

Enhancement-led Institutional Review of Heriot-Watt University

Technical Report

November 2020



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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 Technical Report of the ELIR conducted by QAA at Heriot-Watt University. The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 30 January 2020 and Review Visit on 16 March 2020 and 9-13 November 2020. The review was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Mr Zachary Davis (Student Reviewer)
- Professor Stephen Doughty (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor Hilary Grainger (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor Douglas Halliday (Academic Reviewer)
- Ms Rhiannon Tinsley (Coordinating Reviewer)
- Professor Alyson Tobin (Academic Reviewer).

In advance of the review visits, the University submitted a self-evaluative document (the Reflective Analysis) and an advance information set, comprising a range of materials about the institution's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards.

The impact of COVID-19

The Review Visit was originally scheduled to take place during March 2020. During the Review Visit, the national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic was announced, which resulted in the Review Visit being postponed. In discussion with Heriot-Watt University and the Scottish Funding Council, the Review Visit was rescheduled to November 2020. QAA made some amendments to the ELIR process to accommodate the ongoing pandemic, most notable of which was that the review visit was conducted entirely online.

The ELIR was undertaken while the pandemic, and the institution's response to it, was a key part of the context. Heriot-Watt University was given the opportunity to outline its arrangements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in an update paper that was made available to the ELIR team prior to the Review Visit. Although this was part of the context of the review, the team considered the institution's approach to quality and standards from the time of the last ELIR in 2015. It is acknowledged that the review took place at what was a very challenging time for Heriot-Watt University, and the ELIR team and QAA Scotland are grateful to staff and students for their engagement in the review.

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

About this report

In this report, the ELIR team:

- delivers a threshold judgement 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 can be found on page 3, followed by the detailed findings of the review given in numbered paragraphs.

Technical Reports set out the ELIR team's view under each of the report headings. Shorter Outcome Reports are provided that set out the main findings of the ELIR for a wider audience. The [Outcome Report](#) for this review is on the QAA website.⁴

ELIR Technical Reports are intended primarily for the institution reviewed, and to provide an information base for the production of thematic reports that identify findings across several institutions.

⁴ Outcome Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Heriot-Watt-University

Threshold judgement about Heriot-Watt University

Heriot-Watt 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.

1 Contextual information about the institution, student population and the review

1.1 Summary information about the institution

1 With origins in Scotland in 1821 as the world's first Institute of Mechanics, Heriot-Watt University (the University) was awarded university status in 1966; its vision is to be a progressive, connected, global university. It has a total student population of 23,969 (headcount), partners in 150 countries and 2,349 staff. Academic provision is undertaken across five campuses: three in Scotland (Edinburgh, Orkney and Borders) and two overseas in Dubai and Malaysia - which were set up in 2005 and 2012 respectively - each with a purpose-built site. The Edinburgh Campus hosts over 40 companies based on the first University Research Park in Europe. The University is organised into five schools and each school operates on at least two campuses. Schools are large, multi-disciplinary units with extensive management and administrative functions operating across several campuses managing programme delivery and a range of partnership activities in three different time zones.

2 The University's Strategic Plan: Strategy 2025, runs from 2019 to 2025 and has four strategic themes - Building Flourishing Communities; Pioneering in Education; Excellence in Research and Enterprise; and Being a Global University. Its vision is to be world-leading in all areas of specialism and this is underpinned by a mission to create and exchange knowledge that benefits society. Four values have been developed: Inspire, Collaborate, Belong and Celebrate.

3 Strategy 2025 was developed and endorsed collaboratively, exemplifying the 'One Heriot-Watt Worldwide' ethos. The Strategic Plan is complemented by resource and operational planning processes which support forward financial planning. Institutional Strategic Performance Indicators are reviewed at given points during the year by the Court and the University Executive to inform resource planning and strategic decision-making.

4 The distinctive features of the University are: the scale of its international activity; the range of opportunities for multi-location, multi-mode study; and the close alignment between academic provision and professional careers. The University has a number of international partnerships, as well as partnerships with other UK institutions. There are currently 200 partnerships in operation, which take a number of different forms: Joint Collaborative Partnerships; Articulation Agreements; Approved Learning Partnerships; Exchange Agreements and Individual Study Placements; Research Partnerships; and Industrial Partnerships including Graduate Apprenticeships.

5 The University's strategic ambition to be a globally-connected institution builds on longstanding plans to develop an integrated, multi-site campus institution. The Heriot-Watt University Dubai Campus (HWUD) has grown significantly since it was established in 2005

and in 2018-19, there were 3617 students enrolled on 92 programmes. The University's second overseas campus was opened in Malaysia in 2012. Heriot-Watt University Malaysia (HWUM) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the University. In 2018-19, there were 1992 students in Malaysia across all programmes. Each overseas campus is run by a Vice-Principal (VP)/Provost who sits on the University Executive, the Malaysian VP is also CEO of HWUM.

6 The University's extensive internationalisation has led to the establishment and mainstreaming of processes and structures for effective management, assurance and enhancement. A standard quality assurance and enhancement framework applies to all university provision across all modes and locations. All students are expected to achieve the same learning outcomes irrespective of mode or location. The University's Code of Practice for the Management of Multi-Location, Multi-Mode Programmes (the 'Multi Code') is in the process of being replaced with a new Global Code of Practice for the Management, Assurance and Enhancement of Taught programmes, although progress has been delayed by the pandemic.

9 The University's response to the impact of COVID-19 on learning, teaching and assessment has been managed in two phases. The Learning and Teaching COVID-19 Contingency Planning Group, established in February 2020, was responsible for responding to the impact of the pandemic on learning, teaching and assessment for the remainder of 2019-20. This group was replaced, in May 2020, by the Learning and Teaching COVID-19 Task and Finish Group which focused on preparing for 2020-21. In its third incarnation, the Learning and Teaching AY2020/21 Group is continuing to manage the University's ongoing response to the pandemic. In addition to this, the Group will focus on three key projects over the next academic year: Portfolio Modernisation/Review; review of the academic architecture; and the transition to the new virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.2 Composition and key trends in the student population

10 In 2018-19, the University had a total population of 23,969 (headcount) including 11,687 undergraduates (UG), 10,315 postgraduate taught students (PGT) and 1,359 postgraduate research students (PGR). Overall, there were 15,570 students at five campuses; and 8,399 students enrolled off-campus, studying as independent distance learners or through an academic partner.

11 Since the time of the 2015 ELIR, student numbers studying in Scotland have increased by around 11% (from 8,985 in 2013-14 to 9,961 in 2018-19). Another noticeable change is the increase in the number of students at the Malaysian campus from 170 students in 2013-14 to 1992 students in 2018-19. In comparison, the number of students studying off-campus (studying online or through an academic partner) has decreased by almost 45% (from 15,199 in 2013-14 to 8,399 in 2018-19).

12 The University's partnership arrangements have changed significantly since the 2015 ELIR, in particular in relation to Approved Learning Partners (ALPs), which have been reduced by about 50% in five years - 53 in 2013-14 (9,850 students); 29 in 2018-19 (3,360 students). This reflects the University's strategic decision to focus on strategic in-country collaborations, notably in China, and from 2019-20, in India.

13 The University notes an overall gender imbalance with 40% of students being female. The gender imbalance is significant on particular campuses, for example, 90% of students are female at the Scottish Borders Campus compared to the Orkney campus where 30% of students are female (see below paragraph 38).

14 In line with the priorities in Strategy 2025, the University plans to grow the number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate students from the 20% most deprived postcodes, as defined in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD20). The number of SIMD20 students has increased by 70% since 2011-12 (from 90 entrants in 2011-12 to 153 entrants in 2017-18) with plans to increase this by a further 50% to over 200 entrants by 2021-22. The University is one of Scotland's largest providers of Graduate Apprenticeships (with 135 contracts with 70 employers across seven programmes) and had the largest cohort of Graduate Apprenticeships in 2018-19 (169 students). The University plans to grow this area further and has set a target of 1000 students by 2021-22.

15 One key area where student numbers are expected to grow is in postgraduate provision. The numbers of postgraduate research students should increase with recruitment to the six new PGR programmes at the Dubai and Malaysia campuses. In addition, the University is seeking to grow PGT online provision and is currently engaged in a portfolio review exercise, to explore potential areas for rapid growth. The recent merger of two academic schools has provided opportunities to develop an institution-wide approach to PGT online provision.

16 The Retention Strategy and Operational Plan has been in place since 2016, responding to concerns about meeting the university target, and identifies retention as 'Everyone's Responsibility'. The University has not yet met its target retention rate of 93% but considers the figures positively in light of the increases in the diversity of the student population (the figure in 2017-18 was 89.4%). Retention data is monitored at key points in the academic year as part of planning process and within the Annual Monitoring and Review (AMR) process (see below paragraphs 116-125).

1.3 Commentary on the preparation for the ELIR, including contextualisation

17 The University indicated that it had used this ELIR as an ongoing opportunity to reflect on and develop approaches to learning and teaching. An ELIR Steering Group, chaired by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) (DP (L&T)) was established as a sub-group of University Committee for Learning and Teaching (UCLT). This group met on a monthly basis and guided the drafting of the Reflective Analysis (RA), consultations and development of themes.

18 The Academic Quality Team took day-to-day operational responsibility for ELIR preparations and reported progress to senior management as well as briefing staff and university committees. Broader consultation with staff, students, academic partners and employers had been facilitated through distribution of the draft RA, focus groups, surveys and open consultations and the final version of the RA was agreed by UCLT.

19 Three contextualised themes were identified which emerged from and were refined through consultation with staff and students at committees and working groups:

- Global Learning and Teaching
- Student Engagement
- Fostering Partnership Cultures and Communities; Retention: Supporting Student Success.

20 The ELIR team recognised these themes as key areas of focus for the University and used them to steer discussions with staff and students.

1.4 Summary of the institution's follow-up to the previous ELIR

21 The 2015 ELIR identified five areas for development and the RA detailed that the University had made significant progress in four of these areas. The University has chosen to maintain its position on not including the location and mode of study on certificates and transcripts, as recommended in the 2015 ELIR. This is argued on the basis that the University is a global institution with the 'One Heriot-Watt' ethos and maintains identical academic standards across all campuses. While the University acknowledges that some professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) find this difficult, an enhanced transcript can capture the location of study if students choose to share this. Students who met the ELIR team were all in agreement with the University's position. For further details on actions taken see Section 4.3, paragraph 139.

1.5 Impact of engaging students in ELIR preparations

22 The student representative bodies (SRBs) were extensively engaged in ELIR preparations and drafting the RA, including as members of the ELIR Steering Group and University Committee for Learning and Teaching (UCLT). The contextualised themes were discussed with students on all campuses and also those at academic partner institutions. Student focus groups were set up at all five campuses. Students identified the PGT and PGR student learning experiences and student wellbeing as key topics. For students at academic partners and independent distance learners, community was identified as an issue. Student engagement was considered integral and valuable to the ELIR process. The ELIR team considered the University's approach to engaging its students in preparations for ELIR to have been effective.

2 Enhancing the student learning experience

2.1 Student representation and engagement

23 The University's approach to student representation and engagement is effective, underpinned by strong working relationships between senior management and student officers leading to effective enhancement of the student learning experience. The student representative bodies (SRBs) and the University work in partnership and are actively engaged in consultatively determining areas of focus and working on initiatives to enhance the student experience.

Student representation

24 The ELIR team learned that there is a sustained, strong and productive partnership in place between the University and its SRBs. The University has in place SRBs at each of the three key geographical locations (Scotland, Malaysia and Dubai) and has made efforts to develop effective student representation in both the Dubai and Malaysia campuses where local legislation differs. Student representatives operate at three levels within the institution, which is mirrored at the three key locations: class representatives at the programme level; school officers at the discipline level; and sabbatical officers at the institutional level, with regular communication between them. Students and staff highlighted the success of the school officers and the key role they play within this structure. School officers meet as an International Committee to determine common priorities and share good practice across the global institution. The team learned there is positive engagement between SRBs, with the student presidents communicating regularly, through both formal and informal channels, to discuss key issues and priorities. The Annual Learning and Teaching Reports from SRBs are considered by the UCLT and were viewed positively by the ELIR team. The recent development of an Academic Coordinator role within the Scottish Campus Student Union allows for centralisation of academic representation activities, known as the Education Zone,

and includes support for global student representation. The team commended the strong working relationship between the sabbatical officers of the SRBs and the senior management team of the institution, which have been built over a period of time and are sustained following yearly changes to student-elected positions. The team found that this effective approach had been sustained over a number of years facilitated by an inclusive culture promoted by senior management. This collaborative relationship allows for open discussions, with sabbatical officers regularly meeting with members of the senior management team, enabling enhancement of the student experience. Additionally, student representation is embedded in all key university committees at an institutional, school and programme level. This is evidenced further through the consultation with student representatives in a range of projects such as the development of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, in preparation for ELIR 4 and engagement in the Enhancement Themes.

25 The University works in collaboration with the three SRBs to produce a global Student Partnership Agreement (SPA), first launched in 2018. The global SPA focuses on three themes of academic, community and wellbeing. The ELIR team learned that the SRBs appreciate the move from three, location-specific SPAs to a global SPA and the University notes this as a step change in their working relationship with the SRBs. The University acknowledges the lack of awareness among the student body of the SPA itself; however, notes wider engagement in the enhancements resulting from it. Throughout the University, staff use the SPA to focus activities, even if they are not directly involved with it. The Global Student Liaison Committee (GSLC), a subcommittee of Court, monitors progress and outcomes resulting from the SPA and highlighted in September 2019 enhancements to employability, increased engagement with societies at Dubai and Malaysia campuses, and the introduction of Enhanced Transcripts. The ELIR team commends the University's global approach to the SPA and positive working relationship it fosters with the SRBs. The positive partnership and approach to the SPA has helped to enhance the student learning experience.

26 The Scottish campuses' Student Union has restructured its sabbatical officer roles, removing the VP (Borders) and reinstating the VP (Education) in 2020-21. The ELIR team learned that, following this change, postgraduate representation falls to the Student President with undergraduate representation coming under the remit of the VP (Education). Both the Student President and VP (Education) are in regular contact with relevant post holders in the Dubai and Malaysia campuses enabling a connected approach to enhance the student experience. This effective working partnership helped to facilitate the University's strategic approach to international and multi-campus provision and was viewed positively by the ELIR team.

27 The Scottish campuses' Student Union redeveloped its democratic structures in 2018-19, moving away from pre-defined roles, enabling students to stand for a Member of Parliament in the Student Union (MP) position split over five areas: Scottish Borders Campus; community; academic; wellbeing; and open. The ELIR team learned that student engagement with the Student Union has increased as a result of this development with more students nominating themselves for positions, with wider participation in the Student Union and the University in supporting this step-change. The Student Union has identified areas for further development within the School MP roles, ensuring they work well alongside school officers. The work taken to develop student representation and engage a wider student interest was viewed positively by the ELIR team.

28 The Student Union, supported by the University, has worked to promote representation for PGR students across the institution, with positions for PGR representatives and a lead PGR representative, similar to the role of school officers, in each school. Students who met the ELIR team indicated variability in the effectiveness of these roles within different schools. The University is encouraged to continue developing these

roles to ensure effectiveness in all schools. The University acknowledges difficulties with filling PGR positions on institutional-level committees, and the ELIR team encourages the University to continue to engage with the SRBs and directly with PGR students in order to address this. The ELIR team agreed that PGR representation should be strengthened to address concerns with the PGR student environment (as discussed later in paragraphs 61-68).

29 The ELIR team learned that representation of PGT students is a challenge. The University, in collaboration with the SRBs, introduced a separate representation system for PGT students in 2015-16, however, engagement is still low and as a result, the University is currently reviewing the PGT experience more widely. One outcome resulted in the Scottish campuses' Student Union introducing a PGT MP to help coordinate PGT representation and to engage directly with the institution. PGT class representatives who met the team, indicated that more detailed information on their role, including the time commitment, could be made clearer before applying.

30 Students enrolled as part of a Graduate Apprenticeship (GA), Articulation Agreements, or Joint Collaborative Partnership (JCP) are considered campus-based by the institution and are therefore represented by the formal structures (paragraph 24). The ELIR team learned that approved learning partner (ALP) and independent distance learner (IDL) students are not formally represented via the SRBs, with no representation structures in place. The 2015 ELIR recommended the establishment of formal representative structures for these students. The University, in response to the recommendation, noted traditional methods of representation are not workable for these cohorts and that individual feedback remains the most effective method for gathering student views through, for example, surveying. The ELIR team encourages the University to continue reflecting upon representation for these students and to consider a range of potential methods for ensuring feedback is collected from ALP and IDL students.

31 The Scottish campuses' Student Union is responsible for training school officers and class representatives in the Scottish Campuses. School officers receive in-person training led by the Academic Coordinator and VP (Education). Class representatives are trained by their respective SRB for their associated campus. In addition, class representatives receive a handbook prepared by the Scottish Campuses' Student Union's Academic Coordinator which is tailored for local context for individual campuses by their respective SRB. Students who met the ELIR team indicated that not all class representatives had received the handbook. In the Dubai and Malaysia campuses, students noted that there was a limited understanding of the distinction between class representatives and school officers. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, online training was provided alongside the handbook for class representatives, enabling further interaction. The team learned that student representative training includes details of student support services available to students, allowing for awareness raising and signposting of resources such as the Student Advice Hub and the Student Success Advisors. The University is encouraged to work with the SRBs to provide a connected and global approach ensuring all class representatives receive appropriate training, including a handbook and that students are clear about the roles of class representatives and school officers, particularly in the Malaysia and Dubai campuses.

Responding to student feedback

32 A wide range of formal and informal mechanisms are used to gather student feedback. Students who met with the ELIR team confirmed that Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs), which take place twice a semester, are globally effective and provide a key opportunity to provide feedback to the School on their course and hear outcomes of actions taken. Students in Dubai were positive about the Town Hall meetings held by the

school officers to report back to students on actions taken as a result of their feedback and as a platform for students to raise additional issues.

33 The ELIR team learned that the University has introduced a Student Survey Framework, in response to outcomes from the 2015 ELIR, to help close the feedback loop, ensuring actions are taken, communicated and evaluated. The University's Student Survey Management Group has oversight for all surveys conducted at the institution, reporting to the Student Learning Experience Committee (SLEC). In addition, student-led redesign of the course feedback surveys (CFSs) through the Evidence for Enhancement Theme has enabled feedback to be given to cohorts before the end of the semester.

34 In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University, in collaboration with the SRBs, has taken a new approach to surveying in the form of pulse surveys, implemented in weeks one, four and regularly thereafter, enabling actions to be taken quickly and helping to shape the approach to Responsive Blended Learning (RBL). These short surveys were administered to all students at all campuses with the aim of collecting key information to allow an agile response from the University. Both the student and staff communities have received these surveys positively. Information from these pulse surveys was used to inform the rapid and ongoing development of academic matters and of student support services such as addressing issues with responsive blended learning.

2.2 Recognising and responding to equality and diversity in the student population

35 The University has a range of systematic measures in place to support its students and staff in matters of equality and diversity. As an international institution with five campuses, Heriot Watt has a global widening participation strategy approved by UCLT which aims to include groups beyond the Scottish government definitions. The UCLT has oversight of diversity issues and is supported by an Equality and Diversity Advisory Group to advise on legal issues as the University has to work within different legal frameworks in UK, Dubai and Malaysia.

Equality and diversity

36 The University has a diverse student population with entry routes which have expanded since the 2015 ELIR and there are plans to further grow Graduate Apprenticeships (paragraph 14). This diverse student population is supported through the global admissions approaches operated at all campuses using a broad range of initiatives which include outreach, contextual admissions, summer schools and targeted bursaries. The University operates a global induction process at each of its campuses tailored for the local context. During the review visits, the ELIR team met students from the Edinburgh, Dubai and Malaysia campuses who confirmed the inductions were well organised, effective and provided opportunities for cross-campus interactions. Students had an appreciation of the mix of cultures which enriched their induction experience. Students in need of maths and statistics support can benefit from the Maths Gym initiative based at the Edinburgh campus.

37 The University has a full-time Equality and Diversity Advisor in HR whose remit includes all staff and students at all campuses. UCLT has oversight of equality and diversity issues. There is an Equality and Diversity Advisory Group to advise on legal issues as a consequence of the University operating within different legal frameworks in UK, Dubai and Malaysia. Students that met the ELIR team considered the University to be a globally inclusive institution and cited several examples of cross-campus working which enhanced the diversity of the student experience.

38 The overall University male/female gender balance is 60/40 with some subjects

having a much more pronounced imbalance. The University has developed a Gender Action Plan and continues to engage in initiatives to address gender imbalances, for example, the relatively low proportion of female students in technical and STEM subjects. The University recognises the importance of Athena SWAN in supporting this development.

Widening participation

39 The University recognises that there is a need for improved data to track outcomes of different student groups and is working to put this in place (see paragraphs 92 and 140-144 for further information). At the time of the current ELIR, the University appointed a new Associate Principal with a remit of widening participation; in addition, there are four full-time members of staff working on widening participation. In summer 2020, the University ran a three-day, pre-entry programme at Edinburgh and the Borders campus ('Get Ready for Success'). Students and staff were very positive about the benefits of this course designed to: offer an introduction to academic and practical skills, learn about university support services, and be informed on approaches for success.

40 The University has seen a 56% increase in those needing disability support in the five years between 2013 and 2018. There is a dedicated Disability Service which has disability/wellbeing advisers at each of the five campuses with distance-learner students being supported by the team at Edinburgh. Students considered the student support mechanisms effective and reported short waiting times for the counselling service. The Building Our Commonality project (BOC) has resulted in greater coordination and effectiveness of support services at all campuses (paragraph 132).

2.3 Supporting students in their learning at each stage of the learner journey

41 Overall, the University has extensive arrangements in place to support its diverse population of students. The Learning and Teaching Strategy 2018-2025 sets out the University's strategic priorities for supporting students with the aim of creating a global community of students. The University has a clearly defined overarching institutional approach reflecting their global vision which is enabled by professional services who provide global support and is monitored by a Global Student Liaison Committee reporting to Court. The approach is set out in a single 'Multi Code' which applies globally. The Building Our Commonality project (BOC) was established to transform professional services at the five campuses and provide an equivalent experience for all students delivered by local central services and working with schools locally.

Induction

42 Since the 2015 ELIR, the University has developed a global coordinated approach to induction and transition for all students. This work is led by the Student Experience Team which is located within Student Wellbeing Services. The University was able to draw on a long-established model of student induction from the Borders campus and develop a suitable model for use across all campuses. The induction is tailored for different student groups and the effectiveness of the induction process is monitored by a welcome survey. Recent areas for development were identified including pre-entry communication, building social networks, entrants from Scottish Colleges and Go Global Students. During the review visits, the ELIR team heard positive comments from undergraduate students about their induction experience; however, postgraduate taught students had mixed experiences. The team agreed that the University should use the feedback gained from the welcome survey to reflect on how PGT induction arrangements could be enhanced across the institution to provide an equivalent experience as offered to undergraduate students. The team noted this as an instance of local variation in the implementation of university policy (paragraph 109).

Student support

43 At the time of the current ELIR, the University was in the process of integrating the range of learner support services and had completed phase one of a two-phased approach. The first phase - to create a single landing page for 'Skills Development' - had been completed, providing a single source of information for all students with this programme provided by Learner and Academic Services, and Learning and Teaching Enhancement Services. Phase two will involve using additional resources to support the establishment of a Global Learning Skills Programme for all students.

44 Student wellbeing is a priority in the University's Strategy 2025 and wellbeing is included in the Student Partnership Agreement which has enhanced collaborative working with the student representative bodies. The globally-connected approach to enhancing wellbeing and sharing of resources across campuses within student support services is designed to deliver wellbeing and pastoral support at all campuses in proportion to size. The RA indicated high levels of student satisfaction with Wellbeing Services and students who met the ELIR team reported that services were effective and had short waiting times. The University is developing a more consistent approach for this provision across campuses by developing an Institutional Wellbeing Framework which will be supported by new activity from the Learning and Teaching Academy.

45 A key feature of academic support for the whole student body is provided through the Personal Tutoring system and the Student Success Advisors. The University operates a Personal Tutoring system and all on-campus undergraduate and postgraduate taught students are allocated a personal tutor who is a key source of advice, guidance and support for academic and non-academic issues. The ELIR team considered Personal Tutoring an area of strength which provides a solid framework of support for students and contributes to the University's global and connected approach to student support. Different schools use different approaches to allocate students to tutors appropriate for their context. In the period between March and November 2020, the University made significant revisions to the Personal Tutoring system, developing a single SharePoint site with resources for staff and students which resulted in greater consistency in the operation of the scheme by defining minimum points of contact and specifying the allowed forms of interaction during the closure of university buildings at different campuses. The team found that engagement with, and operation of, the revised scheme was particularly dynamic at the campuses in Malaysia and Dubai with students at these campuses reporting an effective approach to the management and subsequent engagement with personal tutors. Mandatory training for all personal tutors is in place supported by a handbook and the new SharePoint site. Staff who met the team indicated that this approach was effective in supporting personal tutors.

46 Another recent approach to providing increased student support on a global scale is the introduction of Student Success Advisors. Student Success Advisors began in 2018 as a two-year pilot to improve student retention globally using a team of six recent Heriot Watt graduates based at Edinburgh, Borders, Dubai and Malaysia. Following an evaluation of the scheme by UCLT, roles were updated to provide clarity and align with support available from SRBs. At the time of the current ELIR, the ELIR team learned that the scheme had been extended for one further year. Meetings with students and members of the Student Success Advisor team confirmed that the scheme was operating effectively and that the support provided was well received by students. The team noted that the support provided through this scheme was integrated into the overall student support structure and that a secure system was used for recording interactions and monitoring impact. The team concluded that Student Success Advisors are a positive addition to student support, and that the continuation of the pilot was a welcome development.

Student mobility

47 In the period up to March 2020, the University had an extensive mobility programme in place (Go Global) enabling international widening access study opportunities at other campuses. At the end of 2019 there were over 900 international students at Scottish campuses from overseas. The ELIR team learned that intercampus transfers had been growing at around 30% per annum for the last two years and that opportunities for PGT students had also been put in place. Although there are no comparable schemes promoted by the relevant governments in Dubai and Malaysia, the University uses local schemes to develop widening participation. Students in Dubai and Malaysia were particularly positive about the opportunity to attend the UK campus; those that were not able to travel did benefit from exchange of culture and ideas from incoming students. Students who met the team were positive about the opportunities offered by Go Global. The team learned that the Go Global scheme had been paused because of Covid-related travel restrictions during the pandemic. The University intends to restart the Go Global scheme when conditions allow and interest in the scheme is being maintained through invitations to students to register for future opportunities. The team would encourage the University to consider a more pro-active approach using online tools to continue to promote exchange and interaction across the global campuses, thereby providing some equivalent intercultural experiences while physical exchanges are not possible.

48 Further mobility opportunities are provided through 127 Erasmus+ and exchange agreements with European partners. The scheme is only available at Scottish campuses and is managed by the Global Student Office.

49 For 2020-21, each multi-campus global course team developed a core set of digital materials covering the course learning outcomes, provided through the VLE. During the review visits, the ELIR team learned that this coordinated approach to the use of the university VLE, prompted by the introduction of the Responsive Blended Learning (RBL) framework, had resulted in a more coherent learning environment for students at all campuses. This approach had also facilitated greater interaction between students on the same programme at different campuses.

Assessment and feedback

50 Assessment is identified as one of three priority areas in the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2018-2025. The University uses its assessment regime as a key indicator in demonstrating the achievement of the four Heriot-Watt graduate attributes (Specialist, Creative, Professional, Global) and has developed a set of university-wide assessment principles. Further developments in the University's assessment approach are being led by the Learning and Teaching Academy to promote assessment for learning. The University has identified assessment and feedback as an area of activity which routinely ranks lower than other areas in internal and external student surveys. Analysis of data and student comments by the University indicate that feedback on assessment and timeliness of feedback, is of particular concern. Students who met the ELIR team confirmed that their experience of feedback was variable. The University has taken steps to address student concerns related to feedback including the introduction of a three-week feedback policy and assessment featuring in 2019-20 SPA. The University is working to ensure formative assessment is included in all modules.

51 In terms of assessments, the University responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by removing around 80% of examinations and replacing these with alternative forms of assessment. After the changes made in response to COVID-19, students were positive about the timeliness of feedback - in particular, students at the Dubai and Malaysia

campuses confirmed that all feedback was received within the timeframe specified by the assessment and feedback policy.

Employability

52 The University has a very proactive approach to employability through employer engagement and responding to feedback from employers. Graduate attributes and skills development are embedded in the curriculum. The University has monitored this through an additional optional National Student Survey (NSS) question on employability and skills, along with Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey data. Many programmes delivered outwith the UK now have PSRB accreditation which has been a key factor in overseas expansion. The development of the Heriot-Watt Graduate is the focus of the Learning and Teaching Strategy and is based around the four HWU Graduate Attributes. Work is ongoing to raise awareness of these among the students, including support for schools in embedding Graduate Attributes into curricula.

53 To ensure employability is embedded in the curriculum, employability skills are considered as part of the programme approval process. The University has a number of initiatives to help students develop employability-related skills. Newly-introduced enterprise bootcamps have been developed which are described as being popular with students. A Global Challenge pilot week was run in February 2019 achieving positive responses prompting plans to expand this to Dubai and Malaysia. Feedback from employers indicates graduates can readily transfer skills to the workplace. During the ELIR visit, students were positive about employability approaches, including support from the Careers Service and opportunities to develop skills to enhance their careers. The global approach to careers support enables students to access resources and attend events from other campuses. It was evident to the ELIR team, from discussions with staff and students, that the global nature of Heriot-Watt provided opportunities for mobility and engaging with other cultures which were seen as good preparation for today's global employment market.

54 Volunteering is regarded as a positive dimension of employability with schemes promoted by the SRBs and the University encouraging engagement with charities in the UK, Malaysia and Dubai. Volunteering activity is formally recognised on the enhanced transcript and considered an integral part of the wider student experience.

2.4 Postgraduate taught and research student experience

55 There has been a reduction in the number of PGT students in the last five years due to the University discontinuing several approved learning partnerships (ALPs). Over this time, there has been an increase in the PGR student population with further growth planned at the Dubai and Malaysia campuses.

56 The University has been working on the postgraduate student experience since the 2015 ELIR and recognises some areas require further work. The ELIR team learned during the review visits of a range of activities being undertaken to help develop this experience - for example, each school has a student-led postgraduate society which helps to develop a sense of community. The University is encouraged to continue in a strategic approach in order to enhance this further.

Postgraduate taught students

57 Institutional oversight of the PGT learning experience is the responsibility of UCLT and its sub-committees. The ELIR team learned that UCLT is undertaking a review of the PGT experience as a result of low satisfaction - evidenced in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) - through a working group. PGT provision is provided both

on-campus and off-campus, with the vast majority of independent distance learner (IDL) students belonging to the PGT cohort. The University plans to grow its PGT population through online provision and is undertaking work to enhance online learning materials and the underlying platforms to support this - as evidenced by their recent PGT online review - which has resulted in richer course content being provided online and the use of further interactive technologies such as blogs and webinars.

58 The Scottish campuses' Student Union acknowledges the difficulties in engaging PGT students within representative structures, thought to be due to the typical one-year programme duration. The SRBs are planning to establish a single, global and robust PGT representative structure going forward, as outlined in the global SPA. The creation of a PGT MP in 2020-21 has been received well by the Student Union and the University, allowing for clearer communication of key PGT issues. Student representatives noted that PGT students do raise issues in class and are generally engaged with SSLCs. In addition, the University had employed the use of school-level surveys and focus groups to supplement direct feedback from PGT students. The University is encouraged, in collaboration with the SRBs, to reflect upon appropriate representation structures for IDL students on an ongoing basis (paragraph 30).

59 The University recognises that aspects of institutional oversight of the PGT provision could be further developed by using a suite of PGT-related performance data to underpin evaluation of the PGT experience. The ELIR team would encourage the University to take this forward as part of an institutional approach to systematic access to and use of data.

60 The University is developing a common PGT induction framework, with the aim to support a sense of community, delivered at school-level. PGT students see the initial inductions as a key step and a focus on accommodating requirements of an international body of students is a priority. The ELIR team learned during the review visits that PGT students at the Orkney campus have a strong sense of community derived from, for example, working alongside industry experts, effective student representation and a positive induction experience. The team encourages the University to reflect on such areas of good practice and consider developing these across other campuses as applicable.

Research students

61 At the time of the current ELIR, most PGR students were located at Edinburgh campus with a small number of PGR students in Dubai, Orkney and the Scottish Borders Campus. The University is planning to grow PGR numbers at the Dubai and Malaysia campuses. The University is considering introducing a Graduate School enabling centralisation of PGR-related administration to improve support consistently across the institution, following low satisfaction in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES).

62 The University implemented a new Research Degrees Committee (RDC) in April 2018 to oversee the PGR student lifecycle, informed by the QAA's Focus On series. Alongside this, a new post of Research Quality Enhancement Officer has been established providing clearer reporting lines and monitoring of PGR students. The RDC has oversight of PRES, following up on school action plans. The ELIR team noted there does not appear to be a clear, evidence-led and systematic approach to enhancing the PGR experience and encourages the University to reflect upon this, as recently recommended by the University Committee for Research and Innovation. The team encourages widening engagement and awareness in relation to PRES action plans with supervisors and PGR representatives to promote enhancement of the PGR experience. Additionally, the University is recommended to develop an institution-wide approach to enhancing the PGR student environment,

engaging directly with PGR students in the process, to provide a sense of belonging to Heriot-Watt, beyond individual research communities.

63 Each school has a lead PGR representative to focus representation activities. PGR representatives engage in quarterly meetings within their school where staff and students can provide feedback on current actions. All schools are required to have a Research Student Committee for feeding back key issues on the PGR experience. Alongside this schools have a student-led postgraduate society, which aims to build a sense of community. Students who met the ELIR team indicated that PGR students have a variable experience in relation to their sense of community depending on their school and field of research. Isolated areas of good practice exist, often focused through student-led postgraduate societies, such as student-run conferences, seminars and social activities. The team heard about the Research Futures Academy (RFA) which is responsible for enhancing the development of researchers and research culture throughout the institution in addition to enabling collaboration between researchers. Generic research skills and other professional development training is planned and delivered by the RFA. Additionally, the RFA launched the Research Culture Grant in 2019 to fund student and postdoctoral-led initiatives to enhance research culture at the University, funding a range of projects such as a Data Club and the development of culture in academia for female researchers. However, the team agreed that more needed to be done to enhance the wider experience of research students to create a vibrant and thriving community of early career researchers.

64 The University has undertaken efforts to improve the induction for PGR students through the implementation of fixed start dates and a revamped induction programme. The University acknowledged that better coordination and messaging is required to ensure PGRs are aware of the difference in university, school and campus inductions. PGR students who met the ELIR team indicated that the changes had been positive.

65 All postgraduate students who teach can complete the Learning Enhancement and Development Skills (LEADS) programme and students who met the ELIR team spoke positively about it. The Orkney Campus had some difficulty in coordinating into LEADS, so bespoke arrangements were put in place to accommodate some distance engagement, supported by local mentoring. At the time of the current ELIR, the LEADS programme was being phased out and incorporated into the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning (PGCertTL) overseen by the Learning and Teaching Academy (LTA paragraph 87). The PGCertTL is available globally and incorporates programmes on 'Getting Started in Teaching' and 'Learning about Learning'.

66 The Director of Academic Quality signs off Approved Tutor/Demonstrator status at school level, and this is tracked and monitored within the school. LTA maintains a record of PGR students who complete the required PGCertTL course to allow them to engage in teaching. Module leaders and PGR supervisors also need to confirm that a PGR student is approved to teach on a particular module. However, the ELIR team noted that it met several PGR students who were involved in teaching without any formal training, and the University is encouraged to reflect upon its system of Approved Tutor/Demonstrator status to ensure clarity of the procedure and that all PGR student who teach are fully trained to do so.

67 During the ELIR visit, students reported that PGR support through the supervisory team is not always consistent across the University - for example, supervisors leaving and not being replaced for an extended period of time, differences in expectations of the supervisory team's role and lack of supervisor training. Students who met the ELIR team indicated that further work needs to be undertaken in areas related to supervisory arrangements and support services. The ELIR team learned that some PGR students are allocated a mentor depending on their school's arrangements and the team encourages the sharing of this positive practice throughout the institution, ensuring PGR students have clear

support contacts outside of their main supervisory team. The University is encouraged to review supervisory arrangements to ensure a consistent approach for supporting for PGR students, regardless of their school, in order to enhance their research experience.

Supervisors are a key aspect of the wider research culture offered by the University for all its PGR students. Each school has responsibility to ensure that supervisors attend the RFA training. This is a professional development programme for all active research staff to share good practice and enhance their own research. Supervisors are required to take refresher courses every three years, and the University notes that within two years all supervisors will have received the most up-to-date version of training. The RFA course 'Supervise - enhancing your academic practice' is to be made available globally, extending its provision across all campuses and the University has also introduced an electronic logbook to enhance supervisory support.

68 PGT and PGR students who met with the ELIR team noted that signposting for student support services in their communities was poor and PGT students noted variability in the support received depending on their assigned personal tutor. The team recommends developing a consistent approach for all PGT students. PGR students, in particular, felt they did not have sufficient support made available to them, particularly when issues relating to their supervisory team arose. The ELIR team recommends the University provides clear and accessible support for PGR students, beyond mentors and supervisory teams respectively, to support their completion of studies, thereby strengthening the environment for PGR students.

2.5 Learning environment, including the use of technology

69 The University has effective arrangements in place to systematically review and enhance the learning environment offered to students. The ELIR team learned that the COVID-19 pandemic, through the institution's Responsive Blended Learning (RBL) approach to learning and teaching, has accelerated progress towards their global goals of technology use.

70 The University had addressed issues with learning and teaching spaces at the Edinburgh campus through a major transformation, supported by the Student President and student focus groups. As part of the transformation, two Learning Commons, located in the central student services hub area and the Postgraduate Centre, have been established, with a focus on group and self-study spaces with associated technology. The ELIR team learned that some Borders Campus students feel excluded from the wider Heriot-Watt community despite the recent campus redevelopment. The ELIR team encourages the University to reflect upon the current situation to help integrate students at the Borders Campus into the One Heriot-Watt experience.

71 At the time of the current ELIR, the Dubai campus was being relocated to a new central area, enabling new opportunities for collaborations with industry. As part of the move the University had consulted with the student community and aims to address issues relating to lack of available study space, shaping the institution's approach to redesigning educational spaces. Dubai students have been continually informed with updates to the relocation project and are currently satisfied with facilities in the intermediate location.

72 The University's Digital Learning Forum (DLF) has been set up to take a broad, strategic approach to progressing the Learning and Teaching Strategy elements concerned with technology, systems and learning spaces. The DLF has a wide student membership including online students, helping to shape a digital learning ecosystem for the institution.

73 Lecture capture is increasingly used at the institution but needs technical enhancement to support global accessibility across all campuses, enabling sharing of

resources. The approach to RBL has enabled acceleration of online provisions, including live and pre-recorded lectures which are, in some programmes, shared globally across the Scottish, Dubai and Malaysia courses where relevant.

74 The University plans to a move to a single VLE platform supporting all students and all modes of delivery. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was general student dissatisfaction with inconsistent use, and staff reluctance to engage with the current VLE set-up; however, examples of good practice did, and continue to, exist within various programmes, such as using the VLE to allow students to work cross-campus on group projects. The decision to delay the move to a single VLE was taken ahead of the COVID-19 pandemic, and was supported by staff members, in order to focus on the portfolio review and the introduction of the global curriculum management system. The ELIR team learned that the University had implemented an agile and timely response to the COVID-19 pandemic by building on their experience of operating globally and accelerating the implementation of their Learning and Teaching Strategy to develop the RBL framework. As a result, staff engagement with the current VLE has improved and students report increased access to the available VLE features - such as discussion boards - enhancing the student experience. The team commends the institution's agile response, and wide buy-in from a global team of staff, to improve the use of online resources in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic achieved in a timely manner as a consequence of a mature and effective institutional quality framework.

75 Students spoke favourably about access to resources, including journals, books and software, as part of the RBL approach. Where issues arose, such as access to specific journals not being available, the University was helpful in providing solutions. The use of an online platform to support learning and teaching activities, as well as helping to build communities, where students can meet to discuss course material, was received well, particularly by first-year students.

2.6 Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience

76 Overall, the University has an effective approach to enhancing the student learning experience. The ELIR team commends the University for its positive partnership working with student representative bodies. The team found there is an effective, ongoing and impactful working relationship between the University and the SRBs. The differently constituted representative bodies on each of the campuses contribute effectively to the enhancement agenda and there is good evidence of effective partnership working and sharing of practice through the three student presidents based at the Scottish, Dubai and Malaysia campuses. The updated Student Partnership Agreement facilitates improved support for students and works towards a common goal across all campuses. Recent changes to representation of postgraduate students are likely to have a positive impact.

77 The University's vision is to create a global community of learners actively engaging in a vibrant and thriving digital ecosystem. The ELIR team commends the University's good practice in its strategic approach to international and multi-campus provision, and global and connected approach to student support. The current online learning arrangements provided through the RBL framework provide significant opportunities for students from all campuses to interact. An invigorated Personal Tutor support system enables students to receive tailored guidance and support throughout their studies. A Student Success Advisor pilot has been extended for another year providing targeted support for students referred when identified as being at risk of leaving their studies. This support is integrated with other support services to provide a global and connected approach to student support. Enhancements to the assessment framework have resulted in improved feedback to support student learning. A proactive approach to employability, focused on graduate attributes, has continued to ensure that the University has an effective approach to promoting and

developing employability skills, which is further enhanced by the global opportunities available to students.

78 The recent shift to the RBL framework as a long-term vision for university teaching has led to a significant increase in the provision of online learning. The team found that this new approach had resulted in greater interaction between staff and students across campuses and that good practice was being shared. The University is aware of the need to develop support and provision at some of its campuses and is currently working to do so.

79 The University is working to enhance the experience it offers for postgraduate research students using PRES survey results as a key driver. The ELIR team recommends that the University engages proactively and works in partnership with PGR students to identify ways to improve their sense of belonging in the university community and develop a consistent institution-wide PGR student environment. This should include establishing clear arrangements for supervisory teams and promoting access to independent support mechanisms to support students to complete.

3 Strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching

3.1 Strategic approach to enhancement

80 The University has an effective strategic approach to supporting and enhancing its learning and teaching practices and the wider student experience. Since the 2015 ELIR, the University has continued to develop the sense of shared identity to ensure a sense of global community. To support Strategy 2025 there is a Learning and Teaching Strategy in place which is student-focused and places its emphasis on 'learning to learn'. The University engaged staff and students from across all campuses in consultations over an 18-month period to develop the Learning and Teaching Strategy (2018-2025). There is strong commitment and vision from senior leadership to the implementation of the Strategy which is summarised for staff and students in a clear, concise overview document. The ELIR team learned that to further embed the Strategy, a University Committee for Learning and Teaching (UCLT) away day early in 2020, provided opportunities for staff to engage in discussions on the Learning and Teaching Strategy including a workshop on the delivery of the vision of 'Inspiring Learning'. This was viewed positively by the team.

81 The Learning and Teaching Strategy is supported by an Operational Plan, which guides the work of the Student Learning Experience Committee (SLEC). This committee is responsible for operational matters relating to the student learning experience as delegated by UCLT. Each school and relevant professional service has a Learning and Teaching Strategy and Enhancement Plan that aligns with the institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy. Oversight of this alignment sits with the UCLT and overall responsibility with the DP (L&T).

82 The ELIR team commends the University for the institutional commitment to enhancing learning and teaching. There is strong commitment and vision from senior leadership to the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. This is exemplified through clear and accessible policies and procedures; the establishment of the LTA and the role of DLTs in schools. There are opportunities for staff engagement - for example, in Enhancement Workshops in Academic Review, Learning and Teaching Fora in Dubai and Malaysia campuses, and the extensive consultative approach to developing and implementing the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

83 Six major projects within the Learning and Teaching Strategy are overseen by the Learning and Teaching Strategy Oversight Board (LTSOB) chaired by the DP (L&T). LTSOB brought together and established connections between the projects and project

leaders involved in the projects. Once connections had been established, the LTSOB was disbanded and, at the time of the current ELIR, oversight sits with the Learning and Teaching AY2020/21 Group. Activity is maintained through fortnightly strategic meetings led by the DP (L&T).

84 At the time of the current ELIR, the University was engaged in a portfolio review exercise focusing on enhancing the University's PGT provision, reducing inefficiencies and generating income. The review also expedited the development of an integrated, aligned business and academic approval process including the establishment of the Programme Management Board which provides a link between business and academic decisions about new and existing programmes. It has led to the decision to withdraw several programmes that were not recruiting well and the introduction of a small number of new programmes.

85 In response to the pandemic, the University formed a Learning and Teaching COVID-19 Contingency Planning Group of senior staff, with student representation and chaired by the DP (L&T). This group had overall responsibility for learning, teaching and assessment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic for 2019-20. The participation of student officers in these weekly meetings was seen as positive practice by the ELIR team, as was the use of existing governance structures to ensure communication of decisions through to Senate.

86 The development of online learning environments throughout all campuses is through the Digital Learning Forum (DLF), which reports to UCLT via the Student Learning Enhancement Committee. Membership of DLF covers all five campuses and includes representatives of all student groups. It is chaired by the Global Director of Information Services and is responsible for the learning and teaching digital environment at institutional level. Formation of the DLF (replacing the former VLE Management Group) was a strategic decision to broaden the approach to the digital learning environment. This group will take forward projects including the VLE and e-portfolio.

87 As part of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the University recognised the need to establish a stronger capacity for professional development of staff involved in teaching, and the combination of the Learning and Teaching Academy (LTA) together with the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Services (LTES) aim to ensure that support for teaching staff can be provided more consistently and in line with institutional and local needs. The LTA, which was formed in September 2019, also provides a focus for sharing of best practice in learning and teaching across all campuses. Staff who met the ELIR team were positive about LTA activities and level of engagement. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the LTA has supported staff with the additional planning and preparation required to maintain communication with students and support students in learning online. This has been done by producing guidance, toolkits and learning materials. During the review visits, the ELIR team met staff who confirmed the speed at which LTA had provided support and their willingness to work with individuals to provide tailored support.

88 The development and implementation of RBL benefited from the close collaborative working between LTA and the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Services (LTES), the former providing advice, guidance and training relating to pedagogy and the latter providing advice and training in digital and information skills through webinars and drop-in sessions. The LTES, which is part of Information Services, is responsible for a range of activities including audio visual, learning technologists, learning advisers and library liaison. Future plans are for LTES training to align closely with the academic developments within LTA to further develop staff capacity for digital learning and teaching practices. It is noted that the move to RBL has accelerated this activity, and staff and students recognised this as a positive development in response to COVID-19 that would become embedded in normal practice. Several members of staff recognised that RBL and the associated work had

accelerated the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy and aided progress towards the 'Pioneering in Education' and 'Being a global, connected University' ambitions of Strategy 2025.

3.2 Impact of the national Enhancement Themes and related activity on policy and practice

89 The University uses the QAA national Enhancement Themes as an important reference point to manage enhancement. The University has engaged in several activities as part of the most recent Enhancement Theme (Evidence for Enhancement) led through the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Services and, since 2019, the LTA. Eight projects across the University were funded as part of the work on the Evidence for Enhancement Theme. There is global engagement with, and learning from, the Enhancement Themes with a wide range of staff and students across the University leading projects and processes in place to share outcomes and to embed the projects into practice.

90 It was recognised that, in previous themes most of the University's engagement in Enhancement Themes had been by professional services staff. This has changed in recent years with the coordination of participation through LTES (and more recently through LTA) and oversight by UCLT facilitating a wider involvement in the themes, particularly 'Student Transitions' and 'Evidence for Enhancement'. A number of projects involving collaborations between schools and across campuses have produced results reported at Enhancement Themes conferences, workshops, presentations, and through involvement in three collaborative clusters- Learning Analytics, Developing Programme Leadership and Creating Inclusive Learning Environments. At national level there has been good student engagement from the University with two student members on SHEEC and presenting at Enhancement Theme conferences.

91 Work on the previous Enhancement Theme - Student Transitions - has resulted in changes in practice. The Peer Mentoring Project, a collaborative project with the Student Union, has informed subsequent peer mentoring schemes. Work from this project is currently being developed by the Student Success Advisors and the multi-school pilot of peer-assisted learning.

92 Engagement with the most recent theme - Evidence for Enhancement - has resulted in an extensive review of student surveys. As a result, the University's survey process and Course Feedback Survey have been redesigned. This does not appear to have led to any significant change in the way in which data is used to inform decisions. A wide range of resources have been developed by the sector through the Evidence for Enhancement Theme and the ELIR team recommend the University to use the resources to reflect on the University's approach to using data to enhance the student experience (paragraph 140-144).

3.3 Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice

93 The University has a range of mechanisms to identify and share good practice across the institution at four levels: institutional, campus, school and individual. The establishment of the LTA is providing a central focus for sharing best practice across the University. Staff who met the ELIR team recognised that they had not been particularly active in the past at sharing best practice and learning together at school level, but progress had been made by the LTA. A range of activities are supported to facilitate enhancement of learning and teaching across the institution including: learning and teaching development funding in schools; global meetings of professional services teams; Learning and Teaching Enhancement Fora; UCLT half-day sessions focused on particular topics; meetings of

Directors of L&T; school-based continuing professional development events opened up to other schools; and cross-campus sharing of practices through the LTA.

94 The formal committee structures enable cross-university sharing of learning and teaching practices and enhancement. For example, in relation to Annual Monitoring and Review (AMR), the Annual AMR Summary Report, provides a synopsis of all the reports for discussion through the committee structure to Senate. Academic staff in schools referred to their engagement with DLTs as a key connection with these formal structures. The ELIR team learned of a number of examples of this connection with DLTs including: discussions about the postponed VLE project and the supportive response towards concerns about workload; and DLTs working with LTA to identify staff requirements for development.

95 Opportunities to meet and to share best practice also include formal events such as academic reviews (ILR) and the new AMR annual dissemination event. Enhancement Workshops within Academic Reviews provide an opportunity to share good practice and discuss ideas between the discipline team and the review team. Scope for further enhancement opportunities within university processes include a more active engagement in peer observation through the implementation of the Peer Support of Teaching framework promoted within LTA from 2019, and through engagement with the annual summary report to UCLT.

96 The introduction of RBL at a rapid pace provides a positive example of the ways in which academic and professional services staff work together and share expertise. In discussion with the ELIR team, staff gave examples of collaborative working, for example, RBL groups set up in schools, with academic, professional services and learning technologist staff working together, building community and sharing practice. Staff indicated that they were prepared for the move to RBL and viewed it as an enhancement to current practice. During the review visits, staff outlined the opportunities within schools to share practice, expressing the view that RBL is leading to more joint working on programmes. Staff on the Malaysia and Dubai campuses have formed school-based RBL action groups and 'buddy' groups to support this work.

3.4 Engaging, developing and supporting staff

97 There are effective arrangements in place for engaging and supporting staff in the ongoing development of their learning and teaching practice. The 'Support, Development and Training of Staff' is one of the four enablers of the Learning and Teaching Strategy and lists 12 priorities to facilitate implementation. The University's approach to engaging, developing and supporting staff at all campuses is summarised in a series of key principles in the 'Multi Code'. The University plans a more coordinated global approach to the learning and teaching development of staff with the establishment of the LTA.

98 At the time of the current ELIR, the Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert) leading to HEA Fellowship, has been recently reviewed and offered to new academic staff at all campuses. The ELIR team learned that new teaching staff must take the PGCert and have a three-year probationary period. The team heard that previously there had not been a strong institutional-level engagement with HEA Fellowship, but this was now being taken forwards more actively through LTA and consideration was being given to incorporating HEA Fellowship recognition into promotions' criteria.

99 Individual staff needs are identified through the University's annual Performance and Development Review (PDR). To address development needs, schools, together with the University HR Department and LTA, provide staff development activities including bespoke events delivered on campuses outside of Edinburgh. During the review visits, the ELIR team learned of LTA workshops delivered to the Orkney campus on assessment and online

learning. Staff who met the team reported that they were encouraged to undertake training, however, staff at the HWUD and HWUM campuses indicated that training opportunities can be limited by access and/or budget with some training only available at the Edinburgh campus. The team recommend that the University consider staff development opportunities across the institution to ensure equity of access at all campuses. In addressing this, the University should consider online delivery, the need for local provision and level of resourcing required. At the time of the current ELIR, the mandatory PDR process was under review in response to the staff engagement survey 2018. The ELIR team learned that PDR will now take place during summer months to better align with workload planning, as practice varies in schools.

100 In addition to the PDR, there are also informal routes for identifying academic development needs, including the Learning and Teaching AY2020/21 Group, direct feedback from schools and the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Fora (Malaysia and Dubai). Two 'extra' snapshot surveys in weeks 1 and 7 in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to rapid support in terms of addressing staff concerns over wellbeing and preparation for Semester 2. Staff who met the ELIR team indicated that the close working relationship between staff in learning technology and the LTA has ensured an agile response to needs.

101 Schools have a point of contact in LTA who work with them on staff development including HEA Fellowship, with Malaysia Campus having six candidates for PGCert, and three for Senior Fellow, and mentoring arrangements in place. LTA offers a 'New to Teaching' support programme and PGCert for new staff and mid-career support to gain HEA Fellowship. There is recognition of the key role of Programme Director and the need to provide institutional training and support including their access to and use of data.

102 The University recognises previous under-resourcing of learning and teaching related development for academic staff and the need for upskilling, especially digital skills, in light of planned growth in PGT online. The University plans to address this skills gap through the Learning and Teaching Academy (LTA) and the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Services (LTES), which provide training to improve digital skills and capabilities of staff (paragraph 87-88).

3.5 Effectiveness of the approach to implementing institutional strategies and enhancing learning and teaching

103 The ELIR team commends the University's strategic approach to international and multi-campus provision and has continued to strengthen its approach to further develop the sense of a shared identity and 'One Heriot-Watt' ethos, engendering a sense of a global community. There is an effective approach to implementing strategies and enhancing learning and teaching, including a good understanding of the Learning and Teaching Strategy as a result of wide consultation and dissemination. While the year one implementation of the Strategy was deferred from January to September 2019, and some projects delayed (VLE, e-portfolio, Global Curriculum Management System), there has been progress in implementation of the Portfolio Modernisation Review and the establishment of LTA. Introduction of RBL and the rapid development of digital learning methodology across all campuses has accelerated progress towards the ambitions of Strategy 2025.

104 The ELIR team commends the University's institutional commitment to enhancing learning and teaching with its strong commitment and vision from senior leadership to the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. This is exemplified through clear and accessible policies and procedures, the establishment of the LTA and the further development of the role of DLTs in schools. The University has ensured that all staff have

opportunities to contribute to the enhancement of learning and teaching including engaging in Enhancement Workshops in Academic Review and the extensive consultative approach to developing and implementing the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

105 The University has an effective approach to promoting good practice in learning and teaching. There are a wide range of staff development opportunities available, however, not all opportunities are available at each campus. The ELIR team recommends that the University should consider staff development opportunities across the institution to ensure equity of access to opportunities at all campuses. In addressing this, the University should consider online delivery, the need for local provision and level of resourcing required.

4 Academic standards and quality processes

4.1 Key features of the institution's approach to managing quality and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards

Procedures, policy and regulations

106 The University has effective arrangements to secure academic standards and to enable it to manage quality. The policies, procedures and regulations are clear and comprehensive. Many of these are effectively summarised for use by staff and students in the series of Learning and Teaching and Quality Briefing Papers. These meet the Expectations set out in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and the guidance of the Scottish Funding Council.

107 The University's robust and resilient institutional quality framework has enabled the University to provide an agile and effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic during 2019-20 and onwards. Through the provision of clear and accessible documentation, this established quality framework enabled a rapid and appropriate response that was effectively led and coordinated at a senior level and across all campuses comprising a phased response and demonstrating lessons learnt, working across different national contexts. The University's quality framework was evidently well understood by staff across all campuses enabling staff to work within the policies and processes to deliver effective learning and teaching even while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of clear and accessible documentation, including the University's short Briefing Papers covering Quality Assurance and Learning and Teaching, contributed towards the broad understanding of the framework.

108 The University has an appropriate governance framework where overall responsibility for academic standards and quality rest ultimately with Senate. All education committees report to Senate, notably the University Committee for Learning and Teaching (UCLT) and University Committee for Quality and Standards (UCQS). Remits for UCQS and UCLT are primarily for taught provision, while University Committee for Research and Innovation (UCRI and its sub-committee RDC) has remit for postgraduate research provision, although UCQS also monitors postgraduate research student experience. All major committees have appropriate global membership with representation from the international campuses. UCQS and the Academic Quality team held an instrumental role in managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and preparations for academic year 2020-21, including ensuring working within the regulatory framework when developing Responsive Blended Learning (RBL), consulting with PSRBs, rapid approval of course and programme changes, and managing the annual reporting system providing evidence that the University has a mature and effective institutional quality framework which is well understood by staff.

109 Quality assurance responsibilities are discharged through schools. Since 2014, and embedded in Strategy 2025, the University has sought to harmonise and streamline processes and procedures through schools across all locations and modes of study. This resulted in the development of the University's Academic Management Structures (AMS) which has undergone three reviews since the 2015 ELIR. The University has recognised variations in implementation of policy and practice across schools and is encouraged to continue to seek, where appropriate, single institutional ways of operating in line with their global ethos. Under the AMS, school committee structures mirror university-level committees including School Studies Committees and School Learning and Teaching Committees. Each school has a Director of Learning and Teaching (DLT) and a Director of Academic Quality (DAQ) who operate on a global level and, while not being campus-specific, are predominantly based in the UK. In some schools, these roles can be supported by additional Deputy and Associate Directors. The ELIR team learned of positive examples of a school having an Associate Director of Learning and Teaching being based at one of its international campuses. The team was satisfied that the school DLTs keep school staff informed of changes to regulations and policies and noted that DAQs sit on the UCQS committee.

110 In addition to school-based roles, the University has three deans who are integral to the institution's quality assurance system. They are elected for a three-year term by academic staff and play a role in approving 'Approved Teacher/Marker' status for ALP staff, the appointment and promotion of academic staff, and the monitoring of Exam Boards. They also approve the appointment of external examiners and the Chief External Examiner. The ELIR team noted how the deans had played a part in providing a consistent format for school responses to external examiner reports where there had previously been variation in approach by schools. The team learned that this had led to improved consistency in the consideration of external examiner responses across the University and considered it a positive example of the outcome of harmonisation. The ELIR team would encourage the University to use this example of harmonisation to reflect on other variations in implementation of policy and practice across schools which lead to unnecessary inconsistency.

111 The University approach to the global assurance of quality and standards is articulated in the 'Multi Code' - a document which provides the overarching framework within which all policies and procedures for assuring quality and academic standards of programmes are located. The ELIR team identified that staff who had need to utilise the Multi Code appeared aware of it and were engaged with it. The team recognised that this appropriately embedded approach to the management, assurance and enhancement of the University's multi-location, multi-mode programmes ensures a robust framework for assuring quality across locations and modes of study.

112 The ELIR team welcomed the development of the expansion of the Academic Quality team to the campuses in Malaysia and Dubai and the transfer of certain responsibilities, such as leading on local accreditation exercises. In addition to the role of the Global Quality Officer in the management of partnership arrangements, these roles support the global outlook for Academic Quality within the University.

113 The University evaluates the operational application of the different sections of the Multi Code through its suite of annual and periodic quality review processes (see below). The Multi Code is currently being updated as 'a Global Code' in a reflection of the University's shift from a 'hub and spoke' model to a more integrated global model. The ELIR team noted that the timeline for the introduction of the Global Code had been delayed due to COVID-19 and was not unduly concerned, noting that the revision is primarily a consolidation and reframing of existing policies and procedures.

Programme approval

114 Programme academic approval and major modification is managed through a single university academic approval process and well-defined policies which provide clear categorisation and guidance to staff. In order to support the academic approval process, the University implemented a Programme Approval Management System (PAMS) in 2015-16 although the University is currently actively replacing this with a new Global Curriculum Management System (GCMS) which will be implemented in October 2021. Schools utilise PAMS to develop new taught programmes through their School Studies Committee, followed by scrutiny and approval by University Studies Committee (USC). Business case approval previously occurred independently to the academic approval process but, since spring 2020, a new Programme Management Board (PMB) will consider new programme proposals and closures prior to consideration by USC. This is in line with the University's plan to develop a more integrated business and academic approval process.

115 The University has introduced an appropriate temporary, expedited process for approving changes to courses or programmes related to RBL, along with changes being introduced temporarily due to COVID-19 for 2020-21. The University's Programme Approval policies and procedures ensure that only one version of a programme operates across multiple locations or modes of study, with commonality and variation determined through the Multi Code and other policies. The QAA transnational education case study of the University highlighted that challenges around delivering curricula in multiple locations were managed through appropriate planning prior to programme approval.

Annual monitoring and periodic review

116 The University has appropriate and effective processes in place for the monitoring and review of programmes, the responsibility of which resides through UCQS and is operated through the external examining system, Annual Monitoring and Review (AMR), Internal Audit and Periodic Review processes.

117 All of the University's taught provision, along with PGR student learning experience, are monitored annually through the AMR process. AMR has three main purposes: to monitor the academic standards, the quality of student learning experience, and progress towards institutional strategic objectives in learning and teaching. The AMR process also works to identify good practice and links to enhancement. The AMR process includes partnership monitoring (PAMR) where appropriate for collaborative provision. The AMR process was recently revised to ensure that schools were reflecting upon the current academic year and hence on current activities.

118 Due to COVID-19, in 2019-20 AMR was substituted for a weekly monitoring process alongside a planned AMR Dissemination Event which was held in early March 2020. Other processes were cancelled or postponed, including two Academic Reviews and one Internal Audit. Other processes were unaffected or had a later date specified for completion - for example, submission of external examiner reports and PAMR. During the review, the ELIR team heard from staff and reviewed documentation that led them to have confidence that the University fulfilled, and in some areas exceeded, core requirements in relation to assuring quality and standards during this period.

119 PGR student learning experience is evaluated on an annual basis through the Annual Monitoring and Review (AMR) process. In 2018-19, consideration was given to the effectiveness of the University's quality assurance processes for reviewing the postgraduate research student learning experience, concluding that the process was broadly effective but that PGR-specific sections would be shared with RDC. However, the University recognised that reporting was variable and hence revised the School-level Review and Enhancement

Report (SRR) template to ensure that PGR representatives are now part of the university-level group reviewing completed SRR reports. The ELIR team identified that PGR students did not always feel that their voice was heard and recommends that the University should take steps to provide a more systematic and accountable response to PGR students' feedback and issues raised through PGR representation (see above paragraphs 62-63). This could potentially include RDC taking on a more proactive responsibility for actions taken in response to PRES and other forms of PGR student feedback and ensuring that actions are completed and communicated through Senate and to the PGR community. The team also noted the activity that had taken place under the recent Enhancement Theme regarding student surveys and the progress made with NSS and PTES actions that are reported to UCLT. The team considers that a similar proactive approach would benefit PGR feedback and encourages the University to ensure effective institutional leadership, with clear accountability, in order to drive enhancement of the postgraduate research student environment.

120 Periodic review of academic activity is undertaken through three main processes: Academic Review, Internal Audit and Academic-Related Professional Services Review (ARPS) along with Thematic Review. Each academic discipline at the University is reviewed through an enhancement-led approach every five years in a process called Academic Review. The review covers all taught programmes globally within a discipline and serves as a reapproval process. Resulting reports and school action plans are approved at UCQS and an Annual Academic Review Summary Report is submitted to UCQS and UCLT and ultimately considered at Senate.

121 The University is commended for taking steps to align the Dubai and Malaysia campus Academic Review processes with the core processes and embed an enhancement-led approach at the campuses in line with its global ethos. The move to undertake global Academic Review processes and discontinue separate campus reviews has been accelerated by the global working practices brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The University recognises the challenges present in ensuring that Academic Review covers all student cohorts, especially IDL students and ALP students but the ELIR team noted their attempts to incorporate these student views within the review process and encourages the institution to actively review the level of engagement of these students within this process.

122 Enhancement Workshops are incorporated into the Academic Review process and result in improved sharing of ideas and future actions at discipline level with an aim to strengthen the enhancement focus of Academic Review. The ELIR team noted positive engagement with this from staff across multiple locations.

123 Internal Audit is undertaken for 'high risk' activity - for example, partnership activity such as graduate apprenticeships (GAs) and independent distance learners (IDL) - of a school and operates on a three-yearly cycle. The focus of Internal Audit is on assurance and covers the adequacy of management arrangements, risk management and resources for activity such as ALPs, student exchange, industrial placements, GAs and IDL. Reports and school action plans are received and approved by UCQS.

124 There is an appropriate process for the review of professional services which support teaching and learning. Historically, this was undertaken through the Academic-Related Professional Services Review (ARPS) process which tended to focus on themes rather than service so could potentially involve more than one service. In 2019, the University decided to put the current ARPS process on hold pending completion of the Building Our Commonality (BOC) project. The BOC project is a significant strategic project aimed at the transformation of service provision within the global institution, whether those services are provided centrally or at school level. While the current ARPS process is on hold,

the Academic Quality team has been conducting reviews in the interim period. The University expectation is that UCQS will approve a new five-year review schedule.

125 Thematic Review was introduced in 2015-16 with a topic-led teaching and learning focus following a similar format to Academic Review. Topics under review have included Technology-Enabled Learning and Teaching, Assessment and other themes. Although a five-year programme was initiated, the University has concluded that other well-established university processes would be more effective at delivering outcomes and, hence, themes have instead been adopted or embedded into other processes (for example, ARPS, AMR, Planning Round, and the Learning and Teaching Strategy). This embedding approach has enabled allocation of funding for pan-institutional initiatives which was not possible through Thematic Review as a standalone process in its own right.

4.2 Use of external reference points in quality processes

126 The University has an effective approach to the use of external reference points in the management of its quality processes and in the setting and maintaining of academic standards. The University's quality framework is aligned to the Quality Code and is regularly reviewed.

127 The University has undertaken a thorough mapping to the Quality Code along with the use of the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* and Subject Benchmark Statements. In addition, external reference points such as PSRBs and employers, along with global reference points such as national agencies in Malaysia and Dubai, support institutional quality processes.

128 There is evidence of engagement with sector initiatives and developments, including producing case studies for QAA transnational education (TNE) reviews, most recently for the review of TNE in Malaysia in 2019. Key individuals at the University are instrumental in sector bodies such as the Deputy Principal (L&T) being the Scottish sector representative on UK Standing Committee for Quality Assurance and being an academic member of Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) panels. The University identifies that engagement with the TEF exercise has led to enhancement through sector comparisons, with one example being the recognition of the value of high-quality teaching and the reintroduction of Teaching Excellence awards which seemed appreciated by staff.

129 The University makes reasonable use of employers and industry as external reference points, having engaged employers in the development of Strategy 2025 and the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2018-2025. In some schools, employer engagement in quality assurance activities is delivered through Industrial Advisory Panels or Employer Liaison Fora. Alumni were similarly engaged in the development of Strategy 2025.

External examining and assessment

130 The external examining of assessment is a core element of assuring the University's academic quality and standards. The University has clear policies and procedures in relation to external examining, applying the same procedures in all forms of delivery (see above paragraphs 106-113). The University retains full responsibility for the appointment of external examiners where partner organisations are involved. The ELIR team noted the positive practice of the appointment of a Chief External Examiner who has oversight of all school provision across all modes and locations of delivery, ensuring a robust quality approach to assessment across global locations.

131 The University has appropriate arrangements that maintain institutional oversight of assessment supported by institutional policies and guidance. All student work in ALPs is either assessed directly by staff at Heriot-Watt University or else appropriately moderated

(for example, in the case of coursework). The University operates a principle of 'identical academic standards; diversity of learning experiences' which informs its approach to assessment. Across all versions (modes or locations) of programmes, individual courses can offer different forms of formative and summative assessment provided that the same learning outcomes are assessed and that moderation processes take place. In practice, most schools tend to use the same assessment instruments between locations and manage time zone challenges through appropriate mechanisms. The ELIR team noted the effective arrangements for moderation of assessment, with bi-directional moderation occurring between campuses along with examples of marking practices between campus teaching teams reflecting the 'One Heriot- Watt' ethos.

132 Exam Boards operate globally across multiple campuses as multi-campus meetings with either in-person presence or using technology to link campuses. Deans maintain oversight of Exam Board processes and are present (or delegate) at every Exam Board where progression and award decisions are made. The University is currently reviewing its Exam Board processes within the Student Administration Revitalisation Project (SARP) and BOC for efficiency gains and to reduce duplication.

133 Reporting from external examiners and chief examiners is considered by the ELIR team to be effective, with the process effectively communicated through the External Examiner Handbook. External examiner reports are reviewed by the school, the Dean and the Head of Academic Quality while the Chief External Examiner reports are reviewed by the DP (L&T). An annual summary is presented to UCQS which has overall responsibility for oversight of the process.

134 The ELIR team found evidence of prompt action taken on issues raised by external examiners, such as the variation in borderline algorithms in use. A new university-wide policy was introduced in May 2019 with immediate effect in response and yielded positive comments from external examiners. The team would encourage the University to continue to reflect upon any remaining issues already identified by the University in external examiner reports and take action where appropriate.

135 The University provides students with information about the external examining system through a common link available in student handbooks which includes a central email address to which students can apply to receive a copy of an external examiner's report. Students who the ELIR team met were almost universally unfamiliar with the system or how to access external examiner reports, as indeed were some staff. The ELIR team would encourage the University to make external examiner reports readily and easily accessible to all staff in order to provide them with the opportunity to engage in discussion and consideration of this element of quality enhancement. Likewise, the team would encourage the University to reflect on the potential enhancement benefits in improving the ease of access by students to external examiner reports.

PSRB and external accreditation

136 The University delivers over 170 accredited programmes with oversight from 36 PSRBs. The ELIR team understood that each school maintains their own accreditation records. A review of the PSRB oversight process in 2017-18, indicated that greater oversight was needed by Academic Quality and resulted in a PSRB report pro-forma and sharing of information between schools. The implementation of the Global Curriculum Management System aims to provide a globally-accessible system for recording PSRB accreditations.

137 The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in Dubai undertakes biannual, programme-by-programme reviews in order to deliver programmes at the campus in Dubai. The University is currently exploring with KHDA a request to move to a five-yearly

process. Similarly, the University undertakes programme approval, accreditation and reaccreditation exercises with the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) at its Malaysia campus. The University engages with local rating exercises (SETARA in Malaysia) and PSRB approvals (such as the Engineering Accreditation Council in Malaysia). University-level oversight for programme approval and accreditation at the overseas campuses is maintained by Academic Quality and UCQS with operational responsibility delegated to the campus-based Academic Quality Officer/Team.

4.3 Commentary on action taken since ELIR 3 and identification of matters arising from the AIS not otherwise explored

138 The University has responded appropriately to the outcomes of the 2015 ELIR and continued to develop the areas of positive practice that were identified. Oversight of actions taken is the responsibility of UCLT (and its predecessor, Learning and Teaching Board).

139 Five areas for development were identified:

- a **Learning resources, support and environment** - Learning resources have been improved with appropriate investment and the ELIR team learned that students were broadly content with this area of provision.
- b **PGR student induction and training** - The University had made some improvements in this area, including in rationalising intake dates (now three times per year) and providing induction at these occasions. The ELIR team noted examples of variation in approach between schools and locations which requires further attention.
- c **Sharing practice on distance learning** - There has been positive progress on sharing good practice in distance learning.
- d **Student representation** - Student representation of offsite learners remains under review for IDL learners and evolving for ALP learners due to the changing nature of the provision to exclusively PGT.
- e **Student transcripts** - The University's Senate has confirmed its continued practice of not recording on certificates and transcripts, the details of the location or mode of study. The ELIR team found that students broadly welcomed this approach as they identified with a global institution and the team noted that enhanced transcripts may permit students to optionally indicate through inference where the location of study took place. Given the 2015 ELIR recommendation, feedback from PSRBs and Skills Development Scotland, and the fact that the University remains outside the sector norms with this practice, the ELIR team suggests that the University periodically revisits this decision.

4.4 Approach to using data to inform decision-making and evaluation

140 The University broadly utilises the data that it currently has available for strategic decision-making and to inform teaching and learning and has affirmed a commitment to use a suite of learning and teaching benchmarked metrics as part of its Strategy 2025 process. However, the University itself recognises that there are areas where more comprehensive data sets, or more readily accessible data would inform its decision-making and evaluation processes, including the provision of more enhanced data dashboards for staff, data on PGT performance and outcomes by characteristic group. At the time of the current ELIR, the University had recently appointed a new Director of Strategic Planning who will be collaborating closely with the new Vice-Principal and Provost who will themselves have

a key role in the institutional use of data to inform decision-making and to evaluate the impact of actions taken. The new Vice-Principal and Provost will have a role that will include the redesign of the annual planning process in order to deliver Strategy 2025 and will ensure that the revised planning process makes greater use of indicators and data.

141 The University makes appropriate use of student survey data, including NSS, PTES and PRES. As part of its COVID-19 response, the University has made use of short, frequent 'pulse surveys', developed in collaboration with the three SRBs, enabling action to be taken quickly and to benefit the current cohort of students. Plans in relation to activity by the new Vice-Principal and Provost include utilising indicators such as student early experience surveys in order to benefit students in real time.

142 The University aims to move to a position where staff can access data more easily, through the introduction of data dashboards - one example being the recognition of limitations in annual quality reports relying on dissemination through committee structures, whereas data dashboards could improve accessibility and analysis of data. Staff who met the ELIR team indicated a lack of ready access to dashboards and that centrally-held data was provided in either 'snapshot' or 'report card' format.

143 Across the University, the ELIR team learned that data may be held locally at school-level and analysis similarly was school-based from a package of KPI data provided centrally for AMR. Individual schools also run their own analysis of data captured locally, for example, attendance monitoring and student performance data. The University recognises that there is scope to improve analysis of available datasets by Programme Directors of Studies, especially for enhancement purposes.

144 The University has a limited approach to the development and implementation of learning analytics although it recognises potential benefits, particularly in relation to improved dashboards assisting in interventions and student retention. The ELIR team heard that staff were making simple use of data from the VLE to identify levels of student engagement with RBL; however, it was noted that this approach was not consistently used and, given that multiple VLEs are currently in operation, it was not clear that the level of analysis would be institution-wide. The University is recommended to implement an institutional approach to the use of data that is systematic and accessible to enhance the student learning experience and support student attainment (see paragraphs 39, 59, 92, 101). In order to provide appropriate support and guidance, the University should, in the short term, prioritise the development of a more systematic approach to identify students who may be disengaging from their studies. The University might wish to revisit the Exploring Learning Analytics strand and cluster work as part of the recent Evidence for Enhancement Theme. The University considers that progress has been made regarding PGR-related data, but further development is required to produce comprehensive, accessible data sets and the ELIR team would concur with this view.

4.5 Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards

145 The University has effective arrangements for securing academic standards within a global institution. It has comprehensive policies, appropriate regulations and robust processes derived from a mature and effective institutional quality framework. Policies, procedures and regulations are reviewed regularly, publicly available and effectively disseminated through clear and accessible documentation, enabling them to be well understood by staff across all campuses. Its quality framework is well managed and aligned to the expectations of external reference points including the Quality Code and makes effective use of the external examining system, although the University should seek to ensure that there is easy and ready access to external reports for staff and consider the ease of access for students. This resilient framework enabled an agile and effective

response to the pandemic across all campuses which was effectively led and coordinated at a senior level.

4.6 Effectiveness of the institution's approach to self-evaluation, including the effective use of data to inform decision-making

146 The University has an effective approach to self-evaluation through self-reflection and has identified areas for development through both Strategy 2025 and the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2018-2025. The University makes effective use of currently accessible data and KPIs within its measurement of progress towards its strategic objectives.

147 The University has identified areas where greater access to, and use of, data would benefit the institution and has active work ongoing in this regard, not least with the relatively new posts of Vice-Principal and Provost, and Director of Strategic Planning recognising the need to harness and utilise data more effectively. The University is recommended to implement an institutional approach to the use of data that is systematic and accessible to help improve decision-making, enhance the student learning experience and support student attainment.

5 Collaborative provision

5.1 Key features of the institution's strategic approach

148 There is a clearly articulated strategy for collaborative provision which has developed since the 2015 ELIR. The institutional approach to collaborative partnerships effectively aligns with the Institutional Strategy. The University does not have a separate Collaborative Provision Strategy or an Internationalisation Strategy, rather these are embedded within Strategy 2025. The University's approach to collaborative provision is evolving from a traditional hub-and-spoke TNE model to a 'globally integrated' institution model. The University plans to establish and maintain key, long-term and highly-valued partnerships. In particular, it is developing a defined China Strategy and is developing a similar approach for India. Major, large-scale, cross-university partnerships are managed through a project board approach.

149 The University operates collaborative provision with over 200 partnership agreements across 37 countries. Provision includes Joint Collaborative Partnerships (JCP), Articulation Agreements, Approved Learning Partners (ALPs), graduate apprenticeships (GAs), student exchange and research partnerships. As a global institution, the University does not consider its international campus provision or independent distance learners (IDLs) as collaborative provision.

150 The University COVID Recovery Group, established to respond to the international pandemic, along with the International Development Unit, the Academic Quality team and the Learning and Teaching COVID-19 Contingency Planning Group, appropriately and rapidly managed the risks associated with partnership arrangements. Given the significant partnerships in China and the initial country-wide measures adopted to address COVID-19, this enabled effective mitigation of the potential impact, including considering January 2021 start dates for some PGT programmes. The institutional response to students studying through collaborative provision appeared to be consistent with that applied to its other taught provision.

151 Since the 2015 ELIR, the number of ALPs has almost halved (paragraph 12) and there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of students studying at ALPs. The University has shifted to a strategy of deepening collaborations with the remaining ALPs and is developing more multi-school partnerships. The shift in strategic direction to reduce

the number of ALPs and focus on fewer, strategically significant articulation agreements and joint collaborative partners was noted as a positive development by the ELIR team. The University retains the responsibility for developing curriculum, learning outcomes, assessment, external examination, award and all quality assurance of the programme. The partner institution provides local support and teaching through University approved teachers/tutors. Marking of assessments is undertaken by either University staff or approved teachers/tutors/markers. Communication between schools regarding collaborative provision primarily occurs through schools' Director of Learning and Teaching meetings and Head of School communications.

152 Joint Collaborative Partnerships (JCPs) include joint and dual awards where both the University and the partner institution are jointly responsible for the development, management and delivery of the programmes of study. Partnerships include Xidian University and Tianjin University of Science and Technology in China as well as the multi-school partnership with Ocean University of China. Directors of Academic Quality in each school manage reporting from JCPs, providing input to Academic Quality and, in turn, to UCQS.

153 The University has effective arrangements in place to deliver collaborative activity that encourages widening participation in Scotland. The University continues to develop and grow its articulation partnerships with Scottish colleges. Full credit articulation is facilitated through the Associate Student Scheme where the University collaborates with colleges on curriculum, assessment and student support. The ELIR team learned how students were well prepared through schools engaging in curriculum mapping and design, and transition support programmes including 'Get Ready for Success' (paragraph 39). Connectivity between the schools and the colleges is primarily led by the Schools' Directors of Learning and Teaching, and Programme Directors.

154 The University is one of Scotland's largest providers of Graduate Apprenticeship (GA) schemes, partnering over 70 employers. The ELIR team considered that the University had a strategic approach to the development of the GA programme, noting, as an example, that it has invested in a Graduate Apprenticeship Office to manage the recruitment of apprentices to the scheme. The University uses Individual Learning Agreements (ILAs) to encourage reflection by the apprentices and each apprentice is assigned a Personal Tutor. While GAs are linked to existing degree programmes, they generally study as a separate cohort. The shift to RBL has been recognised as beneficial to GA students, providing flexibility to balance their studies around apprenticeship work, and is likely to remain as a mode of delivery. It is noted that this shift introduces increased potential for interaction with full-time students, and develops and shares good practice around remote and work-based learning.

155 At the time of the current ELIR, the University had recently transitioned towards a centralised repository of information around partnership arrangements and management information having previously held school-based registers. Collaborative provision appears to be offered among multiple modes and locations of delivery, often engaging multiple university campuses. The ELIR team took note of the positive development of a small number of recent partnerships originating from and being managed by the Malaysia and Dubai campuses in line with the University's aspirations as a global institution.

156 The establishment of strategic partnerships are subject to business approval at senior level with appropriate consideration of due diligence and a business case alongside academic approval. Partnership arrangement details are specified within contracts and student handbooks which will include the nature of support for students, such as personal tutor support, access to online resources, skills development, and careers support. All partnership students have Personal Tutor support and access to online support tools and

resources. Contracts are renewed every three to five years following review of the partnership and resources through the Academic Review and Internal Audit processes.

157 The University states that in regard to student representation, JCP, articulation and GA students are deemed 'campus-based' and are therefore covered by class representative and school officer structures (paragraph 30). The ELIR team found a mixed response to the institutional understanding of student representation for students studying with collaborative partners but recognised that the University was aware of the challenges in this regard and in relation to ALP students in particular (together with the challenges of seeking IDL student views). The team learned that the University was applying varied and appropriate mechanisms through, for example, additional surveys for 'hard to reach' cohorts to hear these student voices. The team noted positively the proactive engagement by the Student Union officers in working in partnership with the University to support representative structures and feedback mechanisms for collaborative partner students (paragraph 30).

158 Management of programmes, including responsibility for assessments and oversight of quality assurance, rests with schools operating with collaborative partners, as for all of its other taught provision. However, schools with international partnerships are supported by the International Development team liaising with International Directors within each school. Since the 2015 ELIR, the University has established the appointment of a Global Quality Officer in the Academic Quality team who provides further support. All provision with external partners (and IDL activity) is regarded as 'high risk' and has more stringent procedures for approval and monitoring. As part of Annual Monitoring and Review (AMR), schools work with collaborative partners to complete Partner Annual Monitoring and Review (PAMR) reports which the ELIR team considered to provide appropriate monitoring of the student learning experience. An annual summary of PAMR reports is considered by UCQS which ensures that the University maintains an institutional oversight of quality and standards of its collaborative provision.

5.2 Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative provision

159 The ELIR team considers the University has an effective approach to managing collaborative provision. The University has appropriate policies and procedures which ensure consistency of approach to collaborative provision and ensures that quality and standards are maintained along with appropriate monitoring of student experience. While partnerships are managed individually by schools, the University has effective oversight through the application of the Multi Code, and review and monitoring through the University's PAMR and Internal Audit processes with oversight from UCQS through the Academic Quality team.

160 While the University recognises the challenges in ensuring effective student representation across all areas of study involving collaborative partners, the partnership between the Student Union and the University in seeking to develop and support representative structures is commended.

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