

Enhancement-led Institutional Review of Abertay University

Outcome Report

December 2021



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About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method

The QAA website explains the method for [Enhancement-led Institutional Review \(ELIR\)](#) and has links to the ELIR handbook and other informative documents.¹ You can also find out more about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\)](#).²

Further details about ELIR can be found in an accompanying [brief guide](#),³ including an overview of the review method, information about review teams, and explanations of follow-up action.

About this review

This is the Outcome Report of the ELIR conducted by QAA at Abertay University. The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 5 October 2021 and Review Visit on 29 November to 3 December 2021. The review was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Mr Matt Adie (Student Reviewer)
- Mr Mark Charters (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Brian Green (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor David Lamburn (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Gavin Lee (Coordinating Reviewer)
- Professor Alyson Tobin (Academic Reviewer).

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

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

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

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

The impact of COVID-19

QAA made some amendments to the ELIR process to accommodate the ongoing pandemic, most notable of which was that the ELIR was conducted entirely online. The ELIR was undertaken while the pandemic, and the institution's response to it, was a key part of the context. Although this was part of the context of the review, the team considered the institution's approach to quality and standards from the time of the last ELIR in 2016. It is acknowledged that the review took place at what was a very challenging time, and the ELIR team and QAA Scotland are grateful to staff and students for their engagement in the review.

¹ About ELIR:

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

² About QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland.

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

⁴ Technical Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Abertay-University

About Abertay University

Abertay University has a history dating back to 1888 as the Dundee Technical Institute. In 2021, Abertay University is a small, modern university based in Dundee with a student population of around 4,500 (headcount) and staff community of approximately 476 (headcount).

The University offers a broad academic portfolio, with students spread over three academic schools: Business, Law and Social Sciences (BLS), Applied Sciences (SAS), and Design and Informatics (SDI), with the Graduate School providing training and professional development opportunities for the University's student and staff research community. The University describes itself as having a reputation for innovative, vocationally-based programmes and is known internationally in areas such as games and art, games technology, and cybersecurity and computing.

The undergraduate student population, which accounts for 93% of the University's student population, is composed of a majority of Scottish-domicile students who have represented 77-79% of the total population from 2016-21. Over 30% of students admitted to the University do so with 'advanced standing' from further education (FE) colleges. The University has a strong commitment to widening access and, in 2020-21, 16.2% of its Scottish-domicile undergraduate entrants were from Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 20 postcodes, with 33% of entrants from SIMD 40. The University's postgraduate taught (PGT) student population has grown slightly from 2016, with growth predominantly in the international population. The postgraduate research community remains small.

During the period 2016-21, the number of students studying at the University's collaborative partners has significantly reduced. This is a direct result of the University's decision to terminate its partnership with the Systematic Educational Group International (SEGi), Malaysia. The University has commenced a growth strategy to increase its collaborative provision.

Threshold judgement about Abertay University

Abertay University has **effective** arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience.

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

Commendations

- 1 The University is commended for the following areas of good practice.
- 2 **Embedding opportunities for student partnership in enhancement** - the University has established a strong culture of partnership working with its student body which ensures effective student representation and engagement in the range of institutional enhancement projects currently underway. The introduction of the student AbLE consultant role in particular has further embedded student partnership into enhancement activity.
- 3 **Inclusive and accessible learning environment for all** - the University takes a reflective approach to proactively supporting and embedding equality and diversity in its enhancement activities. This is evidenced by a wide range of initiatives and developments to support equality, diversity and inclusion, including the University's 'Lead Voices' initiative and its inclusive employability support for students with autism, which demonstrates an ongoing commitment to building an inclusive and accessible learning community and environment for all.
- 4 **Engagement with employers** - the University's commitment to preparing students for employment, which has resulted in well-established links with employers, positive impacts on curriculum development and systematically integrates work-based and work-related learning across programmes. The use and extent of work-related opportunities across the curriculum are recognised and strongly valued by students.
- 5 **Staff development and support** - the University, through the activities delivered by the Abertay Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy, the Technology Enhanced Learning Support team and the Graduate School, provides a comprehensive range of staff development and support opportunities, both formal and informal, to those involved in learning, teaching and research. These development opportunities are responsive to the needs of staff and the University's strategic direction and contribute to a supportive culture.

Recommendations

- 6 The University is asked to consider the following recommendations.
- 7 **Effective implementation of University strategies** - building on its broadly effective approach to strategic planning in relation to learning and teaching, with a particular strength being the widespread consultation with staff and students during the formulation of the University Strategy and its underpinning strategies, including the Learning Enhancement Strategy. The ELIR team recommends that the University should undertake work to ensure that among all staff there is a clear understanding and ownership of these strategies, and how they inform institutional priorities and actions. In support of this, the University is asked

to enable effective and systematic implementation, supported by appropriate monitoring and evaluation of impact to ensure the achievement of strategic goals.

8 **Student retention** - the University is asked to build on its emerging plans aimed at improving student retention, by developing an evidence-based institutional approach to identify, implement and regularly evaluate the impact and effectiveness of interventions on its retention performance.

9 **Feedback on assessment** - the University should continue to work with staff and students (across all modes of study), to address the improvements that students would like to see around consistency in the quality of the assessment feedback they receive, ensuring the impact of changes in feedback practice can be appropriately evaluated.

10 **Review of professional services** - continue with its plans to revise and implement a process for reviewing student-facing professional services to ensure a continuous, systematic review of services from academic year 2022-23. The University should ensure that the new processes link effectively to the existing institution-led review process for academic areas, allowing for institutional oversight, fully engages students, and incorporates appropriate externality.

11 **Adjustment of student marks** - the University should introduce an appropriate and consistent policy for the scaling of student marks before the start of the 2022-23 academic year. This policy should be appropriately communicated to staff, students, external examiners and collaborative partners.

What happens next?

12 QAA Scotland will continue to engage with the institution through the annual discussion visits which, among other matters, consider the ways in which institutions respond to the ELIR outcomes.

13 One year after publication of the ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to provide a Follow-up Report to indicate how they are responding to the outcomes of ELIR. The final version of the institution's Follow-up Report is published on the QAA website. Institutions also engage in a range of enhancement and development activities including Focus On projects where institutions work collaboratively to improve policy and practice relating to topics that are frequently occurring in ELIR outcomes.

Further information

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

15 This review and its findings relate to the institution as a whole and do not provide information about individual programmes of study or subjects. For further information about those, contact the institution or visit its [website](#).

16 University sector institutions in Scotland also engage in systematic Enhancement Theme activity. Further information about that work, which has a sector-wide and institutional focus, can be found on the [Enhancement Themes website](#).

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

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

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