



UNIVERSITY OF
ABERDEEN

August
2018

Enhancement-led Institutional Review Reflective Analysis

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Contextual information about the institution, student population and the review

1.1 Summary info about the institution, including strategic framework, organisational structure

Summary information

- 1.1.1 Founded in 1495, the University of Aberdeen (UOA) has a proud tradition of academic excellence. As one of the six ancient universities in the UK, we have exported world-shaping ideas and outstanding graduates from our corner of north-east Scotland to the far reaches of the globe, with five Nobel Laureates and over 120,000 alumni in approximately 170 countries worldwide. 36% of our current student population comes from outside the UK. In sum, we are a distinctively Scottish university, but our reach, impact, and aspirations are global.
- 1.1.2 We offer a broad range of undergraduate (590) and taught postgraduate (140) degree programmes, while the research culture of the university offers postgraduate research (PGR) students excellent opportunities for development via our Postgraduate Research School. Our ethos is of student choice, research-enriched teaching (3.4.1), and individual responsibility. This has been the principle behind a number of innovative changes that have set the Learning and Teaching agenda at the university.
- 1.1.3 Our main campus is at King's College in Old Aberdeen. A second large campus, comprising Medicine, Dentistry, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, is located at Foresterhill, adjacent to the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. Multi-million pound investment has provided students and researchers with some of the best facilities in the UK. In 2017, we established our first overseas campus in Doha, Qatar.

Strategic Framework

- 1.1.4 Our University's [Strategic Plan for 2015-2020](#) is founded on a working environment which is inclusive and supportive; one which encourages and enables people to achieve their full career potential; one where equality and diversity are fundamental. The plan is the result of a far-ranging series of consultation workshops, open sessions and an online forum that took place across the university community and is supported by ambitious strategic and operational plans by all academic Schools.
- 1.1.5 Our vision, 'Transforming the world with greater knowledge and learning' and our [mission and values](#), underpin our ambition to be one of the world's top seats of teaching, learning and research – a progressive university that makes a difference, fostering a culture of equality and diversity, encouraging innovation, and empowering staff and students to achieve their aspirations
- 1.1.6 Our Strategic Plan has three core themes under:
- i. **People:** Providing an environment and a culture which enriches the lives of our people (students, alumni and staff), and enables them to realise their potential
 - ii. **Teaching & Learning:** Providing an outstanding educational environment
 - iii. **Research and Knowledge Exchange:** Demonstrating excellence in research and innovation.
- 1.1.7 The three themes are underpinned by nine overarching goals for 2015-20. Our annual strategic planning process and quarterly examination of a diverse set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) help us review our progress towards achievement of these goals (4.4 refers).

Organisational Structure

- 1.1.8 In August 2018 we welcomed our 14th Principal since the formation of a single University of Aberdeen from King's and Marischal Colleges in 1860, Professor George Boyne.

1.1.9 The executive Senior Management Team (SMT) and the University Management Group (UMG) advise the Principal on developing and monitoring institutional strategic direction, academic planning and cross-school and external collaborative developments. SMT comprises the Vice-

Principals, the Secretary to the University and the Directors of Finance and of People; UMG comprises SMT, Heads of Schools and Directors of Professional Services. Our organisational structure is represented below (figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: Pre-August 2018

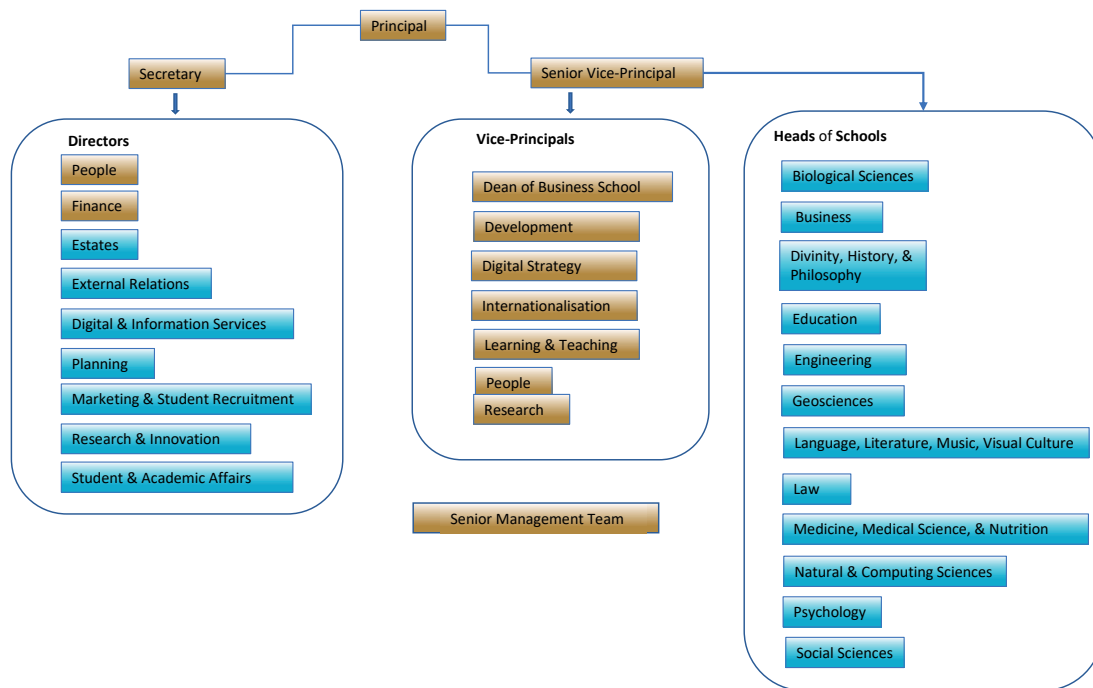
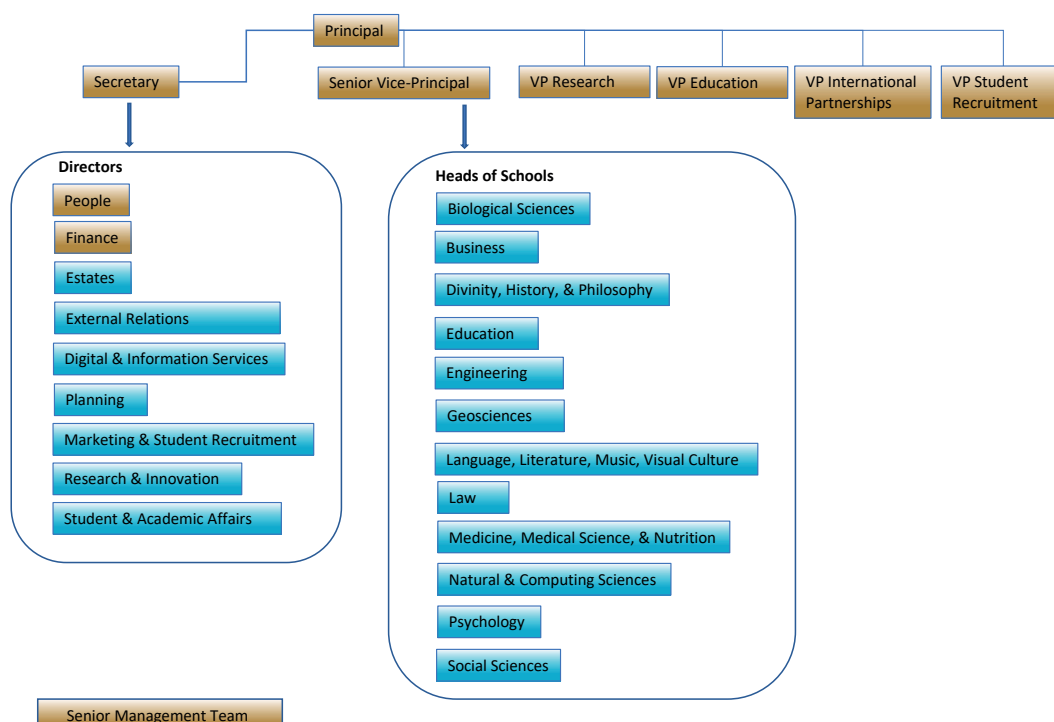


Figure 2: Post-August 2018 streamlined structure



Governance and Management

1.1.10 Our governance structure includes the **Court**, the **Operating Board** and the **Senate**. The Court's principal role is to approve the mission and strategic vision of the university, including institutional and longer-term academic and business plans, and key performance indicators, and to ensure they meet the interests of stakeholders including students, staff, alumni, local and national communities and funding bodies. Court undertook a major review of its composition to ensure it meets the new requirements of the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016 and in July 2017 Her Majesty in Council approved Ordinance 145, making Aberdeen one of the first HEI governing bodies in Scotland to comply with the requirements of the Act.



1.1.11 In 2016-17 our Court undertook an independent effectiveness review led by the Good Governance Institute in accordance with the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance. The report identified that Court and governance at Aberdeen had many strengths, in particular adherence to best practice as recommended by the current Scottish Code of Good HE Governance and the mix of skills and experience of its membership. The report offered a series of recommendations on how Court might further develop its governance practice in the future; in considering these the Court has prioritised the recommendations regarding the respective roles of Court and the Operating Board. It has since approved new articulations of the roles of both bodies which are intended to ensure the Court can have a greater focus on developing and agreeing strategy, with the Operating Board monitoring the delivery of that strategy and making proposals for approval by Court. Further consideration of the report's wider recommendations is being progressed through the course of 2017-18, while also taking into account the implications of the new Scottish Code of Good HE Governance published in October 2017.

1.1.12 Court delegates much of its detailed work to be addressed in the first instance by committees, most notably the Operating Board (to monitor the operational performance of the university and integrate academic, financial, estate and human resource planning and policy making), the Audit Committee (to provide advice to the Court on the effectiveness of the university's procedures for external and internal audit, financial control, governance and risk management), and the Governance and Nominations Committee (the lead committee of Court in matters of governance). All of these committees are formally constituted with terms of reference. Where these committees have delegated authority from the Court to take decisions on certain matters, major decisions are formally reported to the Court. Three committees are joint committees of Senate and Court, and as such include representatives of both;

these are the University Committee for Teaching and Learning (UCTL), the Student Experience Committee and the Research Policy Committee.

1.1.13 Court ensures the quality of educational provision through the review of decisions of the Senate made under its statutory powers to regulate and superintend the teaching and discipline of the university and to promote research, while the Senate has responsibility for all academic matters relating to teaching and research. The composition of Senate is 28% ex officio, 58% elected academic staff and 14% student members.

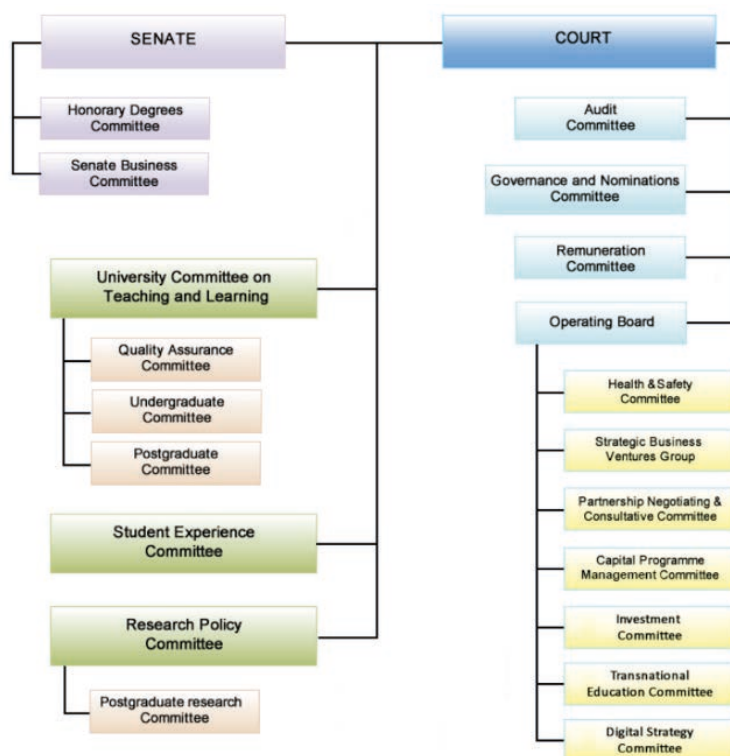
1.1.14 The Senate Business Committee (SBC) serves to shape the Senate agenda and identifies strategic issues for discussion, as well as dealing with routine elements of Senate business. In accordance with the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance 2016, a review was led by the SBC supported by an external facilitator in 2015. Key recommendations centred on establishing greater transparency of process and more effective two-way communication between the Senate, its supporting committees and the academic community. A Senate Effectiveness Review Implementation Group was established and Senate approved the associated actions in February 2016. Enhancements resulting from the review include clarity of outcomes in action required when presenting papers, a [digest](#) of agreed outcomes being posted to the Senate website within 48 hours, and attendance at Senate meetings and Senate sub-committees being published. Annual surveys are completed by members of Senate and the review by the SBC in September 2017 was that 'Senate has been more effective following the implementation of the changes arising from the Senate Effectiveness Review in 2015' (SBC minutes September 2017); the outcome of the 2017-18 survey is due to be considered by Senate at its October 2018 meeting.

1.1.15 Much of the detailed work of Senate is delegated to committees including the UCTL and its sub-committees (**Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught, and Quality Assurance**). UCTL is chaired by the Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching (VP (L&T)), and has oversight of all aspects of learning and teaching and the wider academic student experience. This includes responsibility for the assurance of the quality of our educational provision, for the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning, and for the safeguarding of academic standards. Our learning and teaching committee structures are discussed in more detail in section 3.1.



- 1.1.16 The remit and membership of our institutional committees (figure 3) are available at our [Policy and Governance](#) webpages.

Figure 3



Academic Organisation

- 1.1.17 In 2015-16, to accompany the new Strategic Plan and streamline our structure, we moved from a three-College structure, each with constituent Schools, to a School-based planning model with devolved budgetary responsibility to Schools. The overarching College structure was retained initially to support Schools in driving their strategic plans, and hold Heads of School accountable for delivery. As the devolved framework has become embedded within Schools, and with the annual five-year School Plans (4.4) now being the primary focus for the delivery of our strategic ambitions, the enabling role of the College diminished. From 2017-18 the role of College ceased and Heads of School now report directly to the Senior Vice-Principal.
- 1.1.18 Teaching is organised across 12 Schools which encompass a broad range of disciplines: Business; Divinity, History & Philosophy; Education; Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture; Law; Social Science; Natural & Computing Sciences; Engineering; Geosciences; Biological Sciences; Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition; and Psychology. The **Postgraduate Research School** (PGRS), launched in 2016-17, has institutional oversight of postgraduate research provision (2.4).
- 1.1.19 Schools are supported in regard to taught learning and teaching matters by the Deans for Undergraduate Studies and Postgraduate Studies (Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences & Business), and the Deans for Undergraduate Studies and Postgraduate Studies (Science, Engineering and Healthcare). Collectively termed the ‘teaching deans’, they chair the UCTL’s undergraduate (UGC) and taught postgraduate (PGTC) sub-committees respectively on a two-year rolling rota basis. Schools are further supported by the Dean of Quality Enhancement and Assurance, who chairs the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), and the Dean of the PGRS who chairs the Postgraduate Research Committee which reports to the Research Policy Committee. The Deans are members of Senate and UCTL.



1.1.20 Schools and the PGRS have significant autonomy to develop local best practice within overarching strategy and policy and structures agreed at university level and are encouraged to do so, not least via their membership of our Senate Task Forces on Assessment & Feedback, Retention, and Positive Outcomes. Within each School, UG teaching matters are overseen by a School TLC (or in some cases, a discipline-level teaching committee), chaired by a School Director of Teaching (DoT) who is a member of the UGC. Parallel structures pertain to PGT and PGR matters.

Professional Services

1.1.21 Our Professional Services were streamlined in 2017-18 to align them more efficiently to, and with greater focus on, the broader vision articulated within the Strategic Plan. Nine administrative directorates report to the University Secretary. Those with particular focus on the student experience are described below.

1.1.22 Our Directorate of People brings together all the central service areas supporting the delivery of our People strategy. This includes Human Resources (HR), Health, Safety & Wellbeing, the Careers Service, the Student Advice and Support Office (SASO),

the Chaplaincy and our newly established Student Experience Team (SET) which, in turn, comprises the Infohub, the International Centre and Student Engagement.

1.1.23 The Directorate of Student and Academic Affairs comprises Registry, the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) and Online Education. The Directorate has responsibility for the development and promotion of academic policy, driving forward our work in online education, the maintenance of student record systems and the timetable, student academic administration including curriculum approval, progression and graduation, eLearning, educational staff development and the Student Learning Service.

1.1.24 The Directorate of Marketing and Student Recruitment includes Erasmus, Study Abroad and International Student Exchange activities. The planning and development of Transnational Education (TNE) projects prior to them becoming 'business as usual' is coordinated by the Directorate of Planning. The Directorate of Digital and Information Services (DDIS) brings together the Library, Special Collections & Museums and Digital Services to provide an integrated experience for students.



Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA)

- 1.1.25 We have a vibrant and engaged Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) to which students receive automatic membership upon registration. The Student President is supported by four other sabbatical officers, a Chief Executive Officer and a staff group of 14. Governed by its Board of Trustees, AUSA's mission is to 'Support, Empower and Represent' students. It has worked with the university to develop a mutually supportive and respectful working partnership as exemplified in our 2018-20 [Student Partnership Agreement \(SPA\) \(2.1.5\)](#).
- 1.1.26 In line with the requirements of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, AUSA is independent of any other body, including the university. Nevertheless, the sabbatical team is involved in decision and policy making throughout the university, and represents students on all key learning and teaching committees including Court, Senate, UCTL and its sub-committees and working groups. In 2018-19 the AUSA Education Officer will be part of our agenda-setting meetings for institutional level teaching committees.
- 1.1.27 Alongside its student representative role, AUSA offers a range of activities and services to support the student experience including AUSA Advice, volunteering and part-time job opportunities, over 200 sports clubs, societies and student groups, and the Students' Charities Campaign (RAG), as well as support to our student representative system.



1.2 Composition, key trends and anticipated changes in student population, including information on retention, progression and outcomes

Composition

- 1.2.1 In 2017-18, we have a population of 13,237 FTE students, of whom 10,214 FTEs are UGs, 2,018 FTEs are PGTs and 1,005 FTEs are PGRs. This includes 9,569 FTEs whose fee status is categorised as Home/EU of which 2,928 are non-UK EU, 1,505 categorised as Rest-of-UK (RUK), and 2,163 overseas students. Of our current students, 5% are studying part-time, and just over 4% are classified as distance learners for Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) return purposes. 132 FTEs are studying at our campus in Doha, with a further 332 students participating in study that constitutes a form of collaborative arrangement with a partner institution (section 5).

Key Trends

- 1.2.2 Since the launch of the Strategic Plan our UG population has increased by 7%. Our PGT and PGR population has increased by 12% and 8% respectively since 2014-15.
- 1.2.3 Our overseas cohort has increased by 33% in the same time period, with particular growth at UG (45%) and PGR (38%). We have attracted increasing numbers of non-UK EU students in recent years and have the highest proportion of such students of all [UK Higher Education Institutions \(HEIs\)](#). In 2017-18 non-UK EU students account for 29% of our SFC fundable population, and comprise 31%, 14% and 27% of the UG, PGT and PGR cohorts respectively.
- 1.2.4 Since ELIR 3, the proportion of Scotland-domiciled undergraduate entrants from the 20% and 40% most deprived postcodes has increased by 37% (151 to 207 FTE) and 24% (370 to 459 FTE) respectively.
- 1.2.5 In December 2016, we made a strategic decision to grow our online student population and to develop a range of new online provision. In 2017-18 we launched

13 new online PGT degree programmes in the areas of business, law, engineering and health together with offering over 50 short courses on a stand-alone basis. This new provision has attracted an additional 27% of online learners (predominantly at PGT level). Additionally, we recently launched two Access courses in English and Maths at SCQF level 6 and one Maths course at SCQF level 5 which have already attracted over 365 student registrations, largely to enable their entry into the PGDE.

Population Planning and Change

1.2.6 In line with the Scottish funding model, we set student population targets as opposed to intake targets, with growth achieved through increased intakes and improved retention; since 2015, both measures are improving. Our targets are identified by level (UG, PGT, PGR) and by fee region (Home/EU, RUK, overseas).

1.2.7 **Undergraduate:** We have targeted an increase in our UG population by 3% over the lifetime of the Strategic Plan and have exceeded this at present. Given the number of Home (Scottish and EU) domiciled funded places is capped, this growth will come from international fee-paying students. We are required to manage our undergraduate Home population within the tolerance thresholds set by the SFC (currently 10% of funded numbers) and thus there is fluidity in this cohort. However, given uncertainty around future non-UK EU student recruitment due to Brexit and the predicted 8% fall in the 18-24 year-old Scottish domiciled population, we anticipate no significant growth in the number of Home/EU students by 2020. We hope to maintain the RUK population, a challenging target given increased competition with English institutions where there is no longer a cap on student numbers. The overseas UG cohort is the area in which we see opportunity for growth.

1.2.8 **Postgraduate:** We have ambitious targets to double our PGT population and expect this growth to come primarily from the overseas market and through our efforts to expand our online education provision. The

PGR market remains limited by the external funding opportunities available, but we are aiming to increase both our UK and overseas PGR cohorts by 2020.

1.2.9 We have invested heavily over the past 18 months in developing our online education provision and this strategy is pivotal in achieving our targets, particularly at PGT level. Central to delivery of our overseas student population targets is our [Internationalisation Strategy](#), which in turn is underpinned by a series of regional operational plans in priority areas: China; South East Asia and the Middle East; Sub-Saharan Africa; and the Americas.

1.2.10 We are making progress towards meeting our postgraduate 2020 targets, having already exceeded our PGR 2020 target in 2017-18. A 15% increase in international student numbers in 2017-18 has boosted our PGT numbers, aided by significant growth in PGT students from China and, to a lesser extent, the Middle East. Meeting our 2020 PGT target will challenge us, not least with the downturn in the African and South East Asia markets. We have begun exploratory work in South Africa, reviewing our activity and communication with funders in the region and increasing academic engagement to bring academics out to market to raise our profile and increase interaction to support direct conversion of students. We are in the midst of a review of our South East Asian market and have concerns as to the potential impact of funding restrictions, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia.

1.2.11 As outlined in our [Outcome Agreement](#) with the SFC, we aim to increase the proportion of Scottish-domiciled UGs from SIMD 20/40 postcodes by 1% each year to 2020. This is an ambitious target with only 4.5% of the data zones in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire in this category. We have targeted an increase of 0.5% each year to 6.3% by 2020 for entrants progressing to university from SHEP (Schools for Higher Education Programme) schools.

Non-Continuation

- 1.2.12 We continue to focus on decreasing non-continuation, particularly among our full-time UG population where the measure is most clearly defined. Non-continuation is closely monitored via our institutional strategic planning process. Our overall non-continuation rate for full time undergraduate students continues a downward trend and, at 4.3% (and 7.7% for level 1) for 2016-17, represents the lowest rate we have achieved. This performance pre-dates many additional measures that have been put in place for this session and beyond, all of which aim to further strengthen the support available to students.

Positive Outcomes

- 1.2.13 Based on the latest data available (2016-17), 95.5% of our honours graduates are in employment six months after graduation, with the numbers in graduate level employment or further study at 80.9% in 2016-17, a rise of 4.2% since 2015-16. This is very positive in the context of challenging local employment conditions and is in large part due to an increase in students entering graduate-level employment (up 4.4%). While we recognise the data have been described as experimental, the [Longitudinal Educational Outcomes \(LEO\)](#) data suggest that the students from the [majority of our subject areas have incomes](#) above the sector median one and five years post-graduation (2.6.18).

1.3

Commentary on the preparation for the ELIR, including confirmation of the nature and rationale for the contextualised range of topics included in the self-evaluation

Preparation for ELIR

- 1.3.1 The production of the Reflective Analysis (RA) and Advance Information Set (AIS) was informed by a Steering Group led by the VP (L&T) and comprising the Dean of Quality Enhancement & Assurance, (Dean QE and QA), the Deans of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students, the Deputy Academic Registrar, and the Education Officer from AUSA. Each School had an ELIR team drawn from the School L&T committees to act as a focus for communications and requests for data and feedback, and three workshops were held with ELIR School contacts to seek views on our approach to the RA's contextualisation, gather evidence, and gather feedback on the draft RA. AUSA has been involved at all stages of the process and a workshop was held with School Conveners to brief them over the ELIR process and seek their input into the RA, in particular on how best to respond to issues raised by students.
- 1.3.2 The RA was written after discussion with a wide range of colleagues from across the university. The draft RA was brought to the attention of School Executive Committees and School ELIR teams, the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committees (UGC and PGTC), UCTL, Senate and Court. Student input was co-ordinated by AUSA. The final version was approved by the Principal on behalf of Court in August 2018.



Nature and rationale for the contextualised range of topics

- 1.3.3 The Higher Education sector is going through a period of significant and rapid change, resulting in an increasingly challenging environment. Diversification of the sector, changes in delivery modes, and [financial constriction](#), are resulting in much greater competition between institutions and between traditional and alternative providers (nationally, across the UK, and internationally). In Scotland, changes in demographics over the next 10 years will result (and are resulting in) [fewer 16 -24 olds](#), the traditional undergraduate population, applying to University. Across the UK, [UCAS report](#) a 5% drop in applications for entry to university in 2018. UK Government policies are impacting on student mobility (e.g., Visa changes, Brexit). UCAS report a 7% fall in applications from rest of EU students. Scottish Government policies on [widening access](#), [Gender balance](#) in disciplines, [greater economic alignment](#), will further change the characteristics of the home domiciled population. Finally, changes in [student attitudes](#) including a more consumer-led attitude and greater scepticism of the [value for money of Higher Education](#) are placing greater requirements on Universities to ensure [accuracy and transparency](#).
- 1.3.4 As a result of the combination of the drivers highlighted above, we will face changes in the characteristics of the students we recruit and, as a consequence, significant changes in how we support and teach our students. Clearly, these factors are not unique to us, however, the makeup of our current student population means several of these factors will have (and are having) a disproportionate impact on UOA.
- 1.3.5 Based on measures of international outlook, the Times Higher Education (THE) ranked us [37th](#) in their list of the world's 200 'most international universities' in 2016. We are proud of this distinction and the learning environment created by having 120 different nationalities of student. 34% of our postgraduate taught population are international, 31% of our undergraduate

population is from the rest of the EU, with EU students making up over 40% of the UG population in 4 out of 12 Schools. This is the highest proportion of EU students in any UK Institution. The impact of border regulation, Brexit, and the extent to which the UK is seen as a welcoming destination for overseas students, will all impact more heavily on Aberdeen than many other universities. To ensure we continue to have a learning environment that benefits from as broad a cohort of international students as possible, we are offering different ways students can experience an Aberdeen education through increased online education and Transnational Education (TNE), the most significant of which to date is our overseas campus in Doha.

- 1.3.6 The Scottish Government has set a series of challenging targets around widening access and these are incorporated into our SFC Outcome Agreements. By 2021, all Scottish Universities are expected to have 10% of their intake coming from the 20% most deprived backgrounds (as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, SIMD). The problems of using the SIMD as the metric for measuring widening access in the north-east of Scotland (in particular the lack of sensitivity to rural deprivation and the relatively few SIMD20 data zones in the north-east) are already well rehearsed and were accepted by the [Widening Access Commission](#). However, SIMD continues to be the main driver in Outcome Agreement targets along with an increased focus on full-credit articulation from college. We have the [lowest percentage of SIMD20 students](#) of any Scottish institution and a relatively limited number of articulating students and so have the furthest to go if we are to achieve the targets set by the Government. Examples of our activities to encourage individuals from less represented groups to join us and to support them when they do include our new contextualised admissions and access thresholds policy, Access Aberdeen and Gateway2Medicine Schemes, increased articulation partners and pathways, alongside new transitional support arrangements.

1.3.7 The local economic environment has often been seen to behave differently to the overall Scottish and UK environment. Anecdotally, there has always been a close relationship between the local economic climate and a range of measures, including recruitment and retention. High-paid employment in the energy sector, which is not dependent on degree qualifications, has always proved an attractive option for potential and existing students, contributing to problems in recruitment and retention of local students. Therefore, the downturn in the sector might have been expected to result in a more positive environment for both recruitment and retention of local students. However, this appears to be mirrored by an impact on recruitment at both UG and PG levels, particularly in areas such as Geosciences and Engineering which, for example, have seen a 41% and 33% fall respectively in Scottish domiciled UG applications since 2015-16. However, it is also of note that the 2016-17 graduate destinations data suggest other discipline areas may have seen the biggest negative impact on [employment prospects](#), mitigated in some areas by a switch from employment to further study. To increase the competitiveness of our students in the graduate employment market, we are encouraging our students to reflect and develop their employability skills in a variety of curricula and co-curricula ways and are ensuring our portfolio of programmes is more responsive to the changing needs of the employment market.

1.3.8 We are a broad-spectrum university and have many areas that do not meet the targets set by the SFC on gender balance in disciplines. By 2030, no subject in Scottish higher education should have an overall gender imbalance greater than 75:25. Given the demographic changes and the differences in overall [application rates between Genders](#) this will be very challenging and our institutional [Gender Action Plan](#) identifies an initial set of target disciplines that do not meet the 75:25 target and actions to begin to achieve a better balance.

1.3.9 Taken together with the strategic plan which sets a goal of increasing the proportion of Postgraduate students, the drivers identified throughout **1.3** will result in a considerable shift in the characteristics of students, the types of support they require and the approaches to teaching that will be needed to ensure the very highest quality of student experience. Our reflective analysis should be seen in the context of these opportunities and challenges.

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

1.4.1 The ELIR 3 report asked us to consider six areas for development and we described in our 2015 one-year follow up report the significant headway we had made in relation to these areas. We signpost below where the ELIR Team can find details of our progress since then.

1.4.2 **Evaluating success of initiatives:** ELIR 3 asked us to give more detailed consideration to effective ways of evaluating the implementation of significant initiatives. We have developed a UMG-approved project management methodology, we pilot major projects more regularly as first steps in major change management (e.g. new periodic review process, online marking and lecture attendance monitoring), and we make greater use of metrics in our analysis (e.g. KPIs and strategic planning process, new marking scale and degree classification). RA sections **2.3**, **4.1**, **4.4** and **5** refer.

1.4.3 **Support for a more diverse student population:** ELIR 3 asked us to progress a range of intended actions related to the diversity of our student population. We have opened our very successful International Centre, have enhanced our e-resources for part-time and online students and have markedly increased the support we provide to our widening access applicants and entrants. We have extended our analysis of non-continuation and progression rates to include widening participation cohorts, although including postgraduate students remains on our 'to do' list. RA section 2 refers.

1.4.4 **Pace of responding:** ELIR 3 asked us to consider our responsiveness to external feedback and prioritise implementing our then intended revisions to the Common Assessment Scale and Annual Programme Review. A new marking scale and method for degree classification was implemented September 2014 and a new programme review process (APR), which was part of our work towards a revised periodic review process, came into being the same year. We respond to feedback carefully with regard to time, resource and competing priorities. In 2017-18, for example, we are taking through committee a number of revisions to our resit policy, prompted by feedback from our External Examiners. RA sections **4.1** and **4.5** refers.

1.4.5 **Strengthening links between assurance and enhancement:** ELIR 3 asked us to continue to develop more explicit links between our assurance processes and enhancement activities. We seek continually to develop and strengthen the links between QA and QE as exemplified by the changes made since ELIR 3 to our annual monitoring and periodic review processes. In order to increase the visible association between enhancement and assurance we have established a new role, the Dean for Quality Enhancement and Assurance, who convenes the QAC. The Dean has instigated an annual QAC Digest, annual meetings of QAC representatives and Schools and leads the institutional Enhancement Themes Steering Group, all of which engenders a more holistic approach to quality. RA section **4.1** refers.

1.4.6 **Availability of information:** ELIR 3 encouraged us to make committee minutes and papers more promptly and widely accessible to staff. Institutional level committee agendas and papers are available on StaffNet or SharePoint, with Court and Senate digests available within 48 hours. School TLC and Staff-Student Liaison committee papers are held within a joint Quality Assurance-Planning SharePoint site, governed by permission level access as appropriate. RA section **1.1** refers.

1.4.7 **Detailed use of external reference points:** ELIR 3 asked UOA to encourage more explicit engagement by staff with subject benchmark statements and other reference points. Our new course and programme approval process, Curriculum Management, requires staff to consider subject benchmark statements as standard. Our new period review process, Internal Teaching Review (ITR), requires Schools to complete curriculum maps as appropriate to their discipline(s). Our external examiners bring their expertise and knowledge of practice elsewhere, and members of staff employed as external examiners and/or PGR supervisors at other UK institutions do likewise. Reference points such as the SPARQ's Student Engagement Framework and QAA 'Focus On' projects are highlighted to Heads of School and members of UCTL and its sub-committees for further dissemination to School constituencies, and PSRBs are an invaluable resource to our externally accredited programmes. RA section **4.2** refers.

1.5 Impact of the institution's approach to engaging students in ELIR preparations

1.5.1 ELIR has shown how much our students are key partners in our QA and, particularly, our QE processes. They are represented on Court, Senate, UCTL, all our learning and teaching committees, and the ELIR steering group. All of these groups have contributed to the development of the Reflective Analysis. In addition, ELIR has been a focus of less formal groups, such as the regular meetings between the VP (L&T), elected AUSA Education Officer, and the student School Conveners (**2.1.6**). The AUSA Education Officer was also part of the ELIR preparation meeting with QAAS and the most recent annual discussion meeting focused on ELIR. As such, students have been important contributors to our reflections.



1.5.2 The development of the RA coincided with the development of our first Student Partnership Agreement (2.1.5), and these two activities have been mutually supportive, with the RA providing the added impetus to formalise the agreement.

1.5.3 Our discussions with students in regards to ELIR have provided even greater confidence that the changes to student representation proposed by the AUSA education officer and education committee (2.1.7) will further enhance our partnership working.

1.5.4 Our conversations with students have also led directly to our 2018-19 pilot of separate staff-student liaison meetings for academic and Professional Services at School level (2.1.11).

Enhancing the student learning experience: Student representation and engagement, including responding to student views

2.1 Student representation and engagement, including responding to student views

- 2.1.1 We are committed to creating a supportive and inclusive learning community. By developing a collaborative approach with our staff and students and providing a broad and coordinated curricular, co-curricular and pastoral offering, we are ensuring our students can benefit from a truly well-rounded education.

Student Engagement

- 2.1.2 Our community is built on the central pillar of student engagement and we recognise that as our student population changes, becoming ever more diverse and facing ever more demands on their time, it is an area that requires constant review and effort. We recognised this commitment and the need to ensure we maintain an institutional approach in the 'People' goals of our most recent strategic plan. As a result, in 2017 we integrated a number of different student-facing areas into our Student Experience Team and established the role of **Student Engagement Manager** to lead on the development of student engagement across the institution. The result is now detailed in our Student Engagement Development Plan. Stemming from this, we have developed a coordinated approach to student communications through the activities of our UG and PGT Engagement and Communications Groups, Graduation and Student Health and Wellbeing working groups. The Student Engagement Manager has also helped establish channels to engage students with a range of cross-institutional student support and co-curricular activity and has supported our L&T agenda by, for example, leading the development of our Student Partnership Agreement.

Communication

- 2.1.3 Led by our Student Engagement Manager, key activities over the past 18 months have included (i) a review of student communications across the institution, (ii) a communications survey to all students and (iii) a student communication Business Improvement exercise. These comprehensive analyses have helped us ascertain who/what/how and how much communication with students takes place and engendered a better understanding of the preferred ways students wish to hear from us. As such we have deployed a variety of initiatives to streamline and better target student communications. Quick wins' have included a [road show presentation](#) to Schools and Professional Services units which has encouraged greater clarity in our communications. For example, a [monthly ezine](#) (and going forward fortnightly) during term time delivers a round-up of events, news and opportunities to all students, 'Communicating with You' web pages have been developed and promoted via branded screensavers on all UOA PCs, and an overhaul of our campus promotional sites is under way. A team of [student bloggers](#) support identified student pressure points such as revision week and we are increasing our use of social media with teams across UOA sharing dynamic content, particularly video, to address specific topics such as mental health. A student summer intern is reviewing and redesigning the Infohub web pages. A number of projects are under way with Directorate of Digital and Information Services (DDIS), including streamlining the online platforms (VLE and Student Hub) and developing a new mechanism to enable us to provide more targeted, less redundant information to different cohorts of students (e.g. to Doha, PGT, online cohorts). This way, we can tailor communication to meet their needs. At the time of writing we are out to tender, with plans to 'go live' at the start of the 2018-19 academic year.

2.1.4 As a result of our focus on improving our communications, we have developed a [Student Communications Policy](#) (approved by the Student Experience Committee Spring 2018). A key aspect of this policy is designating responsibility clearly for different types of communication to different groups. With guidance as to which type of communication tool to use it is intended that all internal stakeholders will be able to ensure the right messages are being communicated at the right time and in the right way to students, so they are not bombarded by communications 'noise' in which the important messages are obscured. Launched to all staff in July 2018, via our StaffNet, E-zine, and roadshow presentations across UOA, the policy will be further promoted by identified 'Communication Champions' in each School and Professional Services area. Supporting the policy are an institution-wide diary, a suite of template styles for different message types, and an agreed process for evaluating, reporting and monitoring communication.

Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)

2.1.5 Our approach to working in partnership with our students, providing formal and informal avenues for them to engage with all aspects of their university experience, is embedded in our first **Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)**. Developed by a working group comprising representatives from AUSA, academic and Professional Services staff, and facilitated by SPARQS, our SPA was formally approved by AUSA's Student Council and Senate in April 2018, and will be launched to students, supported by an awareness campaign at the start of the 2018-19 academic year. Three broad work streams have been agreed for 2018-20 and annually, during the sabbatical handover month, we will review and agree the action plan for the forthcoming academic year. The ongoing

delivery and review of the agreement will be overseen by the Student Experience Committee with the SPA informing the Student Experience Team's annual work plan and priorities.

Student Representation

2.1.6 We enjoy a strong and positive partnership with AUSA reflected in, for example, our joint operation of the student representative system. To reflect the variety in our academic disciplines, the specifics of the system have been adjusted to reflect more closely the needs of staff and students within academic areas while ensuring strong representation. In 'professional' disciplines such as Law and Education, representation is often by level of study, in other areas by course. Co-ordination of, and communication between student representatives, and interaction between student representatives and AUSA, has been strengthened by introducing overarching [School and PG Conveners](#) who, in essence, are 'lead' student representatives. All School and PG Conveners sit on AUSA's Education Committee, a key forum for AUSA to gather student feedback on policy and discussion items going through committee. These groups also meet informally on a monthly basis with the VP (L&T) to discuss general issues and influence change. Topics covered in 2017-18 have included Lecture Capture, Learning Analytics, Culture and Community Prizes, and ELIR.

2.1.7 Feedback has suggested that communicating meaningfully with all student representatives proves challenging, particularly in large multi-discipline Schools; this can mean that student School Conveners in particular may not fully appreciate the breadth of issues and, indeed, good practice within Schools. To address this, AUSA suggested the need for a second tier of undergraduate representatives, **Discipline Representatives**. This has been adopted

SPA work streams 2018-2020

- (i) Develop and sustain an inspiring and supportive community
- (ii) Provide a range of broad, valuable and enjoyable development opportunities
- (iii) Create a culture where students are empowered to shape their learning experience

and will begin in September 2018 with the discipline representatives responsible for coordinating communication with other student representatives within their respective discipline areas and liaising with the School Convener. Further, the establishment of our institutional PGRS and PGT committees has enabled more effective PG representative structures. From 2018-19 each School will have a student PGT Convener, who will sit on a new AUSA PG Education Committee which will serve, and raise the profile, of both our PGT cohort and PGR cohorts. Going forward, it is also planned to have Online and TNE representation on both committees.

2.1.8 We have a multitude of formal mechanisms by which students have opportunity to have their voice heard and contribute to developments within courses, disciplines, Schools, and the institution. In the 2018 NSS, 90.4% of final year UG students agreed they had had the right opportunities to provide feedback on their studies and 79.8% agreed their views and opinions were valued. These figures are significantly higher than our benchmark, though we recognise in the same dataset there is further work to be done in closing the feedback loop (2.1.10).

2.1.9 AUSA is represented on all university Committees (including Court, Senate and the Senate Business Committee) institutional-level teaching and learning Steering Groups, Project Boards, Task Forces and Working Groups. School Conveners and class and programme representatives are the majority delegates of Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs). Students are members of Appeals and Complaints Panels, Disciplinary Committees, Internal Teaching Review and validation/accreditation Panels and have accompanied staff on fact-finding and QA visits to potential TNE partners. Feedback on the quality of teaching and learning of each course is by completion of Student Course Evaluation Forms (SCEF), and participation in a range of external and internal surveys, including the National Student Survey (NSS) (4.4).

2.1.10 We encourage our students to provide face-to-face feedback to academic staff and student representatives. Opportunities include via email, advertised office hours and/or School 'open door' policies; during course specific activities such as field-trips, laboratory classes, tutorials and social events; through online discussion groups via MyAberdeen and discipline specific social media groups. We have also been piloting the use of other real-time mechanisms, for example, Biological Sciences has successfully been using Bluepulse2. Our Students 4 Students (S4S) peer mentoring system for new students, School-based Buddy Systems and Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) schemes, and Personal Tutor scheme also provide opportunity for discussion and feedback on co-curricular, pastoral and academic matters. Increasingly we are using focus groups and opinion polls to open up dialogue with students (2.1.13).



Biological Sciences have piloted the use of **Bluepulse**, a system for collecting anonymous feedback from students and closing the feedback loop which can happen in real time during course, with rapid responses from staff. While uptake by staff and students was low in some courses, the feedback was typically very useful, and contributed to improvements while the courses were running. The School has shared their experiences with others via **The Power of Anonymous Feedback** exhibit at our Academic Symposium and Feedback and Assessment Task Force.

Biological Sciences will continue the pilot for 2018-19 and, with minor software changes to make it easier to track incoming student messages and alert students to feedback prompts, will encourage more widespread use throughout the school, promoting in particular its advantage of anonymous and spontaneous comments. Education will also run a trial from September 2018.

“
I like using it to reply to (other) student comments directly for more information with the ability to stay anonymous. Prefer it over SCEF as you can expand on the comments
”

Level 4 Student representative comment at SSLC



Engineering holds informal lunchtime meetings (with lunch provided) with Level 4 and Level 5 students each term. Separate meetings are held with each engineering discipline and with each level of study; the meetings are convened by the Programme Leader for the discipline and also attended by staff. The meetings provide opportunity for face-to-face feedback from students about their experience across all courses that year and their view on the actions taken by the course coordinators in response the SCEFs. Students like these meetings and have asked for the meetings to continue to be held. **Language, Literature, Music, and Visual Culture** hold similar meetings with PGT students.



Responding to Student Views

- 2.1.11 Student representation is not merely tokenistic but highly valued (NSS data **2.1.8**), and frequently leads to positive institutional and School-based change. For example, in response to feedback from AUSA, we introduced our Lecture Capture Policy, extended library hours during the resit diet, extended our policy regarding the release of exam grades, and in line with our focus on building a learning community, will introduce School level Culture and Community prizes for students in the same way we have prizes for academic excellence. The Lecture Capture policy and Culture and Community prizes in particular were championed by the AUSA Education Committee. An ELIR workshop with the VP (L&T) and School Conveners revealed a sense that School-based SSLCs often became 'bogged down' with non-academic, non-School issues, such as those relating to the estate and catering facilities. Consequently, discussion with the Directors of Estates and People have taken place and from 2018-19 we will pilot separate Professional Services SSLCs per School. School Conveners have commended those Schools, including Engineering and Natural and Computing Sciences, who use mid-term SCEF and/or other formal feedback opportunities which allow quick win action to take place during courses.
- 2.1.12 In response to the NSS, Schools develop and implement action plans around areas specific to their own results as part of the strategic planning process (**4.4**) and report to the PGT Committee their response to PTES. At an institutional level, we report key survey findings and planned actions to Senate via our annual Student Experience Report. We recognised that due to the available data sets, this report had a very heavy UG focus and PGT data was less comprehensive and liable to be lost in the larger UG dialogue. Consequently, and in line with other changes to raise the distinctive profile of PGTs, the PGT Committee was asked to review the available data sets and to come forward with plans for a more comprehensive PGT analysis comparable in richness with the UG analysis. One direct impact of this review has been the development of a new internal **Student Engagement Survey** for UG and PGT students that will provide comparable data but which will be run at times more attuned to the lifecycles of the two populations; UG in the spring, PGT in the late summer. The survey has a strong component dealing with the role of digitally-enabled education and links with our goal of using digital technology to enrich the learning of all our students (including online learners).
- 2.1.13 In 2017-18 we also devised a new student experience survey that is focused on the non-academic aspects of the student journey. This survey replaced a plethora of student-focused surveys run by individual Professional Services sections. It was piloted among student ambassadors, interns, hall residents and focus group participants to stress-test the questions and process. There are sections for new and continuing students. We plan to run the survey each autumn. Several student focus groups were held, attended by students from all levels of study, across all Schools, to garner student opinion on the following areas: accommodation, the Students' Union Building, Aberdeen Sports Village, Digital Services and MyAberdeen. Quick win outcomes have included Gaming WIFI in University accommodation, creation of 'women only' free weights sessions at ASV, improved navigation of the MyAberdeen home page, and reduced-price swim and sauna relaxation packages for students in the run-up to exams. Plans are under way with AUSA and ASV to develop a Buddy Scheme to encourage more students to take up sport.
- ### Student Feedback Framework
- 2.1.14 NSS data (**2.1.8**) indicates our students have a positive view of the opportunities they are given to provide feedback and the value staff attach to their views. However, students are less clear on how their feedback has been acted on. Given that in many instances the feedback is acted on and, if not it is for sound pedagogic/practical reasons, this highlights a communication issue. Schools

have been encouraged to look closely at how they feedback on course changes to students and the sharing of best practice. The Assessment and Feedback Task Force has been facilitating this (2.3.14). In the 2018 NSS data we have improved our students' perception of how their feedback has been acted on by 3.4%.

- 2.1.15 For non-academic issues, we have developed our [Student Feedback Framework](#) to coordinate and triangulate student feedback from our mass surveys, focus groups, polls and ad hoc feedback. Crucially the framework outlines our methods to articulate to students our responses or

reasons for apparent lack of response to their feedback. Embedded within the framework is the Student Experience Survey, a timetable of targeted Focus Groups and new initiatives for 2018-19 such as 'ASK' Open Forum sessions with members of university management and identified metrics for measuring success of the framework itself. An, "[InForm, Feedback for your Future](#)" campaign has been developed to help raise student and staff awareness of changes resulting from student feedback. A number of instant feedback mechanisms, including feedback stations in key locations and an online feedback form, will support the framework.



*"Conducting student focus groups was a crucial component of my internship – to inform the next stage of development of the VLE. Having the **student feedback framework** to tap into made the process much easier and helped with recruiting students, facilitating the discussions and informing students on improvements"*

3rd Year undergraduate International Relations - Language and Linguistics

'You Said, We Did' 2017-2018

Institution:

- (i) Lecture Capture Policy, approved by Senate February 2018;
- (ii) Divorce non-academic issues from Staff-Student Liaison Committees;
- (iii) Introduce a Culture and Community Prize in Schools;
- (iv) Extended library opening hours during resit diets and additional computer facilities.

Schools:

- (i) **Psychology** has changed the main level 1 course reader to one including MCQs and flashcards, and introduced weekly tasks to help structure independent study;
- (ii) Formative tests in **Accountancy & Finance** are now on-line to facilitate speedier feedback;
- (iii) **Biological Sciences** have trialled BluePulse2 software to gather rapid, anonymous feedback; in some classes the student representatives have provided the questions to be posed;
- (iv) **Archaeology** has restructured the dissertation preparation support to students introducing new topics including peer reading review, analysis of scientific papers and instruction in graphical expectations;
- (v) **Politics and International Relations** have amended the format of level 1 tutorials by introducing 10 minute small group discussions to facilitate increased student participation in plenary discussions;
- (vi) **Geology** revamped its approach to feedback for a level 4 field trip project undertaken during the summer vacation; feedback is now timelier and includes verbal feedback in a one-to-one interview environment.

Schools provide 'You Said, We Did' feedback in a variety of ways such as newsletters ([Psychology](#)), posters ([Law](#)) and annotated SSLC minutes ([Hispanic Studies](#)).

Non-academic:

- (vii) Sport Buddy Scheme to encourage more students to take up sport ;
- (viii) Review of MyAberdeen VLE and Student Hub overlap and posting of MyAberdeen resources to the Learner's Toolkit for staff and students; investigation of a single login environment for students ;
- (ix) Reviewed guidance on Printing, Scanning, Copying, and file storage; improved communication on where to find free PCs in study spaces;
- (x) Gaming Networks in Halls.



2.2 Recognising and responding to equality and diversity in the student population, including widening access and mode and location of study

2.2.1 With our increasingly diverse student (and staff) population we are committed to inclusivity to ensure that all staff and students can fulfil their work and academic ambitions. We have developed an ambitious plan to mainstream equality into our policies, processes and activities. The importance we afford to this area is evidenced by the creation of equality networks and champions across the university, along with the introduction of linked KPIs.

2.2.2 We described in ELIR 3 our equality governance structures, notably our **Advisory Group on E&D (AGED)**, our **institutional E&D Adviser** who works closely with Student Support Advisers, Student Learning Service, HR and academic areas to keep informed of the E&D issues raised by students and staff. We also described our **Equality Impact Assessment Strategy (EQIA)** and **Impact Assessment Toolkit** against which we assess new policies and procedures to avoid discrimination or unfair treatment in implementation. Our **Equality Networks** (Disability, LGBT+, Senior Women) give guidance and feedback on policy development and Equality Impact Assessments and provide a support service for individuals who identify with one of the protected characteristics. Our **E&D Policy and Code for Staff and Students** (to be revised summer 2018 to include a Diversity and Inclusion Policy) outlines our responsibilities and intent. **E&D e-training** is mandatory to all staff, and embedded in all training for all new probationary lecturers, tutors, demonstrators, researchers and PGR students; 85% of staff have completed it to date. All teaching staff at our campus in Doha undertake the same E&D online training packages as staff at Aberdeen and they attended an E&D training session with our UOA Provost in Doha on our E&D policies and procedures. Each School has an Athena Swan self-assessment team working on gender equality.

2.2.3 These structures remain in place and have been strengthened and extended. We recently revised AGED's remit to include intersectionality and its composition has been extended to enhance its diversity profile and ensure involvement from a wide cross-section of our UOA community. Our E&D networks are dynamic and a source of advice, and fresh direction; all formally report to AGED. Under their stewardship we have made a submission to the Stonewall Equality Index and we are signatories to the Stonewall No Bystanders Pledge. Following consultation with students, a new policy for supporting transgender students will be implemented by summer 2018, supported by training delivered by the Scottish Transgender Alliance. Our Disability Network works with our Directorate of Estates to provide feedback on projects and we are a **Disability Confident** organisation. We are seeking volunteers to help us develop two new network groups: Race Equality and Carers. 11 out of 15 of our Schools and **Institutes** have received the Athena SWAN bronze award; the remainder are under application for accreditation in 2018 including one for a silver award. At institutional level we renewed our bronze award in November 2016 and are on schedule to apply for silver in April 2020.

2.2.4 We are fully compliant with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Our E&D Policy and Code for Staff and Students, Equality Impact Assessment Strategy (EQIA), Impact Assessment Toolkit and Public Sector Reporting Duty reports are available from our **E&D webpages**. Our EQIA and Toolkit is in the process of being enhanced and to facilitate this we have been accepted on to the ECU's project to support the sector to deliver equality impact assessments which are timely and meaningful. We have developed stand-alone strategies to address institutional priorities, for example, our Religion and Belief Policy, Gender Action Plan, Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Student Carers Policy. We published our updated Equality Mainstreaming and Outcomes Report and associated action plan in 2017. We adhere to the principles

of the Scottish Government's Equalities and Human Rights Committee: Universities and Disabilities report, Race Equality Framework (2016-20), engage fully with the ECU Scottish Race Equality Forum and we are committed to the recruitment (and retention) of students across all protected characteristic groupings. We were a part of the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) [Attracting Diversity project](#) which has enhanced our understanding of issues in relation to protected characteristics in regard to recruitment, and has fed directly into the development of our Gender Action Plan and Contextualised Admissions and Access Policy. We are in the process of developing or British Sign Language (BSL) Action Plan in line with the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 and are planning joint consultation events with local HEIs, North East Sensory Services and Deaf Action to ensure that the views of BSL users are fully captured.

2.2.5 Central to the success of our E&D policies and action plans is supporting and raising awareness among our students and staff. For students, we have developed E&D training within our prescribed level 1 [online Professional Skills course](#). This course is targeted at students entering the university and has an 86% completion rate to date. The Chair of AGED and our E&D Adviser engage directly with Schools and Professional Services areas, to raise awareness. Updates appear in the weekly StaffNet email communication.

2.2.6 Students are represented on AGED. AUSA has its own fora that look at issues linked to LGBT, Black and Minority, and Women and Non-Binary groups and we regularly engage with them to develop our practices and policy. Recently we have been working with AUSA on its Students against Sexual Assault (SASA) campaign, with one of our student interns supporting the work. A joint statement underlining our shared commitment to eradicate hostile behaviours and the steps that will be taken to achieve this has been signed by AUSA and UOA in February 2018. A draft policy and procedure, informed by a survey of staff

and students to measure their experience of these behaviours on campus, and their awareness of UOA procedures and reporting mechanisms, is going through our committee process and is scheduled to go to Court in October 2018. We will roll out the Equally Safe in Higher Education toolkit focused on gender-based violence in 2018-19.

Gender

2.2.7 Our ambitious plans around gender equality are outlined in our 2017 **Gender Action Plan (GAP)** and underpinned by our commitment to the Athena SWAN process, which engages all Schools and Institutes. In line with the policies of the Scottish Government, we have committed to improving the gender balance in all subjects where there is an imbalance of 75%/25% or more, by a minimum 1% year-on-year. Strategically we are prioritising Physics, Computing Science, Psychology and Education as (i) internal data indicates they have the most consistent gender imbalances across the Scottish-domiciled population, (ii) STEM based subjects and Education are each SFC priorities and (iii) all were subject to focus under the ECU Attracting Diversity project. Key activities to date have included involving students on Athena SWAN self-assessment teams, ensuring gender balance in role models in open days, websites and prospectuses and establishing a Parents' Room in the Students' Union building. Gender-related targets are monitored via institutional KPIs and we are participating in the joint NUS-SPARQS project on engaging students with gender action plans; we hope this will be significant in ensuring effective student engagement in the ongoing development, not only of our GAP, but other strategy development.

We have hosted [Girls in Engineering](#) conferences with Engineering and local schools for several years and a rebadged [Women in Engineering Summer Conference](#) has been organised for summer 2018.

2.2.8 With activities centred on influencing the influencers (parents, teachers, careers advisers), and raising awareness and aspirations, we have placed particular focus on outreach work at primary and secondary school level and so Student Recruitment and Admissions Service (SRAS) now monitor more closely the gender profile of staff attending these activities. We were central to establishing a Regional Gender Group, GENES, to develop a series of events to promote gender equality to engage prospective students, their parents/carers.

Health & Wellbeing

2.2.9 In response to the increasing number of mental health issues reported by our students, we launched our [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) and supporting action plan in 2016 to enhance the support to both staff and students. We have appointed a Mental Health Adviser (MHA) to the Student Advice and Support Office (SASO) who, in addition to managing a caseload, advises UOA support services, academic colleagues and those who support students in Halls of Residence. We have refocused the work of our Counselling Service to cater solely for students, hosted Wellbeing Days for students (and staff) and identified mental health champions

to signpost staff and students to support mechanisms. We run a two-day certificated Mental Health First Aid training course and we have just launched a half-day course, "Understanding Mental Health – Key Challenges and Available Support", for those who cannot commit to attend for two days. These courses are all frequently booked up a long while in advance. Workshops to raise awareness have been delivered to personal tutors and Schools. Students are being recruited to take part in a peer-led mental health and wellbeing group and to participate in a Peer-2-Peer group focused on developing confidence and building skills in peer support.

Support for All

2.2.10 In ELIR 3 we highlighted the sources of institutional support on non-academic matters available to all students. Sources include the Careers Service, Student Advice & Support Office (SASO), Counselling Service, Student Resident Assistants (SRAs) in university accommodation, and the Chaplaincy within the Directorate of People; Registry and the Student Learning Service (SLS) within the Directorate of Student and Academic Affairs; and the Language Centre. We have a variety of mechanisms, including personal tutors and Students for Students (S4S) that provide avenues of support for pastoral and social matters, as well as academic.

At a School level, examples of initiatives aimed at improving the experience of students who experience mental health conditions and difficulties include an away day for staff in **Language Literature, Music and Visual Culture** to explore extension and attendance policies, absence reporting and disability provisions and the curriculum design. The **Business School** have introduced a policy ensuring that feedback and news about results is not given to students on a Friday. Results that may disappoint students are discussed in a face-to-face meeting where there is an opportunity to provide advice and support.



- 2.2.11 Our new Student Experience Team (SET) comprises the Infohub, the International Centre and Student Engagement Manager and supports all aspects of the student experience from the point that a student accepts their offer to study until they become Alumni. The Infohub is our in-person and online information and advice service for all students, for all student-facing services; it also co-ordinates our Personal Tutoring and Students 4 Students (S4S) Schemes. The SET teams work closely with AUSA on a variety of initiatives to further improve the student experience.
- 2.2.12 SET coordinates our [award winning CluedUp campaign](#) for student health and wellbeing which includes our [CluedUp website](#), a student-facing portal which signposts and directs students to relevant

CluedUP, our innovative student health, safety and wellbeing campaign, triumphed at the 2015 CUBO Awards. Central to the campaign was the development of partnerships with organisations in the local community and beyond, such as Police Scotland, Aberdeen City Council, NHS Scotland and First Bus.

"CluedUp is a brilliant resource! The dedicated Health and Wellbeing website is a one stop shop for everything a student needs to know about Health and Wellbeing. The on campus events and student led monthly blogs provide loads of information and great hints and tips!"
- Final year undergraduate, International Relations and Hispanic Studies



WWW.ABDN.AC.UK/CLUEDUP

services, information, and resources (internal and external) which will support them in maintaining good health and wellbeing. Key features include [student blogs](#) and testimonials linked to key pressure points for students throughout the year, general tips on health and wellbeing, key contacts and interactive content. CluedUp is actively marketed via social media posts on topical issues, student blogs, and an awareness campaign including promotional material such as key fobs on all halls of residence keys. It articulates our commitment to Health and Wellbeing and enables us to monitor and track engagement. In the first two months of campaign re-launch, the website received over 4682 unique user page views compared with 451 for the same timeframe the previous year. Additionally, social media blogs achieved a reach ranging from 2.8K on top tips for exam revision, to over 3K for a post sharing wellbeing tips, reaching and engaging more students than before.

- 2.2.13 Complementary to our own provision, AUSA Advice offers free and impartial help to students. AUSA Advice provide support with a range of issues from academic advice, health & wellbeing, part-time employment and housing. AUSA Advice also provide a comprehensive resource of private accommodation which is available online and run events during revision week to help combat stress among students. AUSA also has an overnight support service, Niteline.

New Aberdeen Campus Students

- 2.2.14 A positive transition is vital to ensure students settle into their new life at Aberdeen, and key to that is making them feel they are a part of our community.
- 2.2.15 We begin the process of trying to create a feeling of belonging when an individual makes first contact with us. Our Enquiry and Conversion Team in the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service (SRAS) has transformed enquiry management and conversion services. We have introduced a live chat service and emails have a target turnaround time of one working day; approximately 3500 emails and 500 live chats

are received each month. To help further the process of building a sense of community we have regular, bespoke email messaging from academic Schools to applicants and offer holders. To support our international audience we now offer free English language support from a current student; during summer 2017, 700 offer holders from over 60 countries took part, with the project winning a national award and the conversion rate of participants being 11% higher than for non-participants. SRAS continue to develop creative ways of engaging with prospective students with, for example, live interviews on social media with students and staff in the home languages of our target markets.

Our **International Centre** won the bronze award for the International Orientation 2016 at the [2017 Heist Awards](#), which celebrates excellence and innovation in education marketing. In winning Bronze the judges said:

"This project demonstrates an admirable degree of personal determination to achieve a win-win situation, where local volunteer institutions were able to reach their target audience and the University of Aberdeen's international students received a thorough briefing of local travel attractions."

Based on this success, and overwhelmingly positive feedback, we subsequently rolled out the programme to all students in September 2017. Taking the form of a [conference-style event](#), students select their own schedule, choosing from workshops and presentations on subjects including banking in the UK, the NHS, study skills, private accommodation, cultural adjustment and library & IT skills. A smaller scale version was piloted in 2018 for PGT January starts and will be continued going forward.



2.2.16 We established separate **UG and PGT Engagement and Communications Groups** to ensure students receive the right information at the right time and without unplanned duplication. These groups, chaired by the UG and PGT Deans respectively, have representation from each School. The groups developed a single, agreed, communications plan ensuring coherency and consistency of message and service for all enquirers and offer holders, drip-feeding the information applicants/offer holders need to know, when they need to know it. An unintended, yet nevertheless big win for the groups, has been the cross-institutional education of different parties as to key stress points and rationale for deadlines, allowing collaborative working to develop a plan that is achievable and works for all.

2.2.17 Coordinated by the SET, the [New Students' webpages](#) promote all orientation and academic induction activities together with a wealth of resources and guidance. A Welcome Week Working Group brings staff from Schools, Professional Services areas and students together to enhance coordination of all induction and orientation activity, and transition communication has been enhanced. In 2017 we launched an enhanced Student Orientation initiative for all students following a successful pilot for international students in 2016 which won Bronze at the [2017 Heist Awards](#).

2.2.18 A programme of welcome talks and events is delivered by the Community Liaison Officer and Student Resident Assistants (SRAs) at our large Hillhead halls of residence during Welcome Week. Students meet their fellow residents and staff and find out about available support services and the events programme planned in halls for the year. A weekly programme of events runs throughout the year incorporating social, cultural, life skills and wellbeing activities in order to build an inclusive community in a welcoming environment.

2.2.19 The team at the Halls of Residence work very closely with Student Support, including the Mental Health Adviser. All SRAs receive appropriate training, including Applied Suicide Intervention Training (ASIST) and sessions from organisations who deal with abuse and dependencies. Informal visits have helped build relationships and trust with residents so that difficulties are identified early and resolved more quickly. There has been a decline in the number of residents referred to disciplinary panels, indicating that the welfare support in the halls is working well.

Disabled Students

2.2.20 Applicants are invited to disclose disability-related requirements; those who do so are contacted by the Student Advice and Support Office (SASO) and invited to speak with a [disability adviser](#). We run an annual two-day transition event for students on the Autistic spectrum. The SASO liaises with accommodation, CAD, libraries, IT and School disability coordinators to share relevant student needs information. We pre-screen and assess dyslexia and other learning differences in-house, help with applications for Disabled Students' Allowance, and have a dedicated specialist Academic Skills Adviser (Dyslexia), IT Assistive Technology Advisers, and our MHA. As part of CluedUp we have scheduled a series of blogs to raise awareness of the support available for visually impaired students and those with other disabilities and mental health issues.

Care Experienced Students

2.2.21 We guarantee an offer of entry to any care-experienced applicant who meets the minimum entry requirements. We provide a range of support mechanisms and services tailored to meet the needs of individual care experienced students, including year-round accommodation, financial assistance and additional advice and support on a range of issues. Our [Corporate Parenting Plan \(CPP\)](#) in line with the Children and Young Person's (Scotland) Act 2014 was published in 2016.

2.2.22 As well as supporting care-experienced students, we are committed to supporting students who may themselves have caring responsibilities and work in support of the Going Higher in Scotland Campaign undertaken by the Carers Trust

2.2.23 Our [Student Carers Policy](#) was formally launched with the Carers Trust Scotland in spring 2018, and in July 2018 we received the Carers Trust's [Going Higher for Student Carers Recognition Award](#).

2.2.24 With colleagues from North East Scotland College (NESCOL) and RGU, we held an information and awareness raising event for our students' associations focused on the support needs and provision for care-experienced students, student carers and students who are estranged from their families.



Widening Access

- 2.2.25 We are committed to widening access (WA) and believe it enhances the environment for all our students. Recognising that not everyone has had the same opportunity to meet our typical entry requirements, we have employed the use of contextualised admissions for a number of years. We formalised our approach in 2017-18 by making this more explicit by publishing our **Contextualised Admissions and Access Threshold Policy**. We were among the first to publish access thresholds.
- 2.2.26 We continue to focus activities on under-represented groups, particularly those from low progression schools in the region, SIMD 20/40 residents and care leavers. We described in detail in ELIR 3 our **Reach** (for Law and Medicine applicants from low progression schools) and **Summer School for Access** (for those whose current qualifications do not reflect their potential for degree study) programmes. We have launched two new schemes: **Access Aberdeen** and **Gateway2Medicine**. Access Aberdeen (for pupils in low progression schools and their feeder primary schools, and those residing in SIMD 20 areas across NE Scotland) offers a range of activities and events (including on-campus activities and individual support) to support, inform and encourage pupils when making post-school study choices. Gateway2Medicine, G2M, is a joint venture with NESCOL to widen access to medicine for students from SIMD20 and other under-represented backgrounds such as those from remote and rural areas. Funded by the Scottish Government, students undertake a one-year Certificate in Pre-Medical Studies successful completion of which, alongside satisfactory performance at interview and the UK Clinical Aptitude Test (UKCAT), gives entry to our MBChB programme.
- 2.2.27 We aim to increase further the numbers articulating from FE Colleges with advanced standing (2.6.6). Noting an increase in college students applying to lower years of study, rather than advanced entry, we are piloting a system for September 2018 entry whereby applicants are guided as to the most appropriate pathways, considering their social and personal factors as well as academic qualifications, and will continue this during 2018-19. In 2017-18 we reviewed our existing articulation agreements to ensure all routes offered full credit transition; where this is not possible due to curricula disparity we are working with college partners to deliver the additional content required. One example of this is the Transitional Summer School bridging programme (see 2.3.5). We have established new articulation routes with new and existing providers (including Fife College, Forth Valley, and New College Lanarkshire) developing new discipline tracks with Social Sciences, Biological Sciences and Engineering; all new partnerships and routes are full credit articulations. We introduced annual Articulation Days and these have proved very successful with student approval ratings approaching 90%.
- 2.2.28 We have established an Articulation Working Group who are developing a strategy for articulation working with our current partners on more advanced partnerships (i.e. not limited to HN pathways). We are also working to standardise some of our most common pathways so we can, from autumn 2018, publish Scotland-wide requirements to inform students at any Scottish College of the opportunities to articulate to Aberdeen.
- 2.2.29 Pre-arrival support for students from our widening access initiatives is centred on inspiring pupils and ensuring the correct information enables them to make the most informed decision about post-school options. Support includes presentations for pupils, staff or parents on aspects of university life (including finance), on-campus activities (discipline visits, meetings with academic (and other) staff, lecture attendance, tours), careers events, and individual support. The latter might include help with UCAS applications and/or guidance on support for individual needs such as bursaries, free accommodation, and information about our corporate parenting policy. All students are given a named

contact in the team for widening access, who they will have met in person, with whom to follow up any queries or concerns during the application and registration process. We engage regularly with our student body to help inform the pre-arrival support we offer. For example, students take the lead on Facebook support, registered articulating students helped inform the development of the Engineering Transitional Summer School and we employed an Engineering student specifically to support the students while on the summer school.

2.2.30 Once registered, students from WA are supported within our standard support structures, with additional support offered in schools and from the team for WA. For example, given that they have a relatively high number of articulating students, Computing Science and Engineering have specific members of staff whose role it is to support them. All students from WA are encouraged to approach our team for WA, with whom they have built up positive relationships before and during application. Students who have entered through our Summer School for Access have scheduled monthly drop-in sessions with the team for WA. Students entering via REACH or who have articulated can make use of closed Facebook pages that also include staff, and one-to-one support is provided for care-experienced students, tailored to meet their individual needs (including weekly meetings with a WA Officer as required). At the time of writing we have established a network group for staff and students in caring roles to offer pastoral peer support and an opportunity to influence or feed into support policies and mechanisms for other carers going forward. This group will meet for the first time in autumn 2018.

2.2.31 Students from lower-income backgrounds tend to enrol in local universities to minimise costs. To attract and support students from across Scotland we offer free accommodation to all SIMD20 students entering their first year of study, Summer School for Access entrants, Transitional Summer School Students and to students

enrolling on G2M. We also offer a range of [scholarships](#) to students from WA, designed to enhance not only recruitment, but also retention over the course of the degree programme. We recognise there is work to be done to encourage students to apply and take up these opportunities.

Non-UK Students

2.2.32 We believe all students benefit from studying in a vibrant international environment, so maintaining and enhancing our international community remains a key strategic priority

2.2.33 To support our non-UK students we offer a range of additional activities including online International Open Days, online pre-departure briefing sessions, arrangements for meeting students on arrival, and information about living in Aberdeen. Since ELIR3 we have a number of new initiatives and developments to support our non-UK students, including:

- Pre-arrival practical support including online courses and videos to help prepare students culturally and to manage their expectations about university life on topics such as how to get to/from the airport and train station, spending time on campus at Christmas, practising different faiths in Aberdeen, and grocery shopping in a new city;
- Development of our [International Centre](#) which, staffed by a team of student volunteers, organise a variety of activities and events in and out with term-time for students to meet and make friendships with others from their own and other cultures. Volunteers are paid and are eligible to participate in our STAR co-curricular award ([2.3.27](#));
- English, Arabic, German, Spanish and Japanese Language Groups allow volunteers to practise language skills;
- Working with the PGRS the Centre hosts 'Global Families', social get togethers for PGR students who have brought their families to Aberdeen.

2.2.34 We strive to make the visa application process less stressful for students. Our International Student Advisors provide a human face (in addition to [online information](#)) to what can seem a very bureaucratic procedure, endeavouring to manage difficult immigration rule changes ensuring, as far as possible, that students who are affected by these changes are kept informed and are offered advice throughout the visa application process.

Online Education

2.2.35 As a largely campus-based institution, we have previously offered relatively few online educational courses/programmes. As part of our strategy to diversify further our student population, we are investing heavily in developing our portfolio of flexible online programmes and courses. These offerings, notably in Business, Health, Law, Education, and Engineering, are a mix of fully online provision and more blended approaches and cover PGT programmes and stand-alone short courses, CPD and access courses. We provide flexible study pathways based on a 'building block' and pay-as-you approach, along with the opportunity for some self-assessment of course eligibility.

2.2.36 Online learners bring a very different set of needs and expectations to study. We have developed an Online Education community area in our MyAberdeen VLE to engage with online learners and to facilitate communication among the students to help engender a feeling of being part of our UOA 'learning community'. This area has been used to facilitate focus groups and [survey](#) the students to enhance their online learning experience. Facilitated by SPARQS, we have explored how we can develop more effective methods to support online students and also for them, in turn, to impact on their own learning. As such we are developing more appropriate systems to support the application, registration, and induction of online learners. To further develop a community for our online learners and, as the traditional method of student representation is not appropriate for

online, we are investigating the use of other approaches to collecting and responding to feedback which better suit the online environment. We will also be engaging online learners with campus-based initiatives such as the Welcome Week competition and student bloggers. Our work with SPARQS contributed to their [Engaging Students in Online Distance Learning](#) resource.

TNE Students

2.2.37 Personal tutors are allocated to all students. Our students in Doha are served by a student support team, including a Wellbeing Officer; there is a medical clinic with nurse and nursing facilities onsite. We have ensured that students have access to equivalent resources; for example, we have a contract in place with a Doha facility for assessment of specific learning differences, disability requirements are discussed and addressed in the same manner as at UOA, and a number of students get financial assistance to help with tuition fees and in return they take on ambassadorial volunteering work. Students in Doha access the Aberdeen Counselling Service via Skype and Collaborate and the Wellbeing Officer is being mentored by our Head of the Counselling Service and is undertaking a Counselling Skills Course in Doha. A detailed programme of orientation events, including sessions with AUSA representatives from Aberdeen, occurs the week before teaching in Doha begins. UOA policies such as our Maternity Policy have been adapted to address differences in legislative requirements. Recognising the different cultural and religious expectations in Qatar, we have made special provision including separate male and female prayer rooms, separate fitness rooms, and students may leave the classroom for prayer. That said, the students are there to experience a UK education, so teaching and common room areas are not segregated and, via the use of collaborate and live streaming, we ensured students in Doha were involved in the Aberdeen-based International Women's Day events. Work is under way to develop our online professional courses for students on the Doha campus.

2.3 Supporting Students in their Learning at each stage of the Learner Journey

Pre-admissions including Outreach and Articulation

- 2.3.1 Through our work with the [Children's University](#), CU, we collaborate with Aberdeenshire Council to engage pupils from Primary 7 upwards, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, in educational and active extra-curricular activities outside school time in several of

our target schools. CU pupils graduate at a special ceremony linked with our summer graduations programme, which helps to bring children and their parents to our campus, and provides an opportunity to meet with staff and students. This gives the pupils and their parents an experience of graduation. Our fourth such graduation took place in June 2018, with 75 pupils from eight schools taking part and 226 family members in attendance.

Business Conference for Secondary Pupils:

Consultation with a number of local schools revealed a desire to raise pupil aspirations and provide opportunities for them to gain an understanding and experience of business-related subjects. A curriculum-based discussion by Business School colleagues with a local network of teachers encouraged plans to host a conference, on campus, in September 2018. Participating S5 and S6 pupils will experience what it is like to be a student; attending short lectures in each of the Business School's disciplines, listening to talks by alumni and student ambassadors, joining interactive activities, campus tours including a visit to our Trading Room and, over lunch, networking with staff, students and colleagues from SRAS and the Careers Service.



2.3.2 We support local authorities with a number of initiatives aimed at secondary education via our [S6 Enhancement](#). These include offering CPD events for Biology teachers to assist in the delivery of the new Higher and Advanced Higher Biology curriculum, and CPD for Chemistry is being discussed with the Royal Society of Chemistry. We have offered S6 labs days for Chemistry and Biology students for a number of years, supporting their completion of Advanced Highers. Chemistry is exploring extending School workshop visits to S4 pupils, with a specific focus on supporting local low-progression Schools. This year our S6 enhancement programme will be extended to the Humanities with English, History, and Sociology taking part. We offer online Maths and English Access courses including a Maths course at SCQF level 5 in line with GTCS requirements, to support students in entering PDGE Secondary Education programmes and the local need for more teachers. We are now exploring further opportunities for similar initiatives, including a SCQF level 7 Maths course with components tailored to support those wishing to study Engineering. Computing Science, and other physical sciences. Access Aberdeen offers a range of activities including revision schools to support pupils' learning pre-admission and we are in the throes of planning a Business Conference for secondary pupils for summer 2018.

2.3.3 Gateway2Medicine, G2M provides 20 places per year for students to do a one year Certificate in Pre-Medical Studies. The first-half session taken at NESCOL comprises courses from the HNC/HND in Applied Sciences with the second half-session at UOA comprising level one courses from the medical sciences BSc programmes. Students have academic and pastoral support throughout from a dedicated G2M tutor and have specific training for the MMI and the UKCAT. NHS Grampian support the programme by offering all students training and employment as bank health care support workers. In the first run of the programme in the 2017-18 session, 21 students were recruited. Six of these qualified

outright through an SIMD20 postcode and/or coming from a care background. Of the remaining 15, a further nine came from a remote rural background. The programme has therefore resulted in recruitment of a cohort of students who would not have qualified under the conventional SIMD20 criteria. At the time of writing, all students are still in the programme and on track to comfortably pass all their courses. A mixed methods evaluation of the programme including qualitative work with all G2M stakeholders is under way including dialogue with the cohort to explore their experience of medical school, influences on their career intentions and their ultimate careers destination.

2.3.4 We have initiatives in place to help care-experienced pupils in primary and secondary education with the long-term aim of enhancing educational attainment and widening access and participation. This includes our Homework Club, which offers local care-experienced secondary school pupils a supportive learning environment to complete their homework and revise for exams. Our pilot Volunteer Classroom Assistant scheme helps trained students support primary school pupils in literacy and numeracy skills in the classroom under the supervision of the teacher.

Transitional Support

2.3.5 Several initiatives help prepare our incoming students for their studies. In 2017 we piloted a two-week [Engineering Transitional Summer School](#) for articulating students. The event focused on key areas articulating students had previously expressed concerns over their preparedness for: mathematics, MATLAB, materials science and integration into university life. It offered an intensive timetable that included a mixture of skills modules and academic classes. Students were given free accommodation and lunch for the duration of the Summer School to reduce barriers to participation. Impact has been impressive (2.6.15). Geosciences runs a series of Maths and Earth Sciences workshops during Freshers' Week for its MSc Geophysics and MSc Reservoir

Engineering PGTs to which students studying our Petroleum Engineering and Oil and Gas Engineering programmes are invited. Voluntary in nature, student participation has increased year on year and staff “have certainly seen the benefit more on the maths side of things” and report that “students are generally more confident with more positive disposition towards the main courses compared with the period when the courses were not running”. In Medical Sciences, our online Understanding the Body MOOCs were developed as an access route for our MSc degrees in Clinical Nutrition and Human Nutrition. Now hosted on the FutureLearn platform for increased accessibility/visibility, the programme runs continually throughout the year and is open to anyone with an interest in developing their science knowledge, and is a condition of offer to some applicants who do not have enough sciences at UG level; approximately 0.5% of participants are MSc offer holders.

Learning Support: Structures

2.3.6 In line with many other Scottish HEIs we offer students a highly flexible curriculum with over 700 programmes and in excess of 5,500 courses. A significant number of students who come to Aberdeen intending to study one programme switch (sometimes more than once) and graduate with a different degree, often in a different discipline area. In order to allow students to fully exploit this flexibility, (and navigate the complexity) in 2015-16 we introduced our new process for course choice and registration. This included an enhanced **Catalogue of Courses**, an online course choice system, **MyCurriculum**, and a personalised timetabling system, **MyTimetable**; the latter in response to requests from students for a tailored calendaring tool. In addition to providing students with the courses they are required to take as part of their current degree prescription, MyCurriculum also provides students with the ability to see and select all the other courses they are eligible to take and which will timetable for them. It also allows students to see what alternative degree pathways are possible based on their existing course

choices. Despite enhancements to address teething problems with the MyCurriculum system, student registration during 2016-17 remained a less than satisfactory experience for students. An extremely high volume of (often duplicated) support queries required the temporary secondment of colleagues from many Professional Services areas to assist in responding to requests to allow the MyCurriculum team to investigate and resolve the more complex issues. A cross-institutional working group, chaired by our University Secretary, introduced a number of enhancements including new supporting materials and support mechanisms. This included Web Chat staffed by student ambassadors, a review and redesign of email communications with clearer guidance, and course choice advice from School being produced in addition to a Learner’s Toolkit video to provide guidance on the course selection process. To improve the in-person experience, in 2017-2018 enhancements were made to the registration venue including the provision of refreshments, entertainment and a queue-busting appointment tool. With over 12,000 students completing MyCurriculum successfully, no significant performance issues experienced and satisfaction with the support service rated as 4.64 out of 5, we are satisfied students now have an easy-to-navigate system to guide their course choices which advises of study pathways available depending on choices made. To build on the successes of 2017-18, a number of recommendations have been made to sustain the high-quality experience and reduce the number of enquiries received.

2.3.7 All on-campus UG students are assigned to a [Personal Tutor](#) upon registration (students in Medicine and Dentistry have Regents) ensuring all have a named member of academic staff to whom they can go for guidance. PTs are routinely informed when students are flagged for having missed compulsory classes, or fail to submit coursework and so are in danger of failing to meet learning outcomes; this provides one route to address problems as early as possible. Initially allocated centrally, in

2016 we devolved authority to Schools to decide how to allocate PTs to students as deemed most appropriate for their home disciplines, with additional flexibility in terms of the remit of the PT (subject to a [minimum expectation](#)). We believe this has increased the sense of belonging of students to Schools, instilling a closer relationship between student and tutor. We recognise there is still much we can improve in our personal tutoring process, particularly in terms of engagement, and the Student Feedback Framework has personal tutoring scheduled as a 2018-19 Focus Group topic.

2.3.8 Our [Learner's Toolkit](#) is a [multi-award winning](#), digital information resource for students and staff. Initially intended to support new students to develop their skills in using UOA digital content and systems, it now contains over 100 resources covering digital skills (e.g. MatLab), university systems and software (e.g. remote/off campus access), university services and schools (e.g. the 'Science Toolkit' for the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition), and productivity tools (e.g. study skills). It also contains our advice and guidance to students in regard to online security. Access statistics reveal the toolkit has been accessed over 56,000 times between Freshers' Week 2017 and April 2018 and, with approximately 300 daily users (peak usage was 1,012) the toolkit receives around five times more traffic than traditional support web pages. Student feedback testifies to the value they place on the toolkit.

2.3.9 In response to changing student needs our Student Learning Service (SLS) has extended its discipline-specific support (e.g. maths skills in Engineering, Business, Biomedical Sciences and Geosciences, and academic writing in Education, Social Sciences, History and Politics and International Relations), in addition to addressing increased demand for individual support sessions for students with specific learning differences and from students with mental health conditions. Increasingly the SLS is working with PGR and PGT students and collaborates with colleagues elsewhere in orientation

programmes and widening access initiatives. Our [S4S](#) student mentoring programme is now institution-wide, with identified School academic supporters (for mentees and mentors) and Registry Officers providing regulatory guidance and support for both UG and PG students.

Learning Support: Policies

2.3.10 Our [Lecture Attendance Monitoring](#) (piloted 2017-18) and [Lecture Capture Policy](#) (introduced April 2018) are examples of our use of digital technologies to encourage student engagement in their learning.

2.3.11 Monitoring attendance more effectively and using patterns of non-attendance as an early entry point for conversation with students who may be having difficulties is, we believe, proactive use of data. The pilot, co-ordinated by the **Retention Task Force**, and involving volunteered courses from each School, trialled the use of QR codes to monitor individual lecture sessions (and other compulsory classes) where students logged their attendance using their mobile device. There were associated alphanumeric references and physical sign-in sheets for those without a suitable device. Importantly, the attendance data were not used in a punitive fashion but to trigger a dialogue. The good practices generated during the pilot were gathered in a staff feedback focus group and students were surveyed for their input. A [case study](#) of the pilot in a level 1 Chemistry courses was presented at our 2018 Academic Symposium. While the pilot identified some technical and operational issues, staff and student feedback has been encouraging and we are addressing the issues and rolling this out further in 2018-19.

2.3.12 Analysis of 2016-17 and 2017-18 teaching events (including lectures) recorded using our digital capture software showed an increase of 56% and 20% of recordings and views respectively, suggesting significant student demand for such a resource. Given our very large cohort of international students, it is important to note that a [study](#) in Psychology indicated students for whom English was their second language particularly benefit

Learner's Toolkit:

"I love visual learning and struggle to read fact sheets, this looks perfect for me"

4th year Petroleum Engineering Student

"Nice, different and special for UOA – would have been a selling point for me when picking my Uni"

1st year Engineering Student

"I use it all the time - you're preaching to the converted!"

2nd year Law Student

"I just wanted to thank you for the videos that you and your team have developed for the Go Abroad team. The short-term visa video you developed last year for my incoming exchange has been extremely helpful and I'm sure that the recent application video that Colm developed for the Go Abroad team will make our jobs that much easier."

Study Abroad & International Exchange Coordinator

"The winner of the Amber Miro Memorial Award is Learner's Toolkit - the panel liked the simplicity of the solution and the innovative approach to connecting to students of differing levels of technical expertise. The fact that the Learner's Toolkit has resulted in four times the amount of training being delivered as a conventional approach demonstrates that this is a powerful and effective way of delivering online training."

UCISA Judging Panel



from access to recordings and, in line with sector literature, there was no significant effect on attendance. As access to recordings may also help support the broad range of learning approaches found in our increasingly heterogeneous student population, allowing students to take control of their own learning, our Lecture Capture Policy directs staff to record all lectures, subject to agreed caveats. As we believe it important students understand that recordings are a supplemental resource, not a replacement for lectures, guidance has been produced on the use of lecture recordings and how to maximise their educational value. In 2018-19 we will collate the reasons why staff are unable to record events to ensure that technological or practical reasons are not barriers to recording.

- 2.3.13 Related to the use of digital technology to support students, in 2016-2017, facilitated by the Retention Task Force, we undertook a small pilot project with Unique Insights to look at opportunities for early identification of students needing support using predictive risk analysis. This pilot was conducted in two Schools, including Divinity, History and Philosophy, which at the time had a high non-continuation rate for new entrants. The specific approach afforded by the system was not considered sufficiently robust to continue beyond the pilot phase. However, as a catalyst for internal activity it was more successful, with DHP recognising potential use of data we held and developing their own approach to provide additional support, resulting in a 4.9% improvement in retention of first year students. As a result of this, in 2018 we are undertaking a proof of concept pilot with a different supplier of analytics software around dynamic data and will, subject to success, take formal proposals and a learning analytics policy to Senate in the autumn of 2018.

Assessment

- 2.3.14 Our Assessment and Feedback (A&F) Task Force was created in 2016 to champion innovation and diversity in assessment methods, to increase student satisfaction with the feedback they receive, and to increase School responsiveness to feedback received from students. The two-prong focus on feedback is in direct response to our recent performance in NSS, where feedback and assessment continues to be the area in which we wish to see the greatest improvement.
- 2.3.15 With representation from each School and AUSA, the A&F Task Force undertook an institution-wide consultation to recognise and share good practice and to identify areas for action, both School-based and institutional. The consultation revealed a variety of innovative assessment methods across the institution including, but not limited to, Twitter feeds (Biological Sciences) and Infographics (Medical Sciences), online reflective diaries (Law) and Arpilleras (Hispanic Studies), Online Open Timed Response exams and innovative group projects to fit both academic and industry needs (Business School); several of these (and other) examples were showcased at an [Assessment and Assignment Skills Exchange](#).
- 2.3.16 Detailed conversations were held within each School in a variety of fora and also at the AUSA Education Committee; the Task Force convener also authored an article for our student newspaper, The Gaudie, to raise awareness of the work of the group to, and to stimulate discussion among, students. The consultation clearly showed that in most instances student feedback is acted on and when it is not this is for sound, pedagogic reasons (5.3.19). Similarly, analysis of the data on the return of work indicates that work submitted on time is usually returned on time (98%). The apparent mismatch between student perception and school data suggests a need for improved communication between Schools and students and clarity and explanation on the timelines associated with assessments and a

Closing the feedback loop: SCEF feedback sessions in Year 2 MBChB

Noting declining SCEF responses rates and a lack of detail provided in quantitative and qualitative comments SCEF feedback sessions were introduced in programme year 2 of the MBChB to communicate with students about the impact of their feedback on course design and development. SCEF summary reports were discussed in lectures inspiring in-depth discussion and providing a forum for students to express opinion on what mattered to them. Staff had an opportunity to incorporate immediate course/delivery modifications. For example, moving venues to facilitate better group discussions. As a result, there has been increased engagement with SCEF by students and positive feedback received:

"It provides a great opportunity to explore the SCEF forms and allows students to explain their point further if unclear and also to see whether this is a common issue that most students experience. They complement the SSLCs/Executives as this provides the whole year group the opportunity to understand and appreciate the ongoing work to improve our course"

A more detailed case study of this initiative is available in our [Good Practice Showcase](#).

review of these to ensure that students are receiving feedback in time for it to influence subsequent assessments. To support Schools in this the Task Force prepared a 'toolkit' to encourage reflective discussion and to help formulate plans within discipline contexts and revised our [Institutional Framework for the Provision of Feedback on Assessment](#). Common areas being addressed during 2017-18 included increased emphasis on in-person feedback, early notification of dates and methods for return of feedback, separate provision of reflective feedback and feedforward and review of assessment deadlines to avoid clustering.

transparent 'feedback loop' where feedback from staff, assessments, and feedback from students are not seen in isolation (nor as separate from other strategic goals), but as part of a continually-evolving and mutually-dependent process. With this in mind, Task Force members contributed 'Dynamic Feedback', 'The Power of Anonymous feedback from Students' and 'Getting the Best from SCEF' workshops/posters to our 2018 Academic Symposium.

2.3.17 Other initiatives have included summary course feedback on all examinations emailed to all students and posted on MyAberdeen in Engineering; Psychology do a similar exercise with vlogs. In Biological Sciences personal tutors offer individualised feedback sessions to tutees, Psychology have 'feedback prompt questions' for sub honours in-course assessments that students answer to elicit feedback on specific issues within their work, and Geosciences have mapped students' assessments across the course of their studies, to determine and alleviate pressure points across the calendar year.

2.3.18 The Task Force is encouraging Schools to continue work towards a clear and

2.3.19 SCEFs used to be paper-based and a 75% minimum response rate was expected; when we moved to electronic SCEFs the response rate was expected to fall, with the expected trade-off being the flexibility of the system (in terms of tailoring questions, scheduling, analysis, and dissemination) and the richness of free-text responses. The ability to run mini-scefs and provide rapid turnaround to discuss issues raised have all been helped by a more flexible format. Whilst this has, in the main, been the case, some disciplines' response rates are very low. The working group, which includes three student members, has investigated the student viewpoint; survey fatigue and 'not seeing anything change as a result' were cited as the primary reasons for non-completion. As such we now showcase good practice in closing the feedback loop to students (including 'You Said, We

Did/Didn't' reports, in-class real time using [Plickers](#) and whole class feedback response sessions via our new good practice website. A student intern has been engaged for summer 2018 to analyse past SCEFs to see which questions are most useful with a view to revising the SCEF, to hold focus groups with PGT students who, because they are at university for a single year, find even less value in completing SCEFs (or other surveys), and to consider other, commercial tools as means of obtaining feedback that might prove useful. Two of the group's student members are also part of the Enhancement Theme student-led project on closing the feedback loop and are helping us learn from effective practice elsewhere.

- 2.3.20 NSS data and other sources of student feedback indicate students are not as satisfied with feedback as they are with the very high quality of the teaching they receive. To help address this mismatch, and in particular the speed with which students are provided with their feedback, we have encouraged the use of online submission and marking. Some Schools are more advanced than others and two vocal proponents are Psychology and Divinity, History and Philosophy (DHP). In Psychology almost all in-course assessments (dissertations excepted) at all levels of study are marked electronically using Turnitin/Grademark. The School's eLearning champion developed training resources to support the transition and staff have generated a bank of ready-made detailed comments to use when they mark for specific types of coursework or for common student errors; this allows markers to deal with general issues quickly and therefore focus more on the issues (good and bad) specific to the individual piece of coursework. The School is now seeking to link online resources within electronic feedback using, for example, videos on the use of evidence within essays, to direct students to material to improve their subsequent attempt at coursework. The 2017 NSS data indicates that Psychology performs above the sector average for feedback and assessment. Historically, the disciplines in DHP have performed

below the sector average in terms of NSS feedback and assessment. This was particularly the case in relation to the issue of the promptness of feedback. As part of the process of addressing these concerns, DHP have moved to online submission and marking initially as a pilot among level 1 students in 2016-17. A case study detailing their online marking experiences has been posted to our Good Practice web pages. The experiences of Schools such as Psychology and DHP have been shared at the A&F Task Force meetings and more Schools (Education, Geosciences, Natural and Computing Sciences, Medical Sciences and Language, Literature, Film and Visual Culture) are embracing online marking given the opportunity for enhanced feedback to students and speedier return of assignments and we continue to support others to adopt this practice. All staff marking assessments undertaken by our students at our campus in Doha use the online marking functionality provided within MyAberdeen. We are monitoring the impact of online marking on the perception of feedback through the NSS and our internal student surveys.

- 2.3.21 In 2016-17 UCTL asked Schools to review the assessment requirements of each undergraduate course and honours programme with a view where appropriate to rationalise, and potentially reduce, the assessment effort considering type, number, and length of assessments. With the restructure of our curriculum in 2010 and the move from six to eight courses per academic session, there was a recognition we had not fully grasped the opportunity to review assessments (e.g. ensuring we were not over-assessing); we also wanted to provide both a stimulus and time for reflection by Schools on their A&F practices, ensure that assessment across programmes was varied and addressed ILOs and, as a consequence, reduce pressure on students during examination diets. Changes were approved by QAC outside the normal timelines to allow for speedy implementation in 2017-18. The review has linked to some large-scale changes such as the use of assessed [blogs in Education](#) and a [variety of practices](#)

including changing a level 1 exam to MCQ, introducing online rubrics for markers of lab assessments and the use of WebPA for self and peer assessment of group work in Chemistry. As part of our annual programme monitoring, colleagues have been asked to reflect on any changes implemented and QAC will report findings to UCTL in autumn 2018.

Employability and Positive Outcomes

2.3.22 Our [Employability Development Framework](#) details our institution-wide, systematic approach to addressing employability in six strands: Aberdeen Graduate Attributes, Curriculum Development, Employer Engagement, Co-curricular Activities, Career Planning and Enterprise & Entrepreneurship. Through the framework we aim to ensure employability is fully embedded across the entire student learning experience and to engender a shared understanding of employability among students, staff and employers.

2.3.23 Our **Positive Outcomes (PO) Task Force** was established in 2016 to develop and monitor the six strands of the framework and make recommendations to UCTL on matters regarding graduate destinations, students' skills development and employability. Comprising Academic Employability Champions from each school, the Careers Service, SRAS and AUSA, the Task Force is ideally placed to share effective practice, identify gaps in our provision, and direct activity. An initial output of PO Task Force-led activity was a university-wide employability survey to establish the extent to which we were promoting student employability in an explicit and effective way. Data collected revealed a range of interesting employability practices across the institution and exemplary educational practices to improve student learning were subsequently shared at a PO Task Force-led [Sharing Effective Practice Event](#). The survey also helped identify gaps in our understanding of enterprise and entrepreneurship education. To address this, SIE delivered a bespoke staff development enterprise workshop for PO members.

Ensuring a minimum careers expectation for Schools to adhere to has been a key aim of Task Force activity and a baseline provision was circulated with an audit of schools' provision having taken place in 2017-18; the results will be analysed during summer 2018 to identify good practice, gaps in provision and support requirements, and will be reported to UCTL in autumn 2018. [Institutional and school-level infographics](#) which present information and data regarding each School's student engagement with our careers and co-curricular provision have also been developed. The infographics are designed to feed into School-level strategic plans, Programme Advisory Board (or equivalent employer liaison groups) and the PO Task Force discussions and to provide focus to the Careers Service to inform future employability decision making. Feedback from Schools has been positive, and constructive:

- Biological Sciences: *"the infographic was discussed at our Teaching & Learning Committee, overall the document is useful for planning and to help enhance the student experience"*;
- Chemistry: *"a useful employability reference point to remind students in course introductions"*;
- Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition: *"a useful document but given the School size it would be useful to have the data presented by key disciplines ... to help analyse the data"*.

Aberdeen Graduate Attributes

2.3.24 We noted during ELIR 3 that Aberdeen Graduate Attributes ([AGAs](#)) were a central, embedded aspect of the UOA student experience. We described then the breadth of initiatives available to our students to develop AGAs, including core academic courses, cross-disciplinary sixth century courses ([6CCs](#)), career-planning courses, work placements and work-based learning and our suite of co-curricular opportunities. These initiatives have been enhanced and increased, and we have extended our AGA discussions with employers and published our findings for [AGCAS: Graduate Attributes & Employer Preferences](#).

2.3.25 We piloted our compulsory, non-credit bearing level 1 **Online Professional Skills** course in September 2015 to help students develop skills, present themselves effectively to potential employers and postgraduate course providers, find work experience and plan their career. The course contains three modules: developing graduate attributes, on campus health and safety, and equality and diversity, and comprises a range of interactive activities, quizzes and assessed exercises. Separate (optional) courses for level 2 and 3 students covering career planning, presenting yourself to recruiters and finding and reflecting on work experience have been available since 2017. We are delighted with the [response from level 1](#) students to date. At the time of writing the PO Task Force is evaluating student data and feedback from 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18 to inform discussion regarding prescribing the level 2 and 3 courses to maximise numbers engaging. Meantime we are looking to encourage engagement at the higher levels by embedding them within existing academic and work-related learning courses.

2.3.26 Our skills development site, **Achieve**, was renewed and relaunched in 2016 and unites elements of attribute development across the curriculum and co-curriculum. We have also created a new **Achieve+** site specifically for PGTs. Both Achieve and Achieve+ comprise bespoke online skills development resources for students to access at any stage of their studies and co-curricular activities. Devised by the Careers Service and the Student Learning Service, the resources align with the skills requirements of the Scottish Credit & Qualification Framework (SCQF) and offer students ways to self-assess and reflect upon and improve their AGAs in preparation for further study or employment. Achieve also links directly to our Learner's Toolkit and the library's guides. Its approach is designed to offer students a holistic means of addressing skills and graduate-attribute development across their degree programme. Achieve/Achieve+ have benefited from the involvement of a student intern supporting the design and

creation of the online site, in terms of visual appeal, online navigation and the creation of marketing resources (including video) to promote Achieve to students, course/programme coordinators and personal tutors.

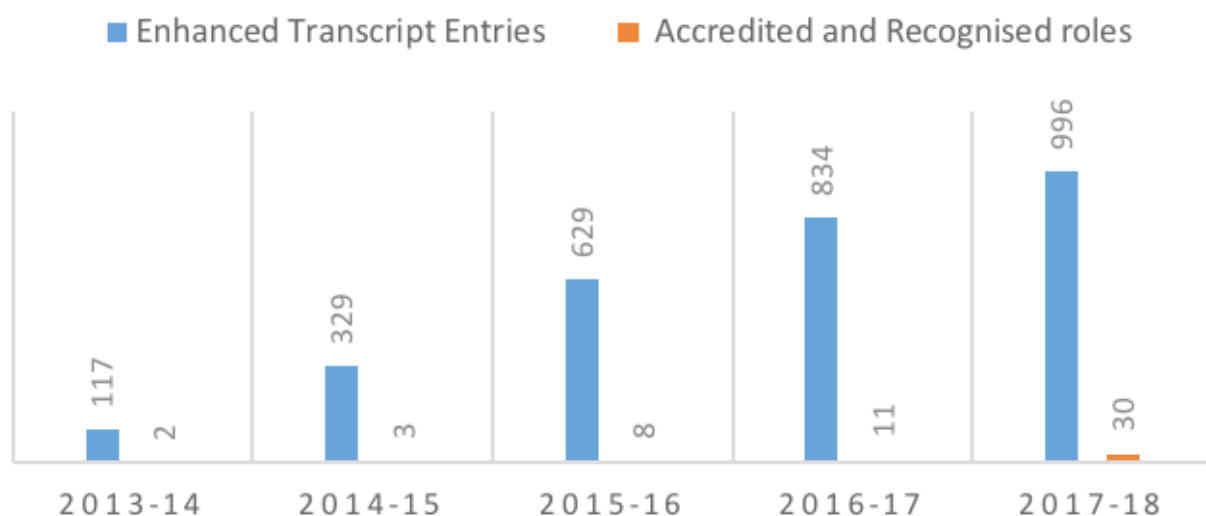
2.3.27 Our long-standing **Students Taking Active Roles (STAR) Award** formally accredits students' development of AGAs by having them engage in a structured programme of reflection on, and identification and demonstration of, the skills they have developed in UOA recognised roles such as student representatives, peer mentors and Students' Association posts. STAR, a case study in ELIR 2, goes from strength to strength, and we now have much greater employer engagement in the design and delivery of the Award. We have shared our [STAR learning via an eBook chapter](#) in Lifewide Learning & Education in Universities and Colleges, and via AGCAS Conference posters and QAA Enhancement Theme events.



2.3.28 We have explored the use of **Open (Digital) Badges** to recognise student skills development with our institutional Employer Board who were very supportive of the concept. This investigation was reported as a case study within a QAA Scotland-facilitated Open Badge Project in collaboration with the Universities of Dundee and Abertay to report on the current experience in the Scottish sector with a view to developing guidance and contextualising it within QAA Scotland Enhancement Theme, 'Student Transitions'. The [project report](#) is available online and we are formulating two pilot Open Badge initiatives: (i) with our Career Mentors with a view to analysing their use and response on LinkedIn profiles and (ii) as part of our scheme, recently accepted by the [Scottish Government's National Health and Social Care Workforce Plan](#), to create additional UG medical places via an enhanced GP programme. A proposal to agree the pilot open digital badge concept and plans will be considered by UCTL in autumn 2018.

2.3.29 To acknowledge learning and attribute achievement across the whole student experience, and to recognise learning beyond the academic curriculum, our **Enhanced Transcript** details students' academic learning and records their UOA verifiable co-curricular achievements categorised as (i) Accredited or assessed performance in non-academic contexts, e.g. the STAR Award, Aberdeen Internship, (ii) UOA recognised activities not formally accredited or assessed by the University, e.g. Student Representative, Career Mentorship and (iii) Institutional prizes and awards in academic and non-academic contexts. The Enhanced Transcript has proved useful to incentivise students to undertake co-curricular activity, employers appreciate it, and it is a useful tool to measure student co-curricular engagement (figure 4):

FIGURE 4: ENHANCED TRANSCRIPT ENTRIES



Curriculum Development

- 2.3.30 Responding to the varied interests and ambitions of our students, since ELIR 2013 the diversity of our work-based learning (WBL) courses in the academic curriculum has increased significantly with our portfolio of [Learning from Work](#), [Career Development: Find Your Direction](#), [Working Together: Employability for Arts & Social Sciences](#), [Engineering Work Experience](#), [City Labs](#) and [Work Experience: Employability Skills Development](#) allowing us to provide degree programmes with differing forms of external engagement and offer students access to work-related learning opportunities during their studies. Our innovative level 3 **Work Experience: Employability Skills Development** course runs in Biological Sciences and Psychology, an outcome of [Career Service colleagues' research](#), has students secure their own School-approved placement, part-time work or personal development project and encourages them to reflect on their personal and professional development and to make connections between their studies and the world of work; this addresses the ambitions of Universities Scotland [Making it Happen](#) report. **Working Together: Employability for Arts & Social Sciences** builds consultancy-style projects into the curriculum, exposing students to real work tasks and providing opportunities to apply their transferable skills such as team work, project management, problem-solving and communication in a different environment. Subsequently adapted by Engineering who have embedded such work experience into level 2 of their curriculum and [presented at our 2018 Academic Symposium](#), the course supports both employability and retention of students.
- 2.3.31 Other elective and/or disciplinary breadth WBL provision includes individual work-based dissertations and group work-based investigations. For example guest lectures from practising psychologists are formally examined in core level 1 courses, Biological Sciences have embraced problem-based learning with field data used to create environmental impact assessments in level 4 and 5 Remediation Technology and level 4 Zoology students prepare policy guidance and public information reports in response to complex biological and conservation impact problems. Geography invite practitioners from transport organisations to allow students to learn more about how the theoretical material covered in class is applied in the practice of transport planning and operations in the region in a debate-style setting. Given the practice of employer engagement with the university can be complex, flexible pedagogies for employer engagement have been sought. These approaches include students undertaking a 'real-work problem or project,' either individually or group-based and providing opportunities for reflective practice.
- 2.3.32 Our Employability and Educational Development Adviser, co-located in the Careers Service and CAD, is responsible for championing WBL and ensures WBL adherence to our academic quality policies and procedures, including curriculum management for course and assessment approval (4.1). WBL courses are subject to the same stringent assessment practices as all our other assessment content and external examiners ratify grades. Level 3 (and above) WBL courses and/or summative assessments are included in degree classification algorithms.
- 2.3.33 To ensure external organisations benefit and are supported through the process, effective information exchange between the UOA and external organisations is crucial. We use a mix of employer guides, site visits, case studies and feedback surveys for sharing practice and for supporting the evolutionary development of WBL. Interface, a central hub funded by SFC, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands & Islands Enterprise, along with staff professional networks, have also been instrumental in connecting businesses to the university to help identify WBL opportunities and to increase employer participation in HE.

2.3.34 We are mindful of the need to adapt to the changing graduate employment landscape, not only in regard to offering traditional on-campus qualifications and our recently developed online degrees. We are also now considering Graduate Apprenticeship options and how we might best respond to Skills Development Scotland's (SDS) Graduate Apprenticeship (GA). Of utmost importance to us is that in developing

and offering Graduate Apprenticeships we work collaboratively with employers and graduate recruiters in areas that align with our strengths and expertise. We have already held a session for Heads of Schools to meet with the Skills Planning Lead (North East), a previous employee of UOA, to find out more about the current and upcoming frameworks of relevance, and to discuss GAs we could potentially develop.

Work-based Learning - Working Together: Employability for Arts & Social Sciences and Work Experience: Employability Skills Development

Encouraged by a visit of the Convenor of the Biological Sciences Programme Advisory Board to the MA Programme Advisory Board to share their School's experience with the Work Experience: Employability Skills Development course, this course was developed to support students' professional development and support students from non-vocational disciplines to transfer capabilities and skills to different contexts. Students work in small groups to develop solutions for projects posed by a local business or charity and to reflect on these experiences via a summative individual reflective report. An assessed, individual reflective report supports learners to:

- * Critically analyse their work-based project learning experiences;
- * Explore their skills and Aberdeen Graduate Attribute development;
- * Capture their next career planning steps and future learning goals.

A series of reflective prompts help to guide students through this process and to enable them to become more proactive, independent and critical learners.

67 undergraduates successfully completed the courses Working Together: Employability for Arts & Social Sciences and Work Experience: Employability Skills Development in 2017-18. With 50 employers engaged in the curriculum to enhance teaching and learning, organisations ranged from micro-business to multi-national organisations.

"This is a really good course and some aspect of it takes us away from the usual stressful structure of typical course. The site-visits are really interesting."

Student SCEF comment, Working Together: Employability for Arts & Social Sciences

"The course gives students real life experience of some of the issues they will face in the workplace. It also arms students with additional employability skills which are vital in today's employment market."

Host WBL Organisation

"The course covers a range of employability skills and issues in a comprehensive manner within a 'live brief' context which makes it current and relevant. Testing group reporting skills is an innovative aspect of the course and a useful skill in the workplace." **External Examiner**

"I loved the whole internship experience and it was great to be doing some applied work for my degree. My host organisation were wonderful and welcoming and supported me throughout the internship. The Course Co-ordinators were brilliant at providing clear guidance on tasks and being easy, and quick to respond."

4th Year Work Experience: Employability Skills Development Student, School of Biological Sciences

Employer Engagement

2.3.35 Engagement with employers occurs in a variety of ways from explicit involvement in curriculum design within the professional programmes in Education, Engineering, and Medicine, industrial placements in the Schools of Natural and Computing Sciences, Biological Sciences and Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, the use of guest lectures and work-related learning as described earlier and employer presentations and workshops organised by the Careers Service. Employers participate in our STAR Award as members of our Steering Group, facilitate our Leadership Academy workshops, are central to our internship programmes and career mentoring program and contribute to a variety of [Careers fairs and on campus activities](#). Our Employer Board and 26 School/discipline-based Programme Advisory Boards, PABs, or equivalent Employer Liaison Groups, rely heavily on the active support and membership of employers and industry experts, and provide academic staff with a channel for engaging more formally and creatively with a range of external stakeholders in a meaningful, impactful way. For example, the Employer Board provided significant guidance to a staff-student LTEP funded partnership project to provide guidance to students on how best to manage their [online footprint](#) as part of the Student Transitions theme. Many disciplines add value to employer on-campus visits. For example, the Biological Sciences' PAB meeting time has been truncated to allow a follow-on student-facing event such as a professional networking event, or PAB employer presentations about their organisation and graduate opportunities so they can share their career paths with students. Typically 60-80 students across all years attend and event feedback indicates students feel more knowledgeable about opportunities and the work of organisations and also feel more confident about their ability to network in a professional way. PABs were highlighted in the ELIR 3 report: *'Particularly positive is the University's use of external members on programme advisory boards (PABs).'*

2.3.36 We support our employers in a variety of ways. Our Career Mentors have access to our [Career Mentoring Toolkit](#) and receive a CPD Certificate in recognition of their support for our students. Our STAR Award employers have access to bespoke support from our Educational & Employability Development Adviser and we work together with our facilitators in designing our Leadership Academy workshops. To build upon and complement employer involvement in the curriculum, a twilight employer-focused 'curriculum design' event brought together employability professionals and academic staff with over 30 local organisations from diverse employment sectors. The event format consisted of a mix of introductory academic speakers and an innovative curriculum design activity and focused on demystifying the process of developing an academic course while also enabling participants to discuss the organisational content and culture in which courses are delivered. Employer feedback from the event was positive, with comments indicating how the event assisted participants to understand the relevance of the curriculum for their business purposes.

2.3.37 One highly specific aspect of our work responding to the needs of employers can be seen in our programme of teacher education. In Education, the university has rolled out new programmes, designed specifically to help address teacher shortages in the north-east and Highlands of Scotland. This includes its new PGDE Distance Learning Initial Teacher Education (DLITE). The university has also developed a PGDE Internship programme for secondary education as an alternative route into teaching, as part of the Transition in Education Scheme (TiES). This programme, which is funded by Scottish Government, has been developed collaboratively between the university and the Northern Alliance local authority partners in direct response to the shortage of teachers in the region in particular subjects (Business Education, Chemistry, Maths and Physics). The route enables participants to develop a knowledge of Scottish Education through

a paid internship in a school in their home authority while they study for a PGDE qualification in teaching. The PGDE is a full-time, campus-based programme with teaching placements in schools in addition to the internship part of the model. Local authorities sponsor individual participants, provide teaching placements in schools and benefit from those “home grown” teaching professionals who then undertake their probationary year, for full registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), within their own locality. In most instances, those who have successfully completed the PGDE Internship programme will continue their careers within the sponsoring local authority.

now managed by the Careers Service, the Leadership Academy develops students’ leadership skills and qualities through a series of interactive workshops and seminars led by inspirational leaders and external organisations. Students must submit and pass a written reflective assignment and have the opportunity to win coaching sessions with IC Executive Coaching. Building on our successful Aberdeen Internship programme which is now in its 9th year, InternPlus allows our UG students (graduating in 2019 or 2020) to undertake part-time, paid internships from November - June, alongside professional development training, within our own Professional Services departments. Projects available in 2017-18 included supporting our Chinese marketing campaign and designing, prototyping and testing an interactive ‘map’ of online programmes and component short courses. Our co-curricular (and other employability related) work featured heavily in our work for the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme with, for example, case studies of our Career Mentoring, Leadership Academy and City Lab projects and student commentaries thereon.

Co-curricular Activities

2.3.38 We described our portfolio of co-curricular activities in ELIR 3, including BP Student Tutoring, career mentoring, career subject student representatives and the STAR Award; these activities continue to thrive. We have extended our portfolio to include our [Leadership Academy](#) and [InternPlus](#) schemes. Instigated initially by AUSA, but

Co-Curricular Activities

Career Mentoring

A six-month mentorship linking students with a working professional for the sharing of career experience and expertise.

- Introduced in 2011 with nine mentorships;
- 2017/18 – 253 mentorship matches established and a new bespoke medicine career mentoring stream launched with a further 18 mentorships;
- [Student Feedback](#).

Online Professional Courses

- Piloted 2015-16;
- 2017-18 Completion rates: Level 1 (87%), Level 2 (90%), level 3 (87%);
- Student feedback: *“I absolutely loved it! A great initiative for students who are looking to develop their understanding of what they can do to make themselves stand out from others and enhance employability prospects!” 1st Year Business Management and Finance: “This course is very good at making you think beyond your studies. It helps you to anticipate what you may need to do in order to be employable after university.” 1st Year Biochemist .*

BP Student Tutors

A volunteering scheme which places students in local primary or secondary schools to provide pupils with positive role models.

- Approximately 40 students from a range of disciplines are placed in north-east schools for three hours per week for eight weeks;
- *"Before taking part in the scheme I took for granted that primary teaching would be easy. Now I see just how hard it can be. I felt the scheme developed my patience and communication skills a lot more."*

BP Student Tutor, 4th Year MA (Hons) History and Religious Studies.

Leadership Academy

Develops students' leadership skills and qualities through a series of interactive workshops and seminars. Sessions are delivered by inspirational leaders and external organisations around the theme of 'leadership'.

- 79 students passed the Academy in the academic year 2017-18;
- *"I would definitely recommend the Leadership Academy. Many students are scared of being leaders. I think it is because they lack knowledge and confidence, however, the workshops I attended gave me both of these things."*

MA (Hons) Geography and International Relations Student.

Internships & Placements in addition to programmes with integral work placements (2016-17 data)

Opportunities to undertake work placements in a range of organisations include:

- Working in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) through the Santander-subsided placement initiative (22);
- National and international internships through the Saltire Foundation (20);
- Internal university-hosted placements through the Aberdeen Internship (13) and InternPlus programmes (12).

STAR Award

Recognises and rewards student skills and attributes development through participation in sports clubs, societies and volunteering activities.

- To creatively showcase the STAR Award and students' wider learning and professional development, an MA (Hons) Politics & International Relations student devised in 2016 this STAR [video](#);
- Student [Case Studies](#);
- STAR Awardees: 2014-15(**149**); 2015-16 (**148**); 2016-17 (**216**); 2017-18 (**241**).

Achieve (UGs) / Achieve + (PGTs)

Located within the University of Aberdeen's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), MyAberdeen, the 'Achieve' and 'Achieve+' site offer comprehensive online skills development resources to support students throughout all stages of their academic studies and co-curricular activities.

2017-18 (Oct -April): Achieve site for undergraduates: 9,118 hits with frequently visited content including: Academic Skills, Academic Writing, Maths Skills & the STAR Award reflective record. Achieve+ site for taught postgraduates and online learners: 2,757 hits with frequently visited content including: Academic Skills, Academic Writing, Professional Skills and Reflecting on the role of a Student Representative.

"The 'Achieve' resources dovetail well with the focus I place upon academic excellence and skills development in my teaching practice and supports students as they develop the skills and attributes employers require."

Lecturer (Scholarship), School of Social Science

"The resources in 'Achieve' Maths Skills let me work away at my own pace. They were helpful with understanding by providing well laid-out example questions, solutions and explanations."

Second Year Engineering Student

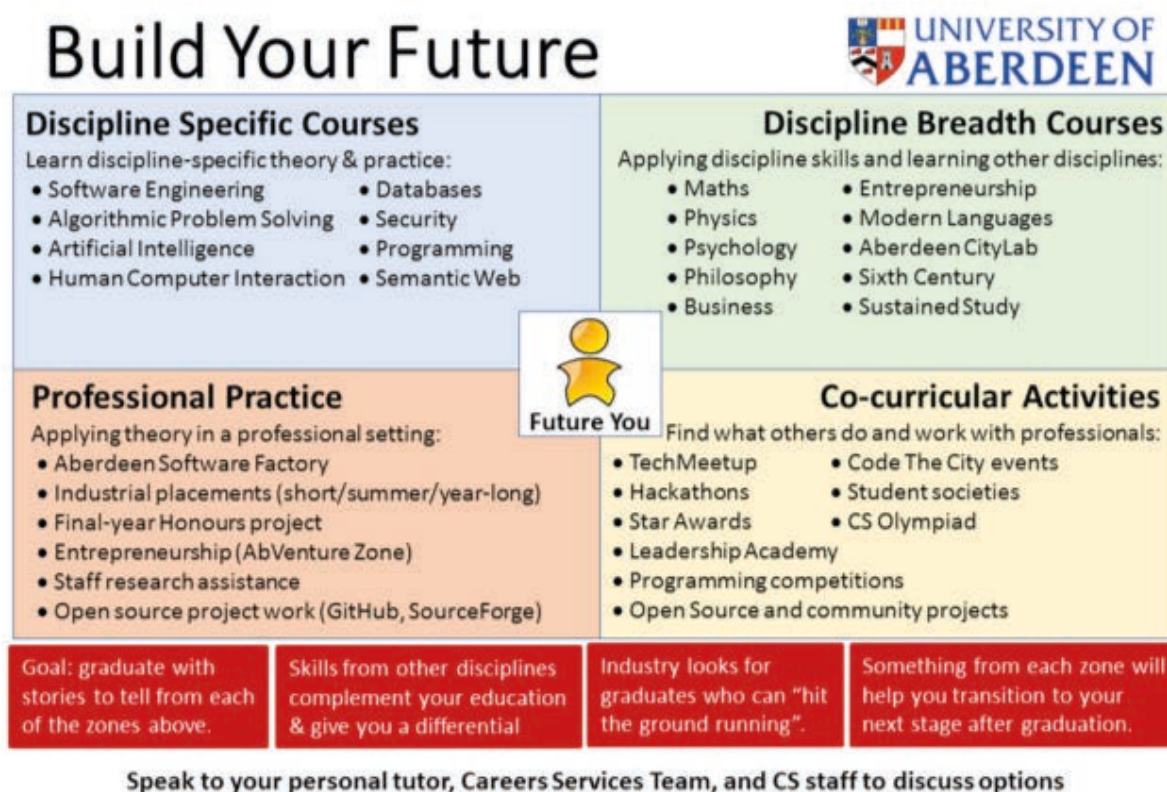
Career Planning

2.3.39 We deliver effective career development opportunities and further study options through a range of careers education, [information and guidance services](#) and we are expanding our interactive career planning resources such [GradConnection](#) and [Career Connect](#) (an [online platform for international UOA students](#) and graduates) to find employment in Asia, the Middle East and Australasia) to complement our traditional provision. Careers Service staff work in partnership with academic Schools to deliver careers input to taught courses such as Professional Archaeology and Geosciences Research Design. Students have many opportunities to connect with employers from a wide range of sectors through fairs, employer presentations and employer-led workshops. Our recent Law School-piloted 'Speed Careering' has proved particularly popular among students intimidated in more standard networking or lecture contexts and has now been adopted in Biological Sciences and Language, Literature, Film and Visual Culture.

We promote all our services in partnership with our team of student Careers Subject Representatives. We continue to offer the opportunity for organisations to raise their profile, develop closer links with the future workforce and share expertise and knowledge together via vacancy advertising for graduate jobs, placements and part-time work. Our part-time work provision has recently been strengthened by a collaborative project – [StudentJob](#) – between AUSA and Careers and supported through InternPlus.

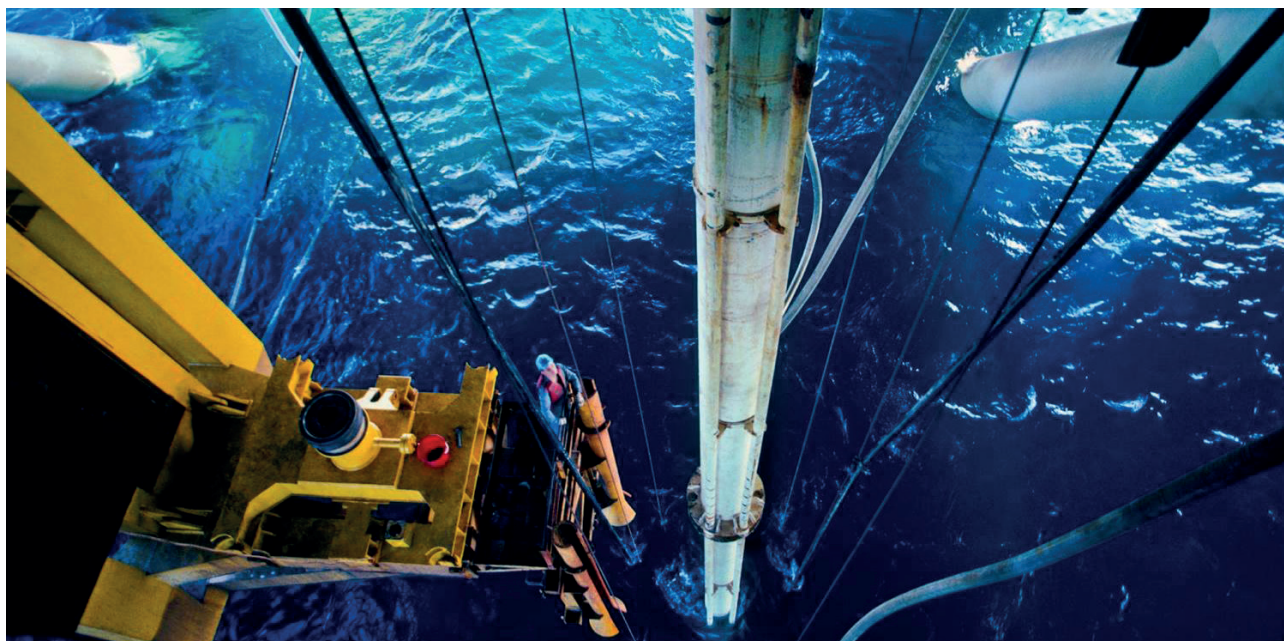
2.3.40 We recently piloted a 'build your future' model (figure 5) with students in Natural and Computing Sciences to help focus their efforts on a breadth of activities while at UOA. The model can be contextualised by each School to show how specific discipline studies are complemented by professional practice and co-curricular activities and the impact of this post-degree. Posted in corridors for students to see, they are also being used for discussions with personal tutors and are now being rolled out to other Schools.

Figure 5



Enterprise and Entrepreneurship

- 2.3.41 Much of the work we do to promote entrepreneurship among our students lies in the activities we promote to get our students thinking in a novel way. Our internship programmes, for example, encourage student ideas, promote the student perspective and support risk-taking. Similarly, several of our work-based learning courses foster new ways of thinking about things and encourage critical reflection.
- 2.3.42 We work closely with the Scottish Institute for Enterprise (SIE) to embed entrepreneurship within curricula and also within the co-curriculum. In 2016-17 SIE delivered 29 enterprise workshops reaching 1,120 students, this is a substantial increase in student workshop engagement compared to 2015-16. A total of 43 business start-up consultations with students were also held. We also work closely with the SIE to deliver a range of non-discipline specific activities throughout the year to help students and recent graduates become more enterprising, consider self-employment or set up a business as a career option. For example, SIE's Scottish Innovative Student Awards (SISA) was launched in September 2017. SIE consulted with UOA on the pilot phase of the Awards in conjunction with three of Scotland's Innovation Centres – Digital Health Institute, Datalab and Censys. 17 UoA students achieved a Bronze SISA in 2017-18.
- 2.3.43 As a Santander UK partner, we run an internal business ideas competition to identify potential applicants for the Santander Universities Entrepreneurship Award and, as reported in ELIR 3, our students have been particularly successful. The trend continues. In 2015 another of our students was a winner of the Young Edge Entrepreneurs competition and also won the Converse Challenge Social Enterprise Competition; this year [two teams](#), comprising students and one of our recent graduates, are through to the regional stage of the 2018 awards. We also run our own [Lightbulb Idea](#) competition, a business idea and pitch completion open to all students which helps those who already have a business idea refine it further. We have seen increasing numbers of applications for Entrepreneurial Scotland Saltire Internships (up 34% in 2018 relative to 2017). As a measure of the quality of the applications, in 2017 there were 1,500 applications and 171 awards, and while we are third in terms of number of applications, we are second in terms of the numbers who are successful (23).
- 2.3.44 A particularly successful initiative in the area of enterprise since ELIR 3 is our **City Labs** course for which we submitted our [‘Aberdeen City Lab! Where the city is the classroom’](#) case study to the QAA Student Transitions Enhancement Themes. ‘City Labs’ is a credit-bearing course for multi-disciplinary level 3 and 4 students at UOA and Robert Gordon University, where students work with a local organisation to design, develop and deliver new services or prototype solutions. The goal is to create sustainable projects that will be adopted by the host organisation and continue beyond the course to develop a better city and community. Students gain knowledge and skills and deploy subject skills as required, which supports students to better understand and articulate the attributes they can offer upon graduation. A short [YouTube](#) excerpt shows the value students place on their City Lab experiences.
- 2.3.45 Considerable progress has been made since ELIR 3 working with SMEs, facilitated by Santander-subsidised [SME internships](#) whereby we help current students and recent graduates gain valuable workplace experience and skills via paid internships. In 2016-17 we secured 22 Santander-subsidised internships, comprising 13 ten-week internships, eight two-week internships and one eight-week internship undertaken by UGs, PGTs, alumni and a PhD student; our Education and Employability Adviser recently published a review in [Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce's Business Bulletin](#). The Santander Scheme has also helped identify additional opportunities to collaborate with a growing population of SMEs and start-up businesses, including



encouraging their membership of PABs. The Careers Service has targeted a wide range of SMEs to participate in our on-campus employer engagement events, allowing them to be better informed as to the mutually beneficial engagement opportunities.

2.4 PGT and PGR student experience

- 2.4.1 To give more prominence to our PGT students in 2016-17 the management and reporting structure for postgraduates, the Postgraduate Committee, divided, with the establishment of the Postgraduate (Taught) Committee (PGTC) and our PGRS. These committees are led by our PGT Teaching Deans and Dean of the Postgraduate Research School respectively. We noted in section 1.2 our ambition to grow both our PGT and PGR populations.

Postgraduate Taught Students

- 2.4.2 Central to delivery of our PGT population targets is growing our international student cohort, online education and addressing the needs of industry and the external environment. Our strategy to increase our international student base has been to invest significantly in digital marketing (and re-marketing) campaigns (including a Chinese micro website), a sustained in-country presence in China (including two

members of staff based with the China-Britain Business Council who are dedicated to UOA, sustained social media activity and an increase in live broadcasting activity), enhanced 'Study Here' web pages and our embedded enquiry room and streamlining of the enquiry process and conversion efforts (2.2.15). In addition to activities to increase the number of international students coming to Aberdeen, we've also been engaging in trans-national partnerships. Detail on this is provided in section 5, however two initiatives worthy of note in relation to PGT are our alliance with Curtin University and partnership with the Al-Faleh Group for Educational and Academic Services (AFG). The Aberdeen-Curtin Alliance was formalised in early 2017 spanning business, health sciences, energy and creative arts. In addition to delivering high-impact research we are working with Curtin University to offer innovative joint degree programmes where students spend time at both universities, the first of which is our [MSc in Global Subsea Engineering](#) to which we hope to welcome our first students to the programme in 2018-19. Although at a very early stage, additional Schools within both universities are now in contact and exploring collaboration opportunities. In April 2017 we opened our first overseas campus, '[AFG College with the University of Aberdeen](#)', a partnership between UOA and AFG. Initially

offering two undergraduate programmes – Business Management and Accountancy and Finance – the intention is to offer additional UG and PGT programmes, the first of which, our MBA and MSc International Business Management will be available for September 2018.

2.4.3 Our online education provision and strategy is pivotal in reaching our PGT targets; we offer over 30 PGT degree programmes and over 50 short courses on a stand-alone basis. To support disciplines in developing new online programmes and/or adapt existing on-campus provision, we encourage a team-based learning design approach, adapted from the 'Carpe Diem' learning design process. This involves a programme review and the [storyboarding](#) courses. Following a constructive alignment model the process is outcome, not content, driven and is 2-stage: focusing upon the programme's overall aims, target market, course components, structure and timeline for delivery followed by sessions focusing upon individual courses, detailing learning outcomes and mapping out the teaching topics, learning and teaching activities and assessment. Fundamental to each session are the target students, the delivery mode, timescale and available MyAberdeen tools. Storyboarding has been met with very positive feedback and the impact has been widespread and varied beyond online provision. Not only have colleagues involved in programmes as diverse as MSc Clinical Nutrition, MSc Decommissioning and Distance Learning Initial Teacher Education (DLITE) embraced the methodology, but all programmes within the School of Education are considering using the process. CAD has used storyboarding to support colleagues in Medical, Medical Sciences and Nutrition to review our MSc Medical Physics and MSc Medical Imaging to ensure the programmes were sufficiently distinct.

2.4.4 We have a variety of ways in which we support colleagues to develop effective, engaging [online education materials](#) including a five-week online programme to support staff in the [Design and Tutoring of Online](#)

[Courses](#). Delivered through MyAberdeen, the course encourages staff to participate in online interactive activities as students to gain experience of being an online student to, in turn, inform course design. Topics include the theory of learning design, the creation of content for online delivery and the use of online communication tools; online storyboarding support materials are also available. Over 40 colleagues from nine Schools and several Professional Services areas participated and positive, constructive feedback was received. A third iteration of the course took place in June 2018. An Online Education Forum meets monthly for colleagues engaged or interested in online delivery to share good practice and ideas. An 'Online Education Team' area has been created in MyAberdeen to support the forum and to disseminate information and, importantly, share good practice about online education.

2.4.5 We also develop and expand our PGT provision to meet external needs and also the employability of students. Our PABs play a key role in this. For example, in Engineering, the members of the PAB contribute significantly to the development and review of course contents, contribute to teaching and guest lectures, and help source and sometimes supervise student projects. These ensure the programmes remain industry and employer relevant, something that has been commended by the accrediting body. The LLM in Business Law and Sustainable Development programme being launched in September 2018 was developed to address the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and NEPA in the US National Environmental Policy Act. Our MSc in Strategic Studies, has been adapted to meet industry demands and respond to new security challenges in the UK and elsewhere. Our new MSc Decommissioning, offered both on campus and online, is the first of its kind worldwide and is in direct response to changing economic conditions. We have launched a new [Masters Programme in Petroleum Data Management](#) in partnership with Common

Data Access Limited (CDA) and sponsored by Shell, Total and Chevron, to address the sector's growing demand for people skilled in effective management of data, critical to increasing understanding of the subsurface and geology of the UK Continental Shelf and contributing to efforts to maximise economic recovery from the basin. Developing PGT programmes such as these ensures that we engender in our students the skills and knowledge tailored to the needs of industry and maximise their opportunities for employment.

2.4.6 During summer 2018 we will review our PGT Portfolio to evaluate the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of our PGT provision with a view to refocusing and expanding our offering to ensure we attract the most talented students locally and internationally. The group, led by the PGT Deans, will report before the end of the calendar year, and will include within its recommendations a process to deliver a light-touch annual PGT degree portfolio review.

2.4.7 We note in **2.1** the changes to our student representative structure for PG students and the support we provide for international, online and new students. Academic-related support for PGT is provided by degree programme and courses co-ordinators. In 2017-18, Psychology piloted personal tutors for PGTs and will continue the scheme in 2018-19. Increasingly our Student Learning Service is providing PGT workshops and one-to-one sessions. As many of our PGT students are international or distance-

based learners engaging for the first time with new learning approaches, we have developed an Achieve+ sister online skills development site with tailored provision to aid their transition into, through and beyond postgraduate study.

2.4.8 We were original participants of the Making the Most of Masters (MMM) partnership project with the universities of Edinburgh and Stirling and its legacy project to enhance graduate attributes and competencies at masters level and build capacity in the graduate workforce. The legacy project with its emphasis on credit-bearing work-based projects as an alternative to a traditional masters-level dissertation is now very much embedded in the academic disciplines and is driven by academic Schools and PGT Programme Co-ordinators in a variety of disciplines including engineering, computing science, global health and management, accountancy and museum studies. Examples include the work-based placement component of our [MSc Global Health and Management](#) programme, which was presented recently at our Academic Symposium under our Evidence for Enhancement umbrella, and our MLitt in Museum Studies where students can opt to work on a practical museum project in a placement offered by a partner museum rather than undertaking a dissertation. Several of our LLM programmes offer two routes: the first the traditional programme that culminates in a dissertation, the second route where the dissertation component is replaced by a professional skills course.



Personal Tutors for PGTs in Psychology

In 2017-18 **Psychology** piloted personal tutors for PGTs with three members of staff. They identified a number of issues with students who were struggling (particularly overseas students), and talking to the students in PT meetings clarified that there was a real need among PGTs for such pastoral and academic support, particularly in regard to support on employability-related signposting. The School will operate the system in 2018-19 and will formally evaluate the scheme, with a view to reporting to the PGT committee, and onwards to UCTL, by the end of the academic year.



LLM with Professional Skills:

The **Law** School has implemented a new model of LLM programme. This programme replaces the traditional dissertation element with a professional skills element relevant to the specific programme. This model was developed in response to feedback from students who indicated an interest in this type of programme. 6 programmes now have both options (Oil and Gas, International Commercial Law, Energy Law, Energy & Environmental Law, International Trade Law, Intellectual Property Law). These innovative programmes have proved very popular, and application numbers have grown quickly such that these are already similar for both the skills and dissertation options on all these courses. The programmes have also been well received by the legal profession as for example the LLM in International Commercial Law with Professional Skills is accredited by the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators

“ The quality training administered by leading professors and lecturers in the field as well as the close interaction with faculty members in other departments will definitely prepare me for my doctoral research later on. Crucially, the theoretical knowledge in oil and gas law, the negotiation skills and time-management skills I gained at the completion of the Programme were invaluable both during my time in a UK Government Department and currently in my work with a Private Equity firm”

PGT student, Masters in Oil & Gas Law with Professional Skills (LLM)



2.4.9 We have, for a number of years, prepared an annual, primarily undergraduate-focused report to Senate, 'Delivering a High Quality Student Experience', considered by the ELIR 3 Team as *"an example of good practice in providing a well synthesised institution-wide analysis of progress against the learning and teaching plan"*. At an early meeting of the newly-formed PGTC it was agreed that the PGT student experience had not been evaluated with the same level of scrutiny and that many of the metrics used to measure the UG student experience did not translate well to PGT. A working group of the committee has begun to consider the methods and processes adopted for UG with a view to agreeing a similar set of robust evidence to engender a shared understanding across UOA as to what constitutes evidence for evaluating the PGT student experience. Discussion is in progress, with a view to bringing formal proposals to Senate in autumn 2018 with a full analysis in spring 2019. Investigation into three key metrics is, however, already under way:

- **Contemporaneous Experience Survey:** We have traditionally participated in the HEA PTES survey which allowed us to benchmark UOA against the results of participating institutions. Garnering good response rates has been a significant challenge and cause for concern however; whilst rates have improved slightly over the years (25% at UOA relative to a sector average of 31.8%), generalising from respondents to those who do not respond to the survey was tricky. Nevertheless, Schools have found the free text comments useful, and it's felt a survey will still be

a useful mechanism to review the PGT experience, albeit in consideration with other tools such as SCEF and SSLCs. As such, notwithstanding the importance of participating in sector-wide surveys, whilst HEFCE are consulting on a new survey to replace PTES, we will deliver our PGT edition of our new internal Student Engagement survey from July-September with questions akin to the NSS supplemented by additional engagement questions (2.1.12);

- **Destination Survey:** Destination data on PGs is collected but efforts are heavily focused on Home/EU students for HESA purposes. As we have a high proportion of International PGs, and response rates are lower than we would like, our data is not comprehensive. Additionally, we recognise that not all PGT study is undertaken to secure employment; some studying part-time and/or online are already in graduate-level employment. Nevertheless, we believe there remains value in considering this data as part of the PGT student experience evaluation as it can be used in interesting ways, such as showing a link between specific degrees and employment. We have investigated surveying the Alumni network but this would require a change to students' terms and conditions, potentially deterring students from signing up to this. Discussion in this area continues;
- **Retention (Award) Data:** An important, but challenging metric to consider as defining a 'positive outcome' is harder at PGT given the greater number of potential exit points. We are working to investigate numbers of students exiting with the fullest degree from

the programme on which they were initially registered, contrasting where possible, UG degree classification against PGT award to consider if this may be a suitable measure of 'added value'. We will also look at number of awards at commendation and distinction level, and trends within this among specific demographics such as gender and nationality.

- 2.4.10 The Working Group are also keen to gather and learn from the experiences of others, both within and outside the UK, and the Chair of the PGT Committee recently met with colleagues from Curtin University, who are similarly considering the best approaches to measure the postgraduate student experience, and with whom we are now exploring opportunities for potential collaboration.

Storyboarding: Redesigning the Masters Programmes in Medical Physics and Medical Imaging. The Programme Co-ordinator was keen to ensure that, whilst the two constituent programmes were still recruiting acceptable numbers of students, they were not needlessly repeating any areas and that the two programmes were sufficiently different and targeting the appropriate students. The programme teams were brought together (a mix of both university and NHS staff), facilitated by CAD, and began by establishing learning outcomes and moving on from there to determine what the differences between the two programmes actually is and how elements might also be delivered in the future in a more granular form of CPD for interested professionals (radiographers and medical physicists in hospitals). Impressed with both the process and outcomes, the Programme Co-ordinator scripted the experience and submitted it as a poster to the 7th National Scottish Medical Education Conference, where it won first prize.

Postgraduate Research Students

- 2.4.11 We adopted a phased approach to establishing our PGRS. While universal agreement had been reached as to the separation of support and management of PGT and PGR students and the creation of a single graduate school, views on the scope of the graduate school differed. The Dean and the Manager of the PGRS were appointed January 2017 to lead the consultation and proposal process. Following an extensive consultation process, involving members of an institution-wide PGR School Steering Group, Heads of School, academic and Professional Services staff, UMG approved a two-phase process. Phase one, a transition stage, would retain the existing model (central support for student enquiries and admissions and administration in four schools, monitoring, progression, scholarship management and training and development for all schools) while the PGRS was established, resourced and existing practices reviewed; proposals are to be considered March 2019. Phase two will implement the agreed recommendations from phase one's review as to the scope of the most effective operating model, be that (i) centralised support for all schools, (ii) decentralised support within Schools with service level review by the PGRS or (iii) a combination thereof.
- 2.4.12 The PGRS team was fully established by early 2017-18 and the Dean and Manager are supported in the development of policy and strategy for PGR students by the PGR committee which, as a formal sub-Committee of the Research Policy Committee (RPC), reports to senior management and Court via the RPC. The PGRS committee (comprising the Director of Research and a PGR student representative from each School in addition to Professional Services and AUSA representatives) also monitors compliance with institutional policies and procedures, and oversees supervisor training and support across all schools.

2.4.13 Phase one of the PGRS has brought together the expertise and ambition of three separate College Graduate schools and the Research Development team for PGR students from CAD, providing the opportunity to build a strong, positive, and interdisciplinary research culture for all PGR students. The PGRS inherited sound (yet separate) systems and procedures, many pockets of good practice within different Schools and a comprehensive and successful [researcher development programme](#) of which *“research students spoke positively of the support and training that had been provided”* during ELIR 3 [ELIR 3 Technical Report]. As such, in its first 10 months of operation the PGRS, supported by the PGRS Committee, has focused its activities on reviewing policies and practices, harmonising procedures and sharing effective practice across Schools; providing a focal point for this work has been the desire to improve PGR completion rates.

2.4.14 PGRs have significant influence on our research culture and its vibrancy, and ensuring the best environment for our PGRs is critical to the strength of our research activity, global research profile career development of our students. Completion rates provide an indicator of the quality of the student experience, the effectiveness of our monitoring and supervision processes, the value of the training and support available and, crucially, our admissions and selection processes, that is, how effectively we accept excellent students who are well-matched to the research interests and research culture of UOA. In April 2017, a detailed [three-year analysis of PhD completion rates](#) across all Schools was considered by Senate, considering mode of study, gender, nationality, fee status (home or overseas), and field of study criteria. With findings revealing PGR completion rates differing markedly across Schools, and across years, from a high of 100% to a low of 33%, Senate also discussed a range of possible actions to positively impact on the PGR student experience and, in time, completion rates. With many of these actions based on student feedback (evaluation forms,

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) data and anecdotal evidence) the PGR Committee agreed to pursue six work streams delegated to working groups, chaired by a member of the PGR committee and involving a subset of the committee and additional participants from Schools and Professional Services: Student-Supervisor Expectations; Monitoring and Progression; Academic Decision Making and Support for PGR Admissions, Research Training and Development, Generic Skills Training and Development and Additional Research Costs (ARCs). Recommendations from the first three work streams to report have been approved::

- **Student-Supervisor Expectations:**

[A Statement of Expectation for PGR Students and Supervisors](#) was approved by Senate (February 2018). It aligns with our Code of Practice for PGR students and will be highlighted to prospective students in induction packs and orientation events. Supervisors have been encouraged to discuss it with their students. Supervisor training has been enhanced with more interactive and reflective activities to enable supervisors to draw on their own experiences to address common PGR-related situations. A two-day residential course was piloted in June 2017 followed by a ‘bite-size’ lunchtime training session in December 2017. Supervisor training for 2018-19 will include a greater focus support for health and wellbeing, research integrity, resilience, and supporting mental wellbeing. Whilst the feedback from the residential programme was positive, it was challenging for participants to commit the time, and so the format will be changed to a series of short courses;

- **Monitoring and Progression:**

Standardising formal assessment criteria has been [agreed](#) by the PGR committee and work is under way to finesse and contextualise these in schools for September 2018. Assessment Panels have been mandated from 2018-19 to approve (or otherwise) student progression and guidance regarding panel remit and composition to ensure externality to the



process has been approved;

- **Additional Research Costs:** The PGR Committee has approved a series of recommendations regarding the applications for, administration of, and contingency arrangements for ARCs.

2.4.15 Work continues in regard to 'Decision Making and Support for PGR Admissions'. Instigating interviews for all shortlisted PhD candidates has already been agreed, and ideas to streamline the applicant process and enhance our online information for prospective students are being considered; a Business Improvement project (3.2.9) to support these discussions has been scheduled for 2018-19. The generic skills working group has identified the need for improved support for part-time, off-campus and distance students and for formal accredited or credit-bearing recognition of generic skills activities with an immediate focus on support for academic writing; a formal proposal will be developed and brought to the PGR committee in autumn 2018.

2.4.16 Supporting interdisciplinary student working has included practical support to PGRs and staff for studentships and other funding applications. Successes include **ESRC** Business Boost funding received in partnership with the universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and the ESCR Doctoral Training Partnership (Scottish Graduate

School for Social Sciences) and also Advanced Training Funds from the Scottish Graduate School for Social Sciences for public engagement training integrated during the ESRC Festival of Social Sciences. A prestigious Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarship award to fund a multidisciplinary [Centre for Doctoral Training](#) in 'green' research and a UKRI Centre for Doctoral Training in Artificial Intelligence call to support 50 students over five years has been invited to full proposal.

2.4.17 Work to enhance our support structures for PGR health and wellbeing is also under way and the PGRS has recently been awarded funding from our [Development Trust](#) Student Experience Fund to support PGR students with additional caring responsibilities to attend professional development activities. We are investigating the cause, frequency and duration of suspensions to study of PGR students. Whilst some suspensions cannot be avoided (e.g. due to illness or maternity leave), there may be other causes that can perhaps be reduced by better support mechanisms; a first step has been to re-introduce and clarify the role of school Graduate School Officers to review all PGR student suspension requests and address support needs. Results of the 2017 Postgraduate Research Student Experience Survey (PRES) have been discussed within Schools and with the Dean and Manager of the PGRS, and localised enhancements have been

agreed and acted upon within Schools. A common theme occurring both from PRES and also PGR SSLCs in 2017-18 is the need for improved channels for communication between Schools and PGRS, and it is hoped both the enhanced supervisor training and new Statement of Expectations for PGR students, and having PGRs from each School as part of the membership of the PGRS committee, will be central to improvements in this regard.

2.4.18 The PGRS delivers the researcher development programme which provides opportunities for PGR students to enhance their professional skills via skills training workshops and opportunities where newly-acquired skills can be put into practice. Our Researcher Engagement and Development ethos developed through an RCUK-funded Catalyst project, stresses the importance of putting skills into practice in a professional setting, to test them and more importantly to generate an evidence base for CVs. We

PGR student successes

[Granite](#), an online journal established by students for students is the UOA's first PG interdisciplinary journal.

Our School-based student conferences, e.g. the [Engineering Postgraduate Research Symposium](#) and [Biological Sciences Postgraduate Research Conference](#) are student organised and led, and provide the time and space for PGRs to network, socialise and engage with the diverse, novel research within their respective Schools.

Two PhD students in the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, have been longlisted for the prestigious [Ivan Juritz Prize](#).

One PhD student in our Health Services Research Unit has been awarded a prestigious [Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship](#) to explore how researchers can effectively work alongside creative industries to improve public knowledge of scientific concepts.

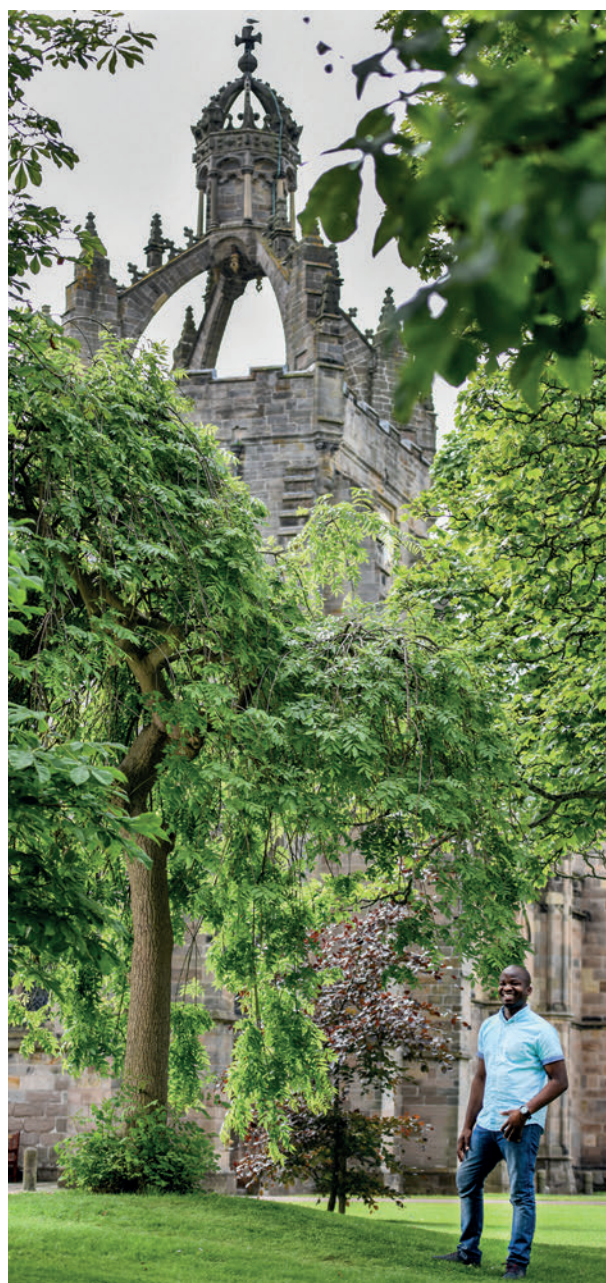
One of our PHD students won a [national award](#) at a PhD Networking Event, hosted by Skills Development Scotland and has subsequently he has been commissioned to produce a short video to showcase the Skills Development Scotland collaborative PhD programme.



recognise, however, that not all individuals will remain within academia and so also provide opportunities for researchers to acquire skills that will support them in any chosen career. For example, in their first year, each PhD student receives foundation skills training including ethics, scientific-writing, government policy-making and time-management. Our Public Engagement with Research Unit ([PERU](#)) provides a year-round suite of activities to give early career researchers opportunities to put new skills into practice and integrate with the researcher community, including Enabling Funds and a Principal's Prize for Public Engagement and the researcher-led Initiative (RLI) fund which encourages researchers to devise, organise and deliver university-wide activities with a career development focus. Our [HR Excellence in Research Award](#) (achieved in 2010, successfully retained 2012, 2014 and 2016), awarded by the European Commission, recognises our commitment to the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and alignment with the European Charter and Code for the Recruitment and Management of Researchers.

2.4.19 The Aberdeen-Curtin Alliance 'pump-primed' a collaborative PhD offering funding for 36 new PhD students from 2017-19. The agreement allows a student to begin their PhD study for a year at the home university then spend a further year at the partner institution before returning to the home university for the final year of study. Students are jointly and equally supervised throughout regardless of their location. Broadly, the studentships are allocated to the principal academic theme areas of the alliance. The scheme has worked well in its first year of operation and has been flexible to allow one student whose study area was suited better to studying one year at Aberdeen followed by two at Curtin. For the first (2017) intake cohort, six students started at Curtin with one now already having transferred to Aberdeen for their second year with a further two transfers imminent. Similarly, six students started at Aberdeen in 2017, with three having

already transferred to Perth, another two soon to do so and one being delayed due to personal circumstances. Feedback from the Aberdeen students has thus far been very positive though there have been some frustrations at points about, for example, marrying up the progression and monitoring requirements of the two partners, but these have been clarified. The Aberdeen cohort of students were given guidance and support in organising their transfers to Curtin and the PGRS and Transnational Education team keeps in regular contact with both them and their supervisors regarding progress, to support them on exchange and deal with any issues that arise.



2.5 Learning environment, including the use of technology

Technology

2.5.1 Technological advances are revolutionising contemporary learning, which has less emphasis on traditional lecturing and more on well-supported, experiential, self-directed or small group learning. In our recent student experience survey pilot (July 2018), 80.4% of those responding said online learning systems were a major part of their education sometimes or often, and when they used them, 90% reported using them to improve their learning.

2.5.2 Students expect to receive their education in a variety of formats, with regular feedback about progress and personalised support when needed. In response, we deliver our teaching through multiple channels (2.5.4). Supporting us in this is our 2016 Digital Strategy. Our strategy seeks to enhance our learning environment and student learning journey, as exemplified throughout our Reflective Analysis, by enabling multiple methods of delivery (2.2.5, 2.2.33, 2.3.20-21, 2.4.3, 2.5.3, 5.3), develop flexible, technology-enhanced learning spaces (2.5.3), optimise use of our VLE (2.5.7), make greater use of data (4.4) and enhance the student experience through other digitally-enabled provision (2.3.6, 2.3.8, 2.3.12, 2.5.4).

2.5.3 In September 2016 we introduced two **Digitally-Enhanced Learning Spaces (DELS)**. The DELS were created to support collaborative and distributed learning. They consist of a combination of flexible furniture, state-of-the-art voice tracking video cameras for web conferencing, and the ability to wirelessly project technological devices and share screens. Together they allow a shared classroom experience for staff and students from all over the world, as demonstrated by our pioneering **GP Live**. To encourage staff to use DELS and to share good practice, CAD hosted an event in October 2017 to showcase work that colleagues from Curtin University, the University of West England and Napier University are doing in similar active learning spaces. Our evaluation of

DELS demonstrates that staff appreciate the access to supportive technologies for engendering novel approaches to teaching; students enjoy using their own devices in a comfortable and flexible environment. Nevertheless lessons have been learned, such as preparing students in advance to expect a different way of learning, and allowing set-up time in advance of the teaching session to upload the appropriate apps to personal devices. Discussions are now under way as to how our experiences with DELS can inform development and baseline requirements of teaching spaces to support collaborative and distributed learning.

2.5.4 We use a variety of teaching channels including traditional, blended, online, via MOOCs, using video and web conferencing to engage in real-time communication with off-campus students in different continents and/or time zones. Other digital developments supporting this include our new video recording solution [Panopto](#). The impact of this flexible video recording solution, which better meets the needs of students and staff, can be clearly seen in the significant increase in recorded events and viewings; the first half session of 2017-18 had 5,358 events recorded (including lectures), an increase of 56% from 2016-17. These events were viewed 190,838 times (an increase of 20% on 2016-17). Panopto's functionality has been instrumental in us moving forward with our Lecture Capture Policy (2.3.12). We have also introduced a new student response system, *Ombea*; students can now use their own device to answer questions and receive instant feedback in the classroom.

2.5.5 In August 2017 we launched a re-branded online portal for students, the **Student Hub**, which provides students with greater insight into, and control of, their personal data including grades, timetable, attendance records and control and personalisation of UOA communications. Sign-posting to, and click-to-call functionality for a range of internal and external support organisations is embedded, including students' personal tutors. The portal uses mobile-first design

GP Live is a near real time e-GP Surgery learning experience for medical students delivered in a DELS environment. A GP tutor records patient consultations that are streamed and subsequently analysed by teams of medical students who can share their thoughts and observations of the techniques they'd seen. Staff and students are very positive:

Staff: The biggest appeal for students is that they see consultations that are almost live, and this adds a sense of immediacy that appeals to students who have grown up in an era where digitisation has made learning far more interactive"

Student: "This session didn't only show a realistic but very skilled (from an untrained perspective at least) interactions between a GP and a patient but it also motivated me to improve towards reaching a similar professional level in future interactions".



principles ensuring students can access all essential information on mobile devices. A comprehensive roadmap for further development of the Student Hub includes rationalising content to ensure no overlap, particularly in regard to examination feedback, with MyAberdeen and redevelopment of our eRegistration portal for September 2019 entrants.

- 2.5.6 Other IT services for students include free wireless internet access in university-owned and managed halls and across campus, high-spec PCs distributed through classrooms, libraries and clusters on campus and in halls and a range of specialist assistive technology software on all classroom PCs, and individual occupancy booths. Full details of the IT services available to students can be found [online](#). Our rolling technology replacement programme ensures all IT and audio-visual equipment in teaching areas and open-access classrooms is replaced on a four-year cycle, thus ensuring high-quality environments. Our IT Relationship Management Team keep IT Services aware of student requirements

and students informed of developments and service improvements. The team also work closely with teaching staff and Schools to ensure their teaching requirements are addressed.

MyAberdeen VLE

- 2.5.7 Our MyAberdeen VLE, and associated learning technologies integrated therein, is managed and supported by the eLearning team within CAD with strategic oversight by our VLE Project and Implementation Board. A 2017 review of MyAberdeen took place with staff and students, to ensure that it remained fit for purpose and adaptable to the changing needs of pedagogy, different modes of study and our increasingly diverse body of students. We are now amid the work necessary to move MyAberdeen to Blackboard's flagship VLE, Learn with the Ultra Experience, and will complete this transformation by July 2019. To support this process we are reviewing VLE analytics and working with Schools to better understand how and why staff use MyAberdeen in order to drive change and greater use of

MyAberdeen's functionality (a recurring concern in student surveys and focus groups).

- 2.5.8 Every year MyAberdeen is upgraded and enhanced, using feedback from previous MyAberdeen Student Surveys to ensure it meets the needs of students. Despite the work under way to move to Ultra, our existing MyAberdeen has continued to improve its design and functionality to better meet the needs of all our students. Using results from past MyAberdeen student surveys, Google Analytics and a student focus group (2.1.13), content has been streamlined, a new mobile-responsive theme introduced and material re-written to ensure inclusivity of all students; this includes tweaks such as inclusion of international telephone numbers and email addresses to cater for students studying online from across the world to providing video tutorials and guidance material to cater for both on and off-campus students. This work continues and from 2018-19 all students will have options to personalise MyAberdeen based on whether they are studying in Aberdeen, in a different campus or fully online. In January 2018 we moved MyAberdeen from Blackboard's Managed Hosting Service to a cloud environment, Software-as-a-Service (SaaS), to fully meet the needs of our online and Doha-based students as the cloud provides minimal upgrade/maintenance downtime, higher quality online learning environment and more immediate access to new features, upgrades and enhancements. To support accessibility and inclusivity we will be introducing Blackboard Ally for 2018-19 which provides staff with guidance on improving accessibility of VLE materials and, for students, it will generate a range of more accessible alternatives for them to download.
- 2.5.9 Student feedback is key to developing our VLE. In 2017 the eLearning team employed an Intern Plus student to improve communication channels with students. Having coordinated [focus groups](#) and online students (through community areas for online students in MyAberdeen), feedback

received has contributed to MyAberdeen content (e.g. feedback button), functionality (e.g. assessment deadlines in the MyAberdeen calendar) and greater guidance to students on MyAberdeen and its recent enhancements via the Learner's Toolkit.

Library

- 2.5.10 The collections, facilities and services provided through our Library, Special Collections, and Museums ([LSC&M](#)), part of the Directorate of Digital and Information Services, underpin the research, teaching and learning activities of our university and we have invested heavily in our provision in recent years. Usage of our campus libraries continues to increase annually, with a 13% increase in the Sir Duncan Rice Library (SDRL) alone since ELIR 3. We have made a concerted effort in recent years to make the library a 'third place' for students, that is the space aside from their home and discipline where they can meet their needs not just for academic study and research, but also for relaxation and social interaction. In so doing we have responded to student feedback and introduced a variety of enhancements to our service including relaxing rules in regard to food and drink, and extending opening hours 24/7 at SDRL. Six new learning pods will be installed within the SDRL during the summer of 2018 to address increasing demand for student collaborative working space. PCs and AV equipment have also been extensively upgraded. The Medical Library at our Foresterhill campus, the Taylor Law Library and the Divinity Library at King's College provide subject-specific services with specialist staff for those disciplines.
- 2.5.11 LSC&M have worked with Schools to support both online and TNE learners in a variety of ways. Students have access to trained subject inquiry specialists, who are based in the relevant section of the Library, and are able to offer one-to-one advice on the use of resources. In addition, our team of six Information consultants provide c.2000 classroom hours of teaching annually to both UG and PG students (2116 hours total in 2016-17). These workshops and seminars include course-specific sessions delivered

in collaboration with academic staff, and general sessions on library skills, such as using journal and database resources, copyright compliance and data management. Working with the Centre for Academic Development, library staff also offer advice and guidance on writing skills, referencing and how to avoid plagiarism; important areas for students coming from a diverse range of educational systems. Supporting our PGT students, we have introduced a compulsory introductory library workshop and also 'refresher' and 'preparation for dissertation' sessions in the second half-session. Working with the PGRS, we now have regular library induction slots for new PhD students throughout the calendar year.



Estate

- 2.5.12 We continue to enhance our physical learning environment, with the creation of DELS rooms, the separate moves of AUSA and the Infohub to refurbished premises, the new builds of our [Rocking Horse Nursery](#) for the children of staff and students (using the Passivhaus standard, the first building of its kind in the Scottish HE sector) and the Rowett Institute (which secured a BREEAM rating of 'outstanding' for its sustainable design and construction) at our Foresterhill Campus, all having taken place since ELIR 2013. Our planned new ['Science Teaching Hub'](#) will provide the main teaching laboratories for students of chemistry, physiology, biomedical sciences, geosciences and biological sciences in addition to dedicated research space.
- 2.5.13 Increasing accessibility and inclusivity for disabled students remains a priority and we renewed our Disabled Go contract for buildings accessibility which included a complete review of new and refurbished building on campus in July 2017.
- 2.5.14 Our colleagues from Estates made three visits to Doha during the building of our overseas campus to ensure that it fully complied with Qatar building regulations and to establish their equivalency with UK building standards, for example, in relation to disabled access.



2.6 Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience

2.6.1. We have implemented extensive measures over the past five years to support the journey of our increasingly diverse students from pre-arrival to graduation and beyond. Wholesale changes such as the 2010 reformation of our curriculum can be transformational, but it is difficult to isolate the direct impact of such large-scale change when it affects so many aspects simultaneously and occurs over a timeframe lasting many years. More recently we have focused on introducing smaller initiatives that, while being institution-wide, can be tailored to specific schools or individual circumstances and have a more immediate and attributable impact.

2.6.2. Crucial to the success of our strategy for engaging students is our strong, productive, and collegiate working relationship with AUSA sabbatical and staff teams, demonstrated by the frequent participation of university staff in AUSA activities and events, and vice-versa, including the VP (L&T) speaking at the AUSA Student Representatives Conference, Careers Service staff participation in the AUSA Employability committee and AUSA presenters at our annual Academic Symposium. Joint working with AUSA on a NUS/SPARQ project on student engagement with Gender Action Plans, and on the Joint Statement on Sexual Assault, have improved our approaches to partnership working. We might legitimately be considered 'late' adopters of an SPA (due in part to the annual turnover of sabbatical officers and change of AUSA priorities that this can bring). We are confident our

SPA builds on this and clearly outlines our shared commitment with AUSA to foster an environment for open, honest and transparent dialogue, while recognising and being respectful of differing approaches to ensure the best university experience for our students.

2.6.3. Collectively our increased activity and reporting (2.2) have enhanced awareness of, and collaboration around, the differing needs and expectations of our diverse cohorts, as well as Equality and Diversity issues more generally.

2.6.4. For example, the extended membership of AGED and its revised remit together with an extension of our equality networks has had a positive impact in policy development, as has our activity and success in Athena Swan. The establishment of an E&D Research Group, based in Psychology, will provide additional and ongoing analyses of the evidence available on the impact of good equality and diversity practice in organisations to support our own work in this area. To assess the impact of our Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy specifically, we are in the early stages of working with See Me (a mental health organisation focused on ending stigma related to mental health).

2.6.5. In relation to mental health specifically, student numbers requesting In-person appointments with our SASO advisers increased by 73% between 2015-16 and 2016-17, particularly among those seeking support for stress, anxiety and mental ill-health; in 2017-18 there has already been 152 referrals to the MHA. The number of clients to the

Student Counselling Service has increased by 17% over the same time period, and by over 36% since ELIR 3. Some of this increase may be the result of better promotion of our support services generally via our improved website and promotional material, our Clued Up campaign, Personal Tutors, and our Mental Health training for staff and students. To date, 147 staff and 33 students have undertaken our certificated Mental Health First Aid training. We believe we are responding well to this challenge, having made significant inroads in both practical support available, and also clear, supportive, policy and procedures to offer students the greatest opportunity of continuing with their studies. However this is an area we recognise will continue to be a challenge. Training is being developed for academic and support staff aimed at improving confidence in supporting students with mental health conditions and in working with distressed students, and links are successfully being developed with NHS services to ensure more joined-up support for our students.

- 2.6.6. We have made significant progress in broadening further our student population. For example, we have increased our articulation partners and pathways and, as a consequence, the numbers articulating with advanced standing. We have grown the number of online learners, and welcomed our first cohort of TNE students to our Doha campus. We are also well advanced in meeting the numbers of student coming from a SIMD20 background, as set out in our outcome agreement.
- 2.6.7. However, we have had a disappointing decrease in the percentage of Scottish-domiciled students entering STEM based courses in 2016-17 and 2017-18. This has been caused, at least in-part, by the depressed oil and gas sector. In response an internal analysis of STEM recruitment and population trends has been undertaken, we are participating in the Education Development Trust's [Go4SET](#) STEM Schools Programme, developing online access courses in sciences and developing a [STEM Ambassador](#) programme which will deliver

careers talks in local schools, host work experience within research labs and attend School careers events. To ensure fair access to the event, a travel bursary will be offered.

- 2.6.8. We have enhanced the support and activities in place to allow our students to feel part of our community, to engage fully in their learning and provide them with the tools they need for success.
- 2.6.9. In the 2017 NSS we achieved 80.7% for Learning Community and in 2018 this was 79.3%, figures that are higher than our benchmark.
- 2.6.10. This view of community is shared across all years, not just the NSS cohort. In our July 2018 Student Engagement survey pilot (N=745), 93.4% of those responding felt we provide a supportive place to learn (sometimes or often) and 94.6% felt staff respected students' backgrounds, perspectives and needs (sometimes or often).



2.6.11. We believe the clearest evidence of our success in supporting students can be seen in the change in the number of students remaining with us and successfully completing their studies (see figure 6). Over the period since ELIR 3 we have seen significant improvement in our retention and the current institutional non-continuation rate of 4.3% is the lowest achieved in 11 years and, in the last session, includes a further 1.4% improvement in the numbers of new students continuing into their second year. We believe this reflects well on our many initiatives at an institutional, school, and discipline level, facilitated by our Retention Task Force. The additional pre-arrival work on building a sense of belonging (2.2.14-15) has included:

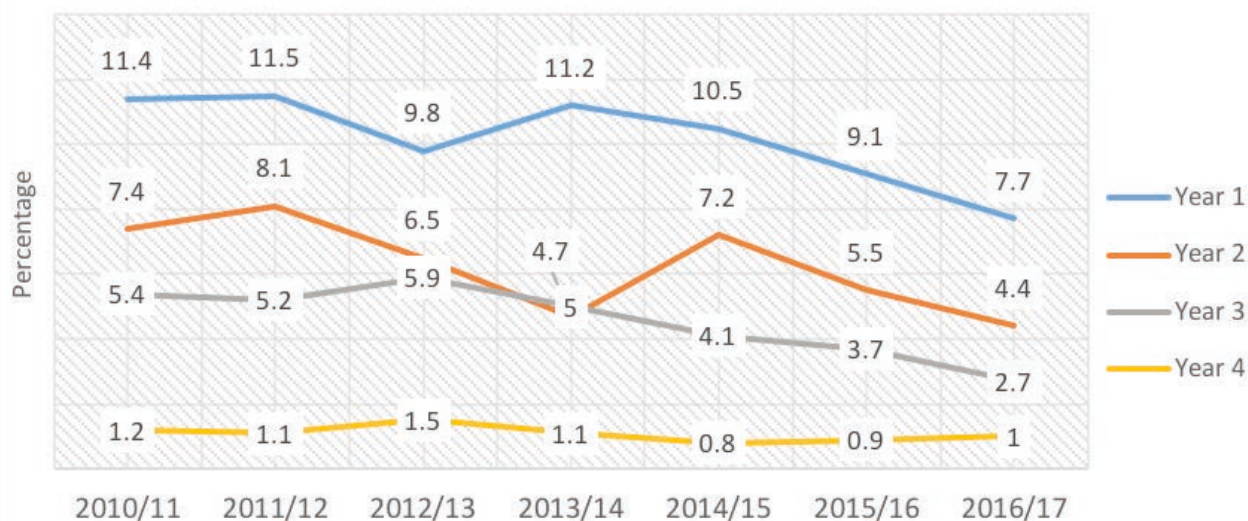
- enhanced orientation and induction (2.2.17-19);
- the appointment of designated support co-ordinators in Schools such as Engineering;
- the lecture monitoring pilot (2.3.11);
- revision to wording of the emails to students warning of progress to make clearer the needed actions;
- other work of sharing best practice facilitated by the Retention Task Force.

These measures appear to be having a positive impact on the number of students who remain with us, and the culture of the university.

2.6.12. As suggested in 2.2.9 we have seen an increase in the number of students reporting issues with mental health, and our analysis of the reasons students withdraw indicates the number of students citing 'Health Reasons' has gradually increased. In 2010-11, 6.5% of students cited this reason, compared with 19.5% in 2016-17. However, the data also indicate that far fewer students are now 'deemed withdrawn' by the institution, the percentage almost halving from 32.9% in 2010/11 to 16.5% at present. This suggests that in having fewer 'silent' withdrawals (students just not returning for the next session), students are communicating with the institution more, likely as a consequence of improvements to the university's withdrawal process and support mechanisms (e.g. 2.2.9).

2.6.13. While we feel we have enhanced significantly our support, we are aware there is still more that needs to be done. As already highlighted in 2.3.13 we have piloted, in a limited way, the use of risk-profiling for first year students and are undertaking a further proof of concept study in the use of learning analytics around dynamic data. A learning analytics policy will be presented to Senate in the autumn of 2018. We believe this, along with the further embedding and roll out of the initiatives already discussed, will improve retention. It will also allow us to provide additional support for groups that

Figure 6: Non-continuation by Programme Year



show elevated levels on non-continuation relative to our general student population, for example, students from deprived backgrounds as measured by SIMD.

- 2.6.14. In addition to creating an increased sense of belonging, we believe various changes have helped students to achieve the positive outcomes they deserve. For example, change to our grading scheme and moderation process have addressed the concerns of external examiners that work which should be receiving the highest classification of mark was not doing so under the previous scheme, to the detriment of students.
- 2.6.15. The transitional support processes we have put in place since ELIR 3 (2.3) have also resulted in improvements in attainment. For example, in the summer school for articulating students developed in Engineering. Students demonstrated an increase in academic knowledge over the duration of the summer school and gained confidence as they became familiar with their new learning environment. Staff reported students who attended were noticeably better prepared for study; almost 75% of those who articulated to Engineering degree programmes in 2016-17 failed at least one of their courses at the first attempt, with this figure falling to 25% in the first half-session of 2017-18 and, in-course assessment, predicting even better performance in second half-session courses. We aim to build on the success of this initiative and a transition summer school for Accountancy students will take place in 2018.

Transitional Summer School in Engineering

"I've learned so much over the past two weeks and even though it has been intense I feel prepared and ready to hit the ground running."

3rd year, MEng, Mechanical Engineering student

- 2.6.16. Since 2016 and the formation of the A&F Task Force, our NSS results for Assessment and Feedback have improved by 6.2%. School A&F plans (2.3.16) were incorporated into the autumn 2017 strategic planning process (4.4) and a 'stock-take' and evaluation exercise will be conducted by the A&F Task Force in autumn 2018, with a view to disseminating further effective practice. We accept this is likely to remain an area of significant activity for us.
- 2.6.17. The ELIR 3 Team noted we had *"placed considerable emphasis on employability ... and [have] a wide ranging and systematic approach to its promotion"*. We have maintained this emphasis and approach. For example, through the work of the Positive Outcomes Task Force in setting minimum careers expectations and new initiatives such as the Leadership Academy and new academic work-based project courses (2.3.23, 2.3.30, 2.3.38).
- 2.6.18. Positive destinations are one of our KPIs, reported to Court bi-annually. Against a difficult economic environment, our graduates' destinations, as measured by the DLHE survey, have remained strong. 96.4% of our Honours graduates moved on to positive destinations (employment and/or further study) in 2014-15. This fell by 0.6% to 95.8% in 2015-16 and remained reasonably stable at 95.5% in 2016-17. This high level of employment and further study is more salient given we are a broad-based institution rather than only offering programmes that link directly to specific employment opportunities. The numbers in graduate-level employment or further study is particularly positive in the current year, having reached over 80% for the first time (78.8% in 2014-15, 76.7% in 2015-16 and 80.9% in 2016-17). The high levels of those going on to further study (30.8%, 35.6% and 33.9% over the last three years respectively), compared with the overall UK HESA graduate destinations data in 2016-17, where only 15% of graduates went on to further study, is further evidence of the quality of our graduates, as many enter prestigious institutions with high entry requirements. Our unemployment

rate in 2016-17 (4.4%) is also below the UK and Scottish unemployment average of 5%. There is [evidence](#) that the challenging local economic environment (and possibly Brexit) is resulting in more of those finishing at university choosing to leave the area, with over a 12% fall in those with a local postcode on completion since 2013-14.

2.6.19. While cautious of the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data, the 2017 data revealed a positive picture on the earnings of our graduates in a number of disciplines. In Law, our graduates were the highest and second-highest earners respectively in Scotland one and five years after graduation (2012-13 and 2008-09 cohorts), while our Engineering & Technology graduates went from being the fourth-highest earners one year after graduation to second-highest after three years and the highest earners five years after graduation (2012-13, 2010-11 and 2008-09 cohorts).

2.6.20. However, while reassured that more of our graduates are successfully competing to enter further study or graduate level employment six months after graduation, we are conscious the employment market, particularly as a result of the impact of the local economic environment, remains challenging. We have put in place opportunities such as additional work-based learning courses, online professional skills courses and activities such as Build Your Future (2.3.40), to ensure our graduates remain as competitive in the employment market as they are in the academic arena.

2.6.21. While we are well advanced in evaluating the experience of students on undergraduate programmes, we recognised the need to give greater focus to postgraduate students.

22.6.22. Consequently, we have an enhanced focus on the PGT and PGR student experiences by establishing separate PGTC and PGRS committees and new leadership via the Deans for Postgraduate Taught Studies and Dean of the PGRS. With the PGTC comprised of colleagues directly involved in PGT delivery, this has significantly enhanced

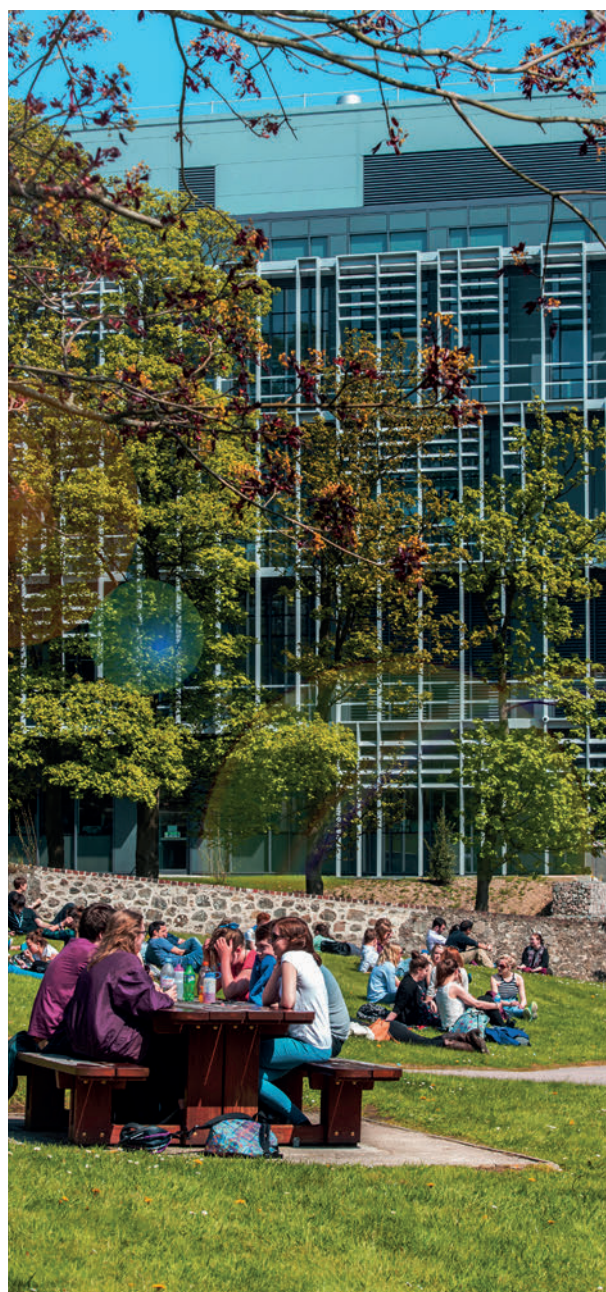
the quality of discussion, has allowed good practice to be shared, and a considered consensus to decision-making. The establishment of the [PGRS](#) has enhanced the management and governance of our research students and the PGR Committee's work stream approach has been beneficial in ensuring School involvement in decision making, in developing awareness of School and discipline contextual differences and in demonstrating incremental progress to, and building trust with, Schools. Communication and flow of information between Schools and the PGRS is working well; PGR committee papers are copied to School Admin Officers and School-based PGR admin teams meet regularly with the PGR School team. The PGRS's largely centralised administrative support for Schools and individual supervisors and students has ensured continuity of service across each School and, where appropriate, has standardised procedures and timescales across disciplines.



2.6.23. Our plans for measuring the PGT Student experience are well under way, and have attracted interested form the sector; the QAA requested, and have published, a paper to their TipZone resource.

2.6.24. The creation of our central PGRS has brought significant benefits to the research student experience. These include providing and supporting administrative opportunities for disciplinary and cross-disciplinary debate and collaboration, such as our [Qualitative Research Network](#). This is a student-led fora for PGRs and staff to stimulate discussion, provide peer support, and deliver informal training on all aspects of qualitative research promoting cross-disciplinary supervision of students and shared projects, such as the recent [Leverhulme Award](#) to fund 15 multi-disciplinary scholarships in sustainable production of chemicals from organic waste. There is greater shared access to external partners, mentors and employers, fostering potential connections or collaborations (2.4.15). The PGRS has also been able to engender circumstances (such as centrally-organised orientation events and events such as inviting Jorge Cham, founder of PHD Comics, to talk on 'The Power of Procrastination') for greater peer support among PGRs to promote networking. Since January 2018, the PGRS has a new home, containing a dual-purpose social hub and interdisciplinary collaboration space for staff and students which is being furnished. It is hoped this will help cultivate a community where PGRs can unite, collaborate and encourage each other.

2.6.25. We will report to UMG in March 2019 on proposals for the scope and structure of the PGRS. In the meantime, PGRS will continue in its transitional phase and with a new Dean for the PGRS having taken up post in June 2018, there will be an increased emphasis on work to support the health and wellbeing of PGR students. A priority in regard to research training and development is to improve our online resource provision to ensure our off-campus, part-time time and distance students are appropriately catered for; central to this will be developing a MyAberdeen virtual home for PGRs in line with latest [QAA guidance on building research communities](#).



Strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching

3.1 Strategic approach to enhancement

- 3.1.1 The four goals set out under the section on Learning and Teaching in our Strategic Plan provide the focus and direction for our work to enhance the experience of our students.
- 3.1.2 Our strategy for enhancing learning and teaching is built around community and an ethos of collaborative working, with our students, individual academics, and Professional Services. Consequently, we provide a range of fora and opportunities that allow for full and frank discussion, development and evaluation of our policies and practice.



- 3.1.3 Our [L&T policies and processes](#) are discussed, developed and refined using this collaborative approach. Proposals can be 'top-down' or 'bottom-up'. Proposed revisions to our resit policy (QAC), Framework for Feedback on Assessment (A&F Task Force) and Attendance monitoring (Retention Task Force) have originated in working groups or sub-committees; Lecture Capture and our drive to introduce Online Education more widely were institutional initiatives, with lecture capture a policy championed by AUSA and its Education Committee in particular.

Committee Structure

- 3.1.4 Our learning and teaching committees play a central role in the development and dissemination of policy and practice.
- 3.1.5 We took the opportunity offered by the removal of Colleges ([1.1.17](#)) to revise our committee structure to increase representation and focus, particularly in relation to enhancing the experience of our postgraduate students.
- 3.1.6 We created a separate PGT committee ([PGTC](#)) which, in line with its UG equivalent, is responsible to the UCTL for oversight of the PGT academic student experience. Our PGTC comprises the postgraduate directors for taught programmes from each of our Schools. At the same time, we created a separate Postgraduate Research School focused on research students.
- 3.1.7 Our UG Committee ([UGC](#)) is responsible to the UCTL for oversight of the undergraduate academic student experience. Since 2010-11, our UGC has comprised representatives from each of our Schools (Directors of Teaching).
- 3.1.8 Linked to [3.1.5](#), the roles of UG and PGT Dean were created as part of our intention to more clearly demarcate UG and PG-taught students and so, in line with our goal to increase the numbers of taught postgraduates, raise the visibility of PGT students. The Deans have a level of strategic learning and teaching oversight across the

institution representing academics (and by extension, Schools) on various university-level groups including the VLE Review and Implementation Project Board, Online Steering Group, and the Enhancement Themes Steering Group. The Deans support academics, raising the profile of teaching and sharing good practice (e.g. their [Assessment and Assignment Skills Exchange](#) workshop). The Deans meet regularly with the VP L&T and promote linkages between academics and Professional Services, educating each party in regard to annual pressure points with, for example, their UG and PGT Communications and Engagement groups.

3.1.9 To ensure impartial oversight of Quality Assurance, issues of quality assurance and maintenance of standards are addressed by a separate Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). QAC is chaired by the Dean for QE and QA and its membership was expanded in 2013-14, ensuring each School was represented on the committee. Having each School represented on each UCTL sub-committee has created greater engagement with staff in Schools who have responsibility for implementing changes arising from UCTL and Senate.

3.1.10 In line with our community approach, to ensure student representation, AUSA has two seats on each committee. There is representation on UCTL from Professional Services including CAD, DDIS, Registry, and the Careers Service.

3.1.11 Alignment between these committees is provided through cross-membership between the UCTL and the QAC, and UGC and PGTC. An agenda-setting meeting of the three Conveners and the VP L&T takes place to ensure alignment of business between that of the UCTL and its three sub-committees.

3.1.12 In addition to regular committee business, special discussions at Senate to 'provide an academic view' (e.g. lecture capture (November 2017) and PGR Completion Rates (April 2017)) allow a wide academic oversight and input into initiatives across the L&T

spectrum. As necessary, extraordinary Senates have been held to discuss issues of particular importance including new moderation processes following introduction of our Code of Practice on Assessment and discussion of Transnational Education proposals.

Task Forces

3.1.13 We recognised that there were areas of strategic importance that required particular visibility and focus. Consequently, Senate established three task forces, one to focus on Retention, one on Assessment & Feedback and the other on Positive Outcomes. The Chairs of each group are members of UCTL. To encourage the sharing of good practice and the development of institutional initiatives, each group has a representative from each of our Schools, along with students and colleagues from Professional Services. The Task Forces have been instrumental in leading developments at UOA, including our lecture attendance pilot, our Framework for Feedback on Assessment and developing our recently-produced minimum careers information guidance policy.



3.1.14 We have a variety of other fora to encourage interdisciplinary, cross-School and cross-Professional Services collaboration, including steering groups (e.g. Enhancement Themes, Curriculum Management), project boards (e.g. Digital Strategy, Careers Service Employers Board), and working groups (e.g. Student Registration, UG and PG Communications). In addition, we have role-specific networks such as the School Disability Coordinators, Digital Learning Representatives and Learning & Teaching network which allow colleagues with specific roles to share experience, practice and, at times, frustrations.

Governance of Strategic Enhancement Projects

3.1.15 Institutional Strategic Projects are governed by a Project Board or Steering Group, each comprising representation from appropriate Professional Services, Schools and students, thus ensuring effective coordination over complex work strands and buy-in from all stakeholders. These groups serve to provide strategic direction for their respective areas, horizon scanning to keep abreast of developments and opportunities in the field, and oversight of progress towards project targets. These strategic initiatives are broad in scope and report on aspects of relevance to different committees. The Online Steering Group, for example, reports to the Digital Strategy Committee in regard to technical and resource requirements, the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee (SRAC) for admission matters, and UCTL for academic matters.



3.1.16 The development of policy and the dissemination of good practice is also aided by many other round-table gatherings, including School Programme Advisory Boards, the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee, Athena Swan committees and the Mental Health Group.

3.1.17 The structures and fora discussed above embody our ethos of collaborative working with representatives from across Schools, Professional Services and students all playing significant roles in the development of our projects and initiatives.

Students as Partners

3.1.18 Students are central to our sense of community and our approach to partnership is exemplified in our first [Student Partnership Agreement](#), SPA, approved by the AUSA Student Council and Senate in 2017-18 for the 2018-20 period. It was developed by a working group with representation from AUSA and UOA staff and sets our joint commitment to agreeing shared goals and principles, and details the agreed priorities we will work towards over the period 2018-20.

3.1.19 We engage students in the enhancement of learning and teaching in multiple ways. These include formal feedback opportunities with benchmarking such as NSS, PTES and the HEA Student Engagement Survey, and our School and discipline-based SSLCs in addition to our online course evaluations (SCEF), Personal Response Systems (PRS) and focus groups. Our 12-week Internship and six-month InternPlus schemes allow us to benefit directly from the student perspective with their direct involvement in projects to enhance the student experience. We recently asked all Schools to engage with their student representatives to devise effective mechanisms for 'You Said, We Did' via their SSLC networks. These mechanisms all provide a rich source of data which feed into our evaluation mechanisms and forward planning.

3.1.20 AUSA is involved in decision and policy making throughout the university, and is represented on all key learning and teaching committees including Court, Senate, UCTL and its sub-committees and working groups. The Student President and two student sabbatical officers sit on the [Student Experience Committee](#) which advises Court and Senate on policy and strategy regarding student welfare and advisory services. The remaining sabbatical officers are also invited to attend. The VP L&T meets monthly with the elected AUSA Education Officer and the Student School Conveners (2.1.6) to get their views on committee business in addition to providing the School Conveners with a forum in which to discuss any issues within their School, and influence change.

3.2 Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice

3.2.1 Good practice is nurtured in our Schools and by our academic colleagues and Professional Services staff, and we have a variety of tools with which we can extract examples for dissemination. These include our annual monitoring and review procedures, our Task Forces, our professional development programmes including our PG Certificate in HE and growing number of HEA fellows, and our collaborative working fora.

3.2.2 Our monitoring and review processes have been strengthened so that their contribution to quality enhancement might be encouraged. For example, annual course review asks course coordinators to 'Reflect on any new/innovative or particularly effective teaching or assessment methods'; we ask external examiners in their annual reports to highlight good practice and, during ITRs, we ask Schools to reflect on their approaches to identifying and sharing good practice and how they have enhanced the student learning experience. ITR thus serves not only as tool whereby Schools self-identify good practice, but also ITR Panel reports are a mechanism by which senior staff can identify areas of good practice worthy of commendation. Examples of good practice

identified in this way are publicised via our QAC Annual Digest and can be seen in our Advance Information Set.

3.2.3 Our Senate Task Forces are key vehicles for sharing internal and external good practice. In addition to the developments highlighted in (2.3.15, 2.3.23, 3.1.13), for example:

- a member of the A&F Task Force developed a feedback module for our online staff training course Principles of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education;
- the Business School representative on the Retention Task Force presented findings from a national Student Retention Conference he had attended;
- the PO Task Force organised a Sharing Effective Practice Event where all Schools submitted AI posters of their work on employability.

3.2.4 An aspect of CAD's work is identifying aspects of good practice from staff exchange of ideas via our PG Cert in Higher Education Learning and Teaching programme and [annual programme of staff development](#). Additionally, CAD tailored events with Schools such as supporting research into the [impact of lecture capture on attendance and performance](#) in Psychology promote discussion of internal (and external) examples of good practice. Where appropriate these are followed up and promoted via events such as our annual Academic Symposia and, as in these examples, may become published pedagogical research.





3.2.5 We encourage staff to undertake novel practice which, if successful, builds our **Good Practice Showcase**. Our Learning & Teaching Enhancement Programme (LTEP) provides modest amounts of funding on a competitive basis to support academic staff to develop innovation in teaching and learning, and to disseminate this good practice throughout the institution and the sector as appropriate. The allocation of funds is overseen by the Enhancement Theme's Institutional Steering Group where the programme is aligned with the national enhancement theme. LTEP projects awarded funding are available [online](#).

3.2.6 An awareness of good practice from across the HE sector is achieved via our regular liaison with, involvement in, and contribution to, national and sector-wide bodies, events, and initiatives. For example, the VP (L&T) chairs the SFC University Quality Working Group and Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) and is a member of the Universities Scotland Learning & Teaching Committee. We have seven members of staff preparing portfolios towards certified membership of the Association for Learning Technology (CMALT). We engage with the national Enhancement Themes (section 3.3), and promote staff attendance at relevant conferences such as the annual Enhancement Themes Conference. Our Senior Educational Development Adviser attends the HEA Principal Fellows' Network and HEA CPD events in regard to our HEA accredited CPD Learning and Teaching Framework.

Business Improvement

3.2.7 We recognise enhancement in learning and teaching and good practice does not always have to focus on innovation in teaching practices, but may be about improving 'everyday' practice. For a number of years Kaizen 'Lean' methodology has been used to conduct holistic reviews of key processes linked to the student experience. Our small Business Improvement (BI) team works intensively with service teams, and often cross-service teams, to identify inefficiencies and to work towards a more streamlined approach to activities. Projects can be large-

scale, such as the BI contribution to our enhanced registration and course choice processes and enhanced E-communication to offer holders, or more local targeted improvements such as the recruitment and training of non-medical personal assistants for disabled students and the process for producing exam papers for Biological Sciences.

Sharing Good Practice

3.2.8 In addition to the regular fora for open discussion and sharing good practice, there are many other opportunities for dissemination.

3.2.9 Our annual **Academic Symposia**, organised by CAD, are an established part of our learning and teaching calendar and a key vehicle for disseminating good practice. Now in their tenth year, the Symposia are aligned strategically with the national Enhancement Themes and attended by staff from a range of disciplines and Professional Services, and from other local institutions. An annual, invitation-only event aimed at staff whose main focus is **teaching** allows academic colleagues from across our institution to come together and share ideas and experiences while also considering ways in which they could continue to develop professionally.

3.2.10 The majority of Schools have whole-School or discipline-specific annual or biannual teaching away days or events where discussing good practice is featured. For example, the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition (MMSN) has multiple events including an annual school education whole day (the 2017-18 theme was assessment) and MBChB specific away days for Years 1 - 3 and Years 4&5 aimed at both university and NHS staff from across our partner boards; and the BSc Medical Sciences programme has recently had a series of workshops as they work to align the honours year and enhance consistency of approach. Where such events do not occur, other dissemination activities take place, such as Biological Sciences' themed

School Fora that are open to all school staff, with assessment and feedback to students being recent topics on their programme.

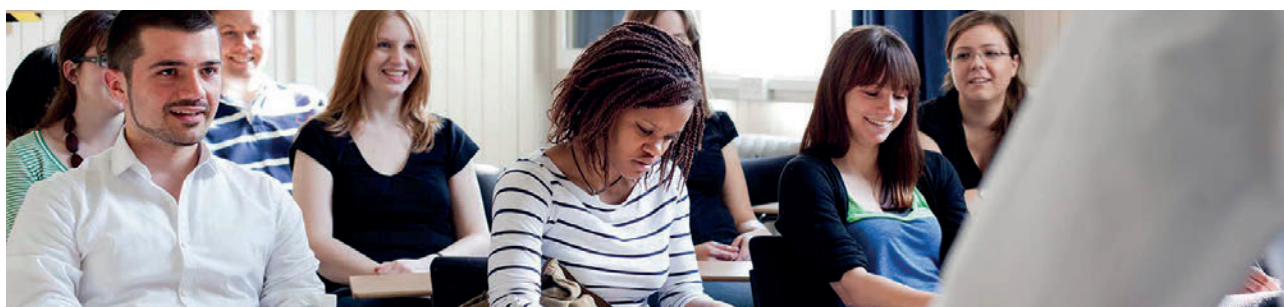
3.2.11 Our student-nominated **Teaching Awards** overseen by the VP (L&T) and Teaching Deans, also help us to identify and disseminate aspects of good practice. In nominating staff, students are asked to consider candidates who are excellent teachers, influencing, motivating and inspiring students to learn; authors of excellent courses or resources that are original, exciting, inspirational; excellent use of assessment and/or feedback to recognise, reward and encourage effort; individuals who are outstandingly sympathetic, supportive and helpful to students, encouraging learning and personal development. Winners are publicised on the Infohub website, the StaffNet E-zine, and receive their certificate and award towards their teaching/research activities at their School's graduation ceremony. The winners and nominees, 6 and 104 respectively in 2017-18, are invited to a presentation event, shared with the **Public Engagement award winners** where the nominees receive their certificates from the Principal. We are participating in the HEA's **National Teaching Fellowship Scheme** which is open to staff in Scotland for the first time this year.

3.2.12 Staff developmental events continue to be promoted through networks supported by CAD. University-wide email distribution lists (including our StaffNet e-zine) continue to be used to promote events from both within and outside the university. In 2017-18 we have instigated a new 'On our own doorstep' series within the **StaffNet E-zine** to promote aspects of good practice to all staff across the institution.

3.3 Impact of the national enhancement themes and related activity on policy and practice

3.3.1 An institutional steering group, convened by the Dean for Quality Enhancement and Assurance, oversees the work of the Enhancement Themes. Our approach is to integrate the work of the themes to align with our strategic priorities and to embed our theme-related work within our existing structures, for example our institutional Task Forces, Academic Symposia and Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme (LTEP). In turn, this focuses resources more efficiently, directs QAA funding strategically, and increases the internal and external visibility of these initiatives. Theme-related projects are showcased at our annual Academic Symposia and L&T Network Events, advertised on our Enhancement Theme web pages and promoted via the QAA website and sector-wide enhancement meetings and events. We are active participants in the annual Enhancement Themes Conference, with 25 delegates (including five students) having attended and having presented nine workshops/lightning talks, and submitted nine posters to the 2016-17 and 2017-18 events, in addition to having submitted a number of good practice case studies to the QAA Enhancement Theme website and TipZone.

3.3.2 The Student Transitions theme launched at a time when we were already engaged in activity to support student transition into HE study in support of our non-continuation strategy, and work to improve our induction and orientation offerings was already well advanced. The theme provided us with a forum for internal





conversation and encouraged us to broaden our definition of 'transition' to include the differing needs of distinctive cohorts of students in acclimatising to, through and from university-level studies, aligning with our changing student demographic and our efforts to address their differing needs. Students have always been members of our ET Steering group and activities. The Student Transitions Theme encouraged further engagement with students, and indeed featured a number of student-led initiatives, including our [Leadership Academy](#), [Level-Up Conference](#) and [Online Professionalism & Employability Guide](#) discussed in [2.3](#).

3.3.3 Within these contexts our outputs have included [social media](#) support for pre- and post- arrival orientation, [peer support schemes](#) and video resources for students at different levels of study, the launch of credit bearing work-related learning courses ([2.3.30](#)), and discipline specific support. We have introduced our Summer School for engineering articulating students ([2.6.15](#)) and a [Maths & Specific Learning Differences Symposium](#) for advisers/tutors from HEIs across Scotland. We have collaborated with Abertay and Dundee Universities regarding the use of [Open Badges](#) to recognise and reward curricular and co-curricular skills development which built upon our work to investigate employers' understanding of Open Badges at our Careers Service Employer Board. Our [student -created multimedia resource](#) to celebrate the end of this Theme animates the student journey from admission to graduation identifying the breadth of transition support now available.

3.3.4 Our approach of integrating the enhancement themes has allowed for the consolidation of a great deal of good practice which, while colleagues might see these practices as having been UOA-driven, has impacted significantly on staff and, over time, has engendered wider exposure to Enhancement Themes and theme-related activity. Many theme-related outputs are in use beyond the end of themes and have unexpected impacts. For example, our work in relation to student transition to university for international students has proved so positive that the suite of orientation workshops and online resources was extended to include all new students from September 2017 ([2.2.17](#)). A survey to discover gaps in our transition provision for postgraduates identified greater support for mental health issues among PGRs was required and this has fed through to our Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and work being undertaken by the PGRS.



3.4 Engaging, developing and supporting staff

Rewarding and Recognising our staff

- 3.4.1 We value teaching and research equally. We believe the two are complementary and together create a learning environment for our students that is enriched by the research our staff undertake, the opportunities students have to participate in research, and our increasingly evidenced-based approach to enhancement (what we term collectively as research-enriched teaching). Our reward and recognition processes reflect this philosophy.
- 3.4.2 Academic staff can apply for promotion on one of the three career tracks: (i) Teaching & Scholarship; (ii) Teaching & Research and (iii) Research. Our [promotions procedures](#) are reviewed annually with amendments reflecting feedback from both promotion committees and applicants. For example, to accurately reflect the roles undertaken by Teaching Fellows, the title of Teaching Fellow and Senior Teaching Fellow were changed to Lecturer (Scholarship) and Senior Lecturer (Scholarship) in 2015. Those seeking promotion on the Teaching & Scholarship track are expected to demonstrate their achievements primarily in the area of delivery, development and innovations in teaching and learning. Supporting guidance has been developed to clarify the relationship between disciplinary research and pedagogy.
- 3.4.3 Our [annual review system](#) discussed in ELIR 3 is largely unchanged. There are plans to review the process as part of work to develop an overall reward strategy to recognise excellence on the basis of contribution to the institution and beyond. A working group has agreed four work streams: review of framework agreement and pay structures; career pathways and progression within and between grades; promotions, contributions and recognition arrangements and financial and non-financial benefits including flexible benefits and total reward. It is intended that the group will report its findings to UMG in September 2018.

Developing our staff as educators

- 3.4.4 CAD delivers our two-day course 'Introduction to Learning and Teaching at the University of Aberdeen' which is compulsory for all new academic staff. Topics include: learning outcomes and assessment, feedback, E-learning, accessibility and equal opportunities, AGAs & Achieve. In addition, CAD offers a range of professional development opportunities including good practice sharing events, an annual programme of workshops and online guidance, as well as organising bespoke events in Schools.
- 3.4.5 Schools, in partnership with CAD, provide training sessions for new demonstrators and tutors. Demonstrators and tutors who have completed their initial teaching development sessions and who then wish to further their professional development are encouraged to consider participating in our HEA-accredited [Principles of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Programme](#).
- 3.4.6 CAD also delivers events as determined by institutional priorities. For example a 'Feedback in Clinical Education' event for staff in the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, two seminars to support new and established staff developing skills in teaching research and scholarship: Beginning Pedagogic Research and Masterclass: Publishing in HE Journals and a five-week course to support staff with online course development to support our Online Education strategy (2.4.4).
- 3.4.7 CAD also facilitates a number of L&T networks including the monthly [Learning and Teaching Network](#) for staff on the teaching and scholarship track and the Digital Learning Representatives Network of school-based academics who, while providing a conduit between the discipline and the institution, also support operational activities within their own schools. CAD and the School Directors of Learning & Teaching meet three times a year to ensure all parties are updated on developments and activities within CAD and Schools.

3.4.8 Staff development activities also take place within individual Schools. For example, the School of Psychology has instigated a series of Pedagogical Labs. Open to all staff across the institution, the monthly sessions showcase current pedagogical research and encourage collaborative projects such as integrating open science into undergraduate teaching; employer, academic and student perspectives of graduate attributes and flipped classrooms and feedback. The research into [Flipped Classrooms](#) has since been published. As a result of posting pedagogical lab presentations online, the coordinator of the lab series is now involved in a global project being led by Tufts University (USA) to research the impact of taking notes on a laptop in lectures. MMS&N runs 'Recognised and Approved Trainer Workshops' twice a year for those trainers who are in roles that have to be recognised by us and approved by the General Medical Council (GMC). The PGRS takes responsibility for training PGR supervisors, focusing on the formal processes of PGR monitoring and progression, how to support PGR researcher development and facilitating small group interactions, including the formation of an effective supervisor-supervisee relationship.

Accredited Professional Development

3.4.9 In August 2014 our [CPD Framework for Learning & Teaching](#) first achieved professional accreditation by the Higher Education Academy (HEA). This framework encompasses all our HEA-accredited provision, including our PG Certificate in H.E. Academic Practice and the Principles of Learning & Teaching in H.E. programme, and offers a broad, flexible approach for staff to attain professional recognition. The framework is benchmarked against the national UK Professional Standards for Teaching & Supporting Learning in H.E ([UKPSF](#)) and is offered at Associate, Fellow and Senior Fellow levels. Support for applicants is available from CAD, including information briefings, day-long writing 'retreats' (offered both centrally and also for specific Schools), one-to-one support and feedback on draft applications. A CPD Recognition Panel, comprising three UOA

Senior HEA Fellows and an external member from another Scottish ancient university, assesses applications using the UKPSF as guidance criteria.

Reflections on our PG Certificates in H.E. Academic Practice

"Above all, the PGCert gave me an outlook and I started building a network across the University. It has also affected the way I teach and I often tell students why we are doing a certain activity. The PGCert strengthens my own confidence. Without the PGCert I would not have started to think of doing my own research."

"Completing the courses has been the most transformative part of my development since starting my academic education. It has permanently changed the way I approach my teaching, in terms of the quantity of knowledge, the nature of that knowledge, meta-knowledge (being able to critically reflect on what goes on in Higher Education) and contributing to education research myself."

"This dissemination of innovative teaching methods to UHI, combined with becoming a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy has led to being asked to become UHI's external examiner for Psychology. I'm in my second year now and find I am using my PGCert mindset every time I evaluate aspects of their courses."

"The PG cert training has been critical to my development as educator. It has provided me with the pedagogy foundation that I did not have when I arrived to Aberdeen. Thanks to those skills I was able to design and develop a brand new course in a critical area of practice for dental students which now includes a diverse range of learning methods (case-based and elearning). The course has consistently received excellent feedback since its inception 5 years ago. The course has also been commended by our professional regulator (GDC)."

Ensuring appropriate workloads

3.4.10 Our institutional [Workload Policy](#), Modelling Principles, and Parameters were formalised in 2015, and set out the core principles and high-level parameters (based on the RCUK definitions for full economic costing) which underpin workload allocation within UOA. Our model of 1,650 hours per year for a full time member of academic staff includes 50 hours per academic for staff development, pro rata for part-time staff, underlying our commitment to continuing professional development. Within these defined parameters, Schools have developed their own models contextualised to their particular circumstances. Consequently, we have 12 different models, each held in a different format, causing some difficulties in gathering and reporting on the information held. To this end we are developing a system to centrally record the data, to increase transparency, consistency and to aid data interrogation. Where possible the system will integrate with other institutional programmes to inform TRAC and REF exercises.

Setting Expectations

3.4.11 Historically, a Framework of Academic Expectations (FAE) has been in place across the university as a tool to help staff assess their contribution and to benchmark contribution across a number of criteria in regard to teaching, research, supervision and administrative duties. Inconsistent use in Schools, and criticism that it was inflexible and too metric-focused, led us to revise the FAE. A new framework for each academic track, based on our Workload Modelling Policy and mirroring the structure in place for academic promotion, has been available for Schools to use on a pilot basis for 2017-18. The new FAE has flexibility built in to incorporate discipline-specific expectations and provide a template for Schools to complete metric-based information on the expected activities of roles across teaching, research and administration. Feedback from Heads of School indicates the pilot has proved useful to inform discussions with staff during annual review meetings,

planning promotion discussions and to determine workloads. There is however a continued recognition that no one size fits all, and that Schools should be able to individualise the general descriptors by way of examples. Further, there is a clear preference for the FAE to be adopted as formal policy. Discussions are ongoing with the Trades Unions to clarify how the FAE will sit alongside workload modelling, annual review, promotions and capability management and to guide its institution-wide implementation.



Supporting Staff

3.4.12 Our move to a School-based planning and budgetary model encouraged us to extend our academic line management structure. Schools each have an academic head and at least one deputy Academic Line Manager with devolved leadership and management of definable academic activity; no academic line manager has more than 15 direct reports. 177 appointments to these roles have been made via a short selection process and all appointees participated in a series of training workshops.

3.4.13 In addition to the teaching and learning-related development opportunities provided by CAD, we provide a number of others available to academic and support staff. These include training and support for staff in conducting annual review, staff recruitment activities, serving as members of ITR panels, serving in student disciplinary hearings and personal tutors. Our HR section also coordinate a suite of [staff development activities](#) including accredited courses such as our International Leadership Development Programme (IDLDP) and our Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) accredited Middle Management Development Programme; our current Teaching Deans and Dean of the PGRS and three new Heads of School are all IDLP participants since ELIR 3. We also have an annual programme of workshops such as assertiveness training, mindfulness, building, developing and motivating teams and stress management. We have a variety of schemes to support staff in different contexts, and/or for staff to develop skills in different areas, including our buddy, mentoring and coaching initiatives.

Engaging our staff

3.4.14 Our students and staff are at the heart of our strategic plan and we pride ourselves on the quality of the learning environment our teaching staff provide to our students and on the development and career opportunities afforded to our staff. One of our 'People' strategic goals is to *'enhance further our caring culture*

of belonging and collegiality in the community for staff, students and alumni, focusing on realising full potential'. Our [Employee Engagement Strategy](#) provides a framework, guidance and activities to promote engagement with staff to help us achieve this goal. The strategy was devised by a cross-institutional group and details our key values, our approach to improve employee engagement and a two-year action plan to monitor progress.

- 3.4.15 To date achievements include:
- launching the employee value statement;
 - increasing engagement with senior leadership through open sessions and public meetings;
 - developing and launching our Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and action plan and delivering ongoing mental health first aid training to staff to support the strategy;
 - improving internal communication channels via local School and Professional Services-based Mental Health Communication champions and the StaffNet E-zine;
 - the launch of a staff mentoring scheme and a staff buddy scheme.

Health and Wellbeing

3.4.16 Staff Wellbeing Coordinators are available to confidentially support staff in relation to workplace relationships, stress or any other wellbeing at work issues. We hold annual, separate, Health and Wellbeing days for staff and students and we continue to raise awareness of our Family Friendly Policy. With mental health issues for staff and students becoming more prevalent, we adopted our Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy in 2016 (see [2.2.9](#)).

Brexit

- 3.4.17 Since the vote to leave the EU was announced in June 2016 as information has become available we have worked with our 670 EU national staff to advise and support them in respect of any impact leaving the EU might have on them professionally. This has included making provision for staff to speak directly to an immigration lawyer regarding their specific circumstances; 57 staff have made appointments to date. As yet we have not received any direct feedback, which suggests staff have left us due to Brexit.

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

- 3.5.1 Our Good Practice web pages contain links to many examples of where our staff have introduced new approaches to their teaching aimed at enhancing learning (see good practice archive). These examples provide a corpus of information for other staff. However, we recognise the associated reporting of the evidence of impact is less consistent across the examples, and access data suggest the pages are under-used. Consequently we have redesigned our approach to collating Good Practice and of facilitating dissemination. We have created a new template for submitting case studies that includes the key sections of problem, solution, and importantly, impact. In addition, in order to encourage staff to submit case studies from 2018-19, we will instigate an award for the most effective innovation each semester. In line with our whole system view of enhancement, this award will be overseen by a panel consisting of students and academic and Professional Services staff.
- 3.5.2 Senate, UCTL and its sub-committees provide oversight and strategic guidance to our L&T practices. Minutes of all committees are available to all online or via SharePoint, and agendas are circulated to Senate members in advance of all meetings, with papers circulated promptly to allow full consultation with constituents.

Our committees are more discursive and accountable than at the time of ELIR 3, and increasingly initiatives are tabled 'for discussion' before formal policy proposal, enabling Schools and individual members of staff to influence their development and engender a sense of ownership among colleagues. These processes are inclusive, support reflection, and communicate institutional priorities widely. Ensuring all Schools are members of our UCTL sub-committees and task forces has enabled more informed decision making and improved communication between Schools and senior leaders. The role of Teaching Dean has an emphasis on encouraging and supporting staff as opposed to governance of L&T. Via their convenorship of the UGC and PGTC and accessibility to Schools, the role of Deans is to ensure that Schools have clear guidance on how to apply policy, that changes are well-communicated, and that where necessary policies are reviewed and adapted to accommodate feedback, thus aiding consistency of approach across our institution. There is still work to be done to ensure information percolates from committee members to all School-based staff, and from 2017-18 our Senate digest will include a summary of all Senate and UCTL-approved decisions, communicated to all staff via the StaffNet E-zine and via email to School Administrative Officers for circulation within Schools.

- 3.5.3 Our collaborative approach to sharing good practice and enhancement of learning and teaching promotes both a top-down and bottom-up approach to development and implementation. Practitioner groups play an essential role in enhancement and the task forces in particular have named individuals with responsibility for championing initiatives and driving change institutionally and within Schools, improving accountability. We recognise their work has not always had visibility, and thus onward impact, and we have sought to redress this by ensuring their output is considered annually at UCTL and that their activities will be disseminated regularly to the wider university community.

3.5.4 Our long-standing and supportive working relationship with our students is emphasised in our SPA (2.1.5). We were among the later Scottish HEIs to produce our SPA given differing priorities of previous cohorts of sabbatical officers, and perhaps a lack of understanding on both sides as to how an SPA could benefit students and staff.

3.5.5 CAD supports staff across the university with pedagogic, research and professional development and acts as a broker for ideas about good practice in learning and teaching. Its unique central position enables it to gather and distribute examples of good practice in teaching and learning support both from within and across disciplines, and also from external organisations. This integrated approach to academic development was highlighted in ELIR 3 as an area of positive practice: *“Clear focus for academic development – the Centre for Academic Development has an emerging role in providing coordinated staff development and support across the University, including facilitating the dissemination of good practice across schools and colleges.”* We recognise identifying and disseminating good practice is not solely the domain of CAD, and that our embedded monitoring and review procedures and collaborative fora across the L&T spectrum provide opportunities for many to contribute to the exchange of ideas and practice. Further, we realise we have not always sought to measure the impact of our dissemination activities.

3.5.6 ELIR 3 noted that *“there is good engagement with the Themes at institutional level with staff contributing to the Themes’ development and the Themes being used to influence institutional activity”* and this continues to be the case. The Themes have been a helpful base for creating linkages, and helping us as an institution and as individuals to address strategic priorities, enhance practice, and contribute to sector development. Senate (February 2018) passed a motion, referencing the current enhancement theme, to ‘enhance its (UOA) use of an ‘evidence-based approach’ to

institutional changes to policy, procedure and practice. The main focus of our work to date for the new theme has been to determine and address gaps in our evidence base, investigating the use of technology to make better use of the evidence available and ensure development opportunities for staff to have the skills necessary to use the evidence effectively. Importantly, we will be applying our ‘lessons learnt’ over the life span of previous Themes by ensuring a more strategic initial plan of work, with built-in measures of success, including anticipated impacts, against which to evaluate our activity identified from the beginning.

3.5.7 Staff engagement, development and support is multi-faceted, reflecting the breadth of experience of our staff, and we continue to enhance the support available to our staff from both a pedagogic and health and wellbeing stance. Our CPD framework has been successful, with 170 staff professionally recognised via the framework since its inception. Numbers preparing and submitting applications continue to grow. The framework now contributes the majority of numbers of HEA-recognised staff at the University of Aberdeen, which stands at 165 Associate Fellows, 184 Fellows, 26 Senior Fellows and 2 Principal Fellows. While the framework was sustainable in its current form with relatively low numbers applying, upscaling of the process is now necessary and work has been undertaken to train School-based advisers who already hold HEA recognition themselves to assist with reviewing drafts prior to submission. It is anticipated that further, parallel CPD Recognition Panels will be required to undertake review and recommendation of applications as they continue to increase.

3.5.8 The success of the support and development opportunities we offer to our staff, and the collegiate environment we foster, is evidenced by the number of staff gaining promotion on the Teaching and Scholarship track and the numbers achieving HEA recognition.

3.5.9 Since 2014, in all 77 Teaching and Scholarship-based promotions applications have been received, of which 37 have been successful, including 19 promotions to Senior Lecturer and eight to Chair. This compares with a total of 387 applications on the Teaching and Research and Research only routes, of which 201 were successful. The success rate for applications on the teaching and scholarship route is approximately equivalent to the success rate of the other routes (48% vs. 51%). Indeed, the success rate for promotion to Chair via our Teaching and Scholarship track is higher than under the Teaching and Research track and higher than the overall success rate of Chair applications. In addition, more staff have been promoted to Lecturer through the Teaching and Scholarship track than through the Teaching and Research or Research tracks.

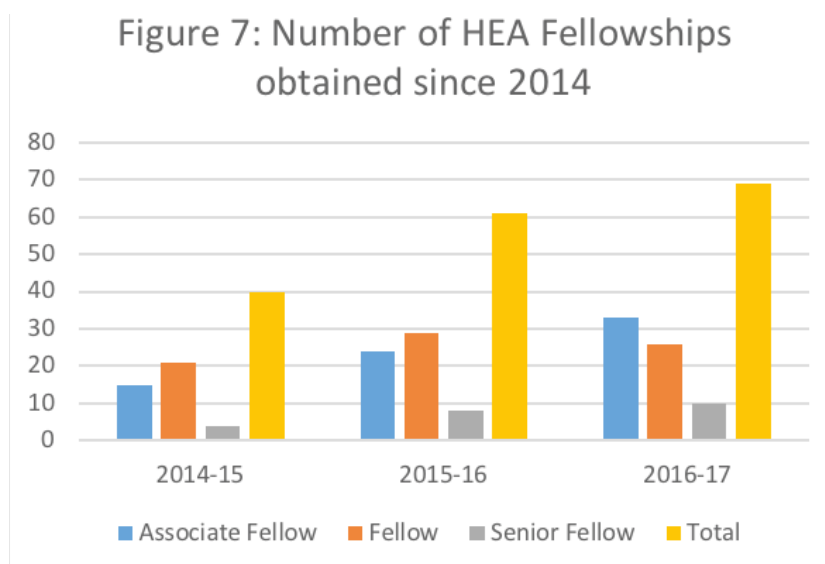
3.5.10 Since our CPD Framework gained HEA Recognition, our assessment panel has convened on 10 occasions and we have seen a steady increase in the number of fellowships awarded annually (figure 7).

3.5.11 As of July 2018, 372 individuals involved in teaching hold HEA fellowships. In line with the support we give to early career researchers such as doctoral students, and our commitment to ensuring the highest standards of teaching, we encourage our doctoral students engaged in teaching to gain HEA Associate Fellow status and the

figure above includes 72 doctoral students. In addition, we have a number of staff who hold other recognised teaching qualifications or accreditations such as General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) and Academy of Medical Educators accreditation.

3.5.12 As an institution with a strong international outlook, many of our staff are from outside the UK and so potentially hold professional teaching qualifications from overseas which may demonstrate equivalent experience to HEA recognition or PGCHES. We recognise we have not always captured these data and are in the process of introducing a new system to recognise such qualifications. Given the potential variability, this will involve individuals demonstrating how their qualifications map against the three Dimensions of the UKPSF. Applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis by a QAC-approved sub-group comprising three QAC members holding HEA Senior Fellowship or above.

3.5.13 We have an aspiration that 100% of our staff involved in teaching will hold a relevant teaching qualification by 2020. To achieve this, we will need to upscale the process for supporting and assessing applications. Work is advanced to train colleagues who already hold HEA recognition to assist with reviewing drafts prior to submission and subsequent assessment panels.



Academic standards and quality processes

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

4.1.1 Our procedures for managing quality and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards are available in our Academic Quality Handbook (AQH).

Managing quality

4.1.2 The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) manages our quality procedures. The committee comprises representatives from each School as well as two student members and is chaired by the Dean of Quality Enhancement and Quality Assurance. The role of Dean was established in 2016 to add emphasis to the link between enhancement and assurance and to reflect our desire to embed and promote enhancement in our quality activities. To that end, the Dean also chairs our Enhancement Theme working group and represents the university on the Theme Leaders' Group. QAC members from each School serve as a local source of advice to their School, via membership of the School TLC. In addition, they each have responsibility for reviewing QA in a separate School, ensuring externality to the process and avoiding any conflict of interest. Members are responsible for all UG, PGT and PGR quality activities in that School and build up a sound knowledge of the context and requirements within which Schools operate. The committee is a key forum for identifying and disseminating good practice.

4.1.3 QAC develops policy in regard to academic standards. Recent examples include the revision to our policy for undertaking moderation, and changes to our policy on the use of resit grades in degree classification. Both these policies were informed by discussions in the other teaching and learning committees (UG, PGTC), and subsequently by UCTL and then Senate.

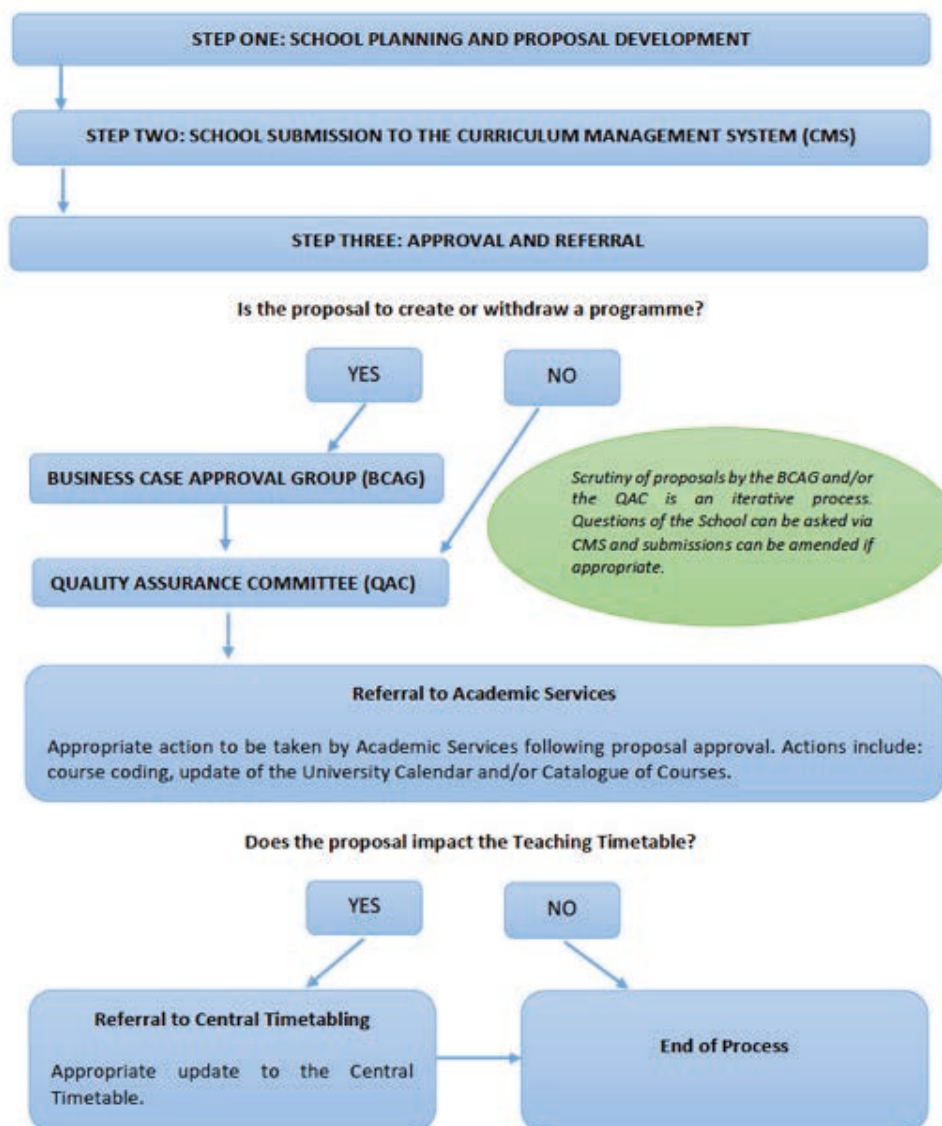
4.1.4 We substantially reworked our AQH in the summer of 2017 to streamline it and make it more accessible. Much of the original AQH content that dealt with explaining 'how the University works' was now duplicated elsewhere. The AQH is now much more focused on the key Learning & Teaching and Quality policies, guidelines and regulations rather than the 'catch all' it had become. Feedback from School administrative officers indicates those who need to use it are finding it more accessible and easier to navigate

4.1.5 To enhance dissemination of information and increase understanding of the role of QAC, in 2016-17 we instigated an annual QAC Digest. This digest is sent to all staff to apprise them of new and proposed policy and QA processes and to highlight good practice identified via our annual monitoring processes. In addition, since 2017, the Dean of QE and QA has led annual visits by QAC to Schools to discuss quality matters with both academic and administrative staff (4.1.23). The Dean is a member of the Senate Business Committee and meets regularly with the VP L&T.

Programme and Course Approval

4.1.6 In June 2015 Senate approved a new **Curriculum Management (CM) process** for the [approval of new courses and programmes](#) as well as changes to, and withdrawal of, existing courses and programmes. Key aims of the new process were to give greater visibility to the links between learning outcomes, assessments and content, provide greater flexibility for academic staff to make changes, and speedier approval. To reduce what were then multiple requests to Schools for very similar data, the new process also brought together a number of activities that were previously handled separately. In addition, our annual strategic planning process was being revised to include business cases for new programmes and, as such, the approval of business cases for new/withdrawn programmes was brought into the CM process as a pre-requisite before the detailed quality assurance considerations.

Figure 8



4.1.7 In brief, and presented in figure 8, programme and courses proposals are prepared within Schools and considered by School TLCs. Endorsed by the Head of School, proposals are submitted via Curriculum Management workflows to the Directorate of Planning's Business Case Approval Group and then, if approved, to the QAC. Members of the QAC review submissions and iteration connected with matters of clarity or provision of extra information may occur between QAC and Schools. Matters of particular concern are highlighted for discussion at Committee.

4.1.8 At School level, consideration of proposals centres on the alignment with institutional and School policy, nature of assessment, student engagement and resource. Planning assesses the economic viability based on

market analysis and resource implications, and QAC focuses on matters of conformity to academic rigour, institutional regulations and practice, and compliance with the QAA Quality Code, SCQF levels, subject benchmark statements (where they exist) and any relevant professional and statutory body requirements. All aspects considered as part of the approval process can be found in the Business Case, Programme and Course Entity [guidance](#). From a QA perspective these entities require School proposals to be more explicit and detailed, for example in aligning intended learning outcomes (ILOs), assessments and graduate attributes. Training and a suite of user guides, including [guidance on ILOs](#) based on Bloom's Taxonomy, is available to users.

- 4.1.9 The SharePoint-based system that previously supported course and programme approval was recognised as not being flexible and did not allow efficient interfacing with different systems including timetabling, the online prospectus and the Student Record System (SRS), often requiring manual data entry with an increased risk of transcription errors, multiple versions of similar data, and duplication of effort. To support the new integrated CM process, a new online system launched in August 2017, but can be considered as still under development. Evaluation of the system so far has included one-to one reviews with School administrative staff to assist with immediate questions and any concerns and meetings with representatives from QAC, Planning and Registry

Monitoring and Review

- 4.1.10 We monitor and review our academic standards via our separate, but intrinsically linked, annual course (ACR) and programme (APR) review, Internal Teaching Review (ITR) and external examining procedures. All are informed by, and adhere to, the QAA Quality Code and SFC guidance. Importantly, student feedback is the foundation of each review process.



Annual Monitoring - Courses and Programmes

- 4.1.11 All credit-bearing provision, including collaborative programmes with other institutions where partners are expected to operate equivalent, if not the same, processes, is subject to [annual monitoring](#). Our processes incorporate feedback from students, teaching staff, employers, professional bodies and external examiners. A framework of expectations and areas of responsibility is available and supported by standard templates for Schools to follow.
- 4.1.12 Our ACR process has been in place since 2012-13, with minor revisions to the ACR template made in 2015-16 to encourage early consideration of changes requiring QAC approval, and to provide a foundation for programme monitoring. ACRs require consideration of a number of data sets to assess student performance and student satisfaction; where threshold levels are not met, Schools are required to address any issues. Encouraged by ELIR 2, and newly-launched at the time of ELIR 3, our APR procedures require each programme, or group of cognate programmes, to be critically appraised with regard to analysis of the ACRs of constituent courses, student demand and PSRB expectations, national benchmark statements and areas for development.
- 4.1.13 With over 700 programmes drawing on more than 5,500 courses being delivered throughout the institution annually, the QAC reviews a random sample of courses from each School annually and considers all APRs, responding formally to Schools on both. Any recommendations are expected to be responded to by Schools during the next cycle of review.

Periodic Review – Internal Teaching Review (ITR)

- 4.1.14 ELIRs 1-3 all confirmed the rigour of our periodic review process, Internal Teaching Review (ITR). However, we were concerned it was unduly bureaucratic and a huge administrative burden for Schools and, as a result, reduced the opportunity for them to focus on the enhancement aspect of the review. Consequently, we developed a new ITR process with a greater enhancement focus.
- 4.1.15 As we have developed our annual monitoring processes they, in addition to our External Examining procedures, increasingly rigorous PSRB oversight and Curriculum Management processes, have provided us with increased confidence our Quality Assurance processes are robust. Further, our strategic planning process also reviews a range of QA metrics with associated action planning on a quarterly basis with the Senior Management Team including benchmarking data such as degree classification, retention, admission and recruitment. We believe that together these activities ensure we meet SFC and QAA expectations regarding assuring the quality and standard of our teaching provision without Schools having to re-submit duplicate information as part of an ITR process. Facilitated by a new [Quality and Planning SharePoint](#) site as a repository for all QA and School Planning information, ITR panels can therefore review much of the QA aspects the institution seeks reassurance on in advance of panel review.
- 4.1.16 In 2017-18 we piloted our new process for ITR which considers all centrally-held QA metrics and analysis first, allowing School submissions and the ITR panel visit to be more focused (although not solely) on quality enhancement. Schools submit an evidence-based Critical Analysis and a Curriculum Map detailing how programmes address Subject Benchmark Statements (where appropriate) and Aberdeen Graduate Attributes. The review visit follows up on key themes identified by the panel from analysis of QA metrics and the School submission.

The visit concludes with a 'Pedagogic Partnership Session' comprising staff and students focusing on key issues raised and the drafting of an enhancement-focused action plan. A report (including commentary on QA aspects) together with a jointly-agreed School Action Plan follows the visit and is considered by QAC, with an updated action plan and commentary expected as a one-year follow up exercise; we understand this to be novel among Scottish HEIs in regard to periodic review.

- 4.1.17 The new process ensures Schools are not providing duplicate information previously submitted as part of annual monitoring or strategic planning processes and provides more contextual metric information to ITR panels. While the Critical Analysis reflects briefly on information already provided in the SharePoint repository, it is shorter and easier to produce than the previous ITR documentation and, from a QA/QE perspective, is more School-specific and thus more informative. The new process allows for increased dialogue between Schools and QAC in the early stages of the process, opportunity for Schools to be reviewed in the context of School-specific priorities and, importantly, a review visit that is less 'interrogative' and more collegiate, focusing discussion on how quality might be improved.





4.1.18 We piloted the new approach with one of our largest, and most academically diverse Schools, the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture (LLMVC). As this was the first School to be reviewed, the Chair of QAC convened the review and several meetings were held with the School to provide guidance and support; this is now in the process of being formalised into a series of guidance notes and training materials for Schools and panel members. A second pilot will occur in autumn 2018 with the School of Biological Sciences, following which revisions considered necessary will be taken to Senate for approval before publication. We consider the outcome of the pilot briefly in **4.5**, and more fully in our Advance Information Set, **AIS B4**.

External Examiners

4.1.19 The work of [External Examiners](#) plays a major role in monitoring the quality of our provision, ensuring standards are maintained on a comparable level with universities throughout the UK, and the system of assessment is consistent, transparent and fair to all students. External examiners are appointed by the University Court in a procedure that aligns with the expectations of chapter B7 of the Quality Code. We have brought together a range of information and resources of use and interest to new and current examiners, including a direct web link to the HEA's External Examiners' Handbook. External examiners are made aware of this in their induction information upon appointment.

4.1.20 They input into the development of course and programme proposals and are asked to identify and provide details of any courses or programmes exemplifying what they consider to be good practice in their annual reports. They are asked to comment on the appropriateness of design, marking, standards, conduct and administration of assessments, ensuring they are just and unbiased. These reports are then considered and responded to formally by the relevant Head of School and by QAC. A number of institutional initiatives including the revisions to the grading process and the degree classification algorithms have been driven by the central analysis of comments raised by external examiners.

4.1.21 Where external examiners raise concerns that might have implications for academic standards, these issues are given immediate consideration by the QAC, reported to UCTL and corrective action taken as appropriate. The 2016-17 [annual report](#) from QAC to UCTL noted external examiner concerns with multiple methods of degree classification being used. As indicated in 4.1.26, the use of two schemes was an interim measure and Senate has now agreed to adopt a single classification process based on a GPA measure.

4.1.22 An analysis of our External Examiner reports is provided in our Advance Information Set, **AIS E2**.

Monitoring and Review Outcomes

- 4.1.23 QAC reports annually to UCTL on their analysis of the ACR, APR, ITR and external examining reports highlighting good practice and areas for development. Examples of good practice have included the 'Optional Challenges' extension activities for more able students (Biological Sciences), movie clips to recap on more challenging concepts covered in lectures (Chemistry), course promotional videos (Philosophy) and flipped classrooms (Education). Areas for development have included a need to review more frequently how skills map across degree programmes as courses and course content changes over time, and improved communication of how ILOs directly link to assessments. Work to address both has been included in the new ITR and Curriculum Management processes respectively. The 2016-17 findings have already prompted QAC to propose revisions to our resit policy, guidance on proofreaders for students, and the formalisation of a role descriptor for school exams officers and associated training, all of which have now been adopted. QAC findings have been disseminated to all staff via the first of what will be an annual [QAC Digest](#), which also serves to keep staff up to date with new QA/QE initiatives and work in development.
- 4.1.24 Informal feedback suggested some colleagues saw the work asked of Schools by QAC as a hurdle to be crossed without understanding what the committee can do to help Schools enhance their teaching provision. In order to dispel some of the myths around QAC activities, annual visits of QAC to each School were instigated in 2016-17. This allows two-way feedback on monitoring and review practices, outcomes and recommendations, together with opportunity for Schools to receive guidance and provide feedback on QA and QE issues. Feedback from this exercise has been very positive, and at least one of our external examiners has indicated his own institution will be adopting this practice from 2018-19.
- 4.1.25 A sample of our annual monitoring reports are available in our Advance Information Set, **AIS D**.
- ### Assessment
- 4.1.26 In 2014-15 we introduced our [Code of Practice on Assessment](#) which provides a simplified and consistent set of rules for marking, UG degree classification and for the determination of progression and award within PGT programmes. The code developed as an extension of work, alluded to in ELIR 3, to develop a new marking scale following criticism by students, external examiners and outside agencies that our then 'Common Assessment Scale' was not easily understood and transferred. In addition, external examiners had repeatedly drawn attention to the lack of our effective use of the upper range of the scale. The code includes all policy on assessment. The key changes introduced are:
- A new alpha-numeric CGS scale which includes more grades within the first class band, aligning with sector norms that the first class band covers a broader spectrum than, for example, the band for upper second and the difficulty of defining upper limits to the performance that an exceptionally able candidate might deliver;
 - A Grade Point Average (GPA) based system for determination of honours degree classification and postgraduate award;
 - Definition of what might be considered borderline and the process to be followed in such cases.
- 4.1.27 The launch of the code in September 2014 was accompanied by a bespoke [website](#), developments to the Student Record System to automatically calculate and confirm GPA and Awards, and produce reports for examiners' meetings, training sessions and guidance notes for staff and a suite of FAQs for students and staff.
- 4.1.28 Conscious of the law of unintended consequences in complex systems, Senate agreed that in the early years of operation we would operate a 'no detriment' policy

while the impact of the new system was evaluated. Students who embarked upon their honours programme (i.e. level 3 and above) and PGT programme in 2014-15 – 2017-18 have been classified via both the Grade Point Average (GPA) approach and the previous Grade Spectrum approach, with students receiving the higher of the two classifications where differences occurred.

- 4.1.29 Our use of GPA required revisions to our moderation and second marking procedures. This also allowed us to ensure our new procedures were compatible with the role of moderation as set out in Chapter B6 of the UK Quality Code. Following a full debate, these were approved by Senate in 2016.
- 4.1.30 In addition to the Code of Practice on Assessment and our external examining procedures, we employ a number of other mechanisms to ensure the standards of our awards, including anonymous marking. To ensure consistency of approach across Schools, and parity of action for students, we also have clear guidelines in the AQH on the procedures to be followed in instances of [student misconduct](#) (including plagiarism), the setting and arranging of assessments, the management of assessments and written examinations, the conduct of examiners' meetings and approval of marks and student [appeals and complaints](#). To support School awareness and understanding of these policies, we have developed a detailed job descriptor for School exams officers and hold an annual training session for them and School administrative staff involved with examinations. All our [assessment policies and guidance](#) are available in the AQH.

Postgraduate Research Students

- 4.1.31 Our system of external examination of PGR students follows the precepts of the QAA Quality Code, adheres closely to the pattern commonly used in the sector and is described in the [AQH](#). Nomination of external (and internal) examiners is made by the head of the parent School and approved by QAC on behalf of the VP (L&T).

4.2 Use of external reference points in quality processes

- 4.2.1 The UK Quality Code, QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and Standard Credit Qualifications Framework (SCQF) are major reference points in managing our quality processes. We explained our use of SCQF in our course and programme approval processes in [4.1.6-9](#), and we indicate how we align our policies and practices with the Quality Code in our Advance Information Set, [AIS A2](#).
- 4.2.2 At the discipline-specific level, Subject Benchmark Statements are used as indicators of the standards expected. Upon publication, revised statements are circulated to relevant Schools for information. Since 2010 all new programme proposals include a requirement that the Benchmark Statement(s) to which a programme is aligned be identified. Schools must submit a curriculum map as part of their ITR submission detailing how programmes address Subject Benchmark Statements and have changed in line with revised statements. For example, in Biosciences, the threshold standard in the 2007 benchmark (5.7 “have some understanding of ethical issues and the impact on society of advances in the biosciences”) was replaced with a more demanding threshold statement (7.7.v. “an appreciation of ethical issues and how they underpin professional integrity and standards”; QAA 2015). This change prompted us to review the location of material in our compulsory courses to ensure all students had the relevant knowledge and skills. The outcome was the incorporation of two new lectures, one in our core first year course (BI1511 Ecology and Environmental Science) and one in a core second year course (BI2017 Genes and Evolution) which is delivered with the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition. We also brought in two compulsory readings in another core first year course (BI1009 Frontiers in Biological Sciences), one related to ethical research practice (a chapter in B Goldacre, *Bad Science*) and one related to animal sentience (C Safina, *Beyond Words*). We have opportunities for students to develop



further their understanding in two optional courses, Animal Management and Welfare (ZO3309, SCQF Level 9) and a new Level 4 (SCQF Level 10) course in 2018-19, Topics in Animal Welfare.

4.2.3 Schools must also adhere to the requirements of their Public, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). In 2016-17 (17-18), 13 (11) programmes plus their variants, in 6 (7) disciplines, were reviewed by 7 (8) separate PSRBs. Our links with PSRBs ensure we remain current and relevant and help promote employability of our students and thus we continue to develop new PSRB relationships. In 2016 we obtained the highest level of recognition of our Dental degree from the General Dental Council, sufficiency. In January 2018 we received confirmation of accreditation for our MA and BSC Geography programmes from the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) (RGS-IBG). PSRB accreditation (and re-accreditation), and importantly the reflection and progression/mapping exercise necessary to the application process, is helpful to us in validating alignment with the QAA threshold standards for knowledge and understanding and subject-specific and generic skills, and that there is clear progression in the themes throughout programmes. In short, that we do a good job. The RGS-IBG feedback, for example, highlighted that:

'[Geography] is a well-structured programme with clear themes running through groups of modules that aid students in pursuing their interests and a strong range of optional modules across the subject areas; There was evidence of reflection and improvement in the teaching delivery, and robust moderation

procedures; The programme has a very good range of assessment formats, including an innovative Question Time activity; The use of personal tutors to further support and develop graduate attributes and skills is good practice.'

4.2.4 Externality is a key feature of our ITR process, with a minimum of two external subject specialists on the panel, exceeding SFC minimum requirements. External panel members are chosen to ensure a range of backgrounds and experience to add a breadth of critical perspectives and advice to the process. For example, the external specialist for Geology for 2015 School of Geoscience ITR suggested the use of the UK Virtual Microscope (UKVM) for level 1 and 2 microscopy and we integrated this into sub honours geology practical classes on Petrography of Igneous, Metamorphic and Sedimentary rocks in 2015-16. Face-to-face practical classes still form the core of the teaching, but the UKVM is now a vital adjunct to classroom learning. Following the success of the initiative, development is now under way to extend its use to image fossils materials, and particularly microfossils in 3-D for 2018-19, and our Geology staff have presented at the 2017 STEM Horizons Conference and have co-authored a paper (currently in review) with colleagues from The Open University.

4.2.5 ITRs also specifically ask Schools to reflect on their use of external reference points in managing academic standards, and the analysis provided by Schools indicates the use of a variety of additional reference points including:

- Hispanic Studies use the European Common Framework definition of CI

‘Effective Operational Proficiency’ to help final year students achieve a ‘proficient user’ level of Spanish across the range of competencies: speaking, listening, writing and reading;

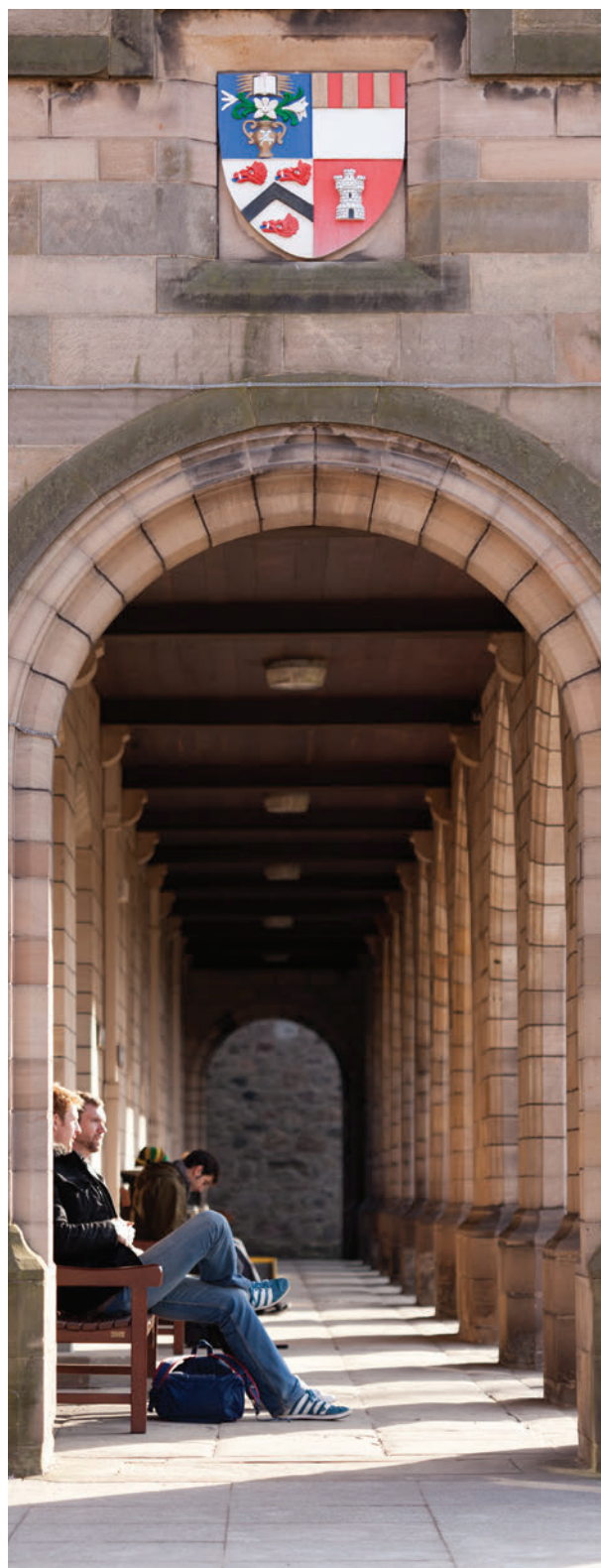
- Engineering make use of the Society of Petroleum Engineering (SPE) as a reference point, in particular the SPE Technical Knowledge of Graduating Engineers matrix which provides technical knowledge sets that are required or valued from a petroleum engineering graduate;
- Psychology must accommodate the requirements of the Economic and Social Research Council’s (ESRC) requirements for training for PhD students undertaking the MREs to receive funding for the 1+3 studentships; requirements were extensively revised in 2015 and a complete revision of the programme was undertaken, including the generation of a number of new courses.

4.2.6 Our external examiners and external representatives on our advisory boards also bring externality to our review processes and, where appropriate, we act upon their guidance. For example:

- Our Chemistry staff are revising content for the 2018 MSc Oil and Gas programme in response to the external examiners suggested refresh of material to include fracking and shale gas extraction;
- Our Economics external examiner recommended we could improve the student experience and quality of output by structuring the dissertation into more clearly defined work packages with their own milestones and deliverables. This approach closely approximates how policy-related projects would work in a research setting. These elements include the research plan, an investigation into the state of research on that issue, and various subsequent stages that vary with the type of research undertaken, e.g. collection of data and empirical estimation or theoretical modelling, policy impact and so forth. This helps students with project and time management skills. Evidence so far

suggests this has been successful;

- On the advice of our external representative on our Clinical Psychology advisory board, we have appointed a trained and practising Clinical Psychologist to provide more clinically-based teaching and to liaise with other psychologists working within the NHS.



4.2.7 We also develop and expand our provision to meet external needs, as discussed in relation to PGT degrees in section 2.4.2. This provision, however, can also take the form of short and/or CPD courses. In the Law School, for example, the Faculty of Advocates desire for a course in Regulatory Law led to the 2017 introduction of an online course, the first of its kind in the UK, and discussions are under way with other professional bodies which might be interested in encouraging or mandating attendance on this course for its members. The work with the Faculty of Advocates has led to a further joint initiative with the university around Computing for Lawyers. In Education, we have designed and launched new programmes to help address teacher shortages in the north-east and Highlands of Scotland. This includes our PGDE Distance Learning Initial Teacher Education ([DLITE](#))) and a PGDE Internship programme for secondary education as an alternative route into teaching, as part of the Transition in Education Scheme ([TIES](#)). This innovative programme, funded by the Scottish Government, has been developed in direct response to the shortage of teachers in the region in particular subjects (Business Education, Chemistry, Maths and Physics) and enables participants to develop a knowledge of Scottish education through a paid internship in a school in their home authority while they study for a PGDE qualification in teaching.

4.2.8 External data points such as league tables and national surveys are also key reference points for us, and we examine our approach to using such data sets in section 4.4.

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

4.3.1 As discussed in 4.1 we have:

- Launched a new approval process for introducing new, or amending or withdrawing existing courses and programmes, which operates via our Curriculum Management System;
- Introduced a Code of Practice on Assessment comprising our new marking scale, CGS, and a GPA method of degree classification and award;
- Refined our annual monitoring procedures, in particular our APR pro forma and process;
- Piloted a new, enhancement-focused, institution-led review, ITR;
- Revised or established new policies and guidance such as our Moderation Policy, Resit Policy, Readmission Policy, Proof Reading Guidance and Exams Officer Job Description;
- Instigated annual QAC-School meetings;
- Launched an annual QAC Digest;
- Streamlined the AQH.

4.3.2 We have provided a sample of documentation to demonstrate our processes for securing academic standards and quality assurance within our Advance Information Set. These have been referenced throughout the RA. All documents are produced routinely as part of our annual cycle of monitoring and review and have been discussed by QAC. The sample of annual monitoring reports provide a representative sample from across the institution and illustrate the sequential

Our **PGDE Distance Learning Initial Teacher Education (DLITE)** programmes for primary and secondary education have been developed collaboratively with local authority partners in direct response to the shortage of teachers in the north-east and Highlands of Scotland. These routes enable participants to continue working while they study for a career in teaching. The programmes are mostly delivered online, with some face to face engagement and teaching placements in schools. Local authorities sponsor individual participants, provide teaching placements in schools and benefit from those “home grown” teaching professionals then undertaking their probationary year, for full registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) within their own locality.

and integrated nature of monitoring and review processes, and how issues identified at course or programme level enable us to identify key priorities and identify associated action required at institutional level.

4.4 Approach to using data to inform decision making and evaluation

4.4.1 Our student record system holds key data relating to aspects of the student experience, including disability-related requirements, student monitoring data and results of summative assessments. Information in this system can be interrogated, and we use it to assimilate, analyse and deliver information across the range of our activities.

4.4.2 Senior management have web-portal access to a variety of static reports on student numbers, retention, progression, diversity and staff-student ratios. Additionally, scheduled or on-demand reports are derived for use by SMT, working groups and Schools. Information on pass rates, registrations, non-continuation, completion rates, and admissions (applications) are routinely supplied to Schools preparing for completion of annual monitoring reports and the strategic planning process.

4.4.3 Management information is used to identify enhancement activity, such as the Postgraduate Research School's analysis of PGR completion rates. It is also used at a high level to identify strategic action. For example, in 2017-18 the UMG scrutinised data in relation to non-UK EU staff and student populations, tuition fees, EU markets, EU-based research grants and EU staff and student mobility agreements as part of its Risk Analysis and institutional strategy discussions in relation to Britain's exit from the European Union.

4.4.4 Data on all institutional KPIs is regularly reviewed and reported to UMG and Court, with recommendations on corrective actions to be taken where appropriate.

4.4.5 Key metrics, organised around student satisfaction, non-continuation, feedback and assessment, degree awards and positive outcomes (DLHE) are drawn together in our annual [Student Experience Paper](#) presented at Senate. This provides an overview of L&T across the previous academic session and serves to stimulate discussion on areas to focus activity in order to enhance further the student experience. In 2017-18, the paper was also presented at [Open Sessions](#) held by the VP L&T as part of our Employee Engagement Strategy. From 2017-18 the PGT Student Experience will now be reported on separately (2.4.9).

4.4.6 We analyse and report on academic appeals (to Senate) and academic and non-academic complaints (to UMG and Senate) on volume, nature of concern, and action taken. Since ELIR 3 the number of Appeals and Complaints has remained relatively static with, on average, 118 appeal and 80 complaints cases annually, accounting for less than 1% of our student population.

Student Surveys

4.4.7 We collect and make extensive use of data from students including survey and focus group data obtained for specific purposes. We routinely collect data from the National Student Survey (NSS), and until 2017-18 (when we introduced our own internal Student Engagement survey) the HEA's Postgraduate Taught Experience (PTES), Postgraduate Research Experience (PRES) and UKES engagement surveys. To make the best use of these data, responsibility for the collection and analysis of NSS, PTES, UKES is undertaken by CAD. Data at individual course level is obtained through our ongoing annual quality processes, including the SCEF and SSLCs.

4.4.8 Recognising that students receive a large number of surveys from numerous sources, and that the volume of requests has an impact on the quality of students' responses, we established a Student Survey Working Group to provide a joined-up approach to surveys, increase response rates and improve understanding of results. Supported by an Institutional Survey Policy, the group monitors the frequency with which individual students are asked to participate in surveys, ensures that robust questionnaire methodology is being used, streamlines the collection of information between different surveys to avoid duplication and works to ensure information gathered is used in a meaningful and transparent way. In so doing the group encourages the use of other, non-survey means for gathering input and helps protect response rates for core surveys such as the NSS. The organisation, delivery and analysis of all of the core surveys designated in the policy is undertaken within CAD. This aids the quality and consistency of the analyses, and promotes widespread reporting and actions undertaken in response to the intelligence gathered through the surveys.

4.4.9 The NSS provides important benchmark information on a range of elements that underpin the student experience. It is also widely used in league tables and the results available to students and prospective students. Two of its measures feed directly into our own student satisfaction KPI metrics. The consequences of this survey are therefore extensive, and great care is taken in the analysis and understanding of the results despite awareness there are a number of [non-UOA specific](#) which influence NSS results. Our internal analysis has evolved through the development of dashboards and comparative tools and includes a comparison of the ranking positions for each question and scale in the survey for our disciplines against the rest of the sector, and analyses of the movements of these rankings between years. Our analysis of the 2017 NSS data and an initial high-level analysis of the 2018 data is provided in our Advance Information Set, **AIS F**.

4.4.10 In contrast to the NSS, where the data is aggregated and controlled by HEFCE/Ipsos MORI, we run a range of surveys which, while being benchmarked nationally, are administered locally. These include the JISC digital student tracker and our new internal Student Engagement survey. These surveys are delivered confidentially rather than anonymously and, as such, a range of analyses have been undertaken to inform a number of questions such as student engagement in single vs joint honours programmes, influence of paid employment on engagement, and ethnicity and gender influences on student behaviour. These analyses are generated in response to specific requests typically driven by enhancement needs, but are disseminated more widely and in themselves also prompt interest and further questioning of the data sets we collect and hold.



League tables

- 4.4.11 We recognise that league tables can provide useful benchmarking data that can then be used to identify areas in which to enhance the student experience. Led by our League Table Working Group, chaired by the Principal, we have conducted analyses around league table performance, looking carefully at the contributing criteria of each, and have developed an action plan to target key areas.
- 4.4.12 Our belief that a diverse international staff and student body enhances the educational experience of all our students means we monitor our position within the QS World University Rankings, the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, and the CWTS Leiden Ranking to ensure we remain an attractive choice for staff and students from across the globe. Performance in the QS and THES League Tables is monitored through our institutional KPIs as indicators for institutional profile, and league table target areas and subject-specific league table analyses are embedded in the strategic planning process.
- 4.4.13 Nationally we review our performance within the Complete University Guide, the Guardian University Guide and The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide. These tables have been chosen as they have metrics that broadly align with our own priorities for improvement, such as non-continuation, student employability and internationalisation. They are also the league tables of most interest to prospective students.

Strategic Planning: KPIs and School Planning

- 4.4.14 We introduced an integrated strategic planning process to coincide with the launch of our 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. The plan's central tenets of Teaching and Learning, Research and Knowledge Exchange, and People each have a number of associated high-level goals, under which five key performance indicators (KPIs) have been developed: Institutional Profile and

Student Recruitment; Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience; Research Performance; Financial Sustainability; and Equality and Diversity. Each KPI is made up of a number of metrics designed as specific performance measures, with targets set against each such as non-continuation as a measure of Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience, and the number PGRs per staff FTE under Research Performance. The KPIs are fixed for the duration of the planning period; metrics are generally more flexible and are regularly reviewed and subject to change, albeit, they are unlikely to be changed frequently.

- 4.4.15 The KPIs and linked metrics are used to underpin strategic planning at both institutional and School level; processes in place are fully aligned from organisational level down. Performance is measured against each metric under each KPI on a quarterly basis (where possible), with regular reports taken to senior management groups. Reporting covers performance against targets, both in year and over time:
- an overview of key challenges faced;
 - areas of identified strength and weakness;
 - a summary of high-level actions taken to facilitate meeting targets going forward.



4.4.16 Each School has a five-year plan in place (from 2015-2020), supplemented by annual plans developed each year throughout the planning period. Annual plans include objectives under each of the KPIs, with performance targets set against each of the associated metrics. These are reviewed during strategic planning review sessions with senior management and Schools each autumn, with each School given latest performance against target figures for each metric under each KPI. This enables benchmarking of performance relative to target over time. School review sessions are led by the Principal or Senior Vice-Principal, and are designed to both evaluate performance over the previous 12 months, and to outline priority objectives for the year ahead. The reporting arrangements enable engagement in the process with a range of key stakeholders. These include Vice-Principals and Teaching Deans, and also Directors and other staff from across the various Professional Services functions, thus involving those in place to set strategic aims and also those whose remit is to help deliver them. In this regard, it is a highly integrated process, drawing together key stakeholder groups, with a view to ensuring a joined-up, successful approach.



Risk Registers

- 4.4.17 We undertook a comprehensive review of our risk management arrangements and launched our new Risk Management Framework (RMF) in 2016-17. Aligning with the internationally-recognised standard for risk management, *ISO31000 Risk Management Principles and Guidelines*, the Framework comprises our Risk Management Policy Statement on Risk Appetite and details our Risk Management Process, tools and reporting structures for the effective management of risk at all levels. It applies institutionally, to Schools, Professional Services, and capital (including TNE) projects.
- 4.4.18 Our Strategic Risk Register addresses ten, high-level strategic risks (each RAG-rated) which reflect priorities outlined in our Strategic Plan. This includes a risk devoted to the student experience, key elements of which are failure to retain students; risk of negative feedback from students; failure to provide a curriculum that meets student and employer needs; and failure to provide appropriate student support to meet the diverse needs of our student body. We report biannually to the UMG, Operating Board and Court, and are accountable to the Audit Committee. At School level, risk management is integrated as a key tool within the wider strategic planning process, with risk registers designed to align with, and support delivery of, the key objectives in School Annual Plans. Within Professional Services, all functions are encouraged to use risk management as a management tool, and to have a risk register in place, notably where there is direct linkage to the Strategic Risk Register; however, there are no explicit reporting requirements.
- 4.4.19 In terms of risk appetite, our institutional baseline is defined as “moderate” to “open” and so, while maintaining a level of prudence, we are generally willing to consider all options, and will accept moderate levels of risk, albeit with a preference for options or activities that limit exposure. That said, our appetite will vary according to the objectives pursued. We do, for example, give

consideration to options or activities which carry elevated levels of risk, where it can be shown that the anticipated outcomes are realistically achievable, and likely to deliver enhanced benefits, our campus in Doha being a prime example.

4.5 Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards

4.5.1 The ELIR 3 report confirmed we have a “*reflective approach to [our] quality assurance processes*” and that our “*processes and procedures in place for securing academic standards are thorough*”. While our approach, in the main, has not changed since ELIR 3, we have refined and enhanced our tools for managing quality and academic standards and believe our processes have been strengthened by the changes implemented.

4.5.2 Our programme and course approval process, Curriculum Management, meets the expectations of chapter B1 of the Quality Code. Our annual monitoring procedures, External Examining, ACR and APR, are now firmly established and provide a thorough foundation for ITR; they address fully the expectations of Chapters B7 and B8 of the Quality Code and the SFC Guidance to Institutions on Quality 2017-2022. Our revised ITR process has allowed for increased dialogue between Schools and QAC in the early stages of the process, an opportunity for Schools to be reviewed in the context of School-specific priorities and, importantly, a review visit that is less ‘interrogative’ and more collegiate, focusing discussion on how quality might be improved. Following our pilot exercise, feedback from the School of LLMVC and the panel, additional guidance is being prepared for Schools and panel members and, following a second pilot with the School of Biological Sciences in autumn 2018, we will seek Senate’s approval to formalise the process.

Internal Teaching Review: Pilot in Language, Literature, Film and Visual Culture

The external subject specialists were universally complimentary of the new process. One external stated: “I thought the event was hugely valuable, and a definite advance on the paperwork-heavy approach taken in (e.g.) my own institution.” This external commented that it was important to the event’s success that the School secured “a ‘critical mass’ of students and staff, across the full range of subject areas” and that the externals had been used well as facilitators and scribes, allowing “...all voices to speak and all voices to be heard”. Another external stated: “...the ITR is a collaborative and constructive process which encourages dialogue and co-creation between staff and students. It struck me as a very effective model for this type of exercise”.

Student feedback was also very positive. One student stated: “*The panel was open and friendly, and gave me chances to share my experience and ideas about school and my study*”. The School communicated regularly with a large group of students who had originally expressed a willingness to be involved and also gave them an update after the event. One student who had been unable to attend the panel sessions commented: “*Thanks for this message, it’s a motivation to stay involved and it shows you matter so it’s really appreciated!*”

The School feedback included comment on how important it is for the School to show students their engagement is valued: “*discussing ITR results with all class reps (and others) is probably really good not just for the ITR, but for future SSLCs.*”

Further detail on the pilot can be found in the post-review report to QAC in our Advance Information Set, AIS B4.

- 4.5.3 QAC provides clear, strategic oversight and direction of quality matters, and our revised QAC composition has increased School accountability at the local level and enhanced an understanding of our quality processes. ELIR 3 asked us to continue to develop more explicit links between our assurance processes and enhancement activities, and we have done so as exemplified by the changes made to our annual monitoring and periodic review processes. We have established a new role, the Dean for QE and QA, to increase the prominence of enhancement. The Dean has instigated an annual QAC Digest of School activity, an annual report to UCTL and Senate, and annual meetings of QAC representatives and Schools; all of these draw together our assurance processes and provide evidence of our enhancement.
- 4.5.4 In **4.1.26** we outlined the rationale for the introduction of our Common Grading Scale. Analysis of the CGS data of the 2015-16 and 2016-17 graduating cohorts shows evidence of more effective use of the upper range of the new grading scale, although this is not consistent across disciplines. Feedback from external examiners suggests that the marks awarded under the new CGS at course level are now generally appropriate. The award of First and Upper Second Degrees is in line with what might be expected given the high entry tariff of the cohort. However, as reported to [Senate](#) there are some suggestions that this is not homogenous across all the different student cohorts.
- 4.5.5 The procedures stipulated in our new Code of Practice on Assessment ensure our processes of assessment are conducted in a fair, consistent and transparent manner across the university. This common approach is especially important due to the inter-disciplinary nature of many of our programmes, which means candidates are studying courses offered by a number of Schools and these courses are then combined in determining the overall award. While the new GPA procedures were evaluated, students were classified via both the GPA and the previous Grade Spectrum approach, receiving the higher of the two classifications where differences occurred. This was not universally popular among external examiners nor some staff, but the policy ensured no detriment to students and provided complete comparator data sets for our evaluation
- 4.5.6 Following the automation of provisional degree classification in the student record, we have seen an increase in the use of the grade centre in MyAberdeen which has increased the use of online feedback to students and transparency in relation to the components of course grades. For example, in Biological Sciences all grades and all feedback is now provided online; Social Sciences now release grades associated with individual examination questions online. We note in 2.3.20 that Schools are at different stages in terms of full online submission, grading and feedback provision, but most are now considering the best approach for them helped by CAD.
- 4.5.7 One measure of the effectiveness of our QA processes is their ability to identify and address the rare issues that may arise, and we believe our processes allow us to do this efficiently. As an example, in two instances concerns were raised by external examiners in regard to possible grade inflation. These instances were investigated by the QAC and discussed with the Schools at their annual meetings with QAC (**4.1.23**). In the isolated cases where it was acknowledged grades were too high, QAC is content that the individual Schools are addressing the problem by adjusting the assessment criteria and introducing more differentiating assessments. Further analysis revealed that grade inflation on degree classification was not present with the high attainment level to be expected given the exceptional quality of the work, as confirmed by external examiners, and the particularly high entry tariff on admission to the university.
- 4.5.8 Academic provision at our Doha campus is quality assured via the same processes as here in Aberdeen, and have proved equally effective, as discussed in section **5.2**.

4.5.9 While confident in our ability to monitor and secure our academic standards, the increased activity arising from our new modes of provision (e.g., TNE, Online), our revised annual monitoring processes, and our drive for greater flexibility and responsiveness in our new curriculum management process, are increasing our QA activity. Taking account of feedback and to ensure that we capitalise on the opportunities our new systems and processes provide, we will bring forward proposals in early autumn to establish school-based QA teams (with role descriptors) and enhance our central support.

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

4.6.1 We reflect and evaluate our provision and quality of service from institutional large-scale review such as our system of degree classification to specific aspects of provision such as our review of online education. Our approach is evidence-based, supported by robust, internal data, external data and external reference points and we use a variety of structures to support our self-evaluation from Programme Boards and short-term working groups to the use of business improvement techniques. We pay close attention to the views of our students via SCEF, SSLC meetings and student representatives' feedback, in addition to annual analysis of national and internal student survey feedback. Individual sections of Professional Services, such as IT Services and the Library previously conducted their own surveys, though our revised policy on communicating with students will reduce the number of these individual surveys (2.1.3). As discussed in 2.1.13 DDIS, Student Accommodation and the Aberdeen Sports Village each held a student focus group and have already addressed some of the feedback. Given the success of the level 1 online Professional Skills course, our Positive Outcomes Task Force and Careers Service are reviewing the feedback from students to decide whether the level 3 and 4 courses should remain voluntary or be

prescribed (2.3.25). In response to requests from academic staff, CAD developed a course covering designing and tutoring in online education (2.4.4) which is entering its third iteration incorporating further staff feedback. Academic provision in Schools is evaluated via our SCEF, ACR, APR and ITR processes and external examining. As shown by the NSS and Student Engagement Survey data, our students recognise the opportunities we offer to provide feedback and the extent to which we value their views (2.1.8).

4.6.2 ELIR 3 asked us to demonstrate more explicitly our engagement with subject benchmark statements and other reference points. We have addressed this in our Curriculum Management course and programme approval processes and our new ITR submission requirements.

4.6.3 We use a variety of data, including institutional KPIs, metrics from league tables, national and internal survey outcomes and a range of internal management reports relating to retention, progression and achievement to inform discussion and evidence policy decisions. Internal data was the foundation on which we developed institutional student and staff policy such as our Gender Action Plan, Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy targets and Athena Swan action plans and associated local planning at School level. Most recently we have amended our Code of Practice on Discipline based on data revealing increasing discipline cases of a plagiarism nature from articulating students, supported by internal data from a pilot exercise in the School of Psychology we have introduced our Lecture Capture Policy, and detailed analysis of undergraduate degree awards has led us to decide upon GPA as our agreed method for degree classification and determination of PGT awards. Since 2016-17 we have been reviewing student data where possible, beyond that required for outcome agreements, with regard to widening access cohorts, for example in regard to non-continuation and degree classification.

4.6.4 We use data to help our students optimise their success, whether it be via monitoring their attendance at compulsory tutorial classes, analysing the breakdown of how individual assessment questions are answered or how course materials posted to our VLE are accessed. However, these data are used as isolated data points and we recognise our use of learning analytics is at an early stage. We are now working to find the best way to integrate the high volume of student data derived from multiple sources (2.3.13). We are developing a Learning Analytics policy to be presented to our Senate in late autumn. Drawing on the best practice in the sector, the policy will ensure the use of student data is fair, ethical and understood by all stakeholders.

4.6.5 The co-ordination of student survey data by CAD (4.4.8) enables a consistent approach to the analysis and dissemination of performance indicators, a much more nuanced view of UG perceptions and support for evaluation of the student experience and pedagogical research. CAD received 139 separate requests from Schools and Professional Services areas for extrapolated data, further analysis or support in disseminating and raising awareness of survey results in a 20-month period from the release of the 2016 NSS data. One example of the impact of this approach can be seen in the NSS response rates in Initial Teacher Education. In 2017, the response rate was below the public reporting threshold. Through focus groups, staff from CAD engaged with the students to explore the reasons for non-completion and explain the benefits we and future cohorts of students derive from greater response rate. As a consequence, staff gained a better understanding of student perception of their experience and, in 2018, the response rate rose from 47% to over 75%, the School improved in 24 out of the 27 questions, and by over 17% in overall satisfaction.

4.6.6 The work of the Student Survey Working Group and dissemination by CAD is influential in raising awareness of the survey data and value of analysis, and the analysis

dashboards have made enquiry more realistic. Targets for KPIs derived from the surveys are integrated into the school planning cycle and Heads of School take account of their survey data in their annual plans. There is a general relationship between engagement with the survey datasets and analyses and improved satisfaction scores in the NSS. In all cases where disciplines have improved their satisfaction scores, parallel staff engagement with the previous year's survey can be identified. For example in German and Scandinavian Studies, overall satisfaction scores have increased from 71% → 91.4%; Finance 73% → 92.3%; Chemistry 90% → 100%. We share concern raised by others regarding the drawbacks of the NSS, and the likely impact that student expectations have on student satisfaction ratings, and we recognise the metrics making use of the NSS results are flawed. Nevertheless, the NSS is a mechanism for measuring and monitoring student satisfaction despite this, and we continue to address feedback gathered in this way, particularly within the qualitative comments section of the survey, where comments help highlight areas for improvement, both generally, and specific to particular disciplines.

4.6.7 As the HEA PTES and PRES surveys were not run at times appropriate to our own cohorts, and in light of the HEA Engagement Survey not addressing the questions of most interest to us, we developed in 2017-18 our own internal Student Engagement survey, based on an [Australian survey](#). This has provided us with greater flexibility in terms of the questions and topics being asked, and while it perhaps comes at the cost of not having externally-benchmarked data for comparative purposes, it allows us to generate data we can interrogate to address the issues of concern to us. It has also been designed to query student experiences with flexible and online programmes, with a PGT variant to be issued at the end of the summer term.

4.6.8 We use the metrics in league tables to benchmark measures of student experience (4.4.11), though we share concerns in regard to the confusion caused by the myriad of league tables, all handling metrics slightly differently. Focus groups carried out with our students in 2017 revealed many make use of league tables but find the detailed metric and subject level information confusing, and so make decisions based only at a superficial level of institutional ranking. We want our prospective students to make informed judgements. As such we have revised our communications around league table performance, and SRAS provide advice on the use of league tables when visiting secondary schools and careers fairs.

4.6.9 Our strategic planning process is data driven; KPI data is updated quarterly, which enables analysis of performance throughout the year. The process is nearing completion of

its 3rd cycle and is reviewed annually, taking account of feedback received from Schools and other stakeholder groups. For example, a broader range of School information is now requested and SMART objectives are included under each performance area. The process provides Schools with clearly defined aims and objectives and an effective monitoring process. To support monitoring, we have developed a Business Intelligence (BI) dashboard; this has improved data quality, reliability and the speed at which data can be produced and standardised the way in which data is reported.

4.6.10 Our latest analysis of our Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience KPI metrics reveals that we are well under way to achieving all our KPI metric targets for 2020, with a green RAG rating for all updates for the 2016-17 and 2017-18 periods.



Collaborative provision

5.1 Key features of the institution's strategic approach (to include collaborative activity, online and distance learning where delivered with others and work-based learning)

- 5.1.1 In June 2018, the pattern of our collaborative activity has changed greatly compared with that at the time of ELIR 3. However, our approach maintains a strong central oversight of activity and clear focus on aligning activity with our strategic goals. Our [Partnerships and Collaborative Provision](#) policies and practices detail our approach. The approach adheres to the QAA Quality Code, Chapter B10.
- 5.1.2 The strategic leadership of collaborative activity is shared by the Vice-Principal for Learning & Teaching and the Vice-Principal (Internationalisation). Consideration of strategic and 'business fit' of proposals is coordinated by the Directorate of Planning; QAC has responsibility for assuring the quality of, and encouraging enhancement within, collaborative provision, and Research and Innovation (R&I) oversee the development of the contractual agreements. Draft agreements and accompanying regulations are considered in turn by Senate and Court. R&I holds the central repository of agreements for all collaborative activity other than student exchanges, which are held within SRAS. SRAS houses the Erasmus Unit and the International Exchange Programme (IEP) team, who are responsible for day-to-day operations of Erasmus+ programmes and incoming and outgoing study abroad arrangements.
- 5.1.3 The ELIR 3 report confirmed we have *"effective arrangements in place for securing the academic standards of [our] collaborative provision"*. We have, since 2017, rationalised the types of partnership we normally enter into and have streamlined our [proposal and approval procedures](#) while maintaining QAC's role in approving

arrangements for assuring quality of academic standards and security and equivalence of the student experience. Once agreements are in place, responsibilities for securing academic standards of collaborative provision lie with Schools, with oversight by QAC. Our collaborative provision is quality assured and enhanced through the standard UOA QA processes (annual monitoring, ITR, external examining) and is reviewed alongside non-collaborative provision. Validation partnerships and collaboration with delivery partners must also submit an annual report to QAC.

- 5.1.4 At the time of ELIR 3 our main collaborative provision was through validation agreements with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) for postgraduate research degrees and the International Christian College (ICC) in Glasgow for UG and PGT awards in areas of Theology and Ministry; a joint Bachelor of Dentistry (BDS) degree with the University of Dundee; articulation agreements with Wuhan University, South China Normal (SCNU) and Shandong Normal (SDNU) Universities in China; several joint supervision and dual degree agreements relating to individual PGR students; and a number of student mobility exchange agreements, including Erasmus. .
- 5.1.5 Since ELIR 3, UHI received research degree awarding powers, ICC ceased operations and, having satisfied the rigorous requirements and quality assurance protocols of the General Dental Council, we now offer our BDS independently (previously with Dundee). Our collaborative activity is detailed in our [Register of Partnerships and Collaborative Provision](#). Based on the success of our articulations with SCNU, SDNU, and Wuhan in China, we have extended our international articulation agreements to include Ho Chi Min City (Vietnam) and the International Medical University (Kuala Lumpur). We also have an articulation agreement with the Kaplan Nottingham Trent International College. Our UK-based articulation agreements are detailed in section 2.2. We validate PGR degrees at Trinity College Bristol Baptist College, and PGT programmes

with the Mindfulness Association and also Persona. We have increased our [Erasmus+](#), [International Exchange](#) (outgoing students) and [Study Abroad](#) (incoming students) agreements as detailed online. We also have a number of joint supervision and dual degree agreements relating to individual PGR students.

5.1.6 The most significant change to our collaborative provision is that we are now working with two delivery partners, that is 3rd party partner organisations who deliver the academic material we provide leading to the award of a taught UOA degree. Our partners in this work are the Al Faleh Group for Educational Services (AFG) with whom, in 2017, we opened our first overseas campus ([AFG College with the University of Aberdeen](#)), and the Interactive Design Institute Ltd (IDI).

5.1.7 Working in partnership with delivery partners has been a step change in our approach to collaborative activity. Learning from our experience of establishing a partnership with IDI and drawing on good practice in the sector, including visits to Lancaster, Heriot Watt and Cardiff Metropolitan Universities, we have developed detailed processes for proposing, approving and managing activity with delivery partners. Our approach is detailed in our Senate-approved [Delivery Partners Principles and Procedures Handbook](#), and we exemplify this with our work with AFG in Qatar. Subsequently we describe our earlier work with IDI, which pre-dates our handbook.

5.1.8 Our [Overseas Travel Policy and Guidance](#), developed in 2016 in anticipation of increased TNE activity being undertaken by UOA colleagues, provides guidance and protocol for the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students.

Transnational Education (TNE)

5.1.9 TNE activity is a core element of our strategy for internationalisation and we are involved in a collaboration with Curtin University (as discussed in 2.4), remain in discussions with partners in South Korea

over plans to open a campus there, and we are progressing discussions with the GMC and SFC regarding the delivery of our five-year MBChB in Medicine with a healthcare education partner in Sri Lanka.

5.1.10 We regularly review opportunities for TNE projects. Factors that contribute to our decision whether or not to progress these opportunities include raising international profile, increasing student recruitment, growing research capability and widening access to higher education (and its resultant benefits for society).

Our Doha Campus

5.1.11 The Middle East is one of our priority regions (**1.2.9**) and AFG is already well established in Qatar as a provider of education from pre-school to high-school level. AFG runs the Doha Academy, a successful schools group with over 3,000 pupils. Sheikah Aisha bint Faleh bin Nasser Al Thani, the chairperson and founder of AFG, is an advocate for higher education, and for the education of females in particular. There was, and remains, a clear need in Qatar to build capacity in the HE sector, and AFG was willing to invest in high-quality staff, facilities, and student services. In 2012, Qatar University (the national university) changed to teach only in Arabic. Our campus helps meet a need for higher education delivered in the English language in Qatar for those students who wish to remain in the region.

5.1.12 Our due diligence (**5.1.17**) and quality assurance visit (**5.1.23**) gave us the confidence, and confirmation, that AFG would support students and deliver a student experience that provides an equal opportunity to learn, support its staff and provide the necessary environment to ensure the health and wellbeing of staff and students. AFG also shared our understanding of equality, diversity and human rights principles. QAC were satisfied the standards achieved by students who are successful in completing programmes in Doha will be equivalent to the standards achieved by students who are successful on equivalent programmes at Aberdeen.



5.1.13 As such our partnership with AFG aligns with the **Fundamental Principles** outlined in section 2 of our Delivery Partners Handbook, and we entered into our collaboration confident that, together with AFG, we would deliver a first-rate UK higher education experience in Qatar that would embrace social inclusion and widen access to HE.

5.1.14 Our model of TNE in this collaboration is that AFG invests the capital to develop and operate the campus. It employs both the academic staff and Professional Services staff. UOA is fully responsible for the curriculum and quality assurance aspects of the provision, as it is the University of Aberdeen's degrees which are awarded. The academic curriculum provision mirrors the Aberdeen campus provision for these courses, with the exception of level 1, which has been designed to be an integrated Foundation/First Year (5.1.30). Two teaching visits per course to the Doha campus take place by UOA staff as part of the quality assurance process and to ensure the compatibility of the materials delivered in Doha with those in Aberdeen. The campus is jointly managed by UOA and AFG. The Provost, a senior academic employed by UOA, is resident in country and oversees the academic operations. All associated facilities, such as teaching equipment, IT,

etc. are provided by AFG to a UOA-agreed specification.

5.1.15 We are the first broad spectrum UK university to operate in Qatar. Teaching started in September 2017 with 132 students registered on our MA Accountancy and Finance and MA Business Management (honours) programmes. The majority of students are in level 1, with 58 students entering level 3. Discussions are under way with the Qatari Ministry of Education and Higher Education regarding additional undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for delivery with, at the time of writing, verbal approval having been received to deliver our MBA and MSc International Business Management from autumn 2018. Discussions are being held with AFG regarding infrastructure requirements for phase two of the project that will involve the construction of a new, dedicated campus in Doha where a much broader range of subjects will be delivered.

5.1.16 We discussed our support for, and activities to promote equality, diversity and wellbeing among our TNE student cohort in 2.2.34. Opportunities for internships and career mentoring are being developed with local companies and UOA alumni (5.1.41); students will undertake the UOA online courses in 2018-19. A number of student societies have been started in the first year, with more planned in conjunction with AUSA.

Due Diligence

- 5.1.17 Our Delivery Partners' Handbook details the procedures to be followed in regard to approving delivery partners to safeguard against issues that might compromise academic standards, the quality of the student experience and, ultimately, our reputation.
- 5.1.18 Several visits to Qatar and to London by the Principal, Senior Vice-Principal, the Dean for TNE and a senior academic from the Business School took place to meet representatives of AFG and the Qatari Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Confirmation was received that AFG had received full approval from the ministry for its proposed partnership with a UK Higher Education Institution and of the suitability of a Scottish university system with its four-year undergraduate degree to the Qatari education system. We also received confirmation neither Qatari legislation, nor national and regional qualifications frameworks, would impact upon delivery and award of our degrees.
- 5.1.19 Our **due diligence** included:
- an AFG-commissioned commercial and financial feasibility study by Deloitte for the establishment of a UK university campus in Qatar;
 - an independent background investigation and due diligence report of AFG by Thomson Reuters;
 - an independent UOA-commissioned due diligence report by SYLAX partners on AFG and its principal shareholders.
- 5.1.20 Due diligence indicated there was strong demand for UK Higher Education (HE) within Qatar and the surrounding Gulf states, that the existing market for Business Studies majors in Qatar exhibited strong demand indicators and limited supply, and the proposed campus would contribute to the development of Qatar's business sector and economic activities. No risk with the AFG entity was identified. Further, Qatar had low corruption and money-laundering rankings. On that basis a conditional legal agreement was developed and approved in association with our university lawyers, CMS McKenna Ltd.
- 5.1.21 An institutional **project board**, chaired by the Vice-Principal (Internationalisation) and comprising representatives from the Business School, QAC, and Professional Services areas was established and met regularly to develop the proposal. In addition, a Business School working group progressed the academic details of the proposal. A full **business plan** was prepared and considered separately from quality and academic matters and a detailed **risk register** was developed and monitored at each meeting (4.4). Preparatory work was carried out in accordance with the procedures set out in Delivery Partners' Handbook.
- 5.1.22 The business plan included costings for a UOA-employed Provost based in the overseas campus, Aberdeen-based academic staff (including link tutors), Professional Services, and quality assurance costs (including annual QA visits and external examining). In-country teaching was incorporated into the Business School's workload model.
- 5.1.23 Representatives of the QAC visited Doha in January 2017 to discuss, and get agreement on, QA and QE requirements of the UOA. The group toured the campus



facilities, met with the Sheikha and AFG senior representatives, and had detailed discussions with the Principal-elect, who was leading the development of our Doha campus. Agreement was reached on a variety of issues, not least that UOA would set admissions criteria for students, recruitment criteria for staff, the syllabus and learning outcomes, and the procedures and processes for assessment and monitoring of academic provision (as per the Delivery Partners' Handbook). As reported to [QAC](#), [UCTL](#) and [Senate](#) the group was assured programmes delivered in Doha would be of the same quality and academic standard as those in Aberdeen and was confident of our own ability to quality assure the academic provision at the Doha campus. The group was also confident of AFG's commitment, and ability, to provide the infrastructure and support services to ensure an appropriate and stimulating student experience.

- 5.1.24 A subsequent visit by representatives from Estates and DDIS (February 2017) satisfied us of AFG's abilities to deliver an appropriate and equivalent learning environment to that of on-campus Aberdeen students, and that all infrastructural issues could, and were, being addressed to our satisfaction.

Approval

- 5.1.25 Following detailed discussion at QAC and UCTL of the academic model, the final proposal (including due diligence reports) to establish a branch campus in Doha was considered, and approved, at an extraordinary meeting of Senate in March 2017. Following the agreement of Senate, the proposal and full business plan was considered, and approved by Court.

Governance, oversight and management of partnership

- 5.1.26 The project board (**5.1.21**) continues to meet regularly and, with the Provost attending via Skype, this now fulfils the role of the Partner Management Group (as indicated in the Delivery Partners' Handbook). In addition, the governance committees described in the contract with AFG (Strategic Partnership Board and Joint Board of Studies) have agreed remits and memberships and will meet regularly.

Securing Academic Standards

- 5.1.27 We have appointed a **Provost**, line-managed by the UOA Senior Vice-Principal, who takes the lead on adherence to the UK QAA Quality Code and UOA quality procedures, student admissions, learning resources, student support, staff development and training. This line management structure was identified as supporting best practice by one of our ILDP groups (**3.4.14**) following visits to Doha and Curtin University.
- 5.1.28 The admissions procedures at our Doha campus comply with our UOA admissions policies and entry requirements have been jointly agreed. Applications are processed by AFG in accordance with the agreed criteria. All applications are reviewed and authorised by the Provost. Borderline applications are discussed with the Aberdeen-based Director of MA Admissions. An admissions 'audit' takes place annually; the UOA Head of Admissions and Director of MA Admissions have access to all admission data for review and a weekly admissions report is sent to UOA.
- 5.1.29 The UOA Business School, via its link tutors, is responsible for ensuring programme quality and the academic standards achieved by students are maintained at an appropriate and acceptable level, and for ensuring that quality enhancement takes place in line with the role descriptor detailed in our Delivery Partners' Handbook.



Curriculum

5.1.30 Programmes and courses are run under the sole auspices of the UOA and the academic regulations governed by our Senate. Aberdeen staff serve as link tutors (annex C, Delivery Partners' Handbook) and ensure programme quality and academic standards are appropriate. The academic curriculum mirrors the Aberdeen campus provision for these courses, with the exception of level 1, which has been designed to be an integrated Foundation/First Year. While some students may leave school with 'A' levels or the International Baccalaureate, many leave with the Qatari Senior School Certificate (Shahadat Al-Thanawayya Al-Aama), which is considered comparable to GCSE. Such

students therefore require foundation level teaching to bring them in line with our degree entrance requirements. As such the Business School developed and QAC approved a modified level one schedule for Doha, which includes a semester of foundation studies followed by a semester of subject-specific teaching. The foundation studies include English for Academic Practice provision, to bring students up to the IELTS expected of overseas students to the UOA campus. Levels 2-4 are as per the programmes delivered in Aberdeen.

5.1.31 AFG teaching staff deliver the courses and receive the intended learning outcomes and course guides to allow preparation of teaching material which can be

contextualised to the Qatar setting. UOA flying faculty deliver guest lectures twice per course, affording a supplementary QA check to that of the link tutors. These visits take place at the start of each course, and thereafter as appropriate to the content, delivered with accompanying back-fill of staff to ensure there is no detriment to the Aberdeen on-campus student experience. To ensure that UOA staff can be present in Doha at the start of each course, the Doha campus starts the new student induction week one week before the UOA semester; it then has 11 weeks of teaching plus an industry week for students midway through term.

Assessment

- 5.1.32 In-course assessments are set by Doha staff in consultation with UOA counterparts for Level 1 but are the same assessments as set in UOA for levels 2 to 4. Examinations for levels 2 to 4 are set by UOA and approved by external examiners in consultation with staff at Doha, with UOA and Doha courses sharing the same exam paper. Examinations for level 1 are set in Doha and agreed with UOA and the external examiner. Examinations take place at the same time as the corresponding examinations in Aberdeen. AFG teaching staff adhere to our [UoA Moderation Policy](#) with Aberdeen-based staff having acted as moderators and as second markers in our first year of operation, which will continue for 2018-19. To further ensure comparability of standards, we use the same, UOA-appointed external examiners for programmes delivered at our Doha campus as for programmes delivered in Aberdeen.

Monitoring and Review

- 5.1.33 Annual monitoring (SCEF, annual course review, annual programme review and external examining) is undertaken in Doha in line with the guidance and procedures at Aberdeen (4.1). Following the first semester, QAC reviewed all Doha courses alongside corresponding Aberdeen courses and, as reported to the June 2018 project board, all the annual course review reports had been submitted. The reviews themselves,

however, varied in terms of the quantity and quality of the information and reflection provided. While there are no apparent overall issues with the courses themselves and indeed, some very positive comments from external examiners, the Business School has been asked to emphasise these reviews are an important part of the QA procedures, and the Provost has prepared an [assessment guide](#) for teaching staff that includes an example of good practice. At the time of writing, second semester courses reviews and annual programme reviews were being prepared for submission by the end of July 2018.

- 5.1.34 Our provision in Doha will be periodically reviewed as part of the ITR of the relevant Schools.
- 5.1.35 In line with UOA expectations, the Doha campus has established a student representatives system and holds staff-student liaison meetings each semester. AUSA's education officer and student representative manager visited Doha in March 2018 to ensure student representation, welfare and engagement were in line with the Aberdeen campus processes. They met, and spent dedicated time, with students and student representatives. AUSA has subsequently arranged access to AUSA online student representative training materials and, from 2018-19, agreed a student from Doha will represent that student cohort on the AUSA undergraduate Education Committee. AUSA will also contribute to the induction week in August 2018 and the



AUSA Education officer will visit the campus to meet and train the school convener at the beginning of November.

- 5.1.36 A review of the first year of operation prepared by the Provost will be consider by QAC at its meeting in September 2018. The annual visit to Doha by a sub-group of QAC will take place in September 2018.

Staff Development and Engagement

- 5.1.37 Academic Staff employed by AFG are recruited according to UOA recruitment criteria with the Provost and Business School staff providing the subject expertise on recruitment panels. AFG academic staff undergo the same induction and training as all new UOA teaching staff and CAD delivered two bespoke sessions for AFG staff on effective feedback to students and small group teaching via Blackboard Collaborate. AFG conduct annual review of all staff in line with UOA protocol. The Provost and CAD have begun to explore how AFG staff might best be supported to undertake the PG Certificate HE L&T. Staff development is also delivered locally and has included sessions on student support, copyright requirements, invigilation training and on UOA assessment practices.

- 5.1.38 Professional Services are employed and recruited by AFG, with input from the Provost. Staff are trained in UOA policies and procedures by the Provost, UOA Registry, and Business School administrative staff. Training has included presenting examination results, student progression rules, and appeals, complaints and disciplinary procedures.

- 5.1.39 Aberdeen-based Professional Services staff keep in regular contact with AFG counterparts in Doha. Colleagues from SRAS, Marketing, and DDIS and Estates have all spent several days at the Doha campus to train AFG colleagues in UOA systems and procedures. The AFG Director of IT and the lead for Student Services have both visited Aberdeen for bespoke training. The respective teams keep in regular contact via email and Skype.

- 5.1.40 Regular monthly meetings of the recruitment, admissions and marketing teams at Aberdeen and Doha take place via Skype. Staff working across the Directorate of Student Recruitment and Marketing liaise regularly with the Provost, and the Provost also participates in meetings via Skype, such as Student Recruitment CRM Project Board. Admissions staff have visited Doha to deliver training.

- 5.1.41 The Head of Careers from Aberdeen will visit the Doha campus in September 2018 and, with the Provost, will continue discussions already under way as to which of our Aberdeen-based employability (2.3) opportunities students in Doha can access (e.g. the STAR Award, Aberdeen internships) and which will be developed locally.

- 5.1.42 Our Student Experience Team at Aberdeen have monthly Skype meetings with AFG counterparts and will visit the Doha campus in November 2018.

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

- 5.2.1 Our development with AFG in Qatar is the first major test of our delivery partners' process and procedures and our first example of an overseas branch campus. The Provost's annual report, prepared in line with guidance provided in the Delivery Partners' Handbook, will be formally considered by QAC at its September 2018 meeting. QAC will then report to UCTL and onwards to Senate.

- 5.2.2 With AFG we have established a strong and effective partnership with an educational provider that shares our values and our commitment to providing a first-class student experience. This validates the rigour of our procedures for approving delivery partners.

- 5.2.3 The evidence for our shared values and commitment can be seen in the relatively

short time frame in which we were able to establish a campus, develop a curriculum and recruit staff and students. It is also seen in our approach to enhancing the student experience, the support we provide for staff, and the way our academic standards have so easily been incorporated into activities in Doha.

Student Experience

- 5.2.4 This is the first year of operation of our Doha campus and the size of both the Level 1 and Level 3 cohorts are small. The non-continuation rate is higher for both cohorts in Doha than for corresponding Business School students in Aberdeen. While some of the reasons for students withdrawing are outside our control (e.g., distance to travel to campus), we are putting in place a number of enhancements to ensure students receive support. These include revising attendance monitoring to ensure course co-ordinators have better early warning of non-attenders and revising the communications to students about potential issues with their progress.
- 5.2.5 Students complete SCEF course evaluation forms and are represented at the staff-student liaison committee, in line with UOA expectations. While SCEF response rates have been low, not unlike the situation at Aberdeen (2.3.19), this is being addressed and the student feedback received has proved very helpful. For example, student comments contributed to the review and restructuring of semester one foundation courses and all staff now advertise regular office hours.
- 5.2.6 In response to concerns expressed by students regarding a member of AFG teaching staff, which were duly investigated, an additional tutor was appointed to deliver weekly revision sessions, and the staff member concerned was supported by AFG and Aberdeen staff. Ultimately the member of staff was unable to meet the requirements expected (attendance on campus; timely delivery of workload and assessment) and their contract was not renewed at the end of the probationary period.

- 5.2.7 Our Secretary to the University visited the Doha campus in February 2018 at the start of the second half-session. As part of her visit she met with a group of student ambassadors who asked for additional facilities on campus including lockers, vending machines, free weights in the female gym and parking spaces. The students also expressed an interest in studying in Aberdeen, either as part of their degree programme or as a GoAbroad activity. As reported to the Qatar project board, where possible these are being arranged, with many requests being addressed for the start of academic year 2018-19.

- 5.2.8 Students in Doha have access to UOA Careers Service staff and online resources. AFG and the Provost have arranged internship opportunities with the local branches of KPMG, PWC, Al Jazeera and Barwa Bank for 2018-19. It has been agreed to appoint a new member of staff with responsibility for developing careers advice and employability initiatives in-country in conjunction with the UOA Careers Service.

- 5.2.9 As reported by our AUSA Education Officer to QAC following their March 2018 visit to the Doha campus: *"AUSA representatives had unrestricted access to the students and were impressed with levels of student engagement with the staff across the campus. The welfare of students was very high on the agenda of all staff. The students also felt very connected with Aberdeen campus due to the fact that academics come from Aberdeen to teach them, and the communications that get sent out is to all students across both campuses"*.

Support for Staff

- 5.2.10 We recognise that we underestimated the level of support required in the first year by many AFG teaching and non-teaching staff. The process of educating and training AFG staff in Aberdeen's policies, systems and practices has taken significant staff time and resources. This was exacerbated by a contractual delay in the Provost taking up appointment. Written guidance and work

manuals, for example on how to present exam results for examiners' meetings, will be prepared during the summer of 2018.

5.2.11 Several of the new teaching staff employed by AFG (in conjunction with UOA) had only limited experience of UK Higher Education (or similar systems) and this did cause complexity in the early days of establishment. As we will have a student cohort at all levels of study from September 2018, we have increased our teaching staff complement and have ensured all new appointees have significant expertise of UK, Australia/New Zealand or North America HE. In addition, two members of UOA staff have taken up teaching contracts with AFG from August 2018. These appointments will increase the understanding of the UOA degree and systems/processes and improve the way students receive an equivalent experience to those based in Aberdeen.

5.2.12 As with any new venture, there have been teething issues, and several 'lessons learnt' meetings have been held in Aberdeen with Professional Services staff to consider how administrative matters such as student data

and the reporting of examination results for examiners meetings between campuses might be handled more efficiently going forward. A suite of protocols to this effect has been developed. For example, given difficulties in transcribing handwritten application forms and in transferring data from Doha to the UOA Registry, there was a delay in fully registering the students and this caused difficulties for them in accessing their university email and getting their student ID card. These issues were largely resolved for students starting in the second semester and a new, UCAS-based system of registration has been agreed for 2018-19 and will reduce the risk of the same issues occurring.

5.2.13 Peer observation of teaching between all AFG staff was launched in semester 2 and has proved useful. We hope to be able to learn from the AFG experience in Aberdeen.

5.2.14 As a mark of the high-quality teaching in Doha, this summer a member of AFG teaching staff received one of our [Teaching Excellence Awards \(3.2.11\)](#) highlighting the exceptional teaching offered in Doha.



Academic Standards

- 5.2.15 2017-18 was the first intake of students into our Doha Campus and the numbers were relatively low. We recognise that a single small sample, combined with the fact that level 1 in Doha is an integrated foundation year and the level 3 students were all direct entrants, makes comparison to level 1 and level 3 students in Aberdeen more complex. However, the available evidence points to comparability in academic standards.
- 5.2.16 Because of the integrated foundation elements, our Level 1 courses in Doha are not directly comparable to those in Aberdeen. Comparing exam performance for Level 3 students in Doha and Aberdeen and bearing in mind the small sample size, our students in Doha performed at similar levels to our students in Aberdeen. Students in Doha performed at a comparable level in one course, better in another, and slightly less well in the remaining two. As indicated in **5.1.32**, we have used the same external examiner for the students in Doha and Aberdeen and this gives us confidence in the appropriateness of the marks and their equivalence between cohorts.
- 5.2.17 To ensure AFG staff are using the CGS marking scale appropriately, a higher proportion of assessments were subject to double marking/moderation than would normally be expected in Aberdeen and, for the Level 3 students, the Business School undertook additional moderation to 'sense check' the results. No issues in relation to standards of marking were identified.
- 5.2.18 Significant effort has been put into explaining to our Doha students what plagiarism is and how they can avoid it. It has been agreed that Level 1 students should, for all assessments, have the opportunity of one submission to Turnitin, as part of formative feedback, prior to final submission.
- 5.2.19 While we recognise there have been teething issues in relation to aspects of administration (e.g., assessment timelines, format of data for examiners' meetings), overall, we are satisfied that Aberdeen policies and procedures in relation to academic standards are embedded in our activities in Doha.
- ### 5.3 Online Education: Interactive Design Institute (IDI)
- 5.3.1 As noted in **2.5.2**, we recognise the role technology plays in enhancing and supporting pedagogy and enabling multiple methods of delivery which, in line with our strategy (**2.2.32**), helps us diversify our student population.
- 5.3.2 While we had some pockets of activity in online courses/programmes, institutionally our experience was limited. It was for this reason that we have sought to collaborate with partners who are established in this area and from whom we gain expertise.
- 5.3.3 Our first collaboration, in 2015, was the launch of MOOCs with FutureLearn. While FutureLearn is not a delivery partner (5.1.6), they provided a flexible platform and significant expertise in the development of online materials using a pedagogic approach that aligns closely with our ethos. Our first two MOOCs, Africa: Sustainable Development for All? and Nutrition and Wellbeing, attracted over 100,000 learners from approximately 165 countries combined. We also gained valuable experience blending the sustainable development MOOC into our multidisciplinary level 1 course dealing with the same topic. We are seeking to share this experience, with a particular focus on the experiences of on-campus learners taking MOOCs, in a paper which is under peer review.
- 5.3.4 Recognising our relative inexperience in this arena, in the past we had held preliminary discussions with several online education providers. As a consequence, in 2016 we approached [The Interactive Design Institute Ltd \(IDI\)](#). IDI had previous experience of working with a UK HEI having, for almost a decade, delivered a number of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees for the University of Hertfordshire. In addition, in 2016, IDI had undergone a successful

Review for Specific Course Designation by QAA, and is registered on the UK Register of Learning Providers (UKRLP); as such they were already well versed in the needs and expectations of UK HE. IDI also provide support for the full student journey from marketing and admissions to support for study, and also support the process of course development.

5.3.5 To evaluate IDI as a future delivery partner in terms of both pedagogic compatibility and platform functionality, we chose to develop our 'Understanding the Body' online access course (2.3.5) with IDI before later transferring it to the [FutureLearn](#) platform.

5.3.6 Having assured ourselves of the pedagogic compatibility and platform functionality, a sub-group of QAC visited IDI in July 2016. The Panel met with staff and students to discuss IDI's approach, looking specifically at the model IDI uses for the delivery of taught postgraduate programmes of the University of Hertfordshire. The main themes of the discussions were the student experience, the learning pathways, tutoring, academic standards, supervision and support, and administration, procedures and infrastructure. A summary of the discussions and the Panel's recommendation were reported to [QAC](#), [UCTL](#) and [Senate](#).

5.3.7 Our quality assurance visit gave us both the confidence, and confirmation, that IDI would support students and deliver a student experience that provides an equal opportunity to learn, support its staff and provide the necessary environment to ensure the health and wellbeing of both staff and students. Further, the QAC Panel was assured that the standards of provision for the courses delivered by IDI would be at least equivalent to the standards at Aberdeen. Following approval by Senate, we then entered into an agreement with IDI to develop two PGT programmes, an [MBA \(Global\)](#) and [MSc Finance](#) programme. The MBA launched in July 2017 and the MSc Finance in January 2018.

5.3.8 There is a formal Management Board which meets regularly and an Annual Business Review meeting. Regular operational meetings are held between the academics in the School and IDI.

5.3.9 There is complete transparency for students and staff and visitors to the web pages as to the relationship between [IDI](#) and [UOA](#) so that it is clear that the UOA programmes are being delivered and supported by IDI. This is in line with the QAA expectation that there is *"transparency about which organisation awards the credit or qualification and which organisation(s) are delivering learning and assessment or providing support and facilities"*.

5.3.10 IDI maintains the online learning platform, markets the programmes, recruits students and administers the admissions and enrolment processes.

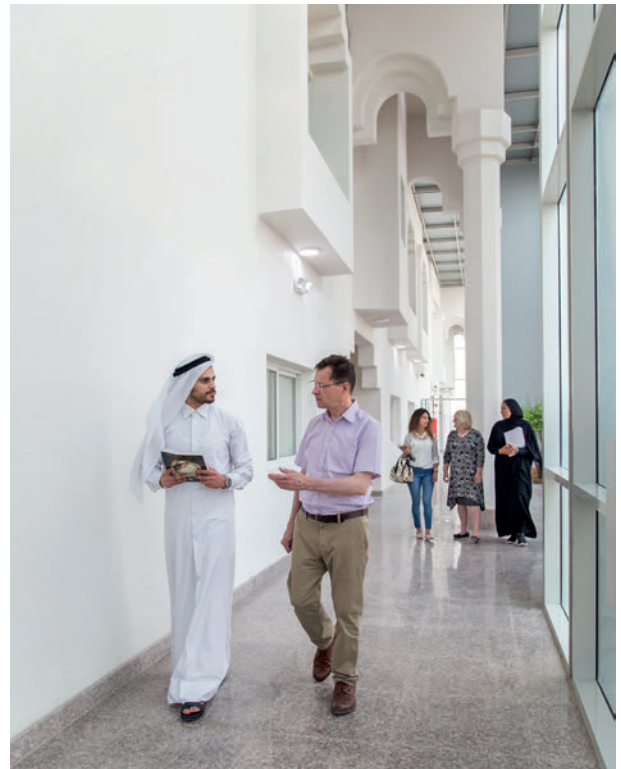
5.3.11 Under UOA oversight, tutors are recruited by IDI to our criteria. All tutors receive specialist training from IDI in online delivery and support, including aspects such as using appropriate language and methods for engagement and communication. In addition, in 2018-19, we are providing additional training to IDI staff on online tutoring skills. IDI holds a staff development event each year for tutors. As well as teaching and engaging with students, tutors provide academic but not pastoral or other support, which is provided by specialist services within IDI. There is a strong focus on building rapport and trust with students, translating learning to the online environment.

5.3.12 The UOA course coordinator plays an important role in overseeing and supporting the work of the IDI tutors. In some cases, the first run of the course was tutored directly by the course coordinator, which allowed them to identify any issues and thereby provide more tailored support to the tutor. Where issues have been identified, the School has worked with IDI to address these (e.g. issues arising from student feedback).

- 5.3.13 IDI's student support team provide academic-related, pastoral and other support (e.g. finance). Student support flag up anything of concern and have categories of students where monitoring is more rigorous (including English not first language; declared disability or other health issues). Student support staff are trained to know when a student needs to be referred to a professional. Students with disabilities etc. are encouraged to disclose these and work with the lead tutor and course coordinator to decide on special provisions. IDI also employs tutors who specialise in support such as academic writing skills.
- 5.3.14 IDI follows UOA's academic regulations. The UOA maintains oversight of all associated processes and procedures, to ensure compliance with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the requirements of our UOA Academic Quality Handbook. The quality assurance and enhancement process, as well as the delivery model, are the same regardless of the programme of study or the country in which the student is resident while studying on the online programmes.
- 5.3.15 Students must meet our standard UOA entry requirements. The application process is supported through 'Ask a Student', 'Webinars' and direct messaging contact with IDI's student support and admissions advisors.
- 5.3.16 A Student Handbook, produced by IDI in conjunction with UOA, is tailored to our programmes and courses and IDI's delivery and support. IDI provides an induction module for all students which takes place in the first week of registration. Engagement is monitored online and students who have not engaged by the Wednesday of the induction are contacted. A feedback questionnaire for new students is circulated at the beginning of the learner journey. In response to comments received from our first cohort, we introduced a messaging system to allow students to message each other directly, create group messages and email all students in their cohort.
- 5.3.17 All courses have a structured activity path over the course of the module which enables student and tutor to see formative work and drafts, so that both know whether or not the student is on track, and to assist the tutor in confirming the authenticity of authorship of the final submission.
- 5.3.18 Annual Monitoring (SCEF, annual course review, annual programme review and external examining) is undertaken by IDI in line with the guidance and procedures at Aberdeen (4.1). A member of our Business School staff acts as an academic link tutor who works with IDI to ensure that all Aberdeen quality assurance processes are carried out appropriately.
- 5.3.19 We have responded to SCEF feedback; for example, students highlighted the need for greater guidance in regard to video assessments. As a consequence, we added course content to provide more guidance on how to create video presentations using various types of software, and improved the guidance around the corresponding elements of formative and summative assessment. Where feedback cannot be addressed, for example, the removal of specific content relating to diversity, we have provided a clear rationale for the decision.
- 5.3.20 Additional student feedback channels have been recommended for 2018-19 including: mid-course SCEFs, anonymised discussion boards, a web-based ad hoc feedback service and virtual Q&A sessions involving UOA academics and AUSA.
- 5.3.21 Summative and formative assessments are set by our Business School staff. IDI tutors undertake the initial marking, UOA staff act as second markers and undertake the moderation procedures. Where IDI tutors are used for the first time, we double mark the assessments. All assessment and moderation takes place within a secure area of the VLE purposely built around the UOA regulations on assessment, including access for external examiners. Assessment outcomes are considered at the UOA examiners' meeting.

Where issues have been identified, these are jointly addressed.

- 5.3.22 External examiners for both programmes are nominated, appointed and employed by UOA. External examiners provide their annual reports to IDI and to UOA. IDI provide a response to UOA, who then report back to the external examiner.
- 5.3.23 In line with our collaborative procedures, the first annual report will be submitted to QAC in September and the IDI programmes will be reviewed as part of the ITR of the Business School.



Conclusion

- 6.1 We are a distinctively Scottish university with reach, impact, and aspirations that are global. Our vision of transforming the world with greater knowledge and learning is a thread that has guided our actions successfully and continuously since our foundation in 1495.
- 6.2 Our philosophy is based on a strong sense of community, commitment to collaborative working, and academic excellence. We pride ourselves on the learning environment created by our international outlook and our diversity, and within that environment, our ethos of student choice, research-enriched teaching, and individual responsibility.
- 6.3 We recognise the opportunities and challenges increased globalisation and digitalisation, demographic and economic change, and shifting stakeholder expectations, bring for our university. The way we are responding to these has guided our reflections.
- 6.4 Our fruitful partnership with Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) can be seen in our new Student Partnership Agreement and revised student representation structure; together we work to ensure we can deliver an outstanding student experience. The student voice is central to our enhancement agenda. Students recognise the high value we place on their views, though we appreciate there is more to do to close the feedback loop and we are working to achieve this, both on our own and as part of the Enhancement Theme student-led project.
- 6.5 The diversity of our community hugely enriches the experience of our students and staff. Our new Culture and Community prize, initiated by our students, reflects how that view is shared by them. Our commitment to widening access is demonstrated not only in our admissions policies, outreach activities (e.g., Access Aberdeen, Children's

University), and increased number of College Articulation pathways, but also in the transition and ongoing support we provide through developments such as our Engineering Summer School and Gateway2Medicine programme. However, we recognise we will remain challenged by widening participation metrics based only on postcodes

- 6.6 We have increased our international partnerships and our new International Centre provides a range of social and pastoral activities as well as our award-winning orientation programme to enhance the support we offer to students who join us from outside the UK. The development of our first overseas campus has been a major endeavour and success. It demonstrates our ability to work together with our students, staff, and delivery partner to ensure we provide an equivalent high-quality experience for students in Doha and Aberdeen.
- 6.7 We provide a supportive environment for our diverse community and require both staff and students to have a shared understanding of our equality and diversity principles. Our award winning Clued Up campaign, establishment of a Student Experience Team, and the expansion of the activities of our Student Learning Service have all enhanced the support we offer. We recognise the increasing incidence of mental health problems (including stress) faced by our students. This is reflected in our new Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, appointment of a dedicated Mental Health Adviser, and the steps we have taken to provide support at an early stage, including through our mental health first aid training programme, and a range of School-level initiatives. We recognise, as does the education sector as a whole, there is more to be done and it remains a priority. We believe that many of the other enhancements we have undertaken, or are undertaking (e.g., review of assessment, learning analytics), will help in this area.

- 6.8 We have an increasing number of postgraduate students and have developed our supporting structures accordingly. The establishment of a Postgraduate Research School, separate committees for PGR and PGT students, and deans with specific remits for these cohort, has raised the visibility of both student groups. The establishment by AUSA of the role of PGT School convener and a PG education committee, complements our structures and gives these students a greater voice. We are prioritising work to develop student experience metrics (including our new Student Engagement survey) that provide the same level of detail for the PGT student experience as we have for the UG experience.
- 6.9 We are increasingly confident in our use of digital technology to enhance learning and to support our students. This has included expanding the number of online courses and programmes we offer, developing Digital Learning Spaces, and creating our multi-award-winning Learner's Toolkit. Alongside these developments, we have created tools and introduced policies designed to support student course choice, their study styles (e.g., lecture capture), and to understand patterns of engagement (e.g., attendance monitoring). The valuable data these enhancements are providing are helping our exploration of learning analytics as a means to continue the significant improvements in non-continuation we have achieved in recent years and to provide another route to identify students early who need additional support.
- 6.10 Our ventures in Online Education and TNE, our increasing number of programmes designed to address the needs of the changing environment (decommissioning, apprenticeships), the addition to our annual monitoring process of programme level review and the redesign of our periodic review process (ITR), have increased the volume of QA activity we undertake. While we remain assured of the rigour of our QA processes, as we envisage activity will grow further we are reviewing our curriculum management process and establishing

school-based QA teams with a common remit to ensure we remain flexible and responsive.

- 6.11 Our graduates leave us with the attributes necessary to compete successfully at the highest level for graduate-level employment and opportunities for further study. We have previously described how we embedded Aberdeen Graduate Attributes within and outside the curriculum (e.g., industrial placements, STAR Awards) and worked with our Business and Industry partners (including alumni) to provide additional employability support and experience (e.g. career mentoring, internships). In recent years we have built on these strong foundations with our refreshed Achieve/ Achieve+ site and Professional Skills courses which have created increased opportunities for our students to reflect on and be able to articulate their attainment of graduate attributes. In addition, we have enhanced the range of credit-bearing courses available to students to develop further their employability skills (City Lab, Working Together, and Work Experience: Employability Skills Development). Our work on a minimum careers expectation will provide further focus for our activities to enhance the employability of our graduates.
- 6.12 Our community is a diverse body of students and staff who are of the highest quality and committed to providing the best student experience possible. The ELIR process has confirmed that, by working together, we have achieved a great deal since ELIR 3 and our reflections have helped us identify and prioritise our next steps in what will remain a challenging environment.





Acronyms used in the Reflective Analysis

6CC	6th Century Course
A&F	Assessment and Feedback
ACR	Annual Course Review
AFG	Al-Faleh Group for Educational and Academic Services
AGA	Aberdeen Graduate Attributes
AGED	Advisory Group on Equality and Diversity
AIS	Advance Information Set
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
APR	Annual Programme Review
AQH	Academic Quality Handbook
AUSA	Aberdeen University Students' Association
BI	Business Improvement
CAD	Centre for Academic Development
CAS	Common Assessment Scale (of the University of Aberdeen)
CGS	Common Grading Scale (of the University of Aberdeen)
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CM(S)	Curriculum Management (System)
DDIS	Directorate of Digital and Information Services
DELS	Digitally-Enhanced Learning Spaces
DLHE	Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Institutions
Dean QE/QA	Dean of Quality Enhancement & Assurance
DoT	Director of Teaching (Schools)
E&D	Equality and Diversity
ECR	Early Career Researchers
EQIA	Equality Impact Assessment Strategy
ET	Enhancement Theme
FOI	Freedom of Information
FAE	Framework of Academic Expectations
FTE	Full -time Equivalent
GAP	Gender Action Plan
G2M	Gateway to Medicine
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HR	Human Resources
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IEP	International Exchange Programme
ILO	Intended Learning Outcomes
ITR	Internal Teaching Review
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
L&T	Learning and Teaching
LEO	Longitudinal Educational Outcomes
LLMVC	School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture
LSC&M	Library, Special Collections and Museums
LTEP	Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme
MHA	Mental Health Adviser
MMM	Making the Most of Masters
MMS&N	School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition

MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
NESCOL	North East Scotland College
NSS	National Student Survey
PAB	Programme Advisory Board
PAL	Peer Assisted Learning
PG Cert (HELT)	Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Learning & Teaching
PGDE	Postgraduate Diploma in Education
PGR	Postgraduate Research
PGRS	Postgraduate Research School
PGT	Postgraduate Taught
PGTC	Postgraduate Taught Committee
PO	Positive Outcomes
PRES	Postgraduate Research Student Experience Survey
PSRB	Professional and Statutory Body
PT	Personal Tutor
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
QAC	Quality Assurance Committee
R&C	Research & Commercialisation
RGU	The Robert Gordon University
RUK	Undergraduate students domiciled in England, Wales or Northern Ireland ('rest of UK')
S4S	Students for Students
SASO	Student Advice and Support Office
SBC	Senate Business Committee
SCEF	Student Course Evaluation Form
SDRL	Sir Duncan Rice Library
SET	Student Experience Team
SHEP	Schools for Higher Education Programme
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SIE	Scottish Institute for Enterprise
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SLS	Student Learning Service
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
SMT	Senior Management Team
SPA	Student Partnership Agreement
SRA	Student Resident Assistant
SRAS	Student Recruitment and Admissions
SRAC	Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee
SSLC	Staff-Student Liaison Committee
STAR	Students Taking Active Roles Award
STEMM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Medicine and Mathematics
TLC	Teaching & Learning Committee
TNE	Transnational Education
UCTL	University Committee on Teaching & Learning
UG	Undergraduate
UGC	Undergraduate Committee
UMG	University Management Group
UOA	University of Aberdeen
VLE	Virtual learning Environment
VP (L&T)	Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching)
WA	Widening Access
WBL/P	Work-Based Learning / Project

