<u>The University of Edinburgh</u>

Senate Quality Assurance Committee
Thursday 22nd February 2024, 2pm to 5pm
Hybrid meeting: Cuillin Room, CSH and Microsoft Teams

A G E N D A

* Standing item

1.	**Welcome and Apologies**	
2.	**Minutes of the previous meeting** To approve: • 7 December 2023 • Note of e-business December 2023	SQAC 23/24 3A SQAC 23/24 3B
3.	**Matters Arising** • Convener's communications	Verbal Update
4.	**SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS**	
4.1	**Annual Reports 22-23:** i) Academic Appeals* ii) Student Discipline* iii) Complaint Handling* iv) Annual Review of Student Support Services ***Closed** - disclosure would constitute a breach of the Data Protection Act as individuals may be identifiable.	SQAC 23/24 3C SQAC 23/24 3D SQAC 23/24 3E SQAC 23/24 3F
4.2	**Student Support: Monitoring and Evaluation*** To note.	SQAC 23/24 3G
4.3	**CTP – PGT Curriculum Framework** For discussion and comment.	SQAC 23/24 3H
4.4	**Quality Enhancement and Standards Review Report** For discussion and noting.	SQAC 23/24 3I
5.	**ITEMS FOR INFORMATION & FORMAL BUSINESS**	
5.1	**Mid-year update on progress against SQAC priorities** To comment.	SQAC 23/24 3J
5.2	**Postgraduate Researcher Experience Survey College Reponses.** For information and to comment. **Closed paper** - disclosure would substantially prejudice commercial interests.	SQAC 23/24 3K

5.3	**Internal Periodic Review: Reports and Responses*** The Committee is invited to approve the [IPR Responses published on the Committee Sharepoint.](#)	SQAC 23/24 3L
6.	**Any Other Business**	
7.	**Date of next meeting** Thursday 25th April 2024, Hybrid meeting: Cuillin Room Charles Stewart House and Microsoft Teams	

The University of Edinburgh
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on
Thursday 7th December 2023, 2pm – 4pm
Hybrid meeting: Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House
and Microsoft Teams

1. Attendance

Present:	Position:
Professor Tina Harrison	Deputy Vice Principal, Students (Enhancement) (Convener)
Professor Matthew Bailey	Dean of Quality, CMVM
Dr Michael Barany	Senate Representative
Professor Laura Bradley	Doctoral College Representative of CAHSS (PGR)
Marianne Brown	Head of Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling
Brian Connolly	Acting Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Academic Services
Dr Anne Desler	School Representative of CAHSS
Dr Gail Duursma	School Representative of CSE
Olivia Eadie	Co-Director, Institute for Academic Development
Dr Pia Helbing	Senate Representative
Professor Linda Kirstein	Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, CSE
Callum Paterson	Academic Engagement and Policy Coordinator
Dr Neneh Rowa-Dewar	School Representative of CMVM
Dr Emily Taylor	Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval, CAHSS
Professor Jose Vazquez-Boland	Senate Representative
Sinéad Docherty	Committee Secretary, Academic Services

Apologies:	
Carl Harper	Vice President (Education), Students' Association
Professor Nazira Karodia	Deputy Vice Chancellor and Vice Principal of Learning & Teaching, Edinburgh Napier University

2.   Minutes of meeting held on 12th September 2023

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 12th September 2023, pending minor amendments. This decision was made after some discussion and it was noted that not all members of the Committee were in agreement.

It was highlighted that minutes must be concise and objective, and cannot be written by Committee.

3. Matters Arising

- **Quality and Enhancement Standards Review (QESR)**

The Committee were informed that the QESR report from QAA Scotland had been received for factual checking, and the outcome was that of confidence in the University's management of quality and standards. There is, however, a sense of urgency with the recommendations specified, assessment and feedback in particular.

The published version of the report will be shared with SQAC and Senate in due course. The publication date is January 2024.

- **EDI Training**

Members of the Committee were reminded to undertake the EDI training if they have not already done so.

- **Committee Vice-Convener**

The Convener highlighted that the role of Vice-Convener has been vacant since membership changed in the summer of 2023. The Convener proposed that the College Deans of Quality each take the role of VC on an annual, rotational basis.

The Committee agreed to this arrangement. The Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture CSE has the role of VC for the remainder of academic year 2023/24.

- **Committee Priorities**

A member of the Committee raised concern that SQAC is continuing in its business despite the committee priorities not having been approved by Senate. The Committee were informed that some elected members of Senate would be inclined to approve the TORs once more information on SQAC business and priorities is known.

A Senate elected member of the Committee advised the areas in which some of their constituents request further information:

o   Explanation of external requirements and the timeline and process of these.
o   Overview of the routine monitoring activities that SQAC will be overseeing.
o   On strategy matters, what issues will be considered by SQAC and what delegated powers may be involved.
o   On strategy and policy matters, more concrete action on how the Student Support Model is evaluated.
o   The role of SQAC in understanding the background and case for the Curriculum Transformation Project.

Action: Academic Services to take comments and present a paper outlining reflections against Committee priorities to Senate for comment.

4. College Annual Quality Reports (Paper C)

College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CAHSS)

The Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval, CAHSS spoke to the annual quality report from that College. The Committee were informed that next year the intention of CAHSS is to focus on fewer priorities, and to make Assessment & Feedback the number one priority.

The following areas and themes were highlighted in the overview of the CAHSS report:

- Inadequate estate & space allocation
- Language competency
- Workload allocation
- Staff wellbeing
- Tutor training in assessment & feedback

Discussion of these items took place, and the following points were made:

- Challenges with available space and allocation has an impact on the perception of quality as it affects the ability of staff to deliver teaching and support.
- CAHSS are gathering information on space provision and management from Schools, in order to identify where problems are most acute and also share best practice/solutions.
- There is a need to manage student expectations around their studying experience, especially PGR students who may expect their own desk and space as standard. Space issues may have a disproportionate impact on the PGR community.
- There are also live issues with RAAC, and the resulting pressure on space highlights the lack of capacity within the University.

- Language competency becomes an issue when students do not have requisite language skills to contribute and participate fully, and this raises the questions of whether courses then meet level 11 requirements.
- Tutor training in assessment and feedback is inconsistent across Schools. Issues stemming from this come up in CAHSS through NSS results, PTES, PRES, IPRs and annual monitoring.
- Tutor training is often seen as a student experience issue but does link in with course planning and delivery, as well as workload.
- The three-week turnaround time for feedback needs to fall within contracted hours for tutors and be reflected in the WAM.
- There are questions as to whether staff have been trained in assessment design, and how staff can be supported to best implement the assessment and feedback principles and priorities when assessment methods are evolving.

> **Action:** Committee Convener to liaise with Dean of Quality, CAHSS around policy and guidance for online assessment and AI.

Following discussion, a member of the Committee expressed the view that concrete evidence of outcomes and measurable targets should be included in the annual quality reports. The Dean of Quality, CAHSS confirmed that the College sets objectives against which it can evidence progress.

College of Science and Engineering (CSE)

The Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, CSE noted thanks to colleagues and academic affairs for their work on the report. Recognition was also given to the efforts made by colleagues in the Doctoral College for their work around the PGR experience.

Key themes identified in the CSE report and highlighted to the Committee were:

- Progression and attainment
- Assessment and feedback
- Implementation of the Student Support Model
- PGR health and wellbeing
- Staff wellbeing and workload

One member of the Committee spoke on behalf of some elected members of Senate, and reported that this paper had garnered most discussion amongst those members. It was reported that some elected members of Senate did not recognise the account of the SSM which did not reflect concerns such as long queues for meetings with Student Advisors, issues with students not having full credit loads in early weeks of the academic year and not enough contact with cohort leads.

The Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, CSE informed the Committee that she and the Dean of Students had met with all Schools in the College in the last month to pull together

the themes for the report. The College's Student Support Implementation Group identified thematic areas, good practice and areas to improve. There have been focused activities on building relationships between students and academic staff, and a Sharepoint site launched to manage requests for recommendation letters and proof of studies. It was acknowledged that this is the first year of the SSM and it will evolve over time. Learnings will be taken from this year inro the next year.

College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine (CMVM)

The Dean of Quality, CMVM highlighted the following areas and themes in the College report:

- Staff and resources
- Concern around the resilience of staff to implement projects such as CTP
- Estates & timetabling
- Student voice
- College leadership
- Examples of good practice, such as the inclusion of a student in the preparation for the MolGenPop IPR and efforts to improve student representation on College committees.

Discussion of these items took place, and the following points were made:

- There can be unintended consequences of decisions, like that to make course evaluation questionnaires the responsibility of Schools & Deaneries, which has an impact on how to manage and apply resource equally.
- Space constraints have an impact on building community, and contribute to the increasing divide between research and teaching.
- The voice and experience of academics needs to be taken more widely into account when it comes to spaces design.
- Student voice is a common theme, with plenty of effort going in but not moving the dial. There should be better consideration by the University of how to share good practice in terms of student voice.
- Online students must be an area of focus, with consideration needed as to how to implement good practice into the online space.
- The governance and structure review which is taking place in the College will inform the priorities for next year.
- Opportunities to share and learn about good practice at University level would be appreciated.
- CMVM reported that the new Student Support Model had received strongly positive feedback within the College.

Following consideration of the three College reports, the following areas were considered to be key institutional themes which will be remitted to individual areas for response, where possible, and addressed further at College level over the next academic year.

➢ Space and estate
➢ PGR student experience
➢ Staff wellbeing & workload
➢ Assessment & feedback

There was not certainty on whether language competency was a common theme across the three Colleges.

Action: The Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, CSE agreed to take this issue back to College discussion to explore if it is a widespread issue.

5. Course Level Evaluation (Paper E)

The Head of Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling spoke to this paper. The Committee were informed that the University is not looking to centralise course level evaluation again, but is looking to review the current practice in-depth with Schools to understand what is happening at a local level.

Discussion addressed concerns around closing the feedback loop, the shape and scope of the review, the aim to reduce the reliance on surveys and the importance of the relationship between staff and students. It was noted that guidance for staff on effective ways to engage, format and gather student feedback in a timely manner would be valuable. A member of the Committee expressed preference for a research and evidence led review with student involvement throughout.

The Committee approved the proposal to review course level evaluation across the University.

6. Any Other Business

The meeting was adjourned before consideration could be given to the further items on the agenda.

Action: Committee Secretary to circulate agenda and papers for outstanding items to be considered as e-business.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The Committee noted that the next meeting will take place on Thursday 22nd February, 2-5pm. This will be a hybrid meeting, taking place in the Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House and via Microsoft Teams. The meeting has been extended by an hour to ensure that Committee business is completed during the meeting itself.

The University of Edinburgh

Senate Quality Assurance Committee e-business
Friday 8th December – Monday 18th December 2023 5pm

Note of e-business

1.	**Items for noting**	
1.1	**External Examiner exceptional appointments 2022/23** To note.	SQAC 23/24 2D
	This item was noted by the Committee. The following comments were received from members of the Committee: • CAHSS are reviewing EE processes to better monitor EE appointments, and develop communication with Schools that will help to avoid so many concession requests. • Some structural issues, such as payments for EE duties, may need to be referred higher for review and action. • The number of exceptional appointments is still low considering the total number of EE appointments across the University. • Small and specialist subject areas may experience issues with conflicts & reciprocal arrangements as the pool of EEs is not large, but this can be managed as long as subject areas are not relying on a single external examiner.	
1.2	**Short Online Courses Update:** Annual Report 2022-23 – To note. Closed - Commercial in Confidence	SQAC 23/24 2F **Closed paper**
	The Committee noted this paper. Comments received from members included the following points: • It has been highlighted within CAHSS that established criteria for evaluation of short courses would be beneficial, and will be needed as the University develops non-traditional and short course learning. • It was noted that the position of CAHSS rep in the Strategy Group is currently vacant, and a colleague has been suggested for this position. • It would be helpful for future papers to set out the strategy for short courses, and to report against that strategy. • It would also be helpful to know how University of Edinburgh completion & conversion of these courses compares to relevant benchmarks, and what is considered a good target for this metric. • Information on the financial/cost efficacy of these courses would provide useful context as to the value of invested resource in these courses. • The change in terminology from MOOCs to Short Online Courses could cause some confusion with the short courses offered by the Centre for Open Learning. It was asked whether consolidating the provision & marketing of all short courses under COL would be an appropriate approach. **Action: Committee Secretary to report back comments to Short Course Strategy Group and request additional information to be included in future updates.**	

2.	Items for approval	
2.1	**Internal Periodic Review: Forward Schedule** For comment and approval.	SQAC 23/24 2G
	The Committee were largely supportive of this item in order to balance out the frequency of reviews, although one member noted they did not approve due to the lack of detail on how the schedule would be revised. Comments received from members of the Committee included: • It is hoped and expected that QA Directors in Schools will be included in the conversations around revising the IPR schedule. • Consideration must be given to workload modelling, to ensure a revised schedule does not negatively impact affected areas and Schools. • Combined IPRs covering all provision may be an appropriate way to address the imbalance in the schedule, and reduce the overall number of reviews to address resource implications. This approach could be encouraged, although not imposed on Schools. • As the largest College, CAHSS can make a significant contribution to addressing the overall imbalance. CAHSS have identified two Schools which can explore bringing their reviews forward, although capacity and time to do so will be a key factor. **Action: Academic Services to provide update on plans to revise schedule at next meeting.** **Action: Dean of QA, CAHSS to approach Schools with regard to bringing their IPR forward into 2024/25 and to update the Committee at the next meeting.**	
2.2	**Internal Periodic Review: Reports and Responses** The Committee is invited to approve the IPR Final Reports and Responses published on the Committee Sharepoint.	SQAC 23/24 2H
	The reports and responses were approved by the Committee. Comments made in relation to particular recommendations and actions will be referred back to Schools for further updates in quality processes. General comments received from members of the Committee include: • Request for Schools to be reminded of formatting accessibility and consistency in their reporting. Variation across the reports can pose a challenge. • More time for members to read the reports and responses would be appreciated.	
	Date of next meeting Thursday 22nd February 2024 2-5pm, Hybrid meeting: Cuillin Room Charles Stewart House and Microsoft Teams	

The University of Edinburgh
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

22 February 2024

Report on the Student Support Services Annual Review

Description of paper
1. Report on the Student Support Service Annual Review (SSSAR) for 2022/23. The paper highlights areas of good practice and key themes arising from the service reports.

Action requested / recommendation
2. To discuss areas of good practice (section 2) and consider whether any further actions are required in relation to the themes (section 3).

Background and context
3. Student Support Services reporting is part of the University's quality assurance framework. Services report on student-facing activity and its impact on student experience. Sixteen reports were submitted this year.

Discussion
4. The paper, attached as Appendix 1, reports on the 2022/23 review process, highlighting areas of good practice identified in each report and key themes arising from the service reports.

Resource implications
5. No resource implications are directly associated with the paper which is a report on activity. Resource implications are implicit in existing planning by support services.

Risk management
6. No risk assessment is included in the paper. Services carry out risk assessment on areas for development.

Equality & diversity
7. No equality and diversity implications are directly associated with the paper. Services consider equality impact as part of the annual reporting process.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed
8. The Committee should consider communication, implementation and evaluation of any actions resulting from the paper. This includes how best to share the findings, recommendations and best practice beyond the sub-committee and SQAC.

Freedom of Information: The paper is **open**.

Report on the Student Support Services Annual Review

1. Reporting Process

1.1 Annual Reporting Process 2022-23

Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC), at the meeting held on 18 May 2023, agreed that with the transition back to regular business after the Covid-19 pandemic it would be appropriate to reinstate the regular Student Support Services Annual Review (SSSAR) process as set out in the Student Support Services Review Policy. Therefore the 2022-23 review process encompassed the following stages:

- reader/reviewer stage;
- readers' meeting;
- full sub-committee meeting;
- final report to SQAC.

The Quality Enhancement & Standards Review (QESR) of the University was held on 16 November 2023 and as the SSSAR process (as set out above) would normally take place over the course of November it was decided the process would be extended to give sufficient space and time for the QESR. Therefore, the readers' meeting was held on 24 January 2024 and the full sub-committee meeting on 7 February 2024.

1.2 Service Reports

Service Heads were invited to complete a reporting template reflecting on activities over the past academic year specifically relating to student use of the service. The template required responses on the following:

- summary of the impact of activities from the previous academic year on the student experience and how these contribute to University Strategy;
- reflection on user engagement and feedback, service use, partnership working and externality;
- staff development and its impact on the student experience;
- reflection on service changes, new ways of working and efficiencies;
- key priorities for the coming academic year;
- risk analysis, indicating any specific risks to achieving the service's core activities, and the approach to mitigating risks.

1.3 Reader/Reviewer Stage

Each report was allocated to one 'reader' (an academic or student representative on the sub-committee) and one 'reviewer' (a service head representative on the sub-committee). The readers/reviewers were invited to comment on their allocated

reports (using a feedback template) and identify areas of good practice for sharing across the services and areas for further development. For reference, all readers and reviewers had access to reports via the SSSAR Sub-Committee SharePoint. On completion of this stage Registry Services produced a composite report on areas of good practice and areas for development identified by the readers and reviewers. Service heads were also sent anonymised versions of the reader and reviewer feedback on their report.

1.4 Readers' Meeting

The Readers' Meeting (academic and student representatives of the sub-committee) was held online on 24 January 2024, convened by Professor Tina Harrison Deputy Vice Principal Students (Enhancement). The readers discussed the composite report of the reader/reviewer stage and identified the following themes for discussion at the meeting of the full sub-committee:

- Size and shape and staff development
- Interconnectedness and partnership working
- User feedback and impact evaluation

It was agreed Registry Services would identify and invite good practice speakers for the sub-committee meeting based on the themes.

1.5 SSSAR sub-committee

The meeting of the Student Support Service Annual Review sub-committee was held in-person on 7 February 2024, convened by Professor Tina Harrison, Deputy Vice Principal Students (Enhancement). The sub-committee discussed the themes identified by the readers in the light of the following examples of good practice:

- Carina Svenson, Director of Accommodation, Catering and Events (ACE) shared examples of how ACE has developed career pathways for staff to address staff recruitment/retention issues and thereby ensure consistency of service for students.
- Lisa Dawson, Academic Registrar, shared examples of how Registry Services has developed partnership working and collaboration with services and Schools to ensure students are supported appropriately.
- Mark Munro, Director of Sport and Active Health, shared examples of how the service gathers and makes use of user feedback.

The Convenor also thanked James Nicholson (Director of Student and Academic Services, Abertay University) for all his help with the SSSAR process during his three-year term as external member of the sub-committee (due to end in July 2024).

2. Good Practice

Readers and reviewers identified much to commend across the reports and key commendations and good practice are highlighted below.

2.1   Accommodation Catering and Events (ACE)

Accommodation, Catering and Events was commended on its strong customer focus particularly in regard to gathering and evaluating user feedback. Examples cited included the use of mystery shoppers and Net Promoter Score providing opportunity for benchmarking internally and externally and the use of the Global Student living index to support targeted enhancements. The service was also commended on its innovative and responsive post-pandemic approach to changing circumstances and student expectations. Examples cited include the click and delivery option at Pollock Halls and Quick Service (QSR) model at the Nucleus (winning best Café concept in recent awards), and the roll-out of Customer Service Managers in property and residential services. Staff development, and in particular the career pathways and opportunities for promotion, was specifically commended as an area of good practice to be shared with other services. It was noted that ACE staff were nominated twice in the Students' Association Teaching Awards Support Category.

2.2   The Advice Place

The Advice Place was commended on its flexible, adaptive and inclusive approach during the post-pandemic period. For example, the introduction of a hybrid working policy to allow staff to benefit from flexible arrangements, where service use allows, and the new framework for pay and progression. The Advice Place was also commended on its partnership working with the Academic Contingency Group to ensure service user issues related to the marking and assessment boycott were known and therefore could be supported.

2.3   Careers Service

The Careers Service was commended on its collaborative work with Schools, Colleges and other parts of the University to provide service delivery that is integrated with students' subject areas and their different career requirements. The suite of resources for Cohort Leads in the new Student Support Model was cited as a good example of this. The Careers Service was also commended on its approach to user feedback and impressive level of user satisfaction. For example, innovations such as the recruitment of Careers

Service Assistants from the student body to gather student feedback and a new student Communications Coordinator to enhance social media posts, the use of video and to close the feedback loop.

2.4   Chaplaincy

The Chaplaincy was commended on its wide range of activities and support it provides for students and staff, with bespoke programmes and initiatives including: 'Dreamwhispering', 'Abundant Academy','Why Don't You Write Me', 'Surviving University', 'Grief Group' 'Mindfulness', and the 'Listening Service'. Evaluation feedback from the Abundant Academy evidenced the positive impact on individuals using Chaplaincy services.

2.5   Disability and Learning Support Service (DLSS)

The Disability and Learning Support Service was commended on the quality of service, as evidenced by the excellent user satisfaction scores, and the commitment to improving student support and in particular the development of the Disability and Inclusion Officer role. The new partnerships with ResLife and the Student Wellbeing Service streamlining the sharing of information and improving the student experience were also commended.

2.6   Equally Safe Team

The Equally Safe Team was commended for partnership working with Schools, Colleges, central services, and the Students' Association to support disclosures and raise awareness of gender-based violence on campus. The Equally Safe Team was also commended on setting up partnerships with external bodies including local gender-based violence networks, participating in high-profile media events such as drink spiking, and participation in a partnership between universities in Edinburgh and local specialist services.

2.7   Estates

Estates was commended on its partnership working with staff and students. The new Head of Space role was commended as a positive innovation which should have a long-term impact as space for students, whether teaching, studying support or social remains a challenge. Estates was also commended on the positive user feedback as evidenced by the nominations and awards its staff received in recognition of their outstanding service to students and staff across the University. In particular the servitoral staff who provide a key service and are often the first point of contact students have when accessing buildings on campus.

2.8 Finance

Finance was commended on the pre-approved payment process for hardship fund, providing reassurance to students with a quick response and support. The Credit Control Team was also commended on the work around timely reminders to students on outstanding fees and ensuring appropriate hardship/ financial support, as evidenced by the metric showing a 70% reduction in students in debt over the year. The service was also commended on the range of guidance and training provided by the team to support of the People and Money financial system in very challenging circumstances.

2.9 Information Services Group (ISG)

Information Services Group was commended on its extensive and detailed report, reflecting on the variety of innovative practice designed to improve the student experience. ISG was also commended on its partnership working across Schools, Colleges and services. Examples cited included the Student Skills Development Service collaboration with the Careers Service on the Edinburgh Awards programme and the links with Widening Participation and the College of Science and Engineering to encourage diversity of STEM roles.

2.10 Institute for Academic Development (IAD)

The Institute for Academic Development (IAD) was commended on the range of resources, activities and support for staff and students, as well as the important wider contributions to achieving the University's strategic goals in teaching, learning and researcher development. In particular the embedding of mixed modes of teaching and training across IAD provision, as well as key contributions made by IAD staff to the curriculum transformation project, the implementation of the new model of student support, and the enhancement of research cultures. The academic achievements and impact of members of IAD in their respective fields of expertise, and the external recognition they have received, was also commended.

2.11 Registry Services

Registry Services was commended on its professionalism and student-centred approach in dealing with high levels of uncertainty regarding recent industrial action. The implementation of a marking and assessment boycott (MAB) helpline to supplement online resources was cited as an example of this student-centred approach adopted during a challenging period.

Partnership working and collaboration with Schools and services to ensure students are supported appropriately was specifically commended as an area of good practice to be shared with other services. For example, Registry Services staff attended Board of Examiners meetings to gain a wider understanding of key areas in the academic year and student lifecycle. The work of the graduations team was also commended on both the additional graduations for students impacted by the pandemic, and the agility in navigating the challenges caused by the industrial action for some graduating students this year. These were cited as evidence of the commitment to the student experience within Registry Services and a community of colleagues working very hard to its continued enhancement.

2.12   Sport and Exercise

Sport and Exercise was commended on the development of the Active Lives programme, cited as a good example of inclusive service delivery which meets both student and staff need across the whole University community. The approach to gathering effective student feedback, was specifically commended as an area of good practice to be shared with other services.

2.13   Student Counselling Service (SCS)

The Student Counselling Service was commended on the innovative, needs-based approach to supporting and enhancing the student experience. For example, the use of evening sessions with remote counsellors, enhanced provision of same-day appointments, and early-stage events such as Paws Against Stress/Therapets. Counselling was also commended on its approach to collecting and evaluating user feedback, with the 45% response rate cited as evidence that students are engaged and motivated to tell the service it is doing a good job.

2.14   Student Recruitment and Admissions (SRA)

Student Recruitment and Admissions (SRA) was commended on its collaborative approach to supporting key principles of Strategy 2030 through effective and adaptive staff development, including those who are also students. Examples include professional tour-guide training for Student Ambassadors and input from the Widening Participation team to training of the Student Advisors.

2.15   Student Wellbeing Service

The Student Wellbeing Service was commended on achieving its key performance indicators (in terms of triage of referrals and contact of students) and the positive impact the work of its staff is having on students (as demonstrated by the lower percentage of students in the moderate to high-risk categories at case closure).

2.16   Study and Work Away Service (SWAY)

Study and Work Away Service (SWAY) was commended on its partnership working and the development of new or continuing collaborative programmes and initiatives to support students across Schools, Colleges and other services.

3. **Themes arising from service reports**

3.1   **Size and shape and staff development**

Services reported increased demand post-pandemic and highlighted staff recruitment and retention issues.

The sub-committee discussed the changes to demand across the services. Members noted that the pandemic saw a shift in service user demand for more flexible and adaptable modes of contact or service delivery which continue to evolve. The pandemic accelerated an existing trend to more digital delivery, stimulated by factors such as student expectations, accessibility and resource limitations. Some services have experienced increasing demand for in-person contact while others noted that student engagement with on-campus activities in general remained relatively low compared to pre-pandemic levels. A number of reports also considered the cost-of-living crisis and the financial impact of services on students. It was noted that the University's strategy to widen participation and the increasingly diverse student body may lead to further changes in service demand over the coming years. In this fluctuating, post-pandemic context members suggested that it may be too early to determine if services are the appropriate size and shape to meet future demand.

The sub-committee discussed staff recruitment and retention issues and the impact this had on the quality and consistency of service provision and the student experience. Members noted ongoing concerns in relation to workload pressures, the number of competing priorities (ideally will be addressed through the University Portfolio Initiatives Board), the implementation of new systems and ways of working, and ultimately the impact these have on staff wellbeing and morale. The onset/fallout of the Covid pandemic, the cost-of-

living crisis and industrial action have all been contributing factors. In this context the increasing focus on career pathways for professional services staff within the services and Schools was welcomed. The benefits of staff seeking opportunities across other services and areas within the institution was also noted, in that it helped to build a depth of understanding and skills for both the individual staff member and for the University as a whole. However, these cross-service/institutional career pathways and opportunities are less well signposted or communicated to staff. More partnership working and collaboration on the issue between services is needed to highlight the career opportunities for staff outside their particular department but within the wider University.

3.2   **Partnership working and interconnectedness**

The introduction of the new Student Support model is driving partnership working across increasingly interconnected services.

Sub-committee considered the intrinsic value of collaboration between services and academic areas to ensure a joined-up approach to the wider student experience. Members noted that these partnerships were easier to initiate and maintain when they are driven by the requirements and resources of strategic projects. At present there is limited capacity within services to initiate collaborative activities in a proactive manner with other services or local academic areas. Barriers cited include core workloads (e.g. what should we stop doing in order to provide the capacity to collaborate?) and the structure of planning process for services (which tends not to facilitate collaborative capacity). Therefore, partnership working and collaborative activities tend to be reactive by necessity. Much depends on individual relationships forged by members of staff, which can be lost when individuals transition to new roles. Members also suggested that there may be a potential role for the Colleges in helping to facilitate or coordinate collaborative activity between services and Schools.

3.3   **User feedback and impact evaluation**

Services have been innovative in their approach to collecting user feedback but have also noted challenges such as low response rates and closing feedback loops.

Sub-committee members raised concerns that the over-surveying of students may be a key contributing factor to low response rates; this is being reviewed through the Student Voice Task and Finish group within the Student Lifecycle Management Group. It was suggested the evaluation model currently being

developed for the implementation of the new approach to Student Support may provide an alternative method to traditional feedback surveys. The model articulates the inputs and activities which have been undertaken through to the desired short- and long-term outcomes and impact of the introduction of the new system; this is being developed in partnership with Professor John Devaney. This will provide an understanding of whether the new Student Support approach has achieved its desired aims for both staff and students.

<u>The University of Edinburgh</u>
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

22 February 2024

Student Support – Evaluation of model

Description of paper
1. This paper provides an update on the two core strands of activity currently underway to evaluate the new student support model; evaluation of the implementation of the model and development of a continuous learning model for on-going quality assurance.

Action requested / recommendation
2. The committee are asked to note the update on on-going and planned evaluation activity.

Background and context
3. The new model of student support has now been rolled out across the University. As part of this implementation, Student Advisers, Academic Cohort Leads and Wellbeing Advisers have been appointed to provide an eco-system of support for students throughout their studies. The model was rolled out in two phases, with 16 Schools adopting the model for incoming students in 2022/23, before a full roll out of the model to all taught students in the 2023/24 academic year.

4. Across the implementation of the model, Registry Services have worked with the Student Support Project Team, Student Support Management Group and College and School Leads to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the model. This has predominantly focussed on gathering qualitative data through focus groups with staff and students.

5. In January 2023, the Student Support Project Board approved a recommendation arising from evaluation outcomes to focus on four key areas for enhancement of the student support model ahead of full roll out of the model in September 2023. Evaluation questions in 2023/24 academic year to-date have focussed on evaluating whether there has been a shift in these key areas, as well as an opportunity to raise any new areas which are working well or new areas for change.

6. The new cycle of evaluation began in November 2023 with Student Adviser focus groups. The evaluation of the implementation of the model will continue until July 2024. Section 19 confirms the planned schedule of activity across Semester 2.

7. **Outcomes in this paper focus on feedback from Student Advisers. Outcomes are based on their perception and experience only and are not yet tested against student experiences or other staff experiences in this academic year as per the implementation schedule.**

8. Alongside the evaluation of the implementation of the model, work is underway to ensure a model of continuous evaluation is in place as the model transitions to business as usual. This is to ensure that the model is delivering what it set out to achieve as articulated through the Student Support Framework. The development of a model to evaluate this is led by Professor John Devaney, Head of Social and Political Sciences. This work includes the development of a logic model to evaluate the model; the identification of key data requirements; and how evaluation and monitoring will be embedded into quality assurance processes. It is expected that both quantitative and qualitative data requirements will be identified as part of this process, including using existing baseline data were possible (e.g. NSS, PTES).

Discussion

Update on 2022/23 recommendations

9. Evaluation questions in 2023/24 academic year have focussed on evaluating whether there has been a shift in the four key areas recommended for development in January 2023 from the Student Adviser perspective. Appendix A confirms activities which were undertaken by colleagues in response to these recommendations. The following confirms responses from Student Advisers in relation to these areas.

10. **Enhanced training and induction schedule for incoming staff**
Student Advisers (SAs) felt the initial training was comprehensive - a positive shift from last year where it was felt there were significant gaps in training on local processes, systems, and policies which impacted readiness for their role and contributed to challenges at the start of semester. There is an on-going desire for refresher training and suggestions for additional training in specific support areas.

11. **Improvements to core processes such as timetabling and course enrolment**
Course enrolment and the volumes of timetable clashes and changes remain a challenge for SAs and is exacerbated by inconsistency in how processes are managed across Schools/Deaneries and the volume of activities in welcome week. Work is on-going through a Task and Finish Group overseen by the Student Lifecycle Management Group to identify improvements in these areas.

12. **Clear definition of roles and responsibilities within Schools/Deaneries, in new roles and existing roles**

The majority of SAs are clear on their role and the tasks they are expected to undertake – a positive shift from last year. While they are clear on their tasks, some SAs do not feel that all the tasks they are undertaking are appropriate for their role, e.g., progression, cohort lead organisation. There remains variation in which tasks the Student Adviser undertakes depending on their School[1] and a gap between expectation and reality of the role.

Areas have reported improved relationships with the teaching office (TO), particularly where they have regular catch ups across TO/SA teams. However, there is still a

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[1] Focus groups were undertaken before the Student Adviser Task List was published

perception in some areas that the SA and TO have different values and expectations of their role and that there can sometimes still be confusion across responsibilities of shared processes. Cohort Lead (CL)/SA interactions vary across Schools, with some areas remaining unclear how they and the CL should interact. This will be explored in the cohort lead focus groups and fed back to Student Adviser Line Managers.

The Project Team worked with College Leads and School colleagues to confirm a Student Adviser task list. This was published in December (after focus groups). The Project Team are also working with the Management Group and HR to review the Student Adviser job description. Focus groups will be undertaken with TO/CL to collect their perception of relationships and boundaries.

Extensive focus groups will be undertaken with students in February and March to understand student experiences with professional and academic support.

13. **Clear articulation of the role of the Wellbeing Service in the support model – with a focus on business processes and decision making.**

There is consistently positive feedback in relation to Wellbeing Advisers (WA) and the support they provide. Some SAs feel there is a significant improvement in their relationship with the Wellbeing Service (SWS), particularly in the consistency of how student cases are handled. This is as a result of work undertaken by SWS in collaboration with Schools/Deaneries across summer 2023 to clarify referral processes and work across the last 12 months on internal SWS processes to improve operational structures and guidance. However, because of some of the changes which have been made to how the service operates, some SAs have found the changing approaches has slowed down trust in the service and developing this is an on-going process. Student Advisers have less confidence in the service when their designated Wellbeing Adviser is unable to take the case, believing the cover Adviser provide more of a signposting role than a support role. There is feedback that information about the Wellbeing Service and Counselling Service overlaps and causes confusion regarding what each service is to be used for. The services are reviewing and enhancing this information.

2023/24 Key Themes

14. In addition to questions focussed on evaluating critical areas from Phase 1 implementation, Student Advisers were also asked to provide feedback across their experience in post so far. This feedback has been grouped into three overarching themes.

15. **Consistency and standardisation.**

There is a noticeable desire for more consistency and standardisation in the support model, particularly regarding roles, processes and systems. Student Advisers believe the variation across Schools is adversely impacting both student and staff experiences. Student Advisers believe that this contributes to their administrative workload, which takes away from time spent in actively supporting students.

For example, this was raised in feedback about course enrolment processes, where challenges were exacerbated by not knowing who is undertaking equivalent tasks in

other Schools. This will be fed up to the Student Lifecycle Management Group Course Enrolment Task and Finish Group.

There remains inconsistency in Student Adviser engagement with Cohort Leads and administration associated with cohort activities. There is a higher degree of satisfaction where there is additional administrative resource to support this activity.

16. **Collaboration and trust.**

Positive collaboration and trust are evident within Student Adviser teams when co-located and sharing workloads, including with their assigned Wellbeing Adviser. Student Advisers also feel that students trust them and the support they offer. However, challenges in understanding roles, processes and responsibilities in wider support roles and services has compromised trust in some areas and needs to be rebuilt. Student Advisers feel that that academic staff do not always trust them. This perception will be tested in the focus groups with cohort leads and academic staff in Semester 2. Related feedback gathered in 2022/23 from academic staff was positive in relation to Student Advisers but concerns were raised regarding workload and provision of academic guidance.

Most SAs feel very supported by their line manager and by their wider team, particularly where they are co-located. The collaboration between Student Adviser teams was often identified as the most positive element of their experience in the role.

SAs feel that their role ensures that students have access to easily accessible support**.** They are confident that they are "known" by their students and trusted by them.

17. **Workload and staff wellbeing.**

Student Adviser workloads remain high, particularly at peak times. Welcome week is one of the most significant challenges due to the number of concurrent tasks to be undertaken and the overlap with progression boards (described as "chaos", "crazy", "mad"). Some confirmed high levels of stress across this period.

Some Student Advisers believe that the number of students they support is too high and compromises the quality of support they can provide. There is a high volume of complex cases which take up significant amount of time. There is a perception that the number and complexity of the courses is higher than the model was originally built to sustain. There is also a perception that demand will continue to grow as the model embeds.

Student Advisers feel strongly that additional support is required for them to cope with the volume and complexity of student cases in their portfolio. This should be access to a trained professional. While most areas have team debrief sessions which are highly effective, there is a strong recommendation that this support is outwith the standard team structure. There is also demand for development of coaching skills. In response to this feedback, a pilot programme has been initiated with the School of Health in Social Sciences to support Student Advisers and build resilience and safety in the workforce to support them in dealing with complex cases.

Plans to begin this work are currently progressing in consultation with Schools and Colleges.

18. Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling (SAIM) within Registry Services are working closely with the Project Team in connection to feedback received, with regular reports to the Student Support Project Board as to recommended areas for improvement. Outcomes from feedback will be communicated to Colleges and Schools and any significant actions taken in response to feedback will be undertaken in consultation with the Management Group.

19. The following focus groups are planned for the remainder of the academic year, ensuring that feedback is gathered from all perspectives.

Role	Timescale
Students – multiple groups	February-March
Model leadership roles	March
Cohort Leads	March
Student Support Manager	April
Teaching office staff	April
Academic staff (e.g. teaching teams / previous PTs, DoTs)	May
Student Advisers	TBC
Professional Services (DLSS, ResLife, Counselling)	TBC

Continual learning model
20. Evaluation to-date has focussed on the implementation of the student support model and has relied heavily on qualitative data through focus groups with staff and students.

21. To ensure the model continues to be monitored and evaluated beyond the duration of the project, an evaluation model is being developed which will support on-going critical evaluation of the model at School/Deanery and central level. This work is being led by Professor John Devaney.

22. The evaluation model (logic model) is currently drafted and being reviewed by key colleagues. The model articulates the inputs and activities which have been undertaken through to the desired short- and long-term outcomes and impact of the introduction of the new student support approach. This will support our understanding of whether the approach has achieved its desired aims for both staff and students. This will refer to the Student Support Framework which articulates what the model sets out achieve.
23. Following confirmation of the logic model (February), SAIM will work with colleagues to understand the research questions to answer for evaluation, and on

understanding these, the relevant data collection requirements. Existing baseline data will be used where it is available. This work will take place across March.

24. SAIM are working with the Project Team to confirm the longer-term governance reporting around evaluation and monitoring.

Resource implications
25. Resource will be managed through Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling team, working in partnership with the student support project, Academic Services, College Implementation Groups and the Student Lifecycle Management Group (SLMG).

Risk management
26. The University is investing in student support which is part of our drive to mitigate concerns in student satisfaction. Effective governance of evaluation and monitoring seeks to mitigate risks to the success of the new model. Failure to deliver this model caries reputational risk, does not deliver student experience as set out in strategy 2030 and continues to affect the University's standing in national league tables.

Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals
27. This paper would support the SDG "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" as part the strategic objective to improve student experience. The proposals would not hinder the achievement of any other UN SDGs or exacerbate the Climate Emergency.

Equality & diversity
28. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed. The work undertaken will support greater equality, diversity and inclusion for students within our community.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed
29. The Project is communicating outcomes discussed within this paper with the Student Support Project Board, College Implementation Groups and School/Deanery Line Managers. Summary feedback will also be published on the Project Briefing Resources site for all staff to access. Any actions arising through discuss at SQAC would be considered through Student Support Project Board.

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05/02/2024

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Freedom of Information *(Is the paper 'open' or 'closed') open*
Open

Appendix A: Actions in response to 2022/23 feedback

Recommendation 2022/23	Actions
Enhanced training and induction schedule for incoming staff	The training schedule was reviewed and enhanced to respond to previous feedback. Information sessions were offered to line managers to ensure better coordination of local and central training. Schools were provided with a list of systems, processes and information to include in local induction.
Improvements to core processes such as timetabling and course enrolment	Task and Finish Groups looking at Course Enrolment and Timetabling were set up through Student Lifecycle Management Group. The Timetabling Group produced a report identifying pains points and recommended next steps to support development of the service – the development of this is under review. The Timetabling Service reviewed their approach to student clash checking in relation to teaching changes. The Service also revised reporting mechanisms to support understanding of why volumes of teaching changes are so significant.
Clear definition of roles and responsibilities within Schools, in new roles and existing roles	The Student Adviser task list was revised in consultation with Schools/Deaneries and published in December 2023. The Project Team are leading a review of Student Adviser job description.

	College Implementation Groups developed local Cohort Lead frameworks to set expectations around the role. The Project Team developed Case Studies to support Cohort Leads in developing activities
Clear articulation of the role of the Wellbeing Service in the support model – with a focus on business processes and decision making.	• Escalation/ referral framework – Co-produced with schools to provide guidance on expected tasks for SA when dealing with wellbeing cases and when and why to refer to SWS • Service framework - this proves guidance on the activities SWA's undertake, length of time we should be working with students based on level of risk/concern • Introduced student service feedback/evaluation form- Collecting direct student user feedback on support provided, used to celebrate success and identify areas of service improvement • Regular presentations to and meetings between school SA teams and leadership team from SWS – Lead Wellbeing Advisors meeting on a regular basis with their counterparts to address any local operational issues • Introduction of daily checking meetings – Staff wellbeing check, capacity check, celebrate success, identify key issues that need addressed and escalated • Reviewing and updating of risk matrix – Risk matrix simplified following feedback from the team • Guidance around effective note recording – Introduction of SOAP notes to ensure a consistent approach to documentation in case notes • Introduction of a translation service with external partner to ensure effective communication with trusted contacts where English may not be their 1st Language • Transition pathways for students leaving Reslife supported accommodation into private accommodation • Weekly Student of concern meetings , (team and service) To identify students of concern who may need escalation to Senior Wellbeing Leadership Team and a weekly check in to ensure any students of concern have appropriate plans in place for the weekend • Introduced Facilitated Peer Support Meeting to address the request from staff to space to debrief on complex cases

Appendix B: Logic Model Framework

The below shows the framework which is guiding the development of the evaluation model for student support. Final outputs will be shared with the committee.

Resources/Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short Term Outcomes	Longer Term Outcomes	Impact
In order to accomplish our set of activities we will need the following:	In order to address our problem or asset we will conduct the following activities:	We expect that once completed or under way these activities will produce the following evidence of service delivery:	We expect that if completed or ongoing these activities will lead to the following changes in 1–2 yrs	We expect that if completed or ongoing these activities will lead to the following changes in 3–4 yrs	We expect that if completed these activities will lead to the following changes in 4-6 yrs

Senate Quality Assurance Committee

22nd February 2024

Taught Postgraduate (PGT) Curriculum Framework and Programme Archetypes

Description of paper

1. This paper sets out a proposal for the introduction of a new Taught Postgraduate (PGT) Curriculum Framework developed as part of the University Curriculum Transformation Project (CTP)[1]. It is based upon the results of engagement with members of the University PGT community during autumn 2023. Feedback from SQAC will be used to refine the proposal for consideration by Senate Education Committee and Senate.

2. Curriculum Transformation contributes to Strategy 2030 outcomes ii, v, vi, and ix, and is relevant to other outcomes including iv, x and xiii.

Action requested / recommendation

3. For discussion. SQAC members are invited to comment on all aspects of the proposal. Key questions for SQAC are:
   - What, if any, QA implications are there for the design and development of the proposed archetypes?
   - What, if any, implications are there for ongoing monitoring and review of the proposed archetypes?

Background and context

4. Curriculum Transformation is a major long term investment project for the University.

5. At the heart of the Curriculum Transformation Project is the development of a new Curriculum Framework.

6. The development of an initial proposition for the PGT Framework and archetypes was led by the Curriculum Transformation Taught Postgraduate Working Group[2] who drew on a wide range of internal and external insights, including Internal Periodic Reviews and other Quality Assurance processes. The first iteration of the proposed PGT Framework was published in August 2022. The reaction to this, particularly the programme archetypes, was positive. Further in-depth engagement between August and December 2023, including College and University workshops, discussions with Schools, programmes and other groups has informed the development of the revised set of PGT programme archetypes presented in this paper.

7. At its meeting on 7th February 2024 Senate approved the following motion: "Acknowledging that the PGT proposals attracted many positive comments from members at the January special session, CTP leadership will prepare formal proposals for the PGT Framework and bring these to Senate for approval as a priority action, with separate proposals for the UG Framework to follow at a later date."

8. The proposal presented in this paper was endorsed by the Curriculum Transformation Project Board on 6th February 2024. The proposal will be taken to Senate Education

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[1] https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/CurriculumTransformation
[2] Two reports produced by the group are available from the curriculum transformation hub: https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/CurriculumTransformation/SitePages/Workstreams-Overview.aspx#postgraduate-group

Committee for discussion and endorsement at its meeting on 7th March 2024 and to College Committees during February to April 2024. Feedback from SQAC, SEC and Colleges will be used to update the proposal ready for consideration and approval by Senate in May 2024. Senate Academic Policy & Regulations Committee (APRC) would then take forward the technical implementation and detail of policies.

9. If approved, Schools and programmes would be able to begin using the PGT Curriculum Framework, archetypes and model programme structures as early adopters from AY24/25, looking towards September 2026 (AY26/27) for its university wide adoption.

Discussion
10. Outcomes from Autumn 2023 engagement

11. The latest phase of engagement has gone well and provided a wealth of insight and worked examples that we are using to inform the formal proposal for a new Taught Postgraduate Curriculum Framework and archetypes. Several high-level themes have come through particularly clearly.

12. We already have a broad and diverse range of provision at taught postgraduate level. Every indication is that we will need this diversity and breadth to expand further in the future. A major challenge that we face is that our current diverse provision operates within an institutional paradigm that is dominated by the sense that PGT education is synonymous with Masters education; and that Masters education equates to programmes that are full time, on campus, with two semesters of taught courses and an academic research-based dissertation or project. While this structure is and will continue to be important, we need to change the paradigm and fully embrace a vision for PGT education that is broad, adaptable and responsive.

13. We need a Curriculum Framework that supports a wide range of provision (including stand-alone courses, collections of courses, Certificates, Diplomas and Masters); with multiple and flexible modes of study (on-campus, online, hybrid; full time, part time, stackable); and with regulations, systems and processes that support and reflect this vision and diversity. The Framework needs to be adaptable and responsive to the requirements of different educational contexts and purposes, domestic and international demand for postgraduate study and lifelong learning, and the needs of our students and educators.

14. This phase of engagement has confirmed a high level of comfort and confidence that the archetypes and Framework can be developed to meet the current and future requirements of taught postgraduate provision across the University. All 86 respondents to a survey we ran during the workshops stated that the archetypes as presented either fully (38%) or partially (62%) meet current and future requirements in their areas. We now need to confirm that the archetypes are flexible enough to support all of our current and forecast future structural requirements. This flexibility will be tested and developed in the updated versions of the archetypes that are previewed below using case studies and examples gathered from across the institution.

15. Other significant findings include the importance to many programmes of bridging content. This includes pre-arrival teaching and support to prepare students for postgraduate study (sometimes provided as an entry requirement or pathway to entry). It includes support for transitions, cohort building, mentoring, academic writing and other skills and methods training around week 0 and running alongside and between the credit bearing elements of programmes throughout the academic year. Bridging content is often provided as stand-alone sessions, is sometimes optional and co-curricular, occasionally credit-bearing. What is apparent is the need to develop processes and

systems (e.g. timetabling) able to accommodate these bridging elements alongside core credit-bearing courses. There are also examples and opportunities to share bridging elements across multiple programmes or cohorts.

16. Block teaching, where material is taught intensively over a shorter period of time (e.g. two full days rather than 1 hour for ten weeks), is often used to provide bridging content. There are other examples of block teaching in current programmes (e.g. for methods training or field work) and interest in developing this further, particularly through the stackable Mode 3 archetype where organising teaching in intensive blocks would be beneficial for specific cohorts. The level of interest and potential for block teaching means we should build this style of teaching into the Curriculum Framework and its supporting infrastructure.

17. Engagement has helped to identify other key enablers needed to support the successful adoption of the archetypes and Curriculum Design Principles. It has highlighted questions and concerns that colleagues have about when and how these enablers will be implemented and capacity within and outwith programme teams to fully adopt the archetypes and design principles.

18. In workshops, with programmes, Schools and other groups, we encouraged colleagues to think about will be needed from a Curriculum Framework in 5-10 years as well as now and in the shorter term. It was encouraging to see a number of immediate and early priorities for the development of regulatory flexibility and associated rules and guidance that would be enabled by these proposals, together with areas where the proposed changes will generate immediate or rapid benefits. Several areas and programmes have flagged their desire to adopt the archetypes at the earliest opportunity.

19. Proposed Framework and Archetypes

20. Recent engagement has confirmed that the three proposed archetypes have the potential to meet current and future structural requirements. There is no need for the development of additional archetypes.

21. The three proposed archetypes are:
Mode 1 – Course Based;
Mode 2 – Activity Based (research, professional or creative practice);
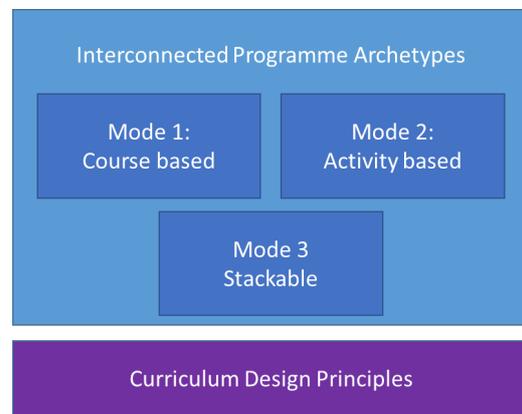Mode 3 – Stackable;

Figure 1
Proposed PGT Curriculum Framework

22. Rather than view these as three separate and discrete archetypes we are proposing that the Taught Postgraduate Curriculum Framework should be built around these three interconnected archetypes and an accompanying set of Curriculum Design Principles (Figure 1). The Mode 1 archetype considers the construction of provision from sets of connected courses, Mode 2 is focussed on student or learner led activities (creative or professional practice, research etc), and Mode 3 concentrates on mechanisms to build additional flexibility into the design of provision by supporting stackable credits. While much of our current and future provision fits in one or other of these archetypes it is the overlap and interconnectivity between the archetypes where there is the greatest scope

for innovation and future proofing. This will be illustrated by the examples of potential model programme structures provided below.

23. For this second iteration of the PGT archetypes we refer to 60 credit blocks of study rather than semesters or years. Blocks of study could be a single semester for a traditional full-time degree, or 1 year for a 3-year part time Masters programme. Other examples of blocks of study would the 5-year stackable block proposed for Mode 3, or other time periods built around block teaching. 20 credit courses are used in the illustrations that follow for ease of presentation. Other course credit weightings will be permitted.

24. Mode 1 - Course Based

25. In its simplest form the Mode 1 archetype provides scope for a 180 credit Masters programme (with associated PG Certificate and PG Diploma awards) to be fully taught or to include a capstone project or activity in Block 3 (Figure 2). This flexibility has been welcomed. Several programmes have expressed an interest in using this archetype to offer fully taught Masters programmes or include shorter or alternative capstone elements (e.g. 20 credits of intensively taught methods training [block teaching] followed by a 40 credit applied project).   Until recently these approaches have required exemptions to be approved at College and sometimes University level, bringing with it additional administrative steps and delays and making it harder to respond to market demand.
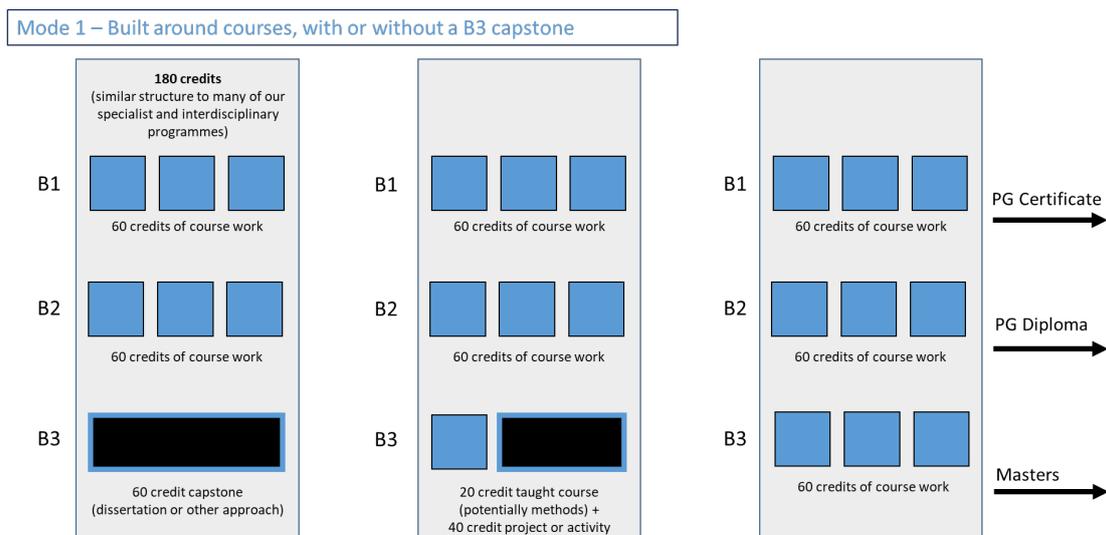

Figure 2 – Mode 1 (with or without a capstone)

26. Mode 1 also covers fully taught PG Certificates and PG Diplomas as well as stand-alone credit-bearing courses.

27. Combining Mode 1 with the additional flexibility in study period facilitated by the stackable Mode 3 archetype would provide programmes with a straightforward way to reach additional students. For example, on the Masters in Religion & Literature programme full-time study is suited to students using the programme as research/PhD preparation while a longer, more flexible part time option would attract additional mid-career participants.
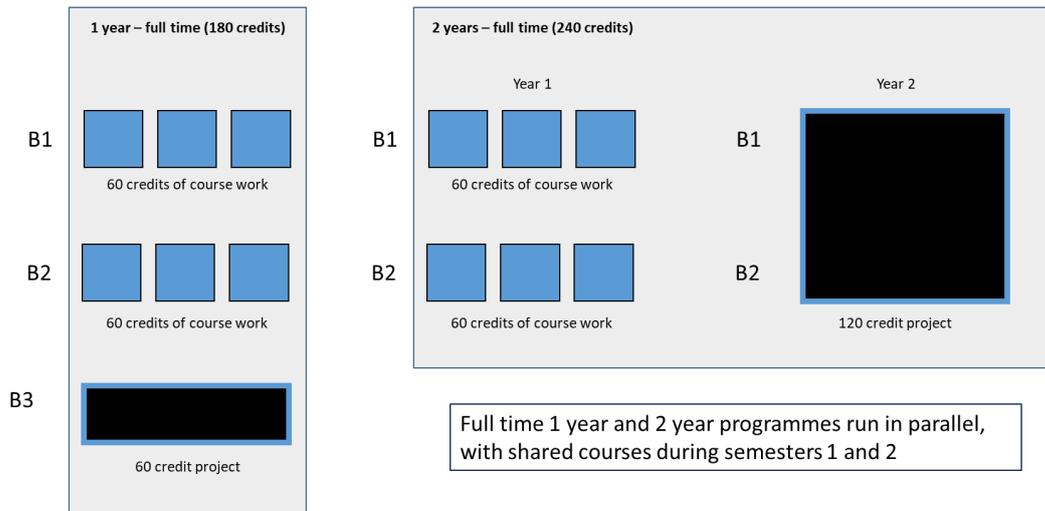
Figure 3 – Mode 1 applied to 2-year (240 credit) Masters

28. The Mode 1 archetype is flexible enough to be used to support a number of other model programme structures. This includes the development of 2-year (240 credit) Masters programmes (Figure 3). In this model, illustrated by Advanced Power Systems Engineering, a 2-year full time (240 credit) Masters runs alongside a traditional 1-year (180 credit) programme. Running the 1 year and 2-year programmes in parallel helps tailor the programme to different market segments. The 1-year programme admits around 30 students each year attracted by the potential of obtaining their Masters in one year. The 2-year programme attracts students wanting to work in areas (e.g. China and India) where a 2-year MSc is the required entry qualification for power systems engineers. The taught elements (Blocks 1 & 2/semesters 1 & 2) run across both programmes. At that point students on the 1-year programme begin their 60 credit project. Students on the 2-year programme take a break from study at this point (with many taking internships or working for the summer). They return for a 120 credit research project running over semesters 1 & 2 of their second year.

29. An advantage of the 2-year Masters programme for staff and students is that students can work on a more substantive project, often generating one or two publications. This provides staff with an opportunity to more tightly connect project supervision to their own research and better manage time and work pressures by reducing summer project supervision commitments. Transfers between the 1- and 2-year programmes are possible although this happens rarely in practice (with visa requirements a consideration). This is a model structure that several other Schools and subject areas have expressed interest in.

30. The Mode 1 archetype can be used to support pathway programmes where students can enrol on a single programme with multiple specialist exit awards (Figure 4). In this example all students select from a set of shared core & optional courses during Block 1 (semester 1 for full time programmes).   This links to a PG Certificate exit route in the core discipline/theme. For Blocks 2 & 3 students either continue with the core discipline or take courses and a capstone linked to one or more specialist pathways leading to PG Diploma and Masters exit routes. There is interest in using the Mode 1 archetype in this way to simplify programme administration and support opportunities for specialism (including areas where programmes already share some courses).
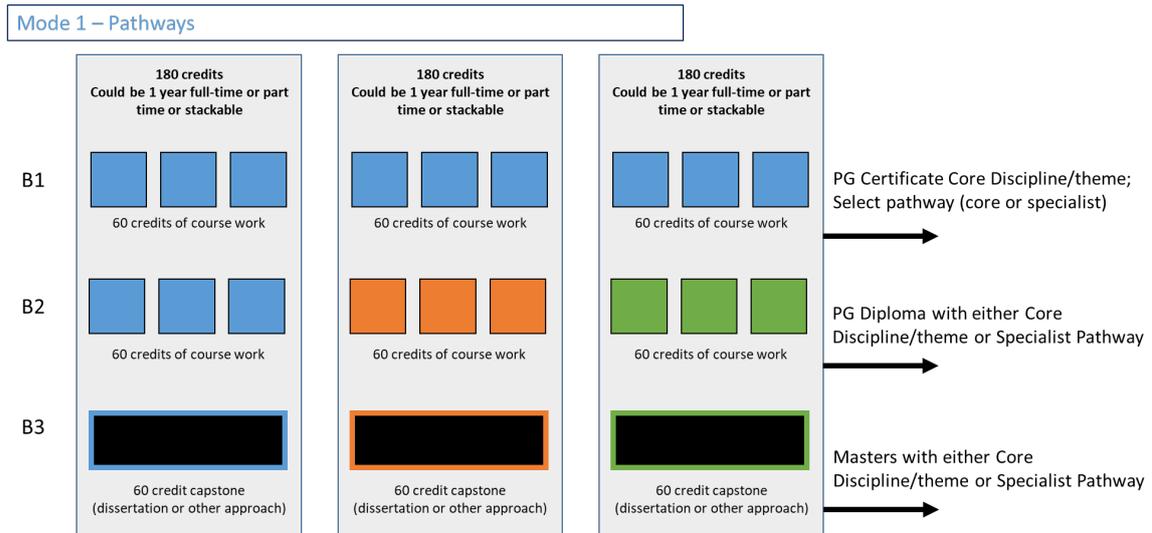
Figure 4 – Mode 1 applied to pathway programmes

31. Mode 2 – Activity Based

32. The Mode 2 archetype is centred on student-led activity. This could be professional practice, research-based or studio-based. The initial proposition was for a student-led activity that would run throughout the study period with a weighting ranging from 60 to 180 credits. This activity would be supported by some combination of supervision, mentoring, skills training or other co-curricular support and could be combined with credit bearing courses (Mode 1).

33. In updating the Mode 2 proposition based on the recent phase of engagement we are emphasising the flexibility of where in the study programme the student-led activity takes place. It could be spread evenly across three study blocks or concentrated in one or more blocks of study (Figure 5). The traditional masters model of two blocks (semesters) of taught courses followed by a 60 credit capstone would align with this definition of the Mode 2 archetype.

34. In this iteration of the Mode 2 archetype there is no minimum or maximum credit weighting for the student-led activity. Instead there is a requirement for the student-led activity to be supported by some combination of supervision, mentoring, skills training or other co-curricular support, and for progression points linked to the student-led activity to be designed and built in to the programme of study. These would support student learning, help monitor progress and ensure that students could exit with an interim award if necessary. The nature of the progression point and associated assessment task would be tailored to the student-led activity. For professional practice this could be linked to the achievement of interim learning goals (potentially co-created). For research they could be linked to activities like the development of a research proposal, systematic literature review, or project plan.
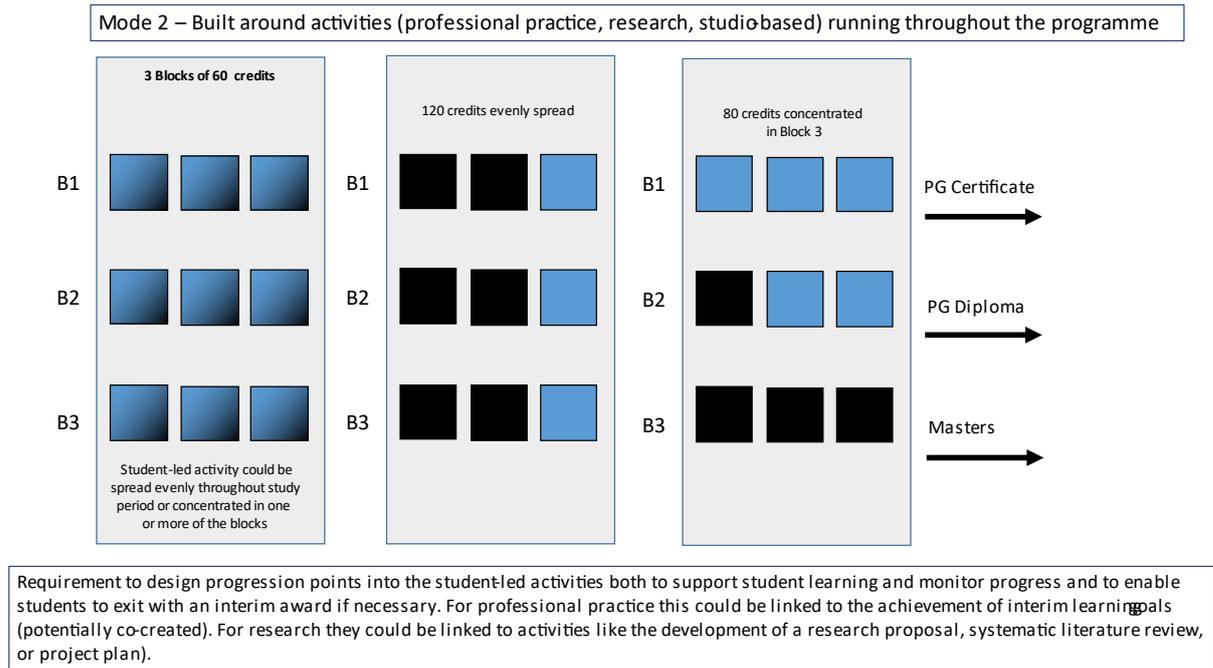
Figure 5 – Mode 2

35. We will work with the Doctoral College to test the applicability of the Mode 2 archetype to Masters by Research programmes and the PGT archetypes as a whole to structured Doctoral provision.   We will also include additional examples and case studies for the application of Mode 2 to professional practice programmes.

36. Mode 3 – Stackable

37. For the first iteration of the PGT Framework the thinking behind the Mode 3 archetype was to support more flexible and longer (potentially open-ended) study periods, and to develop a structure that would make it easier to bring together credit from multiple sources, that could be used to explore connections to micro-credentials and build links from CPD or PPD[3] into credit bearing programmes. In discussions with colleagues the major concerns with the original version of this archetype were risks around coherence, in maintaining the currency and value of learning, and of students losing their sense of connection and belonging over such an extended or open-ended study period, as well as the administrative costs and risks associated with open-ended matriculation and access to systems and services.

38. We have therefore re-framed Mode 3 to focus on the concept of stackable credit and how this could be implemented. Two specific applications of stackable credits that we want to build into the Curriculum Framework proposition are illustrated in Figure 6.

39. Standalone CPD courses are run outside the University credit-bearing teaching infrastructure and are not assessed for the award of University credit. There is significant interest from some areas of the University in being able to offer successful completion of these CPD courses or other relevant micro credentials as a stepping stone to study on a credit-bearing award. This is particularly relevant to some professional training and where there is overlap between the content of CPD and credit bearing courses. Access to an appropriately Quality Assured and robust Recognition of Prior Leaning (RPL) mechanism would be a positive recruitment tool for these programmes. It

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[3] Continuing Professional Development and Personal Professional Development

would also provide an opportunity for learners and the University to reassure themselves of their preparedness for postgraduate study (particularly important for those either new to or returning to Higher Education after a long absence) and support PGT widening access. This type of stackable pathway to study could be used for study programmes designed in line with either the Mode 1 or 2 archetypes.
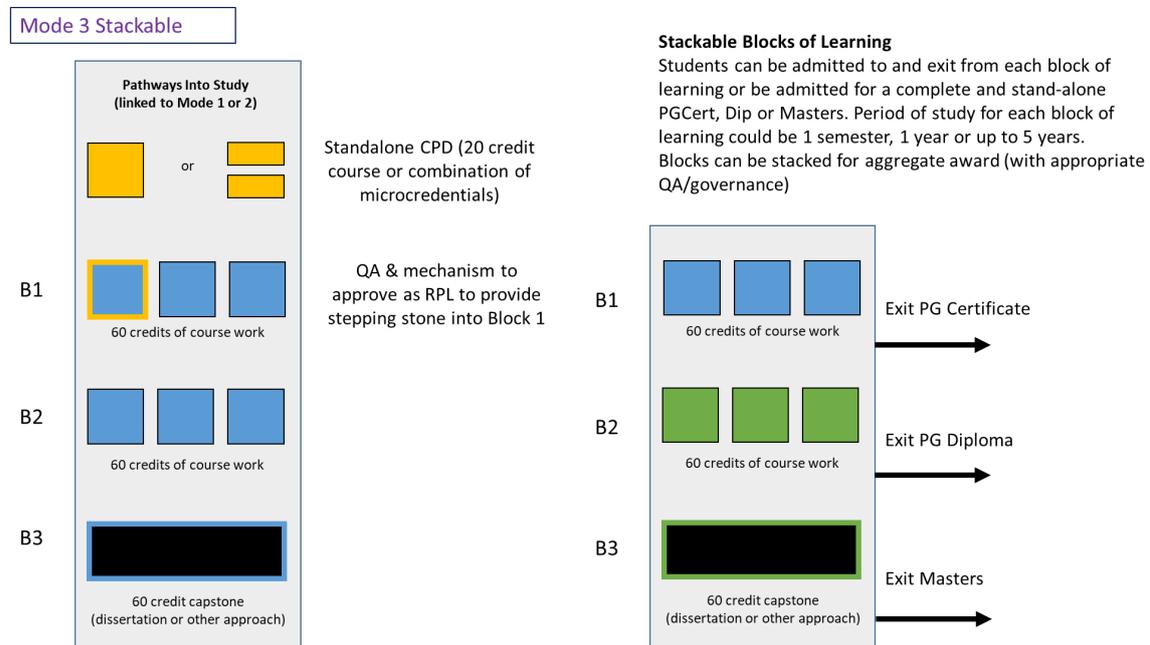

Figure 6 – Mode 3 (Stackable Learning)

40. The development of stackable blocks of learning, where students have up to 5 years to complete 60 credits of learning, would help manage the risks associated with open-ended study models. Students could be charged on a course-by-course basis during this 5-year window and on completion would have 60 credits of learning linked to a PGT award. With appropriate governance and QA in place these learning blocks could be stacked for an aggregate award over an extended period. Mode 3, 5-year stackable learning blocks could be combined with Modes 1 & 2 to permit more flexible study periods, while the combination of Mode 3 with either Modes 1 or 2 could accommodate more flexible pathways for entry/ or modes of study on admission (e.g. in response to student demand) and/or while on programme (e.g. if a student's circumstances change).

41. Taken together these options for stackable blocks of learning could be used as the foundation to build long term learning relationships with individuals and organisations. The Mode 3 archetype provides the space we need to explore how micro credentials and CPD could be aligned with other areas of the PGT framework, including thinking around Executive Education and short courses, and opportunities to add value and surface skills for Masters students. The Mode 3 archetype could be used to test and support models for block teaching as part of the credit bearing core of programmes or as bridging contact pre-arrival or alongside credit bearing courses.

42. Curriculum Design Principles

43. The PGT Framework includes a set of Curriculum Design Principles intended to guide decision making and planning for curriculum design, development and support for courses, programmes, Schools/Deaneries and the Institution (Figure 7).

Curriculum Design Principles

1. Be future ready

The next decade and beyond will bring unprecedented systemic changes to bear across the world. Is our approach resilient enough to adapt and respond at pace? Are our students, programmes and institution better prepared as a result?

2. Extend our impact

We are a force for change recognised globally. More than delivering high quality learning, being part of the UoE means actively learning to shape the future in areas like climate change, sustainability and social equity. Does our approach enable this to happen? How can we foster positive citizenship and give more agency to our students, programme portfolio and institution?

3. Foster disciplinary community & belonging

We value each and every discipline, large and small, and the community they create both within and outside of Edinburgh. We adopt an inclusive, welcoming approach and encourage connections.

4. Learn across boundaries

Complex social challenges require collaboration and curiosity, that's why we have a wealth of opportunity and knowledge at our fingertips that extends beyond traditional roles, disciplines and pathways. Not only that, but our students are changing too with different routes in and out of education. Our job should be to chart a path through this that delivers powerful outcomes and meaningful experiences at Edinburgh.

5. Focus on needs, inclusivity and wellbeing

The experience of studying and teaching here is as important as the content itself. We take the time to understand what students, staff and stakeholders need from us. We are welcoming and mindful of truly diverse needs and perspectives.

6. Amplify Edinburgh's excellence

Edinburgh has an incredible heritage, disciplinary excellence and place in the world. How can we identify what is distinctive about Edinburgh and our University and take full advantage in programmes, courses and day to day experiences and connections.

By doing this, we can give… **student & staff agency & consequence** which in turn creates a… **resilient institution** driven by our principles

Figure 7 Curriculum Design Principles

44. The Curriculum Design Principles are shared across both the Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Curriculum Frameworks and were developed through an iterative process as part of the Curriculum Design Principles & Architecture workstream. They are intended to speak directly to the content of the Edinburgh Student Vision and consultation. This includes consideration of how our curriculum helps students to be future ready and able to learn across boundaries, how we can amplify and play to Edinburgh's strengths, and with a focus on wellbeing, inclusivity and societal impact.

45. Discussion with Schools and other groups indicates a good alignment between the Curriculum Design Principles and priority areas for Schools and the questions colleagues have. The Curriculum Design Principles are intended as prompts to assist programme and course teams, teaching organisations and support services in developing and supporting the curriculum and approaches to teaching and assessment. This includes the introduction of the Assessment & Feedback Principles & Priorities and approaches that support learning at programme level. Guidance and resources (including examples of practice from across the University and sector) are being developed to inform the use of the principles by different individuals and groups (e.g. programme director, course organiser, teaching office, lecturer, teaching assistant, support service) for specific tasks (e.g. programme design, review, communication, prioritisation & planning).

46. Together the programme archetypes and Curriculum Design Principles provide a framework to support consistent action in support of priority areas and themes across the institution. Adoption of the framework, together with the local and institutional discussions that will accompany this, provide an opportunity for consistent, contextualised and concerted action across the institution.

47. Regulatory Enablers

48. In addition to the requirement to update the University Curriculum Framework[4], beginning with the Taught Postgraduate Curriculum Framework, programme archetypes

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[4] https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/staff/curriculum/curriculum-framework

and model programme structures set out in this paper, we have identified a number of regulatory issues and changes that need to be worked through to enable effective adoption of the PGT programme archetypes. This includes a proposal to remove progression hurdles (unless specified at a programme level) in favour of progression points, development of a Quality Assurance (QA) process for the assessment of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in line with the Mode 3 proposals, and consideration of the impact on current regulations around PGT study periods. It will also be important to make sure that the purpose of the PGT Curriculum Framework (to support and enable a vision for PGT education that is broad, adaptable and responsive) is reflected in the framing and use of the Degree and Assessment Regulations.

49. **Progression Hurdles and Points** - Our current Taught Assessment Regulations include the requirement that "For [postgraduate] programmes where there is an identifiable taught component followed by a project or dissertation component, students must pass the assessment requirements of the taught stage at an appropriate level at the first attempt before progression to the dissertation"[5], often referred to as a progression hurdle. In order to enable the flexibility inherent to the new PGT framework and archetypes our recommendation is that this mandatory requirement for progression hurdles be removed.

50. Instead, we propose the introduction of progression points linked to Mode 2 student-led learning activities for each 60-credit block of learning. The inclusion of these progression points would help support student learning, monitor progress and ensure that students could exit with an interim award if necessary. One or more of these progression points could become a progression hurdle (with students required to have met a specified set of requirements) where required for specific programmes (e.g. linked to the requirements for external accreditation). Individual programmes could take a similar approach (introduction of a specific progression hurdle) at the end of learning block 1 or learning block 2 for programmes built around the Mode 1 archetype where required. The system and process implications of this will have to be explored and assessed.

51. **QA Process for RPL -** We will need to review and update University Regulations around RPL[6] to align with the Mode 3 stackable archetype and its use to support more flexible paths to entry and stackable awards. This will include the development of a QA process that programmes will be able to use to approve RPL for entry and particularly for entry with credit and credit transfer in line with SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework)[7] requirements. Initial applications of this RPL process will include:
    - RPL for specific UoE credit and non-credit bearing short courses as pathways to postgraduate programmes (Certificate, Diploma, Masters).
    - Use of internal credit transfer to support assignment of stackable blocks of learning towards awards (Diploma and Masters).

52. **Impact on study periods and maximum allowable time** - Our current regulations[8] specify that students must complete their degree programme within the prescribed period of study, plus any permitted submission period and any approved concession(s). With a mix of permitted study periods for Postgraduate Certificates, Diplomas and Masters, based upon full-time, part-time continuous and part-time intermittent study, and

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[5] Regulation 56 https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/taughtassessmentregulations.pdf
[6] Sections 16-18 http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/23-24/regulations/PGDRPS23-24.pdf
[7] Section 4 https://scqf.org.uk/media/svxnjdts/scqf_handbook_web_final_2015.pdf
[8] Regulations 26-28 http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/23-24/regulations/PGDRPS23-24.pdf

the potential of concessions (interruption of study and extensions) this results in a wide range of potential study periods (see Postgraduate Study Period Table[9]).

53. We will need to review the impact of the archetypes on these study periods and explore the potential for simplification. It may, for example, be possible to use 5-year stackable learning blocks to accommodate both the prescribed period and any approved concessions to ensure coherence and currency of learning.

54. We should also consider the potential impact of Block Teaching (where teaching takes place intensively over a short/set period of time) on study periods and interest in intense shorter duration programmes (e.g. 9 month Masters). This may require the development of additional guidance on notional hours as applied to Block Teaching and shorter duration study periods.

55. We should also consider whether 5 years (rather than 2, 3 or 4 years) is the optimum maximum time period for the proposed Mode 3, 60-credit stackable learning block.

56. Approach to phasing

57. As illustrated above, these archetypes can be combined to support a wide range of model programme structures. The intention is that programmes and Schools would decide on the model structure or structures they want to use. They would also decide upon the mode of study (online, on-campus, hybrid) and define the course collections that would contribute to their programmes.

58. Schools/Programmes could choose to recruit to and/or support multiple modes of study and align course collections to more than one model structure. An example of this flexibility would be a Masters programme (with certificate, diploma and masters exit points) that could accommodate full time study over 1-year; part time study over 3-years; and study through three Mode 3 stackable blocks (each of 60 credits within 5 years).

59. The combination of archetypes and model programme structures opens up some important opportunities for phasing.   This could involve a transition phase where programmes are able to choose to become early adopters and move to one of the archetypes and permitted model structures in advance of the University wide adoption of the Framework.

60. **Transition Phase (from AY24/25)** - If the PGT Framework and archetypes are approved by SEC and Senate by the end of AY23/24 (or at the start of AY24/25) Schools and programmes could prepare proposals for approval during AY24/25 ready for students joining in AY25/26.   Schools and programmes could choose to introduce enhancements and changes that do not need to go through a formal approvals process (particularly linked to the Curriculum Design Principles) more quickly.

61. During this transition phase, priority model programme structures would be identified and used to roll out regulatory, approval, process and system changes or interim workarounds. The vast majority of the model structures discussed in this paper are already running somewhere in the University but need complex and sometimes unstable workarounds, requiring significant amounts of manual intervention, and with multiple different workarounds adopted to address the same purpose in different areas. During this transition phase programmes would be operating in an environment that has not been fully optimised to support the archetypes.   Adoption of the model programme structures would become easier as system/process enablers and changes are

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[9] Postgraduate Study Period Table http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/studyperiodtable.pdf

introduced prior to the University wide full adoption of the framework at the end of the transition phase.

62. Priority model structures to support and fast track during the transition phase could include:
    - Mode 1
        - With flexibility to support full time, part time (3 years) or part time stackable (up to 5 years for each study block). May initially need to be offered either as on-campus or online (rather than mixed mode or hybrid)
        - With flexibility to use Block 3 for a 60 credit capstone (traditional), for 60 credits of teaching or a mix of teaching and capstone (including block teaching)
        - With ability to provide stackable pathway into study (RPL of CPD course, micro-credentials or other prior learning) – all modes of study
        - 120 credit, 2-year Masters (2nd year project based)
        - Specialist pathway models (common core for Block 1 with specialism available in Blocks 2 and 3)
    - Mode 2
        - Explore potential application to Masters by Research
        - Test application (including progression/exit points) with Professional Practice programmes
    - Mode 3
        - Test application of Mode 3 to programmes that currently have extended or open-ended study periods
        - Test application to block teaching
        - Test application to CPD and micro credentials as pathways to support lifelong learning

63. **Compulsory, University-wide Phase (from AY26/27) -** The sense from School discussions is that adopting the PGT archetypes would have modest workload implications but be impactful in freeing up Schools to innovate in PGT design, and also react and respond to the evolving PGT market where there are challenges (e.g stronger demand for employability focus; stronger emphasis on stackable credentials over time). It is therefore proposed that we plan to move to the compulsory, University-wide adoption of the PGT Curriculum Framework and archetypes from September 2026 (AY26/27), with approval and verification being completed during AY25/26.

64. Work is under way now, and will be included in the Curriculum Transformation Outline Business Case, to confirm the system and process changes needed in advance of compulsory, University-wide adoption. We need to be sure of these constraints and requirements before confirming this timeline for phasing, and have confirmed that the workload for Schools and Colleges in preparing for this change is manageable. This will include an assessment of the number of programmes requiring major changes, minor changes or no changes (verification).

65. **Approach to Approvals and Verification** - We will be able to use existing approval mechanisms for programmes making minor or major changes using the new PGT Framework and archetypes. Based on our engagement activities during autumn 2023 we estimate that as many as 80% of our current postgraduate programmes are already aligned with the archetypes and model programme structures presented in this paper. Our recommendation is that we should develop a light touch verification process linked to annual programme QA reporting. As part of the summer 2025 programme QA report these programmes would be required to confirm their alignment with specific model programme structures and archetypes, and provide an action plan for any adjustments

needed to support this alignment (e.g. around programme documentation). Guidance for this process would be issued in autumn 2024.

Resource implications

66. The project resources to date have been managed through the project team staff time to support the development of the curriculum framework and the supporting the curriculum work.

67. An Outline Business Case is being prepared that sets out the resource requirements and implications of Curriculum Transformation. This includes consideration of the investment needed at an institutional level, in Schools and through the project team to support the design, development and implementation of the project.

Risk management

68. The project team maintain a risk register which is reviewed, presented and discussed at the Curriculum Transformation Project Board in addition to follow up actions with the risk owners and those responsible for taking any actions set out to mitigate the risks. The approach to risk management will be reviewed and refined in response to the recommendations of the external review of People & Money.

Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals

69. Curriculum Transformation will support a positive contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the University. Objectives around inclusive and equitable access to education (SDG4), wellbeing (SDG3) and gender equality (SDG5) align with the purpose of Curriculum Transformation and the prototype Curriculum Design Principles. SDG13 (action to combat climate change and its impact) features directly in the Edinburgh Student Vision and through consideration by a Climate and Sustainability working group.

Equality & diversity

70. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for the overall approach to Curriculum Transformation, the organisation and management of the Curriculum Transformation Project was completed in November 2022. Further EqIA will be undertaken as part of the development and implementation phases of Curriculum Transformation.

71. Work is underway, based on discussions with the Curriculum Transformation Board, the University Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee and other stakeholders, on the development of an Equality Impact Assessment for the proposed Curriculum Framework. The approach being taken is to identify opportunities to design in positive action and support for equity, diversity and inclusion, and to identify risks and amelioration around roll out and adoption. This will be discussed by the Board and with Senate Quality Assurance Committee.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

72. The proposal presented in this paper will be taken to Senate Education Committee for discussion and endorsement at its meeting on 7th March 2024 and to College Committees during February to April 2024. Feedback from SQAC, SEC and Colleges will be used to update the proposal ready for consideration and approval by Senate in May 2024.

73. Regular updates will be provided to Colleges, Senate Committees, Directors of Teaching and other groups alongside updates via the Bulletin and other routes.

Author
Dr Jon Turner
Curriculum Transformation Project Lead
12th February 2024

Freedom of Information
Open

<u>The University of Edinburgh</u>
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

22 February 2024

Quality Enhancement and Standards Review

Description of paper

1. The final report from the University's Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR).

Action requested / recommendation

2. For discussion.

Background and context

3. QESR is the current method used by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to review higher education institutions in Scotland for the academic sessions 2022-23 and 2023-24. It forms Phase 1 of a two-phase approach to external institutional quality review which is being developed within the context of a major Scottish Funding Council (SFC) review, Coherent Provision and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research. The SFC is currently working with the Scottish sector to develop tertiary arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement which will be implemented from the start of academic session 2024-25.

4. On Wednesday 24 January, 2024, QAA Scotland published the final report from the University's QESR that took place on 16 November, 2023.

Discussion

5. The overall headline outcome of the review is positive, but we still have considerable work to do. Overall, the review team was confident that the University is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

6. The QESR team commended the Institute for Academic Development in establishing a network of secondees and associates embedded within Schools to support developments in learning and teaching.

7. The QESR team assessed our progress with the 10 recommendations from the previous review (ELIR 4). The team considered sufficient progress to have been taken in relation to four of the recommendations and recognised that action had been initiated in all the areas, but there was still "further work to be done to progress a number where the impact of the action being undertaken is not yet complete". The team also made a number of additional recommendations, two of which require immediate action within the remainder of this academic year and which require School-level action.

      a. The QESR team recommends that we take "immediate action within the current academic year to ensure the new Assessment and Feedback

Principles and Priorities (developed in response to ELIR 4) are fully implemented in all schools, that feedback turnaround times and quality are monitored effectively, and that prompt action is taken to address shortcomings".

b. The QESR team recommends that we take "prompt action, within the current academic year, to consistently implement its updated policy and to ensure that training for PGRs who teach is required at University and School-level, and that this action is monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure all PGRs are fully supported in undertaking their duties."

8. We are currently in the process of establishing an oversight group (joint between Senate Education Committee and Senate Quality Assurance Committee) to take the recommendations forward and ensure they are all addressed within the timelines indicated.

Resource implications
9. No resource implications are directly associated with the paper which is a report on activity. Resource implications are implicit in existing planning by support services.

Risk management
10. No risk assessment is included in the paper. Services carry out risk assessment on areas for development.

Equality & diversity
11. No equality and diversity implications are directly associated with the paper. Services consider equality impact as part of the annual reporting process.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed
12. The Committee should consider communication, implementation and evaluation of any actions resulting from the paper.

Author:
Professor Tina Harrison,
Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement)
February 2024

Freedom of Information: The paper is **open**.

Quality Enhancement and Standards Review

University of Edinburgh

Review Report

November 2023

Contents

Introduction

This is a report of a review under the [Quality Enhancement and Standards Review](#) (QESR) method conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) as part of Phase 1 of the Scottish Quality Enhancement arrangements at the University of Edinburgh.

The review took place on 16 November 2023 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Janet Allison (Coordinating Reviewer)
- Amy Gallacher (Student Reviewer)
- Professor Jonathan Scott (Academic Reviewer).

QESR is Phase 1 of a two-phase approach that enables the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to fulfil its statutory obligation under Section 13 of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005* to ensure that provision is made for assessing and enhancing the quality of fundable higher education provided by fundable bodies for academic quality and enhancement between 2022-24. The second phase of QAA's external quality review arrangements starts in 2024-25 to coincide with the implementation of new tertiary quality arrangements.

The main purpose of this review was to:

- provide assurance about the provider's management of its responsibilities for academic standards to inform an enhancement-led full institutional review in Phase 2

- provide assurance about the provider's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities for students to inform an enhancement-led full review in Phase 2

- report on any features of good practice

- make recommendations for action.

About the University of Edinburgh

The University of Edinburgh was founded in 1583 and is one of Scotland's four ancient universities. The University describes itself as a large and diverse, research-intensive university.

The University occupies an estate of more than 550 buildings organised in five main campuses spread across Edinburgh. The University's academic structure is based on three colleges, each led by a Vice-Principal: the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (28,570 students in 2022-23); the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (8,410 students in 2022-23); and the College of Science and Engineering (12,760 students in 2022-23) which are in turn arranged in 21 schools.

In 2022-23, the University had a total student population (headcount) of 49,740 of whom: 29,765 were undergraduate; 13,550 were postgraduate taught (PGT); and 6,425 were postgraduate research (PGR). Of the 2022-23 student population, 13,290 were studying part-time.

Findings

From the evidence presented, the review team is confident that the University of Edinburgh 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.

Good practice

The QESR team found the following **features of good practice**.

- **School networks in support of learning and teaching development:** The work of the Institute for Academic Development in establishing a network of secondees and associates embedded within the schools to support developments in learning and teaching (paragraph 7).

Recommendations for action

In 2021, the University of Edinburgh received 10 recommendations from Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR 4). The QESR team acknowledged the University's progress on four of those recommendations. However, for the remainder, the QESR team considers further progress and more timely action must be undertaken to fulfil the recommendations. The University should prioritise action on the following recommendations from ELIR 4 so that the impact of the action being undertaken is completed effectively, impacts positively on the student learning experience and is being implemented consistently across schools. In addition, the QESR team makes the following **recommendations for action** based on, and in addition to, the ELIR 4 recommendations:

- **Pace of change:** The University should make progress on and accelerate its actions in response to the recommendations from the previous ELIR, ensuring effective and consistent implementation by all schools, and monitor the outcomes, in order to evidence significant progress within the next academic year (paragraph 20).

- **Learning and Teaching Strategy:** The University should expedite the final drafting, approval and implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy to help staff and students understand how major strategic projects work together and provide clarity on the strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching (paragraph 19).

- **Assessment and feedback:** The University should take immediate action, within the current academic year, to ensure that the new Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities (developed in response to ELIR 4) are fully implemented in all schools, that feedback turnaround times and quality are monitored effectively, and that prompt action is taken to address any shortcomings (paragraphs 23-25).

- **Training for postgraduate research (PGR) students who teach:** The University should take prompt action, within the current academic year, to consistently implement its updated policy and to ensure that training for PGRs who teach is required at the university and school-level, and that this action is monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that all PGRs are fully supported in undertaking their teaching duties (paragraph 21).

- **Promotion of academic staff based on teaching:** The University should clearly and accurately record data on promotion routes based on teaching excellence so it can effectively evidence the implementation of its goal to achieve parity between teaching and research, and take action to ensure this aim is met (paragraph 26).

- **Attainment gap monitoring:** The University should pay particular attention to sharing good practice and supporting staff in understanding the causes of attainment gaps and taking effective action (paragraph 27).

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Strategic approach to enhancement

1   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor, review and enhance its strategic approach to enhancement. The team considered a range of documents, including: the University's Strategy 2030; the report to the Scottish Funding Council; the Outcome Agreement; the proposals and associated action plans in relation to development of the Learning and Teaching Strategy; the mapping of learning and teaching to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code); and the minutes of the Senate Quality Assurance Committee and the Senate Education Committee (SEC). The team also met with staff and students.

2   The University's Strategy 2030 sets out four areas of focus for the University. In the area of learning and teaching, the overarching objectives are that teaching will match the excellence of the research and that there will be sustained improvements in student satisfaction and wellbeing.The University has set out its current strategic approach to enhancement which is linked to four main projects: the Curriculum Transformation Programme (CTP); the new Student Support Model; Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities; and the Continuous Service Improvement Programme. At present, the University recognises that, while each project has a set of action plans, there is not a high-level action plan providing coordinating oversight of all the projects: it is planned that this should form part of the Learning and Teaching Strategy when this is formulated. Oversight of the projects is currently maintained by reporting lines to Court, the University Executive, and the Senate. The University has also recently approved the establishment of a University Initiative Portfolio Board which will provide oversight of strategic projects and the development of new initiatives along with managing prioritisation.

3   The CTP is planned to run until academic year (AY) 2025-26, setting out a 'vision of an outstanding educational experience for students'. As such, it is seen as underpinning the current strategic direction in learning and teaching with progress being reported on to SEC as a standing agenda item**,** as well as update reports to the University Executive. Key features of the CTP include the development of Challenge Courses and Experiential Learning as well as improving teaching efficiency and more effective use of the physical and digital estate. The QESR team was informed by senior staff that the University has engaged with academic champions in the schools to help identify the core elements of CTP and to strengthen communications. However, in meetings with the team, some staff and students observed that they were unclear about the direction and timescale for the project.

4   Progress with the new Student Support Model is reported by the University in its self-evaluation for QESR as being excellent, with initial implementation taking place in AY 2022-23 and full roll-out in AY 2023-24. The overview report indicated that the new model was well received by staff and students with the provision of more effective and consistent levels of student support. This perspective was also confirmed by staff who met with the team, although some students observed that there was confusion over the channels of communication and role responsibilities of key staff, resulting in lack of clarity for some students.

5   The Continuous Service Improvement Programme (CSIP) is monitored by the Student Lifecycle Management Group, with reporting to the University Executive. The CSIP incorporates several projects intended to improve the student journey. Task and finish groups have been established 'with a view to implementing initial small changes for AY 2023-24'. These include large-scale projects such as timetabling, which are seen as a priority and are ongoing, as well as improved planning for course enrolments; review of the schemes for fees, bursaries and scholarships; improved induction and enhanced creation of

a sense of belonging; improvements in the capture and use of student feedback and an enhanced communications strategy. Outcomes of the CSIP have included guidance on the recognition, reward and remuneration for students who support the work of the University.

6   The University's plans to enhance the student learning experience are also articulated in the Digital Strategy which is linked to its engagement with the sector-wide enhancement topic (paragraphs 28-29), and underpinned through the objectives of the Curriculum Transformation Programme and the pre-existing work undertaken by the Edinburgh Futures Institute. This is also supported through the work of the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) which offers a range of focused workshops on developing digital teaching practices and the opportunity to engage in a peer observation of teaching (POT scheme), specifically focused on digital teaching practices. The University has also committed significant resource to prioritise major investments totalling over £2 million to enhance the digital estate.

7   The IAD has developed an ongoing provision of staff development activities in support of learning and teaching. These have included an annual learning and teaching conference, staff engagement with the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice and recognition of fellowships at all four levels of the Professional Standards Framework. The IAD also delivered a wide range of workshops for staff covering different topics to support enhancement of academic practice. The IAD also hosts a number of staff on secondment each year, enabling them to focus time on specific enhancement projects. Former secondees remain engaged with the IAD as associates who form a network linking the IAD with their academic schools as well as being active contributors to the University's Teaching Matters blog. The embedding of the current and former secondees within the schools has helped disseminate good practice and drive developments in learning and teaching. The QESR team consider that the work of the Institute for Academic Development in establishing a network of secondees and associates embedded within the schools to support pedagogic developments, is a feature of **good practice.**

Student partnership

8   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor, review and enhance its approach to student partnership. The team considered the Student Partnership Agreement (SPA); Outcome Agreement to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) 2022-23; Annual report to the SFC on Institution-led Review and Enhancement Activity 2022-23; UK Quality Code Mapping; Internal Periodic Review (IPR) Handbook and Guidance; relevant institutional committee minutes considering student survey feedback; and met with staff and students.

9   The overarching framework for student engagement is set out in the University's revised Student Voice Policy (SVP), which outlines the role and responsibilities of students, staff and university-level committees to ensure that partnership arrangements meet sector expectations. This is supported by extensive mapping to the Quality Code which provides an overview of student engagement activities at course, programme and institutional-levels. At school and college-level, students are given the opportunity to provide feedback through locally managed course evaluation, programme representatives, student-staff liaison committees and engagement with IPR in review meetings and as panel members; which is then used by staff to support reflection during annual monitoring self-evaluation activities. Opportunities for students to provide institution-level feedback are provided through Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) student officers, university-wide student surveys (NSS, PTES, PRES, pulse surveys) and student panels and focus groups; with feedback then being used to inform institutional planning and development of strategic initiatives.

10   The University's commitment to working in partnership with students is outlined

through its Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) - which is updated annually - and identifies shared priority areas between the University and the EUSA, reflecting key challenges affecting the student experience. As each of the SPA themes is intended to recognise existing areas of partnership, work in relation to the SPA is progressed through university-level project or task groups, as well as through new initiatives. In particular, the Curriculum Transformation Programme (CTP) and Continuous Service Improvement Programme (CSIP), both of which are feeding into the development of the new Learning and Teaching Strategy, were highlighted as examples of where ongoing work addresses SPA themes.

11   The University is taking action to address 2023 NSS scores around Student Voice that indicate that 82.27% of students are satisfied with the opportunities available to provide feedback on their course but only 46.16% agree that they know how their feedback is acted upon. This is also reflected in IPR report recommendations from AY 2022-23 which highlight the need to close the feedback loop with students. As part of the SVP, schools have transitioned from using centrally-managed Course Enhancement Questionnaires (CEQ) to locally-managed course evaluation. This change is intended to facilitate closer student-staff interaction at a local level, with school staff responsible for monitoring and evaluating their approach to student voice activities. Progress reports on university-level actions arising from thematic analysis of Annual Quality Reports state that a toolkit has been developed to help support school staff and that monitoring of school-level approaches would continue to ensure effectiveness of the various approaches adopted and enable the sharing of best practice. Students highlighted examples of where course leaders have already taken steps to strengthen communication channels, including use of personalised emails updating cohorts on any actions taken in response to feedback provided.

12   Student representatives that met with the QESR team recognised the closing of the feedback loop as an issue, explaining that they often encounter the same feedback at both school and institutional-levels, and that when feedback is provided, they 'hope' it is acted upon. Student representatives explained that receiving blanket 'nothing can be done' responses from staff was particularly frustrating and demoralising. Staff confirmed that they had experience of receiving feedback that could not be resolved at school-level; however, they highlighted that some Colleges had established Student-Staff Liaison Committees to ensure that feedback can progress through appropriate channels. The QESR team heard that the University is exploring training for staff on how to respond to student feedback when it cannot be actioned; recognising that when action is taken in response to student feedback, either at course-level or when it informs the development of a strand of a strategic initiative, the timescales may prohibit student awareness of the impact of their contribution. Senior staff reported an increasing trend towards use of 'mid-course feedback collection' by schools as it allows action to be taken within the semester and increases opportunities to close the feedback loop with students.

13   Despite the reported NSS student satisfaction with feedback opportunities, reporting to the SFC identifies that schools and deaneries have experienced 'persistently low levels of student engagement with centrally and locally managed feedback initiatives', which has frustrated staff due to the impact on the utility of any feedback acquired. Staff explained while they have run focus groups to understand why students have not engaged with feedback opportunities, focused on building constructive relationships with student representatives and have trialled different feedback gathering initiatives which recognise and reflect 'what matters to students', engaging students continues to be extremely difficult. Examples of where staff have taken action to improve partnership working arrangements with student representatives is recorded in the SFC report, which provides specific examples of where collaboration has resulted in the design of course evaluation methods, creation of additional in-house surveys, and development of supporting guidance for student representatives.

14   Senior staff recognised both closing the feedback loop and low levels of student engagement as ongoing challenges for the University, and confirmed they are working closely with EUSA, student representatives and the wider student body using student panels, pulse surveys and focus groups to enhance institutional understanding of both issues. The QESR heard that while the Student Lifecycle Management Group continues to identify and disseminate best practice from monitoring of school-level approaches, it was felt that the increased flexibility of the new model had undermined clarity on expectations underpinning student engagement and has meant that continuous improvement to student engagement activities is not currently 'self-fulfilling'. The University should continue to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the new arrangements to assure itself that the SVP vision of student-staff owned, strategically-led student engagement is fully realised.

Action taken since ELIR 4

15   In 2021, the University of Edinburgh received 10 recommendations from Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR 4). The QESR team concludes that the University has made sufficient progress on four of those recommendations but further action is required on the remaining recommendations from ELIR 4. In coming to this conclusion, the team considered the ELIR 4 action plan progress update, the ELIR follow-up report, the annual reports to the Scottish Funding Council, the minutes of the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC), the Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee and the ELIR Oversight Group. The team also met with staff and students.

16   ELIR 4 (2021) identified 10 areas for development. The University was asked to make significant progress, within the following academic year on two of those recommendations (assessment and feedback, and the personal tutor scheme). The University has initiated actions in all areas but there is still further work to be done to progress a number of these where the impact of the action being undertaken is not yet complete, fully impacting positively on the student learning experience or being implemented consistently across schools. In aiming to address the recommendations, the University has established several working groups with reporting lines through to the ELIR Oversight Group which, in turn reports to the University Executive.

17   The ELIR 4 team recommended that the University increased oversight and planning for growth of student numbers and the QESR team concludes that sufficient progress has been made. In AY 2022-23, the University agreed a set of objectives - for on-campus undergraduate, taught postgraduate, and postgraduate research students, as well as for part-time online master's students - which are linked to the ambitions of the University's Strategy 2030 and underpinned by the Strategic Performance Framework; the initial focus being on the undergraduate and postgraduate taught student populations. The University Executive agreed the Strategic Recruitment Enrolment Plan which incorporates a set of key performance indicators including specific consideration of widening participation and international student recruitment. The planning also includes provision of additional resources to support teaching in previously over-recruited areas.

18   The ELIR 4 team recommended that the University provided institutional oversight and ensured clarity for staff on the strategic approach to the enhancement of learning and teaching, in particular during the transitional period between the previous Learning and Teaching Strategy, which ended in 2019, and the development of a new one. In response, the University has built on key strategic projects, including: the Curriculum Transformation Programme; the Continuous Service Improvement Programme (CSIP) assessment; and feedback, training and support for PGR tutors and academic staff development; some of these being addressed as specific responsive actions set out below. Work is focused on developing approaches to institutional consistency and establishment of methods for monitoring across schools.

19   It was reported that a task group of the Senate Education Committee (SEC) would take forward the work of developing a new Learning and Teaching Strategy in the first half of AY 2022-23. Subsequently SEC, in September 2023, 'discussed a proposal for the development of a Learning and Teaching Strategy', agreeing that 'an initial draft will be developed for further discussion. In a meeting with staff, the QESR team was told that, in the absence of an institutional strategy, schools had developed their own approaches. At the meeting with senior staff, the team was informed that a draft strategy had recently been formulated and undergone an initial review by SEC. The team was provided with a copy of the draft following the QESR visit. Given the delays in developing the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the associated direction for schools, the QESR team **recommends** that the University expedites the final drafting, approval and implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy to help staff and students understand how major strategic projects work together and provide clarity on the strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching.

20   More effective management of the pace of change was recommended by the ELIR 4 team. This was taken on board as a series of recommendations by the Senior Leadership Team in September 2022, intended to take the form of the series of identified strategic change projects which are linked to Strategy 2030, and which provide clarity regarding the intended outcomes. There is recognition that the University still needs to develop effective ways of managing strategic projects and the QESR team was informed that a University Initiatives Portfolio Board has been established to maintain oversight of these projects and manage prioritisation along with an oversight group, chaired by the Provost, with the Heads of Colleges to ensure effective line management of project implementation. The QESR team **recommends** that the University makes progress on and accelerates its actions in response to the recommendations from the previous ELIR - ensuring effective and consistent implementation by all schools - and monitors the outcomes, in order to evidence significant progress within the next academic year.

21   The ELIR 4 team recommended that the University should ensure effective implementation of its policy for the training and support for postgraduate students who teach. At its meeting in March 2023, the ELIR Oversight Group recognised that there was still progress needed to implement the policy for Tutors and Demonstrators, including postgraduate (PGR) students who teach. This issue is being addressed by a Training Working Group, overseen by the Institute for Academic Development, which has resulted in guidance being developed for the implementation of the policy to ensure consistency across schools. The QESR team was informed that the supplementary guidance to support the policy had been approved by Senate Education Committee the week preceding the QESR visit. PGR students who met the QESR team reported that they had engaged with university-level training, though there was some confusion as to whether that training was mandatory. They also observed that programme-specific training was provided within schools, although this appeared variable and dependent on school provision. Likewise, there was variation in the perceived quality of school-level support provided for PGRs. Staff who met the QESR team reported that a PGR network was planned to further support PGRs who teach, but that there was still variability regarding policy implementation and governance within the schools. The team noted that the proposals for PGR training were appropriate but that more work needed to be done to embed them within the schools. The University should prioritise and complete the recommendation on training for PGR students who teach from ELIR 4, expediting progress to ensure that the work being undertaken is effective. In addition, the QESR team **recommends** that the University should take prompt action, within the current academic year, to consistently implement its updated policy and to ensure that training for PGRs who teach is required at university and school-level, and that this action is monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that all PGRs are fully supported in undertaking their teaching duties.

22   At the time of the 2021 ELIR, the timeline for the implementation of the new Student

Support Model was planned for academic year AY 2023-24. The ELIR team noted that the University had been developing its approach to personal tutoring over an extended time period and recommended that there should be significant progress in implementing its plans, and asked the University to reflect on whether the timescale for implementation (AY 2023-24) was sufficiently ambitious. In response, the University established a new Student Wellbeing Service in September 2022 with an accelerated rollout of the new Student Support Model. Phase 1 was introduced for all new students in AY 2022-23 with Phase 2 being implemented for all students in AY 2023-24. Initial indications are that the system has been well received by staff and students, with greater consistency of support provision. The University reports progress as being 'excellent' and that adoption of the new Student Adviser, Wellbeing Adviser and Academic Cohort Lead roles has already begun to fulfil the strategic initiative aim of ensuring all students have access to appropriate academic guidance and wellbeing support during their studies. This was endorsed by staff who explained that the distinct support roles had provided a more accessible and consistent student support offering. Students that met with the QESR team generally reported optimistically on their experience of the new support arrangements; however, they expressed concern over lack of student awareness regarding which staff held roles in their school, flagging that online students as a group were particularly affected, and that there was the need for clarity on role responsibilities and communication channels between staff when referring students on to other support services. The QESR team recognises that the University is currently developing an evaluation model to provide ongoing quality assurance for the new Student Support Model arrangements; however, the team considers in the interim period that there would be benefit in strengthening communication with students regarding role responsibilities of staff and opportunities for students to provide feedback on the new model.

23 Assessment and feedback was identified as an area for development in both the 2015 and 2021 ELIR reports. The University was therefore asked to make demonstrable progress within the academic year following the 2021 ELIR. As a result, the University's Assessment and Feedback Task Group was established to develop a set of Principles and Priorities. These were approved in May 2022 by the Senate Education Committee alongside the establishment of the Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group and the Assessment and Feedback Guidance, Procedures, Data, Systems and Evaluation Group.

24 Schools have been required to report on their engagement with the Principles and Priorities as part of their annual monitoring procedure with evaluation via quality reports overseen by the Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group. The reports considered by the School Annual Quality Reports Sub-Group indicate variable progress in implementation of the Principles and Priorities. The ELIR 4 Action Plan - Progress Update 2023 states that the progress and impact of these Principles and Priorities have been impacted by the industrial action and the marking and assessment boycott - which is reflected in the National Student Survey (NSS) scores for assessment and feedback - with the largest impact being on feedback turnaround times. The University acknowledges in its annual report to the Scottish Funding Council that there are inconsistencies in meeting feedback return dates, and this was further confirmed during the QESR review meetings. In this context, the QESR team noted that the University was 11.9 percentage points below benchmark for assessment and feedback in the 2023 NSS and that both the quality and timing of feedback were identified as specific issues in the free-text comments. Students also commented on the variable quality of the feedback received. Senior staff recognise that this must be a priority for the University and informed the team that meetings have taken place with College Heads to ensure they monitor turnaround times and report upwards regarding any instances of these not being met. They also informed the team that assessment and feedback will be a focus for programme redesign as part of the Curriculum Transformation Programme.

25 The ELIR 4 recommendation on assessment and feedback also asked the University

to progress with proposals for a common marking scheme. The team heard that work is progressing with the identification of a preferred approach and that high-level principles have been established but that local tailoring of assessment schemes and marking criteria at school-level was proving challenging in some areas. The University should prioritise and complete the recommendation on assessment and feedback from ELIR 4, expediating progress to ensure that the work being undertaken is effective. In addition, the QESR team **recommends** that the University should take immediate action, within the current academic year, to ensure that the new Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities (developed in response to ELIR 4) are fully implemented in all schools, that feedback turnaround times and quality are monitored effectively, and that prompt action is taken to address any shortcomings.

26   The ELIR 4 team asked the University to progress with work to improve the recognition of teaching excellence across all aspects of the University. To aid recognition and support for academic staff development, and the promotion of academic staff based on teaching, the University is developing approaches to enhance support for professional development in teaching which is underpinned by a range of programmes delivered by the Institute for Academic Development. The University has also developed its HR policies to put greater emphasis on 'Contribution to Teaching' and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations for implementation in AY 2024-25 with the aim of ensuring parity of teaching alongside research with associated promotion pathways. The team was informed that staff recognised that there had been improvements in the recognition of teaching but that there was still more to be done, particularly at school-level. The University provided the team with data on promotions but was unable to disaggregate them in terms of the different promotion routes. As such, it was not possible to determine the scale of improvement in recognition for leadership in teaching. The University should prioritise and complete the recommendation on promotion of academic staff based on teaching from ELIR 4, expediating progress to ensure that the work being undertaken is effective. In addition, the QESR team **recommends** that the University should clearly and accurately record data on promotion routes based on teaching excellence so it can effectively evidence the implementation of its goal to achieve parity between teaching and research, and take action to ensure this aim is met.

27   The University had a recommendation from ELIR 4 to consider how to address attainment gaps in student performance through the oversight, coordination and monitoring at an institutional level of school-level actions. Work has been undertaken through SQAC and the use of Thematic Reviews to identify awarding gaps. It is noted that schools have engaged but 'have struggled to understand the underlying causes or what good practice should be encouraged'. The University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) has been engaged with trying to determine the underlying causes for sharing with schools. The associated baselines are planned to be incorporated into the annual monitoring cycle. The QESR team was informed that work is ongoing to support transition and progression, and that this is linked into the Curriculum Transformation Programme. The University should prioritise and complete the recommendation on attainment gap oversight, coordination and monitoring from ELIR 4, expediating progress to ensure that the work being undertaken is effective. In addition, the QESR team **recommends** that the University should pay particular attention to sharing good practice and supporting staff in understanding the causes of attainment gaps and taking effective action.

Sector-wide enhancement topic

28   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering. The team considered Enhancement Topic related Project updates, Digital Strategy updates, uptake of relevant staff development opportunities, the SFC Report, Annual Outcome Agreement, minutes from key institutional committees, and met with staff and students.

29   The University's engagement with the sector-wide enhancement theme - 'The future of learning and teaching: Defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering' - is embedded in its Digital Strategy and through key strategic projects including the development of the new Learning and Teaching Strategy and digital education strand of the Curriculum Transformation Programme. It is underpinned by prior research and projects led by the Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) which, in 2022, launched a major suite of postgraduate taught hybrid programmes delivered through what the University calls 'fusion' teaching, which allows students to combine on-campus with online study, and teaches on-campus and online students together as a single cohort. Post-pandemic, the University has continued to invest in its digital infrastructure, reporting that 5,000 modules have been migrated to the new virtual learning environment (VLE) and it has invested in equipping 400 classrooms with audio visual equipment to support hybrid delivery. Realisation of the Digital Strategy has been enhanced through the formation of the new Digital Estate Prioritisation Group short-life working group (DEP) which will oversee the development and effective management and prioritisation of major digital estate investments.

30   Senior staff confirmed that student-facing professional services are required to reflect on how well they meet the needs of 'online and digital learners' and that thematic analysis of the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) has been used to support institutional understanding of differences in student satisfaction between student groups. Students that met with the QESR team expressed the view that sense of community can be negatively impacted by primary mode of study, and the University is aware that satisfaction for fully online students is lower on the theme of community than for other postgraduate taught students. Students reported an appetite for greater engagement with their academic peers through course or subject-level social events, and for staff support when trying to self-initiate opportunities to network with peers. Staff recognised the challenge of integrating different student cohorts and providing opportunities to collaborate when students are studying across different time zones.

Academic standards and quality processes

Key features of the institution's approach to managing quality and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards

31   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place for the monitoring and review of its approach to managing quality and to setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards. The team considered the institution-led review reports, the University's approach to annual monitoring, papers and minutes from institutional committees, and met with staff and students.

32   The QESR team found that the University's arrangements for managing quality and setting standards meet the Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and align with the guidance on quality issued by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Institutional policies relating to programme and course development are aligned to sector expectations set out in the Quality Code, taking account of relevant Subject

Benchmark Statements, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and relevant qualification frameworks.

33   The University has in place an overarching framework for the annual monitoring of programmes which is undertaken for all credit-bearing provision and non-credit bearing massive open online courses (MOOCs). Internal Periodic Review (IPR) allows for an in-depth investigation of the quality of academic provision over a six-year cycle. The reports are published on the website, followed by a 14-week response and a year-on response. Student Support Service Annual Review and periodic, cross-service Thematic Review are also in place for Student Services and reports are considered by the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC). Clear and concise supporting documentation for staff and students include the IPR Handbook, IPR Guidance for Staff, ILR Guidance for Students and Thematic Review Guidance. Areas of good practice identified in the IPR reports are published annually on the university website, along with areas for further development with the University identifying where the proposed responsibility for action lies. The IPR Schedule, up to and including AY 2028-29, is published on the university website covering undergraduate, postgraduate and research provision.

34   At individual school-level, programme or programme cluster reports are provided to the School Director of Quality to inform the preparation of school annual quality reports. College quality committees (or equivalent) consider the annual reports, identifying themes and areas of good practice, and areas for further development. The annual monitoring templates are designed so that updates on key institutional issues are required to be included in the report - specifically, reflections on the Student Voice Policy, the Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities, and the industrial action. The University considers digital and blended learning as part of its broader approach to quality review - for example, via annual monitoring and IPR, some of these focusing specifically on online digital programmes.

35   Assessment and feedback have been identified as areas for development in the ELIR 2015 and ELIR 2021 reports and, in 2021, the University was asked to make demonstrable progress within the next academic year (detailed in paragraphs 23-25).

36   The responsibility for programme approval and programme modification is devolved to the University's schools and colleges and these are considered by Boards of Studies, which include student representation, that meet at least once a year. The Boards of Studies are required to confirm that all new programmes align with institutional strategy, are academically rigorous, align with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and take account of Subject Benchmark Statements and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements.

37   The University has clearly mapped the arrangements for partnerships to the Quality Code and has an Academic Collaboration Advisory Group as the key contact for staff advice and guidance. A range of policies and a set of guidance documents set out the approval processes for the various collaborative agreements and provide a suite of templates to support schools in developing partnerships. The policies make clear the requirement for all academic collaborations to go through academic due diligence before collaborative proposals can be approved. Memorandum of Agreement templates include statements on the requirements for quality assurance, and the School Annual Quality Report template guidance on scope states that the report covers all taught, research and credit-bearing provision including collaborative provision and non-credit-bearing MOOCs. MOOCs are delivered in collaboration with a number of learning platforms and all courses associated with this are subject to the Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy. The University's remit for Internal Periodic Reviews states that the scope of these reviews includes provision delivered in collaboration with others.

Use of external reference points in quality processes

38   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to the use of external reference points in quality processes. In coming to this conclusion, the team considered the mapping of the quality processes against the Quality Code, minutes from the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) and the Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC), analysis of external examiner reports, and the annual report to the Scottish Funding Council.

39   The University has recently updated its mapping to the Quality Code and the mapping documentation for each element of the Code is linked through to the associated policies which are published on the University's website. The University makes use of external reference points and expertise in the development of new programmes and in respect of major revisions. Approval of new programmes requires that the programme is aligned with the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). There is also a requirement for the involvement of external expertise as well as consideration by PSRBs and employers, where relevant.

40   Internal Periodic Review (IPR) is the main process for assuring the ongoing maintenance of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. As such, there is a requirement that there is alignment with the external reference points as identified in the University Remit. In support of this function, IPR panels are required to include two external panel members. Exemplar reports of recent IPRs viewed by the QESR team confirmed the engagement of external members with relevant expertise and the rigour of the review process. Progress on university-level actions arising from the Annual Quality Reports and the IPRs is monitored by SQAC.

41   In their annual reports, external examiners are required to comment on the academic standards of the awards made by the University as well as the academic content. There is a requirement for the course/programme leads to respond to the feedback from the external examiners and the University also draws together thematic analyses of the external examiner reports for the dissemination of good practice which is considered by SQAC.

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

42   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to the use of data and evidence to inform self-evaluation and decision-making. The team considered the SFC Report, institutional analysis of data on retention and progression, degree outcomes, complaints and appeals, use of data in annual monitoring processes, feedback from external examiners, and met with staff and students.

43   Institutional committees overseeing management of quality and standards - primarily Senate and its standing committees, the Education Committee (SEC) and Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) - receive detailed reporting containing comprehensive analysis, where appropriate including sector-wide benchmarking, to inform reflection and development of strategy and policy relating to learning, teaching and the curriculum; and to monitor the quality of the student experience. SEC uses detailed analysis of National Student Survey (NSS) responses to identify issues affecting the student journey and inform any subsequent school, college or institutional-level actions in response. SQAC considers comprehensive analysis of degree outcome data, containing consideration of student attainment gaps; thematic analysis reports of complaints, appeals and student discipline cases; outcomes of institution-led review; and external examiner and annual monitoring activities - to monitor the quality and standards of student experience and reflect upon the effectiveness of quality assurance processes.

44   The QESR team heard that the University had progressed pre-pandemic plans to enhance its ability to engage with data through the creation of a Data Task Group (DTG). The new group will align with ongoing projects led by the University's Academic Policy and Regulations Committee, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, Governance and Strategic Planning department, and Digital Estate Prioritisation group. Each of these groups had previously been reflecting independently on how existing data could be better used to understand the student body; what data is currently captured and at what point in the student journey; what additional data requirements might be needed; and their capacity to record, manage and share data meaningfully across the institution. The Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling (SAIM) team is currently strengthening data management processes by enhancing existing dashboard provision where entry requirement, widening participation and equality, diversity and inclusion data requests will be pulled together and made accessible for staff across the institution. The QESR team considered that this bringing together of activity, through the Data Task Group, would allow the University to make progress towards enhancing school-level understanding of student attainment gaps, given the increased range of data accessible during annual monitoring activities, and institutional-level understanding through the increased ability to identify and explore trends across subjects, disciplines and student groups (see also paragraph 27).

45   The Annual Report on Complaints Handling for AY 2021-22, considered by SQAC, reports over 1,000 complaint contacts received during AY 2021-23, with nine of these being reported as being progressed to Stage 2 investigation. The University cites a variety of reasons for the proportionately low level considered at Stage 2, including effective frontline management of complaints at Stage 1, complaints being resolved by way of an explanation, complaints being dealt with under another procedure, and complaints not being considered - for example, for being time-barred. The report to SQAC recommends that resource is made available for a data management system to manage complaints.

46   The QESR team considered reports provided to SQAC which used data from recent and historic complaints cases to identify common themes, factors driving the increase in case load and resource implications of the continuing trend. Consideration of this report by SQAC prompted the University to initiate an internal audit into the complaints handling process, recognising the need to have a better mechanism for recording complaints and managing cases, as 'limitations on data collection' had hampered the effectiveness of institutional analysis. Senior staff confirmed that an action plan has recently been approved and will be monitored through the Audit and Risk Committee. Academic Services confirmed that they have already recruited staff and are currently putting in place interim improvements. Staff that met with the QESR team confirmed that staff resource had been increased to manage the rise in complaints, and that consideration was being given to better reporting systems, and that there were no particular thematic areas of concern. Students confirmed that they are aware that there is a formal process in place for dealing with complaints.

47   The annual report on academic appeals for AY 2021-22, considered by SQAC, reports a year-on-year increase in academic appeals with an 8% increase on AY 2020-21, bringing the total number of appeals for AY 2021-22 to 386. The report also notes continued challenges with 'appeal turnaround times', a 'significant' case backlog and confusion among students around what constitutes a valid appeal. In response to the rise in appeals, Academic Services have recruited additional 'bank' staff that can be deployed during peak times to maintain appropriate staffing levels, with the aim of ensuring that all appeals are resolved in as timely a way as possible. Recognising that the number of upheld appeals has remained static, the University plans to complete 'pre-emptive' work with schools to strengthen staff communication with potential appellants, particularly around student understanding of a valid basis for appeals under the Student Appeal Regulations, and to empower staff to act to address student concerns under research and assessment

regulations which may provide an alternative to students submitting an appeal.

48   The University confirmed its plans to reflect upon the success of actions taken to resolve ongoing challenges with Complaints and Appeals processes, including completing sector benchmarking on complaints at the end of AY 2023-24 to establish whether trends diverge from sector expectations; learning from individual cases and reflecting on how expectations are being managed in terms of appeals. The QESR team acknowledges that the University is undertaking work to improve complaints management and would encourage the next external review team to follow up on progress made on this and in the internal monitoring of appeals trends.

The University of Edinburgh
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

22 February 2024

External Quality Review Oversight Group
Terms of Reference

1. Purpose and Role

1.1 To provide direction, oversight and ensure implementation of the actions being taken to progress recommendations from the Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) and the Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR).

2. Remit

2.1 To coordinate and monitor the Action Plan, which outlines the University's response to the review recommendations, ensuring that appropriate action is being taken and advising accordingly on areas of concern.

2.2 To identify links and synergies with existing activities, advising on alignment with actions to progress review recommendations.

2.3 To advise on stakeholder engagement and communications relating to actions to progress review recommendations.

3. Operation

3.1 The Group will report to Senate Education Committee (SEC) and Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) to allow the Committees to monitor progress against recommendations and ensure that appropriate action is being taken.

3.2 The Group will advise the Student Experience Delivery and Monitoring Board (SEDaMOB) and the University Executive on progress against the recommendations and on areas of concern.

3.3 Members will be expected to lead and/or contribute to actions to progress review recommendations as appropriate to their role.

4. Composition

Role	Member
Vice Principal Students	Professor Colm Harmon
Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement)	Professor Tina Harrison
Deputy Secretary, Students	Lucy Evans
Dean of Education, CAHSS	Professor Mary Brennan
Dean of Education, CMVM	Professor Jamie Davies
Dean of Learning and Teaching, CSE	Professor Tim Stratford
Dean of Quality Assurance and Curriculum Approval, CAHSS	Dr Emily Taylor

Dean of Quality, CMVM	Professor Matthew Bailey
Dean of Education Quality Assurance and Culture, CSE	Professor Linda Kirstein
Co-Director of the Institute for Academic Development	Professor Cathy Bovill
Co-Director of the Institute for Academic Development	Olivia Eadie
Head of Academic Administration, CAHSS	Lynsey Dinwoodie
Head of Academic Administration, CMVM	Philippa Burrell
Head of Academic Affairs, CSE	Alex Laidlaw
Vice President Education, Edinburgh University Students' Association	Carl Harper
Edinburgh University Students' Association Academic Engagement Coordinator	Callum Paterson
Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Academic Services	Brian Connolly

February 2024

Senate Quality Assurance Committee

22nd February 2024

Committee Priorities – Mid-Year Reflection

Description of paper
1. The paper asks the Committee to reflect mid-year on progress with committee priorities. The outcomes of the discussion will be included in the next update on standing committee business to Senate and will inform the Committee's work on the priorities for the remainder of the academic year.

Action requested / recommendation
2. The Committee is asked to **comment** on progress with the committee priorities for 2023/24 in order to inform area(s) of focus and/or actions/outcomes for the remainder of the academic year as appropriate.

Background and context
3. The Committee identified its priorities for the next academic year in April 2023 and these were presented to Senate in May and October 2023 as part of the Annual Report of the Senate Standing Committees.

4. Senate discussed the Annual Report in October 2023, however, the paper was not approved (Senate did not approve the paper by a vote of 51%). The Senate Standing Orders require the standing committees to **report** to Senate on an annual basis on action taken under powers delegated to them by Senate.

5. Senate has indicated a preference for more information on standing committee business, including most recently during the discussion at the October 2023 meeting on the Annual Report. This paper was presented to Senate in February 2024 and more information on the outcomes of the SQAC discussion will be included in the next update on standing committee business which will be presented to the next meeting. It is also anticipated that this paper and resulting discussion will help the development of the next Annual Report.

Committee priorities 2024/25

6. A paper will be presented for discussion at the April meeting of the Committee. In order to support the discussion and to provide more information for Senate, enhancements to the previous process will include: increased time at the meeting for the discussion; outlining the rationale and how priorities fit with the remit of the committee; providing information on the anticipated area(s) of focus and/or actions/outcomes; and identification of where a priority is related to a regulatory/external requirement.

Discussion

Overseeing the implementation of a plan of action in response to the 2021 Enhancement Led Institutional Review

The Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) is the current review method used by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for higher education institutions in Scotland. It considers an institution's outcome under the previous review method, Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR).

Our QESR took place on 16 November 2023 and the review team was confident that the University is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. The QESR team commended the University's Institute for Academic Development in establishing a network of secondees and associates embedded within the schools to support developments in learning and teaching.

The QESR team considered four of the ELIR recommendations to be fully addressed and recognised the action taken to date towards the remaining six recommendations, and helpfully made the following further recommendations for action based on, and in addition to, the ELIR 4 recommendations:

- **Pace of change** - the University should make progress on and accelerate its actions in response to the recommendations from the previous ELIR, ensuring effective and consistent implementation by all Schools, and monitor the outcomes, in order to evidence significant progress within the next academic year.

- **Learning and Teaching Strategy** - the University should expedite the final drafting, approval and implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy to help staff and students understand how major strategic projects work together and provide clarity on the strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching.

- **Assessment and feedback** - the University should take immediate action, within the current academic year, to ensure that the new Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities (developed in response to ELIR 4) are fully implemented in all Schools, that feedback turn-round times and quality are monitored effectively, and that prompt action is taken to address any shortcomings.

- **Training for postgraduate research (PGR) students who teach** - the University should take prompt action, within the current academic year, to consistently implement its updated policy and to ensure that training for PGRs who teach is required at the University and School level, and that this action is

monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that all PGRs are fully supported in undertaking their teaching duties.

- **Promotion of academic staff based on teaching** - the University should clearly and accurately record data on promotion routes based on teaching excellence so it can effectively evidence the implementation of its goal to achieve parity between teaching and research and take action to ensure this aim is met.

- **Attainment gap monitoring** – the University should pay particular attention to sharing good practice and supporting staff in understanding the causes of attainments gaps and taking effective action.

The final QESR report was published on Wednesday 24 January 2024 and we are currently in the process of establishing an oversight group to take the recommendations forward.

Responding to the outcome of the Scottish Funding Council's Tertiary Quality Review

Current quality arrangements remain in place – including IPRs and annual monitoring – the outcomes of which were reported to the September 2023 meeting of SQAC. A Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework for implementation within 2024-25 is being developed and the University is represented on groups and is inputting into discussions as part of this development. Updated SFC Guidance on Quality is expected in the summer.

Strands of work relating to the Assessment and Feedback Guidance, Procedures, Data, Systems and Evaluation Group (particularly in relation to data regarding retention, progression and attainment).

The Assessment and Feedback task groups were established by the Senate Standing Committees in the Spring of last year to coordinate and govern the range of institutional initiatives and activities on assessment and feedback. The Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group was tasked to address institutional strategy around assessment and feedback, and academic integrity in assessment. The initial focus of the group was on institutional policy around mode of examinations and overseeing Schools' activities to align with the Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities. The group reports directly to Senate Education Committee (SEC) and is convened by the Deputy Vice-Principal, Students (Enhancements). The Assessment and Feedback Guidance, Procedures, Data, Systems and Evaluation (AFGPDSE) Group has a more operational focus and was initially tasked develop institutional advice and guidance on the practical management of online and on-campus examinations and oversee the development of academic misconduct procedures. The

AFGPDSE group reports to the three Senate Standing Committees on issues related to their respective remits and is convened by the Deputy Secretary, Students. Each group met twice between March and September 2023, with several recommendations made to SEC in regard to institutional policy on examination formats for 2023-24 and the implementation of the Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities.

Despite the two groups having a distinct focus on strategic and operational matters, in practice it has been difficult to draw a clear distinction in some respects, resulting in a degree of overlap and duplication. This prompted the convenors to pause and consider whether the groups are delivering what we currently need. The anticipated publication (Wednesday 24 January 2024) of the final report of the Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) which the University underwent in November 2023, has also prompted a further re-think, due to the additional recommendations on assessment and feedback. Therefore, at the meeting held on Thursday 18 January 2024, Senate Education Committee (SEC) approved a proposal from the convenors to dissolve the AFGPDSE Group and reconstitute the Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group with a refreshed membership and remit focused on delivering the outcome of the QESR and longer-term ambitions for assessment and feedback. The Group will continue to report to SEC with a revised terms of reference and membership.

Evaluation and monitoring of the implementation of the new student support model.

Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling (SAIM) is currently working on evaluating and monitoring the new student support model in two strands; (1) evaluating the implementation of the model (continuation from 2022/23 academic year) and (2) the development of an evaluation mechanism as the model transitions to business as usual – including how this mechanism integrates with existing quality assurance processes.

This work is being guided by academic colleagues from SPS, working with SAIM, the project team and with a group of key stakeholders.

Resource implications
7. This paper does not propose any actions. The resource implications of any actions which arise from the discussion would need to be outlined and considered.

Risk management

8. Progress against priorities is vital to the Committee fulfilling its remit. Failure to fulfil its remit raises potential risks associated with the University's framework of academic policy and regulations, the student experience and external quality requirements.

Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals
9. This paper does not respond to the climate emergency or contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Equality & diversity
10. This paper does not propose any actions. The equality and diversity implications any actions which arise from the discussion would need to be outlined and considered.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed
11. The outcomes of the discussion will be reported to Senate in May 2024 as part of the update on standing committee business. Additionally, the Senate Committees' Newsletter provides information on standing committee business.

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