EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCESSES: ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW (ELIR), QUALITY ENHANCEMENT & STANDARDS REVIEW (QESR) AND TERTIARY QUALITY PROJECT (TQP) UPDATE

1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper provides an update regarding the External Quality processes by QAA Scotland, including Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR), and Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR). The paper also provides an update on the Tertiary Quality Project.

2. PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

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<tr>
<th>Board/Committee</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Previously considered/approved by</td>
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<tr>
<td>Further consideration/approval required by</td>
<td>Quality Assurance Committee 9 May 2024</td>
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<td>University Education Committee 13 May 2024</td>
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3. RECOMMENDED ACTION

The Quality Assurance Committee is invited to note the updates provided in respect of the actions arising from the University's last Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) conducted in 2018, appended as Appendix A, and the actions arising from the Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) undertaken in February 2023, appended as Appendix B. The QAC is further invited to note the update provided in respect of the Tertiary Quality Project.

4. ENHANCEMENT-LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW (ELIR)

4.1 The Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAAS) review process, Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR), completed its fourth and final cycle in 2021/22. The University of Aberdeen ELIR 4 was undertaken in Autumn 2018. The ELIR Outcome Report confirms that the University has ‘effective arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience’ and notes that ‘there can be public confidence in the University's awards and in the quality of the learning experience it provides for its students’.

4.2 The University was commended for several of areas of good practice: the support given proactively to an increasingly diverse student population; the focus on widening access and the pre- and post-entry support given to such students; the targeted communications policy; the University’s engagement with Aberdeen University Students’ Association (AUSA) resulting in the development of the Student Partnership Agreement; and the University’s quality processes and arrangements for self-evaluation and enhancement.

4.3 The ELIR Report asked the University to consider seven areas for development:
   (i) The balance between institutional and school responsibilities;
   (ii) Monitoring and expansion of personal tutoring;
   (iii) Relationship between Postgraduate Research School and Schools and training of PhD supervisors;
   (iv) Preparation for teaching;
   (v) Review of Professional Services;
   (vi) Monitoring, training and induction of External Examiners; and
(vii) Review processes for Collaborative Provision to ensure accuracy of Register of Partnerships.

4.4 All actions identified by the Review Panel and taken forward by the University have now been completed. Appendix A provides an update on the areas for development (as identified in section 4.3 above).

5. QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AND STANDARDS REVIEW (QESR)

5.1 ELIR has been replaced by a new external institutional review methodology which will be a two-phase approach as follows:

- **Phase 1**: Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR)/Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM) (2022/23-2023/24)
- **Phase 2**: Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) (2024/25 onwards)

5.2 The Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) for the University took place on 14 February 2023, following a comprehensive submission of required documentation. On the day, a number of sessions took place with the Review panel:

- Session with HEI Key Contacts
- Session with Students
- Session with Quality Assurance-focused Staff
- Session with Quality Enhancement-focused Staff

5.3 The University was advised that the Review Panel had confidence that the institution is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. In addition, the panel recognised the following areas as good practice: (i) effective implementation of University strategies; (ii) engagement with Enhancement Themes; (iii) an inclusive approach to blended education/learning and teaching; and (iv) student partnership.

5.4 The QESR findings asked the University to consider the following areas for development:

(i) ensuring student access to External Examiner Reports; and
(ii) continuing work to finalise the University’s approach to personal tutoring arrangements.

5.5 All actions identified by the Review Panel and taken forward by the University have now been completed. Appendix B provides an update on the areas for development (as identified in section 5.4 above).

5.6 Relatedly, the University underwent an Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM) with QAAS on 29 February 2024. The meeting was led by the University’s Quality Enhancement Manager/Liaison Officer at QAAS and was attended by the following:

- Vice-Principal (Education)
- Dean for Quality Assurance and Enhancement
- Dean for Educational Innovation
- Director of Academic Services and Online Education
- Assistant Registrar (Academic Services)
- Wellbeing and Engagement Manager
- Vice-President for Education (AUSA)

There is no formal outcome or categorisation of the University’s performance in the ILM, just an official recording of the meeting notes, which are appended as Appendix C.

5.7 The ILM covered a range of topics including updates to ELIR 4 and QESR actions; the enhancement and management of quality and standards, and the student learning experience; institutional analysis of key data; current developments in student engagement; the University’s mapping to the UK Quality Code; and engagement in, and activity related to, the current sector enhancement topic.
6. **UPDATE ON TERTIARY QUALITY PROJECT (TQP)**

6.1 The **Tertiary Quality Project** (TQP) involves the development and delivery of a common approach to assuring and enhancing quality in Scotland’s tertiary sector, both FE and HE, which will be implemented in academic year 2024-25. The project is being delivered by QAAS as commissioned by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). The University of Aberdeen is actively feeding into this ongoing development and consultation process. The project currently includes several ongoing strands as detailed below:

- **Scottish Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF):** The TQEF is the proposed new quality assurance and enhancement framework, comprising a shared set of principles, delivery pillars, and outputs to give assurance on academic standards and the quality of the student experience, and ensure accountability for public investment in learning and teaching. The diagram in image A below outlines the principles of the TQEF.

![Image A: Principles of Scotland’s Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework](Source: Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland)

- **External Enhancement-Led Peer Review:** A new external peer review methodology is being developed which will replace ELIR. The new review cycle which will apply to both colleges and universities will commence in academic year 2024-25 and will last 5 years, with each institution being reviewed within the first four years, leaving the last year to reflect on the review methodology. QAA is working closely with Education Scotland, in drafting the new methodology to ensure it meets the needs of both the FE and HE sectors. It is anticipated guidance will be made available in June 24.

- **Self Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP):** A central feature of TQEF methodology will be the submission of an annual report called the Self Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP), which will provide evidence-based reflection on institutional activities relating to the principles of TQEF. The SEAP will replace the annual Quality report which the University was required to submit to the SFC in the autumn each year. In addition, the SEAP will require preparation of an action plan, which will remain “live” throughout the year. Further guidance on the SEAP is expected in June with the first submission to the SFC being due in November 2024.
• **Student Learning Experience Model:** Another key aspect of the TQEF relates to the Student Learning Experience Model, developed by sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland) in close partnership with students. It is designed to place strong emphasis on the matters of most importance to students and contains 9 building blocks covering the learning experience underpinned by a set of reflective questions.

• **National Thematic Enhancement Activity:** The continuation of thematic enhancement activity remains a core strand of TQEF although is new for the FE sector. Work is ongoing to design and deliver an approach to national enhancement across Scotland’s tertiary sector, drawing on the expertise of all stakeholders. The potential theme, its duration and the funding model to support this is being widely discussed and developed, with the University being represented in these discussions.

6.2 Further information and guidance regarding the new Scottish Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework is due to be released in June 2024 for implementation in 2024/25. Further information will be shared with QAC and UEC in due course.

7. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Steve Tucker (Dean for Quality Assurance and Enhancement), [s.j.tucker@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:s.j.tucker@abdn.ac.uk).

18 April 2024

**Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status:** Open
## UPDATE ON THE ELIR 2018 RECOMMENDATIONS (MARCH 2024)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area for Development</th>
<th>Specific Recommendation</th>
<th>Update</th>
<th>Status</th>
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| The balance between institutional and school responsibilities | Reflect on the balance between institutional and School responsibilities for establishing and implementing policy and practice to assure itself that all those studying for a University of Aberdeen (UoA) award have parity of experience. | In the one-year follow-up report we:  
- Specified the committee structure that enabled dissemination of policy changes and afforded a mechanism to monitor School-level compliance with such changes.  
- Described several policies relating to assessment and classification changes approved through Senate to be implemented in Academic Year 2019/2020. Due to some uncertainty over the communication of some of these changes with students, however, many of the changes had to be delayed. | COMPLETE |
|                       |                         | In our October 2022 updated we noted we had:  
- Refined the Education committee structure, ensuring increased School representation on Committees including the University Education Committee (UEC) (formally the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL)), and more clearly distinguishing the roles between the QAC and the UEC.  
- Ensured the effective rollout of the policies relating to assessment and classification changes referred to within the one-year follow up report.  
- Developed a suite of procedures (No Detriment Procedures and Comprehensive Measures refer) in consultation with Schools in respect of Assessment procedures to ensure students’ classifications were not disadvantaged due to the Covid-19 pandemic.  
- Held several sessions for School Examination Officers and School administrative staff to ensure awareness and understanding of these procedures. Bespoke sessions were held on request.  
- Ensured the practice of providing this level of training and support remains in place, despite the transition from ‘emergency’ Covid measures to more standard means of degree classification and award.  
- Reviewed all policy documentation, in the context of Covid-19 and the transition to blended learning, to ensure each was up to date and remained fit for purpose.  
- Published a Policy Review Plan, providing a transparent approach to ensure education policies are reviewed on a regular basis and not solely on an ‘ad-hoc’ basis or as external factors (such as the publication of regulatory guidance) require. |
- Published a ‘Late Submission of Work Policy’ ensuring parity of experience for all students who, without good reason, submit assessment after the published deadline for doing so.
- Considered a proposal regarding the attendance of a QAC member or Registry staff representative at Examiners Meetings. This remains under consideration.

Since October 2022 we have:
- Published an updated Policy Review Plan, providing a transparent approach to ensure education policies are reviewed on a regular basis and not solely on an ‘ad-hoc’ basis or as external factors (such as the publication of regulatory guidance) require. The plan responds to feedback from Schools regarding particular areas of concern, with a view to ensuring consistency across our policies, streamlining processes and reducing workloads.

| Monitoring and expansion of personal tutoring | Continue to monitor personal tutoring arrangements to ensure they remain fit for purpose, in the context of the University’s changing student population. The University should progress its intention to introduce personal tutoring for postgraduate taught students, including those studying online. | In the one-year follow-up report we:
- Informed the QAA of the introduction of personal tutors for PGT students. The principles of which were supported by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL) and Senate. As a consequence of differing approaches withing Schools to assigning personal tutors, a review of the effectiveness of School-based personal tutor systems for PGT students would be undertaken.
- Noted that the personal tutor system for undergraduate students was implemented in September 2013 and that a holistic review of the approach was timely, so that enhancements could be implemented as needed. |

In our October 2022 update we noted we had:
- Engaged in initial informal discussions with Aberdeen University Students’ Association, Heads of School and Senior Personal Tutors regarding the delivery of the undergraduate personal tutor system, including in respect of Qatar.
- Widened the Senior Personal Tutor Forum to include all staff leading on delivery of pastoral support alongside the specialist services. This includes Postgraduate Taught programme leads, professional services colleagues from some schools and from on demand who have this responsibility and the Postgraduate Research Centre.
- Developed a website to make the Pastoral and Guidance support that is provided for students clear to all staff and students and new training and resources have been developed for staff. | COMPLETE |
In direct response to the recommendation in the ELIR report, established a ‘Pastoral Support Review’ Task and Finish Group (TFG) to review the pastoral support provided for PGT students, and the UG PT system.

The TFG, will recommend any changes which should be made to the UG personal tutoring and PGT pastoral support on the Aberdeen and Qatar campuses for on campus/blended/online teaching in respect of:

- who is to deliver it
- the nature of the support and information sharing needed to support this
- how to enhance staff and student engagement with the personal tutor and pastoral support systems
- identify priorities and prepare and deliver an implementation plan, including as appropriate requests for additional resource
- develop an internal benchmarking and evaluation plan.

Continued the work of the TFG, under the leadership of the Dean for Student Support and Experience, with future updates to follow to the Education Committee structure.

In our October 2023 update, we noted we had:

- Reviewed webpages for both staff and students, enhancing the purpose and clarity of the personal tutor and other pastoral guidance roles, and highlighting resources and sources of support as appropriate.
- In-person staff training for pastoral support and guidance session delivered, with further workshops scheduled.
- Senior Pastoral Support and Guidance forum oversees and reviews the consistency and equity of the student experience, reporting to the Student Support and Experience Committee.
- Communications issued to staff and students with information pertinent to pastoral support arrangements to ensure each cohort have the most up-to-date information, including information in induction materials.

Since the October 2023 update, we have:

- Completed the work of the ‘Pastoral Support Review’ Task and Finish Group (TFG), including a review of pastoral support provided for PGT students, and the UG personal tutor system.
- Providing PGT and online pastoral support by all schools via a mixture of personal tutoring and pastoral leads dependent on school resource.
- Providing pastoral support to both Aberdeen and Qatar campuses with in-personal personal tutors assigned to Qatari students.
• Clarified information of UG personal tutoring/regent roles and updated on pastoral guidance webpages.
• Undertaken a marketing campaign promoting engagement with personal tutors/regents and all support services so that regular reminders are placed on digital noticeboards, newsletters etc.
• Staff and student pastoral support and personal tutoring webpages have been combined and clarity provided as to the role/purpose being one of sign-posting to the relevant professional support services available.
• Created a separate staff resource page that includes advice, information, and updated online training resources.
• Delivered an in-person staff workshop for pastoral support and guidance each semester.
• Produced a Pastoral Support Training slide pack for School training which is delivered by Senior Personal Tutors.
• Updated information as part of new staff induction session, which now includes pastoral support and guidance information and opportunity to meet key staff.
• The Senior Pastoral Support Group (SPSG) meets five times a year and consists of senior pastoral UG and PGT leads from each School, PGR rep, and senior Professional Services representatives. The committee is responsible for overseeing and reviewing the delivery and strategic development of pastoral support, reporting to the Student Support and Experience Committee.
• The Aberdeen Student Experience Survey which goes to all students includes questions relating to personal tutoring and pastoral support to allow institutional and school evaluation of pastoral support delivery and evaluated by SPSG.

| Relationship between Postgraduate Research School and Schools and training of PhD supervisors | Continue work defining the role of the Postgraduate Research School and its relationship to the academic Schools, enabling the University to ensure that all research students have an equivalent experience. The University is also asked to ensure that new postgraduate research supervisors undertake the training provided by the University. | This area for development was fully addressed in the one-year follow-up report (the extract below refers) and the processes as described continue as standard practice. In the 12 months following ELIR 2018, the Postgraduate Research (PGR) School made significant progress in harmonising processes across the University and in doing so made improvements to recruitment processes, induction and online training and the processes for reviewing progression of PGR students. Other improvements include:
- rebuilding the PGR School website,
- re-vamping PGR Study Here pages with streamlined research area information, and
- developing a researcher roadmap to help researchers understand and plan their personal development journey with links to the researcher | COMPLETE |
development programme offered by the PGR School. These improvements are helping to ensure that all new PGR students have an equivalent experience.

A Doctoral Researchers Group (DRG) has been established to help improve communication within and across Schools and to ensure that the needs and views of our PGR students are heard and can be addressed. This group comprises of a PGR student representative from each academic School, the elected PGR AUSA representative and the Manager of the PGR School. The DRG provides a forum for student-led discussion to raise important common needs and issues facing PGR students from across the University, to enable these to be raised at appropriate committees and to ensure PGRs are involved in decision making on matters directly related to them. Members of the DRG sit on the PGR committee and other institution-wide committees and working groups.

The DRG has led to the creation of a Doctoral Society or ‘Doc Soc’. The Doctoral Society is the first completely PGR student-led society incorporated within AUSA. It brings together PGR students from all Schools to hold social, career development and wellbeing events throughout the year. The purpose of the society is to create a warm and inclusive environment for all PGR students at Aberdeen to socialise, network and share experiences. As many of our PGR students travel from across the world to study here these opportunities are vital to allow them to succeed during their time here.

Details of our comprehensive four-stage professional development programme for PGR supervisors, implemented in AY 2019/20 are detailed below. From October 2019, the PGR School keeps an active record of supervisors who have attended training courses (either new or refresher) and this will form the benchmark for ongoing reporting. Supervisors will be invited after 5 years to attend refresher sessions. The PGR School receives a monthly report from HR with information on new members of academic staff who have joined the University. New members of staff are contacted by email and invited to attend a training session. If individuals have not attended within 12 months, the PGR Coordinator and /or Head of School will be contacted to ensure attendance prior to PGR student supervision.

An interactive supervisor handbook has been developed to provide information about the Code of Practice, policies and processes encountered during PGR study from registration to assessment and submission. It also includes information about...
the help and support that is available if students encounter difficulties during their studies, both within the PGR School and across the University.

All new supervisors (new to supervising and new to the University of Aberdeen) are required to attend an introduction to PGR supervision workshop. This workshop covers the philosophy of PhD study at Aberdeen and includes research culture and integrity, the role of supervisors as well as the processes/systems which guide and support supervisors to induct, supervise, develop and ensure progress for postgraduate researchers. It signposts policies, regulations, resources and guides that are required when working with students.

Experienced supervisors are required to attend a regular update session to ensure they are kept up to date on policies/processes/activities related to supervising PGR students at the University of Aberdeen. These sessions also provide an opportunity to showcase best practice.

This series explores topics related to doctoral supervision, supervision relationships, tensions, worries, and pitfalls on PGR progression, development and career. Sessions provide a platform to discuss issues, share good practice and use case studies to inform practice. Example topics include:

- Improving communication with your PGR student
- Examining research doctorates
- Supporting distance/online doctorates
- PGR transitions – into and out of the PhD.

| Preparation for teaching | Ensure all new staff and postgraduate students who teach and assess complete, as a minimum, the University’s ‘Learning and Teaching in HE’ course before taking up teaching responsibilities. | This area for development was fully addressed in the one-year follow-up report (the extract below refers) and the processes as described continue as standard practice. | COMPLETE |

Preparation for Teaching: Staff

In April 2019, the UCTL approved a proposal from the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) to enhance the current provision by providing all new teaching staff with support from their first day in post by:

(i) Ensuring that completion of the Learning and Teaching in Higher Education at the University of Aberdeen two-day course be compulsory within the first year of arrival at the University of Aberdeen. The Course runs every September and January however this has been enhanced with the addition of a run in April to provide further capacity and opportunity for engagement. CAD monitors and
records course attendance to ensure that all staff requiring to complete this training within their first year of appointment have done so.

(ii) Developing a short welcome video which will explain how the Centre can support new staff from the outset and encourage them to get in touch directly if they have any specific academic development needs. The video was made available, along with a suite of online resources which address aspects of teaching practice such as course design and planning at the University of Aberdeen, from a ‘New Staff’ webpage on StaffNet at the end of January 2020. We will monitor use and seek feedback to ensure that it is a useful resource.

(iii) Through liaison with academic Schools and disciplines, an email from the Centre is sent to new staff on arrival with links to the video and the online resources and includes the Centre’s contact details. The online induction pack provided by Human Resources to new staff includes links to the welcome video and staff development resources provided by CAD.

Preparation for Teaching: Postgraduate Research Students

A comprehensive four-stage professional development programme for learning and teaching for Postgraduate Research Students has been developed by CAD. This programme includes:

(i) The development of an online introduction to teaching course: A new, bespoke online course in MyAberdeen which covers basic principles of teaching and learning is available for all PGR students, with those engaged in teaching activities being required to take the course before doing any teaching. The course has been developed by CAD in collaboration with the Postgraduate Research School and was made available at the end of January 2020. The Postgraduate Research School will publicise the learning opportunity and monitor completion of the course which will include an assessment. Materials provided through this course will continue to be available to the student throughout the duration of their PhD.

(ii) Mandatory training by Schools: In the early part of the first half session 2019/20, ten out of twelve schools provided mandatory training for PGRs before they undertook any tutoring, demonstrating or field work supervision. CAD delivered the majority of this training and also provides guidance to Schools who wish to provide their own training so as to ensure an institution-wide consistency of approach. Work is ongoing, led by CAD, to ensure that there is comprehensive provision across all Schools. CAD is working with Schools and the Postgraduate Research School to ensure that all PGR students who are involved in teaching undertake this training. Discussions are also ongoing.
to explore how this monitoring process might be streamlined to provide a more efficient way to allow student engagement to be tracked.

(iii) **Peer observation:** The Schools of Psychology and Biological Sciences will pilot a peer observation process developed by the CAD in the second half-session of 2019/20. Ultimately, all Schools will be required to undertake one peer observation for each PGR student in the first year during which they have teaching responsibilities. Schools will be provided with a template developed by the CAD and will be required to keep a record of this information alongside training attendance. Schools are also required to provide students with a named contact for advice and support should it be required.

**Principles of Learning & Teaching in HE:** This popular course which has consistently high attendance, accredited by the Higher Education Academy (now Advance HE) since 2010, will continue to be offered to PGR students who are actively involved in teaching and have a role in supporting the learning of others through activities such as lecturing, running tutorials, demonstrating in laboratory sessions and supervising students. The course runs in November and May and is also offered online in August.

<p>| Review of Professional Services | Continue with plans to develop processes for the routine review of student-facing professional services. | A separate review process for student-facing Professional Services has not been implemented. The processes that are already in place to review professional services, as part of School review processes, are a more meaningful way to review how well professional services function to support the student experience. As part of the annual planning process, Schools are asked to highlight areas requiring support from Professional Services and with effect from AY2019/20, the annual planning process was strengthened with the inclusion of meetings with senior staff from each Professional Services Directorate. As part of the University’s mechanism for Institution Led-Review (ILR), termed <strong>Internal Teaching Review (ITR),</strong> representatives of the Professional Services, including the Registry, the Careers and Employability Service and Student Support are invited to attend and contribute to panel visits. A specific session during the ITR enables the ITR Panel to capture the strengths (and weaknesses, if any) of our Professional Services in education-related matters. All ITRs from AY2019/20 onwards have had this bespoke session. Documentation associated with the ITR has been amended to clearly reflect the following aims: (i) to review the extent and quality of the interactions between relevant professional services and a School and its student and identify any areas for enhancement and (ii) to encourage and support engagement with relevant professional services. | COMPLETE |</p>
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<th><strong>In the one-year follow-up report we:</strong></th>
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| Reflect on the effectiveness of its current arrangements for monitoring the training and induction provided for external examiners at School level. In addition, it should ensure that all students have easy access to the external examiners’ reports for their programme. | - Described the information all External Examiners (EEs) are provided with relating to their role in the University, including but not limited to: links to various teaching policies and regulations and advice on how to access the virtual learning environment, MyAberdeen. It was noted that Individual Schools also provide additional induction.  
- Confirmed that a review of the training and induction provided to EEs had been undertaken. The review identified a number of enhancements to improve the efficiency of delivery and user friendliness of the information provided to EEs.  
- Noted that making external examiner reports accessible to students is an action that is in progress.  

**In our October 2022 update we noted we had:** |
| **• Begun a review of the current External Examining process from beginning to end. To date, work undertaken has included:** | **• Established a small group, comprised of academic staff and key stakeholders, to continue this review work, more specifically in respect of policies governing the EE process.** |
| o a review of review of the appropriateness of all documentation pertaining to the nomination and recruitment of EEs was undertaken;  
o the creation of a QAC-owned MyAberdeen organisational area for EEs which houses policy, institutional information and a training package to cover information pertinent to all EEs. From this area, EEs gain access to School-specific areas which provide further information, training, School contacts and key dates as required throughout the year. | **In terms of ensuring students have access to External Examiner reports, within the one-year follow-up report we proposed to modify the form to include a section that contained the EEs assurance of the quality of the course/programme that could be released to students, with the more detailed considerations of the EE kept more private. This has subsequently been actioned as a recommendation from QESR.** |

Since October 2022 we have: | **COMPLETE** |
- Finalised the review of the External Examining process, in respect of policies governing the EE process. The review output was approved by Senate in April 2023.
- Agreed, at a meeting of the University’s Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), a proposal to arrange for the publishing of all EE reports online with access restricted to staff and students of the University, and the relevant EEs. EE reports will be made available for a period of three years, updated annually on a rolling basis. This project was rolled out in September 2023.

| Review processes for Collaborative Provision to ensure accuracy of Register of Partnerships | Review processes for maintaining the Register of Partnerships and Collaborative Provision, to ensure its ongoing currency and completeness. | The Register of Partnerships is now managed by the Academic Services team who ensure actions for partnerships, such as renewals or terminations, are progressed as appropriate and liaise with QA contacts, the Contracts Coordinator in Research & Innovation and with the Lead International Governance Officer as necessary. A process for the approval and management of International Partnerships is in place and work remains ongoing to align the processes for other partnerships to this. | COMPLETE |
This plan provides the actions to be taken in respect of (i) Student Access to External Examiner Reports; and (ii) Pastoral Support. These actions are continued from the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) 4 process.

As part of the Education Committee governance, all Education Committees have representation from all Schools, which allows a two-way flow of communication between the Schools and University.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching Area for Action</th>
<th>Associated Actions</th>
<th>Timelines</th>
<th>Responsible Person(s)</th>
<th>Responsible Committee and Monitoring</th>
<th>Update on Progress</th>
<th>Review Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Access to External Examiners Reports</td>
<td>Communication to External Examiners to advise that their reports will be published and made available to students.</td>
<td>July 2023</td>
<td>Dean for Quality Assurance &amp; Enhancement</td>
<td>QAC. Reports back via Annual Monitoring exercise for 2022/23.</td>
<td>Complete: A communication to External Examiners was issued on 3 July 2023.</td>
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<td>Communication to Schools to ensure upload of External Examiner Reports to organisation page on MyAberdeen.</td>
<td>July 2023</td>
<td>Dean for Quality Assurance &amp; Enhancement</td>
<td>QAC. Reports back via Annual Monitoring exercise for 2022/23.</td>
<td>Complete: A communication to Schools was issued on 3 July 2023.</td>
<td>Annually (Ensure reports have been uploaded)</td>
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<td>Guidance to be developed regarding the publication of External Examiner Reports to describe the location of publication, naming conventions and the relevant process.</td>
<td>August 2023</td>
<td>Dean for Quality Assurance &amp; Enhancement</td>
<td>QAC. Reports back via Annual Monitoring exercise for 2022/23.</td>
<td>Complete: Guidance for the publication of reports was developed and issued to Schools on 14 September 2023.</td>
<td>Annually (Review guidance)</td>
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<td>Inclusion of transparent information pertinent to the Organisation Area in MyAberdeen to be added to the annual staff communication for the updating of course handbooks and for induction/orientation events at School-level.</td>
<td>August 2023</td>
<td>Dean for Quality Assurance &amp; Enhancement</td>
<td>QAC. Reports back via Annual Monitoring exercise for 2022/23.</td>
<td>Complete: The staff communication was issued on 24 August 2023.</td>
<td>Annually (Review communication)</td>
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<td>Communication to Students to advise of uploaded External Examiner Reports to MyAberdeen.</td>
<td>August 2023</td>
<td>Schools / Student Experience</td>
<td>QAC. Reports back via Annual Monitoring exercise for 2022/23.</td>
<td>Complete: communications were issued to students by the end of September 2023.</td>
<td>Annually (Ensure communications have been issued)</td>
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<td>Amendments to the External Examiner Annual Report form to advise that reports will be published.</td>
<td>April 2023</td>
<td>Dean for Quality</td>
<td>QAC. Reports back via Annual Monitoring exercise for 2022/23.</td>
<td>Complete: the amended report was approved by Senate on 19 April 2023.</td>
<td>September 2024 (Review of form)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Start Date</td>
<td>Responsible Officer</td>
<td>UEC, via SSEC: Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC.</td>
<td>Complete:</td>
<td>Dissemination Date</td>
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<td>Review and restructuring of public-facing pastoral UG and PGT support webpages to enhance the purpose and clarity of the personal tutor and pastoral guidance roles.</td>
<td>Sept 2023</td>
<td>Dean for Student Support and Experience</td>
<td>UEC, via SSEC. Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC.</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2024 ahead of next AY (Review of Webpages)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restructuring of staff pastoral guidance staff web resources to aid staff in locating appropriate information for UG and PGT pastoral support.</td>
<td>Sept 2023</td>
<td>Dean for Student Support and Experience</td>
<td>UEC, via SSEC. Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC.</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2024 ahead of next AY (Review of Webpages)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction of in-person staff training for pastoral support and guidance role.</td>
<td>Sept 2023</td>
<td>Dean for Student Support and Experience</td>
<td>UEC, via SSEC. Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC.</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2024 ahead of next AY (Review of feedback from previous sessions)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction of an annual pastoral support and guidance staff/student information event to be included as part of BeWell/Mental Health Awareness week.</td>
<td>Sept 2023</td>
<td>Dean for Student Support and Experience</td>
<td>UEC, via SSEC. Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC.</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2024 ahead of next AY (Review of feedback and communications)</td>
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<td>The Senior Pastoral Support Group will oversee and review the consistency and equity of the student experience, reporting to the Student Support and Experience Committee.</td>
<td>Sept 2023</td>
<td>Dean for Student Support and Experience</td>
<td>UEC, via SSEC. Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC.</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2024 ahead of next AY (Review of SPS&amp;GF Arrangements)</td>
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<td>Dissemination of information to staff pertinent to pastoral support to ensure they have the most up to date information about support available via Senior Personal Tutors within Schools.</td>
<td>Sept 2023</td>
<td>Dean for Student Support and Experience</td>
<td>UEC, via SSEC. Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC.</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2024 ahead of next AY (Review of SPT Forum Arrangements)</td>
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<td>Communications to be issued to students pertinent to the pastoral support arrangements in their School to ensure they have the most up to date information about support available, including specific information in orientation and induction materials.</td>
<td>Sept 2023</td>
<td>Dean for Student Support and Experience</td>
<td>UEC, via SSEC. Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC.</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2024 ahead of next AY (Review of communications)</td>
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1. Information is disseminated to students via the Experience, Engagement and Wellbeing team, who coordinate student communications. Further information is disseminated via Senior Personal Tutors and the Senior Personal Tutor Forum.
| Review of PGT pastoral support to enhance consistency of provision and enhance student understanding and access to appropriate support networks. | Sept 2023 | Dean for Student Support and Experience | UEC, via SSEC. Updates provided to Committee via SSEC Report to UEC. | **In Progress:** review will be overseen by SPSG and reported to relevant committees | June 2024 ahead of next AY. |

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2 This action will be reviewed on an ongoing basis in order to ensure an equity of the student experience, and feedback will be captured as part of the ASES and PTES surveys. The data from these surveys inform discussions at SSEC and UEC. The SSEC has a standing item on pastoral support for discussion related to any pastoral support matters. All Schools are represented on both the SSEC and UEC, and thus the School representatives maintain a flow of communication between the Committee and Schools.
Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM): record of meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>University of Aberdeen</th>
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<td>QAA Attendees</td>
<td>Caroline Turnbull</td>
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</table>
| Institution Attendees | Professor Jo-Anne Murray, Vice-Principal (Education)  
Professor Steve Tucker, Dean for Quality Assurance & Quality Enhancement  
Professor Kirsty Kiezebrink, Dean for Educational Innovation  
Dr Gillian Mackintosh, Director of Academic Services & Online Education  
Emma Tough, Assistant Registrar (Academic Services)  
Karen Scaife, Wellbeing & Engagement Manager  
Rhiannon Ledwell, Vice-President for Education (AUSA Students’ Union) |
| Date | Meeting held on Thursday 29 February 2024 |

1. **Welcome, introductions and apologies:**

The QAA Liaison Officer welcomed everyone to the meeting and colleagues introduced themselves. There were no apologies noted.

The QAA Liaison Officer thanked colleagues and particularly Liam Dyker, for supplying the paperwork for the meeting, recognising it takes time to collate these documents. She shared the following observations on the documents circulated:

   a. In terms of quality process information, please don’t keep sending on copies of the University processes being followed unless these have been specifically updated. If this should be the case then a summary of these changes added to document ILM001b would be an appropriate place to record this.

   b. It is great to have copies of key papers that have gone to the academic governance committees throughout a session – to see how the University’s work continues to evolve. However, there are also occasions when having a copy of the actual meeting minute would have been helpful, so the QAA Liaison Officer could check the subsequent actions. She went on to state that the inclusion of some meeting minutes would have resolved a number of questions that occurred as she read through the papers. University colleagues agreed to supply extracts or full copies of relevant committee papers for future meetings. Finally, the QAA Liaison Officer asked if in future she could also receive a copy of the minute from the annual meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) which considers all the annual monitoring and internal institutional review meetings.

**Action:** For future ILM meetings, the University will supply extracts or full copies of relevant committee papers, particularly those for QAC.

The QAA Liaison Officer went on to inform colleagues that she had very recently moved to a new role within the agency and was now working as a Quality Enhancement and
Engagement Manager with the Membership, Quality Enhancement and Standards team. This move means she will no longer be the University’s liaison officer with this role now residing with Laura Porter (Quality Enhancement Manager, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). It was confirmed that Laura would be in touch with the University to introduce herself to colleagues.

2. Institutional approach to enhancement

The QAA Liaison Officer explained that before exploring the items on today’s meeting agenda, she wanted to pick up on two additional matters that were of interest to QAA:

i) Consultation on Modern Languages: The QAA Liaison Officer asked colleagues if they could provide her with an update on the current consultation reviewing the University’s Modern Languages provision. She outlined that from QAA’s perspective the agency would be interested in how the University intends to continue to assure the quality and standards of that provision once any final decisions have been reached, and what arrangements would be developed to support any students impacted. University colleagues confirmed that the consultation had ended and the risk of redundancy had been lifted in part for some staff (and lifted for all staff in modern languages. University colleagues confirmed that work was ongoing to develop a series of plans which aimed to maximise student numbers and research outputs. It was confirmed that these plans had been considered by the University Court during the week beginning 19 February 2024. It was also confirmed that the University was considering options for reducing staff numbers through voluntary severance (VS) and early retirement in order to avoid the need for any kind of compulsory redundancies. The plans that had been considered by the University Court had received positive feedback particularly linked to options for attracting more students to apply to these programmes. The Dean for Quality Assurance & Quality Enhancement also confirmed that at this point in the consultation process he did not expect there to be any direct impact on the University’s quality processes or approaches to enhancement. The Vice-President for Education (AUSA Students’ Union) raised a number of concerns regarding the University’s consultation approach. She stated that students were very concerned about the possibilities of staff redundancy, and expressed her disappointment that there had been no student representation on the steering group that was leading on the consultation process. She went on to express concerns regarding a lack of student representation and voice as part of the University’s decision-making process. The Vice-Principal (Education) accepted that there had been limitations with student partnership working so far in the consultation process and confirmed the University’s ongoing commitment to working with students and staff on this matter. She went on to reassure the QAA Liaison Officer that following on from the University Court meeting, an implementation group being established would have students as members and that this commitment had been emphasised to students in a letter from the Senior Vice-Principal to a group of students in response to an open letter.

ii) AFG applying for International Membership with QAA: The QAA Liaison Officer explained that one of her colleagues had informed her that one of the University’s collaborative partners (AFG), was intending to submit a proposal to the University of Aberdeen’s Board of Governance on 12 December to seek permission to apply for an international membership with QAA. The QAA Liaison Officer wondered if anyone present was able to provide an update on whether this proposal had been approved or not.
University colleagues confirmed that no decision had been made yet, with conversations still ongoing with the Qatar Academic Planning Group. Following a question from the Dean for Quality Assurance & Quality Enhancement, the QAA Liaison Officer outlined some of the merits and benefits of international membership to AFG as a separate and independent institution that it wouldn’t get via the University of Aberdeen.

iii) **Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes**: The QAA Liaison Officer noted from the University’s Annual report on ILR for session 2022-23, that as part of the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy, a number of Task and Finish Groups (TFGs) have been established to achieve the strategic priorities linked to Education. With reference to the Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes, she asked colleagues to provide her with an update on how the trialling of systems and approaches with students and other stakeholders is going and enquired whether everything remains on schedule to launch the Framework and associated attributes and skills in academic year 2024-2025? University colleagues and the Vice-President for Education (AUSA Students’ Union) confirmed that a system being used by the University called ‘MySkills’ has already gone live with a ‘soft launch’ and colleagues reported that 815 skills evaluations had already taken place. The Vice-President for Education (AUSA Students’ Union) confirmed that the system replaces a student’s enhanced transcript. This system supports students who for example have been involved with the Students’ Union as class reps etc, to appropriately record the skills they have developed. Students have access to a dashboard, which initially measures and then reassesses a student's confidence in a particular skill. It provides students with an initial snapshot at a period of time, which is then followed by exercises to develop a skill, after which the student reconsiders their confidence level in order to hopefully see growth. The output from the system is a passport which students can take away with them once they have finished their studies, supporting them in terms of future employability and further studies. The system will also allow the University to consider and further enhance the skills and support mechanisms that are available to students. Finally, it was confirmed that the University intends to formally launch the MySkills system next session.

In terms of the University’s Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes, it was confirmed that following a re-fresh, a revised set had been approved by the University Senate. The revised Attributes had been developed in consultation with staff, students and employers, with this work being led by the Dean for Employability and the Careers team. Colleagues confirmed that in the revised Attributes there were no longer separate ones for Postgraduate students. Using the experiences and feedback associated with its original Graduate Attributes, the University had taken steps to ensure the Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes are less abstract and support students to better evidence how they fulfil these. The Careers team is now developing a suite of employability courses which will be ready and available to students to coincide with the launch of the Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes in 2024-25. These courses will be open to any students within their programme of study and means changes to programmes, course and programme learning outcomes, and approaches to assessments.

iv) **Work-based learning**: The QAA Liaison Officer also noted from the University’s Annual report on ILR for session 2022-23 that work is being taken forward this session, by the Work Placements Task and Finish Group, to upscale the use of work-based learning (WBL) within
courses and programmes. University colleagues confirmed this is being led by two Deans (the Dean for Employability and Entrepreneurship and the Dean for Enterprise and Innovation) who have completed a review to better understand what WBL means across the University community. The University is committed to ensuring that every student gets an opportunity to experience WBL as part of their programme of study. This review has considered a range of factors including:

- the credit size of these placements;
- how colleagues consider the ‘step up’ in credits associated with WBL so it’s not just about the length of any placement;
- building a common understanding amongst staff and students of the language associated with the design and delivery of WBL
- given the range of placements offered, what support needs to be in place across the University;
- how are WBL opportunities assessed;
- how to ensure WBL and placements are accessible to all students, perhaps through the use of remote placement.

The QAA officer understands that following this review, a range of work will continue to be taken forward. This includes the production of a handbook on the design and delivery of WBL and the establishment of an online database of placement opportunities.

Following on from this discussion the QAA Liaison Officer enquired as to the involvement of students in the Task and Finish Groups that have been established to take forward the Education priorities within the wider Aberdeen 2040 Strategy. University colleagues confirmed that students are indeed members on each of these groups.

v) Approach to evaluation: The QAA Liaison Officer noted from the University’s Annual Outcome agreement report to SFC for session 2022-23, that a huge amount of activity is outlined as taking place across the Institution. She enquired as to how the University takes steps to evaluate the impact of it all, in order to ascertain if it is investing in the correct initiatives? Colleagues confirmed that evaluation was part of the remit of each of the different governance committees, with the University Education Committee (UEC) routinely reviewing school action plans – which require Schools to report on progress and actions. Colleagues went on to provide the example of the current Principles for Delivery of Education which were developed following a detailed evaluation of changes to policy and practice that had initially be necessary due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated pivot to online. Colleagues were content that the University’s approach supports staff and students to benefit from its evaluation activities, with lessons learned used to support enhancement. Finally, it was confirmed that the University makes use of a range of data to help with its evaluation activities. For example, this session the data available has indicated an increase in the number of academic integrity cases, the reasons for this are currently being reviewed and evaluated.

vi) Assessment and Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI): The QAA Liaison Officer also noted from the University’s Annual Outcome agreement report to SFC for session 2022-23, that a new set of support resources, guidance and information had been developed for use
by staff and students linked to assessment and Generative AI. She asked what the feedback had been from staff and students who have used the resources and what the institution’s next steps will be given the current interest across HE in Generative AI? The Vice-President for Education (AUSA Students’ Union) and colleagues from the University, all agreed that given how quickly this whole topic area is moving, students and staff still have questions and work needs to continue to increase awareness of these resources. Colleagues recognised that both staff and students will use Generative AI, and it was important to develop policy and practice which support them to do so, rather than trying in anyway to ban its use. University colleagues went on to describe a research project which is currently being undertaken by a student intern. A focus group approach will consider the challenges of Generative AI from a student perspective. The University plans to ensure that information is available to students within each course they study on the VLE, rather than this being sited more remotely on the University website. Colleagues confirmed that, in partnership with a number of other Scottish HEIs (the University of Dundee, Heriot-Watt University, and Edinburgh Napier University), Aberdeen had secured funding from the Advance HE Collaborative Development Fund to look at Generative AI, supporting conversations to take place across the sector. The project has already established the Scottish AI Tertiary Education Network, which all HEIs have joined. Plans are currently underway to invite colleges to join the network and ensure that every institution has both staff and student representation within the network.

The Dean for Quality Assurance & Quality Enhancement confirmed that in response to the advent of Generative AI, academic staff had already started making changes to their approach to, and methods of, assessment. This is resulting in lots of changes being reviewed by QAC. QAC is using this as an opportunity to identify good practice – so these examples can be shared across the Schools and also to flag with individual Schools should there be any issues with proposed changes. He went on to state that many of the changes proposed are also consistent with the University’s wider drive to introduce more use of authentic assessment.

3. Student partnership

The QAA Liaison Officer confirmed that it was useful to have sight of the update paper on the Student Partnership Agreement which was in place between the University and the Students’ Union. The document confirms that that three priority areas were currently being taken forward, mental health, inclusion, and employability. She also noted the approach of appointing a University lead and a SU staff lead for each area. Given the table provides examples of suggested reporting, the QAA Liaison Officer asked if it would be possible for colleagues to provide some examples of some of the actual activity that is being delivered under each priority. The Vice-President for Education (AUSA Students’ Union) and the Wellbeing & Engagement Manager confirmed that the SPA is very much a working document which is reported on at each Student Wellbeing Committee meeting, as well as on a regular basis to the Mental Health Working Group, the Student Support and Experience Committee and the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee. They confirmed that there are approximately 3 – 4 projects activity running under each of the priority areas. They provided some examples including, the running of black history month; the MySkills Project – linked to employability; a forthcoming Careers fair in March which was being developed to
include representatives from voluntary organisations and charities and the introduction of Rainbow rooms to support wellbeing. It was also noted that positive changes had been made to the class representative system leading to enhanced engagement by class reps. These changes include more in-person events, standardised feedback forms, mock SSLC training and better communication with student reps in Qatar.

**Action:** The Wellbeing & Engagement Manager agreed to supply the QAA Liaison Officer with a more up to date version of paper ILM025 which would which details all of the current initiatives. Post meeting note – This paper has now been received.

4. **Actions taken since ELIR 4/QESR**

The QAA Liaison Officer asked for clarification and an update on a number of the recommendations the University had received during its QESR in 2023.

- **Student Access to External Examiners reports:** Further to the information in paper ILM004a, colleagues confirmed that communications were issued to students at the start of this session, that explain both the role of External Examiners within a programme/course of study and how students can access External Examiners’ reports. Colleagues confirmed that the University has decided to use VLE sites as the most effective means of providing easy access to these reports for students. Each of the academic schools was issued with information detailing the University’s expectations on making External Examiner reports available to students. The QAA Liaison Officer asked how the University assured itself that the academic schools had indeed completed this work. Colleagues stated that part of this reassurance was provided through completed student course feedback forms, and from discussions with the Students’ Union President. Also, the Administrative Officer (Academic Services) who curated the site information had completed a review of the content on school VLE sites.

- **Pastoral Support:** The QAA Liaison Officer noted the introduction of an in-person staff training offer on the pastoral support and guidance role, and asked if this training is being completed by all staff undertaking the role? She also asked what engagement levels have been like? University colleagues explained that a full-scale review had been undertaken, led by the Dean of Student Support and Experience. As part of this review, the decision had been taken to extend the use of the pastoral support role to also provide support to Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students. Colleagues went on to confirm that the training is offered to all staff in UG/PG teaching roles and generally uptake on the programme has been excellent. The training documentation has been updated and will be regularly reviewed by a forum that has been established in this area. Colleagues updated that an evaluation is currently underway to consider pastoral support for PGT and Online students to ensure what is offered continues to meet student needs and expectations. The QAA Liaison Officer asked colleagues to outline what the University’s expectations are of pastoral support, and how does the institution assure itself that students get a comparable experience? University colleagues confirmed that the AUSA Students’ Union is currently running a ‘Borderless Campaign’ focused on supporting international students. The campaign addresses all aspects of the student experience from academic, to pastoral and social life.
There was also a discussion on potentially using the data collected as part of the University’s Excellence Awards, gathered in the ‘best personal tutor’ category, to identify examples of good practice that could be shared more widely across the institution. The QAA Liaison Officer suggested liaising with colleagues at the University of Stirling who had been successfully undertaking this type of analysis for a number of years now to see if they had any advice to offer.

- **ELIR 4 (2018) recommendations:** The QAA Liaison Officer noted from the paperwork submitted that it seems 3 of the 7 recommendations appear still to be outstanding. She asked when the University expects to be in a position to complete these outstanding actions? The three recommendations are:
  - Balance between institutional and school responsibilities
  - Preparations for teaching: specifically peer observation
  - Review of processes for collaborative provision

There was a discussion that in the context of these three recommendations, their nature is such that from the University’s perspective, they remain ongoing. The example that was specifically discussed concerns the balance between institutional and school responsibilities. The current academic committee structures and current governance arrangements mean this is a matter which will importantly remain under review. With regards to reviewing its processes for Collaborative provision, University colleagues stated that given current plans to expand collaborative provision, it was important to ensure these processes were subject to regular review.

Reflecting on this update, the QAA Liaison Officer encourage the University to review the approach it has been taking to updating on these recommendations, so that the narrative that has been outlined in today’s ILM is better reflected in its ELIR update reports. That way any future review team is clearer on the progress made since, and how the Institution plans to keep matters under review.

5. **Sector-wide enhancement topic**

The QAA Liaison Officer thanked colleagues for supplying the update paper on the institution's engagement with the current sector-wide enhancement topic. She noted the institutional piloting of TESTA, asking colleagues to confirm that as part of the Aberdeen 2040 Implementation Plan to 2025 for Education related activities, two of the academic schools (Schools of Social Science and Natural and Computing Science) had been part of phase 1 of TESTA? With 3 new academic schools engaging as part of phase 2. University of Aberdeen colleagues confirmed that the QAA Liaison Officer’s understanding was correct and the TESTA project was coming to the end of Phase 2. Currently work is underway to consider how TESTA might work for postgraduate programmes, so that ultimately a single process is developed to support both UG and PGT provision.

Colleagues explained that undertaking the training, programme/course redesign and quality approval processes is a very time and resource intensive activity. So, colleagues from the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) have designed materials that will allow Schools
to proactively take forward the process for themselves. Internally this is known as ‘TESTA lite. This means that for each academic school, CAD colleagues work with school colleagues leading and training them on how to take a programme through the process. For the second programme involved in the TESTA process, the school is supplied with a support pack which is used to allow it to lead on the process – with support provided by the academic development team. With the third programme, the school leads on and is responsible for the TESTA change process, with QAC members from the school being part of TESTA at this stage. The University believes it’s important for QAC members from the School, to be involved in the school level change processes, with this ultimately helping when TESTA driven changes to programme provision come to the Committee for approval. University colleagues spoke of the importance of building this protocol for TESTA in order to best support University wide implementation over the next two years.

The QAA Liaison Officer noted from the Annual Monitoring External Examiner Summary reports produced for its UG and PG provision, that some concerns had been raised by External Examiners related to the removal of innovative practices such as online discussion boards etc. She was interested to explore with the University how it undertakes to ensure the best balance is achieved between online and in-person learning and teaching in order to most effectively support students. Colleagues confirmed that QAC school representatives are responsible for ensuring the University policy and practice linked to innovations in L&T practice and the use of online tools is on the agenda with their School Teaching Executives. This approach should ensure that innovations introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic which have demonstrated to be effective for students are built upon. Colleagues stressed the importance of keeping discussions open here in terms of central university expectations and subject/discipline requirements. It was felt that course amendments/approvals associated with the implementation of TESTA and wider work on the design of assessment will help here. It was also felt that changes to the representation systems for students supported more regular feedback to course/programme leaders which should also help to ensure more innovative practices are maintained particularly when students comment positively on their experiences. Finally, colleagues explained that the University has an Excellence Award linked to the ‘most creative assessment’ which could be used to help support the sharing of good practice within the academic community.

6. Academic standards and quality processes:

The QAA Liaison Officer noted from the Annual ILR report submitted to SFC, that the ITR of the School of Language Literature, Music and Visual Cultures had been postponed to academic year 2023 - 2024 and enquired as to the nature of the extenuating circumstances that required this postponement. Colleagues stated that the School Director of Education was not available to support the review work as specified in the original ITR schedule. Colleagues confirmed that the ITR had been successfully completed at the end of December 2023.

The QAA Liaison officer noted that the University had not submitted full copies of the ITR reports for session 2022-23 as part of the paperwork it had produced for this ILM. Colleagues agreed to send these on.
Action: University colleagues to supply QAA with full copies of the ITR reports for reviews that took place in session 2022-23. Post meeting note: These reports have now been supplied.

The QAA officer noted that the University had provided QAA with copies of a number of Summary reports linked to Annual Monitoring for session 2021-22. She asked given this ILM meeting falls quite late in academic session 2023-24 and recognising the timelines that the University works to in terms of its review and approval processes (the reports don’t go to QAC until end of March/April 2024) – would it be possible for QAA to have copies of the session 2022-23 Summary reports once these are available please? University of Aberdeen colleagues confirmed that following a change of process associated with annual monitoring, summary reports will no longer be produced. Instead School reports will be discussed at QAC with the minute of the meeting providing a summary of good practice and areas to be addressed. Colleagues stated they were happy to make arrangements to have these School reports and the minutes of the relevant QAC meeting (being held at end of June) sent to QAA for consideration.

Action: University colleagues to supply copies of the School reports and QAC minutes associated with the June meeting.

Across the various summary reports supplied by the University, the QAA Liaison Officer had identified a number of common themes which the University is aware of. She raised a number of questions linked to these themes.

- **Grade Inflation:** The QAA Liaison Officer noted the University’s use of data to support it to measure the attainment of its students and recognised the University has measures in place to monitor student performance and instances of possible Grade Inflation. She was interested in how the Institution continues to re-assure itself that there aren’t ongoing concerns? University colleagues explained that monitoring of this information was an ongoing matter and it was important, through its academic committee structures to keep performance under review. The role of External Examiners here was viewed as important, as was the relationship to student entry tariffs. Responsibility for monitoring student attainment and award data lies with the academic schools and the University is content that its graduate outcomes are broadly comparable to those of Russell Group institutions who have similar entry criteria to those of Aberdeen.

- **Academic Misconduct:** The QAA Liaison Officer asked if colleagues could provide her with an update on the University’s work in this area. In particular she was interested in how its approach to assessment supports students to avoid being subject to potential academic misconduct, what the impact of Generative AI has been on case numbers and support offered for international students?

Colleagues recognised that Generative AI, while rapidly emerging was still relatively new and on the whole staff are taking a cautious approach to its use as they develop their expertise and understanding of what these technologies might potentially offer in terms of approaches to assessment. Using examples, discussions are currently underway with both staff and students in order to better advise on whether an instance is truly a case of academic misconduct or actually something that has arisen as a result of inexperience in academic writing. Work is continuing to explore staff and students understanding of what is considered to be academic misconduct and identify where any differences exist. Colleagues also stressed the importance being placed on opportunities to share good practice recognising that currently the use of Generative AI is variable across schools. The University intends to use this
information to inform a larger piece of work on Generative AI, recognising that these technologies will in some instances fundamentally change L&T and assessment practice.

Colleagues outlined that a range of support is offered to all students on plagiarism, including a toolkit of new resources and a video on aspects of the student learning journey. The Students’ Union also offers a really helpful advice service.

- **Delivery of Collaborative provision** – The QAA Liaison Officer noted that the University’s partnership with Online Education Services (formerly the Interactive Design Institute) was not renewed and arrangements had been put in place to transfer programme content back to the University. She asked colleagues if they could outline the arrangements which were put in place to support students? University of Aberdeen colleagues qualified that the decision to terminate the contract was purely for financial reasons and had nothing to do with any concerns around the quality of the teaching being offered. The programme content and its delivery for students has been transitioned across to the University’s VLE. The decision impacts continuing students with admission of new students only commencing from September 2024. All of the provision remains online and is now being delivered by University academic staff, who have used it as an opportunity to develop shared delivery across other programmes within the Business School. The University has established a Project Board to manage the transition and the eLearning team in the Centre for Academic Development work with the Business School to support the move of content from IDI over to the VLE. It was confirmed that the programmes affected reside within the University’s Business School, with approximately 200 students currently enrolled.

Note: At this point, the 2 hour meeting time was complete. However the QAA Liaison Officer still had a small number of questions to explore with colleagues. It was agreed that she would submit these to the University, who would prepare a response to each of them. The remainder of these meeting notes capture the questions asked and shows the university response in blue font.

The QAA officer noted that in the Annual Monitoring PGT Annual Programme Reviews Summary report for session 2021-22, concerns were flagged about the language skills of PG international students. I’m interested in what changes the university and its schools/departments have made in response?

- **All Schools have a Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Pastoral Support Lead overseeing PGT School support which includes directing students to support services including language support. In addition, School Support leads are members of the Senior Pastoral Support Group which has oversight of institutional pastoral support provision. Leads are responsible for ensuring that there is clear and regular school messaging signposting students to relevant support, including language support, complementing central messaging through student ezines and campus digital noticeboards.**

- **School Education Action Plans identify areas for enhancement to PGT provision and has resulted in a number of Schools establishing compulsory PGT study skills courses which incorporate writing and language skill support for international students. These Action Plans are reviewed and monitored through the Education committees enabling oversight of activities and the sharing of practice.**
The Language Centre provides support specifically for international students in the form of seminars, drop-in sessions and one-to-one appointments. The Centre offers the following sessions: (i) academic writing; (ii) seminar skills; (iii) general fluency and communication skills; (iv) listening and note-taking; and (vi) presentation skills. In addition, the Language Centre works with Schools to design bespoke support and currently works with Engineering, Business, Law, Psychology, Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History (DHPA), Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition (MMSN) and Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture (LLMVC). In academic year 2022/23, more than 2000 students attended these bespoke sessions.

For PGT students, complementary to the specific writing skills workshops delivered by staff from the Language Centre, the Student Learning Service (SLS) has an open programme of online and in-person writing workshops for PGT students, addressing various aspects/formats of academic writing, which are frequently attended by international students. SLS also offers one-to-one advice sessions on academic writing, which are available throughout the year. In preparation for the summer projects/dissertations SLS offer a range of writing and study strategies workshops for PGTs, which run in the May-June period. SLS also offers online resources for PGT students (in Achieve+ in the VLE) which include guides/videos on all aspects of academic writing and broader study strategies.

For postgraduate research (PGR) students, SLS offers an online 3-part academic writing course for PGR students, which is run in the first and second terms, and is particularly popular with international students from across the university. One-to-one advice sessions (online and in-person) on academic writing are available to PGRs with the agreement of the supervisor.

In the same document the QAA officer also noted that in the same reports further concerns had been raised by some Schools on the achievements of these cohorts and their ability to engage with their dissertations. I’m curious as to what the university has done to address this concern? (This matter was also picked up in ILM024)

The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) has seen an increase in new courses that precede dissertation courses in the programme, aimed at developing the skills necessary for project work and dissertation preparation. For example, AH5901 and AH5902 Christianity and the Visual Arts Preparation, run in the Art History department for both online and on campus students, are for part-time students and have been created to allow students to start work on their dissertation in their first year of study. Additionally, a suite of Academic Skills for Business courses were introduced in 2022/23 (BU50P1, BU50P2, BU50PB, BU50PL, BU55P1 and BU55P2).

QAC has also reviewed and approved a number of programme proposals for integrated Masters degrees leading to PhD where there is a strong emphasis on research methods training.

7. Use of external reference points in quality processes:

Colleagues should note that the QAA Liaison Officer had no questions to raise regarding the University’s mapping to the UK Quality Code. She is content that the mapping meets sector
expectations and she notes the changes to 3 sections and the University’s approach to keeping the mapping under review and updating.

8. Use of data and evidence to inform self-evaluation and decision making:

**PTES/PRES**: The QAA Liaison Officer noted that the University participated in the PTES and PRES surveys in 2023 for the first time in recent years. Noting the satisfaction scores and response rates. Accepting it was the first engagement with these surveys, could the University confirm the actions it has taken forward to hear to improve response rates this session?

- The University piloted the PTES and PRES surveys in 2023. The surveys were opened for a short window (3 weeks) and data shared with relevant committees and Schools. PTES results were discussed at SSEC and PRES at PGR Committees where it was agreed to continue participation with the surveys. Relevant actions are decided at both Committee level to inform institutional actions and at School level to inform School action plans. To enhance participation both surveys have been launched in 2024 with a longer response window (Feb-May) and supported by a campus-wide promotional campaign ‘Survey Season’ encouraging community engagement with all surveys (NSS, PTES, PRES), as well as more targeted School and institutional messaging encouraging participation in NSS, PTES, PRES specifically.
- To close the feedback loop, Schools communicate relevant School-based actions in ‘You Said, We Did’ messaging directly to their students. Schools are encouraged to send their relevant School-based actions to the Experience, Engagement and Wellbeing team for promotion in the student’s ‘You Said, We Did’ webpage where all actions on feedback are promoted.

The QAA Liaison Officer noted that from is analysis and reviewing of non-continuation rates across all years of study the University believes its internal data shows that non-continuation has been rising since the Covid-19 pandemic with overall non-continuation rising from 2.6% in 2019/20 to 3.2% in 2020/21 and 5.1% in 2021/22. Would it be possible for the University to confirm what strategies being adopted to tackle this rise?

- Institutional non-continuation data is reported annually and discussed at relevant University Committees (SSEC and UEC) as well as at School Education Committees. All Schools are required to produce a School Education Action Plan which must include School-based activities aimed at improving non-continuation rates. Schools are supported in developing relevant action plans by the Dean for Student Support and Experience and the VP for Education. School action plans are submitted to and discussed at SSEC and shared to promote good practices.
- Non-continuation data informs institutional mental health and wellbeing strategies with the goal of enhancing retention. The wellbeing strategy has a strong focus on promoting positive mental health as well as awareness of support mechanisms for students, particularly during periods when student withdrawal rates have been identified as at their highest. Work is guided by the student pressure point matrix and Mental Health and Wellbeing Group. Activities include regular “take a break” opportunities (particularly during assessment periods), BeWell week and Wellbeing Wednesdays.
• School monitoring leads are responsible for tracking non-continuation/student withdrawal rates and ensure that effective monitoring procedures are in place to identify students at risk, and to ensure that supportive interventions are quickly administered. Activities are supported by a School Monitoring Leads Group which is responsible for overseeing and developing monitoring procedures, as well as being a forum for sharing good practice.

Data for oversight of: Appeals and Complaints (2021-22): This paper provides a summary of the number and nature of academic appeals and complaints that were received by the University. The QAA officer notes a large jump in the number of Academic Appeals during this session. Given where we find ourselves in session 2023-24, the QAA officer was hoping that figures for 2022-23 might just about be being considered by the University. Is someone able to provide me with an update on these please and how they compare with the 2021-22 figures (464 up from 274)?

• The Appeals and Complaints Data Summary 2022/23 was recently considered by the Quality Assurance Committee at its meeting on 6 March 2024. In this regard, the paper is attached.

Data for oversight of: Student Discipline (Academic) (2021-22): Academic Misconduct Update: This paper provides an update on the volume of academic misconduct cases investigated during each academic year over the last 6 years. The University’s code covering different categories of misconduct was updated and approved in 2021-22 with revised codes being used for new cases in 2022-23. The paper shows there has been a significant increase in the total number of academic misconduct cases up to 409 in 2021-22 from 210 in 2020/21. The biggest contributing category is plagiarism where figures increased to 356 from 187 (2020-21). The figures also indicate that this is a bigger issue for international students as a student group (almost doubling). Again, given where we find ourselves in session 2023-24, the QAA officer was hoping that figures for 2022-23 might just about be being considered by the University. Is someone able to provide me with an update on these please and how they compare with the 2021-22 figures?

• The Academic Discipline Data Summary 2022/23 was recently considered by the Quality Assurance Committee at its meeting on 6 March 2024. In this regard, the paper is attached.