

Enhancement-led Institutional Review of the University of the West of Scotland

Technical Report

November 2019

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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

Threshold judgement about the University of the West of Scotland

The University of the West of Scotland has **effective**

Futures and the UWS Academy; these three units are grouped together as 'Academic Life: Education'.

5 At the time of the current ELIR, the University was making changes to its committee structure, which included the dissolution of the Global Engagement Advisory Committee and a number of committees at school level; the alignment of cognate programmes around Divisional Programme Boards rather than Programme Boards; the creation of a Programme Approval and Review Group (PRG) to oversee new programme approvals and developments; and the replacement of Subject Panels and Progression and Award Boards

11 Following extensive consultation with staff and students, using a range of methods including surveys and focus groups, the University asked the ELIR team to focus on three aspects of its context:

- Ç Student-Centred (student success, support, enhanced curriculum)
- Ç Campus and Community (multi-campus, widening access, global reach)
- Ç Engagement and Partnership (employers, industry/PSRBs, students).

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Student representation

17 The University has effective arrangements in place to support the engagement and representation of students, including responding to student feedback. Student representation is evident across the institution and levels of study. Student representatives are elected at

Equality and diversity

28 The University's framework for supporting equality and diversity is outlined in its Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Procedure and Guidance Notes, and is informed by the relevant legislation. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Committee is a standing

team met students who had benefitted from this scheme and who were very positive about their experience.

34 The University is involved in other widening participation projects and is one of three higher education institutions involved in the Access to a Career in Teaching (ACT) programme, which support pupils from Glasgow City Schools who can demonstrate a commitment to the teaching profession to follow this career path and return to teach in their own communities. The University has the largest proportion of Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) West students progressing onto its degree provision, primarily in the School of Health and Life Sciences, and provides a range of pre-entry support to aid transition to university in partnership with SWAPWest.

35 Student retention overall has improved over the past five years and is monitored at programme and school-level via programme boards and school education forums. An *ad hoc* Retention Oversight Group was established in 2019-20 to monitor and improve progression for all students, using the University's data dashboards. In future, monitoring will be integrated into an annual Portfolio Review process and overall oversight of student retention will be the responsibility of a newly created Student Experience Group chaired by the Deputy Principal.

36 The University is committed to increasing the number of care leavers over the next three years as part of its SFC Outcome Agreement 2018-19 to 2020-21. In discussions with the ELIR team, students expressed concerns about a reduction in support for care leavers as a result of the recent University rebalancing exercise. The team learnt that support for care-experienced students had not been reduced but had been reconfigured and would continue through Marketing and Student Recruitment, where there are plans to ensure

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

39 The University provides a student-centred, personalised and distinctive learning and teaching experience supporting students at each stage of the learner journey.

Admissions and transition to university

40 The University has a transparent, fair and consistent approach to admissions. Policies for unconditional and adjusted unconditional offers, as well as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), are clearly set out. Care experienced students are guaranteed an adjusted offer for one of the University's recruiting programmes; or an interview/audition for one of the University's selecting programmes. The ELIR team noted that the Admissions Procedure does not provide specific details on contextualised admissions and the team would encourage the University to provide these.

41 Given the diversity of the student body, the University takes a supportive approach to providing pre-entry information, advice and guidance, working actively with applicants to support application and transition to university, for example, Care Leavers' support and mentoring through schemes such as SWAPWest. Following acceptance of a place, students receive a series of pre-entry communications and advice directly and via the student portal (MyDay) (paragraph 50), aimed at supporting transition into university. The portal is available to new students from May to July and provides an online 'Roadmap' with various systems and support mechanisms students are likely to need at specific points, including enrolment and induction, or when applying for student cards and Student Awards Agency Scotland funding.

International students

42 International students are included in all induction events and, in addition, receive a welcome guide specifically for international students alongside additional tailored events provided in t

positively and clearly valued the support provided by Student Services, especially singling out Counselling, Careers and the International teams.

45 The Student Hub (The Hub) exists as a virtual enquiry service accessed via telephone, email and the MyDay Portal for students at all campuses and, currently, as a physical service at the Paisley and Lanarkshire Campuses. The Hub acts as a point of information and assistance providing online self-service and referral to specialist areas within the University where necessary. The response time for enquiries to the Hub is two to three hours, with direct contact from specialist services provided within five working days. Due to the multi-campus structure and increasing proportion of international students, support methods have diversified to include individual Skype appointments and video-conference workshops. There are plans to implement the physical Hub model at other campuses, with a strengthened 'on campus' support in the form of Careers and Academic Skills support already in operation at London.

46 The SU also provides a range of support services complementary to those of Student Services, including access to an emergency hardship fund and the SU case workers to support students through academic appeals and Extenuating Circumstances applications.

47 The ELIR team met students who expressed concerns that existing levels of student support would not continue following rebalancing. During the ELIR visit, students indicated that communication, particularly regarding rebalancing, could have been improved. At the time of the current ELIR, the new student support structures were being implemented. The University is strongly encouraged to review the student experience in the light of the rebalancing after a suitable period of time, and to introduce a process for ongoing holistic evaluation of student-facing professional services.

Student health and wellbeing

48 Student mental health is a key priority area for the University. A recently-formed Wellbeing Group, reporting to the Health, Safety and Sustainability Committee, takes a holistic approach to staff and student wellbeing and oversees activities to support wellbeing and mental health, including staff development. A wide range of initiatives and support mechanisms are available to staff and students. Of note is the provision of free gym membership for students at all university-operated fitness facilities. At the time of the review visits, the University was in the process of developing a Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA) in partnership with the SU.

49 Specialised support is provided through the Disability Service, Counselling Service and an Occupational Therapist and Student Wellbeing Adviser. Although demand for the Counselling Service has increased by 50% in the last five years, the average waiting time for an initial appointment is below sector and NHS averages. The University has achieved this through a number of approaches, for example, introducing initiatives to develop a sense of community including more inclusive sports activities, as well as the role of The Hub in triaging and signposting alternative sources of support that are available to students. The comprehensive and proactive approach to supporting student health and wellbeing was viewed positively by the ELIR team.

Personalised learning and study support

50 The MyDay student portal plays an important role in supporting students at various stages of their learning journey, including access to their personalised timetable. A recent

Graduate attributes

55 The visibility of graduate attributes was highlighted as an area for development in the 2014 ELIR and a refreshed set of UWS graduate attributes aligning with the three corporate drivers of Student Success, Research and Enterprise, and Global Engagement were approved in 2016-17: 'I am UWS - Universal, Work-ready and Successful'. In many cases, these attributes are inherently taught and embedded within modules, and the programme specifications will typically detail which graduate attributes a student can expect to achieve upon completion of the programme, and this is assured via the quality processes. However, the University acknowledges that there is still some way to go for all students to recognise and articulate graduate attributes. This was verified in discussions with the ELIR team when students indicated a lack of awareness and understanding of the terminology used around graduate attributes. To promote greater awareness of graduate attributes, the University is encouraged to progress with plans to focus on improved communications and ensure that all programmes highlight and identify graduate attributes, with identification of specific graduate attributes made in module descriptors and curriculum mapping.

Assessment

56 Enhancing assessment processes has been identified as a priority in the University's Education Enabling Plan (EEP), and the Education Advisory Committee (EAC) set 'Assessment and Feedback'

including internships, work placements and industry mentoring. However, students at the London Campus who met the ELIR team, commented on the lack of work-related experiences available to them. Although external guest speakers from business had been introduced at the students' request and curricula made use of real-life case studies, London Campus students expressed a desire for better access to real-life work opportunities as part of their programme. The University is encouraged to continu

70 Academic support for PGR students is provided through the schools and associated research institutes while the Doctoral College is responsible for the administration as well as organising cross-school events, wellbeing initiatives, developing student representation and professional development for PGR students. In discussions with the ELIR team, students indicated that they viewed the transition from the Graduate School to the Doctoral College as positive, in particular, the enhancements this had made to the research student experience. Students also

The ELIR team met students from each of the Scottish campuses (for London Campus see paragraph 75) who were generally positive about their local learning environment and facilities and appreciated the uniqueness of their particular campus for various reasons. In terms of library provision, it was viewed favourably by the UG and PGT students at Paisley and Lanarkshire and there was agreement that library provision on other campuses could be improved.

74 The University has recently invested in new facilities in Lanarkshire, providing students with a modern learning environment with spaces designed to facilitate a change in pedagogy, teaching and use of technology. Additionally, a number of spaces at the Paisley Campus have been renovated. Academic staff have been supported by UWS Academy and Education Futures to transition into these spaces in order to adapt their practices and, most significantly, the University has employed a learning spaces specialist to provide personalised support to staff to maximise the use of the facilities and environment. Senior staff were enthusiastic about this unique support role. The University has received mixed feedback on the new campus to date with some students giving critical feedback on the open plan learning spaces. However, environment rated as the most positive element of studying at UWS in the university-

78 The University identified community as one of its contextualised themes for the ELIR, however, the students the team met identified least with the sentiment of community across the University as a whole. This was, in part, due to the lack of intercampus communication and the perception of a hierarchy between campuses, with variations in facilities contributing

infrastructure to enhance the student experience. Clear benefits are already evident which are being effectively and strategically implemented across the wider institution.

85 Community was identified as one of the key themes for the ELIR. There is evidence that this could be improved, particularly in the effectiveness of consulting and communicating with students around institution-wide changes that affect the student experience. This is especially true with respect to the recent rebalancing and review of professional services. The University is encouraged to develop a strategic approach for communicating institutional changes with students, and to consider the content, format and method of dissemination of information to ensure there is widespread understanding of institutional priorities and actions. The University is also encouraged to use improved communications to ensure that all programmes highlight and identify graduate attributes.

86 The University's truth that 'We are here for our students', is clearly reflected in the behaviours and values exhibited by the whole university community. The development of strategies and approaches to improve the effectiveness of two-way communications with students, principally at the institutional level, will further enhance this sense of community and of belonging at the University.

3 Strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching

3.1 Strategic approach to enhancement

87 The University has effective and established systems in place to promote the strategic enhancement of learning and teaching. The University's commitment to teaching and learning is evident in the Corporate Strategy. At the time of the current ELIR, the Corporate Strategy was under review with a revised strategy nearing completion for approval by Senate in January 2020. The ELIR team learned that the Corporate Plan would be retitled the 'UWS Strategy'. The UWS Strategy would have a greater focus on learning and teaching and it would be based on principles and values which were underpinned with key performance indicators.

88 The Education Enabling Plan (EEP) provides a framework for enhancing learning and teaching,

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led by Academic Life: Education and with representatives from each school, allocates funding for staff to engage with Enhancement Themes. This approach balances centrally coordinated activity with cross-school collaboration.

97 Overall, the University has an effective approach to engaging with the national Enhancement Themes and other sector work.

3.3 Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice

98 The University uses a multi-layered approach to identify and disseminate good practice including the EAM process (paragraph 130-135), use of external examiner reports, programme leader events, ILR and the annual Learning, Teaching and Research Conference. Staff identified the annual conference as an important mechanism for sharing good practice which was attended by staff from various campuses. The 2018 and 2019 conferences, 'Bridging Boundaries: Connecting Learning, Teaching and Research' explored research-teaching links and included external speakers as well as contributions from staff and postgraduate students.

99 Academic programmes are a significant unit of responsibility for teaching delivery and therefore important for identifying and sharing elements of practice that are effective at the subject level. Information from Programme Annual Monitoring Reports (PMRs) is considered at programme boards, school-based annual monitoring events, school boards and, ultimately, at the institutional EAM event (paragraph 132). This process allows staff at various levels to share good practice. An annual institutional report which includes the outcomes of the institutional events, common themes identified in ILR, external examiner reports and an action plan, is considered by EAC and Senate (paragraph 134).

100 The UWS Academy is responsible for identifying, developing and disseminating good practice through engagement at EAM, ILR and programme leader events. It is increasingly making use of electronic means to share good practice. Examples of this include the development by the UWS Academy of web-based resources to support the design and integration of assessments.

101 The two-stage ILR process was regarded by staff as an important mechanism to identify and share good practice. The ILRs are tailored to specific school challenges with the resulting reports being written by the Quality Enhancement Support Team (QuEST). QuEST is able to match good practice within and between schools, with corresponding challenges in other areas. Sharing good practice across the institution in this way was viewed positively by the ELIR team.

3.4 Engaging, developing and supporting staff

102 The University has effective approaches for engaging and supporting staff in their continued development and for the ongoing enhancement of learning and teaching. These include formal credit-bearing programmes such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PgCAP); an academic induction Moodle resource; and the opportunity to engage at school-led events or making use of online materials such as those developed by the QuEST team. The Department of People and Organisational Development (P&OD) co-ordinates

experiential route to Fellowship. At the time of the current ELIR, across the University around 56% of staff have fellowships of the HEA. The University recognised that the target of 90% was aspirational but will keep it in place and continue working towards it. In support of this, the UWS Academy is focusing on HEA Fellowships supported by a new Moodle submission site, which will track applicants in a more structured manner than previously. New academic staff are systematically inducted into Fellowship recognition routes when they join the University.

104 Academic Life: Education plays a strategic role in coordinating and enabling staff development to enhance learning and teaching, and offers staff a comprehensive range of development opportunities. At the time of the current ELIR, both Education Futures and UWS Academy were relatively new units. Education Futures was set up with the strategic aim of supporting the needs of the institution rather than individuals in providing a modern effective, accessible and inclusive digital learning environment. UWS Academy supports seminars, the Annual Learning, Teaching and Research Conference, sALTiRE (Academic Learning and Teaching Routes for Excellence) introductory workshops, discussion and reading groups.

105 University staff take part in an annual workload activity and personal development process called MyContribution which aligns school and institutional needs with the personal development requirements of staff. The MyContribution process is well-established and supports reflection on achievements and staff activities for the year ahead. The University indicated that the process is designed to ensure that it is able to see best value from the staff and that the staff are supported in their career through a Personal Development Plan (PDP).

106 The MyContribution process was generally praised by staff who met the ELIR team. Some staff reported a degree of 'angst' around the activity plans as there was a perception of inconsistent practice between departments.

4 Academic standards and quality processes

4.1

Enhancement and annual monitoring (EAM)

115 EAM provides a key mechanism for reviewing academic standards. There is a clear process of cascading reports at the various levels and, at each level, reports have both an assurance and enhancement function - module review forms inform programme monitoring reports, which inform school reports and school EAM events, which in turn shape the University annual report and the institutional EAM event. The University report is considered by Senate via EAC and by schools at their EAM events, and confirmation is provided annually to Court, demonstrating that the reports are discussed at various levels across the institution.

116 The process for completing Programme Monitoring Reports (PMRs) has been enhanced through the introduction of a bespoke online site - Academic Data Services Applications - which enables reports to be completed online and provides staff with access to templates, examples and prepopulated data. The Programme Performance and Module Performance dashboards provide access to a very comprehensive, easily navigable suite of information to support EAM. The data facilitates analysis of cohort performance, enabling the impact of enhancements to be tracked and supports internal and external benchmarking. The transparency and accessibility of this data was welcomed by staff, enabling them to undertake more detailed monitoring of their programmes. The provision of programme and module performance data and its use in decision-making was viewed positively by the ELIR team.

117 The school and institutional EAM events provide opportunities for discussions of the themes and issues arising from annual monitoring. The school event includes a review of the previous year's SMART targets, development of SMART targets for the coming year and presentations by each programme leader on one area of positive practice and one area of development, thereby promoting wider awareness of key issues and also sharing good practice.

118 The institutional event is intended to enhance cross-school analysis, discussion and reflection of the student experience. Staff from all campuses are invited to participate in the event, which brings together academic and professional services staff. The ELIR team considered this to be a positive approach.

119 The outcomes of the institutional event are encapsulated in the annual institutional report which identifies trends, areas of positive practice and issues requiring institutional consideration, and incorporates the common themes identified in the ILR and external examiner annual thematic reports. The institutional report is considered by EAC and the Senate and includes an action plan which is monitored by EAC. The institutional report demonstrates how the University aggregates the outcomes of different monitoring and review processes and identifies key overarching themes. Staff who met the ELIR team spoke very positively about their experiences of the EAM process.

120 The ELIR team considered the EAM process to be very thorough, robust and well-

enhanced its ILR process since the 2014 ELIR through two key developments. Firstly, schools have the flexibility, through discussion with QuEST, to aggregate programmes and subjects into a unit of review appropriate to the mode of delivery. This flexibility has been welcomed and valued by staff. The second development relates to the introduction of a two-phased approach to ILR.

122 The two-phased approach enables the review visit to be tailored more specifically to the subject area and to focus on pertinent topics, including a Core Discussion Area, identified both by the subject under review and by QuEST. Staff viewed the two-phased approach, particularly the opportunity for focusing in-depth on areas for development identified in Phase 1, as very positive. The ELIR team considered the two-phased process to be a highly-effective approach to internal review and noted that it had been showcased in a sparqs publication.

123 The ILR process considers the effectiveness of the school's own processes for monitoring and review, as well as key assurance and enhancement reports, such as programme monitoring reports, external examiner r

Assessment

127 The University has effective arrangements in place for the management of assessment. Regulations, policies and procedures on assessment are provided as part of the *Regulatory Framework* and the *Assessment Handbook*. The Handbook provides guidance on assessment design and implementation and on assurance of academic standards (paragraph 56-58). The University has recently approved measures to enhance the structure and approach to assessment boards, particularly in terms of online assessment results processing and indicative decision-making.

128 The University has identified, through its established monitoring and review processes of external examining and ILR, lower levels of performance in assessment on the MBA/DBA programmes at the London Campus compared with similar programmes at other university campuses. The ELIR team learnt that the University intends to change the collaborative partnership model for the London Campus to take full responsibility for all aspects of the student experience and employ UWS staff at the campus. At the time of the current ELIR, induction and training on the University's assessment framework have been provided by UWS staff to Recognised Teachers of the University (RTUs) at the London Campus and there were regular visits to the London Campus by UWS staff. The team would encourage the University to continue in its plans to address the comparability of experience and student outcomes for students studying at different locations and modes as part of its future development of its London-based provision.

4.2 Use of external reference points in quality processes

129 The University is making effective use of external reference points in the management of its quality assurance and enhancement processes.

Quality Code

130 The University's *Quality Handbook* is aligned to and meets the Expectations of the 2013-18 Quality Code and is currently being reviewed to ensure alignment with the revised Quality Code. The University confirmed that completed mapping will be presented to AQC in February 2020. AQC considers the Mapping Document throughout the year to ensure that it remains comprehensive and robust and the Institutional Monitoring Report provides confirmation that the Expectations of the Quality Code continue to be met.

Programme approval and review

131 A range of external reference points is used in programme design and approval and in ILR, including approval and review teams with external panel members. Approval events can be held jointly with PSRB accreditations. The outcomes

133 Schools are responsible for ensuring that external examiners receive written responses to their reports and school EAM reports confirm receipt and response to all reports, with further confirmation provided in the Institutional EAM Report to the Senate. The University's consideration of the impact of new Extenuating Circumstances Policy demonstrates institutional responsiveness to issues raised by external examiners. The new policy was reviewed and revised in response to concerns raised by external examiners. There is also a clear process for following up on institutional actions related to sharing examples of positive practice.

134 External examiner reports are made available to students via the VLE. Although there were variable levels of awareness among students who met the ELIR team about the existence of these reports, students are involved in the consideration of the External Examiner Annual Thematic Report at AQC and EAC.

135 The ELIR team learned that a revised external examiner reporting process is being introduced for 2019-20 reports, which aims to encourage a more reflective, enhancement-focused commentary, including evaluation of student performance across different modes and locations. The University is encouraged to continue with these plans and to incorporate the outcomes into its annual thematic report on external examining.

Benchmarking data

136 The University makes extensive use of data in its strategic planning and monitoring processes, which enables progress to be measured against internal targets and to be externally benchmarked. The University's dashboards facilitate Scottish and UK sector comparisons at module and programme levels. The University demonstrates further learning from the wider sector through its extensive review and redesign of its collaborative partnership processes, which included an evaluation of sector practices and responding to recommendations made by an external consultant (paragraph 159).

4.3 Commentary on action taken since ELIR 3

137 The University has a systematic approach to implementing, monitoring and evaluating the impact of actions taken in response to the 2014 ELIR outcomes. EAC has institutional oversight of the ELIR Action Plan, and actions emerging from ELIR inform updates to the EEP.

138 The University was asked to address six areas for development in the 2014 ELIR. With regard to supporting the pace of international expansion, there has been a significant growth in 4(pa)3ernally benchmarke

University's own MEQ and the NSS, and clear evidence of this information being considered at multiple levels. Survey results are consolidated into school SMART targets, which form part of the school EAM Report. The ELIR team learned that some students were unaware of how their MEQs had influenced change. The University is encouraged to continue to develop itag develop.

contribution and role of support services in the enhancement of the student learning experience. Reviewing these services will be useful following the University's rebalancing exercise. The University should draw on the existing good practice in the ILRs of academic provision.

5 Collaborative provision

5.1 Key features of the institution's strategic approach

152 The University has an effective approach to managing its collaborative provision including arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the student experience. The University's Global Engagement Enabling Plan 2014-2020 outlines its internationalisation objectives which include 'offering UWS degrees and professional development through a range of off-shore arrangements' and a key performance indicator of 3,000 students enrolled on UWS degrees through TNE/online arrangements by the end of 2019-20. The University is aware that its growth targets have not been fully realised; however, there has been significant growth in TNE student numbers since the 2014 ELIR

develop a more managed approach to managing research collaborations. Following the extensive review of collaborative processes, the role of Recognised Supervisor of the University (RSU) has recently been introduced by the University.

158 At the institutional level, the Vice-Principal (Academic) has delegated to the Associate Vice-Principal (Research), strategic responsibility for Graduate Apprenticeship provision, as a reflection of the University's intention to cultivate increased links between teaching, research and employer engagement. The University is expanding its Graduate Apprenticeship provision beyond the initial four programmes, which had 98 students in 2018-19. Monitoring and review of Graduate Apprenticeship provision is embedded into quality processes and are considered at school boards (paragraph 109-114).

159 In 2018-19, the University undertook a number of reviews of its processes for

Assessment

164 The academic security of assessment on TNE franchised programmes is managed and assured through the use of identical examinations which are scheduled simultaneously with a third party managing the conduct of the examination. In the first year of a new programme, all assessment results are moderated by UWS. The assessments used on TNE programmes are the same as those used on campus, albeit adapted to take account of the local context, for example, local law and regulations. Training provided to RTUs by UWS Link Tutors and through the RTU VLE site covers key assessment-related information, such as assessment methods and providing feedback. The University's *Assessment Handbook* is issued annually to all partners, and moderation takes place in accordance with the Handbook's requirements. For validated programmes, where the assessment is set and marked by the partner, the University undertakes a sample of marking as part of its moderation processes.

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its plans to enhance the sense of belonging among TNE students to UWS and to coordinate developments through the proposed short-life working group. In addition, the University is encouraged to continue its plans to introduce a TNE-specific survey for students on collaborative partnerships (paragraph 146).

5.2 Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative provision including arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience

169 The University has an effective approach to managing its collaborative provision,