

May 2023

Introduction

This is a report of a review under the [Quality Enhancement and Standards Review](#) (QESR) method conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) as part of Phase 1 of the Scottish Quality Enhancement arrangements at the University of Strathclyde.

The review took place on 11 May 2023 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Ms Molly Knight
- Professor David Lamburn
- Ms Donna Taylor.

QESR is Phase 1 of a two-phase approach that enables the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to fulfil its statutory obligation under Section 13 of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005* to ensure that provision is made for assessing and enhancing the quality of fundable higher education provided by fundable bodies for academic quality and enhancement between 2022-24. The second phase of QAA's external quality review arrangements starts in 2024-25 to coincide with the

these were taught postgraduate students. The institution's student FTE comprised 66% from Scotland, 7% from the rest of the UK and the remaining 27% international (including the European Union).

Findings

From the evidence presented, the review team is confident that the University of Strathclyde is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

Good practice

The QESR team found the following **features of good practice**.

- **Strategic approach to enhancement:** The University has a very clear and effective approach to strategic planning and an ongoing commitment to enhancing the student experience. The Learning and Teaching ambitions of the Strategic Plan are effectively operationalised through a combination of frameworks, working groups or targeted institutional projects, all driven and managed through its education committees to ensure the student experience is enhanced (paragraph 3).
- **Student partnership working:** The University has continued to build on student partnership working with the creation of the Strathclyde Strategic Alliance (SSA) which complements the Student Partnership Agreement (SPA). This, supplemented by the operation of an effective Student Experience Committee (SEC), the innovative use of student internships, and co-creation of protocols, as well as involvement in joint projects, contribute to achieving mutually beneficial and valuable collaborative working arrangements across both the student body and with university colleagues (paragraph 11).
- **Digital education:** The University has continued to develop and strengthen an effective digital education capacity through a collaborative, deliberate and strategic approach (paragraphs 17-21).

Recommendations for action

The QESR team makes the following **recommendations for action**.

- **Thematic review of professional services:** As the new professional services review process is embedded, the University should produce a timetable of reviews to ensure that all student-facing professional services are systematically reviewed within a suitable timeframe (paragraph 27).
- **PGR teaching:** The University takes action to ensure that its Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students Who Support Teaching and Teaching-related Activities is fully and consistently implemented across the University (paragraph 13).

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Strategic approach to enhancement

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evidence of student feedback and participation across all key quality and standards processes including appropriate student representation on key university committees related to quality and standards. Several mechanisms are in place to hear the student voice and encourage increased partnership. At the time of the current QESR, the long running 'You Said We Did' campaign continued to be valuable, complemented by an additional 'Maintaining the Dialogue Survey' which influenced institutional priorities. During the QESR visit, students indicated that the 'Maintaining the Dialogue Survey' had positively supported the level of student engagement across the institution.

tracking of compliance by departments and schools. The implementation of the measures taken is ongoing; in meetings with students the QESR team identified inconsistencies in the application of the University's policies relating to training, recruitment, support and provision of feedback on teaching related activities with some PGR students receiving no training before teaching or assessing and some receiving no feedback on their teaching. The QESR team **recommends** that the University takes action to ensure that its Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students Who Support Teaching and Teaching-related Activities is fully and consistently implemented across the University.

14 Responding to ELIR recommendations relating to student engagement with the work, role and reporting of external examiners, the University revised its procedure and guidelines for external examiners, and updated its Faculty Annual Report (FARs) template to enable monitoring of compliance with the guidance. It also made arrangements for external examiners to meet with students, both during and after the pandemic, and invested in the human resource required to oversee the external examining activity more broadly. The revised guidance indicates that, with appropriate exceptions, external examiner reports are to be made available to students in full. This is undertaken through the Student-Staff Liaison Committees (SSLC). The QESR team was informed that, in practice, instead of providing students with the full external examiner reports, summaries of external examiner reports are provided at SSLCs and Faculty Academic Committees which provide the means to discuss comments with staff. The team noted that the University's policy and practice were not fully aligned and would encourage the University to amend the policy to reflect practice.

15 One recommendation from ELIR 4 related to the University's intention to implement a process for reviewing professional services. Within the recommendation, the University was encouraged to make demonstrable progress within academic year 2019-20 to implement a process for reviewing professional services in accordance with plans it shared with the ELIR 4 panel. As part of its strategy for internal review, the institution analysed sector approaches and determined that a thematic review approach would have benefits over a service-led method, especially in identifying connectivity and enhancement opportunities. A policy and procedure was developed and approved by ESC, and sub-committees reporting to it,

Sector-wide enhancement topic

17 The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended learning offering. The team considered the institution's Digital Education Reflective Statement, guidance papers, minutes of key committees and groups, reports, and met with staff and students.

18 The University's strategic commitment to and cross-institutional development of digital and online education activity predates the new Scottish Funding Council tertiary enhancement topic - 'The future of learning and teaching: defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering'. The Strathclyde Online Learning (SOL) Committee developed practices, procedures and standards in digital learning. The institution's Graduate Apprenticeship provision (with multiple modes of delivery) enabled the development of expertise, the infrastructure and student experience to support a rapid expansion of digital delivery during the pandemic. Digital champions perform a key advocacy role in schools and faculties. The QESR team noted key investments in human resource, technical support and IT infrastructure, coherent and comprehensive staff development programmes, and physical high-specification infrastructure. All students are introduced to the University's online learning platform.

19 The governance infrastructure around online, blended and digital education has been developed to be responsive to feedback from students and staff, and to ensure that the expectations for quality and standards in the UK Quality Code are met. The Strath Union Vice-President Education is a member of the SOL Committee. The Student Experience Committee (SEC) considers flexible learning and the Strathclyde Strategic Alliance (see paragraph 11) has deliverables related directly to digital education. e-FIRST working groups ensure agile responses to circumstances and student need while playing the Sespda role in the 2019 -2023.0

align with the Quality Code, and the Scottish Funding Council'

ensures relevant colleagues are given opportunities to contribute with embedded actions within annual plans. Engagement with digital learning and associated surveys and consultations will inform improvements to the University's digital infrastructure with a view to achieving the ideal balance and ongoing dialogue to enhance the student experience.

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