

Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR4)

Overview and Briefing Paper

This paper provides an overview of Heriot-Watt University's fourth **Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR)**, which will be undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAAS) in 2019/2020.

This paper is one of a series of ELIR4 Updates, which are produced by the Head of Academic Quality, for University Committee for Learning and Teaching, the ELIR Steering Group and other Committees as appropriate.

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1. Key Dates

- HWU's ELIR Review Visit will take place in early 2020; there will be 2 parts: **Planning Visit: Thursday 30 January 2020; Review Visit: week 16 March 2020** (likely to be 5 days)
- Documentation to QAAS (Reflective Analysis and Advance Information Set): 15 November 2019
- 2018/19: preparations (drafting the Reflective Analysis; engagement across all campuses; progressing key issues; identifying and addressing gaps against key areas for review)
- 2019/20: finalisation and submission of documentation; review visit preparations; ELIR Review Visits; responding to outcomes of Planning Visit; post-review: commentary on draft reports; production of ELIR Action Plan to address review outcomes.

2. ELIR Responsibilities

The University Committee for Learning and Teaching has institutional responsibility for HWU's ELIR. In practice, much of the UCLT activity related to ELIR will be delegated to the ELIR Steering Group. The University's ELIR preparations are led and managed by the Academic Quality team.

3. ELIR Steering Group

At its meeting on 5 September 2018, the UCLT approved the establishment of the ELIR Steering Group, and the first meeting was held on 21 November 2018. The ELIR Steering Group meets on a monthly basis.

4. Scope of ELIR

The scope of ELIR includes **all of the institution's credit-bearing provision**. ELIR is concerned with the **learning experience of all students on credit-bearing provision**, irrespective of their level, mode or location of study. This will include: undergraduate and postgraduate students; taught and research students; full-time and part-time students, including those involved in credit-bearing continuing professional development; and campus-based, work-based and distance-learning students. It will include students entering the institution through the full variety of routes and pathways. It will include home, European and international students, irrespective of funding.

ELIR considers how effectively the institution **manages equality and diversity** within its student population. This will include the arrangements for identifying and responding to student needs.

The scope of ELIR includes **collaborative provision** wherever and however it is delivered, such as through partnership with a further education college or employer organisation. Where provision is made in conjunction with an overseas partner, ELIR will relate to the arrangements in place in the Scottish institution for managing the quality of the student learning experience and the academic standards of the awards. Scottish institutions will continue to participate in review of their transnational education (TNE) and related activity organised by QAA from time to time. The outcomes from that work will form useful reference points in ELIR.

5. Focus of ELIR

The Scottish sector has defined enhancement as **taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students.**

ELIR has a **focus on the institution's strategic approach to enhancement**, which will be implemented at multiple levels within the institution. The resulting enhancement may involve continuous improvement and/or more significant step-changes in policy and practice.

ELIR is particularly interested in the institution's strategic intentions and its plans for the **composition of the student population.**

ELIR has a **focus on the student learning experience.** This comprises two main aspects: **the learning opportunities the institution provides for its students** and **the extent to which students are engaged with the management of quality, and are, therefore, engaged as partners in shaping their learning.** The effectiveness of student engagement is a significant focus of ELIR: the extent to which students are partners in the formulation, operation and evaluation of the institution's approach to enhancement and partners in their own learning.

In order to take deliberate steps, it is expected that the **institution will have a clear strategic vision of the enhancement** it is seeking to bring about. It is also expected that the institution will **evaluate its current strengths and areas for development.** In doing so, the institution may make use of a framework of questions:

- where are we now?
- where do we want to be in the future?
- how are we going to get there?
- how will we know when we get there?

The **approach the institution takes to self-evaluation forms a significant focus in ELIR**, which includes how the institution makes use of variety of external reference points (SCQF guidance on quality; SCQF; Subject Benchmark Statements; UK Quality Code; Standards + Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and other relevant international reference points; UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning; Enhancement Themes).

ELIR promotes **managed risk-taking**: institutions will have to demonstrate their ability to identify and manage risks associated with change/enhancement.

Institutional approaches to internationalisation are explored through a number of dimensions in ELIR.

Key Areas for Review

The format of the institutional Reflective Analysis and the ELIR Team's Technical Report provide an overarching structure for the review. There are five key areas:

- 1) Contextual information about the institution, student population and review
- 2) Enhancing the student learning experience
- 3) Strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching
- 4) Academic standards and quality processes
- 5) Collaborative provision

See Appendix 1 for the sub-sections within each of these five categories.

6. Outcomes of ELIR

Judgements

ELIR4 judgements contain two elements:

- a clear statement on the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for quality and academic standards (the threshold or baseline judgement): “quality” refers to the quality of the student learning experience; “standards” refers to the academic standards of awards.
- a suite of differentiated outcomes identifying good practice (commendations) and areas where the institution is asked to improve, or to review its approach (recommendations).

As with ELIR3, there are three categories of effectiveness: “effectiveness”; “limited effectiveness”; “not effective”. An “effective” judgement can be qualified by a priority action (ie a caveat/proviso). *Definitions for each of the three judgements can be found in the ELIR4 Handbook (pp14-15).*

Reporting

The reporting element of ELIR remains as previously: a concise Outcome Report (judgements, commendations and recommendations) and a more comprehensive Technical Report (detailed commentary on the five key review areas). Institutions will continue to provide a one year on Follow-up Report.

7. Composition of Review Team

In previous ELIR cycles, the number and composition of review teams was identical for every institution. For ELIR4, there is a core minimum; beyond that, the size and composition of the team can be varied to fit the institutional context.

Core Minimum of the Review Team: one student reviewer; three UK-based academic reviewers (at least one from the Scottish HE sector, and at least one from RUK); one co-ordinating reviewer (senior administrator). Institutions have the option to include an International Reviewer (mandatory in ELIR2 and ELIR3) or additional academic reviewers.

HWU will have a say in the final selection of the team, eg at least one team member with experience of international, multi-mode and multi-location activity; at least one team member from a pre-92 institution.

8. ELIR4: Continuity and Change

The most significant change in the method for the fourth cycle is the **emphasis ELIR4 places on the contextualisation of each review**. The intention behind this change is to maximise the value of the exercise to individual institutions and to the sector, building on the strength of support for ELIR to continue being enhancement-led, and acknowledging the importance placed on evidence-based self-evaluation.

ELIR4 enables a range of outcomes to be achieved:

- Promoting holistic, evidence-based evaluation by institutions and the opportunity to engage in discussion on the outcomes of that evaluation with a team of peers.
- Delivering a clear statement on baseline quality and academic standards, and beyond that providing a suite of differentiated commendations and recommendations.
- Enabling whole-sector enhancement and developmental activity to be conducted, drawing on thematic information about strengths and challenges of the institutions reviewed.

ELIR4 introduces a number of changes in the process, many of which relate to **contextualisation**:

- more detailed discussions about the scope and focus of the review at an early stage
- feedback from the ELIR team on the contextualisation decisions in advance of the Planning Visit
- a one-day Planning Visit rather than a two-day Part 1 Visit
- adjustments to the Technical report structure and style, including much greater emphasis on the institution's approach to using data to inform its decision-making and the analysis of its strengths, challenges and priorities.

There will be a particular emphasis how students have been engaged in determining the institution's chosen focal points.

There is a detailed section on Contextualisation in the ELIR4 Handbook (see section 10 for references).

There will be greater flexibility between reviews in a number of respects:

- the size and composition of the ELIR team can be varied to fit the institutional context

- the duration of the Review Visit can be adjusted
- the gap between the Planning Visit and the Review Visit can be adjusted during the date-setting stage.

Institutions will continue to prepare and submit a Reflective Analysis (RA) and an Advance Information Set (AIS). Case studies will no longer be required, although institutions may submit them if they wish to present information to their ELIR team in that format. The AIS will continue to contain a mapping of the institution's policy and practice against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) - this can be an update to the mapping submitted in ELIR 3.

The nature of Follow-up activity will be aligned more closely with the Focus On projects, with the intention of facilitating cross-institutional learning.

Throughout the development of ELIR 4, universal support has been expressed for the method to continue being enhancement-led. The developments being introduced are intended to strengthen its enhancement focus and to continue championing student engagement at all stages including through the ongoing annual discussion meetings. The role of student views in the decisions taken around contextualisation of ELIRs will be explored by the ELIR teams in each review.

Quality Enhancement Framework

ELIR continues to fulfil a key role as one of the five interrelated elements of the Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland:

- Enhancement Themes
- institution-led review
- student engagement in quality
- public information
- Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR).

9. Key Areas for HWU

More detailed briefings and discussions on HWU-specific matters related to ELIR can be requested from

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10. Further Information

For more information related to HWU's ELIR4, please contact m.king@hw.ac.uk

Detailed guidance and handbooks on ELIR are available on QAA Scotland's website at:

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review>

Structure of the Institutional Reflective Analysis and the ELIR Team Technical Report

1. **Contextual information about the institution, student population and the review**
 - Summary information about the institution, including strategic framework, organisational structure.
 - Composition, key trends and anticipated changes in the student population, including information on retention, progression and outcomes.
 - Commentary on the preparation for the ELIR, including confirmation of the nature and rationale for the contextualised range of topics included in the self-evaluation.
 - Summary of the institution's follow-up to the previous ELIR.
 - Impact of the institution's approach to engaging students in ELIR preparations.
2. **Enhancing the student learning experience**
 - Student representation and engagement, including responding to student views.
 - Recognising and responding to equality and diversity in the student population, including widening access and mode and location of study.
 - Supporting students in their learning at each stage of the learner journey from pre-admission to post-graduation, including outreach, admissions, articulation, graduate attributes, assessment, employability, and enterprise and entrepreneurship.
 - Postgraduate taught and research student experience.
 - Learning environment, including the use of technology.
 - Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience.
3. **Strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching**
 - Strategic approach to enhancement.
 - Impact of the national Enhancement Themes and related activity on policy and practice.
 - Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice.
 - Engaging, developing and supporting staff.
 - Effectiveness of the approach to implementing institutional strategies and enhancing learning and teaching.
4. **Academic standards and quality processes**
 - Key features of the institution's approach to managing quality and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards.
 - Use of external reference points in quality processes.
 - Commentary on action taken since ELIR 3 and identification of matters arising from the AIS not otherwise explored.
 - Approach to using data to inform decision-making and evaluation.
 - Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards.
 - Effectiveness of the institution's approach to self-evaluation, including the effective use of data to inform decision-making.
5. **Collaborative provision**
 - Key features of the institution's strategic approach (to include collaborative activity, online and distance learning where delivered with others and work-based learning).
 - Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative provision including arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience.