Enhancement-led Institutional Review of University of Abertay Dundee

Outcome Report

April 2016

Contents

About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method

A dedicated page of the QAA website explains the method for Enhancement-led Institutional Review of higher education institutions in Scotland and has links to the ELIR handbook and other informative documents.[1] You can also find more information about QAA and its mission.[2]

Further details about the enhancement-led approach can be found in an accompanying ELIR information document,[3] including an overview of the review method, definitions of the judgement categories, and explanations of follow-up action. It also contains information on the Scottish Funding Council's response to ELIR judgements.

About this review

This is the Outcome Report of the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Abertay Dundee. The review took place as follows: Part 1 visit on 8 to10 March 2016 and Part 2 visit on 18 to 22 April 2016. The review was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Professor Hilary Grainger (Academic Reviewer)
- Emeritus Professor Marianne Howarth (Academic Reviewer)
- Emeritus Professor Ian Pirie (Academic Reviewer)
- Dr Tess Goodliffe (International Reviewer)
- Mr Mark Charters (Student Reviewer)
- Dr Pamela Sinclair (Coordinating Reviewer).

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

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

It is possible for the overarching judgement to be expressed in three levels which indicate that the institution's arrangements are: effective; have limited effectiveness; or are not effective. More detail on these categories is provided in the ELIR information document.

The overarching judgement for this report can be found on page 3, followed by the areas of positive practice and the areas for development.

A more detailed Technical Report is also available for this review.[4] The Technical Report sets out the ELIR team's findings under each of the headings in the ELIR 3 method.

---

[1] Further information about the ELIR method:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/enhancement-led-institutional-review.
[2] Further information about QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[3] ELIR information document: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=61.
[4] Technical Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10007849

About the University of Abertay Dundee

The University of Abertay Dundee (the University/Abertay) has a history dating back to 1888 as the Dundee Technical Institute. In 2015-16, the University had a total student population of 6,116 (head count) students, including 3,664 undergraduate students, 233 postgraduate taught students and 128 postgraduate research students studying at the Dundee campus. Students studying at Abertay's partner institutions total 2,091 (head count) undergraduate students with 185 students based at Fife College, 1,863 students at the Systematic Educational Group International (SEGi) University and Colleges, Malaysia and 43 students at Ecole Supérieure de Conduite de Travaux (ESCT), Paris. Eighty-two per cent of campus-based students are Scottish domiciled. Students are spread over five academic schools: the Dundee Business School (DBS); the School of Arts, Media and Computer Games (AMG); the School of Science, Engineering and Technology (SET); the School of Social and Health Sciences (SHS) and the Abertay Graduate School. The University describes itself as having a reputation for developing innovative, exciting programmes often with a vocational focus, and is known internationally in areas such as computer games, technology and art, urban water technology and cybersecurity.

Overarching judgement about the University of Abertay Dundee

The University of Abertay Dundee has **effective** arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience. These arrangements are likely to continue to be effective in the future.

This is a positive judgement, which means the University has robust arrangements for securing academic standards and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

Areas of positive practice

1   The ELIR has identified a number of areas of positive practice and these are summarised below.

2   **Open and responsive culture** – the University has established an open and responsive academic community. It welcomes and responds to the views of academic staff, professional service staff and students.

3   **Partnership working with the student body** – student engagement has been significantly strengthened at both institutional and subject levels. There is an open and constructive relationship between the Students' Association and the University Senior Management Team. Student representation has also been formalised across the institution with direct links between students, schools and the Student Representative Council.

4   **Support Enquiry Zone** – building on the positive practice identified in the previous ELIR, the University has further enhanced its student support arrangements with the establishment of the Support Enquiry Zone which provides an integrated one-stop service. The service is highly responsive and clearly valued by students and staff for its accessibility, provision of support including academic and pastoral matters, and its signposting to specialised services where those are required.

5   **Transition support into higher education** – there is a deliberate and sustainable strategy for providing effective support to students entering the University from its partner colleges. This is demonstrated through its progression data and by the University's wide range of support activities including dedicated student transition officers, collaborative approaches to curriculum development and delivery, outreach work with local communities and the Teaching, Learning and Enhancement (TLE) team providing staff development opportunities for staff of the University's partners.

6   **Graduate School** – the establishment of the Graduate School has had a positive impact on the postgraduate student experience, providing a focus for postgraduate support and development and helping to foster a postgraduate community of students and staff at Abertay. The Graduate School offers a range of training and professional development opportunities, including induction training, seminars, a supervision training programme and support for students with teaching responsibilities.

7   **Graduate attributes** – the Abertay Attributes are fully embedded in the curriculum and are closely linked to the University's strategic priorities. The attributes are widely recognised by students and staff, and provide a focus for promoting and supporting the development of students' skills and experience inside and outside of the curriculum.

8   **Teaching, Learning and Enhancement team** – the TLE team fulfils a highly visible leadership role for enhancement activity at the University. The team provides ongoing continuing professional development for staff, has a key role in sharing good practice, and supports local and cross-institutional enhancement activity through the Abertay Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund (ATLEF) projects and Teaching Learning and Enhancement seminars. The team has also played a key role in supporting staff through the significant strategic changes that have taken place.

9   **Approach to assessment** – the University has enhanced its approach to managing assessment. The introduction of a 10-point literal grading scale and a grade point average system has clarified student understanding of their attainment and incentivised student performance. This has been accompanied by the introduction of an electronic management of assessment system which has prompted reflection and the promotion of good practice around assessment and feedback practices including short turnaround times for students to receive feedback on their assessed work.

10   **Analysis of the student journey** – as a starting point for widespread change, the University conducted an exercise known as 'Baselining the Student Journey'. This is a model of good practice for its systematic, self-critical and analytical approach which provided a secure foundation for a broad range of enhancement projects.

Areas for development

11   The University is asked to consider the areas summarised below.

12   **Evaluating institutional change** – adopt a systematic and measured evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of the significant strategic changes that have taken place. The University has acknowledged that, given the significance, volume and pace of change, there is now a need to embed and reflect on policy and practice, and this view is endorsed by the findings of the current ELIR.

13   **Institution-led review** – ensure the quality review exercise the University has planned for 2017-18 is not only a review of the curriculum reform project but also meets all of the guidance for institution-led review including undertaking detailed and self-reflective scrutiny of all provision at the subject level, with ample opportunity for engagement by external subject specialists. In addition, there would be considerable benefit in the University reflecting on its annual monitoring procedures following curriculum reform and the changes to organisational structure to ensure that annual scrutiny continues to provide the best insight to the ongoing academic health of programmes and provides a good fit with the revised periodic subject review arrangements.

14   **Recording and reporting of institutional decisions** – tighten arrangements for securing the accuracy and clarity of reporting at institutional level including in centrally-produced programme review documentation and in the papers of committees and working groups to ensure that decisions are clearly recorded and reported in sufficient detail to support effective institutional oversight.

15   **Communication with students** – review the approach to communicating with students, ensuring formal information relating to policy and regulatory matters is visible to the student population. The University has a multi-channel approach for student communications and is asked to review this to ensure the mode of communication appropriately reflects the information being disseminated and to avoid important information becoming lost in the high volume of messaging. In addition, the University is encouraged to

progress with its intention to make the external examiner reports and associated school and programme responses more visible to students.

16   **Feedback week** – given its significant potential for supporting student attainment, reflect on the purpose and focus of feedback week as part of the revised curriculum. The University is currently reviewing feedback week at institutional level and is encouraged to include a discipline focus, in partnership with students, to ensure the week takes account of differing pedagogical approaches and students' stage of study.

What happens next?

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

18   One year after publication of the ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to provide a follow-up report to indicate how they are responding to the outcomes of ELIR. Institutions also engage in a follow-up event with colleagues from other institutions to explore the ways in which the ELIR outcomes are being implemented. The final version of the institution's follow-up report is published on the QAA website.

Further information

19   A more detailed Technical Report is also available for this review. The Technical Report sets out the ELIR team's findings under each of the headings in the ELIR 3 method.

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

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

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

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