Quality Assurance Agency Scotland, Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR)  
Heriot-Watt University, 2014-2015  

Background and Briefing Paper

1. Introduction
The Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAAS) will undertake its third Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR3) of Heriot-Watt University in 2014/15. The Review comprises:

(1) submission of a Reflective Analysis, Case Study, Advance Information Set and supporting evidence (due 15 November 2014);

(2) Review Visit, which will be in 2 parts: Part 1 will be 28-29 January 2015 and Part 2 will be the week beginning 16 March 2015 (likely to be 5 days).

This background and briefing paper describes briefly the process of review and the steps that the University needs to take in preparation.

2. Focus of ELIR
ELIR has an enhancement purpose, defined as taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students.

ELIR is concerned with the University’s strategic approach to enhancement, as implemented at multiple levels within the institution. Enhancement may be continuous improvement and/or more significant step-changes in strategy, policy and practice.

A significant focus of ELIR is on the approach which the University takes to self-evaluation, particularly the systematic arrangements which the University has in place for evaluating:

- its strengths
- potential risks to quality and standards
- improvements to the student learning experience

ELIR will also consider how the University:

- uses external reference points (SCQF, Quality Code, subject benchmark statements, Bologna/European HE Quality Assurance, SFC guidance on quality)
- engages with Enhancement Themes
- identifies and manages risk associated with change
- engages with students in their learning/partnership approach
- approaches internationalisation

The changes introduced for ELIR3 (eg submission of an Advance Information Set of documents related to quality and standards) are intended to allow for an increased focus on enhancement during the actual Review Visits.

Other changes related to ELIR outwith the actual Review Visits include: Follow-Up Event, and increased student engagement in ELIR Annual Discussions.

3. Scope of ELIR
The scope of ELIR covers the student learning experience on all of the University’s provision (degree entry, UG, PGT, PGR) across all levels, modes (including work placements) and locations of study (Dubai and Malaysia), and across all categories of student (Home/EU and overseas). ELIR also encompasses all UK and international collaborative provision, ie ALP’s and Joint Collaborative Partners.

4. **Areas of Review**
   Six key areas are considered as part of the ELIR Review:

   (1) institutional strategic framework
   (2) student learning experience
   (3) learning and teaching enhancement
   (4) quality assurance and academic standards
   (5) self-evaluation and management of information
   (6) collaborative activity.

   The Technical Report (see Section 5) will include commentaries on each of the six sections.

5. **Review Outcomes: Judgement and Reports**
   ELIR outcomes comprise: a judgement on the University's effectiveness; two Review Reports.

   **Judgements**
   The commentaries on each of the six areas of review will lead to an overarching judgement related to effectiveness regarding:
   
   *the current and likely future effectiveness of the University's arrangements for managing academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience.*

   There are three levels of effectiveness against which the University's arrangements will be judged:

   - "are effective";
   - "have limited effectiveness"; or
   - "are not effective".

   A single judgement can be made, or a split judgement, which expresses a difference in effectiveness between one or more of the six review areas. An "effective" judgement can be qualified by a priority action (ie a caveat/proviso).

   The University will formally be notified of the Review Outcomes via a written Key Themes Letter (typically, in the same format as the Outcomes Report; see below) within one week of the conclusion of the Part 2 Visit.

   **Reports**
   Two reports will be published approximately three months after the Review Visit concludes:

   (1) Outcomes Report (short): judgement; areas of positive practice; areas for development;
   (2) Technical Report (longer): information about HWU; judgement; commentary on six review areas (containing areas of positive practice and areas for development).

   At the end of 2014/15, HWU will be invited to join the four other HEIs being reviewed in the same session to an ELIR Discussion Event in order to share experiences and practices.

   One-year after the Review Reports have been published, HWU will provide an ELIR Follow-On Report, indicating progress towards the areas identified for developments. There will continue to be an Annual Discussion between HWU and QAA Scotland.

6. **Format of Review Visit**
   The review process follows the standard procedure of submission of required documentation (Reflective Analysis, Case Study and Advance Information Set; see Section 8), followed by a two-part Review Visit.

   In advance of the Review Visit, the University will be given an indication of the key themes which the ELIR Team wishes to explore through meetings and through scrutiny of documentation.

   The Part 1 Review Visit comprises the six-person ELIR Team (see Section 7), plus the University's designated QAA Scotland Officer. For Part 2, the QAA Officer attends only the private team meeting on the final day.
Part 1 Review Visit: 2 days (28-29 January 2015)

(1) Institutional Presentation (morning of 28 January 2015): showcasing the University's approach to enhancing quality and securing academic standards.

(2) Meeting with Institutional Contacts (Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and Head of Academic Quality) (afternoon of 28 January 2015): exploring key questions identified by the Team.

(3) Meeting with Student Representatives (afternoon of 28 January 2015): themes around representation; how the University engages students/partnership approach; how students make their views known; how their views are taken on board; their learning experience.

(4) Meeting with School/Academic Staff (morning of 29 January 2015): cross-theme, covering their roles in quality assurance and quality enhancement.

(5) Meeting with Institutional Contacts (Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and Head of Academic Quality) (late afternoon of 29 January 2015): the Team will provide the following documents:
   - Draft programme of meetings for Part 2 (number, time, theme)
   - List of staff and students whom the Team wishes to meet in Part 2
   - List of themes to be explored during Part 2
   - Documentation required for Part 2

Part 2 Review Visit: up to 5 days (16-20 March 2015)

The duration of the Part 2 Visit will be notified to the University at the final Part 1 meeting. For Heriot-Watt University, the Part 2 Visits in previous ELIRs have been the full 5 days (the final day is a private team meeting). Part 2 involves the Team reviewing documentation and meeting with staff and students, as agreed at the end of Part 1. There is no set pattern for Part 2 meetings, as these will be based on the Team’s emerging key themes/lines of enquiry; often, however, the following types of meetings occur:

- UG students (not student representatives): cross-discipline/different modes/different locations
- PGT and PhD students (including those with a teaching role)
- Academic staff (early career, recently promoted, newly appointed)
- Professional Services staff
- Senior academic and administrative staff

In view of the extent of Heriot-Watt University's international activity, it is likely that the Team will wish to meet with staff and students from the Dubai and Malaysia Campuses. In ELIR2, QAA Scotland recognised the difficulty of meeting with ALP students; however, their views were sought via a questionnaire administered by QAAS.

The Team may explore quality assurance and academic standards matters; however, the Part 2 Visit is intended to be enhancement-led.

The meetings will extend over four days. On the fifth day, the QAA Scotland Officer will rejoin the ELIR Team to agree conclusions and the judgement, and produce a draft of the Outline Report, which will be communicated to the University as the written Key Themes letter.

There is no formal meeting at the end of Part 2 to communicate the Review Outcomes to the University. In practice, however, the QAA Officer will meet informally with the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and Head of Academic Quality to provide an overview of the judgement and key findings.

Themes for Part 2

The Review Team may choose to investigate a particular aspect or theme in detail during the Part 2 (the list of themes received at the end of the Part 1 Visit will give an indication of key lines of enquiry). Thematic enquiries are undertaken when provision is unusual or of particular importance to an institution.

Such lines of enquiry are not a value judgement, nor an indication of a potential problem; rather, they are often undertaken to enable the Team to understand properly the particular practices of an institution. Under the new format of ELIR, the University will be notified in advance of Part 1 and Part 2 of the main themes of enquiry.

In view of the scale and diversity of internationalisation at HWU, the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Head of Academic Quality will meet with QAA Scotland to discuss and put in place arrangements to ensure that the Review Team has an appropriate level of understanding prior to, and during, the Review Visits, of the University's overseas provision.
7. Composition of the Review Team

All reviewers will have been trained in the Scottish ELIR system. The review team will comprise:

- Three senior UK-based academic reviewers: one will be a Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) or equivalent; there will be at least one from a Scottish higher education institution (HEI) and at least one from elsewhere in the UK; the third reviewer could be from either the Scottish or the wider UK sectors (all are typically in management positions);
- One international reviewer (senior academic) from an overseas HEI;
- One student reviewer (maybe a current Sabbatical or someone who has been a student within the last 3 years);
- One co-ordinating reviewer (senior administrator from a Scottish HEI or other UK HEI)

The University will be given the opportunity to comment on the proposed Team members in advance of the Team being finalised. For Heriot-Watt in particular, there will be a need to ensure that the Team contains individuals who are familiar with multi-mode, multi-location international provision.

Prior to the Part 1 Review Visit, the QAA Scotland (QAAS) Officer will allocate between the Reviewers responsibility for writing the six sections of the Technical Report. Typically, most sections will be co-authored by the five reviewers working in pairs, and reviewers may be contributing to more than one section (the Co-ordinating Reviewer and the QAAS Officer do not write individual report sections, but are involved in the overall editing). Therefore, Reviewers will pursue particular lines of enquiry in meetings and through review of documentation in accordance with their allocated report sections.

The QAAS Officer assigned to the Review will accompany the Team during Part 1 and will chair all meetings with the University, but will not be present for most of Part 2. During Part 2 the Team will be managed by the Co-ordinating Reviewer and the other five team members will alternate as chair of meetings with University staff and students. The QAAS Officer will rejoin the Team at the stage of reaching judgements and drafting the Key Themes Letter/Outcomes Report on the final day.

8. HWU Documentation: Reflective Analysis, Case Study, Advance Information Set

The University is required to submit three different types of documentation to QAA Scotland 12-weeks in advance of the Part 1 Visit (ie by 14 November 2014).

Reflective Analysis

The Reflective Analysis is the most important of the ELIR documents for the University, QAA Scotland and the Review Team – it is used by the latter as the basis for identifying key themes to be explored during meetings and through review of further documentation. The Reflective Analysis must demonstrate the University's capacity for self-reflection and critical evaluation, and must be evidence-based (with description kept to a minimum). The RA is structured according to the six areas for review (see Section 4), and must clearly indicate student input to the document. See Appendix for Structure/Content of the RA.

The Reflective Analysis will be accompanied by an extensive series of supporting documentation which has been referenced throughout the RA. These documents will be loaded onto QAA’s Sharepoint intranet for access by the Team.

In ELIR3, the University will be asked to identify in the RA what it hopes to achieve from ELIR and to highlight aspects on which it would welcome the ELIR Team’s views.

Experience from HWU’s previous ELIR’s suggests that the document is best written by a small group of people, with a larger review group.

Where areas for development have been highlighted in the RA, the ELIR team will explore:

- the extent to which quality or academic standards are potentially at risk
- the extent to which the institution has identified the issue(s) in advance
- the plan for addressing the issue, including any wider development work planned and the anticipated timeframe for its completion
- the likelihood of the issue recurring in future.

Where areas of strength have been identified in the RA, the ELIR team will explore:
• the extent to which all of the institution's students can benefit
• the arrangements for disseminating the good practice
• the plans for evaluating and promoting the good practice.

Case Study
The Case Study is a separate, self-contained example of the University's strategic approach to enhancement, and is designed to illustrate in practice the strategic approach outlined in the Reflective Analysis. Like the RA, the Case Study should be reflective and evidence-based. The University has selected the new Learning and Teaching Strategy as its Case Study topic.

Advance Information Set
As a new feature in ELIR3, HEI's submit, together with the RA and Case Study, a comprehensive series of information on key processes for securing academic standards and assuring quality. The earlier submission of quality assurance-related information is designed to enable the Team to identify in advance specific themes to explore and, consequently, provide more time during the Visits for quality enhancement-related discussions. Typically, the Advance Information Set will include:

• Mapping to UK Quality Code
• Academic Review and Internal Audit Reports
• SFC Annual Reports on Quality
• Sample of Annual Monitoring + Review Reports
• Analysis of External Examiner Comments
• Analysis of Student Feedback

Further documentation will be provided, as requested by the ELIR Team, for the Part 2 Visit. The Team is likely to request additional documentation during the Visits – these requests will be moderated by the Co-ordinating Reviewer to ensure that they are reasonable and relevant. HWU itself can provide additional documentation which, although not requested by the Team, would aid the Team's understanding of particular issues.

9. Managing the Preparations for ELIR
The Learning and Teaching Board is responsible, at the institutional level, for oversight and management of all aspects of the ELIR process (preparations, documentation, review visit and post-review actions). In practice, as with the two previous ELIR reviews, the Board has delegated much of this activity, particularly the production of the Reflective Analysis and co-ordination of the Institutional Presentation on the first day of the Review Visit, to an ELIR Steering Group.

As per previously, the Steering Group comprises both senior staff and student representatives. The membership is:

• Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) (Chair)
• Two Directors of Learning and Teaching
• Head of Academic Quality
• Head of Centre for Academic Leadership and Development
• President of Student Union, with support by HWUSU staff member
• ELIR Administrators, Academic Registry

The day-to-day management of the process will be undertaken by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Head of Academic Quality.

The initial drafting of the Reflective Analysis and the Case Study will be undertaken by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Head of Academic Quality, with support from other staff as necessary, particularly within Academic Registry, the Centre for Academic Leadership and Development, and the Student Union.

The Steering Group will assist with refining and finalising the various drafts of the Reflective Analysis, including the process for engaging and consulting with the wider University to ensure broader ownership. The Steering Group will also manage the timetable of events related to ELIR.

The University is fortunate to benefit from the experience of members of staff who have been involved in ELIR reviews at other institutions, in all three cycles of reviews. Four current staff members have, between them, been part of twelve ELIR's. Such experience will be invaluable across the entire ELIR process, from drafting the Reflective Analysis to more routine operational matters. Other staff members have been trained in ELIR3 and are awaiting allocation to a Review. The University is also well-placed
to draw on the expertise of ELIR Student Reviewers – approximately 25% of ELIR Reviews to date have featured a current/former HWU student as the Student Reviewer on the Team.

10. Possible HWU-Specific Themes for Review

Heriot-Watt University has made significant progress towards the areas for development highlighted in its ELIR2 Reports. In particular, the University has recently introduced a wide range of policies and procedures to strengthen the quality and standards of its multi-mode, multi-location provision (Policies on: Moderation of Assessment; Programme Titles, Courses and Learning Outcomes; Block Teaching; Campus Transfers; Exams in Different Timezones; post of Chief External Examiner).

While the University will not know until the week before the Part 1 Visit in January 2015 what the key themes for the ELIR Review will be, there are several topics which might be expected to be explored.

The ELIR Team is likely to be interested again in "the student learning experience" across all forms of provision (overseas campuses and partner organisations). HWU's international activity will continue to be a major area for review, including ALP's. In view of its particular nature as an Associate Campus (and the only such one), West London College could be an area of enquiry.

Various issues have emerged as the preparations for ELIR have progressed, particularly as each of the six sections and the various sub-sections within the Reflective Analysis are being written. The Learning and Teaching Board has been engaged in identifying gaps in processes, policies and, where necessary, managing the revision of procedures. As part of the process, there will be consultation and engagement with the University's Boards and Committees, including the three Academic Councils.

The following table highlights some of the key issues identified and progress towards them as at 25 March 2014:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional approach to sharing good practice in learning and teaching</th>
<th>proposed approach was endorsed by the Learning and Teaching Board on 5 March 2014.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional approach to self-evaluation</td>
<td>a process for institutional strategy development and review has been documented and endorsed by the Vice-Principal and the Director of Planning; the document will sit alongside other documents describing the University Strategic Plan process and also the Learning and Teaching Strategic Process document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional approach to the management of information</td>
<td>Documenting this approach is being progressed under the direction of the Academic Registrar &amp; Deputy Secretary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional process for gather and responding to student views</td>
<td>a first draft of a documented process for student surveys was considered by the Learning and Teaching Board on 5 March and is currently being revised by the Student Survey Management Group, with a view to a final version being presented to the Board on 11 June 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional approach to enhancing the student learning experience at ALP's</td>
<td>discussions at recent the Learning and Teaching Board meetings; proposals relating to inclusion of Enhancement Plans for ALP's at approval/renewal were approved by the Quality and Standards Committee; QSC will consider modified Visit procedures following consultation with Schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional approach to Collaborative Activity – ALP's</td>
<td>At its Away Day on 18 March 2014, the Learning and Teaching Board recommended that the SCOAIR proposals be re-visited, with a view to additional staffing being committed to the management of partnership activity in order to relieve the burden on academic staff of business, legal and planning matters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

M.King
Academic Registry
25 March 2014
Appendix

Content of the Reflective Analysis (ELIR Handbook, 3rd Edition)
The content/structure of the Reflective Analysis, the areas of focus during the ELIR Review Visit, and the content/structure of the Technical Report are based on the same six themes:

1. Institutional context and strategic framework
   i. Key features of the institution's context and mission
   ii. Strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching
   iii. Effectiveness of the approach to implementing strategies

2. Enhancing the student learning experience
   i. Composition and key trends in the student population, including typical routes into and through the institution
   ii. Supporting equality and diversity in the student population
   iii. Engaging and supporting students in their learning
   iv. Approaches to promoting the development of graduate attributes including employability
   v. Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience

3. Enhancement in learning and teaching
   i. Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice
   ii. Impact of the national Enhancement Themes and related activity
   iii. Engaging and supporting staff
   iv. Effectiveness of the approach to promoting good practice in learning and teaching

4. Academic standards
   i. Approach to setting, maintaining and reviewing academic standards
   ii. Management of assessment
   iii. Use of external reference points in managing academic standards
   iv. Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards

5. Self-evaluation and management of information
   i. Key features of the institution's approach
   ii. Commentary on the advance information set
   iii. Use of external reference points in self-evaluation
   iv. Management of public information
      Effectiveness of the approach to self-evaluation and management of information

6. Collaborative Activity
   i. Key features of the institution's strategic approach
   ii. Securing academic standards of collaborative provision
   iii. Enhancing the student learning experience on collaborative programmes
   iv. Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative activity

In each of the above headings, the Reflective Analysis should indicate:
• what is distinctive and what is typical about the institution
• what the key areas of strength and challenge are
• how the institution has evaluated its policy and practice
• how the institution intends to build on good practice or address areas for development.

In addition, the Reflective Analysis should identify:
• how it was prepared and approved
• how students were involved and the impact of that student engagement
• brief background information about the size and scale of the institution
• the institution's overarching strategic priorities
• what the institution is seeking to achieve from its engagement with the ELIR, and whether there are any particular matters it would wish the ELIR team to consider.

"Institutions are strongly encouraged to be open and honest in the RA".