlands and Islands, Moray and Perthshire. Much of our curriculum is designed to be accessible across multiple sites. Our blended learning approach makes extensive use of ICT and video-conferencing to enable students and staff to work together, wherever they are physically located.
3. We are a university that has developed from within the region, and our partnership model is based on the foundations of our governance structures and strategic management committees, as well as cross-partnership operational and practitioner groups. The university is a complex organisation, and continues to develop rapidly, particularly in relation to its regional role spanning further education (FE) and higher education (HE). The university partnership is distinctive in that it is now accountable for all formal post-16 education in our region. We are seeking a distinctive positioning within the post-16 education sector, however our HE activities are those common to all higher education institutions (HEIs) in Scotland, encompassing teaching, research and knowledge exchange, with the same national reference points.
4. Throughout its development, we have deliberately sought to learn from other organisations in order to enhance the experience of our students, as well as sharing good practice internally. The diversity of our APs and scope of our activities enable us to develop strong links with organisations across a range of industry sectors, research and technology, as well as other universities

and colleges. We continue to embrace this institutional learning ethos, but we are confident in sharing our approaches and practice with others through national and international fora, at conferences and in publications (see LTA case study and Section 3 for examples). In extending our international reach, we are building partnerships with institutions across the world. For example, we have established a relationship with Federation University in Australia, another tertiary university with multiple campuses, which is enabling professional learning for senior management, and emerging opportunities for development of shared curriculum.⁶ Throughout this RA, we will seek to demonstrate how sharing practice is part of our strategic approach to quality enhancement.

STRATEGIC VISION AND PLAN 2015-20

5. We published our Strategic Vision and Plan 2015-20 in April 2015, following a year of consultation and development led by Professor Clive Mulholland, who was appointed as the university's Principal and Vice-Chancellor in June 2014.⁷ It sets out our strategic vision to become the UK's leading integrated university, encompassing higher and further education, reflecting the strengthened role of the university in relation to FE in the Highlands and Islands region.

The strategy is built around three themes, being 'our students', 'the university for all of our region', and 'focused research'. Throughout this RA, we will seek to demonstrate how we are student-centred, and how we work with students to ensure that they play a full part in the university's activities and help to shape our future.

The Strategic Plan identifies a deliberately small number of critical performance indicators (CPIs) to enable high-level monitoring of progress against strategic objectives. These are supported by specific key performance indicators (KPIs) at the operational planning level, which enable effective, ongoing self-evaluation, and will be used to monitor the impact of interventions and initiatives.

Our mission:
To have a transformational impact on the prospects of our region, its economy, its people and its communities.

Our values:

- Collaboration
- Openness
- Respect
- Excellence

² List of Academic Partners and brief descriptions
³ UHI Development – milestones (1992 to present)
⁴ UHI Fact Card 2015

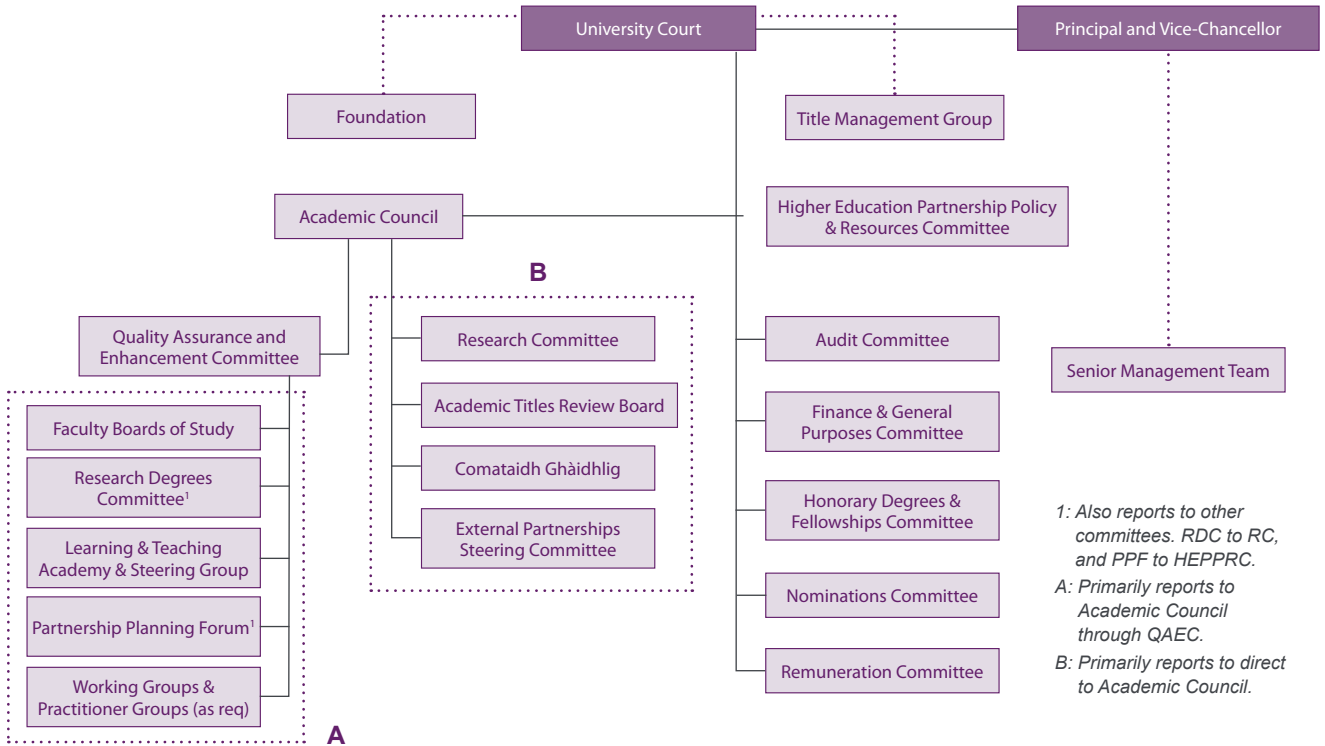
⁵ UHI Fact Card 2014
⁶ Collaboration with Federation University, Australia
⁷ Strategic Vision and Plan 2015-2020

FIGURE 1.1: STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-20 ON A PAGE



INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

FIGURE 1.2: ACADEMIC COMMITTEE STRUCTURE



GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT
UNIVERSITY COURT AND ACADEMIC COUNCIL

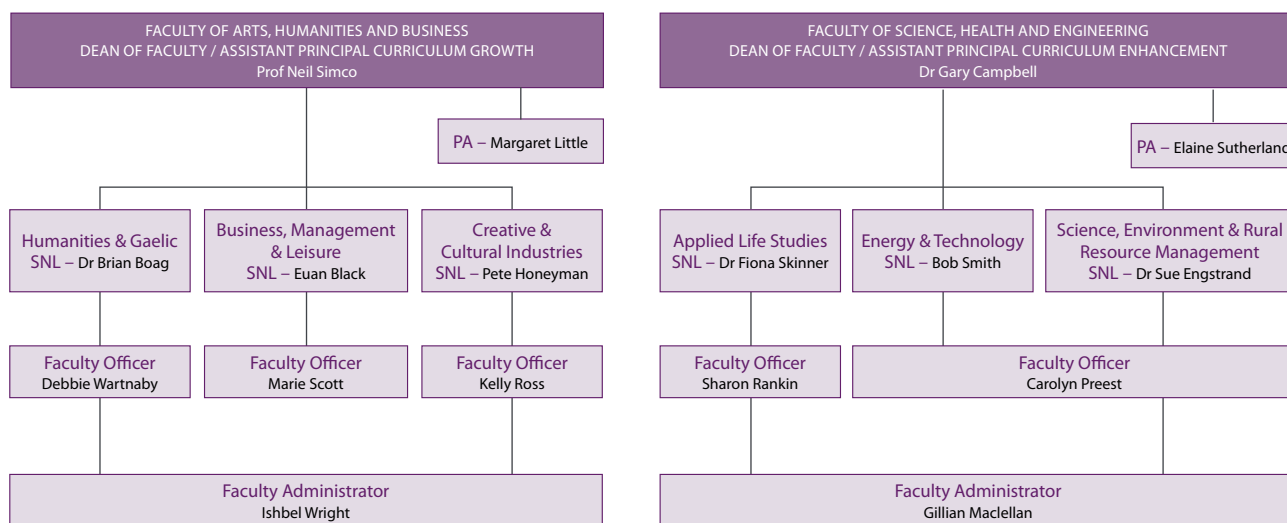
6. The Court is the governing body, and has responsibility for the determination of the educational character and mission of the university and overseeing its activities. Its constitution was recently changed to accommodate our new responsibilities in relation to further education.

Academic Council remains the highest academic authority in respect of our higher education responsibilities, acting on behalf of Court for all matters academic (see Figure 1.2 for our academic committee structure).

The Court and all our academic committees have student membership, often represented by HISA principal officers, although not exclusively.



FIGURE 1.3: FACULTY AND SUBJECT NETWORK STRUCTURE

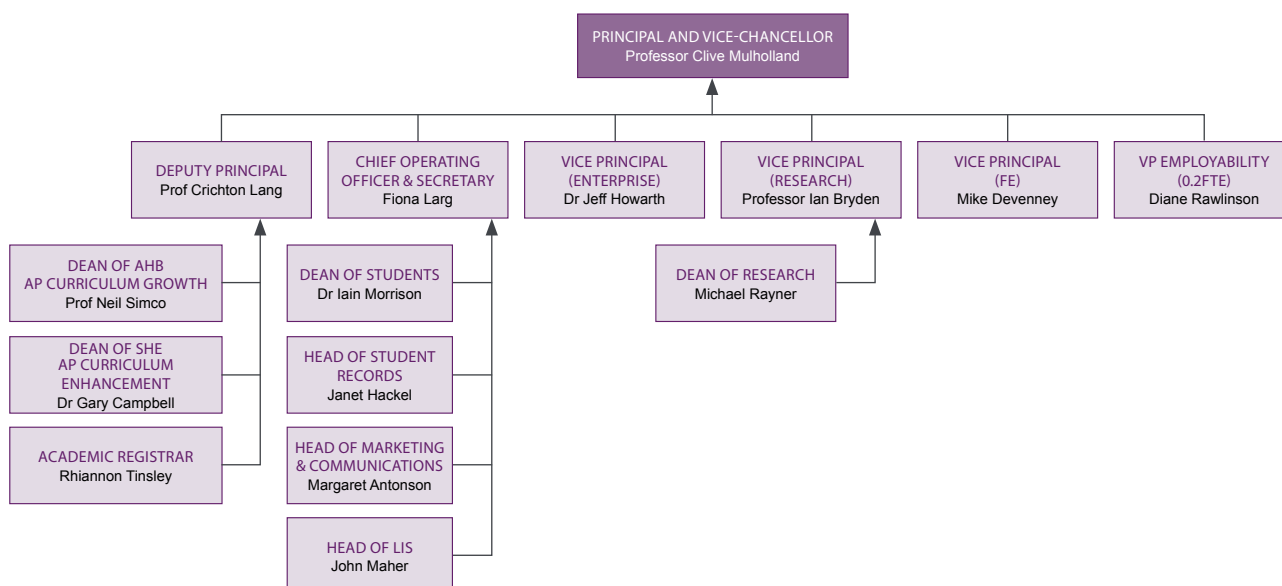


7. We have a sponsorship agreement with three universities: Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Strathclyde, and each is represented on the Court, Academic Council and Research Committee within our governance structure. This arrangement was set up initially to assist us in developing the requisite characteristics for rDAP. Since achieving University title, the focus of our relationship with them has been on research and knowledge exchange development. The representatives of the sponsor universities act as 'critical friends' and provide valuable guidance as we mature as an institution; however, we have always been responsible for defining and progressing our own strategic direction. At the point of achieving rDAP, the arrangement will end, the sponsor Universities having fulfilled their obligations.⁸

REGIONALISATION AND THE POST-16 EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) ACT 2013

8. The Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 identifies the University of the Highlands and Islands as the regional strategic body responsible for the co-ordinated planning, funding and monitoring of further education across the Highlands and Islands. Prior to full implementation of the Act, the Cabinet Secretary for Education established a governance working group which recommended a reconstituted University Court, and the establishment of the Further Education Regional Board (FERB) as a new committee of Court to oversee its further education responsibilities. We have now taken on our role as the Regional Strategic Body, tasked with securing coherent

FIGURE 1.4: SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM STRUCTURE



⁸ Articles of Association (revised 2014)

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

further education in the localities of the relevant APs. Through FERB, we discharge our responsibilities for supporting a regional approach to the planning and funding of FE provision, monitoring college performance, and meeting the terms of the FE Regional Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). The new Court took over full responsibility for governance of the university in July 2014 following Privy Council consent to the required changes to the university's Articles of Association.⁹

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE (QAEC)

9. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee is responsible to Academic Council for monitoring all activity being reported to Academic Council through the subcommittee / Faculty / practitioner group structures. It has a strategic remit for prioritising and monitoring key institutional projects, developments and operational changes relating to quality assurance and enhancement agendas, and the quality framework for the university (see Section 1.ii for more detail).¹⁰

FACULTIES AND SUBJECT NETWORKS

10. There are two Faculties in the university, each with three Subject Networks, the latter being the cross-partnership, discipline-based groups which fulfil a role similar to that of a department or school in other institutions. The Faculty and Subject Network structures have explicit responsibilities for curriculum planning, management and quality assurance processes, discharged through the Faculty Board and executive structures. They also provide an important locus for quality enhancement initiatives and sharing good practice, for example through Faculty conferences and Subject Network development events (see Section 3).

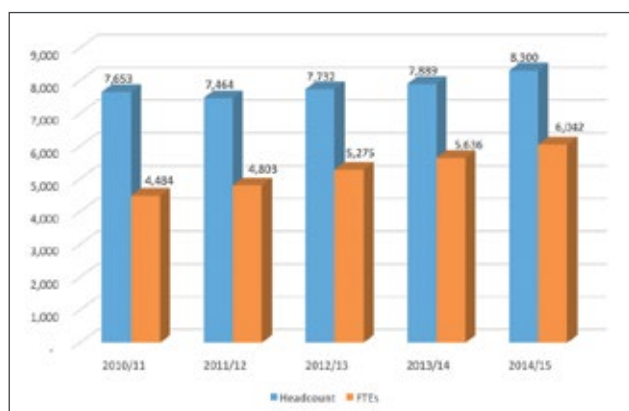
11. Since the last ELIR there has been some restructuring within the Subject Networks, aimed at facilitating greater coherence in their curriculum and planning function. The Computing and Information Technology Subject Network has been amalgamated with Science, Environment

and Rural Resource Management (SERRM) Subject Network, thereby aligning all Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) activity in a single Faculty. The curriculum within the Management School has been incorporated into the Business and Leisure Subject Network, providing a single focus for business, leisure and management curriculum from Higher National (HN) through to postgraduate level, including continuing professional development (CPD) programmes. Teacher education has been relocated into the Humanities and Gaelic Subject Network, to align better with staff expertise (see Figure 1.3).

SENIOR MANAGEMENT

12. University Court appointed two additional Vice Principals in 2013, one for research and one for further education, enabling the postholders to be fully involved in the planning and implementation of the new governance and management arrangements prior to the university formally assuming its new responsibilities as the Regional Strategic Body. These posts provide for greater senior management focus to be given to these areas of activity, and include a representational aspect to ensure that the views of the APs are fully taken into account within the senior management structure. Court further strengthened the senior management structure by extending the roles of the Vice Principal (Academic) to become Deputy Principal and that of the University Secretary to become Chief Operating Officer and Secretary. The Faculty Deans have both taken on an Assistant Principal role reflecting their responsibilities for curriculum across the partnership, in Curriculum Growth and Curriculum Enhancement respectively. They join senior management team (SMT) meetings on a monthly basis to ensure that there is strategic connectedness between their partnership-wide curriculum responsibilities, the Faculties and the executive function of the university (see Figure 1.4). In addition, we have appointed a Dean of Students, leading our student support and engagement teams, and re-established a dedicated Academic Registrar role.

FIGURE 1.5: GROWTH IN STUDENT NUMBERS, 2010-11 TO 2014-15



⁹ Articles of Association (revised 2014)

¹⁰ Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2015-16, Section 3

FIGURE 1.6: GROWTH IN SFC FUNDED NUMBERS, 2009-10 TO 2017-18

	SFC funded (FTE)	Growth	SFC fundable (actual FTE)	Growth	Variance actual to SFC funded
009-10	3512		4160	-	648
2010-11	3525	12	4206	46	681
2011-12	3224	-301	4348	142	1124
2012-13	4505	1282	4858	510	353
2013-14	4698	212	5188	330	490
2014-15	5391	713	5569	381	167
2015-16	5983	553	(c5850-5950)	(c281-381)	(-33 to 133)
2016-17	c6000	17	(c6250)	(c250)	250-
2017-18	c6000	0	(c6600)	(c350)	350-

Note: SFC additionally funded our initial teacher education provision, allocating 20 FTE in 2013-14, 40 FTE in 2014-15, and 68 FTE in 2015-16 for PGDE programmes.

13. Academic Partner Principals and other senior managers play a key role in governance, management and executive structures of the university partnership. This encompasses both representing their own AP and leading on behalf of the partnership, in particular in those areas of transition where we can draw on the strengths of our tertiary nature. For example, the Principal of West Highland College UHI chaired the working group convened by Academic Council to review the university admissions policy. The Principal of Inverness College UHI is seconded on a part-time basis to fulfil a partnership-wide remit as Vice-Principal (Work-based Learning and Employer Engagement).

SENIOR ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

14. In addition to curriculum leaders within APs and the Deans and Subject Network Leaders employed by Executive Office, we have made significant investment in appointing Professors, Chairs and Readers in targeted areas. We have been able to appoint high calibre individuals attracted by our growing reputation, as well as making a number of internal promotions. Leadership posts have been appointed in recent years at professorial level, in areas of strategic importance both to the university and the region as a whole, and these include Chairs in pedagogy, digital health, energy, and engineering. The Chairs have a remit to provide leadership by bringing activities in their discipline areas into closer alignment across the partnership, and to develop research and scholarship. The appointment of a Chair of Pedagogy in 2014 is particularly relevant to our strategic approach to learning and teaching, and the postholder now leads the Learning and Teaching Academy. Leadership posts at Reader level have also been initiated, such as in History. The professorial staff meet regularly with the Principal to discuss and agree relevant aspects of university strategy and development,

with the expectation that they will lead and embed these 'on the ground'.¹¹ Most are employed by Executive Office, but physically based in one of the APs.

ACADEMIC STAFFING AND PROFILE

15. The majority of teaching and learning support staff are employed by the APs, and some by Executive Office. Many teach at both FE and HE level, which enables them to support students effectively in the transition between FE and HE, or from HN to degree. A high proportion of staff hold a teaching qualification, as this is mandatory in the FE sector. However, staff deployment and time allocation can be challenging in the context of the higher class contact hours prevalent in the FE sector, and the different terms and conditions across 14 different employers. We seek to address these differences through consensus building and agreement on partnership-wide policies relating to staffing and staff development, and through initiatives aimed at developing shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, thereby supporting equivalence (see Section 3).

GROWTH IN OUR STUDENT POPULATION

16. Our student numbers have increased significantly since 2011-12 (when we gained University title), from 4803 FTEs (full time equivalent) to 6042 FTEs in 2014-15, an increase of more than 25% (see Figure 1.5). This growth was underpinned by the large increase in SFC funded numbers, which we viewed as a 'vote of confidence' by the Scottish Government through its investment in the university as a driver of socio-economic change in the Highlands and Islands region. Funded numbers rose from 3224 FTEs in 2011-12 to 5391 FTEs in 2014-15. Further FTEs for growth were secured from SFC in both 2014-15 and 2015-16, with a small increase expected for 2016-17 to bring the final funded number up to c6000 (see Figure 1.6).

¹¹ List of Professorial Staff

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

17. We have successfully met the challenge of fulfilling these funded numbers year on year to date, investing in new curriculum development and recruitment activities. Such growth was only achievable, in a relatively short time, on the grounds of our growing reputation as a destination of choice, delivering high quality provision, and meeting the needs of students and stakeholders. Over this period, there have also been notable changes in the student profile, in both demographics and study patterns (discussed in Section 2). However, we continue to operate as a highly accessible university, attracting a high number of mature and part-time students when compared to other Scottish universities.^{12 13 14}

GROWTH IN OUR CURRICULUM

18. Clearly related to the growth in our student numbers, we have extended our curriculum offer across the HE levels of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). We have developed and launched new degrees at undergraduate and postgraduate (PGT) level, responding to market demand and regional workforce

development and skills needs identified in Scottish Government-led Regional Skills Investment Plans and through engagement with employers, industry bodies and other stakeholders. These are focussed on our mission and strategic objectives, and include the development of initial teacher education (primary and secondary), applied sciences and Gaelic studies.^{15 16} We are planning to extend substantially our portfolio in health and care, and will deliver a pre-registration nursing degree from September 2017 (subject to approval). We have approved new types of provision, where these are seen as offering new opportunities to students, and responding to market demand. For example, the Joint Masters Degree in Aquaculture, Environment and Society, in collaboration with universities in France and Greece, successfully attracted Erasmus+ funding, and saw its first intake in September 2015 (see Section 6). We offer a range of shorter courses at SCQF Levels 7-11, providing CPD and vocationally oriented qualifications, such as CertHE in Tourist Guiding.

FIGURE 1.7: SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK DIAGRAM

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications	Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	SQA/HE
12		Doctoral Degree	Professional Accreditation
11	Some SQA qualifications are changing between 2013-2016. See www.sqa.org.uk/news/updates	Masters Degree, Integrated Masters Degree, Joint Academic Diploma, Post-Graduate Certificate	Professional Accreditation SQA 9
10			Professional Accreditation
9		Bachelors / Diploma Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	Technical Accreditation SQA 8
8		Diploma Of Higher Education	Technical Accreditation SQA 8
7	Advanced Higher, Scottish Baccalaureate	Certificate Of Higher Education	Modern Accreditation SQA 7
6	Higher		Modern Accreditation SQA 6
5	National 5, Intermediate 2		Modern Accreditation SQA 5
4	National 4, Intermediate 1	National Certificate	Modern Accreditation SQA 4
3	National 3, Access 3	National Progression Award	SQA 3
2	National 2, Access 2		
1	National 1, Access 1		

SCQF FRAMEWORK (SOURCE WWW.SQA.ORG.UK)



¹² UHI Fact Card 2015
¹³ Student Demographics 2014-15
¹⁴ Student Demographics 2011-14

¹⁵ Undergraduate Prospectus 2015-16
¹⁶ Postgraduate Prospectus 2015-16

19. We continue to offer substantial numbers of programmes leading to awards of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and the university partnership is one of SQA's biggest 'customers' in Scotland. 54% of our students in 2014-15 were enrolled on 'other undergraduate' programmes. Mostly these are Higher National Certificates (HNC) and Higher National Diplomas (HND), although a range of Professional Development Awards (PDA) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) at various SCQF levels are also offered. These vocational awards are valued by students and employers in their own right, but also articulate into degree 'top-up' programmes (with full credit transfer) for those who wish to pursue their studies to a higher level. We have extended the range of PGT provision across both Faculties, often utilising distance and online delivery, meeting needs for career and professional development. In some areas, the degrees draw on highly specialised research, attracting small but growing numbers. Although there may be low cohort numbers initially, it is expected that such programmes will take some time to break even, and their sustainability is closely monitored, as is the quality of the student learning experience.
20. Partnership Planning Forum (PPF) is a key cross-partnership body for HE curriculum portfolio planning and student number planning, and comprises senior managers from all APs and Executive Office. It is responsible for approval of new curriculum proposals, and for overseeing the planned retirement of programmes, in order to support efficient management of the curriculum portfolio. PPF monitors student numbers on behalf of the Higher Education Partnership, Planning and Resources Committee (HEPPRC), recommending admissions targets in the context of the substantial increase in funded numbers noted above, and overseeing activities to meet the recruitment challenge. PPF periodically facilitates events bringing together APs and Subject Network Leaders (SNLs) to determine a strategic and coherent approach to curriculum planning, demonstrably linked to regional employment sector priorities set out in the Skills Investment Plans. The planning events also serve to coordinate proposals to maximise drawdown from major external sources, particularly the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) funding stream on Developing Scotland's Workforce coordinated through SFC. PPF oversees the investment of curriculum development funds, ensuring that these are used optimally to support strategic priorities.¹⁷ PPF has matured since ELIR2, and the membership is able to discuss different perspectives openly, acknowledging their varying local operating environments and challenges. It has an important role in consensus-building to reach decisions on resource allocation acceptable to all members of the partnership and on the basis of risk management. PPF reports to HEPPRC which has ultimate responsibility for confirming student number targets, distributing resource in relation to these and monitoring performance. PPF also has a 'dotted line' link to the Finance Directors Practitioners' Group, which has a role in implementing PPF decisions, and ensuring that PPF's deliberations are undertaken with knowledge of the financial environment.

PARTICIPATION IN NSS AND PRES

21. We have participated in the annual National Student Survey (NSS) since 2013, and took part in the biennial Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) for the second time in 2015, having previously used internally-managed survey tools. This participation indicates a commitment not only to gather data on student satisfaction and experience, but also to be able to benchmark ourselves at a national level, and set appropriate targets. NSS is one of the CPIs in the Strategic Plan, and our target is to achieve 2% above the Scottish average for 'overall satisfaction' by 2019-20 (see Section 5). Both surveys have provided very useful data on our performance within the sector, and improved our ability to analyse areas of comparative strength and weaker aspects of student satisfaction, and triangulate these with other data. As trend data becomes available, we will be able to use NSS and PRES more effectively as indicators to evaluate the impact of quality enhancement initiatives.

RESEARCH DEGREES AND rDAP

22. Our research students are registered with the University of Aberdeen, with whom we have successfully operated an accreditation arrangement for the delivery of research degrees since 2005, with the most recent re-accreditation in 2014.¹⁸ Achieving research degree awarding powers (rDAP) is a key goal for us, as we regard rDAP as a fundamental characteristic of a university in Scotland; and indeed it is a commitment embedded in our constitution. Our application for rDAP was submitted to the Privy Council in December 2014 and the scrutiny panel has been engaging with us during 2015.¹⁹ At the time of writing, it is expected that the panel will submit its report to QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP) in May 2016, and an update will be provided to the ELIR team in due course.

RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (REF) 2014 OUTCOME

23. The 2014 REF results showed excellent performance for us, with over 65% of the research submitted for review achieving the two top grades: internationally excellent (3*) and world leading (4*). We outperformed most of the newer universities not only in Scotland, but in the UK as a whole. Overall, our ratings in the UK-wide league table of "Grade Point Averages" (produced by the Times Higher Education Supplement) showed us rising by 33 places to finish in the top half of the table, ahead of institutions with decades or even centuries of history behind them. Our "Research Impact" was given a particularly positive reception, with 87% being judged either world leading or internationally excellent.
24. The REF outcome provides evidence of recognition of the excellence of our research base and research environment. It has generated significantly increased external interest and engagement, and a range of potential new avenues for collaboration and funding. It will bring benefits in terms of prestige and positioning within the sector, and enhanced funding, both directly from SFC

¹⁷ Curriculum development proposals and use of ESIF funding (PPF)

¹⁸ Report of PGR re-accreditation by University of Aberdeen (2014)

¹⁹ rDAP Application (Dec 2014)

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

and indirectly through our ability to draw down research funds. Our Research Excellence Grant (REG) direct grant award from SFC increased from £1,368,000 in 2014-15 to £1,862,000 in 2015-16 and is anticipated to rise by c. £1m over the next two years in a staged uplift. This additional resource will be used to enhance our PGR student experience both directly and indirectly; by increasing the PGR student cohort and supporting their engagement in the research community through enhanced opportunities for networking and training facilitated by the developing Research Clusters.

MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENTS

25. The university partnership and the APs have undertaken major infrastructure development projects in recent years, again linked to growth in our student numbers and expansion across the range of teaching and research activities. We continue to invest in developments to enhance the learning environment for our students, both in physical accommodation and ICT infrastructure, such our video conferencing capacity, supported by our Learning and Information Services (LIS) team.
26. We have been successful in securing funding for major estates projects including the Inverness Campus at Beechwood, the Alexander Graham Bell Life Sciences Centre at Moray College UHI, the Kilbeg village development at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI, the refurbishment and extension of the Portree Centre at West Highland College UHI, Perth College UHI Academy of Sport and Wellbeing, and expanded premises at Shetland College UHI. We have committed to building student residential accommodation in several locations, in line with areas of greatest need identified through our planned recruitment and growth, with the first residences in Inverness and Fort William opening to students in September 2016, and the second wave in the following year. As well as enhancing the student experience directly, these developments are making a significant contribution to our mission to support the socio-economic development of the Highlands and Islands region.

1.ii

STRATEGIC APPROACH TO ENHANCING LEARNING AND TEACHING

27. Our approach to enhancing learning and teaching has multiple elements; sharing practice, staff development and support, working in partnership with our students and stakeholders, self-evaluation, monitoring and review. These elements are articulated and evidenced through our policies, processes and quality framework, and are of course closely inter-related. Our strategic approach is coordinated and overseen by QAEC; however, actions are taken forward by staff at all levels across the university partnership and in conjunction with the student body.

SENIOR ACADEMIC COMMITTEE STRUCTURES AND REMITS

28. Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) maintains institutional-level oversight of quality

assurance and quality enhancement agendas and priorities, including the strategic approaches to learning and teaching and student experience. The committee was established in 2013 as the university's key strategic body for quality enhancement, an evolution of the former Quality Enhancement Steering Group (QESG). Acting on behalf of Academic Council, it is chaired by the Deputy Principal, with membership comprising senior managers across Executive Office and APs and a student member. QAEC members participate in a wide range of external networks and bodies relating to national quality enhancement agendas, and our institutional lead for the current Transitions Enhancement Theme is also a member. QAEC is therefore the strategic locus for knowledge exchange and sharing practice both internally and externally. QAEC members also form the core of the Quality Monitoring Group (QMG), which has a key role in the annual quality monitoring cycle (see Section 5).

29. The operation of Academic Council was reviewed in 2013 as part of our normal approach to self-evaluation, with specific consideration given to the implications of the Post-16 Education Act for academic governance.²⁰ QAEC was tasked with reviewing the remits of other academic committees and groups ultimately reporting to Academic Council, with a view to improving their effectiveness and efficiency. With Faculty and Subject Network structures well-established, and a range of active practitioner groups progressing learning and teaching agendas, the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (LTQC) was disbanded as it was no longer required as a separate committee.
30. While retaining formal responsibility for quality assurance and quality enhancement matters previously within the LTQC remit, QAEC takes a more strategic institutional role, devolving leadership, policy development and implementation to appropriately empowered groups and individuals. QAEC continues to monitor activities and outputs of these groups and performs a steering and co-ordination role, ensuring efficiencies and connections are made wherever possible. At institutional level, it optimises and promotes the contribution of practitioner groups in sharing practice and decision-making. These groups provide an effective mechanism for drawing together expertise distributed across the partnership and individuals' links to external professional and sectoral networks. Examples include the Student Engagement Group, the placement practitioner group and disability support practitioners.²¹
31. In December 2014, QAEC reviewed its own modus operandi, and reiterated its role in the assurance of academic standards, enhancement of the student experience, and engagement with external sector agendas and requirements, including the national Enhancement Themes.²² It was necessary for QAEC to become more effective in prioritising a number of key enhancement-focussed initiatives each year, assigning these to lead groups or individuals and actively monitoring progress. These are selected in the light of strategic objectives and using a risk based approach informed by

²⁰ Review of Academic Council Sub-committee structures

²¹ List of Practitioner Groups

²² QAEC operation and interests



quality monitoring and internal audit outcomes; recent areas of focus have been library provision and services and student placements.²³ In addition, QAEC took on a more focussed remit in relation to specific objectives in the Strategic Plan, monitoring progress through agreed KPIs, for example on student satisfaction, retention and achievement. It is clearly recognised that there is a wide range of enhancement taking place across the partnership, within each AP and each programme, as evidenced through monitoring and review processes.

LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

32. We are unusual in the UK in being a distributed, tertiary university which makes extensive use of blended learning and delivery methods across our broad curriculum portfolio. At the time of the last ELIR, we articulated our approach in a single “Integrated Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy” document, similar to the approach adopted by many other HEIs with a more traditional structure and pedagogical approach. Goals and objectives were reviewed annually, and the document was last revised in 2012.²⁴ This strategy document did reflect much of the best practice within the university, but our evaluation found that it was not commonly used by staff as a point of reference in their day to day operations, and thus had limited effectiveness and impact. Feedback indicated that staff found it too extensive to be implemented at programme level, and yet not broad enough to resonate with the range of pedagogic, technical and business models in use. For example the learning and teaching strategy for Marine Science (largely face-to-face delivery with extensive practical work) was very different to that adopted by Sustainability Studies

(wholly online delivery). Subsequently we have taken a multi-faceted and evolutionary approach to our learning and teaching strategies, reflecting the diversity of our pedagogical approaches, and aiming to develop a culture of innovation and enhancement which supports the ‘best fit’ for a given context and the needs of our students. As a consequence, we have developed a simple, high level set of precepts and a range of supporting policies and practices. The overall approach incorporates:

1. Overarching precepts – applicable in any of the diverse learning and teaching contexts within the university;
2. Embedded policies – a range of policies and guidance relevant to discrete aspects of learning, teaching and assessment;
3. Evaluation and review processes – of learning and teaching at the level of modules, programmes, and subject areas, leading to enhancements.

33. A draft set of precepts was endorsed by QAEC in 2014, and these will be developed into an accessible and applicable format that captures our learning and teaching philosophy.²⁵ The Chair of Pedagogy and Head of the LTA is leading the further development of the precepts, and consulting on the content and development of a revised Learning and Teaching Strategy, in conjunction with the LTA Forum. The consultation process aims to ensure that the new strategy provides a context for the future development of learning and teaching across the university, and articulates a range of values that resonate within the context of each AP. The new Learning and Teaching Strategy will be launched in academic year 2016-17.

34. Learning and teaching policy statements are embedded in guidance documents that have been developed in consultation with staff and drawing on sector best practice. These are intended to support staff in the context of their own learning and teaching practice.

Examples include:

- Assessment, Feedback and Feedforward
- Blended Learning Standards
- Guidance on video conference use (technical and pedagogical)
- Use of Jabber (web-based video conference software)
- Recording of taught sessions (VC)

.....

Many of these policies and approaches to practice are supported by staff development materials and guidelines which may be available as web-pages or in the form of video guides.^{26 27}

²³ Quality Monitoring – summary of key enhancement areas from reflection on 2013-14
²⁴ Integrated Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2012-2014 (Draft)

²⁵ Revision to Learning and Teaching Strategy – draft precepts
²⁶ Recording of Taught Sessions Policy
²⁷ Blended Learning Standards

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

35. The learning and teaching approach within each module, programme and subject area is evaluated through the normal processes of curriculum approval, and annual and periodic review in the light of the precepts, policies and guidance outlined above. Internal and external reference points and benchmarks, such as KPIs and enhancement themes, provide a framework and focus for evaluation, linked to strategic objectives and priorities. At each level of curriculum, the aim is to encourage and support enhancement of the student learning experience through evidence-based evaluation, action planning and review. While these processes necessarily form part of our quality assurance framework, we have systematically and explicitly structured them to be enhancement-focussed. In new curriculum development, Advisory Groups act as 'critical friends' working with programme teams to share expertise on learning, teaching and assessment approaches, as well as subject expertise. The scope and purpose of subject and service review as peer-led processes enables focus on learning and teaching and the enhancement of the student experience. The effectiveness of the approach may be seen through the action plans drawn up and implemented in response to the recommendations arising from these reviews. Within annual monitoring, the integration of internal enhancement themes facilitates self-evaluation at all levels, with a focus on a specific area, such as assessment feedback or research-teaching linkages. The professional dialogue format as the culmination of the annual monitoring cycle at institutional level has proved increasingly effective in fostering openness, with the emphasis on constructive challenge and debate rather than completing paperwork.

LEARNING AND TEACHING ACADEMY (LTA)

36. The development and implementation of the LTA is one of the case studies supporting the RA, as a key strategic enhancement initiative. The LTA was initially established in 2013, in part to address some of the areas for development identified in ELIR2 relating to supporting staff development and sharing good practice. It is the locus for a range of activities that will drive pedagogic innovation and excellence, and develop pedagogic research as a significant area of research activity within the university. The appointment of a Chair in Pedagogy signals our continuing commitment to leadership in learning and teaching. This academic leadership role also heads the LTA, encompassing some of the responsibilities of the previous Dean of Learning and Teaching (which is no longer maintained as a distinct role).

37. The LTA is intended to become an overarching 'brand' for a team dedicated to enhancing the student learning experience and which includes individuals and teams working on; professional development, learning materials and curriculum development, the measurement of impact, learning and teaching policy development and pedagogic research. It is focused on ensuring we can immerse our learners in creative and engaging educational experiences, whether they are on campus or online, and to extend our capacity and reputation for innovative educational practice and provision. It is also intended to support and further embed the changes in organisational culture instigated through the C21C project (see Section 3). Key to the work of the LTA is the upskilling of staff and development of learning and teaching in ways that exemplify current and emerging best practice, and which



encapsulate the pedagogic vision and values of the Strategic Plan. Professional recognition of excellence in learning and teaching will be co-ordinated through the LTA, with an initial priority in this area being to substantially increase the number of staff who are recognised at an appropriate level of Fellowship by the Higher Education Academy.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

38. We seek to engage students effectively in enhancement of learning and teaching, and we have established multiple mechanisms and processes aimed at ensuring the student voice is embedded within quality assurance and quality enhancement activities (see Section 2). These include formal feedback opportunities through NSS which provides national benchmarking data, as well as other surveys and channels such as the Red Button. We have included additional questions within NSS on learning materials and delivery, to enable us to evaluate impact in terms of student satisfaction trends. A standard online module evaluation survey focussed on learning and teaching has been developed and rolled out, available to all modules from 2015-16 onwards. The survey tool, through the pilot phase, is already providing a rich source of data to support evaluation of planned enhancements, and for internal benchmarking.
39. Student input is a key element in curriculum approval and review activities. In subject and student support service review, the panel meets with student groups to hear views on their learning experience directly, and there is also a student member on the panel. Where feasible, approval and reapproval panels also meet with student groups. We aim to include student representatives on committees and working groups at all levels, including those which inform and direct strategic direction in learning and teaching. However, it is often through the class representative structure or staff/student liaison groups that students feel their input is most effective, where the feedback loop is relatively quick and direct and enables demonstrable changes to be made. The Subject Network Student Officers (SNSOs) have made additional contribution in their project reports, on learning and teaching topics such as assessment, online learning and induction.
40. Successive Student Partnership Agreements have included a learning and teaching theme for joint working, enabling the student voice to determine the specific focus. In 2013, there was a specific work strand relating to assessment and feedback, proactively aligning with the development of our Assessment, Feedback and Feedforward Policy. The current iteration of the SPA also has a learning and teaching work strand, with specific activities being defined at the time of writing.

ENGAGEMENT WITH ENHANCEMENT THEMES

41. We actively engage with the national Enhancement Themes and, in common with the Scottish sector as a whole, value the focus and development of policy and practice which this element of the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework facilitates. In particular, we

have found the move to 3-year Themes helpful, as the longer timeframe enables a greater impact, with more opportunity to plan, implement, embed and evaluate initiatives. While QAEC is the locus for institutional level planning and engagement with each Theme, there is opportunity for practitioners at all levels to contribute, and to draw on the Theme's published resources to enhance their current practice (see Section 3). At an institutional level, we are in a position to contribute as much to the Enhancement Themes as we learn from practice elsewhere in the sector, reflecting on the specific features of our university and how we can and have applied and adapted practice to our context.

42. We have aligned our Enhancement Themes work with institutional priorities, such as working with schools to support local school-leavers in their transition to university study, and articulation from HNC/D to degree programmes. We have adopted the Transitions Theme as one of our internal enhancement themes within annual monitoring from 2014-15 (see Section 5), as well as project activities. This prompts staff across all taught provision to reflect on the Enhancement Theme within their own teaching and subject area, supporting identification of existing good practice, and opportunities for enhancement. There will be a valuable opportunity for further systematic analysis of this data, and wider sharing and promotion both internally and externally.

ROLE OF FACULTIES AND SUBJECT NETWORKS

43. Faculties and Subject Networks play a key role in enhancing learning and teaching, particularly in supporting and developing academic teams at different locations, and sharing good practice, and the Faculty plans are explicitly aligned with institutional strategic objectives.²⁸ They are responsible for processes of curriculum development, approval and review through which we share practice on learning, teaching and assessment approaches, as well as subject-specific expertise. Periodic subject reviews are explicitly enhancement-focussed, and support teams by making recommendations and prioritising actions. Faculties and Subject Networks organise a range of opportunities for networking, through formal committee structures and conferences and other events. Curriculum development funding, coordinated and prioritised through the Faculties, may be used specifically for learning and teaching approaches and practices in specific subject areas.²⁹ We continue to invest in academic leadership at the level of the Subject Network through leadership development programmes for the Subject Network Leaders, and supporting peer networking through residential events.

PRACTITIONER GROUPS

44. We benefit from a number of well-established practitioner groups, outwith Faculty structures and discipline areas, at both an operational and strategic level. Operational practitioner groups exist in areas relating to learning and teaching, such as libraries, placements and disability support.³⁰ These groups facilitate sharing good practice, and the delivery of

²⁸ Faculty of Science Health and Engineering Faculty Plan

²⁹ Curriculum development proposals and use of ESIF funding (PPF)

³⁰ List of Practitioner Groups

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

training or briefing in operational changes, and also act as consultative bodies and 'critical friends'. By their nature, most of the practitioner groups include individuals who work across the FE/HE boundary, and are therefore able to draw on practice and approaches in both sectors, particularly in relation to student support. The Quality Forum comprises quality representatives from all APs and Executive Office, and has an explicit tertiary remit, reporting to both the Further Education Regional Board (FERB) and QAEC. The Research Practitioners Group considers matters relating to research-teaching linkages. In some instances, QAEC has proactively fostered the establishment of such groups, including the Libraries Group and Placement Practitioners Group, recognising the importance of their work in progressing enhancement initiatives. Although there is not a formal committee reporting line, QAEC receives reports and outputs from such groups (by agreement) to assure itself of effective progress.

MAJOR PROJECTS

45. We undertake significant initiatives from time to time to progress our strategic objectives in relation to learning and teaching, sustainable and efficient curriculum and enhancing the student experience, whether in curriculum review, opening up curriculum to new markets, or responding to external drivers. Such initiatives are directly empowered from the outset at the level of Academic Council and/or HEP/PRC. It has been found effective to formalise such initiatives under the direction of Project Boards, with cross-partnership chairing and membership to ensure effective coordination over complex work strands and buy-in from all stakeholders. The Project Board function is to carefully manage the financial, operational and/or reputational risks associated with new developments or significant change without stifling innovation. As the project achieves its initial objectives and moves into the implementation and evaluation phase, the Project Board is formally wound up. Often the consultation and ongoing development functions are continued in the guise of a Steering Group involving practitioners working with executive staff. Examples of this strategic approach include C21C, HN Project Board, UHI Direct, and the online module enrolment and selection project, discussed in more detail in later sections.

IMPROVED USE OF DATA

46. We have continued to develop our use of management information available through the student records system (SITS) to support effective management of students and monitoring and review processes. A range of Core Reports is available through the staff portal, and their use has been embedded into annual monitoring at all levels. At the direction of QAEC, the Student Data Reporting Group has undertaken a review of the reporting functionality of the student records system to streamline KPI reporting, and enable more effective monitoring. A standard minimum dataset of KPIs relating to retention, progression, achievement and student population profile (including equalities data), has been

agreed for inclusion in annual monitoring SEDs. A KPI report format with improved visual presentation has been developed, displaying three-year trend data to support staff in evaluating the impact of enhancement initiatives (see Section 5). We have also developed SITS to enable more administrative processes to be automated and completed online via the Student Portal, thereby providing a more efficient service to students. These include online enrolment, module selection, and enrolling students on to relevant areas of the VLE.

47. At institutional level, improved data management and reporting functionality means that datasets from NSS and PRES, and module evaluations may be more effectively analysed and triangulated with KPI data to inform enhancement activity and projects. 'Dashboard' style reports are also available to facilitate live monitoring of, for example, applications and enrolments against agreed targets. Management information is used at a high level to identify strategic action. For example, the student number taskforce established in 2014, led by the Assistant Principal for Curriculum Growth, scrutinised detailed management information to identify specific workstreams aimed at maximising student recruitment in order to meet our growth targets.

1.iii

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES

48. Since ELIR2, we have seen a period of rapid and significant change within the university, in our academic leadership and governance, constitution and student profile. As a reflective institution, we have kept our approach to implementation of institutional strategies under review in the light of changing circumstances, and seek to improve our effectiveness while maintaining focus on the student experience and overall institutional mission. We have revised and strengthened our senior management team, and clarified leadership responsibilities within our governance structure, as planned strategic developments to underpin the ongoing evolution of the university partnership as it moves into its next phase.

49. The Strategic Plan provides a clear and renewed statement of our strategic objectives and how we will measure progress towards these during the life of the plan. Monitoring and reporting on strategic objectives will be focussed on a small number of CPIs, and enable improved benchmarking using external reference points and national measures such as the NSS and Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) surveys. The high-level objectives are supported by more detailed operational planning, with identified accountable individuals and performance indicators. During the early stages of the Strategic Plan, we are measuring our performance using the measures outlined in the regional outcome agreement, as reported and monitored through Court.

50. Academic leadership and responsibilities have evolved to take forward strategic objectives, both in specific disciplines and pan-institutional areas. Named individuals have lead responsibility for driving change, and this approach brings improved accountability. However, we recognise the challenges around effective communications and awareness-raising, particularly in a dispersed organisation, and we are seeking to address this through engaging staff as widely as possible in areas directly related to their practice, for example through practitioner groups and project boards. Major change initiatives and innovations, such as C21C and the current project on HN management processes, are scoped and aligned to strategic objectives, and include an explicit evaluation and reporting phase through the project board to enhance visibility of their impact and contribution.
51. Practitioner groups play an essential role in the development and implementation of strategies which are owned by the partnership, and allow local variation and implementation where desirable. Practitioner groups are effective in bringing together expertise across the partnership, and they have strengths in sharing good practice, providing support in the form of accessible guidance materials and staff development opportunities. We recognise that sometimes their work does not have high enough visibility and impact, and we are seeking to address this by ensuring that their output and recommendations are considered through the committee structure, supported by a senior management 'champion', and that they formalise their activities through effective action planning and review.
52. We have revised our academic committee structure to improve effective decision-making and to locate accountability at the appropriate level; committee remits and memberships have been reviewed to achieve this. Through QAEC, there is clearer strategic oversight and direction by prioritisation of a limited number of key enhancement initiatives and projects, informed by the outcomes of monitoring and review processes. This means that our efforts can be focussed on those areas which will have the most positive impact on student experience, recognising that it is counter-productive to try to take forward multiple initiatives at the same time.
53. The shift of emphasis from quality assurance to quality enhancement within quality monitoring processes and focus continues to embed within the institutional culture, reflecting the maturation of the university. This is facilitated by better data analysis and reporting capacity, providing a reliable evidence base for self-evaluation (see Section 5). As staff become more confident in accessing and using the available data, they are able to use KPIs more effectively to drive enhancement, through innovation and evaluation. The more structured action planning and review cycle enables teams at all levels to prioritise key areas linked to Subject Network, Faculty and institutional aims and objectives. The governance changes have also supported a growing openness and transparency across the partnership, in sharing outcomes from quality monitoring and self-evaluation, leading to a more informed and realistic appraisal of our progress towards strategic objectives.



ENHANCING THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

2.i
COMPOSITION AND KEY TRENDS IN THE STUDENT POPULATION

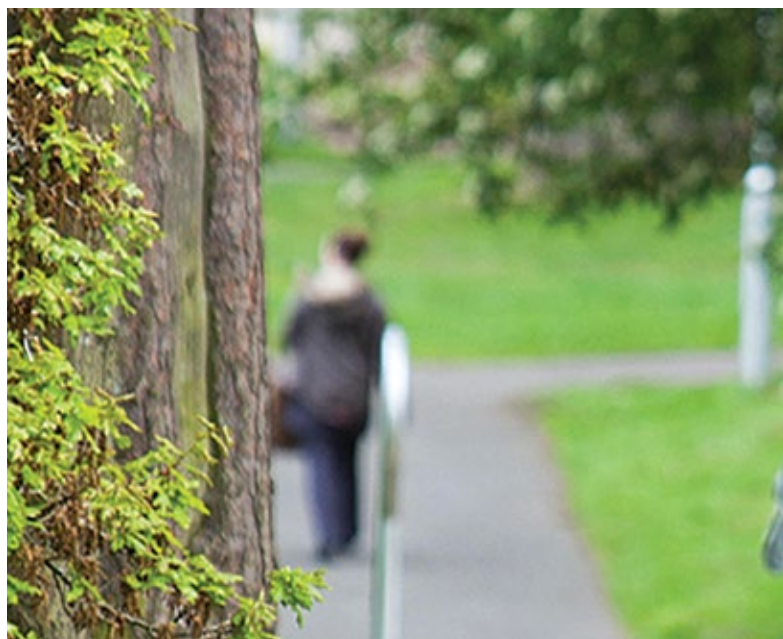
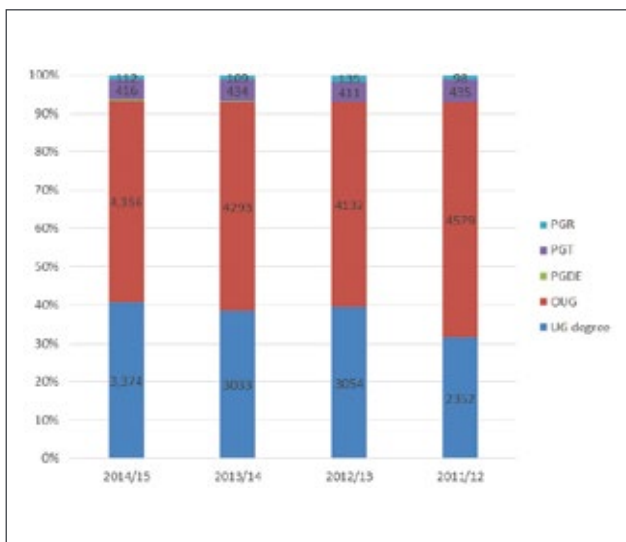
54. We are a strongly regional university, with the majority of our students (74%) coming from within our immediate catchment area, reflecting the essential role that the university as a whole, and the APs individually, play in the economic and social structure of the Highlands and Islands region. A further 19% are from the rest of Scotland. We are committed to widening access, and continue to attract a high proportion of mature and part-time students when compared to other Scottish universities. To date, we have operated largely as a 'recruiting' rather than a 'selecting' university, in the light of our regional mission, and in order to fulfil the growth targets set out by Court and from Scottish Government. Since ELIR2, as well as overall growth, the student profile has been changing, in both demographics and study patterns. A summary of our student profile and demographics is appended.^{31 32}

55. There has been a significant increase in the student population, with most growth (in absolute numbers) at Perth College UHI. However, some of the smaller APs, notably West Highland College UHI and SAMS UHI, have also seen proportionately large increases over this period. The proportion of full-time students has shifted over the same period, from 52% full-time in 2011-12 to 62% in 2014-15. With more students on campus, and for longer, these factors have put pressure on both teaching and residential accommodation. We have invested in new-build student residences in areas of highest demand and where there is planned growth, but there is a need to prioritise spaces for students travelling to the region as these will open on a phased basis. New buildings have been opened in many locations to provide expanded

high quality teaching accommodation, but there has inevitably been some disruption related to temporary accommodation and transferral arrangements, which have been reflected in the issues raised by students via feedback channels.

56. Over 90% of our students are undergraduate, with around 5% PGT, and under 2% PGR; these proportions have remained fairly static. There is an approximate 50:50 split between the two Faculties for UG provision, with Business and Leisure and Applied Life Studies forming the largest Subject Networks. More than half of our undergraduate students are studying 'other undergraduate' programmes, primarily HNC/Ds but also CPD and other professional / vocational awards. However, while we have maintained student numbers on 'other undergraduate' programmes they are decreasing as a proportion of our student population (from 61% in 2011-12 to 52% in 2014-15), and there are several factors contributing to this. We have changed our curriculum portfolio, and launched several degree programmes in new disciplines, and have converted some "2+2" programmes to full degrees or "1+3" structures. In the current economic and employment climate, some students, who may previously have exited having successfully achieved their HNC/D, are choosing to progress to degree level study. Moving from HN to degree level study is a key transition for many of our students, and one which we continue to support proactively through programme structures and curriculum design and delivery, study skills support, and bridging programmes and articulation arrangements. We are now seeing a substantially larger number of students successfully achieving Honours degrees (340 in 2015) and taught Masters degrees (74 in 2015).

FIGURE 2.1: STUDENT POPULATION BY LEVEL OF STUDY (HEADCOUNT)



³¹ Student Demographics 2014-15

³² Student Demographics 2011-14

57. 93% of our students are from Scotland, and 74% from our regional catchment area. The proportion of our students under the age of 25 has increased to 48%, which reflects our growing reputation and attractiveness to this age group, including school leavers, as a destination of choice. The shift from part-time to full-time study mirrors national trends, with 62% of our students studying full-time in 2014-15. The expectations and needs of this group of younger, full-time students tend more towards those of a traditional campus-based university, both in terms of social experience and pedagogic approaches, and we seek to provide full information about the learning experience on a given programme at a given location, particularly with regard to our use of VLE and VC delivery.
58. We have small numbers of international students across all levels of study, and these have seen a small overall decrease in recent years, due to changes in the external environment and difficulties in obtaining study visas, a situation affecting the UK HE sector as a whole. While we have identified strategic objectives to increase international student numbers, it is anticipated that these will largely be through distance learning programmes, drawing on our existing expertise in this area, rather than seeking to attract large numbers to study in Scotland, given the limitations on our physical accommodation. In 2014-15, 52 students based in China enrolled on our first trans-national (TNE) programmes in Engineering, and numbers have increased to 78 in 2015-16.
59. The percentage of students declaring a disability has increased from 10% in 2011-12 to 15% in 2014-15, with 5% of those indicating dyslexia/other learning disability. We have strengthened our disability support services over recent years, with the appointment of a disability support officer, and an active practitioners group. We have well-established arrangements for the assessment of, and support for, individuals' specific needs through Personal Learning Support Plans, and feedback from students is very positive about the support they receive.
60. We have achieved significant improvement in our retention rates overall since ELIR2, reflecting our efforts both in enhancing the student experience, and in improving data integrity and reporting. Over the last three years we have continued to achieve improvement in retention of our full-time degree students, and within some student groups we perform better than the Scottish average (benchmark). However, for the 2013-14 dataset, the measure of non-continuation following year of entry was worse than benchmark across all degree entrants (11.4% compared to benchmark of 10.9%), which was also less positive than the previous year. For mature entrants within that group, the University achieved slightly better than the benchmark. For part-time students the non-continuation rates are lower than benchmark. For full-time 'other undergraduate' students we perform better than benchmark for both young and mature entrants, achieving overall 15.4% compared to benchmark of 16.1%. Again, though, this was less positive than the previous year. There are of course multiple factors affecting the headline statistics, including the economic and employment context and the make-up of our student population in comparison to other HEIs. We will continue to monitor these indicators both at institutional level, particularly for part-time students, and through drilling down at programme level through annual monitoring. We continue to develop and implement strategies at programme and institutional level that will contribute to improved student retention, progression and achievement. These include changes to academic support and learning and teaching practices, such as the enhancements to the PAT role outlined below.



ENHANCING THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

2.ii SUPPORTING EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE STUDENT POPULATION

INTRODUCTION

61. Our approach to equality and diversity needs to be regional as well as local in perspective and our published equality outcomes have to take account of very different contexts: from city-based campuses to remote, rural learning centres and from students in large classes to individuals studying online. We have established an Equality Outcomes Group to support the implementation of our policies and strategies on equality and diversity relating to students, curriculum and staff, which are monitored by Court. In addition, the Equalities Practitioner Network brings together staff across the partnership with an interest in, or responsibility, for equality and diversity in a more informal forum, aimed at information sharing and awareness raising.
62. We have appointed an Equality Outcomes Adviser to work on a cross-partnership basis and to refine the equality outcomes originally published in 2013 at strategic regional level. Immediate priorities were to complete the required Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming reports and to concentrate on building internal infrastructure that supported the development of, and shared practice and resources about, equalities and diversity. These are now in place and recent outputs have included an updated Equality Charter, and the drafting of a set of regional equality outcomes. An online equality impact assessment resource is now available to all staff through the VLE, and has been showcased through a highly successful development event. The Equality groups now have to focus on extending and measuring the impact of their work on the curriculum and the student experience. At the time of writing, we have applied for a place on the HEA's Embedding Equality and Diversity in the Curriculum strategic enhancement programme and have received positive indications about our chances of being included. This will assist us in re-examining the management, design and delivery of learning, teaching and assessment so as to incorporate (rather than add on) equality and diversity and build on the foundations of our recent equalities work.

The university partnership was recognised in a recent Equality Challenge Unit report summarising the performance of Scottish colleges and higher education institutions in fulfilling the Scottish equality duties reporting requirements for April 2015. The recognitions were for:

- Perth College UHI – for detailed and evidence-based outcomes reporting
- Executive Office – for its reporting on progress made in coordinating and aligning the equality work of academic partners
- Shetland College UHI – for its unique collaborative approach to reporting

63. Widening access is fundamental to our mission, and is mainstreamed within existing work, but we are also proactive in how we can support under-represented groups. Targeted interventions are utilised, but on the basis of integrating targeted student groups. An example is a series of support emails that are sent each year to SIMD20 students, highlighting support initiatives. We continue to refine our approach to the collection and analysis of student protected characteristics data in order to enhance student experience.

FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM

64. The nature of our student population has guided the development of our learning and teaching approach. It is geographically dispersed, with many students in remote and rural locations, and we continue to have large minorities of part-time and mature students, with constraints on attendance. Taken together, these characteristics mean that our curriculum needs to be flexible in location and mode of delivery.

BLENDED LEARNING

65. We have adopted the 'blended learning' approach to delivering our curriculum, with the 'blend' varying from fully online to completely face-to-face, making use of video-conference (VC) and virtual learning environments (VLE) as appropriate. The roll-out of this approach was systematically coordinated through the Curriculum for the 21st Century (C21C) project, which was established as we prepared for a phase of significant growth in student numbers. It aimed to make as much of the curriculum available in as many locations as was academically and financially sustainable, and promote equivalence of academic support for all students. Both VC and VLE will continue to be key in our use of technology to support curriculum delivery, and will be addressed within the development of the revised Learning and Teaching Strategy.
66. We have for many years been a leader in the use of VC for curriculum delivery, using this technology to support synchronous learning sessions to connect lecturers and students across multiple sites. A recording function now allows students to access lectures at a time convenient to them, optimising flexibility for students and enabling staff to work more effectively with student groups, e.g. through more tutorial sessions. VC use has been further enhanced with the addition of Cisco Jabber technology linked into the main VC system, allowing students to access their lectures and tutorials from their own desktop. There are however some downsides to this flexibility which have been reflected in dialogue with staff, students and External Examiners. These relate to the impact on student experience when a pedagogy, based on the premise of students in a group situation, is experienced in isolation, even though this may be through the student's own choice or personal circumstances. It is also clear that, in the light of recent growth in student numbers and teaching sessions, we are nearing capacity within the VC system, and this has led to issues being raised via the Red Button. We are revising the principles and protocols

for VC timetabling and allocation of network resources to ensure that the system is used efficiently and to maintain its reliability.

67. We make extensive use of our VLE (Blackboard), which is an essential tool for curriculum delivery and staff/student communications for many of our programmes, but particularly for those with dispersed student cohorts and delivered by staff based in different APs. We have made significant improvements in integration between Blackboard and SITS. Every course and module has a 'space' in Blackboard, and SITS enrolment now gives students automatic access to relevant areas, with more efficient administration. Responding to the increased demand for mobile device access, we have purchased Blackboard Mobile which provides content accessibility and also allows us to 'push' information to students, such as calendar and module/course information. We have integrated our streaming server (Medial) with Blackboard, which ensures that material is accessible via all systems and can be delivered in different qualities to match students' connection speed. Medial has excellent accessibility features, allowing transcripts and resource files to be associated with videos, as well as live lecture streaming, and addresses some elements of bandwidth problems. We are also investing in development of a podcasting service which can generate audio files from text files, enhancing accessibility for all our students.

68. We have maintained a 99.7% 'up time' for the VLE, and there is a robust process for dealing with problems, but we can still experience some difficulties due to integration with multiple technologies, such as the Blackboard/Turnitin plugin failure which was experienced by most HEIs running it. We seek to communicate with students about network or individual problems via the Helpdesk service as effectively as possible, as well as updating on new developments. This is an area we keep under ongoing review, in the light of the criticality of access to network services to the student experience.



PROGRAMME STRUCTURES

69. In parallel with the developments to enhance the flexibility and quality of delivery and support we have continued our development of flexible and sometimes innovative approaches to programme structure. The use of SQA HN awards as elements of degree programmes has been useful as a developmental process for students and staff alike. Although we have increasingly moved to full four year degrees, we have deliberately retained the so-called "1+2" (HNC plus 2 years degree study) or "2+1" (HND plus 1 year degree study) structures. These structures serve to provide some students with a more graduated change in learning style as well as facilitating inward articulation from other institutions.

FIGURE 2.2: "1+3" PROGRAMME STRUCTURE IN AIRCRAFT ENGINEERING

Honours	SCQF level 10	Aircraft Engineering Design BEngH
Degree	SCQF level 9	Aircraft Engineering BEng
HND	SCQF level 8	Aircraft Engineering HND
HNC	SCQF level 7	Aircraft Engineering HNC

FIGURE 2.3: "2+1" PROGRAMME STRUCTURE IN FORESTRY

Degree	SCQF level 9	Sustainable Forest Management BSc
HND	SCQF level 8	Forestry HND Arboriculture and Urban Forestry HND
HNC	SCQF level 7	Forestry HNC Arboriculture and Urban Forestry HNC

ENHANCING THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

70. A recent innovation in programme design is the accelerated degree in geography, which was launched in 2015-16. The accelerated structure will enable students to achieve an honours degree over a shorter period (three years), which will be attractive to those seeking to shorten their studies for financial or other reasons. This model was initially explored for delivery in England, under the brand of UHI Direct, working in partnership with FE colleges to provide progression opportunities to HE for students who wish to remain in their local area. It enables us to capitalise on our expertise in blended learning and high quality online learning materials, while also generating an alternative income stream through tuition fees. Market analysis and feedback from the pilot college in England indicated that there was not sufficient demand to launch the first programme there for September 2015 as initially planned, and we are assessing whether to do so next year. However, the pedagogical model is felt to be sound, and discussions are ongoing with other colleges; there is also potential to extend to locations outwith the UK. The UHI Direct Project Board decided that it would be prudent to run the first accelerated programme within our region in the first instance to prove the concept before seeking wider exploitation. The first intake of students on the accelerated degree in geography began their studies in September 2015, based on the new Inverness Campus, and are providing extremely positive feedback on their learning experience.

WIDENING ACCESS

71. Our university was established to bring higher education to the communities of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, including those in remote and rural areas. Our mission relates not only to these regions, but to all people within these communities and beyond who choose to study with us. Two out of the three themes within the Strategic Plan are very relevant to widening access, these being 'our students' and 'the university for all of our region'. Within these themes we have set specific targets in relation to priority groups and progression from FE to HE, and progress towards these targets is monitored by Court through relevant KPIs.

72. We are committed to widening access and academic recruitment based on merit, and achieving a fair balance of entrants to higher education. Our work in this area is embedded within mainstream practice and summarised in the Widening Access Framework and we monitor student populations at programme level on an annual basis.³³ With reference to protected characteristic groups, we seek to achieve a student population that is representative of our region. We will be working with the Equality Challenge Unit in 2016 on the 'Attracting diversity: equality in student recruitment in Scottish HEIs' project, which will help us to identify under-representation and develop positive action initiatives. Support will be focused on ensuring that student recruitment processes are inclusive of groups sharing a protected characteristic, and can better target any groups that are under-represented.

ADMISSIONS

73. We recognise that admissions policy and practice are vital aspects of widening access, and we are committed to recruitment and selection processes that are fair, non-discriminatory and open. We undertook a review of admissions during 2013, with a view to benchmarking against sector practice and aligning with the UK Code of Practice, which led to revised policy, processes and regulations.³⁴ We will continue to monitor effectiveness and consistency through analysis of applications and enrolment data. Further recommendations are being taken forward to support our aims in widening access, as it is acknowledged that overcoming historic disadvantage requires more than simply ensuring fairness. We have therefore established a working group on contextualised admissions during 2015-16, which will develop training and support for academic decision makers.

ACCESS ROUTES AND ARTICULATION

74. Most of our programmes have a range of access routes, as well as the standard entry qualifications of Scottish Highers or A-levels, including FE qualifications, and many of our students indicate an FE qualification as their highest qualification on entry. For people who have been away from study for some time, or don't have the standard entry requirements, we offer a range of specific Access to HE courses, to boost learner confidence, and to provide the necessary skills to study successfully at HE level and underpinning subject knowledge. The number of students entering via Access to HE courses is small but growing (25 in 2014-15).

75. We welcome applicants with a HNC or HND, and normally accept full credit transfer for direct entry to year 2 or 3 of a degree programme. While we are not within an SFC-funded regional articulation hub, we seek to ensure that students have the best range of progression options available to them. A new articulation agreement was signed with Aberdeen College (now North East Scotland College (NESCol)) in 2011.³⁵ Since then we have worked to increase the number of course links available, and have cooperated with NESCol to promote these opportunities to their students. The agreement currently includes 18 degree courses, and is reviewed annually to ensure that all possible articulation routes are included. Since the agreement was signed, the number of students articulating from NESCol has increased from 14 in 2011-12 to 33 in 2014-15. While the numbers are modest, they are healthy given that the majority of NESCol students are likely to continue study in Aberdeen on completion of their college course. We recognise that articulating students require enhanced support and encourage these students to make use of student and study support services we provide. The success of the NESCol agreement has prompted us to enter into a similar agreement in 2015 with Dundee and Angus College.

76. We recently became a university partner of SWAP East (Scottish Wider Access Programme), a consortium of FE colleges and universities. Its aims are to promote access to higher education for adult learners who have

³³ *Wider Access Framework (June 2015)*

³⁴ *Review of Admissions Policy – Report to Academic Council*

³⁵ *Articulation Agreement with North East Scotland College*

been out of education for some time, who have few or no formal qualifications, or who come from traditionally under-represented groups. Students who successfully complete their SWAP access course are able to enrol on to our HN or degree courses via specified progression routes.³⁶ 2015-16 will be the first year of our courses being made available to SWAP students, and we hope to see a positive uptake from these.

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

77. We encourage applications from prospective students who may not have standard entry qualifications and support the principle of recognising prior learning, whether certificated or experiential, so that students do not need to repeat learning they have already achieved. Applicants and programme teams are encouraged to promote and use the RPL process widely and there are now more than 400 RPL applications each academic year, using prior formal and informal learning to gain academic credit towards university awards. The process is managed through an RPL Panel which operates with delegated authority from the Exam Board.

SCHOOL LIAISON

78. Our school liaison work is focused on raising aspirations, especially amongst priority groups who are known to be less likely to be progressing to HE, informed by the targets set out within the Strategic Plan and the FE and HE outcome agreements. We work closely with ASPIRENorth, a programme within the national Schools for Higher Education Programme, which encourages young people to make more positive and better informed decisions about their post-school educational choices within and beyond our region. Our Regional Schools Group (reporting ultimately to FERB) aims to develop and oversee the delivery of a partnership-wide strategy for increasing the further and higher education curriculum offered to, and utilised by, schools and school pupils within our region, using delivery models appropriate to local needs. A portfolio of new modules, or existing curriculum made more accessible or delivered in collaboration with schools, is being piloted in several areas, and we are evaluating success in terms of uptake and achievement. However, we do not yet have robust data on progression rates, and are developing reporting tools for this.

2.iii ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN THEIR LEARNING

79. As an institution, we face unusual challenges in student engagement due to our dispersed structure and blended learning delivery model. Nevertheless, the theme of 'our students' is central within the Strategic Plan, and we are proactively seeking ways to overcome these challenges, working in partnership with the student body as outlined below. We were represented on the Advisory Group for the Quality Code chapter on Student Engagement, and it was valuable to be able to input to the indicators about how students in a non-traditional institution can be effectively engaged. Following publication we conducted an audit of our existing practice and found that there were many

areas in which we exceeded the precepts (see AIS). We recognise that there are always areas which can be improved, however, and are not complacent about the challenges we face.

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION (HISA)

80. The Scottish Government and the SFC recognised the uniqueness of these challenges and awarded us funding to establish a new framework for student representation within the Highlands and Islands region, meeting the needs of both FE and HE learners. The project and its outcomes, and the establishment of the Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA) forms one of the case studies supporting the RA. HISA replaces the former UHI Students' Association (UHISA), which was voluntarily dissolved in spring 2015. The HISA President meets with the Vice-Chancellor monthly focussing on high level issues, and also meets with the Deputy Principal to progress plans at an executive level and maintain effective ongoing communications. These regular meetings are felt to be highly valuable for both the university and HISA in building an effective partnership, and it is anticipated that the Association Director (a permanent post employed by HISA), will join the meetings in 2016.

STUDENT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

81. We were the first institution in Scotland to adopt the Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) in 2013, a formal agreement between the university and the students' association, which sets out how students and staff will work together to improve the student experience, and is renewed annually. The SPA includes the general arrangements for engagement and partnership working, and makes provision for three areas to be prioritised for development each year. To date, topics have included engagement, integration, assessment, representation and communication.³⁷

The university and HISA have established a SPA for 2015-16, signalling their joint commitment to the workstreams below:

- Partnership Representation
- Enhancing Learning and Teaching
- Clubs and Societies



³⁶ SWAP East Agreement
³⁷ Student Partnership Agreement 2015-16

ENHANCING THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

82. We have been active in pursuing the three agreed SPA workstreams in 2015-16, providing extensive support to HISA in its first year of operation including the recruitment and training of its first permanent staff, and the election of Depute Presidents at the APs. The Student Engagement Group has also assisted by providing HISA with class rep lists, and reviewing the range of available student surveys and feedback opportunities. In the coming year we hope that HISA's staff and structures will be able to encourage greater student engagement, and enable the Student Development Officer to undertake a greater range of engagement activities in semester 2. We are working with HISA to renew the SPA for 2016, with an emphasis on developing the tertiary nature of the agreement to include all our students and we have sought initial support and advice from sparqs (student partnerships in quality Scotland) in preparation. We will also review whether to incorporate our earlier Student Charter in the SPA.³⁸

STUDENT REPRESENTATION ON COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

83. University Court and all the academic committees of the university have student membership, as do relevant AP committees. There are also 'class reps' operating at a more local level through programme committees or staff/student liaison groups. Student representation continues to be an extremely valuable aspect of our operations but, like many HEIs, there is patchy take-up, particularly at the level of Faculty Board and Subject Network Committee. This is something we are trying to improve using different approaches tailored to the particular circumstances: for example, in 2014-15 Lews Castle College UHI asked the class reps for volunteers for several college committees, with two people for each committee. This has worked well for some committees: the students felt less intimidated as they had a fellow student present and there was an improved student voice heard in the committees across the college. In Shetland College UHI a poster campaign emphasised the employability advantages of committee work. The Student Engagement Group acts as a useful forum for the dissemination of such approaches.

84. Student feedback indicated that more could be done to ensure that committee agendas and chairing approaches allow for the student voice and that student members are fully briefed on the remit of the committee. To support this, the Student Engagement Group developed a 'students on committees' protocol in 2013 as an induction resource for students, explaining what their role is, the terminology and process employed at meetings, and other information and support available to make a student representative feel able to contribute effectively.³⁹ As outlined above, the workstream in the SPA on student representation is intended to bring about further improvements in this area.

85. The Student Support team offers training to students who are taking part in subject and service reviews, and occasionally supports programme-specific focus groups, as well as taking part in induction and training for new student representatives each year. Training for students on committees is offered as and when required, and an

induction template for student committee members, which can be customised for specific committees, is provided. The team will be working with sparqs in 2015-16 to develop generic training for students wishing to take up representational roles, especially distance learning students who may not be able to take advantage of current training opportunities. It is anticipated that this training will further support student engagement, working in partnership with HISA.

86. sparqs continues to be an important partner in our efforts to enhance student engagement. Not only have they provided extensive class representative training to both FE and HE students, but they have been involved at the instigation of, and throughout, the regional student representation project which has created HISA. The Dean of Students is chair of the sparqs University Advisory Group and a member of their national Steering Committee, and thus maintains a close relationship with them and is able to draw on their support and expertise as required.

SUBJECT NETWORK OFFICERS (SNOs)

87. Since ELIR2, we continued to work in conjunction with the previous students' association (UHISA) to appoint Subject Network Student Officers (SNSOs), and review and refine their remit. These paid roles were intended to facilitate student engagement with strategic management and governance processes through the Subject Networks, and strengthen communications between UHISA, the student body, and university structures. These positions consistently attracted high calibre students who worked alongside the relevant SNL, whose engagement was vital in providing an induction and ongoing support in what could be a complex environment. Each of the SNSOs produced a report on an aspect of the student experience within that Subject Network which were disseminated to staff, and some were presented at relevant fora, including a poster presentation at the QAA Enhancement Themes conference in June 2015. However, not all Subject Networks were able to appoint SNSOs in each year, and the SNSOs reported that there was varied understanding among students and staff as to the expectations and visibility of the role.

Key duties and responsibilities of the revised SNO role are to:

- Attend all Subject Network Committee meetings
- Participate in the Higher Education Regional Committee (HERC) of HISA
- Be accountable to the HISA Regional Student Council
- Produce reports for HERC and HISA Regional Student Council on developments in their Subject Network and, with other SNOs, the HE curriculum and quality enhancement
- Encourage and promote participation within their Subject Network
- With support from HISA staff, undertake research

³⁸ UHI Student Charter

³⁹ Students on Committees Protocol

88. In 2015-16, we have worked with HISA to review the role with a view to enhancing and embedding it further, and the change in title to Subject Network Officer signals a step change from the previous SNSO role. The role now has a firmly rooted position within the overall student representational structures alongside student representatives, but maintains the focus on two-way communication at Subject Network level.⁴⁰ HISA successfully recruited three SNOs as elected and paid posts in Semester 1 of 2015-16, and will run elections for the remaining posts in Semester 2.

FOSTERING A SENSE OF BELONGING

89. We recognise the challenges faced by students in feeling part of a peer community when the institution is so geographically dispersed. Students consistently tell us how much they appreciate being able to study without leaving their home communities and this often outweighs any disadvantages of not having a traditional university experience. We want each one of our students, wherever they are based, to have a positive university experience, socially as well as academically, and are working with our students to achieve that aspiration. All main campuses offer local opportunities for social interaction, and some campuses have traditional students' association buildings with excellent facilities and resources. We also use technology to facilitate social interaction with other students, through social media or discussion boards within our VLE. The university student newsletter, *The Network*, is produced monthly during term-time, with news and events, and sent to over 10,000 email addresses.

90. We increased the level of funding to HISA significantly in 2015-16, in recognition of the potential impact of students' association on social and extra-curricular activity, not least through HISA clubs and societies. We collaborated with students to develop a Social Experience Policy as an outcome of the 2013-14 SPA, which aims to offer opportunities to develop interests, engender a sense of belonging to the university, and support the formation of social relationships. Considerable effort has been devoted to developing clubs and societies, and encouraging them to form so as to be inclusive of dispersed groups of students. The nature of the university means this is an area that requires considerable ongoing effort, and we hope that HISA will achieve renewed momentum in this area.

91. We are building on existing good practice in clubs and societies, freshers' fayres and induction, online social engagement, mentoring of students by other students, local events, sports competitions and volunteering opportunities. The annual 'health and wellbeing weeks' have allowed students to participate and organise their own events, whatever their location. We have sought to enable students in more remote locations (who may be studying alone) to interact more with fellow students on their programme of study, and we are making more use of the Blackboard Collaborate system and social media to facilitate contact. A number of subject-focussed



societies have been set up, some initiated and led by students, and some by programme teams, for example, in Archaeology and Literature.

STUDENT SURVEYS AND FEEDBACK CHANNELS

92. We have reviewed our use of student surveys, addressing a recommendation in ELIR2, to seek more meaningful student engagement through these formal mechanisms. Participation in national surveys (NSS, PRES) enables us to benchmark performance against comparator institutions, and we have committed to participation in the PTES survey in 2016, to ensure that we can monitor satisfaction of our PGT student population in the same way. We have adopted a rationalised approach to internal surveys, seeking to avoid over-surveying our students, but continuing to capture rich local data and enable internal benchmarking to drive enhancement (see Section 5). We have recognised the need to improve on systematically closing the feedback loop to students and raising awareness of the actions taken in response to survey outcomes and other quality monitoring processes, through which we routinely gather and produce a wide range of information. While some data are published or reported externally, and many reports are already available internally through committee papers and/or shared folders, there is room for improving its organisation and accessibility, and thereby raising awareness and engagement. We have agreed an approach to the internal publication of quality monitoring information for staff and students, and will work with HISA to publicise this among students.⁴¹ A surveys page has been created in the student support area of the website, informing students about what surveys they will be asked to complete, what we do with this data, and examples of specific actions taken.⁴² The sample of issues presented as 'you said, we listened' builds on the approach which some APs already take within their own college.

⁴⁰ *Subject Network Officer (SNO) Role Descriptor (September 2015)*

⁴¹ *Planned publication of quality monitoring information*

⁴² www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/surveys

ENHANCING THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

FIGURE 2.4: 'YOU SAID, WE LISTENED' STUDENT FEEDBACK ISSUES



RED BUTTON

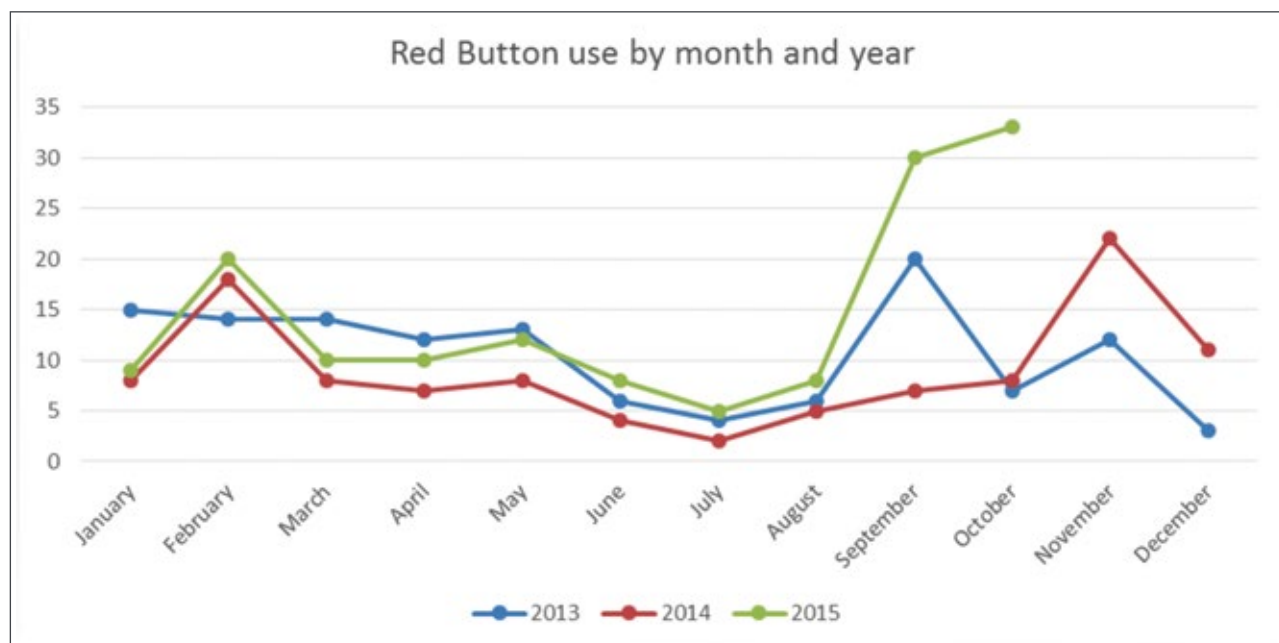
93. The Red Button is a web-based, informal problem resolution and feedback mechanism. Students may use the Red Button to let us know how we are doing, positive or negative, or if they encounter an issue. All comments are read and followed up by the Dean of Students (within 3 working days) to the point of resolution, which might be the problem solved or an explanation of why it cannot be solved. The service is particularly useful for students who may not know who to contact, or may not feel comfortable speaking to a member of staff directly. It is a useful mechanism for ensuring fairness, and provides an accessible route to problem resolution for a wide range of issues, and we are confident that the Red Button is complementing, rather than replacing other feedback channels. Enquiry numbers have increased year on year, but it should be noted that sometimes the same issue is reported by multiple students. The Red Button was highlighted in ELIR2 as an area of positive practice, and it has developed in several aspects since then. A set of service standards is in place to manage user expectations and, following feedback from Quality Managers, quarterly reports are provided to APs and Subject Network leaders, as well as the widely disseminated annual report.⁴³ The reports detail usage by AP, Subject Network and theme as well as providing anonymised detail of each enquiry

and its resolution. The Red Button is highly regarded by users, but student feedback in 2014-15 indicated that many students are still unaware of it, or don't realise that it may be useful in their particular circumstances. We are in discussion with HISA about how to raise student awareness about the Red Button, and have produced new marketing resources.



⁴³ Red Button Annual Report 2014-15

FIGURE 2.5: RED BUTTON ENQUIRIES OVER LAST 3 YEARS



STUDENT-LED TEACHING AWARDS

94. We were one of the first universities to set up the Student-led Teaching Awards in partnership with the National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland in 2009-10. Every year the students nominate staff from anywhere in the partnership for a variety of awards such as Most Inspiring Lecturer, Most Engaging Online Tutor, Best Assessment Feedback. The nominations are considered by a panel of students and the results are based on the quality of the nomination and the evidence of excellence provided, rather than the number of nominations, to avoid bias towards larger cohorts. Importantly, everyone nominated receives suitably anonymised student comments, which elicits hugely positive responses among staff each year. The students' comments offer a rich and detailed source of feedback on their experiences and what they value in our staff, and they are widely disseminated through Faculty and AP structures. As a result of this, some individuals have presented at staff development events and others have been asked to join working groups on particular topics. It is anticipated that the LTA will help to disseminate this aspect of the student voice as effectively as possible, and to use the evidence provided by the award nominations to enhance practice across the institution more widely.

STUDENT SUPPORT

PERSONAL ACADEMIC TUTORS (PATs)

95. The Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) role is a crucial one in supporting students during their studies and is known to have a significant positive impact on the student experience and satisfaction. PATs act as a key contact point for students, particularly important for those who may not be regularly (if ever) attending on campus. The development and implementation of the PAT role is a

major element in supporting equivalence of experience across our student population, and sets out minimum levels of engagement with every student. PATs provide an introductory meeting in the first semester each year, as part of an extended induction and the specific course and year of study. In addition, there is a minimum of one academic advisory session each semester on an individual basis, where the student's academic progress is reviewed. PATs undertake signposting and early referral to appropriate specialist support for issues such as ICT access, library and learning resources, finance and personal concerns. They also provide information on academic regulations, guidance on plagiarism and copyright matters, advice on study methods and academic writing skills and provide access to study support. A working group was set up to review the PAT role in 2014-15, in the light of student feedback which indicated that there was some variability in the implementation and understanding of the PAT role across the partnership. This led to some adjustments to the role: for example, to regularise the number of students and courses an individual PAT can be asked to cover, but we are continuing to monitor the risk of overload within the PAT role in the context of other administrative and teaching responsibilities staff may have.⁴⁴

96. We also reviewed the PAT staff resources and guides, and identified the need for improved accessibility to these, using a range of mobile devices. The existing resources were available in a number of places including the intranet and VLE; the route to accessing these was not always clear and some PATs who did not use the VLE were at a disadvantage. We commissioned a project through the EDU to create a self-directed online resource, built from the existing text-based resources with additional

⁴⁴ Revised Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) Role

ENHANCING THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

content provided by the EDU project team, which will assist in the induction of new PATs and be a reference point for existing PATs. The layout and feel is similar to the Essential Student Skills resource developed by the EDU, and it is expected to have a notable impact in supporting PATs, and providing greater consistency in the way the PAT role is carried out.⁴⁵

ESSENTIAL STUDENT SKILLS (ESS) ONLINE

97. The need for high quality induction and support materials is well-understood, as is the need for them to be available to all our students irrespective of course, location or mode of study. Different APs and programmes have developed local induction and support materials over time, with materials often covering similar topics. Some of these resources were refined over several years, reflecting valuable feedback, but not all students had access to the same materials and so the benefits of this work had not been universally shared.

98. The Educational Development Unit (EDU)'s Essential Student Skills project sought to level the playing field and offer all students the same high quality resources via an online portal. The resources are designed to cover the whole student journey and are generic in nature. Each resource can be used as a 'stand-alone' resource or be contextualised by academic staff for use in their own subjects. Using a single point of delivery ensures equity of experience and the currency of the material with only one version needing to be updated. Students are able to become familiar with the resources prior to enrolment; a considerable benefit in preparation for study. In addition they can access the online resources in their own time and return to them as often as required throughout their studies. It was considered crucial that the materials built on existing materials rather than being created from scratch. The project would not have been possible without staff willingly sharing their resources and the 20 packages created by the project represent the culmination of a long process of amalgamating and refining such existing resources. Most programmes use a blend of delivery formats and one of the key outcomes of the ESS project was to prepare students for this new style of learning. Three of the 20 ESS packages are designed to introduce students to the tools used for communication and collaboration in a blended learning setting. The resources themselves also provide an experience of learning online.⁴⁶



99. A valuable benefit of this project was the staff engagement which took place, particularly in the initial scoping exercise. A number of staff also engaged in the peer review of the material during the development process. Feedback was very positive and provided excellent constructive comments. After completion, the materials were disseminated to a number of groups within the university as well as through the ongoing programme of staff engagement. Staff have particularly welcomed the mobile-compatible web portal design as this offered more dissemination options and has helped support the promotion of the resources. Student feedback on a draft of the resources was sought from the SNSOs, who gave positive feedback and a number of their recommendations were taken on board. To date the resources have been widely used by students; there were over 10,000 page views in its first month alone. This project was the winner of the new Student Support Initiative award in 2015.

100. Students have access to library services at their own AP (which cater for the needs of both HE and FE students) including print books and computing facilities, as well as a substantial e-resource collection (journals, e-books and other materials) which is managed by the university e-resources manager. These are available on any compatible device via an internet connection, and accessible to all students 24/7. The process of finding information from both the physical and digital parts of the library has been made much simpler with the library search engine Multisearch, which provides a 'Google-like' way of searching many sources at the same time. We are also developing a series of "Lib Guides" linked to the VLE which will steer students to e-resources related to their modules. Students are also able to access, free of charge, the print book stock of the entire partnership (with the exception of one specialist institution) via the inter-site loan system.

101. The libraries service has undergone a number of reviews in the last three years, responding in part to student feedback which identified this as a recurrent area of lower satisfaction, although they are very positive about the support provided by the libraries staff. A working group convened in 2013 to review aspects of the university partnership's library provision had the following remit:

- > To consider how the equivalence of student access to library resources is monitored and enhanced
- > To consider how the libraries service enhances the student experience in terms of inter-library cooperation and resource sharing and alignment with Subject Network and programme teams
- > To recommend changes arising from these considerations

The libraries service was also the focus of the first student support service review in 2014-15 (see Section 5 and AIS).

⁴⁵ <http://staffresources.uhi.ac.uk/pat>

⁴⁶ <http://induction.uhi.ac.uk>

102. The reviews identified that, since each AP's library service had evolved to respond to local student populations and needs, this had led to areas where there was a lack of service consistency, for example relating to access to study spaces, core texts, and IT facilities. More positively, through the review process, libraries staff were able to share expertise and best practice across the partnership and thus enhance the service available at individual campuses. This led to the establishment of a more formalised libraries practitioner group, with a redefined role. We have invested in leadership of the group, which has developed an action plan to enhance student experience, supported and monitored by QAEC as a key enhancement priority.⁴⁷ This plan includes the establishment of minimum service levels, while recognising that not all aspects of the service can or need to be the same across the partnership, and further definition of KPIs and targets, including usage data. There was also an identified need to raise awareness of the library services, especially among students who do not often attend on campus. The libraries staff are increasingly using social media and other proactive ways to reach those students. The action plan has already led to demonstrable progress including:

- > All students at all locations can now borrow 15 books at one time
- > Agreement to fund postage costs for return of book loans for distance learning students
- > Purchase of reading list software to enable students to link directly from reading lists in VLE to library catalogue
- > Opening hours at all library locations to be reviewed and mapped against local students' needs

STUDENT MENTORING

103. The student mentor network provides training and a structure for more experienced students to share their knowledge and experience with those new to higher education. The mentor-mentee relationship is an informal one with meetings taking place in cafes or similar spaces, or there is the option to meet online or by email with mentors when they are based at another campus. Mentoring is valued by both mentors and mentees, but it can be difficult to find enough students to become mentors. We are therefore devoting more effort into explaining the benefits of mentoring and promoting awareness of the mentoring network.

ONLINE COUNSELLING SERVICE

104. An online counselling service was launched on University Mental Health Day in February 2015, following a small pilot in three APs. The online service is offered in addition to face-to-face counselling services currently available at some locations, as it was anticipated that students who are unable to access face-to-face counselling (e.g. geographically remote, mobility or transport difficulties, caring responsibilities) might be more likely to contract for online sessions. We have been cautious in the roll-out of the service, as each of the trained counsellors has limited capacity at present to take on online clients. We are monitoring demand for

the service through enquiries and referral rates, and will continue to evaluate its impact. Feedback from clients who have accessed the service has been positive, in that it has enabled them to see things from a different perspective and to continue with their studies.

SUPPORT FOR CARE LEAVERS

105. Care leavers are one of the priority groups where we are seeking to increase participation, both through targeted recruitment activity and ongoing support once enrolled. A working group has been formed and meets quarterly to share good practice and assist APs to mainstream support for care leavers e.g. assisting AP applications to the Buttle Trust. Care leaver specific information is now available on the student support area of the website, and the impact of this work is evidenced through the increase in students or applicants identified as care leavers. Identification of exact numbers of care leavers to provide benchmark data continues to be a challenge and the group has worked with members of the admissions team to try to make it easier for students to disclose and for us to gather more comprehensive data.

SUPPORT FOR DISABLED STUDENTS

106. We are accredited by the Scottish Government to conduct needs assessments with students for the purposes of claiming Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). This enables us to overcome the barrier of distance and assess students wherever they are based, and we have conducted and quality assured more than 230 needs assessments since achieving accreditation in 2011. In 2012, we won JISC's Innovation and Technology Award: Access and Inclusion for our case study on assessing the needs of remote learners. We currently have 12 qualified DSA needs assessors, with more student support practitioners currently in training, and our disability support coordinator can assess students peripatetically as required. Further enhancements are planned including:

- > exploring ways to gather feedback more systematically from both students and student support practitioners
- > considering how examples of good practice can be identified and shared amongst needs assessors
- > coordinating the development of an online resource that needs assessors can use when introducing technologies to students
- > arranging a student support development day aimed at needs assessors and disability practitioners, focussing on current technologies and the integration of technologies with university services

Overall, ongoing DSA accreditation enhances the inclusive credentials of the university partnership and is symptomatic of our accessibility ethos, and it has also provided an impetus for the development of inclusive policies and practices more widely. For example, we initially developed a recording of taught sessions policy aimed at supporting disabled students, which has now been subsumed within a recording of taught sessions policy applicable to all students.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Libraries Service – Action Plan 2015

⁴⁸ Recording of Taught Sessions Policy

ENHANCING THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The system allow users to:

- Schedule appointments with support staff
- Print a dyslexia sticker for an eligible student
- Arrange equipment loans and view details of assistive technologies on loan to students
- View/Create/Amend a student's Personal Learning Support Plan (PLSP)
- View the exam arrangements that have been agreed for them
- Access DSA Quality Monitoring Forms
- Request a coursework extension, if such an entitlement has been agreed in a student's PLSP
- Upload documents (e.g. needs assessment reports, specialist reports, etc.)

107. Our SITS student record system has functionality to manage data relating to students with disclosed additional needs. We have developed a user-friendly web-based interface, to enable these students and relevant staff to access this data more easily. On-demand reports are now available to provide details of specific student requirements on a need-to-know basis, for example to Exams Officers for implementing exam arrangements. The system also records a student's interactions with support services. Key benefits are the emphasis on students being equal partners and promotion of greater transparency in the provision of student support. Practitioner feedback indicates that the web-based system is more intuitive and user-friendly than working directly with SITS and the implementation of common workflows makes training and support easier for all users, regardless of location.

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH (PGR) STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

108. PGR students have access to all student support services provided by the university, and locally by their host AP. There are also specific resources and services, including those available to them as associate students of the University of Aberdeen under our accreditation agreement. Each PGR student is assigned a Third Party Monitor, which is an academic member of staff independent of their supervisory team. This person can be contacted for pastoral issues, or for anything which a student may not wish to discuss with their supervisors, and this was highlighted by Aberdeen as good practice. The PGR VLE site has been developed over recent years to include information relevant for PGR students and their supervisors, and the Graduate School maintains close relationships with our PGR students, wherever they are based. We are developing our use of SITS in order to streamline PGR student administration, from application through to graduation.⁴⁹

109. A new post of Head of PGR Student Development was established in 2013 specifically to support engagement

with research students, working in conjunction with colleagues in the Graduate School and APs. We aim to foster close integration of PGR students into the life and work of their host departments and supervisors, supporting the creation of a research community. We further facilitate the development of student networks through events and use of social media and the VLE site, which has a student discussion board. A face-to-face induction event takes place in October and March each year, open to all students, which receives very positive feedback. The annual PGR student conference brings students together to share their research, give presentations and meet their peers. It is held at a different location each year and is integrated with the university Research Conference biennially, allowing students to network with staff and other researchers. There are two PGR student representatives on the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) and one on the Research Committee, who also meet regularly with Graduate School staff to ensure the PGR student voice is heard through both formal and informal channels.

110. Training needs for PGR students are assessed on an individual basis with the supervisor through progress monitoring. We offer a range of training opportunities; the Graduate School covers travel and accommodation costs for face-to-face courses, and we also use VC delivery, and promote take-up of external training opportunities, such as those provided by the Scottish Graduate Schools. We have taken steps to ensure that all PGR students who wish to engage in teaching have access to appropriate guidance and training opportunities, as recommended at ELIR2; these include both locally-delivered and networked provision. However this is an area which continues to be flagged in student feedback, and a more formalised approach is required. A programme of practical training sessions has been piloted at SAMS UHI, where there are the greatest number of PhD students who wish to take up opportunities for teaching/demonstrating. Following assessment of the pilot, RDC will agree the elements of good practice to be developed into guidance to be rolled out partnership-wide. Implementation will be in the form of on-site workshops and training in larger APs, with the option of delivery through the Graduate School for others. The training will be monitored through the Graduate School Committee, and formally recorded.

2.iv APPROACHES TO PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES, INCLUDING EMPLOYABILITY

CAREERS AND EMPLOYABILITY SUPPORT

111. The Strategic Plan identifies clear aspirations in relation to employability, with a CPI based on DLHE outcomes for graduates. This survey showed that 92% of our graduates went on to work or study in 2013-14, slightly above the national benchmark, and we aim to maintain or improve this outcome. The Careers and Employability Centre supports and facilitates the development, management and delivery of careers guidance and

⁴⁹ Graduate School Annual Report 2014-15

placement services across the partnership. This includes coordination of practitioner groups, events such as Employability Week, policy and process development, management of the Jobs Database and dissemination of the regional jobs board to key contacts. The careers education, information, advice and guidance policy was revised and updated in 2013, and sets out how the Careers and Employability Centre works in partnership with AP services.⁵⁰

112. The Careers and Employability Centre has also led the development of the Skills and Employability Award, and a range of career management advice sheets. An annual seminar programme is delivered by VC across the network, with strong input from careers professionals and employers, which was shortlisted for the AGCAS (Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services) Awards for Excellence: Technology Award in 2013. Since not all of our students can gain face-to-face access to professionally qualified careers advisers, we have a substantial online resource and e-guidance service. Students can download advice sheets, information on workshop events and career mentoring, access seminar recordings, register on the jobs database and book an appointment through our 'speak to an adviser' service.

113. Student feedback shows that guidance services are very well received, with 100% of clients saying they would recommend these to a friend, and 100% saying they found the advice very helpful or quite helpful.⁵¹ However, we are aware of the need to raise awareness of our services among students and employers, particularly in respect of graduate training schemes and programmes. In some geographical areas there are inherent challenges in local labour market opportunities and rurality issues. We are also working to increase engagement and awareness among both academic and support staff, and have improved marketing to try to reach all students who may benefit from our services. We will continue to monitor progress against KPIs and impact through analysis of employer and student feedback, and benchmark our

practice through ongoing membership of AGCAS and the Career Development Institute.

114. Our strategy for employer engagement, branded as UHI for Work and Enterprise aims to promote a coherent and consistent approach to supporting and advising employers, and optimising placement and employment opportunities for students and graduates, reinforcing our role in supporting the socio-economic development of our region.⁵² The strategy explicitly complements and builds on the longstanding and effective employer links developed by APs locally and/or by programme teams. The focus to date has been on developing strategic partnerships with a small number of employers which have a major influence on employment and prosperity within the region and may be global, national or regional in scale (e.g. Scottish and Southern Energy, Dounreay Site Restoration). These 'key accounts' involve multiple strands of activity and activity across several APs and are expected to input to curriculum design and planning and /or be a current or future major employer of our graduates. Future work strands will focus on closer integration with the Careers and Employability Centre, curriculum development and design, for example to extend and embed entrepreneurship and other employability skills, and increasing placement or other experiential learning opportunities.

115. The student placement policy was recently reviewed and is supported by guidance on expectations and legislative requirements for tutors, employers and students, including an addendum on equality and diversity considerations. The EDU is undertaking a project to develop user-friendly, online resources to enhance student experience in getting the most out of their placement, to improve understanding of respective responsibilities set out within the policy, and to ensure that legal obligations are met. The placement practitioner network, established as part of the policy review process, is developing as a forum for sharing practice and CPD opportunities.⁵³



⁵⁰ Careers, Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Policy

⁵¹ Careers and Employability Centre Annual Report 2013-14

⁵² UHI for Work and Enterprise

⁵³ Revised Placement Policy Dec 2015

ENHANCING THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

116. The original UHI Graduate Attributes were developed in 2010 in response to the Graduates for the 21st Century Enhancement Theme. Five 'Core Values' were identified, intended to be applicable to both staff and students. In 2013 we commissioned a research project on embedding the graduate attributes, as part of our engagement with the Enhancement Theme on Developing and Supporting the Curriculum. This research concluded that generally students and employers valued the UHI Graduate Attributes, but raised several areas for development including: generally low levels of awareness of the attributes; a lack of clarity about the language or meaning of some of the attributes; and some gaps in the coverage of the attributes in terms of key skills and abilities valued by employers and students. QAEC convened a working group in 2014 to review whether the current Graduate Attributes were fit for purpose, taking account of the research outcomes, and to make recommendations as to how they may be developed in the future. The group identified that the existing Graduate Attributes required revision and a new set of attributes was proposed, mapped to those defined nationally by SQA and QAA whilst making them relevant to our students, and meaningful at SCQF Levels 7-12.⁵⁴ We recognise that further work is needed to raise awareness and engage staff and students at programme level, and to identify an effective way to articulate graduate attributes in programme documentation, in a way that is meaningful to students and employers. While graduate attributes and employability skills are embedded into learning outcomes at module and programme level, they are not always recognised as such by students, and we will work with the Careers and Employability Centre to take the recommendations of the research forward. One of our Enhancement Theme research projects on Transition to employment builds on the earlier work, and aims to test and gain feedback on the graduate attributes as a framework for identifying, measuring and monitoring transferable skills development.

SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY AWARD

117. Highlighting the tertiary nature of the university partnership, the Skills and Employability Award was designed as a non-credit bearing award to enhance students' employability skills. It is open to both FE and HE students, comprising a suite of eight interactive career management modules, all of which had to be completed before achieving the award, e.g. induction, a skills audit, skills development activities, and creating a CV. The award was piloted within three APs over two academic sessions. Both years experienced low student participation and completion rates, so the award was reviewed in 2015 to consider whether it was fit for purpose, and how to increase uptake. Workshops were held with staff and students to consider alternative models, assessment frameworks and engagement. It was identified that there were limited resource to promote and deliver the award, and that the lack of formal recognition meant it was not highly valued by students. As a result, it has been agreed to review those

elements of the award which could be delivered wholly online, using materials developed by the EDU, and thus reducing the level of staff support required, and it is intended to relaunch in 2016-17. To give the award greater credibility among students, successful completion will be included as one of the extra-curricular activities on students' Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) when this facility is rolled out, supplementing the record of their academic achievement.

ENGAGEMENT WITH HEAR

112. We have monitored developments in the sector relating to the HEAR, and its potential to enhance the employability of our graduates. We initially prioritised the development of the Skills and Employability Award, as a means of providing immediate, interactive and practical support in this area. In dialogue with HISA, we are taking forward implementation of HEAR, aligning with all of the work streams within the SPA. By recording student participation in extra-curricular activities and representation roles, it is expected not only to highlight the employability skills developed through these activities, but also to consolidate the work of the students' associations as part of the university community. A joint working group has been established to oversee implementation, and will explore the possibility of offering some form of Achievement Record to FE students within the partnership, as well as HE students.

2.v

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE APPROACH TO ENHANCING THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

119. We aim to be an inclusive, student-centred institution, focussed on meeting the needs of our region, as well as attracting students from elsewhere, and offering a positive learning experience to all. We have a strong emphasis on widening access and continue to target under-represented groups effectively. Together with our flexible curriculum delivery, we pride ourselves on enabling many individuals to access and benefit from HE learning opportunities who would otherwise be unable to do so.
120. Our student support services, for both academic and pastoral support, are designed and delivered in ways that take account of our structure and circumstances, drawing on the expertise available across the partnership, and using technologies as appropriate. Our relatively small student cohorts enable strong relationships to be formed, where staff are able to respond to requests and needs of our students, to manage and enhance the individual student experience. Students and externals give highly positive feedback about student support, through tutor interactions and support services, and we regard this as a strength. However, it is an ongoing challenge to ensure that there is a consistency of approach and an equivalence of student experience across all student groups and locations. There are strong mechanisms in place to help achieve this, including the practitioner groups, student surveys and other feedback tools and the development of accessible support and guidance

⁵⁴ Graduate Attributes Short Life Working Group Final Report

for all students and staff. Nevertheless in a complex and highly geographically distributed organisation, equivalence and consistency must be continually sought and reinforced, with ongoing efforts in communication and awareness-raising among staff and students about support services.

121. While our graduate employment rates are in line with the national benchmark, we seek to support all of our students in maximising their career and employment opportunities. We work closely with employers in a range of industry sectors, and offer highly vocationally relevant curriculum across all levels. However, we aim to expand placement opportunities further, and increase take up among students, as well as developing employability skills more systematically. We also recognise the need to work with the student body to be more explicit about articulating the employability skills and other graduate attributes that they will develop through their programme of study and extra-curricular activities. We plan to take this forward through reviewing the graduate attributes within the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and working with HISA in implementing HEAR.
122. We seek to engage students in enhancing the learning experience through communication and feedback loops which are relevant and effective. We have available an increasing amount of information about the student experience: from early experience surveys to the NSS, from online module evaluations to SNSO contributions and class rep input. Students and staff often talk

about 'survey fatigue' amongst students and we are creating a more coherent approach to the use of such instruments. The focus on key metrics in the Strategic Plan should help to bring a more structured approach to the collection and analysis of that data, and we are taking steps to build on existing good practice in informing students about the action that has been taken as a result of their feedback. QAEC has an enhanced role in monitoring key student data and there is a clearer approach to the management of NSS survey and action planning arising from its outcomes.

123. We need a strong, effective and sustainable students' association that can speak on behalf of its members, promote improvements in learning and teaching and work in genuine partnership with us to improve the experience of all of our students. The structure and constitution of the previous students' association, as outlined in the case study, coupled with internal problems in the period leading up to its voluntary dissolution in spring 2015, meant that it was not in a position to fulfil this role effectively, and this is clearly evident in student feedback. Both we and HISA are keen to ensure that we develop effective joint approaches to the enhancement of the student learning experience, and to fulfil the spirit of our Student Partnership Agreement. HISA is in its early days, but the signs are extremely positive that, with our increased financial investment, permanent staff and a representational infrastructure that will, for the first time, allow two-way communication from classroom to Court, the two organisations will be able to work in this way.



ENHANCEMENT IN LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.i APPROACHES TO IDENTIFYING AND SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

124. In considering our approach to the enhancement of learning and teaching over the past ten years, but in particular since ELIR2, there are some clear evolutionary trends and some distinctive approaches which have been determined by our unique nature. Due to our geographical context and the needs of a student population often constrained with respect to time and location of study, we have been proactive in developing distinctive, flexible and sometimes innovative learning and teaching approaches to develop and deliver our curriculum. The university partnership has accommodated and encouraged multiple approaches, leading to foci of distinctive practice, some of which is recognised as sector-leading, as evidenced by nominations and awards at national level, and through reflection from peer networks, External Examiners and panel members. We are regularly approached by other universities, often outwith the UK, seeking to work with us and learn from our approaches, and in particular the work of the EDU and LTA; for example, the Blended Learning Standards developed by the EDU have been much requested.⁵⁵ Institutions throughout the world which share some of our characteristics (including from Australia, USA, France, Sweden, Iceland, Canada, Corsica and the Caribbean) have invested substantial time in interactions which have led to reciprocal visits, sharing of documentation, consultancy and joint research. As the university has matured, there has been a sustained effort to move to greater levels of consistency, in the interests of equivalence of student experience and efficiency, while maintaining healthy and appropriate diversity. In order to identify, augment and agree implementation of the best of our learning and teaching practice, a range of initiatives has been pursued, which may be categorised as programmatic, systematic and specific.

We are proud of recent awards and nominations including:

- Winner of JISC 2012 iTech Award for our case study on conducting Disabled Students' Allowance needs assessments for remote learners (also praised by the College Development Network suggesting it could be a model for regional colleges)
- Shortlisted for the Innovation Technology Excellence Award in the 2015 Herald Higher Education Awards for our development of virtual field trips.
- John Christison (Inverness College UHI) awarded the Mendel Medal in 2014 for work enabling student and staff exchanges amongst HEIs affiliated with the Erasmus Forestry Network
- Ian Gibb (Perth College UHI) won the Hospitality Educator of the Year title at the 2015 Catering in Scotland Excellence Awards

PROGRAMMATIC INITIATIVES

125. Programmatic initiatives are those which have been conceived by senior management and endorsed at the level of Academic Council. Typically they run for at least three years and are designed to have an impact across the whole partnership and at a variety of levels. Since 2010, we have instigated three programmatic initiatives aimed at identifying, augmenting and sharing practice with a view to enhancing the learning experience; the Learning and Teaching Academy (LTA), the Educational Development Unit (EDU) and Curriculum for the 21st Century (C21C).

LEARNING AND TEACHING ACADEMY (LTA)

126. The LTA was initially established in 2013, in part to address some of the areas for development identified in ELIR2 relating to supporting staff development and sharing good practice. It will work in conjunction with the APs, the Faculties, the EDU and others to further facilitate the identification, augmentation and above all the sharing of good and best practice in learning and teaching. A major strategic initiative co-ordinated through the LTA is the development of the ALPINE framework. In addition to offering colleagues the opportunity to have their practice recognised through Fellowship of the HEA, the ALPINE framework has been designed as a platform for the development and sharing of learning, teaching and assessment practice across the partnership. The development and implementation of the LTA to date forms one of the case studies supporting this RA.

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT UNIT (EDU)

127. The Educational Development Unit (EDU) supports strategic curriculum development in blended learning, and comprises both educational development leaders and instructional designers. It aims to enhance areas of the curriculum by developing new teaching resources for blended learning, in collaboration with teaching teams and relevant external stakeholders, and to develop staff in the delivery and modification of these teaching resources. The EDU was originally established as an externally-funded project in 2012 to develop online learning materials, and thus working to specific targets and outputs. It soon started to evolve into a resource identifying, supporting and promoting skills, materials and practices designed to enhance learning and teaching. An evaluation of the activities and effectiveness of the EDU in August 2015 confirmed its high levels of technical expertise, and the depth and variety of engagement which the EDU has achieved, and we are now able to start to evaluate the impact the work of the EDU is having on the student learning experience. An analysis of the level and distribution of staff engagement shows a steady increase in subject areas engaging with EDU activities. The number of staff directly involved in EDU activities rose from 148 in January 2013 to 268 in September 2014 and the range of programmes represented and types of enhancement projects also increased significantly. However, there appears to be reluctance among some staff to make use of materials and approaches developed by others, which

⁵⁵ Blended Learning Standards

may limit fuller adoption of best practice. This issue is known to be encountered in other HEIs, and we aim to undertake some potentially publishable research in this area.⁵⁶

128. The EDU is increasingly contributing to enhancement activities at a national level. It has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to generate a standard system of unit costs for the transformation of traditional learning materials to online and blended forms. The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) has commissioned the EDU to evaluate the potential for universities to act as publishers of electronic books and learning materials for the sector in the E-Textbook Institutional Publication Services (eTIPS) project. The EDU's work was shortlisted in summer 2015 for the national Herald Higher Education awards and the College Development Network Learning and Teaching awards. The EDU has developed expertise and experience which is steadily disseminating throughout the university and beyond. However further work is needed around widening and supporting opportunities for staff reflection, upskilling and scholarly engagement with pedagogical practice, and this clearly aligns with the role of the LTA. As the EDU and the LTA have evolved, there is clear synergy of staff, expertise and impact between them, and we will bring the EDU and the LTA together into one group with a shared purpose.



CURRICULUM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY (C21C)

129. C21C was essentially a top-down programme of projects which sought to increase shared understanding and consistency of the delivery of learning and teaching across the HE curriculum and networked student support.⁵⁷ A key aim was to support equivalence and consistency of the student learning experience, with a workstrand focussed on the development of agreed roles for Module Leaders, Programme Leaders and PATs. C21C was successful in addressing many of the structural barriers to a greater sharing of good practice, but it did not fully succeed in overcoming the 'institutional culture' differences which are inevitably part of a diverse and distributed partnership organisation. In part this was due to the perception, despite the effort which went into communication and consultation, that C21C was imposed top-down and primarily driven by efficiency considerations. In learning from this project, it was clear that good practice is more likely to be successfully shared and embedded if it is contextualised and adopted through a practitioner-led approach. Such an approach may be seen in the LTA ethos, and the development of the ALPINE framework.

SYSTEMATIC EVALUATION AND REVIEW PROCESSES

130. Our routine and systematic quality monitoring and self-evaluation processes are fundamental in identifying good practice and areas for development in learning and teaching which drive enhancement. Annual and periodic review processes draw on a range of data sources, including student feedback, external feedback and KPI data, and provide the evidence base for identifying good practice, and sharing this at multiple levels – at the level of module, programme, Subject Network and institution. We have put in place more standardised approaches to the gathering of student feedback and improved accessibility to KPI data on student achievement and progression, which will improve our ability to triangulate this data systematically with self-evaluation evidence from SEDs. The AIS provides examples of these processes in action, and how each stage leads into the next.
131. At institutional level, QAEC is responsible for directing appropriate groups or individuals to take forward actions and priorities emerging through quality monitoring processes; that is, to address areas requiring development or to disseminate instances of good practice. One example is the development and implementation of the Assessment, Feedback and Feedforward policy and associated guidance.⁵⁸ Aligning with a sector-wide trend, assessment and feedback have been recurrent areas for development identified through monitoring and review processes, and is a perennial area of lower student satisfaction. QAEC tasked the Head of Academic Development with reviewing our approach. A working group comprising staff and students was convened to examine the issues of concern and ensure that, where excellent practice did exist in the provision and use of feedback, this was shared as widely as possible. This work led

⁵⁶ Education Development Unit (EDU) Documents

⁵⁷ Curriculum for the 21st Century (C21C) Documents

⁵⁸ Assessment, Feedback and Feedforward Policy and Guidance

ENHANCEMENT IN LEARNING AND TEACHING

to the creation of the Assessment, Feedback and Feedforward policy, which was approved by QAEC in 2014. In leading implementation of the policy, the SNLs have identified specific actions within their operational plans, contextualised to their networks, which provides a focus for the sharing of practice at the level of programme teams and through networking events. The impact of this approach is being evaluated through the annual monitoring process, where one of the internal enhancement themes of assessment and feedback seeks reflection on alignment of practice with the policy.

132. There are numerous examples of enhanced guidance and support materials, drawing together good practice examples and case studies, which have been developed as a result of issues identified through monitoring and review processes, such as the Module Leaders' resource page, guidance on writing learning outcomes, the use of Turnitin software and selecting appropriate technologies for learning and teaching. Feedback from staff indicates that the process of identification and prioritisation works well, and the time to get from 'identified need' to 'creation of policy, guidance and support materials' is diminishing. The breadth of engagement among staff in the development of such guidance, through evaluating and sharing their own practice is increasing, but we recognise that more effort is needed in raising staff awareness. Past experience shows that having guidance available is necessary but not sufficient to enhance the student experience, so we work with Quality Managers, Subject Network Leaders and other relevant staff to consistently direct staff to the appropriate 'signposted' areas.

SPECIFIC INITIATIVES

133. These might also be called 'targeted' or 'local' initiatives as they originate and are aimed at particular teams, groups or individuals. These may stem from institutional priorities or themes or may have been identified through subject review or programme development processes as appropriate for action at a more localised level, perhaps within a Faculty or programme team. The impact of such initiatives tends to be observed more immediately. For example, a staff development workshop involving engineering staff on the use of the 'flipped classroom' approach influenced their preparation for the academic approval event for the new degree a few weeks later. The Head of Academic Development reviews all new programme proposals to advise on ways of implementing or developing blended learning at an early stage, and identifying staff development or other support opportunities. Other examples of sharing good practice within specific groups include Faculty conferences and Subject Network networking events, the annual research conferences and the student-led teaching awards and student support initiative awards (see Section 2).⁵⁹



3.ii IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL ENHANCEMENT THEMES AND RELATED ACTIVITY

134. We have engaged fully with the Enhancement Themes since their inception; most recently with Developing and Supporting the Curriculum (2011-14), and the current theme of Student Transitions (2014-17). To derive maximum benefit from the engagement, our approach is to address challenges, and enact change, in areas pertinent to the theme but specifically aligned to our specific context and mission. Our work relating to the current and previous Enhancement Themes is directed through QAEC, and has been productive in terms of internal and external outputs, and internal and external impact.

DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING THE CURRICULUM

135. Within the context of the Developing and Supporting the Curriculum (DSC) Theme, the challenge of sustaining curriculum development and innovation was a key driver in the initiation of the Learning and Teaching Academy, together with wider developments in learning and teaching, pedagogic scholarship and research, and is discussed in more detail in the LTA case study.

CURRICULUM REFORM

136. Curriculum reform was a major area of activity undertaken within the context of the theme, and the C21C project formed the backbone of our engagement, with twin aims relating to enhancement and sustainability.⁶⁰ C21C ran from 2011-2014, operating within a framework agreed by Academic Council and HEPPRC, and drawing together several inter-linked strands of activity including:
- > Migrating undergraduate and postgraduate curricula from a 15 credit framework to a 20 credit framework. As part of this migration, significant changes were made to the curriculum including

⁵⁹ Faculty of Arts Humanities and Business 'Enhancefest' Conference Brochure (June 2015)

⁶⁰ Curriculum for the 21st Century (C21C) Documents



the creation of a more cohesive and interrelated curriculum, where modules are shared more widely across multiple programmes and schemes.

- > Re-approving all degree programmes in 2011-12, during which period we took the opportunity to strengthen preparedness for employment in a number of ways, e.g. through the creation of a Placement Suite of credit-bearing modules.
- > Revising underpinning processes connected with curriculum management and delivery. This included: a new process for Module Leadership allocation; creating a series of protocols to underpin the curriculum; revised role descriptors for module and Programme Leaders; and a common approach to the allocation of staff time.
- > Implementing a systematic approach to using SITS to enhance module management, including online enrolment and module selection.
- > Re-framing personal academic support for students, and the development of the PAT role (discussed in Section 2) to replace that of 'Student Adviser'. Significant activity has since occurred to embed this role across the partnership. This has been paralleled by work to use blended learning and teaching approaches, so that as much of the curriculum as possible is accessible from as many places as possible.

In summary, C21C brought about significant enhancement in the student experience, particularly in accessibility of curriculum, and consistency and equivalence of student support. It has also achieved some success towards a more sustainable portfolio and efficiency in curriculum delivery and student management. However there are some areas which require to be revisited in the light of other changes, such as VC use and timetabling, and some where it is yet too early to evaluate impact fully.

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE

137. Another key area of our engagement with the DSC Theme was our institutional response to the Curriculum for Excellence. The LTA commissioned two research projects exploring the Curriculum for Excellence in the senior phase and transition to SCQF 7/8. The projects were undertaken by teams of academic staff who were engaged with the practical aspects of the transition between senior phase school activity and first year university/college experience. The projects reported their findings in spring 2014, and the outcomes and implications of their findings were cascaded in various ways, including through the production of internal reports and professional development events. As a result, within our review of admissions policy, we revised our entry requirements in order to align these explicitly with the Curriculum for Excellence agenda. In addition, the Regional Schools Group undertook the development of an aligned strategy for SCQF7 curriculum offered in the senior phase and related admissions guidance, pastoral and academic support, which forms part of our ongoing schools liaison activity.

TRANSITIONS

138. During the first year of the current Theme, under the co-ordination of one of the Subject Network Leaders, we devised and initiated our programme of work for the period 2014-17.⁶¹ As for the previous theme, we are again focusing on areas that are of particular relevance to our institution but which also resonate with current challenges in the Scottish HE sector. Our chosen foci are:

- > the implications and impact of the Curriculum for Excellence on HE and FE learning and teaching
- > the transition from HN to degree study
- > the transition from university to employment

Small-scale institutional research projects in each of these areas have been scoped out for completion in 2015-16, each with direct student involvement. In addition, we have secured funding from the HEA Pedagogies of Transitions fund to set up an articulation/transition network for Creative Industries, to map and enhance student opportunities for transition from HNC/D to degrees in Scottish universities, which will support and inform our work on this aspect. Colleagues have also contributed a number of good practice case studies in our chosen areas to the resources repository on the national Enhancement Themes website.



⁶¹ QAA Enhancement Theme 2014-17: Student Transitions

ENHANCEMENT IN LEARNING AND TEACHING

139. We have undertaken an extensive scoping exercise across the partnership to allow us to determine the various approaches being employed, and create a benchmark dataset to inform our subsequent work for the Theme. The scoping exercise involved a survey and interviews that were undertaken in May and June 2015, with a Transitions Scoping Exercise Report produced thereafter, which demonstrated a significant breadth of activity at the local level, tailored to particular student cohorts. Beyond the project work, our engagement with the Theme has been reflected in a range of further activities and initiatives. For example, the QAA International Conference on Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education in June 2015, which was focused on the current Transitions theme, featured six presentations and workshops delivered by our staff. The Transitions Theme also provided the focus and inspiration for the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Business Conference in June 2015, titled “Enhancefest”. The conference was held over two days at Perth College UHI, and featured a range of talks, participative workshops, and poster presentations that celebrated and shared existing good practice from across the Faculty. The engagement of staff with the Theme was evident within many of the sessions, several of which were delivered by colleagues directly involved in leading the institutional projects, or who were sharing work that we will be seeking to further support through those projects.⁶²



140. At the time of writing, we are planning a Student Transitions event in early 2016 to consolidate and extend the work currently underway, and to further disseminate the outcomes to date. The programme for this colloquium event features external guest speakers, presentations on our institutional projects, and participative workshops providing an opportunity for participants to review and enhance their own practice. In addition, one of the LTA Scholarship projects will provide funding for a team of colleagues to devise and undertake a project relating to a selected transitions issue (see LTA case study).
141. We will play an important role in disseminating research-based outputs from the Transitions Theme across the sector, through our involvement in co-editing a special issue of the *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice* dedicated to the Theme, in partnership with colleagues from the University of Dundee and Edinburgh Napier University. Professor Roni Bamber, the Chair of the Enhancement Theme, has agreed to be guest editor for this special issue.

RESEARCH TEACHING LINKAGES (RTL)

142. This earlier theme provided impetus for our work in developing RTL, in both enhancing the student experience directly, and supporting staff engagement in research and scholarship. This was an area for development flagged in ELIR2, and we have undertaken a range of activities to foster this. The Deans of Faculty, working closely with the Dean of Research, oversee the development and embedding of RTL within the taught curriculum, and support the SNs in their research and scholarship activities, and engagement with the developing Research Clusters. The Research Conference in 2012 included plenary sessions highlighting the issues and opportunities, and Faculty and SN events have featured RTL workshops and events, with the theme carried through to the Staff/ Student Research conference in 2014. RTL is one of the current internal enhancement themes, providing an opportunity through the annual monitoring process to reflect on the impact of our activity to date, and is also explored through subject review. Through these processes we have identified areas of good practice and recommendations or actions for further embedding and development at all levels. In order to engage a wider body of staff and students in RTL, we are articulating subcategories of RTL appropriate to different contexts i.e. research-informed, research-led and research-based, to reinforce its relevance across all provision. The LTA is working with the Research Office to develop a shared understanding, and examples to illustrate these facets of RTL.
143. We have expanded the remit of the sabbaticals scheme, to enable staff either to undertake research that is specifically designed to contribute to/in a teaching context, or to translate existing research into new programme content. Staff are encouraged to ensure that their research lends support to their taught provision,

⁶² Faculty of Arts Humanities and Business 'Enhancefest' Conference Brochure (June 2015)



and feeds directly into it where relevant and possible. RTL has been explicitly addressed in the selection criteria of the academic leadership posts, and we seek to ensure that newly appointed academic staff have research already in their ongoing activities or have the potential (and expectation) to become research active, and incorporate this into their teaching activities. The research mentoring scheme was launched in 2014, aimed at supporting staff engagement with research and RTL at all stages of their careers. In addition, PhD students are encouraged to engage in some teaching activities where appropriate.

144. The LTA will support the development of RTL in various ways including relevant professional development workshops and events; for example an LTA Connect webinar exploring RTL in curriculum and assessment design. It is anticipated that one of the practitioner groups facilitated through the LTA will focus on RTL, while research-informed and research-based learning and teaching approaches are also expected to be reflected in the revised Learning and Teaching Strategy. Educational scholarship supported through the LTA, including opportunities for colleagues to produce publishable work relating to their own learning and teaching practice, also places a strong focus on exploring and embedding RTL. The Head of the LTA will

work with the Deans of Faculty and Dean of Research to ensure the LTA's activities complement those already established to maximise their collective impact.

3.iii ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING STAFF

145. Staff engagement and support in the context of learning and teaching is multifaceted and reflects our structure and operational breadth. Our staff base is varied and includes staff who have developed within the university from a further education background as well as those recruited with a more traditional university career profile. Our staff deliver and support teaching in a wide variety of modes and blends ranging from face-to-face to online and block-release to accelerated degrees, and many teach at HE and FE levels, as is appropriate to our tertiary and regional mission. Within the university partnership each AP is a separate employer, and each has its own policies, practices and support mechanisms for staff development. All APs undertake a process of annual professional development review with their staff, aimed at ensuring that they have appropriate skills, qualifications and experience to carry out their assigned role, although the exact format varies, and the content and outcome of the individual reviews remain confidential.

ENHANCEMENT IN LEARNING AND TEACHING

146. In conjunction with the AP-led activities, we have evolved a range of engagement mechanisms which aim to provide appropriate professional development support to all staff, and enable us to act in a 'joined up' way in pursuit of our strategic aims. These are being brought together and coordinated through the LTA, which aims to:

- > provide a framework, practical support and resource for professional development
- > provide recognition for staff contribution, reflection and achievement through the HEA-accredited ALPINE scheme
- > act as a focal point, source of shared expertise and encouragement for pedagogic research

The LTA's development has been overseen by the LTA Steering Group, chaired by the Assistant Principal for Curriculum Enhancement, and comprising several members of QAEC, ensuring that its aims and objectives are fully aligned with our strategic enhancement agenda.

147. The LTA coordinates access to £100,000 p.a. of staff development support funding which is distributed in the form of sabbaticals, scholarships and direct support for professional development. The latter ranges from PSRB qualifications and professional updating, engagement with sector bodies and employers to PhD and includes ring-fenced support for staff undertaking our Masters in Education provision. Combined with the conference attendance fund managed by the Research Office, this forms a 'ladder' of professional development to support staff wishing to develop a research interest in support of their teaching. Opportunities include:

- > AP-led professional development events
- > Faculty and SN-based staff development sessions
- > Mentoring and coaching available at appropriate points of staff career
- > Bespoke development / support from the LTA/LIS for specific teams
- > Online guidance, materials and toolkits relating to technical and pedagogic aspects of learning and teaching practice

148. There is a wealth of opportunities for staff support and engagement in professional development provided both by APs locally, and through partnership-wide structures and initiatives. Nonetheless, since staff are employed under differing terms and conditions, there are challenges, evident through subject review and annual monitoring, arising from the differing approaches to staff remission from teaching to engage in CPD, scholarship and research and the absence of a standard workload planning model. Reflection on this point at QAEC, the Human Resources Practitioners' Group (HRPG) and especially the LTA has identified two main areas for development; the need for greater alignment of HR-based systems for accessing these opportunities; and a more systematic approach to the identification of professional development requirements. Both of these are recognised in the Strategic Plan and the supporting operational plan.

3.iv

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE APPROACH TO PROMOTING GOOD PRACTICE IN LEARNING AND TEACHING

149. We have in place a range of effective mechanisms for identifying good practice in learning and teaching. Approval and review processes explicitly identify areas of good practice, which are shared through team discussions and captured in outcome reports. Annual monitoring SEDs at all levels, incorporating self-evaluation and reflection on feedback from students and externals, also capture good practice, summarised and shared through the annual monitoring dialogues, but these outcomes could be shared more proactively. Identified good practice is shared also through conferences and Subject Network events, as well as externally, and these are rated very positively by staff. The student-led teaching awards are highly effective in promoting and celebrating good practice, and we frequently achieve external success and recognition through awards and publication of case studies.

150. We have undertaken some major initiatives which sought to build on good practice in learning and teaching, particularly as relevant to our blended learning approach and use of ICT. C21C successfully implemented changes to curriculum frameworks and business processes to support staff in adopting good practice. However, one of the lessons learned was the importance of engaging teaching teams more effectively through a practitioner-led approach. The work of the EDU and the resources and toolkits developed by staff, are an effective way of sharing and promoting good practice. The EDU has evolved from its project status, and we will continue to extend its activities to reach and involve more individuals and teams across the partnership and externally.

151. The LTA is expected to make a significant impact in improving our ability to share and disseminate practice more widely, using a practitioner-led approach to establish and engage peer networks. In particular, as the ALPINE framework is rolled out, this will support effective promotion of good practice both through the accreditation process itself, and by achievement of a nationally-recognised professional award. The LTA will provide a focal point for building on our expertise and experience in learning and teaching in a blended learning context, and meeting the needs of our student population. One of the outcomes of the scoping work for the Transitions Enhancement Themes was the extent and variety of programme or AP-led activity, and the potential for raising the profile of such work internally.



ACADEMIC STANDARDS



4.i APPROACH TO SETTING, MAINTAINING AND REVIEWING ACADEMIC STANDARDS

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY REGULATIONS

152. The university's quality framework is overseen by QAEC, acting on behalf of Academic Council. The Academic Standards and Quality Regulations (ASQR) sets out a well-established set of principles, regulations and procedures for setting, maintaining and reviewing academic standards for its taught provision, published on our website.⁶³ Further guidance, primarily intended for staff, is set out in related policy statements, supporting documents and proformas available on the intranet. Regulations relevant to research degrees have been approved by Academic Council, and will be adopted at the point of achieving rDAP.⁶⁴ The ASQR is one of the primary mechanisms by which we demonstrate how we meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code (see AIS).

153. The ASQR is published annually, both in electronic form and hard copy. Sections of the ASQR are reviewed as needed, responding to external drivers and / or potential enhancements identified through self-evaluation processes. For example, admissions policy and practices were reviewed in 2013-14 with the aims of improving consistency and maximising learner opportunities, and ensuring compliance with equalities legislation. The Admissions and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) regulations were revised as a consequence to support fair and consistent practice in admissions.⁶⁶ Changes to academic regulations require approval from Academic Council, which has responsibility for the oversight of academic standards of awards of the university. Changes are normally approved at least six months prior to implementation, to ensure there is adequate time to update student handbooks and guidance materials. However, updates

to operational procedures or guidance may be made as a result of routine evaluation of effectiveness, and disseminated via webpages and notification to key staff. For example, changes to the format and timing of annual monitoring meetings have been made in the light of feedback from staff (see Section 5).

154. We established a working group to consider the way in which we provide information about our quality framework, with the intention of improving accessibility and awareness among staff and students.⁶⁷ The group recommended a holistic approach to the re-organisation of our academic regulations, policies and procedures. The single volume "Academic Standards and Quality Regulations" currently includes both regulations relating to academic standards, and procedures and guidance relating to quality assurance and monitoring processes. Related proformas and policy documents are available in electronic form, but the organisation and location of these on the intranet was not very user-friendly for staff or students. It was agreed to move to a core set of "Academic Principles and Regulations" related to academic standards of university awards, including admission, assessment, credit frameworks and award structures, progression and award, appeals, and academic misconduct. This will be published as a printed and electronic document, available in English and Gaelic. It will signpost to relevant policies, guidance and other resources as appropriate, which will be published in electronic version only on the quality framework webpages. These webpages will form a single point of access for all academic regulations, procedures, policies and associated resources, organised by topic and with a search function, thereby improving accessibility. It is not envisaged that this change will entail any substantive change to the regulations, but it will enable policies and procedures to be updated and replaced as needed, and minor updates and corrections may be readily made, improving currency and accuracy. This re-organisation, planned for implementation in 2016-17, is one of the

⁶³ *Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2015-16*

⁶⁴ *PGR Regulations*

⁶⁵ *PGR Code of Practice 2015-16*

⁶⁶ *Review of Admissions Policy – Report to Academic Council*

⁶⁷ *Separation of Academic Regulations, Policies and Procedures*

ways in which we plan to improve provision of key information to current and prospective students, and improve accessibility for staff.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL

155. Curriculum development and approval processes are overseen by the Faculties, and the principles and procedures are set out within the ASQR, which provides clear guidance on the external reference points we use in setting the academic standards of its awards, in accordance with Part A of the Quality Code (see AIS). Programme teams are inherently referencing the SCQF and qualifications descriptors in designing programmes aligned with ASQR, and they are required to identify explicitly how they have used subject benchmark statements to formulate learning outcomes at programme level. Detailed proformas and guidance are available to support staff in designing and structuring programmes and modules.⁶⁸ Advisory groups, comprising internal members and external subject specialists, are convened to work with programme teams, acting as critical friends and a key part of the quality assurance process. As we have expanded our curriculum into new subject areas, and developing into Honours and Masters level, the advisory groups provide a valuable mechanism for sharing expertise across the partnership, and supporting less experienced programme teams. Both advisory groups and approval panels use the ASQR to ensure academic standards are set appropriately, and in line with our regulatory requirements. Approval event reports indicate that academic standards are in the main appropriately set, although for some programmes, conditions are set by the panel which must be met prior to recruitment. For example, this might be a revision to programme documentation to ensure that learning outcomes are appropriately expressed relative to the SCQF level. Where there are PSRB requirements relating to subject content or performance criteria which vary from the standard university regulations, these are formalised into programme-specific regulations e.g. BSc Oral Health Science, BSc (Hons) Psychology.

CURRICULUM MONITORING AND REVIEW

156. Our processes for reviewing and maintaining academic standards include annual monitoring at module and programme/award level, as evidenced in AIS. Self-evaluation documents (SEDs) require consideration of a number of KPIs, including student achievement and distribution of results which provide information relevant to academic standards. Threshold levels are set for pass rates, for example, and any module falling outwith threshold is automatically flagged for review and comment (see SEDs in AIS).

157. Following initial approval, all degree programmes and schemes are subject to re-approval after a specified period (normally four years), providing an opportunity to review indicative content, learning outcomes, student achievement and other KPIs relating to academic standards. Thereafter, re-approval is required only in specific circumstances, such as where there is a PSRB

requirement to do so, or if quality monitoring processes indicate that there is a need for review. Again, reports from reapproval events confirm that academic standards are being appropriately set and maintained.

158. Subject review enables periodic in-depth reflection on and analysis of how the requirements and the standards of the awards within each Subject Network are being managed and maintained. The process is set out within the ASQR, and the subject review panel includes external academic membership. All provision within the Subject Network is reviewed, based on a self-evaluation document produced by the Subject Network members, and drawing on the outcomes of quality monitoring processes and other evidence. Outcomes from subject reviews provide further evidence that academic standards are being appropriately set and maintained (see AIS).

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

159. External Examiners are selected and appointed in line with the expectation and indicators of the Quality Code. They are asked specifically to comment on academic standards and comparability of assessment processes against other HEIs. Their reports are submitted using a proforma, and all External Examiners receive a full written response, overseen by the relevant Exam Board chair. The vast majority of External Examiner reports indicate that academic standards are comparable to those elsewhere, that assessment is appropriate and fairly conducted, and that university regulations are applied rigorously and consistently (see AIS). Their reports and interactions with programme teams provide valuable input on curriculum content, assessment and delivery, and are a key source of evidence in quality monitoring and review processes. In the rare event that an External Examiner has raised a concern which they believe poses a risk to academic standards, such issues are given immediate consideration by the Faculty and a full response and any actions taken sent to the External Examiner.

4.ii

MANAGEMENT OF ASSESSMENT

160. Our arrangements for the management of assessment are set out in the ASQR. The Assessment, Feedback and Feedforward Policy and guidance, approved by Academic Council in March 2014, augments the relevant sections of the ASQR, providing guidance to staff on the management of assessment feedback.⁶⁹ It links to other learning and teaching policy statements, such as those relating to selection of learning technologies, and the use of Turnitin and the recording and subsequent use of video conference sessions. In addition to the ongoing review of assessment strategies by programme teams through annual monitoring, the effectiveness and appropriateness of assessment is also evaluated at Exam Boards (both Tier 1 and Tier 2). Outcomes of these reviews may lead to modifications to assessments at module or programme level, and, on occasion, changes to assessment regulations and procedures at institutional level.

⁶⁸ Programme Documentation Proformas and Guidance

⁶⁹ Assessment, Feedback and Feedforward Policy and Guidance

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

EXAM BOARDS

161. We operate a two-tier Exam Board system for all of our taught degree provision. Tier 1 deals with module outcomes and discussion of programme delivery and Tier 2 with programme outcomes in terms of awards and progression. The two-tier system is an efficient approach for our institution, in the light of the high proportion of modules shared between programmes and the extent of networked delivery and has been in operation since 2010-11. Most Exam Boards are conducted with VC participation, and External Examiners consistently comment on their effective organisation and administration (see AIS). The smooth running of Exam Boards depends on effective flow of information, and it was identified in Exam Board debrief/evaluation meetings that in some areas this was jeopardised where marks were being entered into the student record system after the stipulated deadline (although still before the Board). This was an issue which was flagged to PPF for monitoring and action where needed, which has resulted in steady improvement in compliance, rising from 78% in June 2013 to 83% in June 2015. Tier 1 Exam Board Chairs are tasked with investigating areas of non-compliance and escalating to AP management where necessary. Both Tier 1 and Tier 2 Boards enable monitoring of academic standards across degree provision, whether at module or programme level, and they are a key mechanism for securing comparability within and between different subject areas. Standard statistical reports are available for Tier 1 Exam Boards to enable monitoring of student achievement and distribution of results.

PROGRESSION BOARDS FOR SQA PROVISION

162. The purpose of progression boards is to review student progress and performance and ensure that student records are accurate. While progression boards do not make award decisions (this rests with SQA as the awarding body), they play an important part in the maintenance and review of academic standards, and meeting the SQA quality criteria. They also enable student support interventions, and support learning and teaching enhancement.
163. We have implemented networked progression boards on a phased basis from 2013-14, overseen by the HN Project Board (see Section 4). In particular, these support consistency in managing the assessment and delivery of SQA programmes which are networked across the partnership (as opposed to single site delivery).⁷⁰ Ten networked HN Programme Leaders, performing a similar role to degree Programme Leaders, have now been appointed for our largest cross-partnership programmes, i.e. those being delivered in 5 or more APs. The number of HN programmes participating in a networked progression board has increased from four in 2013-14 to ten in 2014-15.
164. The networked HN progression board pilot has driven regulatory changes that require all HN resulting to be considered at a single progression board, and developed

processes and practice to support streamlined operation of those progression boards. These changes ensure the resulting and progression of all HN students, regardless of programme or AP, are dealt with in a thorough, consistent and fair manner. Whilst progress to date has been effective, further development is required, and enhancement activity for 2015-16 will focus on:

- > Refining practice around mitigating circumstances
- > Revising core reports for HN progression boards
- > Enhancing the range and content of supporting process documentation

EXAM CENTRE

165. We operate a central Exam Centre, as a cross-partnership single service, managed through a service level agreement with Moray College UHI. This has worked successfully over many years, and the Steering Group set up to support its development has now been discontinued as the Exam Centre has moved to being 'business as usual'. Due to the extent of our networked provision, there are often students sitting the same exam at multiple locations, so the coordination is highly complex. The Exam Centre administers all degree exams, coordinates the exam timetable across all locations, and provides a single point of advice and guidance for staff, exams officers and invigilators, supporting consistency of practice and fair treatment of students.⁷¹ Common documentation and rubrics are used across all provision to ensure students can see quickly exactly what is required of them, regardless of how or where a module is delivered. The exam timetable is published early in each semester, to enable students to effectively plan their assessment schedules, and for arrangements for rooms and invigilators to be made at all locations. The Exam Centre is responsible for the secure transfer and storage of exam papers and distribution of scripts for marking. The Exam Centre also advises on alternative exam arrangements and alternative venues, helping to meet the needs of all our students, particularly as many student cohorts are geographically dispersed within Scotland and beyond, while maintaining integrity of the exam process.
166. It was identified that a proportion of exam papers, particularly resit exam papers, were being submitted to the Exam Centre after agreed deadlines, leading to potential risk to smooth operation of exams, as administrative staff were obliged to follow up missing papers and to process them very quickly. This led to revision of the agreed schedule for submission of exam papers, and a requirement to submit a resit paper at the same time as the main paper, with compliance monitored at senior management level through PPF.⁷² There has been a vast improvement in the timely submission of exam papers as a result; for the S2 diet in 2012-13 90% of programmes submitted some documentation late, while for the same diet in 2014-15, this had dropped to 37% (NB this includes items such as registers). Clearly, compliance with the submission schedule is not yet universal, and we are continuing to progress this via PPF. The Exam Centre reviews

⁷⁰ *Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2015-16, Section 17A*

⁷¹ *Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2015-16, Appendix B*

⁷² *Review of UHI Exam Centre Procedures*

all exams officers' and invigilators' reports, using this feedback to inform review of procedures and guidance, enabling improved efficiency and clarity, for example relating to permitted materials in the examination room.⁷³

4.iii

USE OF EXTERNAL REFERENCE POINTS IN MANAGING ACADEMIC STANDARDS

167. We make use of a range of external reference points in managing academic standards. Our regulations and procedures are aligned with the UK Quality Code (see AIS), and make explicit reference to SCQF and subject benchmarks, taking a similar approach to that of many HEIs. We have taken a systematic approach to mapping our policies and procedures to the UK Quality Code and other relevant sector guidance and publications, and this is monitored by QAEC (previously by LTQC). As new or revised guidance is published, the relevant individual or group is requested to consider its content and implications, map against current policies and procedures, and report back on action taken, and any further recommendations for change.

168. In developing collaborative provision and student exchange opportunities, we have made use of international reference points, particularly the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation Scheme (ECTS) to support student mobility and recognition of qualifications (see Section 6). The Joint Masters Degree in Aquaculture, Environment and Society was structured using ECTS as a common platform for the recognition and accumulation of academic credit, and the ECTS grading scale for transparency of assessment criteria across three institutions.⁷⁴

169. Guidance and procedures for the design, approval and review of curriculum signpost to external reference points, including the SCQF and qualification descriptors and subject benchmark statements.⁷⁵ ⁷⁶Programme teams are required to indicate how they have made use of them in programme documentation, and in dialogue with approval and review panels.⁷⁷ Teams may draw on several subject benchmark statements in developing innovative or inter-disciplinary degree programmes. Subject Review self-evaluation documents provide evidence on how different programmes and subject areas have approached this.



SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (SCQF)

170. As well as being a key reference point in our quality framework for curriculum development and approval, the SCQF forms the foundation of our RPL processes and articulation arrangements, with academic staff mapping learning outcomes against the SCQF to ensure that academic standards are secured. Examples include mapping of curriculum outcomes delivered by collaborative partners in China to support articulation into our engineering programmes, and articulation from HNC/Ds to degree programmes from Scottish FE colleges.

PROFESSIONAL, STATUTORY AND REGULATORY BODIES (PSRBs)

171. Where relevant, we seek professional accreditation for our courses. In some cases, such accreditation provides added value to graduates in terms of employability, in others it is a requirement to practice. A number of programmes are accredited by PSRBs, thereby meeting the particular industry or professional requirements of that employment sector, and providing external recognition of the quality and standards of our provision.⁷⁸ An important development for the university in 2013 was achieving recognition from the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) for delivery of initial teacher education, and we now offer a range of Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programmes in primary and secondary education, in both English and Gaelic medium.

172. We have worked in partnership with the General Dental Council, NHS Education for Scotland and other partners to develop programmes in Dental Technology and Oral Health Science which can be delivered on a blended learning basis, tailored to the needs of our students and the region. We remain responsible in all circumstances for setting and maintaining academic standards of the programmes, but we have the flexibility to approve variations from our standard regulations such as specific module threshold pass marks, in order to meet the GDC accreditation requirements. Similarly, the BSc (Hons) Psychology is accredited by the British Psychological Society, meeting its requirements in relation to content and staff qualifications. Currently we are seeking approval from the Nursing and Midwifery Council to become an Approved Educational Institution, prior to offering a pre-registration nursing degree.

EXTERNALLY IN CURRICULUM DESIGN, APPROVAL AND REVIEW

173. As well as through External Examiners, we require external members on our Advisory Groups, approval panels and subject / service review panels. These may be academic staff from other HEIs, or industry specialists or professionals, who are suitably qualified and experienced to advise on academic standards and comparability to other programmes in the sector. Their critical expertise and input is highly valuable, especially

⁷³ Revised guidance on permitted materials in exam venue

⁷⁴ Aquaculture, Environment and Society Joint Masters (JMD ACES) Documents

⁷⁵ Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2015-16

⁷⁶ Programme Documentation – Proformas and Guidance

⁷⁷ BA (Hons) Adventure Tourism Management Programme Document (CUR02)

⁷⁸ Programmes with PSRB Accreditation

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

where we are developing into new curriculum areas. A recent example is the approval of a degree in Sport and Fitness, where it was advised that a more explicit mapping of the science content in the programme would help to ensure that the award designation of BSc (Hons) was appropriate.

174. Programme teams regularly liaise with employers and industry advisory bodies, to ensure that the academic standards required of our graduates are current and relevant to employers in terms of knowledge and skills. As well as formal PSRB accreditation arrangements, we work with major organisations such as regional Health Boards, the Professional Golfers' Association, Scottish and Southern Energy, Scottish Natural Heritage to ensure our provision is current and relevant.

OTHER AWARDING BODIES – SQA

175. We are a single SQA centre (i.e. regarded as a single entity by SQA) for all higher education provision, and we deliver awards across a broad range of subject areas. Predominantly these are Higher National Certificates (HNC) and Higher National Diplomas (HND), although a range of Professional Development Awards (PDA) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) at SCQF level 7 and above are also offered. All students on SQA HE courses across the partnership are HE registered through our single centre. (For clarity, APs enter their FE students under their own FE centre number).

176. We hold maximum devolvable powers from SQA for key quality assurance functions, which demonstrates their confidence in our ability to approve, monitor and deliver their awards to the appropriate standard. As the awarding organisation, SQA sets the learning outcomes and academic standards for their awards, published in 'arrangement documents'. In approving and monitoring SQA provision, our processes ensure that SQA's criteria and standards are met as well as our internal quality criteria relating to resourcing and student experience. Our quality assurance processes, such as validation, approval and internal verification, together with SQA's external verification (EV) system, provide assurance that academic standards are set and managed appropriately in accordance with SQA quality criteria. We have an excellent track record in meeting SQA's assessment and verification standards, demonstrated by the annual schedule of EV visits (agreed in conjunction with SQA on a risk-based approach) and the EV reports.⁷⁹ EV reports are a key source of evidence in quality monitoring and review processes, and are explicitly referenced in annual programme and Subject Network SEDs (see AIS).

177. SQA programmes are fully integrated into quality monitoring processes through the ASQR, including annual monitoring and subject review. Our quality processes for SQA provision, such as course approval and internal verification, are intended to be transparent and accessible to staff and students and follow a standardised procedure across the university. The SQA networked Programme Leader role is in phased roll-out

for all SQA networked provision, at the direction of the HN Project Board, and is proving effective in sharing good practice and strengthening programme teams across different locations. External verification of SQA provision also applies agreed protocols and procedures, and is coordinated and managed centrally through the university's SQA coordinator.

178. At a strategic quality enhancement level, we are represented in SQA national fora, such as the HN Key Partners Steering Group and SQA/College Quality Focus Group. It is important for us to be able to utilise such channels to connect effectively with national developments, particularly in those areas that have a key impact on enhancing the quality of the learner experience. Those areas include; FE/HE transition, HN/degree enhancement and implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence. We aim to engage effectively with all our main stakeholders, both internally and externally, in a coherent and coordinated way through our regional and local structures.

179. SQA is reintroducing its 'Systems Verification' process, by which it seeks to ensure that all SQA centres have effective systems in place to meet its revised quality assurance criteria for 2015-18. We undertook a self-evaluative mapping exercise to identify existing evidence to demonstrate achievement of each of the SQA systems verification criteria.⁸⁰ This will be maintained as a live document in which additional or alternative sources of evidence are included on an ongoing basis. An SQA development visit provided support for implementation of the revised criteria in advance of full rollout in 2015-16 and resulted in an outcome report, mapping SQA's findings against each criterion and identifying developmental actions, recommendations and areas of good practice. Identified good practice includes the use of student feedback to inform self-evaluation and action planning. Our developmental actions and recommendations are in keeping with those for other Scottish HEIs and many points reflect recent changes to SQA criteria, such as the requirement to put in place a malpractice policy that covers aspects beyond our existing academic misconduct policy. All actions and recommendations will be addressed through the HN Project Board, and planning and task allocation are underway at the time of writing. The university SQA Coordinator will coordinate review of the mapping document and monitor progress in conjunction with AP colleagues, reporting to the HN Project Board and subsequently to QAEC.

180. The HN Project Board was established in October 2013 as a strategic level initiative to ensure the connectedness of HN delivery and development across the partnership, and to deliver practical and sustainable process enhancement that ultimately enhances the student experience. Its remit includes: overseeing the appointment of networked HN Programme Leaders; fully implementing networked HN progression boards and developing a re-focused framework for the

⁷⁹ SQA External Verification Report 2015

⁸⁰ SQA Systems Verification Criteria and Mapping

enhancement of HN provision, including the sharing of materials and good practice, internal verification activity, and underpinning staff development. Its membership therefore reflects a range of functions including: AP senior management, Deans of Faculty and Subject Network Leaders, student records office (SRO), quality managers, HN Programme Leaders, and the university SQA co-ordinator. The HN Project Board reports primarily to QAEC but also informs other committees, including Quality Forum and PPF. Project Board members participate in other working groups, such as the module evaluation survey working group, to ensure SQA practitioner input to the design and development of quality enhancement initiatives university-wide. Developments to date include: the ongoing rollout of networked HN progression board pilot; implementation of the networked HN Programme Leader role and the appointment of 10 networked HN Programme Leaders (to those HNs which are delivered in the majority of APs); defining the university HN delivery frameworks and ongoing change process; oversight of the SQA Systems Verification audit and production of an enhanced HN course handbook template.

OTHER AWARDING BODIES – UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

181. Our PGR students are registered with the University of Aberdeen, with whom we have operated a successful accreditation arrangement for the delivery of research degrees since 2005, with the most recent re-accreditation in 2014.⁸¹ The University of Aberdeen devolves significant responsibility for the management and quality assurance of PGR provision to us, reflecting a high level of confidence, confirmed in the latest re-accreditation report. The relationship has been very valuable for us in developing expertise and experience in management of PGR and associated academic standards.

182. In preparing for achieving research degree awarding powers, we were able to draw on the experience of working with the University of Aberdeen's regulatory framework as a reference point in formulating our own regulations for setting and maintaining academic standards, in addition to sector guidance and the UK Quality Code, adapting where appropriate to our own context and structures.^{82 83}

4.iv

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR SECURING ACADEMIC STANDARDS

183. We are confident that the ASQR provides an appropriate and robust framework for setting, maintaining and reviewing academic standards, which is well-established within the university partnership. It is explicitly linked to external reference points, in particular the UK Quality Code, the SCQF and subject benchmarks. Building on what has already been achieved, we have recognised that accessing information and guidance supporting the ASQR could be further enhanced, and we are addressing this through a planned re-organisation of these materials

and resources on our webpages. There is value in having more flexibility to update procedures and guidance readily, but this will need to be balanced with effective communications with staff about any changes.

184. Our curriculum approval and review processes, incorporating extensive external input, provide an effective quality assurance mechanism, and outcomes indicate that our academic standards are in line with sector norms. It is also clear from the conditions and recommendations that arise from the review processes that we must continue to be rigorous in fulfilling those conditions, and ensuring that action plans are systematically implemented and monitored. As new curriculum is developed and delivered, there is an ongoing need to ensure that less experienced staff are supported in understanding how the quality framework enables academic standards to be secured, and that we monitor the consistency of implementation across all subject areas and APs.

185. Procedures supporting management of assessment continue to be refined, and there are areas which we are actively monitoring via PPF with the aim of improving compliance with agreed deadlines, including exam paper submission and entry of marks prior to Exam Boards. We are continuing to work on the implementation of the Assessment, Feedback and Feedforward policy, in particular awareness-raising and working with HISA. This area was agreed as an internal enhancement theme for 2014-15, and the annual monitoring SEDs provide initial data on impact to date. Evidence from Exam Boards, and particularly from External Examiners, provides assurance that academic standards are comparable to those elsewhere in the sector. They have also been effective in identifying where there are potential risks to academic standards arising, which have enabled us to address these promptly.

186. We make extensive use of external expertise, which is incorporated into our curriculum development, approval and review processes. This has proved highly valuable as we have extended our curriculum portfolio during a period of rapid growth, ensuring that our provision meets national academic standards and sector norms. External Examiners and verifiers provide confirmation of our capacity in setting and maintaining standards, as do our longstanding and successful relationships with other awarding organisations.



⁸¹ Report of PGR re-accreditation by University of Aberdeen (2014)

⁸² PGR Regulations

⁸³ PGR Code of Practice 2015-16

SELF-EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION

5.i KEY FEATURES OF THE INSTITUTION'S APPROACH

ANNUAL QUALITY MONITORING

187. Our annual quality monitoring process is reflective and continuously cyclical in nature, and includes all of our undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision. Its focus is on student-centred quality enhancement, i.e. the ongoing development of curriculum and the student experience by teaching and support teams, rather than on quality assurance and due process. However, quality assurance issues, including those identified through monitoring relevant KPIs, are addressed where necessary. We routinely and systematically consider the effectiveness of this process of critical reflection and enhance our provision based on the outcomes (see AIS).⁸⁴
188. All degree modules, programmes, Subject Networks (SNs) and APs are required to submit annual self-evaluation documents (SEDs), including reflection on the actions taken in the preceding academic year. Comment is requested on student feedback, External Examiner reports, KPIs, and internal enhancement themes. Submission dates are sequenced to allow lower-level SEDs to feed into and inform the writing of higher-level SEDs. The relationship between module, programme and Subject Network SEDs is an important one, and the increasingly strategic approach to quality monitoring and the systematic identification of key areas for focus has developed well over the last few years. Restructuring to six Subject Networks more readily facilitates a set of strategic and cohesive actions which, taken together, give clear definition to enhancement and monitoring at institutional level.

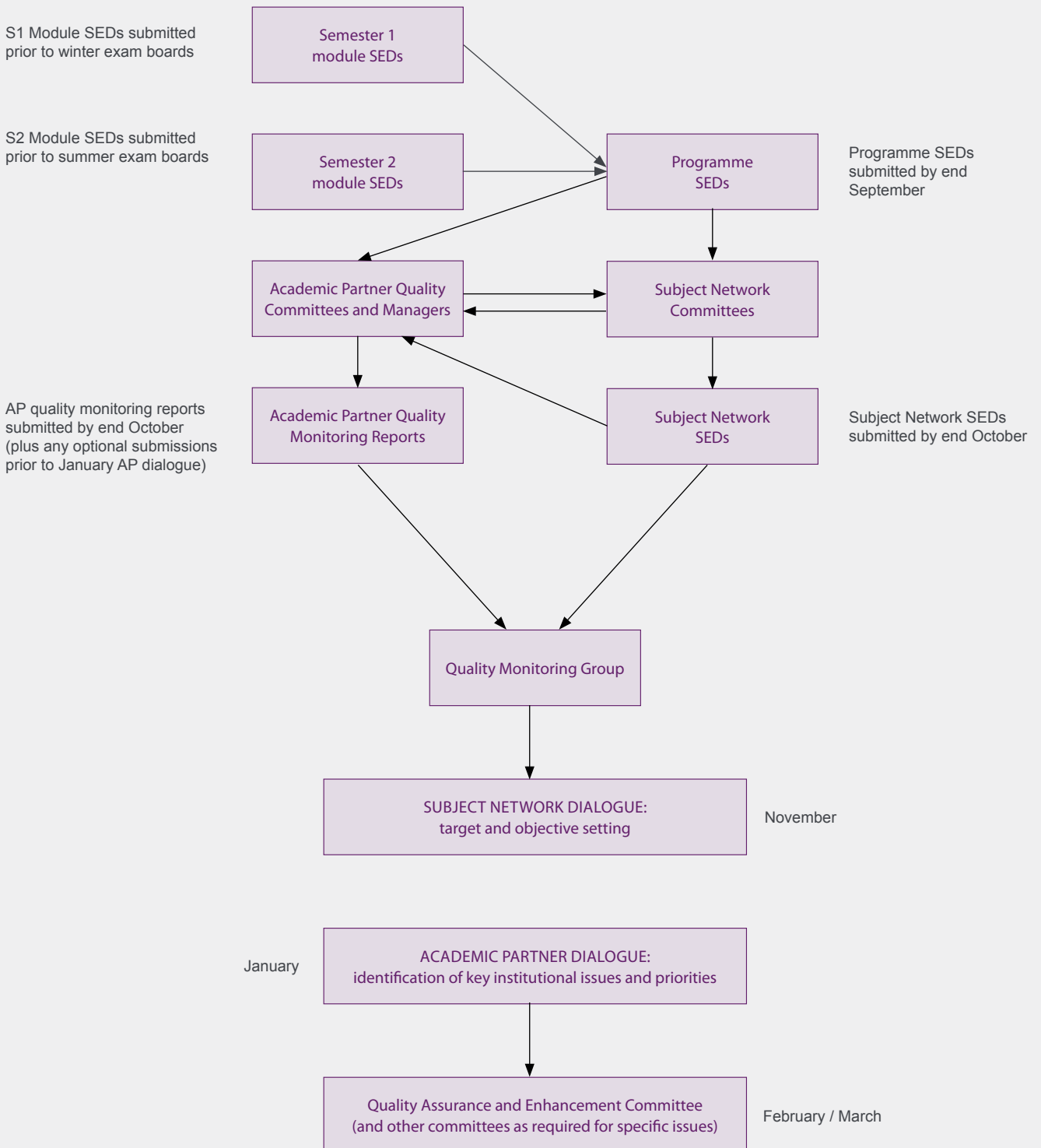
189. The SN and AP SEDs form the basis of discussion at a series of annual dialogue meetings. The SN dialogues involve the Quality Monitoring Group (chaired by the Deputy Principal and comprising internal, external and student membership) meeting with representative groups for each SN. Subsequently a meeting of the SNLQM Forum engages in open and supportive dialogue on key areas identified at the SN dialogues, in addition to AP-specific issues. The SNLQM Forum comprises all Subject Network Leaders, all AP Quality Managers and internal members of QMG. An outcome report is produced for each SN dialogue, and quality assurance and enhancement and curriculum-related actions and objectives (for SNs, APs, and Executive Office) for the following 12 months are agreed following the SNLQM Forum.

190. Annual quality monitoring is an area within which the growing body of KPI and student feedback data can be used effectively, and which can also (without losing the enhancement focus) be used to address issues identified in other elements of our internal quality processes or through specific projects. We recognise the need for robust KPI data to form a significant part of annual quality monitoring and this has been the subject of continual enhancement over recent years. Most recently it has been reflected in the identification of a suite of new CPIs in the Strategic Plan, and there was extensive dialogue both about these and the related KPIs at senior level. We have reflected on the definition and use of KPIs in annual monitoring as part of our evaluation of the process itself, as we recognise the desirability of continuously evaluating how we use the data available to us, and which data sources we cite.



⁸⁴ Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2015-16, Section 5

Figure 5.1: Annual Quality Monitoring Flow Chart



SELF-EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION

INTERNAL ENHANCEMENT THEMES

191. Annual monitoring SEDs include reflection on internal enhancement themes, which are determined in response to external drivers and/or institutional priorities, e.g. QAA enhancement themes, strategic goals, specific student support activities. QAEC selects the themes each year (although some themes run over several years), but this will also be discussed by Quality Forum as we seek greater alignment between FE and HE as a tertiary organisation. The internal enhancement themes for 2014-15 were agreed following reflection on developments in the sector, and analysis of student feedback and KPIs:

- > **Engagement with assessment and feedback:** this was identified in response to internal and external drivers. Student feedback indicated that this was an area for development, also noted in ELIR2. It is also a recurrent area for lower student satisfaction at national level, as identified through the NSS, the NUS Charter on Feedback and Assessment, and ELIR sector reports. Our Student Partnership Agreement for 2013-14 included assessment as one of its themes and we developed our Assessment, Feedback and Feedforward Policy and associated implementation plan in 2014.
- > **Research-teaching linkages:** relates to strategic objective to improve the linkages between research and curriculum and to ensure taught curriculum is informed by staff active in research and/or scholarship and engaged with their industry sector.
- > **Transitions:** aligns with the national Transitions Enhancement Theme 2014-17. It was felt that using this as a theme would give an opportunity to identify and share good practice at all levels, and would provide a useful dataset to promote and showcase activities nationally.

The use of internal enhancement themes in annual monitoring is intended to reinforce the enhancement focus of the process, and alignment to sector developments and institutional priorities. Guidance is provided to staff to support their use in reflection, and the themes have been effective in highlighting good practice at all levels, and in monitoring activities. There is scope to analyse and disseminate the information generated in this way more systematically, and we are reflecting on ways to achieve this.



ENHANCEMENTS TO ANNUAL MONITORING PROCESS SINCE ELIR2

192. QAEC is responsible for the development and operation of the annual quality monitoring process, which has been the subject of ongoing critical reflection. We have made considerable progress, as demonstrated through a series of evolutionary steps, each one taken after careful deliberation. We engaged in the Institutional Approaches to Self-evaluation (IASE) project commissioned by QAA Scotland, and have sought to embed its principles.⁸⁵

ACTION PLANNING

193. Action planning within annual monitoring was identified as an area for development at ELIR2. In response to this, module SEDs for 2013-14 onwards were required to include a table of key actions planned for future delivery (previously, action plans within module SEDs were optional). From 2015-16 onwards, Module Leaders will be required to include progress reports on actions identified in the previous SED, in addition to planned actions for the following year. Programme SEDs already included the requirement for action plans, and from 2015-16 will also include the requirement for a progress update on these actions. The requirement for progress reports further strengthens the quality monitoring processes and ensures that there is explicit feedback on agreed actions, thereby 'closing the loop'. It also mirrors the approach to systematic monitoring of actions identified at subject review and the ongoing monitoring of high-level actions agreed through SNLQM Forum.

SED PROFORMAS AND KPIS

194. The SED proformas have been amended for 2015-16 to strengthen consistent analysis of KPI data. Over time, at the highest level, this will facilitate a strong connection with the Strategic Plan CPIs, hence ensuring a cohesive and consistent approach where priorities for action are clearly identified. A working group was convened to revise the module, programme, and Subject Network SED proformas through the identification of data requirements, which would in turn inform the agenda of the Student Data Reporting Group to move forward with the design of appropriate KPI reports. The Quality Forum reaffirmed SEDs as the basis of the quality monitoring process at all levels, and agreed approaches to the use of quality monitoring SEDs and KPIs/data. The working group produced revised SED proformas, whereby a standard KPI report is incorporated into the SED capturing relevant data. Benefits of this approach include:

- > Supports consistency of approach
- > Supports evidence-based reflection
- > Reinforces SITS as 'the one truth', rather than any locally held records
- > Eliminates the need to cut and paste data into the proforma
- > Readers can view the original data on which the author is commenting

The definition and threshold levels of the KPIs have been refined and approved through consultation with Quality

⁸⁵ www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/IASE-project-report.pdf

Forum and QAEC, and the KPI report and presentation have been taken forward by the Student Data Reporting Group.⁸⁶

195. The format of the annual AP report has been through several iterations since the implementation of the current quality monitoring process, seeking the best way of integrating monitoring and review processes within the APs with those taking place within programmes and SNs. For the 2014-15 cycle it was agreed to revert to a SED proforma to support consistency of reporting style and depth, and to focus on KPIs which were closely aligned to the Strategic Plan, and relevant across the FE/HE boundary.

CHANGES TO SN AND AP DIALOGUES

196. The relationship between the SN and AP dialogues has been refined over the last three years providing further demonstration of our critical reflection on the annual quality monitoring process. Initially, the SN QMG dialogues and AP QMG dialogues were parallel processes; common outcomes arising from SN QMG dialogues did not feed into the AP QMG dialogues, which were organised as a separate series of meetings with AP representatives. Action lists arising from SN and AP QMG dialogues were produced, and groups or individuals were identified to take these actions forward. We recognised that whilst this process led to individual SNs and APs ensuring a process of ongoing reflection, there was a risk that this reflection and the ensuing action would not be cohesive. This approach also meant that it was less likely that high level, strategic issues would be identified and considered systematically. Whilst the alignment of SN and AP dialogues did provide a forum for sharing understanding, we considered that further refinement was required so that a clear, common and agreed agenda for action and enhancement could be identified. In combination with other quality processes, we are now able to identify more readily the key overarching areas and topics for development.
197. The format for SN dialogues has remained largely unchanged since their inception - a small group of representatives from each SN meets with QMG members for discussion based on the SN SED. However, the AP dialogues have evolved, at the direction of QAEC, to be much more inclusive and to provide strong continuity in relation to the SN dialogues. Instead of multiple separate meetings including solely AP staff and members of QMG, we have moved to a single, round-table meeting of the SNLQM Forum involving members of QMG, AP Quality Managers and Subject Network Leaders. This format is proving effective in enabling the group collectively to link network- and partner-based developments. As a result QAEC is able to manage actions arising from annual quality monitoring in a more focussed and strategic manner, and now explicitly agrees and monitors key actions arising from the quality monitoring process. This has strengthened the effectiveness of the process as a 'high level' common agenda is defined and clear strategic areas for action are identified and followed through.

ROLE AND REMIT OF THE QUALITY FORUM

198. A further recommendation emerging from annual quality monitoring was to consider greater alignment of FE and HE quality monitoring processes. The Cross-Regional Quality Forum (CRQF) (an established, cross-regional group comprising most of the key managers with a remit for FE quality across the partnership) was identified as a possible forum to facilitate these discussions. It was identified that there was a perception that APs did not feel a strong sense of ownership of quality monitoring processes for HE programmes, and that they were seen as very 'top-down', hindering their effectiveness in maintaining and improving the quality of the student experience.
199. It was also considered that the critical axis between the Subject Network Leaders, working across the partnership (horizontal) and the Quality Managers working within individual APs (vertical) should be strengthened. As a result, in June 2014, the group was reconstituted as the Quality Forum; membership was extended to include representatives from all APs, the Academic Registrar and Quality Monitoring Officer from Executive Office; and the group's remit was extended to include both FE and HE matters. Given that Quality Managers have responsibility for the oversight of both FE and HE quality within their AP, this forum provides a context for dialogue and opportunities for working more effectively across the tertiary organisation. The group has since met regularly and acted as a key consultation group in revising the annual quality monitoring SEDs and KPI reports.

PPF COMPLIANCE MONITORING

200. The role of PPF has been systematically strengthened over recent years, both in terms of its core role in regard to student number planning, but also in relation to compliance monitoring in some key data management and quality processes, including submission of SEDs at module and programme level. Regular reporting to PPF ensures there is visibility at senior management level of annual monitoring and also enables intervention where there is any evidence of non-compliance. This strengthened role for PPF has been borne out of ongoing evaluation and critical reflection, and the value of PPF as a forum where senior staff consider issues which relate to student numbers, academic planning and compliance across the university partnership.

SUBJECT AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICE REVIEW

201. We operate a process of periodic internally-led subject review, in accordance with Quality Code expectations and SFC guidance. The unit of review is the Subject Network, which is required to submit a SED and supporting evidence which form the basis for discussion with the panel. Panels are chaired by the Deans, usually a Dean of Faculty, and include internal and external members and a student member.⁸⁷ Subject review reports, action plans, and the formal one-year follow-up report are monitored by the relevant Faculty Board and presented to QAEC for approval. The subject review

⁸⁶ SED Proforma Working Group: Final Report Feb 2015

⁸⁷ Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2015-16, Section 4

SELF-EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION

process considers student support matters as well as curriculum, learning and teaching, in order to look at the student experience holistically, although there is a separate service review process (see AIS).

202. We introduced student support service review in 2014-15, in recognition of the critical connectedness between the Subject Networks and Faculties as academic entities and the professional student support services. This had been a long-standing aspiration of the Student Support practitioner group, and is consistent with practice elsewhere in the sector, and we consulted with other HEIs in developing our methodology to ensure that we adopted best practice in the sector. QAEC agreed that there should be a formal review process instigated for these services, to strengthen our ability to enhance the quality of the student experience, and in light of student feedback indicating variability in some areas. Students benefit from the student support services provided locally by each AP, as well as being able to access those provided on a partnership basis. The process mirrors subject review, but is adapted as needed to the different structure and governance of the service under review. The first service review focused on libraries and was chaired by the Dean of Students; the panel included a student, and internal and external members (see AIS). The libraries team included representatives from each AP, and the event included two meetings with students, and a meeting with AP library managers from across the partnership. Feedback from all participants affirmed that the process was valuable and enhancement-focussed.
203. QAEC is responsible for oversight of the university-wide recommendations arising from subject and service reviews, assigning actions to relevant individuals or bodies and monitoring progress on these actions. Subject Network level recommendations and subsequent action plans are monitored at Faculty and Subject Network level, and both these and the university-wide recommendations are monitored on an ongoing basis through annual quality monitoring. Recommendations arising from service reviews are monitored in a similar manner, with the service team reporting to QAEC.

LINKS BETWEEN ANNUAL MONITORING AND SUBJECT/SERVICE REVIEW

204. The annual SN SEDs form part of the evidence base for the periodic subject review SEDs. Together they provide an initial agenda for subject review panels. Datasets used in annual quality monitoring underpin the identification of trends described in subject review SEDs, and support discussion at review events. The compilation of common themes (either areas for development or areas of good practice) arising from the annual SN QMG dialogues and subsequently discussed and further refined at the SNLQM Forum results in an action plan which may include areas for development by SNs, either individually or collaboratively. Such activities would also be detailed in subject review SEDs, and may form the basis for

discussion at reviews. These links provide further evidence of our critical reflection leading to an increasingly strategic approach to the management of quality monitoring and enhancement, wherein clear common agendas are identified across quality processes. In this respect we consider that subject / service review will be most effective if it is routinely and demonstrably aligned with annual quality processes.

EMERGING THEMES AND PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED AND ASSIGNED BY QAEC

205. The role of QAEC has evolved and developed over recent years, taking a more strategic and focused approach to quality monitoring and enhancement than the former committee structure allowed. The current approach builds on earlier iterations to enhance further the effectiveness and impact of quality monitoring and enhancement processes, including annual monitoring and subject and service review. QAEC reviewed its modus operandi in December 2014, agreeing to prioritise a small number of key themes or areas each year, assigning these to lead groups or individuals and actively monitoring progress. To support this, effective links to practitioner groups and other committees which are accountable to QAEC were reinforced.⁸⁸ It was agreed that, for as long as deemed necessary, the following areas would be closely monitored by QAEC:
- > Libraries service
 - > NSS and other KPI data reporting and management
 - > ELIR 2015-16 preparation and management
 - > Transitions Enhancement Theme (in alignment with strategic planning)
 - > Engagement at HE level with employability and skills for work (including the activities of the Placement Practitioners Network, and in alignment with strategic planning).



⁸⁸ QAEC Operation and Interests

206. QAEC has also from time to time instigated reviews of specific areas of activity as a result of self-evaluation and internal audit processes, both where there was potential risk emerging, but also to identify and share good practice. One example of this was a working group established in October 2013 to undertake a review of placement and other offsite activity, in the light of the strategic aim to provide more placement opportunities. In addition, there were institutional and national drivers to promote student mobility, and we are seeking to increase student participation in outgoing exchange and/or study abroad opportunities, whether through Erasmus+ or other programmes. We also recognised an institutional-level risk that students may have a poor experience associated with activities undertaken 'off-site'. A small number of instances had been identified which indicated that our procedures and regulatory framework for planning, managing and monitoring such activities, and/or the consistent implementation thereof, should be reviewed. Three work streams were identified by the group, each with a set of recommendations for further action:

- > Work stream 1 – Placement Learning Policy and supporting staff and student guidance
- > Work stream 2 – Student mobility / study abroad arrangements e.g. Erasmus, International Exchange Programme, other exchange agreements (outgoing students)
- > Work stream 3 – Student records issues

The group reported with its recommendations in September 2014 and ongoing work is being undertaken through the Placement Practitioners Group, led by the Careers and Employability Centre Manager, and reporting progress to QAEC.^{89 90}



IMPROVING USE OF DATA AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

207. The Strategic Plan and Vision 2015-20 was developed through a series of workshops involving AP Principals and senior staff from Executive Office. As part of its development, detailed consideration was given to a set of high level CPIs, reflecting both FE and HE, focussed on the strategic themes such as student numbers, research activity and income, business and community engagement, and student satisfaction. These CPIs were approved by Court in March 2015, and subsequent activity and workshops involving senior staff have focused on the development of a related set of KPIs. Monitoring of CPIs has high visibility at Court and more generally the monitoring of the CPIs and KPIs will become embedded fully in our committee deliberations. In comparison to the previous strategic plan, the Strategic Plan and Vision 2015-20 has a tighter focus on a relatively small number of CPIs, and it is anticipated that this will support the further development of a cohesive approach to quality monitoring and enhancement which is based on identified key priorities for the university partnership.

208. We have established the Student Data Reporting Group (SDRG) to review the reporting functionality of SITS to streamline KPI reporting, and enable more effective monitoring. SDRG has a remit for both FE and HE student data and is tasked with prioritising and overseeing the development of reports in order to meet external requirements in the light of our new responsibilities as the regional strategic body. Additional resource has been committed to move this forward. For HE provision, a standard minimum dataset of KPIs relating to retention, progression, achievement and student population profile (including equalities data), has been agreed for inclusion in annual monitoring SEDs. A KPI report format with improved visual presentation has been developed, displaying three-year trend data to support staff in monitoring KPIs at all levels and evaluating the impact of enhancement initiatives (see AIS). 'Dashboard' style reports are also available to facilitate live monitoring of, for example, applications and enrolments against agreed targets.

209. We undertook a 'curriculum and diets' project during 2012-15, to further enhance the management of student and curriculum data held on SITS, and associated business processes. This has enabled a more student-centred approach, with students now able to select their modules online, initiate processes such as suspension of study or submission of mitigating circumstances, and update their personal details. The project has automated a number of key processes, and delivered more reliable information for planning purposes, leading to, for example, improved timetabling information for students and resource allocation. The Academic Management Information Group (AMI), comprising registry and academic staff, works to extend and embed such developments, and has a remit to continually improve the integrity, accuracy and usefulness of academic data, and the efficiency and effectiveness of related business processes.

⁸⁹ Review of Placements and Offsite Activity Report Aug 2014

⁹⁰ Revised Placement Policy Dec 2015

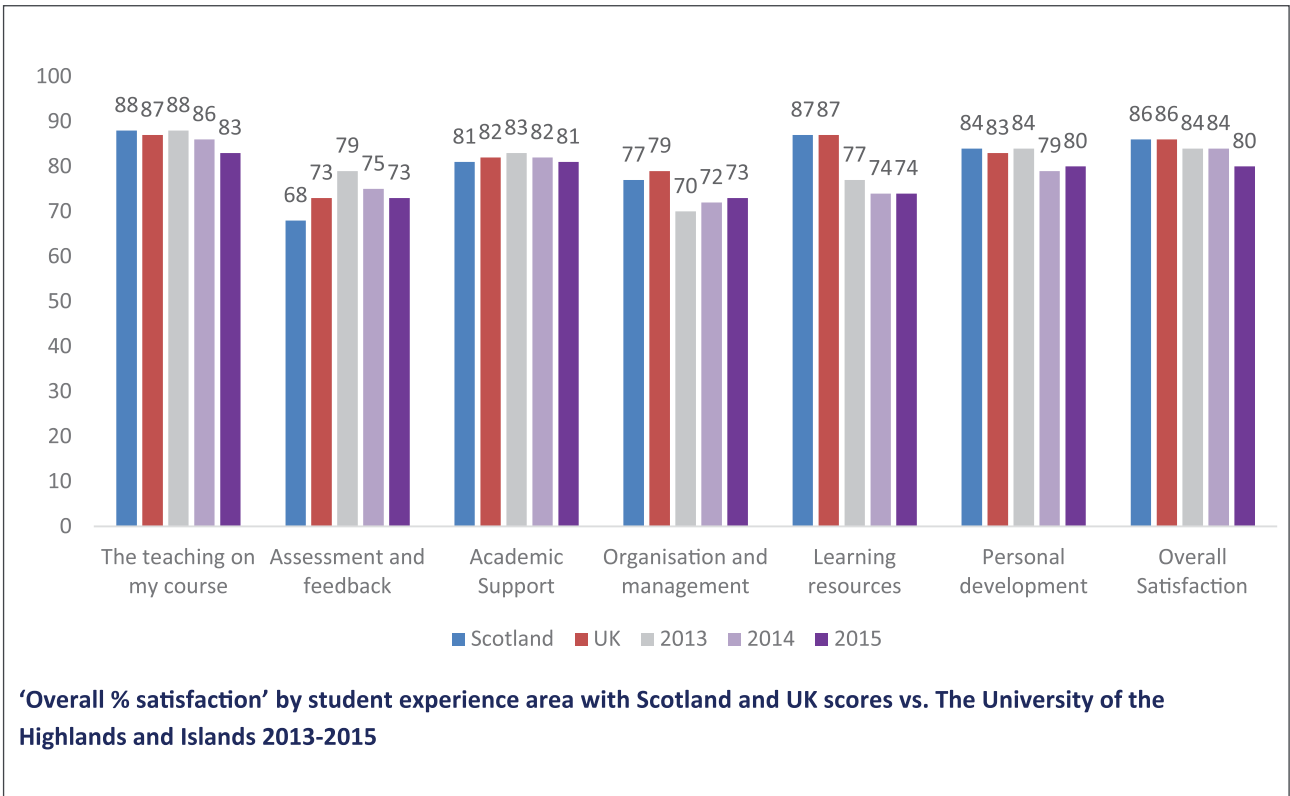
SELF-EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION

STUDENT SURVEYS
NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS)

210. QAEC is responsible for overseeing management, analysis and action planning relating to NSS, on behalf of the Principal and Academic Council, and has identified this as one of its key enhancement priorities. NSS score is the student satisfaction CPI within our Strategic Plan, with a target of 2 percentage points above Scottish average overall satisfaction by 2019-20. The decline in our score for 2015 underlines the need for a concerted and cohesive approach, with engagement across all APs and Programme Leaders, and working in partnership with HISA. This approach will monitor and direct the full cycle of NSS activity, identify issues and agree actions, and take oversight of work being undertaken by APs and Faculties, with regular reports to QAEC.⁹¹ Looking at NSS outcomes over the first three years of our participation, emerging trends relate to issues of student communication and engagement, assessment feedback and feelings of belonging, and we are taking action to address these.

211. We considered carefully the optimum time to start participating in the NSS, in the light of factors including our increasing student numbers, the development of our quality framework, and the desirability of being able to benchmark against the sector, given the increase in the number of HEIs in Scotland taking part. We decided to enter the NSS for the first time in 2013, and established the NSS Project Board to oversee this. The remit of the Project Board was to ensure the data sample submitted for the NSS was as accurate as possible; to raise the profile of the NSS and meet the required response rate across all APs in order for the results to be published, and disseminate the results accordingly. The success of the Project Board in achieving the consistently high response rates demonstrates a strong team effort and is an example of effective partnership working. Staff in each AP are attentive, effective and highly supportive of meeting the response rate target, and management of this aspect of NSS moved to 'business as usual' for 2015. Since our first year of participation in the NSS, awareness and increased buy-in has been achieved across the partnership despite the survey actually producing only limited tailored feedback to APs due to the small cohorts across some of our campuses and courses.

FIGURE 5.2: NSS 2015 OUTCOMES BENCHMARKED TO SECTOR AVERAGE



⁹¹ Response to NSS 2015 and Action Plan

⁹² National Student Survey (NSS) Report 2015

212. It was disappointing that our institutional score for student satisfaction dropped by 4% in 2015, compared with the 2014 survey results, and we have lost several positions in the ranked list of Scottish HEIs.⁹² The dip in student satisfaction this year appeared to be linked to particularly low scores in a relatively small number of programmes and/or specific locations, e.g. HND Acting and Performance, BA (Hons) Music Business, HND Visual Communications. A notable decline in satisfaction for BA (Hons) Child and Youth Studies also had a major impact, since this programme had a large target cohort. There was significant disruption for certain cohorts of students as a result of storm damage at North Highland College UHI and Moray College UHI in early 2015, coinciding with the timing of the survey, which may have led students to voice their issues through the NSS mechanism as well as more local feedback channels. A different sampling methodology was used for the 2015 survey, and results are based on very small student populations which are therefore subject to a high amount of variance; both factors may have contributed towards the reduced score. It was also apparent that the Red Button reports and issues raised by students in 2015 correlated with those areas of the NSS survey that scored lower than the previous year.

213. Areas of relative strength included satisfaction with Assessment and Feedback which matched the Scottish average of 73% and is higher than the UK average of 68%. Academic Support (81%) matched the UK average and just 1% behind the Scottish average. The overall satisfaction rate at some APs either matched or exceeded the Scottish and UK average of 86%: SAMS UHI (95%), Lews Castle College UHI (94%), Shetland College UHI (94%) and West Highland College UHI (86%). Some Subject Networks, including Business and Leisure (89%) and Science and Environment (90%), also exceeded the average Scottish and UK score for overall satisfaction. This positive trend was replicated for some individual courses, including HND Accounting (100%), BScH Environmental Science (100%), BScH Marine Science (95%), HND Business (92%), BAH Business and Management (94%) and BAH Scottish Cultural Studies (91%).

214. There have been a number of organisational and procedural changes in our management of, and response to, the NSS. The Deputy Principal retains institutional responsibility for the NSS and the Dean of Students is now responsible for the administration of, and processes arising from, the survey, working with a Process Management Group. In responding to the NSS outcomes, specific programmes or APs are required to develop action plans to address the areas of lower satisfaction. The Deans of Faculty lead on this with Subject Network Leaders and specific programme teams, and the Deputy Principal leads discussions with the relevant APs. There has been reflection and reporting on the actions arising from NSS 2015, the development of a detailed action plan relating to NSS 2016 and a report on the approach to the NSS by other Scottish universities.

These NSS 2016 activities will include:

- > Reviewing the sample student population for NSS 2016
- > Providing feedback on actions taken from the NSS surveys
- > Delivering effective and timely communications
- > Hosting staff workshops on the NSS
- > Mobilising NSS champions – students and staff
- > Meetings with other institutions to explore their approaches and practices around NSS to identify the scope for replicating these

215. Meetings with other universities to explore their approaches and practices around the NSS have highlighted the importance of fully engaging teaching staff, as their support is vital to inform students about actions taken as a result of NSS feedback, respond to students' questions about the survey and to generate a high response rate. It is clear that providing feedback to students on actions taken from NSS surveys is extremely important so that students understand that their views are taken seriously. Workshops will be hosted with Programme Leaders and PATs in January 2016 to go through the NSS question set, discuss the actions taken from previous NSS surveys, review the activities planned to promote NSS 2016 and to share good practice. Briefing notes will also be prepared to ensure staff are fully informed and supported ahead of NSS 2016. The input of teaching staff will be supported and underpinned by communications across a range of channels, including social media.

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE SURVEY (PRES)

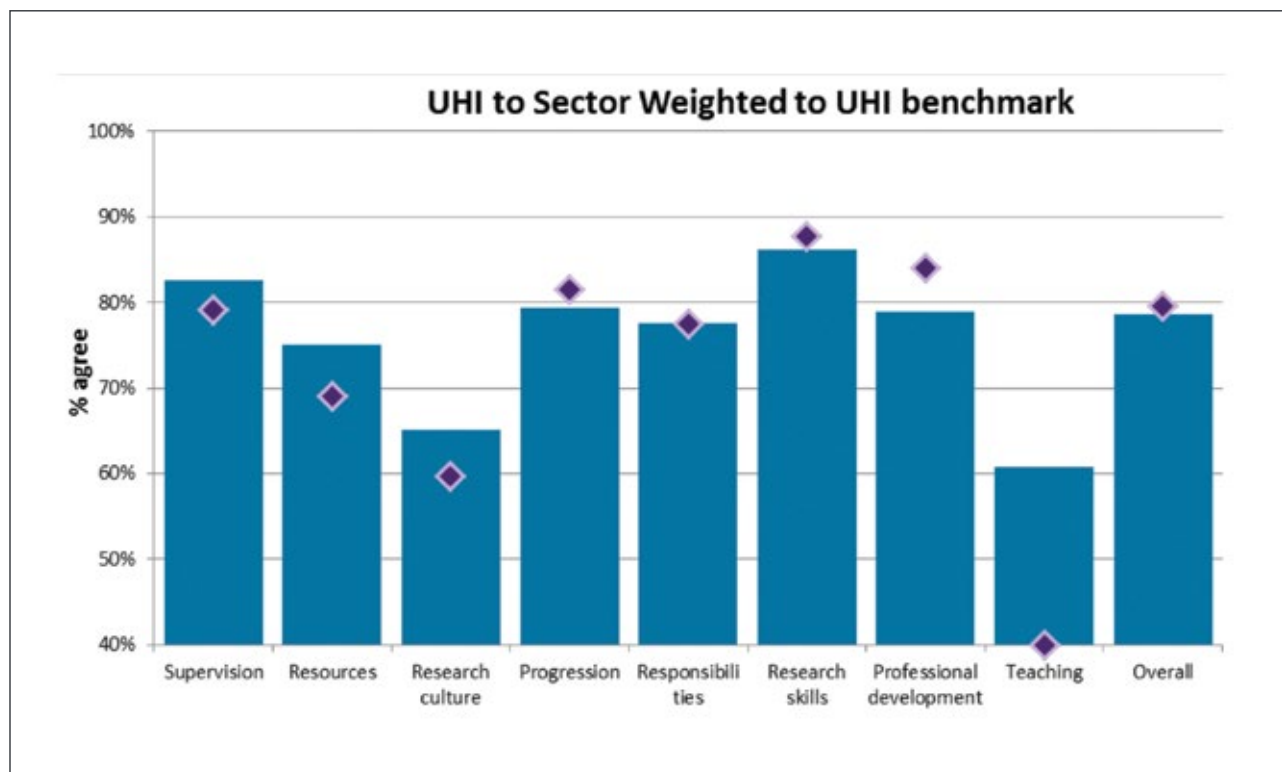
216. We took part in the biennial PRES survey for the second time in 2015, led by the Research Degrees Committee (RDC), which is responsible for analysis and action planning, reporting on progress to QAEC. We achieved a response rate of 45%, with students from all of the APs and subject areas taking part, although the number (45 students) was small. The results were benchmarked against comparator institutions within the Million+ group of universities to assess overall performance, and also analysed against the 2013 survey to gauge 'distance travelled'. Overall, the outcomes were positive, with student satisfaction 1% above average for the UK as a whole, and 4% above that of the comparator group. In many areas, we are performing at the same level as the UK and Scotland as a whole. Areas where further work is required are also clear, and these correspond with issues emerging through the progress monitoring process. The action plan for responding to PRES outcomes is being taken forward through RDC, and was discussed with students at the Research Student Conference held in November 2015.^{93 94}

⁹³ PRES Report 2015

⁹⁴ Graduate School Annual Report 2014-15

SELF-EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION

FIGURE 5.3: PRES 2015 OUTCOMES BENCHMARKED TO SECTOR AVERAGE



217. Responses relating to supervision improved from 2013, but were less positive than the comparator sectors, indicating that there was room for improvement in a number of areas. A programme of compulsory supervisor training is in place, and should work towards improving this area and increasing student confidence in the support provided by their supervisory teams. The response to the questions about resources was mixed, but library provision specifically was felt to be lacking. We have already made a significant additional funding commitment in this area, and are working with the libraries team to raise student awareness of resources available to them.

218. There have been areas of strong improvement in 'developing a research culture' where we had lower rating in 2013. Students were more positive about the research ambience in their departments than in the comparator group and indicate they have been provided with opportunities to interact with the wider research community. This is supported by the 2014 REF outcomes where our excellent 'environment' scores provide external peer verification of a high quality environment for our PGR students to engage with their research studies. However the ability to access research seminar programmes and interact with the PGR community was weaker than the comparator sectors. This may arise from the dispersed nature of our research community and highlights an area for further

work. It was notable that the majority of students did not feel that they had received appropriate support and guidance on teaching opportunities, or formal training for their teaching role, although the data here may have been slightly skewed by a number of respondents being existing academic staff. As well as continuing to promote locally-delivered and networked opportunities, we are currently piloting a more formalised training programme to address this area (see Section 2).

219. Results in the progress and assessment section showed improvement or equivalence to the comparator sectors, as did those on valuing and responding to student feedback. These have been areas of key focus for the Graduate School over the last two years, so the improved outcomes here provide evidence of the effectiveness of the interventions. The professional development section was particularly strong, as was student confidence in completing their research programme in the planned timescale.

EARLY EXPERIENCE SURVEY

220. For the first time in autumn 2014, seven APs collaborated in a pilot Early Experience Student Survey, following discussion at the Quality Forum to focus on student engagement as one of its priority areas. Both FE and HE students at each participating AP were surveyed on their induction and initial interactions with the college, using a common set of questions. The pilot

aimed to collate and compare the survey results in order to identify good practice and areas for development across the partnership, and a final report produced a high-level analysis of results across the seven APs. While providing a rich source of data for each AP to inform local action plans, there were differing approaches to output reporting, which limited the potential for internal benchmarking. However, the survey provided useful information on how we could improve issues such as pre-course information and support, the design and administration of induction and the dissemination of information on student support, technical support and communications with staff during the first weeks of the academic year. It also showed a limited understanding about student representation and the role of class reps, correlating with NSS outcomes, and this is being explored through the work plan with HISA. The survey was conducted again in autumn 2015, with a similar number of APs participating, and greater commonality in the survey instruments used. Initial analysis of the results to identify themes at a regional level will be undertaken and reported to Quality Forum in the first instance.

MODULE EVALUATION SURVEY

221. We have developed and piloted a standardised online module evaluation survey tool, replacing multiple module and programme level surveys, in order to improve our capacity to gather student feedback at a detailed level. The survey is more strongly focused on enhancement than assurance, and its purposes are to:

- > provide teaching staff with student feedback to both inform changes to their teaching practices and to monitor the impact of these changes (quality enhancement)
- > provide a comprehensive and reliable measurement of the student learning experience and perceived teaching quality (quality assurance)

222. A 14 question survey (a mixture of multiple choice and free text responses) was agreed, building on existing survey tools within the university and the wider sector. The survey questions address: teaching and content, resources, assessment and feedback, overall quality. Careful consideration was also given to how to present the survey results effectively to staff, as well as the use of data, and to student privacy and anonymity. A clear privacy statement was devised and is well publicised to students. The survey uses SITS, thereby reinforcing data integrity; it offers the dual benefit of students not having to enter details (e.g. module codes and personal data) when completing the survey; and also the security of surveying all and only those students actually enrolled on each module/unit. Once a sufficient number of surveys have been run, it will be possible to analyse survey responses by student population characteristics such as gender, age, mode of study, location.

223. A successful pilot was run in 2013-14 with 41 degree modules participating. Following the pilot, a number of improvements were made to the way that survey results were made available to staff. Participation increased for

2014-15 with over 400 degree modules, HN units and PGT modules taking part. A small number of modules piloted the use of 'flexible' surveys, where module leaders added their own questions to the core survey questions. There was greater focus on closing the feedback loop, and a template was created for staff to report a summary of the survey results to their students, and the changes that will be made in response. The survey tool will be available to all degree modules in 2015-16. Forthcoming developments will focus on promoting the surveys to students to increase response rates, refining the data reports in response to staff feedback, and developing a tailored approach for HN programmes.



SELF-EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION

5.ii

COMMENTARY ON THE ADVANCE INFORMATION SET (AIS)

224. We have sought to provide a sufficient sample of documentation to demonstrate our processes for securing academic standards and quality assurance within the AIS, following the guidance in the ELIR Handbook. Documents within the AIS are also referenced at other relevant points within the RA, either to provide evidence of a specific point of enhancement or reflection, or to demonstrate our monitoring and review processes themselves. Most documents are produced routinely as part of our normal cycle of monitoring and review, and have been discussed by QAEC and other relevant groups. One exception is the mapping to the Quality Code, which is presented as a summary paper, since the mapping process has necessarily taken place over time; discussion and reflection by different groups has been reported in various formats. The sample of annual monitoring reports relate to academic year 2014-15, and includes self-evaluation documents (SEDs) from each stage of the annual monitoring cycle and outcome reports. These are intended to provide a representative sample across our provision, and illustrate the sequential nature of our annual monitoring process, showing how issues identified at module or programme level are brought together at each of the subsequent stages, enabling us to identify key priorities and actions at institutional level. They also demonstrate our enhancement-led focus within the annual monitoring process.

5.iii

USE OF EXTERNAL REFERENCE POINTS IN SELF-EVALUATION**SECTOR ENGAGEMENT****REPRESENTATION ON NATIONAL SECTOR GROUPS**

225. We are represented on UK-wide sector bodies relating to quality enhancement and/or learning and teaching, including Universities UK, Millennium+ and the Academic Registrars Council. Within Scotland, we are represented on Universities Scotland and its Learning and Teaching Committee, Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), the Scottish Graduate Schools and Teaching Quality Forum (TQF). The Dean of Students has recently been appointed as one of the first three trustees for sparqs, having previously chaired their University Advisory Group. Participation in these fora is highly valuable as a means of discussing institutional approaches and priorities at sector level, in the light of emerging themes, such as the "Focus On" reports generated from the ELIR reviews. We contributed to the national workshop on Focus on Assessment and Feedback, which has informed the implementation of our assessment policy. In May 2014, we participated in the pilot ELIR follow-up event, facilitated by QAA Scotland, together with other universities at the same point in the ELIR review cycle, and found this highly valuable in sharing views and progress on our respective action plans.

ENGAGEMENT WITH DISCIPLINE-BASED GROUPS AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS

226. Staff engage with sector bodies and their peers within their discipline or professional area, and share information and sector developments through practitioner groups and Subject Networks. Again, this is an effective way of sharing best practice across our distributed partnership and ensuring our curriculum and services are informed by sector developments, and enables us to contribute our knowledge and expertise at national level, as well as via consultation events and/or electronic surveys. For example the Academic Registrar was on the QAA Scotland Steering Committee for development of ELIR3 methodology, and the Dean of Students was a member of the Advisory Group for the Quality Code Chapter B5: Student Engagement. He is also the institutional lead on AMOSSHE Scotland, an organisation which informs and supports the leaders of student services in the UK through sharing of resources, draft policies and expertise in areas such as the use of social media. Our Careers Manager is a member of the AGCAS Scotland national executive.

227. At the discipline level, staff from several APs are engaged in the national SFC-led Land-based Providers Group to develop a national strategy for Land-based Education to coordinate provision with both supply and demand Scotland-wide (up to SCQF Level 8). We are Scotland's newest teacher education institution, and staff are engaged fully with the sector in order to ensure our programmes reflect national requirements. Accordingly the Dean of Arts, Humanities and Business is a full member of the GTCS Council (General Teaching Council for Scotland), and our Head of Teacher Education represents us on the Standing Teacher Education Committee (STEC), the key sector body which ensures universities interface with government and the GTCS. All staff involved in teacher education are required to undergo professional update as a condition of their registration with GTCS, and our professional update scheme was approved unconditionally.

5.iv MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

228. Most of our public information is published via the university website, which is overseen by our Marketing and Communications team and the webteam. Through the One Web project we unified a number of aspects of web provision, so that now the university website and 10 AP websites share a common design and technology framework (three specialist APs retain an individual web presence due to their specialist provision and focus e.g. Gaelic language). Individual webpages are maintained and updated by authorised staff at each AP. The One Web approach reinforces the 'one university' identity with a common 'look and feel' across the websites, while enabling APs to present local information appropriately for their own HE and FE student populations. Users and students can therefore navigate readily between local college and university webpages to find the information they need.

PROGRAMME INFORMATION

229. Programme-level information for publication is generated from the documentation produced through the programme approval process. New programmes to be included in the prospectus are identified from the curriculum planning decisions taken by PPF, which is responsible for final approval of new programme proposals, at which point the programme can be promoted as 'subject to approval'. Following confirmation of approval, finalised programme details are uploaded to the online prospectus (and for entry on the UCAS database where relevant). All programme information published via the website is driven from SITS, ensuring that information is current and accurate, with an import process run on a 4-weekly cycle to deal with the updating/adding/removal of programmes.
230. The print prospectus is designed primarily for young and full-time entrants as these are the groups mostly using this medium. Therefore it includes degrees and HNs available on a full-time or structured part-time basis but doesn't include PDAs, SVQs etc. Production of the print prospectus operates on an annual basis, and is distributed to Scottish schools and colleges to fit with the timing of decision-making for UCAS applicants. As the prospectus has a specific print deadline, a cut-off date is applied for programmes to be included, and the marketing team provide a final list of programmes to PPF for approval. The online prospectus allows for ongoing updates, whereby programmes can be added or removed following approval by PPF.
231. Certain categories of programme information on the database require to be approved by the Faculty before either new programmes are added or changes are made to existing programmes, such as entry requirements, Home Academic Partners, module content, programme structure. A formal annual check on accuracy of programme information is undertaken by Programme Leaders and the responsible AP during the prospectus production cycle. Where necessary, a modification proposal will be submitted to the Faculty for approval. Changes to other fields, for example additional marketing content, may be made directly by the marketing team, who will oversee consistency of tone and style.
232. Other marketing information is maintained and updated by the marketing and web teams, such as fees and accommodation information. Fee schedules are agreed by the Finance and General Purposes Committee and published on the website. Accommodation options and costs are updated annually for the Key Information Set (KIS) data update. We have adopted a Model Publication Scheme in line with good practice relating to Freedom of Information legislation, which sets out what information is available and how it can be accessed.

KEY INFORMATION SETS (KIS)

233. Since 2013 we have provided the Key Information Sets (KIS) for eligible programmes; this is a standardised

dataset designed to enable prospective students to compare undergraduate programmes and HEIs UK-wide. Some information is derived annually from existing metrics (e.g. NSS, DLHE, HESA data), and some we provide directly. Data is displayed via the KIS 'widget' on each course webpage, linking to the national Unistats website. The KIS data for each programme is reviewed annually for accuracy, and to identify where additional specific marketing information could be added. Responsibility for approving the KIS data rests with the Head of Marketing and Planning, and the data return is signed off by the Principal.

DEVELOPMENT OF MODULE DATABASE

234. We are currently developing a web-based interface (known as the module database or catalogue) to hold key information from the module descriptor, alongside data fields populated directly from SITS. Testing is underway on linking the module database information to our website (see Figure 5.4) which will give students and staff improved access to the definitive information on module content, mode of study and assessment details, learning outcomes, and learning resources. The Faculties are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the module information, via approval and modification processes. Once testing has been completed the information will also be automatically linked to the VLE. The module database will give improved access to students and PATs to search for and review modules, and assist in making informed module selection. In time, we also intend to make the information publically available to stakeholders, employers, and as a marketing tool for our provision.

KIS data includes:

- Learning and teaching methods
- Assessment methods
- Professional body accreditation information
- Student satisfaction
- Employment and salary data
- Financial information, such as fees



SELF-EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION

FIGURE 5.4: SCREENSHOT OF MODULE DATABASE INFORMATION

About	Information
<p>This module will develop the student's knowledge of patient management and the role of the therapist within the dental team. Study skills will be taught.</p>	<p>Module Code UB707229</p>
<p>Pre-requisites</p> <p>University entry requirements This module must be successfully completed in order to gain entry to further modules at Level 8.</p>	<p>Semester S1</p>
<p>What will you study?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influences on behaviour Introduction to psychology applied to the care of patients Introduction to sociology applied to the care of patients 	<p>SCQF Level 07</p>
	<p>SCQF Credits 20</p>
	<p>Mode of study Face-to-face 27% / Self-directed study 73%</p>
	<p>Learning Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess the patients' level of anxiety, experience and expectations in respect of dental care Manage patient anxiety and pain through effective communication, reassurance

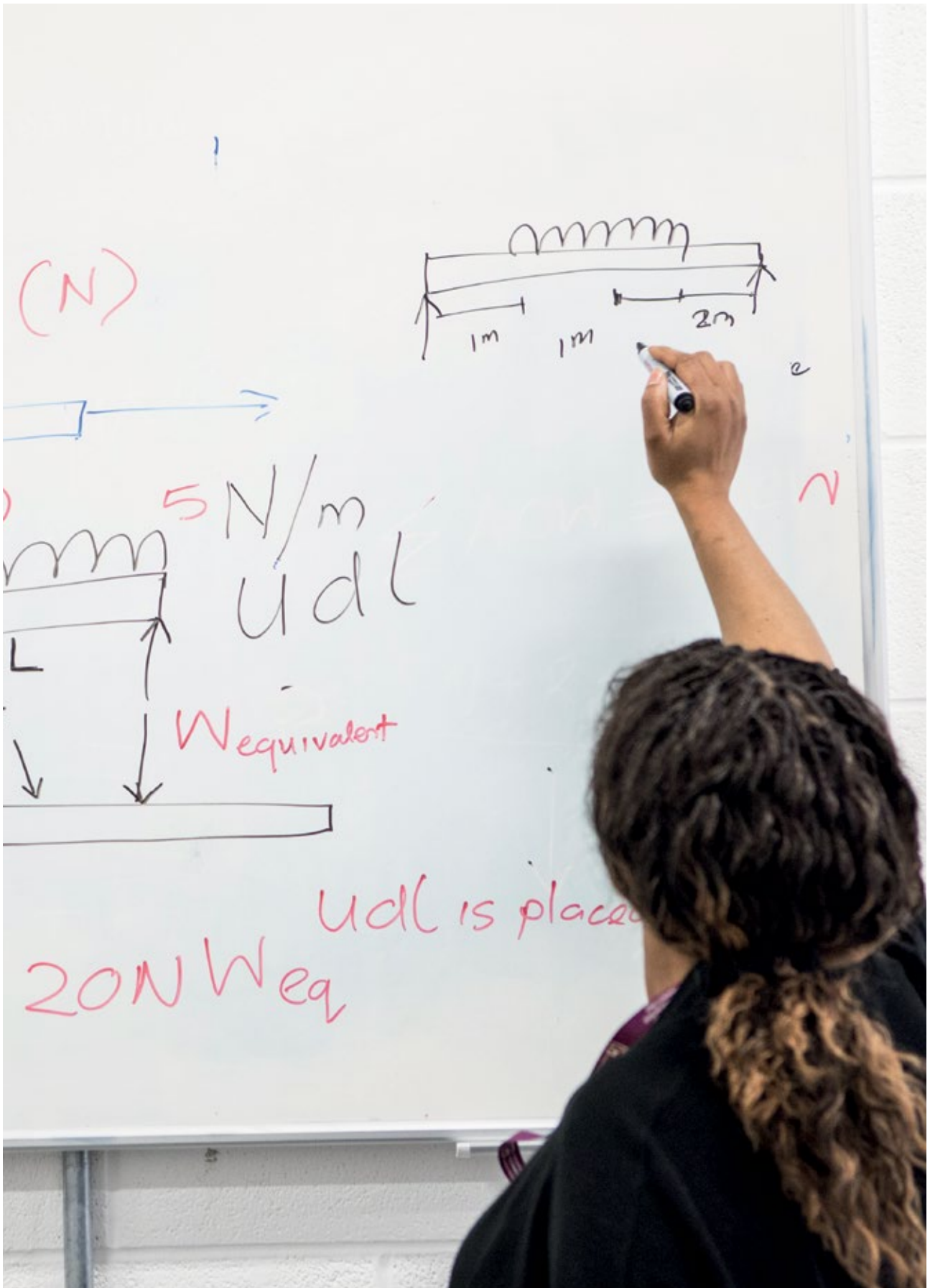
5.v EFFECTIVENESS OF THE APPROACH TO SELF-EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION

235. We have an effective and embedded approach to self-evaluation and the management of information, as exemplified by how a number of purposeful changes have been made to systems and processes in recent years. The development of QAEC as a strategic committee with institutional level oversight for quality and enhancement, the way in which the arrangements for annual monitoring have been refined and streamlined, and the securing of appropriate linkages between quality monitoring and enhancement in FE and in HE are all examples of where a process of critical reflection has led to enhancement. We have adopted an increasingly explicit approach to the identification and progression of strategic level issues emerging from self-evaluation, as exemplified in the QAEC key projects and initiatives. This is reinforced through strong external links with national bodies and peer networks and external benchmarking, enabling us to reflect on our position and objectives in relation to the wider sector and comparator institutions. We have also developed a more comprehensive and systematic approach to the use of student surveys, engaging with nationally benchmarked surveys where appropriate, and standardising our internal surveys in order to secure meaningful data comparable across the partnership.

236. We have invested significant effort in reviewing our annual monitoring process, seeking to maintain its enhancement focus, and improving the effectiveness of our self-evaluation through improved use of KPI data. At the level of modules and programmes, there is some variability in submitting SEDs in a timely manner, which is evident through the Subject Network dialogues and clearly has a negative impact on the effectiveness of the process. This issue continues to be monitored through PPF, but it is also anticipated that the revised SED proformas will make their completion more efficient and meaningful for staff, by means of enhanced guidance, and accessibility to relevant KPI data. We will also explore ways of closing the feedback loop to staff more effectively by disseminating outcomes at different levels.

237. In terms of the management of information, we have also progressed our practice, with significant enhancement of reporting functionality from SITS and the utilisation of data within monitoring and review processes. The ongoing work of practitioner groups is highly important in promoting consistency and integrity of management information, supporting accurate reporting and self-evaluation processes. We continue to refine and improve our business processes for the management of data through cross-partnership working groups including SDRG and AMI. The identification and use of KPIs has been more firmly embedded in the operation of committees and individual staff, from Court to programme leaders, to support effective monitoring and evaluation at all levels against strategic objectives.





COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY

6.i KEY FEATURES OF THE INSTITUTION'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

INTRODUCTION

238. We have identified a number of strategic themes which provide the direction for the development of collaborative partnerships, including student recruitment and widening access, internationalisation and reputation building.⁹⁵ Collaboration is highlighted as one of our core values, and applies to both internal and external partnerships and ways of working. Proposals for collaborative partnerships, whether national or international, need to demonstrate how they will align with these strategic themes. We work in partnership with other organisations in order to further our vision and objectives, to share our expertise, and to learn from the expertise of others, be they other universities, businesses or public and third sector organisations. Collaborative working enables us to build our profile and reputation through working with regional, national and international partners, as does our institutional membership of a range of international networks, such as the University of the Arctic and United Nations University. We are developing partnerships with other universities which have similarities in terms of mission, geography, or pedagogical approach. Examples include Federation University, Australia's newest university encompassing further and higher education, and Högskolan i Borås in Sweden, a technical institution offering vocationally oriented provision up to doctorate level. A database of collaborative partnerships is maintained, which captures summary information on partnerships where a formal agreement has been established.⁹⁶ This section of the RA will focus on collaborative partnerships which involve the award of qualifications or academic credit, but a brief outline of other types of relationship is given below.

239. At a national level, we collaborate with HEIs and other public sector organisations to provide access to learning opportunities, where each partner provides specialist expertise and resources; examples include the MA (Hons) Gaelic with Education (awarded by University of Aberdeen); and BA (Hons) Drama and Performance, delivered in partnership with Glasgow Kelvin College to student cohorts in Inverness and Glasgow. We contribute to national collaborative partnerships where we have particular subject expertise. This includes research pooling initiatives and projects such as the Marine Alliance for Science and Technology for Scotland (MASTS) and Soillse, the research network for the maintenance and revitalisation of Gaelic language and culture. We deliver masters level provision for a collaborative MSc in Industrial Biotechnology awarded by the University of Strathclyde which hosts the SFC-funded Innovation Centre in this area. We have worked in partnership with the University of Aberdeen as the awarding body for our PGR programmes since 2005, with maximum devolved responsibility for the management of such programmes (see Section 4).

240. In addition to collaborative activities with other educational organisations, we work with employers and businesses to provide work-based learning or placement opportunities, and our approach and policy is discussed in Section 2. We are also active participants in Community Planning Partnerships across our region, and work closely with local authorities, Skills Development Scotland and schools to plan and provide education, training and skills development to support sustainable regional economic growth.

EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS STEERING COMMITTEE (EPSC)

241. Strategic oversight and monitoring of collaborations and partnerships is through External Partnerships Steering Committee (EPSC), reporting to Academic Council.⁹⁷ EPSC is responsible for formulating policy and practice in relation to collaborative activity, for assessing and approving external partners through due diligence processes, and for reviewing and approving written agreements.

242. A Collaborations Handbook sets out the principles and procedures associated with the proposal, approval and monitoring of collaborative partnerships. The Handbook was updated in 2013, as we started to develop more external relationships, and EPSC became more established. The revised version was mapped against the UK Quality Code Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education with Others.⁹⁸ However, it is recognised that a further review will be useful, to include differentiated approaches for a different types of partnership, and in line with the strategic objective to develop transnational education (TNE) models to accommodate any future expansion of such provision.

243. We have taken a selective and cautious approach to the development of collaborative activity (defined as activity leading to the award of a qualification or academic credit). To date the scope (types of partnership) and scale (in terms of student numbers and numbers of external partners) of such activity is relatively limited.⁹⁹ We have further developed and implemented structures and procedures to secure and monitor such provision, in line with the recommendation of the last ELIR report. We have adopted a low-risk approach, and retain direct control over design, delivery and assessment of collaborative provision (with the exception of one Joint Masters Degree, see para xx). Most partnerships are articulation agreements, or student exchanges with well-established educational institutions. We have not engaged in any franchise or validating arrangements with other providers to date, but will keep this under review. However, we recognise the resource investment that would be required to support the development and management of more extensive collaborative provision.

244. A fundamental element within the risk management of collaborative partnerships is the assessment of suitability of proposed external partners through due diligence enquiries, overseen by EPSC. The Collaborations

⁹⁵ *Strategic Vision and Plan 2015-2020*

⁹⁶ *Collaborations Register*

⁹⁷ *Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2015-16, Section 3*

⁹⁸ *Collaborations Handbook (Version 2 2013)*

⁹⁹ *Collaborative Programmes – Student Enrolments and Awards*

Handbook sets out criteria for selection and approval of external partners, based on the guidance in the Quality Code. Due diligence procedures and reports are based on the principle of proportionality, considering the nature of the proposed partner, and the type of activity which is being proposed.¹⁰⁰ EPSC makes an initial assessment of risk based on preliminary information, normally including reflection on a visit to the proposed partner by members of staff. EPSC confirms whether to proceed or not with a proposed partner, and indicates what further information or assurances are required. Where there is a positive initial view, EPSC normally agrees to progress a partnership in a staged manner. A formal MOU is normally signed by both parties in the first instance.¹⁰¹ This document is non-binding, but indicates intentions to work together and to facilitate further discussions, and sometimes funding proposals, for specific activities such as research collaborations, joint curriculum development, and staff and student exchange opportunities. As and when specific activities are developed, these are subject to further discussions and written agreements, and further due diligence procedures would be expected to be incorporated into existing quality assurance processes at the relevant level, such as programme approval.

245. EPSC has assessed proposals for collaboration with private providers and commercial organisations where there are opportunities relating to development of specialist provision and/or student recruitment. Such proposals may be initiated internally, or stem from an approach by the external organisation, and the risks and opportunities are considered on a case by case basis with regard to strategic fit, financial and reputational risk. To date, through the due diligence procedures, EPSC has not approved any such partnerships, judging that the level of risk was higher than acceptable.



246. Standard written agreements covering different types of collaborative partnerships have been developed, and refined as needed. They are mapped against external reference points, drawing on the guidance within the UK Quality Code, and other publications such as those from the International Unit and refer to legislative requirements. Each of these has been considered by EPSC and approved as models which may be used as a basis for future developments, subject to tailoring to the specific partnership and final approval by EPSC.¹⁰² Further guidance and support to staff in developing partnerships is provided through the Academic Registrar, Deans of Faculty and UHI World.

MODELS OF COLLABORATION

247. Different models of collaboration have been established according to the context of specific target markets, and in negotiation with external partners, with a view to meeting strategic objectives relating to student recruitment and developing sustainable income streams. With regard to international partnerships, most activity is focussed on establishing and growing articulation and student exchange / study abroad arrangements in a measured way, in the light of our current limitations on residential and teaching accommodation. We have also developed three other collaborative partnerships, each with a different model, which may be extended to other external partners or programmes – one joint delivery with a Scottish FE college, one transnational education (TNE) partnership in China, and our first Joint Masters Degree. The latter two programmes recruited for the first time in 2014-15 and 2015-16 respectively, hence we are as yet at an early stage in assessing their sustainability over the longer term.

6.ii

SECURING ACADEMIC STANDARDS OF COLLABORATIVE PROVISION

248. We apply the same rigorous quality framework for collaborative provision as we do to provision delivered wholly within the partnership, in setting and maintaining academic standards (see Section 4). As noted above, we have chosen not to engage in validation or franchising arrangements to date. Therefore, we are able to manage the risks inherent in partnership working by retaining direct control over design, delivery and assessment of curriculum, except in the case of the joint award discussed below.
249. To enable close monitoring during the first year of delivery of new collaborative arrangements, whether in the UK or overseas, additional reports are required to be submitted to EPSC after the first 3 months and 6 months of delivery. These reports provide early feedback to EPSC, and a mechanism for flagging up any issues which may have emerged and how they are being addressed, enabling any immediate interventions if necessary.^{103 104} Thereafter, quality monitoring and review processes are conducted as normal, at module and programme level, with reflection on relevant cohorts and delivery locations integrated into a single reporting

¹⁰⁰ Examples of Due Diligence Reports and Preliminary Enquiries to EPSC

¹⁰¹ Collaborative Agreement Templates

¹⁰² Collaborative Agreement Templates

¹⁰³ Collaboration with Hunan Institute of Engineering (HIE)

¹⁰⁴ Collaboration with Glasgow Kelvin College – BA (Hons) Drama and Performance

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY

structure. All students are enrolled on SITS, and cohorts at collaborative partners may be distinguished within reports, to enable analysis of separate cohorts, and comparison of progression and achievement for monitoring and enhancement purposes.

JOINT MASTERS DEGREE IN AQUACULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY (ACES JMD)

250. We were successful in securing Erasmus+ funding for the development of a Joint Masters Degree in AquaCulture, Environment and Society (ACES JMD), in a consortium with the universities of Crete and Nantes. This funding stream is highly competitive and prestigious, and brings significant benefits in terms of global reputation, as well as funding. The ACES consortium is led by SAMS UHI as the co-ordinating institution. The ACES JMD is the first joint award which we have entered into, and the initial proposal was endorsed by Academic Council. By doing so, we acknowledge that we are exercising our responsibility for academic standards jointly, and placing trust in the academic standards and quality frameworks of the external partners, and the inherent risk that this entails. The consortium operates within the well-established frameworks and protocols of the Erasmus programme. It comprises three European universities, each with its own Erasmus Charter, thereby all parties are assured that each is committed to the general quality framework within the EHEA. The development and academic approval process followed our normal process for programme development and approval. Each institution was responsible for developing and approving, through its own quality assurance structures, a number of modules which will contribute to the ACES JMD award. Both the Advisory Group and the approval panel included external members, in accordance with our regulations. All three universities participated fully in the curriculum design and development process, through face-to-face meetings, and using Skype or phone. Each institution was responsible for securing approval

for the ACES JMD award through its own governance structures, and from national agencies where relevant. A Joint Programme Management Committee has been established which meets every 6 weeks via Skype, attended by all three universities. Face-to-face meetings, including associate institutions, take place twice yearly, with the next scheduled for February 2016 in Crete.¹⁰⁵

251. We have been systematic and thorough in ensuring that the award meets our own academic standards and regulatory requirements. The content, learning outcomes and credit structure of the programme were explicitly mapped against the SCQF, and relevant subject benchmark statements to ensure that these met the academic standards of a UK Masters degree and our own academic regulations. Each partner was able to use the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA) as a reference point with its own national framework to establish equivalence of level. Programme documentation refers to credits using ECTS system. The credit value of the ACES JMD (and its two-year duration) conforms to the Erasmus+ norm, which is greater than our normal Masters degrees. Some programme-specific regulations were established, particularly around assessment, devising a common ECTS grading scale and establishing a joint exam board authorised by all three institutions to award the ACES JMD. We have appointed a single External Examiner, with the endorsement of all consortium partners.
252. Graduates will receive a Diploma Supplement from each institution detailing their performance and achievements, and we are able to issue a joint certificate together with the University of Crete, while the University of Nantes will issue a separate certificate, as required by the current legislative position in France. Each certificate will specify the award of Joint Masters Degree in AquaCulture, Environment and Society (ACES JMD), and the three awarding institutions, to ensure clarity about the nature of the award.



¹⁰⁵ *Aquaculture, Environment and Society Joint Masters (JMD ACES) Documents*

253. The first cohort enrolled at SAMS UHI in September 2015 and has only small numbers, in part due to the short promotion and recruitment period available following finalisation of the contract with the EU. A number of applicants who originally accepted offers subsequently withdrew, either for financial reasons, or securing employment or other study offers. With a revised ACES website and a range of marketing activities, the second application round has attracted high calibre applicants from across the world. Over 230 enquiries have already been received and 21 full applications at the time of writing, with the deadline for scholarships in February 2016. The current cohort is progressing well, and benefitting from the shared study environment with PGR students at SAMS UHI.

TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP – ENGINEERING

254. We have developed a transnational education (TNE) partnership with Hunan Institute of Engineering (HIE) in China, whereby staff deliver SCQF Level 9 of two engineering degrees in-country on a 'flying Faculty' basis, augmented by online learning and local tutorial support. The development of the partnership with HIE took place over an extended period to ensure sufficient time for preparation and relationship building. Students undertake two years of study on a HIE programme, where the curriculum and learning outcomes have been mapped to our degree programmes using SCQF and relevant subject benchmark statements as reference points. Subject to agreed academic achievement and English language criteria, students then articulate to SCQF Level 9. The same degree programmes are delivered in Hunan and in Scotland, having the same award title, curriculum, learning outcomes and structure, and were subject to the normal approval process to set academic standards. Prior to delivery in China, some modifications were made to modules to accommodate different delivery patterns, overseen by the normal Faculty approval process.¹⁰⁶

255. There is a clear identification of roles and responsibilities at managerial and operational level both in the university and in HIE. As far as practicable, quality assurance processes are integrated, including annual monitoring and exam boards. Our academic staff are responsible for assessment, and Module Leaders and Programme Leaders are responsible for quality assurance and review as normal. We also appointed a dedicated programme coordinator, with subject expertise, to manage the partnership on day to day basis, and maintain effective communication, including support for our academic staff. External Examiners have responsibility across the programmes as a whole, and are in a position to review the comparability of standards and academic performance of cohorts in UK and in China.

256. Students who successfully pass Level 9 may exit at that point with BEng Ordinary degree, or have the option to continue their studies at Level 10 in Scotland to achieve BEng (Hons) degree, subject to visa requirements. The first cohort of 52 students enrolled in 2014-15, and 33 successfully completed their Ordinary degree (with some students taking resits during 2015-16). Their success was celebrated at a graduation ceremony held in Hunan in early December 2015, attended by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor. Only one student from the first cohort has transferred to Scotland in 2015-16 to study at Level 10. Several factors acted against others doing so, including professional and postgraduate study opportunities, reluctance to leave home, and difficulties in securing UK study visas. HIE is now supporting students through the English language test process at an earlier stage in their programme, and offering financial support, and we are confident that more students will choose to transfer in 2016-17. The current second cohort enrolled in 2015-16 comprises 78 students.

257. The collaboration has been monitored closely and the programme coordinator has been key to building positive relationships between staff in Scotland and China, and managing the student experience. He has been able to resolve some teething problems rapidly for the first cohort, while identifying actions needed to enhance provision for subsequent cohorts, particularly in English language support. Student feedback has been open and broadly positive, and HIE are very pleased with the collaboration. While we consider the collaboration to be successful to date in terms of student recruitment and achievement, as well as reputation building, it is recognised that the in-country model is resource intensive, and its sustainability will be carefully assessed.

JOINT DELIVERY WITH SCOTTISH FE COLLEGE – BA (HONS) DRAMA AND PERFORMANCE

258. The BA (Hons) Drama and Performance was developed and approved in 2013, with input from Glasgow Kelvin College (GKC, previously Stow College), with both partners contributing specialist expertise. The programme was designed as both a 2+2 award and a 1+3 award to facilitate progression from both HND and HNC, and with flexibility in module choice, enabling Glasgow-based students to take modules with a more urban focus and those in Inverness to take advantage of their geographic context. The programme has performed well to date in terms of recruitment, retention and student achievement. Both partners recognise the importance of rigorous preparation with regard to the academic transition from HN to degree study and designed module content and assessments accordingly; each Module Leader and/or tutor has also developed additional study skills sessions to enhance successful transition.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Collaboration with Hunan Institute of Engineering (HIE)

¹⁰⁷ Collaboration with Glasgow Kelvin College – BA (Hons) Drama and Performance

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY

259. The programme is subject to our normal quality assurance processes for monitoring and review, integrating consideration of the two cohorts and locations, with full input from GKC staff. There is clear documentation setting out roles and responsibilities. The university Programme Leader has responsibility for quality assurance across both locations, liaising with the GKC site leader. Modules are delivered in parallel by staff at both locations, and have a single university Module Leader, and there are arrangements in place for cross-team marking and moderation to ensure comparability across the cohorts. The External Examiners have a remit for the programme overall and are therefore able to comment on academic standards and performance of both cohorts. Annual monitoring reports provide evidence of a supportive collaborative approach, and thorough evaluation of the programme across both locations. KPI analysis in relation to student attainment highlighted a degree of underperformance in certain modules in the first year of delivery; at a review of the learning and teaching experience in 2014-15, it was agreed to deliver an identical programme at SCQF levels 9 and 10 in both locations to ensure equity of student experience and expertise in module leadership.
260. In Semester 2 2014-15, a significant issue arose at GKC due to staff absence. While temporary cover arrangements were put in place, these staff did not have the specialist knowledge to support the students at the appropriate level. This was addressed jointly by the university and GKC to offer extra tuition to those students affected, with additional support and feedback, and students were assessed as if for the first time. This was an unfortunate situation which obviously was disruptive for the students, and identified as a concern by External Examiners. However, analysis of student achievement data indicates that it had limited impact on their performance, and that academic standards were maintained. New staff appointments have been made at GKC, and there is regular communication between the staff teams, enabling any issues to be discussed and resolved in an ongoing and proactive manner. To strengthen cross-team communications, the university Programme Leader liaises frequently with the GKC site leader and other staff, and this will be supplemented by VC/Skype meetings between Module Leaders and module tutors during the course of each module. This demonstrates how we have responded to an emerging and unforeseen issue, putting in place arrangements to ensure students were not disadvantaged, and taking action to strengthen communication and standardisation across the two locations.

INTERNATIONAL ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS

261. We have established number of articulation agreements on a 3+1 model with international external partners, primarily in China. Students undertake the majority of their study in their home institutions, and transfer to the UK to undertake study at SCQF Level 10 and gain an Honours degree. Students are not guaranteed entry and are subject to selection process depending

on satisfactory academic progress and meeting other criteria. We have stipulated maximum numbers, to ensure that we can support a positive learning experience for the whole cohort, both home and international students. The curriculum and learning outcomes of the external partner's underpinning programme of study are mapped to those of the degree programme(s) by our academic staff and this mapping is approved at Faculty level. Specific achievement thresholds or modules/units may be agreed, as well as English language fluency requirements or other criteria. The mapping process is based on ongoing discussion and reciprocal visits for teaching staff as well as senior managers, to facilitate a deeper understanding of the national and institutional context, curriculum, facilities and learning and teaching approaches, as well as cultural issues. The reciprocal visits and discussions have proved highly valuable in building sustainable partnerships and mutual understanding, and have also identified where there may be a need for bridging study or additional support in particular areas. Our staff visiting partner institutions have provided staff development sessions on learning and teaching approaches, our regulatory requirements and quality monitoring processes, as well as delivering guest lectures. Partner staff visiting Scotland have also contributed to classes and interacted with our students to develop their familiarity with our university context, with visits lasting from 2 weeks to 2 months.





262. The first cohorts of students from China articulating under these 3+1 articulation agreements, in music and engineering, will transfer to Scotland in September 2017, and further agreements for BA (Hons) Visual Communications and BEng (Hons) Aircraft Engineering are pending approval from the Chinese Ministry of Education. This approach allows us to build our profile within China, while having relatively low risk exposure. Since the regional and national authorities in China are highly conservative when approving arrangements with foreign partners, and we are a relatively new university, the fact that we successfully obtained the necessary government approvals for these partnerships is evidence of our growing reputation internationally. During recent visits to existing Chinese partners, other institutions have approached us to open discussions for similar partnerships.¹⁰⁸

263. Articulation agreements have also been in place with two universities in India to enable entry to BEng (Hons) Aircraft Engineering from Andhra University (at Level 8) and Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (JNTUK) (at Level 9). These operated successfully for several years, but changes to UK visa regulations have had a negative impact on the Indian market, and we have decided to bring the agreements to an end. The JNTUK arrangement required students to complete a technical report to demonstrate their ability to perform independent research and engineering judgement, to ensure they were able to meet the academic standards of the degree programme. In 2014-15, the programme was reapproved, and JNTUK were advised of the curriculum changes and agreed to adjust their own programme accordingly. However the programme team noted that JNTUK students were less well prepared for the technical report than previously. We decided an intervention was appropriate to ensure that students

who had enrolled on the feeder programme in JNTUK were not disadvantaged, and that we did not suffer reputational damage. Additional tuition was therefore provided by our staff to a final cohort of JNTUK students to support them in meeting the entry requirements. This action demonstrates our careful monitoring of the partnership and maintenance of academic standards, and our ability to respond quickly to an emerging situation, acting in the best interests of the students and with a view to maintaining our good reputation.

ARTICULATION AND PROGRESSION AGREEMENTS IN SCOTLAND

264. We have articulation arrangements in place with Scottish FE colleges outwith the university partnership, to support progression and widening access agendas. These provide progression opportunities for students who complete access courses, such as through the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) partnership, and those completing HNC/D awards, who may gain entry with advanced standing to relevant degree programmes e.g. Dundee and Angus College. Articulation agreements may specify particular units or level of achievement within the Graded Unit, to ensure that students have appropriate underpinning knowledge and skills to be able to progress to a degree programme.¹⁰⁹ During the past year we have additionally become a university partner of SWAP East (Scottish Wider Access Programme), and a wide range of progression routes have been agreed. These will be promoted to SWAP students during 2015-16, for entry in 2016-17 (see also Section 2).¹¹⁰ As we have expanded our portfolio of degree programmes, most of the outward articulation agreements which enabled access to specialist provision which we did not previously offer, have been run out, as we now deliver such provision ourselves.

¹⁰⁸ MOU with Zhoukou Normal University, China: Articulation Agreement BA (Hons) Visual Design

¹⁰⁹ Articulation Agreement with North East Scotland College

¹¹⁰ SWAP East Agreement

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY

STUDENT EXCHANGES AND 'STUDY ABROAD'

265. We are expanding the number of partnerships with other universities and colleges to offer student exchanges and 'study abroad' opportunities where there is a good match with our mission and ethos. These are predominantly in the USA and Canada, where there is relatively low risk in terms of student wellbeing, cultural differences and language barrier. In some cases, longstanding relationships which originated with a particular programme or AP have been renewed and extended to enable all eligible students to apply, and to place incoming students at any appropriate AP.¹¹¹
266. We achieved our Erasmus Charter in 2014, enabling access to staff and student mobility grants within the 2014-20 Erasmus+ programme. Some APs have also renewed the Erasmus Charters held in their own right. There are currently over 50 inter-institutional agreements in place with institutions across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and in a wide range of subject areas, from forestry to business.¹¹²
267. Feedback from students who participate in exchanges is extremely positive, but the number of participants remains low, with only a handful of students going to USA or Canada each year, although slightly more come to Scotland. Participants in Erasmus-funded mobility periods are also low, with a much greater number of incoming than outgoing students. Students cite factors such as lack of finances, family or employment commitments, language barrier, and concern about impact on degree outcomes. We are seeking to promote exchange opportunities to students, emphasising the range of locations and subject areas, and educational and employability advantages.¹¹³

ACADEMIC CREDIT FROM STUDENT MOBILITY

268. As part of the review of offsite activity undertaken during 2013-14 (see Section 5), regulations and processes were revised relating to study abroad periods within a student exchange agreement, and how credit gained at another institution may be counted towards a student's degree. The regulatory framework had not previously been explicit about such arrangements, giving rise to a risk of inconsistent practice. The regulations now set out the circumstances and limitations which apply, taking into account sector guidance and practice, and articulating what had in fact been common practice.¹¹⁴

6.iii ENHANCING THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE ON COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMMES

269. Our approach to enhancing the student learning experience, as discussed in Section 2, applies to all our students, including those enrolled on collaborative programmes. Staff are familiar with the context of working with colleagues in multiple partners within the university structure already, and with cohorts of students in multiple locations. Enhancement initiatives and processes at institutional level are equally inclusive of collaborative programmes, primarily through the integration of such programmes within normal quality

processes. However, within collaborative partnerships there are specific additional areas of focus for enhancement.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND REPRESENTATION

270. We seek to involve all students in programme design, delivery and review, but also to capitalise on opportunities for enhancement which arise from a collaborative partnership. For example, a joint residency is held for Drama students at Inverness and Glasgow in alternate years, to enable input and master classes from professional practitioners in these different industry contexts, and to facilitate communications between the student cohorts, extended beyond the residency itself through social media. There is an aspiration to develop ways of sharing live practical work, to broaden students' experience of different styles and inspirations.
271. Course committees and class reps are organised in a context and format which is appropriate to the particular partnership. For Drama students at GKC, where there is a well-established student representation system, course committees follow a similar format to those at Inverness College UHI. Course committee meetings are not integrated across the two locations, although a class rep support pack is provided to GKC. Minutes are shared and class reps have established good relationships with programme teams. For Engineering students in HIE, course committee meetings are held each semester, chaired by the SNL by VC, and attended by the programme coordinator, HIE staff and two student reps from each programme. In addition, student feedback on each delivery of each module is collated by the HIE coordinator and shared with the module teams. This has resulted in adjustments to module delivery patterns and timing, to better suit the Chinese cohort. One of the ACES students serves on the ACES Student Liaison Committee, which meets with the SAMS UHI quality committee on a bi-monthly basis, and will continue to feed in remotely as the cohort moves to the other locations.^{115 116 117}



¹¹¹ St Francis Xavier University, Canada – Student Exchange Agreement

¹¹² Collaborations Register

¹¹³ Student Mobility Statistics

¹¹⁴ Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2015-16, Section 17

¹¹⁵ Aquaculture, Environment and Society Joint Masters (JMD ACES) Documents

¹¹⁶ Collaboration with Hunan Institute of Engineering (HIE)

¹¹⁷ Collaboration with Glasgow Kelvin College – BA (Hons) Drama and Performance

STUDENT SUPPORT

272. Students are directed towards support and materials to help prepare them for transition to study on one of our programmes, and this normally starts prior to their enrolment if this is within an articulation arrangement. As part of the relationship-building dialogue and curriculum mapping process, staff are able to direct students to those resources most likely to be useful to them. This may be existing resources and facilities, such as online study skills support, or bespoke materials. For example, the HIE engineering students are given access to a specific area of the VLE prior to enrolment, with tailored subject-specific learning materials. Where possible, our staff visiting an external partner will meet with teaching staff and prospective students, discuss learning and teaching approaches, and may deliver guest lectures, which have been very positively received. Similarly, teaching staff from partner institutions are encouraged to visit us to gain direct experience of our context and to strengthen relationships with colleagues, and are thus able to provide advice and guidance to their students prior to transition.
273. Once enrolled, students on collaborative programmes, wherever they are based, have full access to all our online resources, including student support and learning resources, such as e-journals. The ACES students undertake professional skills development as part of their programme, using the framework of our Skills and Employability award and online resources, contextualised to Masters level and supported by SAMS UHI staff.
274. Students on collaborative programmes receive key information about their programme at induction, and also covering the institutional relationship between the university and the partner, student rights and responsibilities, and key university regulations and policies. The format of induction varies according to the circumstances of each partnership. For example, there is a joint induction for Drama students in

Inverness, attended by both Inverness and Glasgow based students, delivered jointly by university and GKC staff. For the HIE partnership, the programme coordinator delivers a face-to-face induction over two days, with particular emphasis on academic skills and referencing in the light of different learning and teaching approaches. This is supported by local HIE staff, to ensure students have a full understanding of expectations from the outset.

275. For international students transferring to Scotland, specific welcome and orientation sessions are organised at the larger APs, to assist in settling in, cultural acclimatisation and dealing with practicalities of finances and accommodation, and a programme of social / cultural events. The ACES students enjoyed an induction week combining academic and social activities, including participation in the Scottish Salmon Festival and symposium, an international event bringing together academic and industry representatives.

6.iv

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE APPROACH TO MANAGING COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY

276. Since ELIR2, we have entered into a small number of collaborative partnerships, with educational institutions in the UK and internationally, and have adopted a measured and low-risk approach to managing collaborative activity, both through the selection of external partners, and the types of activity we engage in. As a strategic objective, we are seeking to maximise student recruitment through existing and new partnerships, international networks and collaborations, and anticipate that we will build on our current activities. However, we are aware of the resource investment needed to ensure that associated risks are managed effectively.
277. Through EPSC, we maintain oversight of the approval of external partners, and ensure that appropriate due diligence enquiries are undertaken prior to entering into any substantive written agreements. The extent and nature of due diligence checks is proportionate to both the nature of the proposed partner, and the type of activity under discussion. Guidance on due diligence areas is provided within the Collaborations Handbook, but we have not as yet established a standardised proforma or risk scoring approach. On occasion, EPSC has decided against entering into proposed partnerships on the evidence of due diligence checks, agreeing that the financial or reputational risks were too great.
278. The Collaborations Handbook is a key reference point and provides guidance on our principles and procedures associated with the proposal, approval and monitoring of collaborative partnerships. However, it is recognised that a further review will be useful, to include differentiated approaches for a different types of partnership, and in line with the strategic objective to develop TNE models to accommodate the expansion of such provision. The current version of the Handbook is aligned with



COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY

the UK Quality Code, and the next revision will also take account of emerging sectoral guidance on the development of joint and dual awarding arrangements.

279. The development and use of a range of model agreements is an effective means of maintaining consistency and managing risk, particularly as relationships with external partners may be initiated by different APs. The model agreements are closely aligned with the UK Quality Code expectations and provide clarity on roles and responsibilities of the respective parties. Written agreements are approved through EPSC prior to signature by the Principal, thereby providing assurance that they have been subject to due scrutiny.
280. Records of external partnerships and written agreements are maintained on the collaborations register, however this is not yet widely used internally, and it is planned to communicate the resource more widely to promote engagement within the partnership with existing external partners, particularly to encourage uptake of student mobility opportunities.
281. Collaborative provision is fully integrated with our normal quality assurance and quality monitoring processes, with regard to setting, maintaining and reviewing academic standards. New awards have been established following normal curriculum development and approval processes, with the involvement of external partner staff. Programme delivery and management arrangements, and roles and responsibilities of staff, have been thoroughly planned and documented. Our monitoring systems have been effective in identifying emerging issues, and we have been able to make proportionate interventions to address these, and ensure that academic standards are maintained.
282. There is evidence of enhancement, particularly in actions aimed at ensuring that students based in different locations are able to benefit from the collaborative arrangement, such as opportunities for joint projects, and access to shared learning materials and staff expertise. Nonetheless, annual monitoring processes indicate that there have been some challenges in relation to effective communications and availability of staff. These will continue to be closely monitored, particularly as more data becomes available on student enrolment and achievement.





ELIR2 REPORT OUTCOMES

THE UNIVERSITY WAS ASKED TO CONSIDER THE AREAS SUMMARISED BELOW:

Report outcome	Main developments	RA sections and supporting evidence
1. Student representation – continue to develop the arrangements for student representation, including the UHI Students' Association, to enable the development of a strategic partnership between the University and its student body.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional student representation project and establishment of HISA Development of Student Partnership Agreement (to complement Student Charter) Development and work of Student Engagement Group Roll-out of SNSOs, review and development of SNO role 	HISA case study Student Partnership Agreement RA Section 2iii
2. Communication with students – review the way in which it communicates with its students to ensure there is a clearer focus on key programme information, especially in e-mail communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved use of management information and enhancement of student portal Improved student access to module / programme information, including e.g. online module selection, access to module results, withdrawal/suspension, automated enrolment on VLE Improved prospectus and pre-entry information about learning and teaching approaches used within programmes Implementation and embedding of PAT role, advising and signposting students Centralised VC timetabling to improve coordination of networked programmes Standard service communications about outages and downtime for VLE and other IT services Ongoing development of module database 	RA Section 1 RA Section 2iii RA Section 3 RA Section 5 iv University website and prospectus
3. Student surveys – develop a more consistent approach to the design of student survey questionnaires and improve the way in which the outcomes of student surveys are reported back to students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in NSS and PRES Implementation of standard online module evaluation survey Coordination of Early Experience survey across multiple APs Improved feedback loop to students through 'surveys' webpage 	RA Section 2iii RA Section 5 i RA Section 5 iv
4. Analysing student concerns – analyse the root causes of the issues raised by students through the 'Red Button' device.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly and annual reporting of Red Button activity and themes reported to QAEC and Student Engagement Group Rapid response to each contact (within 3 working days) and/or referral to appropriate person; ongoing communication until satisfactorily resolved 	RA Section 2iii
5. Student training for teaching role – as a matter of priority, ensure that all students receive training before undertaking a teaching role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced training opportunities for PGR students wishing to engage in teaching. Training delivered by individual APs and a formal pilot underway in one AP, with a view to broader roll-out across the partnership Exploration of a 1-day training course, in association with Head of LTA 	RA Section 2iii
6. Research student experience – develop an explicit strategic approach for enhancing the research student experience, and continue to develop a sense of community among the research students, building on the positive progress made through, for example, the annual research conference.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing work of Graduate School and RDC including e.g. seminar series, PGR student induction, engagement with PGR student reps Link with Scotland-wide Graduate Schools in Arts, Humanities, Social Science and Marine Science Improved identification and communication of PGR student training needs and how these can be met Enhanced electronic library resources Annual PGR conference (biennially linked to university Research Conference) 	RA Section 2iii RA Section 5i
7. Research and scholarship – continue seeking ways of providing staff with opportunities to develop their scholarly activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of Learning and Teaching Academy Development of Research Clusters Ongoing staff development activities (networked and locally delivered), including MED Development of ALPINE framework to gain HEA fellowship Staff development funding including sabbatical and conference attendance funds Internal enhancement theme on research-teaching linkages Engagement with national Enhancement Themes 	RA Section 3ii RA Section 3iii LTA case study AIS sample of annual monitoring documents

Report outcome	Main developments	RA sections and supporting evidence
<p>8. Learning environment – develop additional ways of assuring the quality and consistency of the virtual learning environment (VLE) and video conferencing in programme delivery. This should include providing staff development to support the effective use of technology by all staff.</p> <p>In relation to research students, the University should consider how the necessary library resource will continue to be made available if the current agreement with the Partner Universities were brought to an end.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Learning and Teaching Academy • Development of Educational Development Unit (EDU) and 'house style' of instructional design and practice • Ongoing staff development activities (networked and locally delivered), including MEd and PGCert Digital Pedagogy (subject to approval) • Implementation of Blended Learning Standards toolkit and guidance • In preparation for rDAP application and scrutiny, review of library resource needs undertaken 	<p>RA Section 3ii RA Section 3iii LTA case study</p> <p>RA Section 1 rDAP application</p>
<p>9. Annual Monitoring – enhance the systematic arrangements already in place by making explicit use of action points and reflection on the previous year's review at the module and programme levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory action plans and progress update in module, programme and Subject Network annual monitoring proformas • Review of SED proformas 	<p>RA Section 5i AIS sample of annual monitoring documents</p>
<p>10. Data management – continue to progress the planned improvements to data management. In particular, ensure that systematic use is made of the facilities with the management information system to support evaluation of the different student groups at each of the module, programme and Academic Partner levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved use of management information and enhancement of student portal • Establishment and ongoing work of AMI (Academic Management Information Group) • Improved access to module / programme information to support evaluation • Review of SED proformas • Development of 'dashboard' style reports for live monitoring • Specification of standardised KPI reports at module, programme, Subject Network and AP level • Establishment of Student Data Reporting Group to review reporting functionality and requirements across HE and FE 	<p>RA Section 1 RA Section 5i</p>
<p>11. Assessment and feedback – review the information provided to students on assessment criteria to ensure the existing examples of good practice are implemented across the institution. In addition, review the consistency with which feedback is provided to students on their assessed work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and implementation of Assessment, Feedback and Feedforward policy and guidance • Internal enhancement theme on 'engagement with assessment and feedback' 	<p>RA Section 3i RA Section 5i AIS sample of annual monitoring documents</p>
<p>12. Collaborative provision – ensure the full suite of arrangements for securing and monitoring collaborative provision are implemented for any new collaborative agreements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Collaborations handbook • Ongoing work of External Partnerships Steering Committee • Development of model partnership agreements • Risk-based approach and due diligence process 	<p>RA Section 6</p>
<p>13. Implementing strategic plans – include measurable objectives within the Subject Network operational plans in order to support the implementation of the related Faculty strategic plans.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and launch of Strategic Vision and Plan 2015-2020 • Review of Faculty Strategic plans • Subject Network operational plans with enhanced action planning and progress updates • Improved curriculum and student number planning processes to support strategic priorities overseen by PPF, engaging with Subject Networks • Strategic curriculum development funding allocation overseen by PPF, enacted through Subject Network plans 	<p>RA Section 1 Faculty Strategic plans Subject Network operational plans</p>

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Academic Council
AC	Argyll College UHI
ACDAP	Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers
ACES JMD	Joint Masters Degree in AquaCulture, Environment and Society
AD1	New programme proposal proforma
AGCAS	Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
AHB	(Faculty of) Arts, Humanities and Business
AIS	Advance information set
ALPINE	Accredited Learning, Professional Development and Innovation in Education
AMOSSHE	Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education
AP	Academic Partner
APQC	Academic Partner Quality Committee
ASQR	Academic Standards and Quality Regulations
ATRB	Academic Titles Review Board
B&L	Business and Leisure Subject Network
BA (Hons)	Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
BSc (Hons)	Bachelor of Science (Honours)
C&CI	Creative and Cultural Industries Subject Network
C21C	Curriculum for the 21st Century
CertHE	Certificate of Higher Education
CfH	Centre for History (based at Dornoch, part of Executive Office)
CfNS	Centre for Nordic Studies (based at Orkney College UHI and Shetland College UHI)
CoP	Code of Practice
CPD	Continuing professional development
CPI	Critical Performance Indicator
CRQF	Cross-Regional Quality Forum
CUR01	Scheme document proforma (part of approval documentation)
CUR02/04	Programme specification proforma (part of approval documentation)
CUR03	Module descriptor proforma (part of approval documentation)
DipHE	Diploma of Higher Education
DLHE	Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
DSC	Developing and Supporting the Curriculum (Enhancement Theme)
E&T	Energy and Technology Subject Network
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation Scheme
EDU	Educational Development Unit
EE	External Examiner
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ELIR	Enhancement-led Institutional Review
EO	Executive Office
EPSC	External Partnerships Steering Committee
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESS	Essential Student Skills project
ET	Enhancement theme
eTIPS	E-Textbook Institutional Publication Services
EV	External verification
FE	Further education
FERB	Further Education Regional Board
FQ-EHEA	Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GA	Graduate attributes
GDC	General Dental Council
GKC	Glasgow Kelvin College
GTCS	General Teaching Council for Scotland
H&G	Humanities and Gaelic Subject Network
HE	Higher education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEAR	Higher Education Achievement Record

HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
HEPPRC	Higher Education Partnership Planning and Resource Committee
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HIE	Hunan Institute of Engineering
HISA	Highlands and Islands Students' Association
HN	Higher National award
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
HRPG	Human Resources Practitioners' Group
HTC	Highland Theological College UHI
IC	Inverness College UHI
ICT	Information and communication technology
JANET	Joint Academic NETwork
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
JNTUK	Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University
KIS	Key Information Set
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LCC	Lews Castle College UHI
LIS	Learning and Information Services
LTA	Learning and Teaching Academy
LTA	Learning, teaching, and assessment
LTQC	Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (now disbanded)
MA	Master of Arts
MASTS	Marine Alliance for Science and Technology for Scotland
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MC	Moray College UHI
MEd	Master of Education
MEng	Master of Engineering
MLitt	Master of Letters
MOD1	Proforma to request a modification to a programme or a module
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPhil	Master of Philosophy
MSc	Master of Science
MTh	Master of Theology
NAFC	North Atlantic Fisheries College UHI
NESCol	North East Scotland College
NHC	North Highland College UHI
NSS	National Student Survey
NUS	National Union of Students
OC	Orkney College UHI
OGE	Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd agus nan Eilean (Gaelic name for UHI)
PAT	Personal Academic Tutor
PC	Perth College UHI
PDA	Professional Development Award (SQA award)
PgCert / PgDip	Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma
PGDE	Professional Graduate Diploma in Education
PGR	Postgraduate research
PGT	Postgraduate taught
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PL	Programme Leader
PLSP	Personal Learning Support Plan
PPF	Partnership Planning Forum
PRES	Postgraduate Research Experience Survey
PSRB	Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body
QA	Quality assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QAEC	Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (previously QESG)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

QE	quality enhancement
QEF	Quality Enhancement Framework
QESG	Quality Enhancement Steering Group (now QAEC)
QF	Quality Forum
QM	Quality monitoring
QMG	Quality Monitoring Group
RA	Reflective Analysis
RC	Research Committee
rDAP	Research Degree Awarding Powers
RDC	Research Degrees Committee
REF	Research Excellence Framework
REG	Research Excellence Grant
RETI	Réseaux d'Excellence des Territoires Insulaires
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RTL	Research-teaching linkage(s)
SAAS	Student Awards Agency for Scotland
SAMS	Scottish Association for Marine Science UHI
SC	Shetland College UHI
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SDRG	Student Data Reporting Group
SEA	Student Exchange Agreement
SED	Self-evaluation document
SERRM	Science, Environment, and Rural Resource Management subject network
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SHE	(Faculty of) Science, Health and Engineering
SHEEC	Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SITS	Student records database system (Strategic Information Technology Services Ltd)
SMO	Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI
SMT	Senior Management Team
SN	Subject Network
SNL	Subject Network Leader
SNLQM Forum	Subject Network Leaders / Quality Managers Forum
SNO	Subject Network Officer (previously Subject Network Student Officer)
SNSO	Subject Network Student Officer (now Subject Network Officer)
SPA	Student Partnership Agreement
sparqs	student partnerships in quality Scotland
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SQAPG	SQA Practitioners Group
SRO	Student Records Office
STEC	Standing Teacher Education Committee
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification (SQA award)
SWAP	Scottish Wider Access Programme
T1 / T2	Tier 1 / Tier 2 Exam Boards
tDAP	Taught Degree Awarding Powers
TNE	Transnational education
TQF	Teaching Quality Forum
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Services
UG	Undergraduate
UHI	University of the Highlands and Islands
UHISA	UHI Students' Association (previous students' association, now dissolved)
UoA	University of Aberdeen
VC	Video conference
VLE	Virtual learning environment
WA	Widening access
WHC	West Highland College UHI





University of the
Highlands and Islands
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd
agus nan Eilean

