

Enhancement-led Institutional Review of University of St Andrews

Outcome Report

October 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 Outcome Report of the ELIR conducted by QAA at the University of St Andrews. The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 6 February 2020 and Review Visit on 26-30 October 2020. The review was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Emma Hardy (Student Reviewer)
- Associate Professor Asa Kettis (International Reviewer)
- Professor David Lamburn (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor Susan Rhind (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor Jon Scott (Academic Reviewer)
- Katrina Swanton (Coordinating Reviewer).

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

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

The threshold judgement for this report can be found on page 3, followed by commendations and recommendations.

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

The impact of COVID-19

The Review Visit was originally scheduled to take place during March 2020. This was after the start of the national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the Review Visit being postponed. In discussion with the University and the Scottish Funding Council, the Review Visit was rescheduled to October 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. The University was given the opportunity to outline their arrangements in

¹ About ELIR:

www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review

² About QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland

³ Brief guide to ELIR: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/brief-guide-to-elir-method.pdf

⁴ Technical Report:

www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/University-of-St-Andrews

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 2014. It is acknowledged that the review took place at what was a very challenging time for the University, and the ELIR team and QAA Scotland are grateful to staff and students for their engagement in the review.

About the University of St Andrews

Founded in the early 15th century, St Andrews is Scotland's first university and the third oldest in the English-speaking world. University buildings are distributed across four principal sites: the town centre, North Haugh, East Sands and, from 2020, the Eden campus in Guardbridge.

The University's fundamental goal is to attract and nurture the best staff and the most promising students from around the world and provide an environment in which they can produce their best work for maximum societal benefit. The University's corporate strategy embraces four themes: World-leading, Diverse, Global and Entrepreneurial. Implementation of the strategy is supported by five new enabling strategies: accommodation, estate, finance, digital and people

Social responsibility is a core aspect of the strategy. Within it the University commits itself to acting ethically, transparently, sustainably, and for the wider public benefit at all times. In 2019, a new post of Community Engagement and Social Responsibility Officer, reporting directly to the Principal, was created in order to provide a focus for the University's social responsibility activities.

The University has 20 schools in four faculties (Arts, Divinity, Medicine and Science) - each led by a Head of School. All Schools have Directors of Teaching, Directors of Postgraduate Studies (Taught) and Directors of Postgraduate (Research), although in some smaller Schools these two roles are combined.

In 2018-19, the University had a total student population of just under 9,000 with broadly 80% undergraduate and 20% postgraduate students. The student body is diverse with 27% being Scottish, 28% from the remainder of the UK, 12% EU and 33% overseas. Since the last ELIR, the University's EU and overseas student population has grown by 15% in line with the growth in overall student numbers.

The University's strategic objective is to grow to 10,000 students by 2025, retaining the balance between undergraduate and postgraduate students. Such growth will require investment in the estate with a planned series of refurbishments and new builds to create additional capacity.

Threshold judgement about the University of St Andrews

The University of St Andrews has **effective** arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience.

This is a positive judgement, which means that, overall, the University meets sector expectations in securing the academic standards of its awards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience it provides, currently and into the future. This judgement confirms there can be public confidence in the University's awards and in the quality of the learning experience it provides for its students.

Commendations

1 The ELIR has identified a number of areas where the University will be commended for good practice.

2 **Partnership working and responsiveness to student voice** - the University has a well-established and effective system of student representation and engagement supported by a Partnership Agreement and Collaboration Statement through which priorities are agreed between the University and the Students' Association. The extent to which students were involved in the workstreams and decision-making processes relating to the current pandemic was particularly positive. Students greatly value staff's willingness to listen and respond to their views.

3 **Support for access, diversity and inclusion** - the University is actively engaged in supporting widening access through a suite of outreach programmes and the use of contextualised admissions information. This approach has delivered significant increases in the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The University has also taken strategic actions to enhance its approach to diversity and address the current attainment gaps for minority student groups. These include senior staff appointments and curricular initiatives including development of the Inclusive Curriculum Toolkit. Within schools, equality, diversity and inclusion directors are involved in the approval of new modules and curricular changes to ensure attention is paid to inclusivity.

4 **Student learning experience** - the University provides an excellent overall student learning experience, underpinned by a very effective framework of induction and support for incoming students - in particular, focusing on the transition of widening participation students into higher education with ongoing academic and pastoral support. It is evident there is a strongly collegial learning community in which students and staff have a clear sense of belonging.

5 **Student wellbeing** - the University has made significant steps in addressing mental health issues. Mental health was identified as a focus of the 2018-19 Annual Academic Monitoring Exercise and a Mental Health Task Force has been established to prioritise mental health support for students and staff, in line with the development of a university-wide wellbeing strategy.

6 **Graduate employment** - the University's strong performance in graduate employment is underpinned by the support provided through the Careers Service and the establishment of a Graduate Attributes Framework aligned with the University Strategy. Engagement with the Graduate Attributes Framework is facilitated through the Professional Skills Curriculum which is open to all students and recognised in the Higher Education Achievement Report.

7 **Systematic approach to enhancement** - the University has a systemic approach to enhancement underpinned by established quality processes, such as annual monitoring dialogues, a diversity of approaches for sharing practice, and initiatives to strengthen the link between pedagogical research and teaching practice. The University has been proactively engaged in recent national Enhancement Themes. This has resulted in the development of a wide range of activities and resources linked to student transitions, mentoring and exploring the use of evidence to enhance the student experience.

8 **Development of academic leadership** - the University has a more strategic approach to academic leadership development supported by the restructure of its Organisational and Staff Development Services (OSDS) and an ongoing review of the relationships between a number of other professional service units engaged in academic and educational development. The dedicated mentoring and support provided by OSDS for heads of school and directors of teaching, has been particularly positive and the visibility of education-focused pathways promotes interest among staff in teaching leadership positions.

9 **Role of the Proctor's Office** - the Proctor's Office performs a pivotal role in providing institutional oversight and supporting schools to ensure adherence with university policies and requirements, and respond to external and internal initiatives. The staff located in the Office provide effective leadership for quality assurance and enhancement including the implementation of new initiatives.

Recommendations

10 The University will be asked to consider the areas summarised below.

11 **Oversight of postgraduate research students (PGRs) who teach** - develop more effective oversight of the training and support provided at school level to PGRs who teach. The University has put in place clear guidance regarding the mandatory generic teaching training provided to PGR students, but schools are responsible for overseeing teaching and marking activity, and students report a variable experience in terms of the provision of guidance, support and workload management.

12 **Engagement with staff development** - continue developing and implementing systems to monitor staff engagement with mandatory areas of training and support, such as academic induction. The University should also implement the system currently under development by Organisational and Staff Development Services to monitor the completion of all required training for staff, in particular postgraduate research supervisor training.

13 **Student access to external examiner reports** - ensure that all students have easy access to external examiner reports for their programme of study by the end of academic year 2020-21.

14 **External examiner engagement in degree classifications** - implement, from 2020-21, the University's intended approach to sharing a final analysis of degree classification with external examiners and asking them to reflect on the distribution patterns when submitting their final reports.

What happens next?

QAA Scotland will continue to engage with the University through the annual discussion visits, which, among other matters, consider the ways in which the institution is responding to the ELIR outcomes. One year after publication of the Outcome and Technical Reports, the University will be asked to provide a Follow-up Report, and to engage in development activities with other institutions.

Further information

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

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](#).

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](#).

Further information about QAA Scotland and the enhancement-led approach, including the ELIR method, can be found on the [QAA website](#).

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

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