

Enhancement-led Institutional Review of Edinburgh Napier University

Outcome Report

December 2019

Contents

About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method	1
About this review	1
About Edinburgh Napier University	2
Threshold judgement about Edinburgh Napier University	3
Commendations	3
Recommendations	4
What happens next?	6
Further information	6

About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method

The QAA website explains the method for [Enhancement-led Institutional Review \(ELIR\)](#) and has links to the ELIR handbook and other informative documents.¹ You can also find out more about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\)](#).²

Further details about ELIR can be found in an accompanying [brief guide](#),³ including an overview of the review method, information about review teams, and explanations of follow-up action.

About this review

This is the Outcome Report of the ELIR conducted by QAA at Edinburgh Napier University. The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 9 October 2019 and Review Visit on 2-6 December 2019. The review was conducted by a team of five reviewers:

- Bobi Archer (Student Reviewer)
- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor Peter Bush (Academic Reviewer)
- Dawn Martin (Coordinating Reviewer)
- Professor Valerie Webster (Academic Reviewer).

This report sets out the threshold judgement formed by the ELIR team on:

- the current and likely future effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for managing academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience.

The threshold judgement for this report can be found on page 3, followed by commendations and recommendations.

A more detailed [Technical Report](#) is also available for this review.⁴ The Technical Report sets out the team's findings under each heading in the ELIR 4 method.

¹ About ELIR: www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review

² About QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland

³ Brief Guide to ELIR: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/brief-guide-to-elir-method.pdf

⁴ Technical Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Edinburgh-Napier-University

About Edinburgh Napier University

Edinburgh Napier University has a total student population of around 20,000 (headcount) from 140 countries studying at one of the University's three campuses in Edinburgh, online or through a transnational education partnership. The University has established collaborative partnerships in a variety of international locations including Hong Kong and Singapore, as well as a number of newer partnerships in countries including Myanmar, Mauritius and Vietnam. The University has six academic schools.

The University's Vision is to be 'an enterprising and innovative community, renowned internationally, with an unrivalled student learning experience'. Its range of provision has an applied and professional focus that builds on strong links with the communities in which it operates. The University is committed to widening access to higher education, to delivering graduates that are highly-valued by employers and to building a research base that contributes to policy, business and economic growth.

At the time of the 2019 ELIR, the University was developing a new strategy with the working title 'Shaping our Future' which aims to build on the achievements realised through its 2020 Strategic Plan (Strategy 2020). Strategy 2020, which was launched in 2014, set out key objectives that included: growing the academic reputation of the institution; delivering an excellent, personalised student experience; building innovation, enterprise and citizenship and internationalising provision.

Threshold judgement about Edinburgh Napier University

Edinburgh Napier University has **effective** arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience.

This is a positive judgement, which means that the University meets sector expectations in securing the academic standards of its awards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience it provides, currently and into the future. This judgement confirms there can be public confidence in the University's awards and in the quality of the learning experience it provides for its students.

Commendations

- 1 The University is commended for the following areas of good practice.
- 2 **Strategic approach to widening participation** - the sustained, strategic, systematic and evidence-based approach to widening participation and direct entry which is having a continued positive impact on the number of widening participation students admitted to and progressing through the University. Effective interventions are evident at all stages of the learner journey from pre-admission through contextualised admissions arrangements to induction, transition and on-campus support. These include the student-led and University supported peer network of students from a widening participation background (Establish), the Countdown to Zero induction programme and introduction of dedicated widening participation student ambassadors.
- 3 **Support for developing students' skills in employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship** - the University's commitment to meeting its strategic objective to ensure that all students are prepared to succeed and thrive in the professional world through offering a range of programme-led work-related activities, placement learning opportunities and entrepreneurial skills development through its Bright Red Triangle service - a one-stop shop for extracurricular innovation and enterprise activities.
- 4 **Approach to monitoring postgraduate student academic progress** - since the 2015 ELIR, the University has developed a robust approach to overseeing individual postgraduate research student academic progress, including the introduction of regular review meetings every six months involving an independent panel chair.
- 5 **Systematic enhancement of leadership in learning, teaching and research** - the University has strengthened its structures for the support of learning and teaching and research-teaching linkages through the appointment of new vice-principals for learning and teaching and research, and the introduction of new school leadership roles. This includes the establishment of the school heads of learning and teaching, who are members of school leadership teams and participate in challenge discussions with the University Leadership Team which cover a range of matters including learning, teaching and research.
- 6 **Clear partnership working between academic and professional services staff** - academic and professional support services staff work effectively at school and institutional levels to deliver the University's strategic priorities. Examples of effective partnership working are evident in the delivery of a high-quality online learning environment and collaborative working between the academic staff and professional services colleagues working on placements, quality and planning.
- 7 **Effective development for academic and support services staff** - the University provides a wide range of opportunities, both formally and informally, to support the

continuing professional development of staff. These include: ENroute - the University's Professional Recognition Framework for staff involved in teaching and supporting learning provided by the Department of Learning and Teaching Enhancement; the Inspiring Leadership programme for senior leaders involved in leading or influencing university strategy and the Students as Colleagues initiative where students are trained as voluntary professional 'reviewers' of teaching practice and are paired with a staff member from a different discipline.

8 **Developing institutional approach to the use of data** - the University is growing its institutional capacity to provide data to staff in an accessible format to support the delivery of strategic and operational priorities including admissions and widening participation. Staff are increasingly using data routinely for a wide range of purposes, including to inform action planning and annual monitoring.

Recommendations

9 The University is asked to consider the following recommendations.

10 **Student representation** - ensure that there are clear representative structures in place at all levels, and in particular at school level, for all modes of delivery including online learning. Make certain that there are effective arrangements in place for the recruitment, training and support for all students undertaking a representative role, including and beyond programme level, for a variety of activities, including school and institutional-level committees, approval boards and institution-led reviews.

11 **Student voice and student engagement** - continue to develop mechanisms to enhance student engagement and respond to the student voice. Routinely monitor the effectiveness of the arrangements in place, including specifically, the consistent operation of student-staff liaison committees and effectiveness of the merger of the Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee with the Student Experience Committee. Ensure that students are supported to raise matters at relevant levels of the governance structure, appropriate action is taken as a result and outcomes disseminated to the student body.

12 **Tailored support for students including those studying off campus** - in the context of the University's growth agenda, ensure there is a systematic and embedded approach to supporting all groups of students. Continue to develop support mechanisms for online learners, graduate apprentices, transnational education students and other groups studying off campus to ensure accessibility of services, sustainability and a positive student and staff experience. In particular, the University is asked to carefully monitor the personal development tutor staff/student ratios as student numbers grow.

13 **Postgraduate research culture** - in line with the strategic objective to enhance the research community and sense of belonging for postgraduate students, consider introducing a structured and longitudinal institution-wide induction, to include appropriate training and development. This recognises positive steps the University has taken to enhance the arrangements for monitoring students' academic progression.

14 **Training for postgraduates who teach** - ensure that all postgraduate research students (current and future) who teach, complete the mandatory course prior to commencing teaching.

15 **Approach to institution-led review** - progress with the implementation of revisions to the institution-led review process which are likely to provide greater institutional oversight of the process and consistency in considering outcomes including ensuring that appropriate

action is taken at institutional level. The University is asked to ensure that the current institutional approach to reviewing postgraduate study considers more fully the wider student learning experience beyond student progression. There would also be benefit in the University ensuring it includes an appropriate level of externality and considering the extent to which the method will continue to be fit-for-purpose as postgraduate research student numbers grow. In addition, the University is asked to establish a systematic and timely mechanism for reviewing the contribution of the professional support services to the quality of the student experience.

16 **External examiner reports** - make external examiners' reports accessible to all students in order to give them the opportunity to engage in discussion and consideration of this element of the assessment process.

17 **English language proficiency for transnational education programmes** - review, within the current academic year, the English language entry criteria and proficiency of students on all transnational education programmes to ensure future student intakes have adequate language proficiency on entry and provide language support for existing students where required.

What happens next?

18 QAA Scotland will continue to engage with the institution through the annual discussion visits which, among other matters, consider the ways in which institutions respond to the ELIR outcomes.

19 One year after publication of the ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to provide a Follow-up Report to indicate how they are responding to the outcomes of ELIR. The final version of the institution's Follow-up Report is published on the QAA website. Institutions also engage in a range of enhancement and development activities including Focus On projects where institutions work collaboratively to improve policy and practice relating to topics that are frequently occurring in ELIR outcomes.

Further information

20 A more detailed [Technical Report](#) is also available for this review. The Technical Report sets out the team's findings under each heading in the ELIR 4 method.

21 This review and its findings relate to the institution as a whole and do not provide information about individual programmes of study or subjects. For further information about those, contact the institution or [visit its website](#).

22 University sector institutions in Scotland also engage in systematic Enhancement Theme activity. Further information about that work, which has a sector-wide and institutional focus, can be found on the [Enhancement Themes website](#).

23 Further information about QAA Scotland and the enhancement-led approach, including the ELIR method, can be found on the [QAA website](#).

24 For further information about the Scottish Funding Council see www.sfc.ac.uk.

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