

The University of Edinburgh External Quality Review Action Plan

In response to the 2021 [Enhancement Led Institutional Review \(ELIR\) 4](#) and the 2023 [Quality Enhancement and Standards Review \(QESR\)](#) the University of Edinburgh is implementing the following action plan¹:

Theme	ELIR 4 Recommendation	QESR Recommendation	Action Taken	Lead	Status
Strategy, growth and planning	<p>Oversight and planning for growth of student numbers</p> <p>“... implement an approach to facilitate institutional oversight and the effective planning and monitoring of student numbers, in order to ensure that appropriate and timely actions can be taken where increases in student numbers impact on arrangements for learning and teaching and student support.”</p>	QESR deemed "sufficient progress" has been made and there were no further recommendations.	We continue to operate according to our previously reported approach in relation to the size and shape of our student population, focused on growth only where there is a clear strategic rationale, and delivered through our Strategic Recruitment Enrolment Plan.	Deputy Secretary, Governance and Strategic Planning	Completed

¹ The action plan is co-ordinated and monitored by the External Quality Review Oversight Group, a sub-group of Senate Education Committee (SEC) and Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC).

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	<p>Strategic approach to the enhancement of learning and teaching</p> <p>“... in view of the current transition between the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2017 and future plans, the University should provide institutional oversight, and ensure clarity for staff, on the strategic direction underpinning current learning and teaching developments.”</p>	<p>Learning and Teaching Strategy</p> <p>“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”</p>	<p>Senate Education Committee (SEC) approved the final version of the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2030 at its meeting in February 2025. SEC also approved the Terms of Reference for the Learning and Teaching Strategy Implementation Group (LTSIG) and the Curriculum Development and Innovation Group (CDIG). Both groups will help support the effective implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2030.</p>	<p>Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement)</p>	<p>Completed (in terms of the Strategy being developed and launched. Implementation is ongoing until 2030).</p>
Change management	<p>Pace of change</p> <p>“... develop an effective approach to the strategic leadership and management of change that will ensure more immediate and timely implementation of identified solutions in order to support staff and</p>	<p>Pace of change</p> <p>“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</p>	<p>In developing an effective approach to strategic leadership and management of change, we undertook external benchmarking, sought internal feedback and reviewed lessons learned. We established a University Initiatives Portfolio Board to lead on the governance of major change projects. The Board has oversight of initiatives that involve a significant</p>	<p>Jointly owned by: Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement); Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary, Students; Heads of</p>	<p>Completed (in terms of establishing an effective approach. Implementation of approach is ongoing).</p>

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	enhance the student experience.”	evidence significant progress within the next academic year.”	<p>change for a large number of staff and/or students, as well as visibility of significant investment projects (excluding capital expenditure). This approach to strategic change is ensuring a clear link between strategic projects and the delivery of Strategy 2030.</p> <p>Change management training is being rolled out to sponsors and board members of strategic change projects and all members of the University Executive.</p> <p>The Student Experience Delivery and Monitoring Oversight Board (chaired jointly by the Provost and Vice Principal Students) was established to provide institutional oversight of agreed actions and deliverables aligned to identified interventions designed to enhance the student experience.</p> <p>The External Quality Review Oversight Group is monitoring progress of all outstanding ELIR/QESR recommendations to</p>	College; College Deans; Heads of School	

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			ensure all recommendations are fully addressed.		
Monitoring consistency of implementation of strategy, policy and practice	<p>Oversight and implementation of policy and practice</p> <p>“... recognising the decentralised nature of university structures, the institution should establish a systematic approach to enable effective institutional oversight and evaluation of the implementation of policy and practice. As part of this, the University is asked to increase the range and use of institutionally determined baseline requirements to ensure consistency and accountability. The institution should ensure that mechanisms are put in place to adequately evaluate the consistency of</p>	QESR deemed "sufficient progress" had been made in recognition of the increased reporting frameworks in relation to the University's development projects.	No additional action was requested by the QESR team. Our ongoing action is focused on ensuring continued effective implementation and evaluation of policy and practice through the Student Experience Delivery and Monitoring Oversight Board (established during AY 2023/24), see above.	Jointly owned by: Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement); Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary, Students; Heads of College	Completed

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	implementation of strategic objectives across the institution and act when Schools deviate from institutional expectations.”				
	<p>Training for postgraduate research (PGR) students who teach</p> <p>“... ensure effective implementation of its policy for the training and support of postgraduates who teach and ensure all PGR students are trained before engaging in teaching activities.”</p>	<p>Training for postgraduate research (PGR) students who teach</p> <p>“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.”</p>	<p>Senate Education Committee (SEC) approved several actions in support of improving the ongoing implementation of the policy that included: the development of guidance around training and recruitment of PGR tutors; activating a tutor and demonstrator network to share practice; and implementing structural changes to the governance of tutors and demonstrators. A University level PGR Lead was also appointed to improve governance.</p> <p>Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) approved amendments to the annual monitoring templates, requiring Schools to report on their training provision (and engagement with their training provision) for PGR students who teach.</p>	University PGR Lead	<p>Completed (we reviewed Schools’ training provision and reinforced the mandatory induction and training expectation; gathered baseline data; established appropriate governance for ongoing oversight of the policy)</p> <p>Ongoing (implementation of new governance)</p>

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			<p>We undertook specific action in each of the three Colleges to survey and review the training provided to ensure ongoing relevancy.</p> <p>The Institute for Academic Development (IAD) took action to (a) improve regular data returns to Schools to report and record engagement with IAD training for tutors and demonstrators; (b) change the modality of some training to a self-paced online course to increase opportunity for engagement. Schools will have the ability to include this training in onboarding checklists for new tutors and demonstrators via the HR system where completion also will be recorded. The online introductory provision will continue to be supplemented by additional specialist IAD workshops for tutors and demonstrators, as well as broader IAD provision open to all teaching staff, as well as subject-specific training provided by Schools.</p>		<p>arrangements to ensure ongoing effective implementation and monitoring of the policy)</p>

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			<p>The new governance body for Tutors and Demonstrators was established in 2024/25. The group is developing a systematic approach to gathering training information on all tutor and demonstrator (T&D) staff on guaranteed hour (GH) contracts (including PGR students who teach).</p> <p>The group has also looked at data returns from Schools to evaluate the stated level of support for T&D. Initial data shows that the T&D policy is now being observed (with meaningful training in all Schools) and T&D staff receive payment for the time spent undertaking the training. There is still a lot of scope for CPD type training which is considerably patchier and discussions are underway about just how much of the 9 hours core staff training should be mandated for GH staff and how much of this would/should be undertaken by PGR students generally as a core part of their study programmes.</p>		

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Student support	<p>Student Support model</p> <p>“...make significant progress in implementing plans to ensure an effective approach to offering personal student support. In doing so, and recognising the extended period of time that the University has been developing its approach to personal tutoring, it is asked to reflect on whether the current timescale for implementation of the institutional Student Support and Personal Tutor Plan in 2023-24, is sufficiently ambitious. The University should make demonstrable progress within the next academic year in respect of ensuring parity of experience for students and effective signposting to support</p>	QESR deemed "sufficient progress" had been made	<p>The QESR team made no further recommendations, but a suggestion 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" in the interim period while the University is developing an evaluation model to provide ongoing quality assurance for the new Student Support Model (SSM) arrangements.</p> <p>Throughout AY 2023/24, there was continued emphasis on monitoring the impact of the SSM on student experience and ensuring consistent ongoing implementation. This included enhanced communication to students and analysis of student and staff feedback. The national annual Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2024 results revealed increased awareness of and satisfaction with student support - 4% increase on 2023 on the question – “My School/Deanery</p>	Jointly owned by: Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary, Students; Colleges; Schools	Completed

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	<p>services and delivery of an agreed and consistent baseline level of provision. As part of its approach, the University is asked to develop an effective mechanism to monitor consistency of implementation and allow it to evaluate the impact of these changes on the student experience.”</p>		<p>has provided advice and guidance on how to access support where needed”.</p> <p>The Student Support Continuous Improvement Group (SSCIG), in partnership with SQAC, is responsible for institutional oversight, coordination, and assurance for the effective delivery and continuous improvement of student support across the University. We have developed an evaluation model to support strategic oversight which integrates existing quality assurance processes with key indicators, data, and insights relating to student support provision across the University. This approach includes an annual report assessing the effectiveness of the SSM which will be considered by SSCIG annually before submission to SQAC along with any recommendations for action at institutional level. SSCIG will also develop an evaluation dashboard which will be used by the group to monitor the effectiveness of the SSM throughout the year.</p>		

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			The inaugural annual evaluation report was well received at both SSCIG and SQAC in 2025-26. The report, and the evaluation model, will continue to be developed by SSCIG and SQAC on an ongoing basis.		
Assessment and feedback	<p>Assessment and feedback</p> <p>“... over an extended period of time, the University has considered a broad evidence-base which has highlighted concerns about assessment and feedback and this remains an area of challenge for the institution. The University is asked to make demonstrable progress, within the next academic year, in prioritising the development of a holistic and strategic approach to the design and management of</p>	<p>Assessment and feedback</p> <p>“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.”</p>	<p>Significant action has been taken to address this recommendation. There has been considerable work through Student Experience Services and Colleges and Schools to implement the Principles and Priorities, in particular gathering data and developing dashboards to monitor feedback turnaround times, and work to ensure that marking rubrics are provided for all assessments. We are also reviewing our moderation practice to include a focus on the moderation of feedback quality.</p> <p>The Student Experience Delivery and Monitoring Oversight Board, (detailed above), (a) reviewed and monitored College actions for the</p>	<p>Jointly owned by: Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement); Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary, Students; Heads of College; College Deans; Heads of School</p>	<p>Nearly completed (immediate and significant action has been taken to establish an appropriate approach to ensure effective and consistent implementation and monitor feedback turnaround times. Ongoing monitoring will continue throughout to</p>

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	<p>assessment and feedback. The University should also progress with proposals for the establishment of a common marking scheme to ensure comparability of student assessment processes across Schools.”</p>		<p>implementation of the Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities, initially focusing on the timely return of feedback to students, and (b) developing a framework for gathering and monitoring feedback turnaround times, including the development of data dashboards, as a means of understanding current and ongoing performance. We are using the data to identify and celebrate good practice, understand challenges and to provide support where appropriate. We will continue to monitor turnaround times.</p> <p>The National Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2024 results showed an improvement in assessment and feedback (8.6% increase in returning prompt feedback to 66.8%; 5.1% increase on supervisors providing feedback on dissertation/project to 83.5%).</p> <p>We have developed a Student Assessment & Feedback Audit Toolkit allowing Schools to self-</p>		<p>embed and drive improvement)</p>

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			<p>assess the quality of the feedback provided on their coursework and assignments. A pilot was conducted with the School of Geosciences where it was well received with benefits noted for staff and students. However, in the current financial climate this work cannot be currently prioritised due to the stretched resource capacity within School Teaching Offices (who would need to administer the process). As a result, the toolkit has been made available to Schools to take forward if they wish to use.</p> <p>The Principles and Priorities were updated for AY 2024/25 to improve clarity and also to offer further guidance on the application of some of the principles. Our annual monitoring processes evidenced a significant improvement in turnaround times across the majority of Schools and pinpointed particular issues that contributed to delayed release of marks and feedback (such as moderation practices, late submissions and delays due to staff leave or illness).</p>		

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			<p>When we began monitoring the data systematically in Semester 1, AY 2023/24, on average 55% of assessed work was meeting our three-week standard. By the end of AY 2024/25 this had increased to almost 80% on average, with around half of our Schools giving feedback within three weeks on 80% of assessed work. For AY 2025/26, we have set a target for all Schools to achieve a minimum of 80% of assessments returning feedback within three weeks.</p> <p>The Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities are due for a scheduled review by the end of AY 2025/26. Given the substantial activity that has taken place since the Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities were first developed, this will provide an opportunity to conduct a more comprehensive review, and be clearer about the current and future institutional expectations for assessment and feedback building on the considerable developments that have taken place. The</p>		

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			Assessment and Feedback Strategy Group, a sub-Group of Senate Education Committee, will oversee the development of the Policy during AY 2025/26 and a focus on feedback quality being take forward through increased expectations of the development and provision of rubrics. This will extend to reviews in many Schools considering how assessment can be considered programmatically – and the overall student academic experience – to ensure a holistic approach and respond to potential areas of overassessment.		
Developing and promoting teaching excellence	<p>Recognition and support for academic staff development</p> <p>“... take action to remove barriers which exist that prevent some academic staff from fully engaging with its existing suite of development opportunities for the professionalisation of teaching.”</p>	QESR deemed "sufficient progress" had been made. .	The IAD continues to provide a wide range of staff development activities in support of learning and teaching, including, but not limited to: an annual learning and teaching conference; the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice and recognition of fellowships at all four categories of the Professional Standards Framework; a wide range of workshops covering different topics to support enhancement of academic practice; secondments,	Institute for Academic Development (IAD)	Completed

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			<p>enabling staff to focus time on specific enhancement projects; the University's Teaching Matters blog; and a range of networks supporting colleagues in specific roles.</p> <p>The QESR team commended the work of the IAD in establishing a network of secondees and associates, embedded within the schools to support pedagogic developments, as a feature of good practice.</p>		
	<p>Promotion of academic staff based on teaching</p> <p>“... progress with work to improve the recognition of teaching excellence across all aspects of the University. In particular, the University should ensure that recognition for teaching is embedded in annual review processes, that clarity of roles and titles is established, and that a clear progression</p>	<p>Promotion of academic staff based on teaching</p> <p>“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.”</p>	<p>In AY 2022/23, enhancements to HR policy, forms and guidance were implemented which, amongst other things, put greater emphasis on contribution to teaching and equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) considerations. These included the forms and guidance for academic promotions, and the procedure for the appointment and operation of Established Chair selection committees, which reflects the University’s commitment to</p>	<p>Jointly owned by: Head of HR; Provost</p>	<p>Completed (in terms of establishing a mechanism to record data on promotion based on teaching excellence. The recognition of teaching excellence remains an ongoing priority)</p>

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	<p>pathway providing parity of recognition for education-focused academics is developed. In addition, the institution should ensure that it has the data available to be able to evidence and evaluate the progress made in all of these areas.”</p>		<p>parity of teaching alongside research.</p> <p>During AY 2023/24 we put in place a mechanism for recording promotions based on teaching, not only for teaching-focused staff, but also for staff with a balanced portfolio. This should enable us to track the extent to which excellence in teaching and leadership in teaching is being recognised in promotions processes at all grades through to Grade 10. Data will be available from the 2023/24 promotion round.</p> <p>We are in the early stages of developing a framework, consistent with the University’s Strategy 2030 and People Strategy, to define the principles that underpin individual policies and processes for key points in the academic staff journey (including recruitment, induction, development, promotion). This will seek to embed as core priorities appropriate recognition of, and</p>		

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			support to develop, contributions to teaching and teaching excellence. These principles will inform the ongoing review and development of HR policies and procedures and guidance.		
Attainment gaps	<p>Attainment gap monitoring</p> <p>“...consider how to address attainment gaps in student performance through the oversight, coordination and monitoring at an institutional level of school-level actions.”</p>	<p>Attainment gap monitoring</p> <p>“The University should pay particular attention to sharing good practice and supporting staff in understanding the causes of attainment gaps and taking effective action.”</p>	<p>We have taken several actions to support ongoing work to address awarding gaps.</p> <p>Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) established a Student Data Monitoring Group to explore and recommend a systematic approach to monitoring student data at university level, taking a student lifecycle perspective (including retention and progression, and student outcomes). This built on the work of the Progression and Attainment (ProAttain) Working Group in the College of Science and Engineering.</p> <p>The Group identified the following strands of work: benchmark approaches to monitoring student data; identify the different student groups and the key stages in the</p>	Jointly owned by: Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement); University Lead, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	In progress

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			<p>student lifecycle that should be overseen at University level; identify the relevant data required and any gaps in current data sets; identify and share good practice examples of successful interventions in relation to awarding gaps.</p> <p>One strand of ongoing work is establishing agreed definitions and characteristics to be used in relation to monitoring the awarding gap. Meetings have been held with colleagues from the Disability and Learning Support Service (DLSS) and the Widening Participation (WP) Team to better understand our student population and the definitions, markers and characteristics which relate to our students. The agreed definitions are expected to be applied to data collection and analysis to facilitate greater understanding of our awarding gaps within the University.</p> <p>Another strand of work has focused on an enhanced analysis of degree outcomes by SQAC. This was inaugurated in 2023-24 and the</p>		

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			<p>annual degree outcome analysis now includes data on low classification degrees and a focus on key groups of our students who are more likely to experience the awarding gap.</p> <p>An online toolkit has been created (including guidance on universal design) to help our staff anticipate our students' needs and improve the overall learning experience in an inclusive and accessible way that benefits all our students, and guidance on decolonisation in the curriculum, which includes nine recommendations for positive change to narrow the awarding gap and also to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for every student.</p> <p>The Group also identified key points in the student journey where more understanding of the data is required, and detailed some of the known challenges with data and systems. Work is ongoing to improve data quality and collection at University level. Whilst</p>		

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			<p>improvements for and limitations of the existing data have been identified by the Group, changes to University-wide data collection and systems are not an achievable aim before 2027/28. Existing data, although not ideal in its granularity, can be used to inform decisions to target certain groups and work with Schools to pilot initiatives.</p> <p>In order to drive this work forward SQAC agreed to reconstitute the Group in 2025-26. The membership was refreshed and the group renamed the Student Success Task Group to better signpost its commitment to successful outcomes and broaden its focus from enhancing data collection and analysis.</p> <p>The reconstituted Group will work more closely with the University EDI Lead to align with University's EDI Strategy and identify opportunities to join up with existing awarding gap and EDI activities. The Group will work with the EDI Lead to identify and share good practice examples of</p>		

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			<p>successful interventions in relation to awarding gaps.</p> <p>The Group has also identified a number of interventions (informed by annual monitoring reporting of activities taking place within Schools and benchmarking of good practice in the sector) that could be trialled by the University to tackle awarding gaps. Pilot interventions will be taken forward in academic year 2026-27.</p> <p>We are also co-lead in the STEP (Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme) SAPSO project, seeking to understand how institutions support different groups at key stages in the student life-cycle: Access, Progression and Successful Outcomes. The aim of the project is to identify exemplars of good practice and establish an ongoing shared resource for the sector where colleagues seeking to address similar issues can seek help and share their experiences. SQAC will continue to monitor the progress of both the STEP project and the</p>		

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			Student Success Task Group to ensure that each is informed by the work of the other.		