Enhancement-led Institutional Review of University of Aberdeen

Outcome Report

November 2018

Contents

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 the University of Aberdeen. The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 10 October 2018 and Review Visit on 19-23 November 2018. The review was conducted by a team of five reviewers:

- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw (Academic Reviewer)
- Ms Ruth Brown (Student Reviewer)
- Mr Paul Probyn (Coordinating Reviewer)
- Ms Linda Smith (Academic Reviewer)
- Dr Gillian Thomson (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.

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[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/University-of-Aberdeen

About the University of Aberdeen

Founded in 1495, the University of Aberdeen is one of Scotland's four ancient universities. The University describes itself as a 'broad spectrum' institution, offering 590 undergraduate and 140 taught postgraduate degree programmes, many of which are professionally accredited, across a wide range of disciplines. Its main campus is at King's College in Old Aberdeen. A second campus, accommodating Medicine, Dentistry, Medical Science and Nutrition, is located adjacent to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. The University established its first overseas campus in Doha, Qatar, in 2017.

The University's Vision is 'Transforming the world with greater knowledge and learning' and it defines itself as a 'distinctively Scottish' university, with 'reach, impact, and aspirations that are global'. The University describes its ethos as embracing student choice, research-enriched teaching and individual responsibility.

Threshold judgement about the University of Aberdeen

The University of Aberdeen 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   **Student support** - recognising its increasingly diverse student population, which brings a more complex set of needs, the University has proactively developed its student services to effectively support the requirements of all students. Strong institutional commitment has ensured that equality and diversity is embedded across University policies, procedures and activities, and is also underpinned by a comprehensive range of initiatives involving both staff and students.

3   **Widening access** - the University's strategic focus on widening access has resulted in the development of a broad range of activities and measures including pre and post-entry support, with students confirming they are positively supported and prepared to succeed with their studies.

4   **Communication policy** - the University has effectively implemented a Student Communication Policy resulting in students recognising they are provided with targeted information on matters relevant to them.

5   **Student engagement** - the University and the Aberdeen University Students' Association have made considerable progress in developing strong partnership working including establishing an ambitious Student Partnership Agreement and implementing a Student Engagement Development Plan. Student representation structures have continued to evolve in a positive manner with the aim of ensuring that all students are effectively represented.

6   **Quality processes and arrangements for self-evaluation and enhancement** - the University has undertaken significant development of its quality processes to ensure these support self-evaluation and enhancement. Internal Teaching Review places a firm emphasis on enhancement, makes full use of the expertise of external subject experts, and engages students actively in developing a forward-looking action plan. The Quality Assurance Committee and its members play a pivotal role in implementing the University's approach to quality enhancement, ensuring good practice is shared at both school and institutional level.

Recommendations

7   The University is asked to consider the following recommendations.

8   **Institutional and school responsibilities** - reflect on the balance between institutional and school responsibilities for establishing and implementing policy and practice to assure itself that all those studying for a University of Aberdeen award have parity of experience.

9   **Personal tutoring** - continue to monitor its personal tutoring arrangements to ensure they remain fit for purpose, in the context of the University's changing student population. The University should progress its intention to extend personal tutoring for postgraduate taught students, including those studying online.

10   **Postgraduate Research School** - continue work defining the role of the Postgraduate Research School and its relationship to the academic schools, enabling the University to ensure that all research students have an equivalent experience. The University is also asked to ensure that new postgraduate research supervisors undertake the training provided by the University.

11   **Preparation for teaching** - ensure all new staff and postgraduate students who teach and assess complete, as a minimum, the University's 'Learning and Teaching in HE' course before taking up teaching responsibilities.

12   **Review of professional services** - continue with its plans to develop processes for the routine review of student-facing professional services. The University should ensure that the new processes link effectively to the existing Internal Teaching Review process for academic areas, allow for institutional oversight, fully engage students, and incorporate appropriate externality.

13   **External examiners** - the University is encouraged to reflect on the effectiveness of its current arrangements for monitoring the training and induction provided for external examiners at school level. In addition, it should ensure that all students have easy access to the external examiners' reports for their programme.

14   **Collaborative provision** - review its processes for maintaining the Register of Partnerships and Collaborative Provision, to ensure its ongoing currency and completeness.

What happens next?

15   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.

16   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

17   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.

18   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.

19   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.

20   Further information about QAA Scotland and the enhancement-led approach, including the ELIR method, can be found on the QAA website.

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