

Analysis of institutional annual statements on Institution-led Review from the higher education sector: 2018-19

About this analysis

1. This is an analysis of the annual statements on Institution-led Review (ILR) submitted to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) by each Scottish higher education institution (HEI). The [SFC guidance](#)¹ asks institutions to cover a range of topics in their statements: ILR outcomes, review of support services, student engagement in ILR, relevant contextual information and key messages derived from monitoring and analysis of data including feedback from students. This paper summarises the key information arising from the annual statements with particular emphasis on the ILR and related outcomes.
2. The analysis provides an overview of the themes emerging through ILR processes across the Scottish sector and over time. It is not an exact measure of what is good or more challenging in the sector for several reasons. In line with the enhancement-led approach, institutions use their own review schedules and have flexibility to establish different methods for conducting ILR, including having different units of review (paragraph 4). Nonetheless, there is value in reflecting on the themes arising from the institution reviews as a collection. This analysis also shares a range of practice identified within the institutions which we encourage colleagues in the sector to consider in reflecting on their own practice.

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3. This paper contains the following sections:
 - Summary of the key points (paragraphs 6-11)
 - Detailed outcomes of institution-led review (ILR) in 2018-19
 - areas highlighted as predominantly positive practice (paragraphs 13-15)
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 - What do the statements tell us about the nature of review in the university sector? (paragraphs 57-67)
 - Institutional comments on context and data analysis (paragraphs 68-79)
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¹ www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/guidance_sfcgd112017/SFCGD112017-SFC-guidance-HE-institutions-quality.pdf

Points of important context when reading this analysis

4. The [SFC guidance to higher education institutions](#)² on quality states that the primary mechanism by which institutions assure and enhance the quality of provision is through processes of institution-led evaluation and review, referred to as 'Institution-led Review' (ILR) and it is a matter for each institution to determine how it organises its internal processes for reviewing and evaluating provision, provided it follows the SFC guidance and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. All aspects of the provision are expected to be reviewed systematically and rigorously on a cycle of not more than six years. This means that:
- the duration of ILR schedules adopted by HEIs will vary to support their individual academic structures
 - the unit of review used by institutions will vary, for example, some may use programme-level, others subject/discipline-level or possibly school/faculty-level, again to support their academic structures. Organisational restructuring will often have an impact on both the ILR schedule and unit of review being used by an HEI
 - ILRs and their outcomes relate to particular subject areas or provision and not the whole institution - it is therefore possible that positive practice and areas for development can be identified at the same institution in the same year.
 - topics are summarised and, by definition, the full background is not included here.
5. This paper includes the names of institutions where good practice and development points arising from ILR are identified in the reports submitted to SFC. It is equally possible that development points can be picked up in one year when all other provision exhibits positive practice for the same topic. Nonetheless, we believe that by including institutions' names, this report becomes more useful for sector colleagues as it assists with sharing practice.

Summary of key points

6. It is evident from the annual statements that ILR activities in Scotland are thorough, providing institutions with assurance that academic standards are being achieved and that the quality of the student experience is high and is being enhanced. This view concurs with the outcomes from Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR). The annual statements show that students are engaged with both ILR and enhancement activities. It is also clear that institutions use the ILR outcomes, as well as other important information, such as student feedback from institutional and national surveys, to improve provision at both programme/subject level and institutional level.

² www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/guidance_sfcgd112017/SFCGD112017-SFC-guidance-HE-institutions-quality.pdf

7. The analysis notes an inevitable fluctuation in the volume of ILR activity between reporting years. This variation simply reflects the fact that each HEI has developed and manages its own review schedule to support its academic structures and unit of review (paragraph 4). In 2018-19, there was a substantial volume of evaluative activity carried out by institutions: 95 ILRs (compared to 130 in 2017-18 and 94 in 2016-17) and 120 professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) engagements (compared to 140 in 2017-18 and 117 in 2016-17) accrediting over 287 programmes (compared to 319 programmes in 2017-18 and 458 in 2016-17). The PSRB figures also reflect the cyclical nature of these engagements, and no particular conclusions should be drawn from this change in number.
8. Many of the ILR outcomes are specific to the provision being reviewed but trends or themes can be seen across the individual reports. Reviewing the analysis reports that have been produced by QAA Scotland over the last four years, it shows that the majority of the themes identified by HEIs through their ILR processes have remained relatively constant. The reports indicate that some themes continue to evolve, illustrated where topics emerge for consideration for the first time (for example, 'sense of community' in paragraphs 14 and 15). Also, each year, some of the topics identified have shifted slightly in terms of being cited as: predominantly positive practice, as areas predominantly for development, or as a combination of both. Some of this change can be attributed to the different mix of disciplines being reviewed each year. Thematic change within the sector as a whole is more likely to be identified within the ELIR process, although some commonality of broad themes can be seen between the ILR and the ELIR outcomes. In relation to development points, it is important to note that many of these ask institutions to build on existing practice or to bring about greater consistency in their practice.
9. **Predominantly positive practice** is identified in the following areas:
 - quality and commitment of staff - was also identified as an area of predominantly positive practice across the sector in both 2017-18 and 2016-17
 - sense of community - in last year's report this topic was discussed as a sub-set of the 'student support' theme.
10. The vast majority of **predominantly for development points** are about building on existing or ensuring consistent practice. Areas identified were:
 - staff and physical resources - which has now been identified as an area predominantly for development in the last five consecutive academic sessions (reported on since 2014-15)
 - assessment and feedback to students - has emerged as an area predominantly reported on for development this session. In the previous three years, this theme was reporting on as being an area of both positive practice and requiring further development.
11. A number of **additional themes** emerge in each year's analysis which are identified by institutions as being positive practice in some ILRs and as areas for development in

others. It is important to remember (see paragraph 4) that ILRs and their outcomes relate to particular subject areas or provision and not the whole institution and, as a result, it is therefore possible that positive practice and areas for development can be identified at the same institution in the same year. This session, five areas emerged:

- **employability and links with industry** - was reported on both positively and as an area for development in both 2017-18 and 2016-17, and as an area of predominantly positive practice across the sector in 2015-16 and 2014-15. While institutions clearly recognise the need to continue to develop their practice, this theme is viewed very positively by institutions, with the annual reports often providing detailed information on the broad range of approaches offered by HEIs. Perhaps given the area's current strategic importance, the reports have also frequently outlined information linked to planned development activity and encouraging programme areas to build on existing practice
- **student support** - was identified as a topic having aspects of positive practice and areas for development again this session (also identified as such in 2017-18 and 2016-17), and as predominantly positive practice in 2015-16 and 2014-15
- **learning and teaching practices and curriculum design** - this is the second academic session that institutions have reported on this theme as being an area of positive practice, while recognising a requirement to further enhance practice. It was reported on as being predominantly positive practice in both 2015-16 and 2016-17
- **use of technology to support learning and teaching practice** - was identified as being a theme of predominantly positive practice in 2017-18
- **postgraduate student experience** - had previously been identified as an area for development (2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18)
- **academic and staff development** - was reported on as an area of development in 2017-18.

Detailed outcomes of institution-led review in 2018-19

12. The detail included in this section draws on the information provided in the institutional annual statements. It is possible that additional examples of practice could be found from wider engagement with the institutions. The types of topics that emerged from the analysis very much mirror those identified and discussed in previous reports.

Areas highlighted as predominantly positive practice

Quality and commitment of staff:

13. As noted in previous years, this session sees institutions continuing to report on the dedication and commitment, enthusiasm and expertise, quality and availability, approachability and engagement of staff from both academic areas and student support

services, with 13 HEIs viewing this as an area of positive practice.³ The reports indicate the qualities listed are highly valued by students who feel supported to succeed at key points in their student journey. A number of institutions also reported on the positive impact of collaborative working across academic areas and/or professional services on the learning experience of students (University of Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University, St Andrews and University of Strathclyde).

Sense of community:

14. In last year's report, 'sense of community' was discussed as a sub-set of the 'student support' topic. In 2018-19, five HEIs reported positively on their approaches to building strong staff and student communities (University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, Heriot-Watt University and University of St Andrews), viewing these communities as: enhancing student awareness of the range of support mechanisms (within their academic area and from student support services); improving engagement and developing a sense of belonging; and providing a space for reflection on, and improvements to, the student learning and teaching experience.
15. The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University and the University of the Highlands and Islands talked about the use of student societies to develop a sense of belonging with many of these groups being student-led. While the University of Dundee, in some discipline areas, is using 'academic families' to increase awareness of the pastoral and academic support available to students.

Areas highlighted predominantly for development or enhancement

16. Two areas were identified from the annual statements by HEIs. The annual statements suggest that depending on institutional structures and arrangements for managing review outcomes, institutions use a variety of arrangements to address development points. The majority of institutions tend to separate discipline or school-specific matters from those areas requiring consideration at institutional level.

Staff and physical resources:

17. This is the fifth consecutive academic session that the management and development of staffing resource across programmes and/or physical resources has emerged as an area for development, identified again in session 2018-19 across 11 reports.⁴ As was the case in the 2017-18 report, the main staffing challenge this session relates to is having adequate staff resource to support programme delivery, while ensuring equity of workloads.⁵

³ University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Open University, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling and University of Strathclyde.

⁴ University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling and University of Strathclyde.

⁵ University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, University of Stirling and University of Strathclyde.

18. The physical resource challenges included: the availability of adequate physical teaching, learning, study and social spaces for students (University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Glasgow School of Art and Heriot-Watt University); class and examination timetabling (University of Edinburgh), and IT systems and learning support infrastructure (University of Abertay, University of Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt University). The annual reports provide evidence that institutions are working to address these issues, with four of them describing work which is either underway or in the planning phase linked to significant strategic investment in their estate, including developing learning and teaching and social spaces, student support facilities, library and IT, and sports facilities (University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, University of Stirling and University of Strathclyde). The University of Strathclyde reported on the opening of its new Wolfston Building incorporating both teaching and social spaces for students while ensuring academic staff remain accessible. The University of the Highlands and Islands detailed plans to support the implementation of its new virtual learning environment (VLE) (see paragraph 48) and Edinburgh Napier University commented on the effective use of staff and technicians within the clinical simulation lab service which were deemed by the ILR review panel to be integral to the experience of students in the School of Health and Social Care.

Assessment and feedback to students:

19. Analysis of the annual reports shows assessment and feedback to students emerged as an area for development in 2018-19. While institutions reported on both positive practice and development activities, the number of individual citations and examples of practice provided gives a strong sense of the volume of development activity being undertaken by HEIs as they continue efforts to achieve improvements in performance, in what is recognised as an area of continued strategic focus for the sector. It is useful to note that evidence emerging from the current ELIR 4 cycle indicates that assessment and feedback is tending to emerge more positively.

20. Assessment and feedback was identified as an area for development in 15 reports.⁶ Institutions reported on the need to improve: the consistency of their assessment and/or feedback processes for students (University of Aberdeen, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, University of the Highlands and Islands and Open University); the timeliness of feedback to students (University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow); the quality of assessment feedback (University of Dundee and University of Edinburgh); and the need to adopt approaches to consider the volume and nature of assessment in order to avoid assessment bunch and overloading students (Glasgow Caledonian University, Queen Margaret University, Scotland's Rural College and University of St Andrews). The Open University annual report describes work it has been undertaking to improve the consistency of tuition and assessment across modules in a programme by restarting its 'Language of Assessment' project and 'Language of

⁶ University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Open University, Queen Margaret University, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Scotland's Rural College, University of Stirling, University of St Andrews.

Assessment' workshops. The programme also developed a Language of Assessment strategy for integration into a broader initiative on widening access and participation.

21. A number of reports commented on the need to adopt more innovative and diverse approaches to assessment and feedback techniques and mechanisms, including the use of online/digital assessment, marking and feedback (University of Dundee, Heriot-Watt University, Robert Gordon University, University of St Andrews and University of Strathclyde).
22. Positive practice was identified in nine of the institutional statements.⁷ The majority of this practice highlighted the breadth, variety and innovative nature of the assessment and feedback methods employed across programmes (University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, Robert Gordon University, University of St Andrews and University of Stirling). The University of Glasgow reported assessment and feedback is one strand of their Transforming Glasgow project, with two working groups established to consider assessment and feedback, and e-assessment and that, in the interim, they also have a smaller programme of work underway targeting quick wins. Heriot-Watt University, Queen Margaret University and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland reported that following analysis of National Student Survey (NSS) results, assessment and feedback had been identified as an institutional priority (paragraph 75).
23. Robert Gordon University provided an update in its annual report on a university-wide project, commenced in 2016, to enhance students' experiences of assessment and feedback. The work is being led by the Department for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access (DELTA) which is working collaboratively with academic schools, bringing together students and staff to identify and pursue enhancement solutions. The project has resulted in a shift to the use of online submission, marking and feedback. The University goes on to report on improvements in its internal Student Experience Questionnaire and in its NSS scores in questions linked to assessment and feedback (paragraph 75).
24. The University of Dundee and University of Strathclyde continue with their implementation of the Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment (TESTA) methodology. No specifics were given regarding the progress of these projects against implementation timelines.

Additional themes

25. A number of **additional themes** emerge in each year's analysis which are identified by institutions as being positive practice in some ILRs and as areas for development in others. It is important to remember (see paragraph 4) that ILRs and their outcomes relate to particular subject areas or provision and not the whole institution and, as a result, it is therefore possible that positive practice and areas for development can be identified at the same institution in the same year. The majority of the themes explored in this report are therefore reported on here. It is clear from the reports that on the whole, HEIs view

⁷ University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, Robert Gordon University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling.

these themes as strengths within their institution but recognise and articulate a drive for further development and enhancement, often linked to a requirement to achieve more in order to deliver either institutional strategies or support the achievement to sector/external drivers.

26. Six broad topics emerged as positive practice in some reports and as areas for development in others, these were:

- employability and links with industry
- student support
- learning and teaching practices and curriculum design
- use of technology to support learning and teaching practice
- postgraduate student experience
- academic and staff development.

Employability and links with industry:

27. With the continued emphasis being placed on apprenticeships and the skills agenda across the sector, enhancing student employability skills is cited repeatedly across the annual reports to SFC. As shown below (paragraphs 28-31), this theme is viewed very positively by institutions, with the annual reports often providing detailed information on the broad range of approaches offered by institutions. However, given the area's strategic importance, the reports have also frequently outlined information linked to planned development activity.

28. Fourteen of the institutional statements⁸ identified employability as an area of positive practice, with strong and positive links with industry identified by eight institutions (University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Queen Margaret University, Scotland's Rural College and University of the West of Scotland). Four HEIs commented on providing opportunities for external partners to support curriculum design and development (Edinburgh Napier University, University of the Highlands and Islands, University of Stirling and University of the West of Scotland), with Edinburgh Napier University and University of the West of Scotland specifically commenting on the effective use of employer liaison groups in this work. Six institutions also cited placements, work-based learning, field trips, volunteering and study abroad as examples of positive practice (University of Aberdeen, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, University of the Highlands and Islands, University of St Andrews, and University of the West of Scotland).

29. Three institutions specifically commented on the use of graduate attributes to support employability and careers development (University of Glasgow, University of the Highlands and Islands, and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland). As part of the review of its postgraduate curriculum, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland are using graduate

⁸ University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Open University, Queen Margaret University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, University of Strathclyde and University of the West of Scotland.

attributes to help qualify what is distinctive about graduate study at the Conservatoire, taking account rising challenges around employability.

30. The importance and benefits of professional practice was outlined by four institutions. Queen Margaret University highlighted the importance of positive relationships with clinical placement providers to support the student experience. Glasgow School of Art is employing a range of initiatives to improve student awareness of professional practice. The University of Aberdeen reported on work in the School of Education where, in response to student feedback, school placement opportunities have also been incorporated into year one and two of the programme. The review panel commented particularly on the manner in which students were involved in taking forward this enhancement development. The University of Stirling reported from its ILR of Social Work that the partnered delivery of learning and teaching with the University's Service Users and Carers' Group (UNITY), supports students to develop rich developmental and learning experiences for future practice with service users and carers.
31. The University of Stirling also reported that employability and skills is a key institutional priority and that the University has set targets to both expand the number of placement opportunities available to students and improve the number of students entering employment or further study on graduation. A range of approaches are being employed including: embedding employability into the curriculum; developing standalone employability skills workshops; more effective use of industrial advisory boards; the establishment of specialist employability posts in each faculty; a new system to support placement administration; establishing a work-based learning policy and toolkit; and working to increase the numbers of credit-bearing work-based learning modules.
32. Fourteen institutions⁹ reported they had received recommendations to enhance or develop practice in the area of employability and links with industry. A number indicated work was underway to strengthen external relationships with industry (University of Dundee, Glasgow Caledonian University and Heriot-Watt University), to increase the numbers of students undertaking placement opportunities (University of the West of Scotland) and make changes to the size and composition of industrial advisory boards to improve the effectiveness of their operation (Edinburgh Napier University and University of the West of Scotland).
33. On the subject of student placements, institutions indicated development activity was underway to: improve support for students preparing for placement (University of the Highlands and Islands); clarify the role of placements (Queen Margaret University and Scotland's Rural College); clarify the expectations placed on students and placement providers and their staff during placement (Queen Margaret University and Scotland's Rural College); enhance support systems to mitigate students concerns about some aspects of placement administration (University of Stirling) and to provide more consistent support for students while out on placement (University of Aberdeen). The

⁹ University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, University of Highlands and Islands, Open University, Queen Margaret University, Scotland's Rural College, University of Strathclyde, University of Stirling and University of the West of Scotland.

Open University is offering direct careers support for students including a new 30-credit module and a careers and employability workshop.

34. Seven institutions commented positively on work undertaken to approve provision to support the delivery of graduate apprenticeships (University of Aberdeen, Edinburgh Napier University, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Open University, Robert Gordon University and University of the West of Scotland).

Student support:

35. A sector-wide commitment to providing high-quality support for students is evident with 14 institutional statements specifically commenting on this as an area of positive practice.¹⁰ A number of themes emerged from the analysis. In relation to widening access/participation, ILR teams commended the range and quality of support available to widening participation students to ensure they are appropriately equipped for university-level study (University of Abertay, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Queen Margaret University, University of Stirling and University of Strathclyde), along with the partnership working with further education colleges (University of Abertay, Glasgow Caledonian University and University of Stirling). The University of the Highlands and Islands described a range of activities it is undertaking to support widening participation including: the introduction of a SWAP access Nursing programme; integrated study pathways from school, through further education and into higher education, which offer full academic credit; and a female-only computing programme and male-only care/nursing events. Glasgow Caledonian University conducted a thematic review of the articulating student experience which concluded that the University had a mature and well-developed approach to widening participation that covers the key stages of the student journey. The University also offers a range of support mechanisms to students, including the Caledonian Club, the Advanced Higher Club, College Connect, academic/wellbeing support during study and careers support for exit.
36. A number of reviews spoke positively about the induction experience delivered for students (Edinburgh Napier University, Heriot-Watt University, University of Stirling and the University of the West of Scotland). The effective management of personal tutoring systems was highlighted in review activity at Edinburgh Napier University, Heriot-Watt University and University of Stirling, with a small number of institutions also reporting on the development of student mentoring systems (Edinburgh Napier University and University of St Andrews). The University of Dundee's report describe the production of a student-led video to support the transition of students between years of their undergraduate programme.
37. The institutional annual reports give a genuine sense of a sector which is striving to ensure it continues to deliver the best support possible for its students. This is evidenced in the number of developments points raised across institutional review activity, with 15

¹⁰ University of Abertay, University of Dundee, Edinburgh Napier University, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, Open University, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, University of Strathclyde, and University of the West of Scotland.

institutions reporting on matters.¹¹ The vast majority of development points are about building on existing or ensuring consistent practice.

38. Three institutions reporting on undertaking activities to enhance induction arrangements for students (University of Edinburgh, University of St Andrews and University of Stirling) and a number of reviews asked subject areas/programme teams to continue to review retention and progression data to better understand the reasons behind student withdrawal/transfer, so strategies and approaches to practice could be developed to improve retention (University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands and University of Stirling).
39. Seven institutions indicated that activities are being undertaken to further enhance and strengthen their personal tutor systems (University of Aberdeen, University of Glasgow, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, Robert Gordon University, University of Stirling and the University of the West of Scotland) and five discussed the need to enhance communications and signposting in order to ensure students are aware of how and where they can access the academic and professional services support available to them (University of Dundee, University of Glasgow, Queen Margaret University, Scotland's Rural College and University of Stirling).
40. Given current media attention and the requirements detailed in SFC's current Outcome Agreements, student wellbeing and approaches to supporting students with mental health concerns, was reported on by seven institutions (University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Robert Gordon University, University of St Andrews and University of Stirling). The annual statements go on to outline a range of approaches being employed including: establishing frameworks, agreements, strategies and action plans (University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, University of the Highlands and Islands and University of Stirling); the appointment of specialist practitioners (University of the Highlands and Islands and University of St Andrews) and training and development opportunities and workshops for both staff and students (Robert Gordon University and University of Stirling). The University of the Highlands and Islands conducted a thematic review of support for student mental health, launching a student mental health agreement linked to their Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) and supporting the funding of a dedicated mental health practitioner who will develop the University's Mental Health Strategy.
41. Glasgow School of Art has introduced a Student Experience Action Tracker (SEAT) system to support the institution to more effectively monitor the progress of all actions being taken in relation to improving the student experience. The University of Strathclyde has established a new Student Experience Committee convened by the Student Union President and are also making use of a student monitoring system which supports colleagues to access and review 'live' retention data which can be analysed by key student groups, for example, mature and MD20/40 students.

¹¹ University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow School of Art, University of the Highlands and Islands, Heriot-Watt University, Open University, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, University of St Andrews, Scotland's Rural College, University of Stirling, and University of the West of Scotland.

42. The University of the Highlands and Islands has launched an online service desk encompassing IT, facilities, library and student records and is further enhancing its communications with students using its student portal, as it strives to improve access to services for students regardless of location or mode of study. The University of Edinburgh has embarked on a Service Excellence Programme (SEP), which aims to transform the University's core professional services over a five-year period to 2022. During 2018-19, the programme delivered a number of enhancements including personalised exam timetables, lectures and tutorials, students' phones via Office365 calendars, the launch of a dedicated Student Immigration Service and the first phase of a new dedicated Study and Work Away Service for students and staff. Heriot-Watt University reported that its 'Building Our Community' project involves significant review of all the Professional Services.

Learning and teaching practices and curriculum design:

43. Fifteen HEIs¹² made specific reference to this area as positive practice arising from their reviews, with the activity being commended for its quality and breadth (University of Aberdeen, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, University of St Andrews and University of Strathclyde), the use of innovative approaches (University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University and Open University) and the currency and relevancy of the curriculum (University of St Andrews and University of Stirling).

44. Examples of particular practices include: approaches to support students' engagement with interdisciplinary content on modules and/or programmes (University of Dundee and Queen Margaret University); approaches to curriculum development (University of Dundee and Robert Gordon University); the integration of theory and practice (Glasgow School of Art and Queen Margaret University); approaches to enhance the interactive nature of the learning experience (Scotland's Rural College); and the opportunity within the curriculum for students to develop a range of skills linked to research, academic writing and employability (paragraphs 27-34) (University of Edinburgh, Queen Margaret University and University of the West of Scotland).

45. Alongside the evident range of positive practice and ongoing enhancement to existing approaches, learning and teaching practices and curriculum design also emerged as an area for further development in 11 reports.¹³ Specific themes are difficult to identify across what is a diverse set of recommendations for development, with many of the examples cited reflecting either wider institutional strategic priorities or the specific priorities within discipline areas.

Use of technology to support learning and teaching practice:

¹² University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, University of Glasgow, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, Open University, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, University of Strathclyde, and University of the West of Scotland.

¹³ University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, University of Glasgow, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, Open University, Queen Margaret University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling and University of the West of Scotland.

46. This session, the use of technology to support learning and teaching practice was commented on positively by nine HEIs.¹⁴ The reports suggest this outcome is becoming of increasing strategic importance to institutions, who while recognising its importance and value in enhancing the learning and teaching experience of classroom-based students, are also actively exploring how technology can be more innovatively employed to support different programme delivery options, for example, online, distance learning, part-time, transnational education (TNE), graduate apprenticeships (paragraph 34) and work-based learning, and possible new income streams. The increased strategic importance of this outcome may account for the fact that 12 HEIs¹⁵ also highlighted it in their ILR activity as requiring further development and enhancement.
47. Positive practice highlighted in the reviews included: the increasing use and continued development of VLEs - particularly to support online or distance-learning students (University of Glasgow, Open University, Robert Gordon University and University of Strathclyde); the use of technology to support assessment and feedback processes (Robert Gordon University and University of Stirling); the collaboration between specialist IT and/or student support services and academic areas (Edinburgh Napier University and University of the West of Scotland); an increased commitment to enhancing the information available online for students (Robert Gordon University); and the development of online induction resources (University of the West of Scotland). Five institutions (University of Aberdeen, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, University of Stirling and University of Strathclyde) indicated work is underway to consider the use of learning analytics (LA) to support aspects of student engagement, retention and attainment.
48. As well as making a significant investment in upgrading wi-fi, the University of the Highlands and Islands reported that a major focus of activity in 2018-19 was the implementation of new VLE. Support activities included setting up a network of local champions, the delivery of face-to-face sessions by the project team, training and guidance delivered via an online introductory module and a series of webinars and virtual drop in sessions. Robert Gordon University has worked on the publication of a Baseline for Support for Online Learning and also undertaken work on its digital estate and student-facing support services.
49. The areas of development cited in the report were diverse with the main themes being: to continue with efforts to share good practice across the institution; increase the use of technology/digital approaches to support the learning, teaching and assessment experiences of students; keep under review that technical support required to support the use of technology (particularly where institutions have strategic ambitions to expand online/blended provision); and continuing to ensure greater consistency and/or parity of the student experience.

¹⁴ Edinburgh Napier University, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Open University, Robert Gordon University, Scotland's Rural College, University of Stirling, University of Strathclyde and University of the West of Scotland.

¹⁵ University of Aberdeen, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Open University, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews and University of the West of Scotland.

Postgraduate student experience:

50. During the ELIR 3 cycle, some aspects of the postgraduate experience emerged as areas for development at 13 out of 18 institutions reviewed. Themes included training and support for postgraduates that teach, developing the research community, induction, and providing better consistency of information. In session 2016-17, the sector considered the postgraduate research (PGR) student experience via Focus On. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the 2018-19 analysis noted that the vast majority of matters reported on by institutions in their annual reports, either as commendations or recommendations, relate specifically to the experience of PGR students.
51. The reports confirmed that a number of HEIs had undertaken thematic reviews of the PGR student experience in 2018-19 (Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow School of Art, Scotland's Rural College and University of Stirling). The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's report confirmed it is currently undertaking wholesale review of its postgraduate curriculum which will be ready for validation in session 2019-20. The University of Glasgow described its intentions to strengthen support for all postgraduate students with governance responsibilities for this area moving to the University's Student Experience, and Learning and Teaching Committees. The University's college-level committees have also been tasked with ensuring the postgraduate taught experience is similarly aligned to that of undergraduate students. The University is also planning to undertake revisions to its postgraduate advising systems. The University of Stirling has established an Institute of Advanced Studies to support the development of its PGR experience and develop the broader research community. Following a thematic review of its PGR student experience, Glasgow Caledonian University is working to ensure that PGR students are more closely aligned with their disciplines and academic schools. The University has created dedicated physical space for PGR students in the library, is ensuring the Graduate School continues to be a hub for research students and supervisor development, and has worked in partnership with the Students' Association to review the academic representation structure to strengthen the PGR student voice.
52. All seven of the institutions who identified areas of positive practice in the postgraduate student experience, reported on these only in the context of the experience of PGR students (Glasgow School of Art, Edinburgh Napier University, Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews, University of Strathclyde and University of Stirling). A broad range of themes were identified including: the quality of supervision teams (Scotland's Rural College and University of Stirling); opportunities for students to engage in training and development (Edinburgh Napier University, Glasgow School of Art, Scotland's Rural College, University of Stirling and University of Strathclyde); induction support for PGR students (Scotland's Rural College and University of Stirling); and work to strengthen research communities and promote a sense of belonging (Edinburgh Napier University, Glasgow School of Art, University of St Andrews and University of Stirling).
53. Eight institutions¹⁶ identified areas for development in the postgraduate student experience. Where information has been provided by institutions, this section attempts to

¹⁶ Edinburgh Napier University, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews, and University of Stirling.

qualify these areas as being relevant to either postgraduate research students (PGR) or postgraduate taught students (PGT).

- **PGT students** - one HEI reported on the need to keep the quality of teaching delivered by postgraduate tutors under review and linked this to making enhancements to their processes for recruiting postgraduate tutors (University of St Andrews). The ILRs carried out by two institutions flagged that further work was required to support PGT students and enhance supervision arrangements (Glasgow School of Art and University of Stirling).
- **PGR students** - institutions highlighted a range of developments linked to the PGR experience including: improving structures, processes and communication systems (Scotland's Rural College and University of St Andrews); strengthen the PGR community and wider research culture (Glasgow Caledonian University and Scotland's Rural College); induction arrangements for PGR students (Heriot-Watt University, Scotland's Rural College); strengthening PGR student representation (Heriot-Watt University and Scotland's Rural College); plans to expand postgraduate development and training opportunities for students (Heriot-Watt University and Scotland's Rural College) and for PGR supervisors (University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University and Scotland's Rural College); continuing work to enhance support for postgraduate students who teach (University of St Andrews); and enhancements to supervision arrangements (University of Stirling).

Academic and staff development:

54. Ten institutions provided examples of positive practice.¹⁷ These included: equality and diversity training for staff (Glasgow School of Art); development and support activities for staff (University of Dundee, University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Robert Gordon University and University of Strathclyde); the high-quality provision offered by academic development departments (University of the Highlands and Islands, Robert Gordon University, University of St Andrews and University of the West of Scotland); development activities to support the adoption and use of learning technologies (University of Dundee, University of the Highlands and Islands and Robert Gordon University) and support for early career academics, tutors and demonstrators (University of Edinburgh and University of St Andrews).
55. Five reports indicate that teaching and teaching excellence is being considered within staff recognition, career review, development and reward schemes (University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, University of Glasgow and Robert Gordon University).
56. Eight HEIs reported on areas of development,¹⁸ with specific themes difficult to identify across what is a diverse set of recommendations for development. However, four

¹⁷ University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Robert Gordon University, University of St Andrews, University of Strathclyde and University of the West of Scotland.

¹⁸ University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Open University, Robert Gordon University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews and University of Stirling.

institutions did report on taking steps to promote and raise awareness of the staff development opportunities on offer and a commitment to enhancing staff engagement with these. Through its review activity, the University of St Andrews encouraged its academic development unit (Centre for Academic, Professional and Organisational Development (CAPOD)) to continue to explore why some groups of staff and students struggle to engage with the development activities on offer, what more can be done to raise awareness of these activities, and an ongoing requirement to ensure the development offer aligns with strategic priorities. In a similar vein, Robert Gordon University reported on some of the challenges associated with ensuring staff engagement and development with online learning practice as it strives to ensure the consistency of the student experience across the University. The University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow recognised the importance of ensuring staff were encouraged and given time to engage with activities linked to developing their learning and teaching and pedagogical practice.

What do the institutional statements tell us about the nature of review in the university sector?

57. It is evident from the annual statements that ILR activities in Scotland are thorough, providing institutions with assurance that academic standards are being achieved and that the quality of the student experience is high and is being enhanced. The statements show that students are engaged with both ILR and enhancement activities. It is also clear that institutions use the ILR outcomes, as well as other important information such as student feedback from institutional and national surveys, annual monitoring reporting and external examiners reports, to improve provision at both programme/subject level and institutional level.
58. **Methods of review** - the [SFC guidance to HEIs](#)¹⁹ on quality gives institutions flexibility in the design of institution-led reviews (ILR). The annual statements confirm that the unit of review varies across institutions, often linked to their structure, size and subject mix. In all institutions, the ILR process results in a report and the area under review produces a response or action plan. A central or school committee considers the review outcomes and response. In addition, all institutions monitor academic provision on an annual basis usually at the programme level. The specific details of annual monitoring vary between institutions, however, in the majority of cases, reports on annual monitoring are discussed at institutional level in the learning and teaching committee or equivalent. Ten institutions²⁰ highlighted that they hold annual meetings or discussions to consider the outcomes or to share information from annual monitoring
59. **Student engagement in review** - student engagement in ILR and other learning and teaching and quality processes continues to be a strong feature within the reports. All institutions reported that, in line with [SFC guidance](#),²¹ there is a student member on their ILR panels. Two institutions (Heriot-Watt University and Queen Margaret University)

¹⁹ www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/guidance_sfcgd112017/SFCGD112017-SFC-guidance-HE-institutions-quality.pdf

²⁰ University of Dundee, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Open University, Robert Gordon University, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews and University of the West of Scotland.

²¹ www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/guidance_sfcgd112017/SFCGD112017-SFC-guidance-HE-institutions-quality.pdf

confirmed that students were involved with their review processes for provision delivered with collaborative partners. In its 2017-18 annual report, Heriot-Watt provided a detailed statement on a range of developments and activities to enhance student representation and engagement across its campuses in Edinburgh, Dubai and Malaysia. This session's report confirms the University has achieved its aspiration to move to a single partnership agreement (SPA) between the University and its three student representative bodies in 2018-19.

60. Eight institutions²² mentioned they provide briefing and/or training for student panel members and for student representatives/sabbatical officers and in the majority of these cases this activity is delivered in conjunction with the students' association. Overall, while details vary, the annual statements provide reassurance that students are indeed engaged with reviews from an institutional and subject perspective. In addition to students meeting ILR panels, eight institutions (University of Aberdeen, University of Abertay, University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University, Robert Gordon University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews and University of Stirling) indicated an expectation that students are involved in the preparations for the review. It is positive that four institutions (University of Aberdeen, University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University and Scotland's Rural College) specifically commented that students have a role in discussing the review outcomes and/or the production of development plans. Sixteen reports also confirm that student membership of key university committees is strong, allowing students to fully engage with quality matters and learning and teaching policy decisions, as well as the outcomes of institution-led reviews.²³
61. Ten institutions²⁴ made explicit reference to the existence or development of a student partnership agreement (SPA) (or equivalent). As detailed in paragraph 59, Heriot-Watt has developed a single SPA between the University and its three student representative bodies. The University of St Andrews also confirmed its intention to move from a collaborations statement with its student body to a SPA from the start of session 2019-20.
62. First reported on in the 2017-18 analysis report the 'theme of responding to student voice/feedback' continues to emerge as an area of increasing activity on the part of institutions with eight institutions commenting specifically on this in their 2018-19 annual statements.²⁵ Six institutions commented positively on the approaches being adopted by programme teams to be responsive, articulate action, and meaningfully engage with students in responding to their feedback (University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, University of Glasgow, Glasgow School of Art, Scotland's Rural College and University of St Andrews). A number of institutions talked about making enhancements

²² University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, University of Glasgow, University of the Highlands and Islands, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, University of St Andrews and University of Stirling.

²³ University of Aberdeen, University of Abertay, University of Dundee, Edinburgh Napier University, University of Glasgow, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, University of Strathclyde, University of the West of Scotland.

²⁴ University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Queen Margaret University, University of St Andrews, Scotland's Rural College, University of Stirling and University of the West of Scotland.

²⁵ Edinburgh Napier University, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling.

to student representation systems/structures and feedback mechanisms to help support their efforts to more effectively communicate changes to students (University of Edinburgh, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Open University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews and University of Stirling).

63. **Professional service area review** - [SFC guidance](#)²⁶ states that 'all services contributing to the student experience should be reviewed as part of an institution's approach' although there is flexibility in how this is done. The annual statements indicate that institutions use a wide variety of approaches, with ELIR reports making a similar observation. Five institutional statements indicate that consideration of professional services is embedded in ILR and/or quality-related processes (University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, Edinburgh Napier University, University of the Highlands and Islands, and University of the West of Scotland). Where this is the case, many panels include at least one professional service area representative. Seven institutions reported on operating a rolling programme of activity to support professional service area review (University of Abertay, University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University, Queen Margaret University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews, and University of Stirling) and five institutions indicate the use of a thematic approach (University of Edinburgh, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and University of Stirling). A number of institutions operate a hybrid model with some professional services being reviewed on a periodic basis and others being evaluated as part of wider quality processes. As detailed in paragraph 42, the University of Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt University are currently undertaking strategic projects which will involve completing fundamental reviews of their respective professional service areas.
64. **Volume of activity** - the analysis of the annual statements shows a substantial volume of review activity taking place within institutions. In 2018-19, 95 ILRs were carried out compared to 130 in 2017-18 and 94 in 2016-17. This fluctuation in the volume of review activity simply reflects the cyclical nature of ILR activity as institutions work through their individual review cycles. In addition to ILR of academic provision, reviews were also conducted of specific units including graduate schools, a range of professional services and partner institutions.
65. **Professional body activity** - in 2018-19, 120 professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) engagements took place accrediting more than 287 programmes. Of the 120 engagements, 116 were confirmed as successful and four were awaiting an outcome at the time of writing. The figures for 2018-19 show both a decrease in PSRB engagements (120 compared to 140 in 2017-18) and in the number of programmes that were accredited (287 compared to 319 programmes in 2017-18). Again, this reflects the cyclical nature of the engagements and no particular conclusions should be drawn from this change in number.
66. **Sharing practice in institutional evaluation and dissemination of positive practice** - within institutions there are systematic approaches to identifying and sharing good

²⁶ www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/guidance_sfcgd112017/SFCGD112017-SFC-guidance-HE-institutions-quality.pdf

practice formally through the consideration of review outcomes in a range of senior institutional committees. Institutions also adopt a range of more informal mechanisms to disseminate good practice including: sharing practice website (University of Glasgow); digests of the outcomes of review processes (University of Dundee and Edinburgh Napier University); learning and teaching conferences, lunchtime seminars and events (University of Abertay, University of Dundee, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, Open University, St Andrews University, Scotland's Rural College and University of the West of Scotland); or specific academic development activities. The reports continue to indicate that key staff roles are in place to specifically support the effective cascading of good practice.

67. At sector level, the Teaching Quality Forum (TQF) continues to be an effective mechanism for sharing good practice and discussing developments in the sector. During 2018-19, topics for discussion have included: developing a more robust and comprehensive understanding of grade profiling/improvement in Scotland; the recent changes in the form and content of the Quality Code for Higher Education, and how institutions are mapping policy and practice to the new Code; and the use of progression and retention data in annual monitoring.

Institutional comments on context and data analysis

68. SFC guidance asks institutions to report on matters beyond the ILR outcomes including institutional context and key messages arising from analysis of performance indicators and student surveys.
69. As has been reported in previous sessions, annual statements continue to give a clear sense of a dynamic, fast-moving sector which is undertaking high volumes of change, frequently in response to student feedback. The statements show a real desire to deliver an excellent student experience and continue to explore ways of more effectively closing the feedback loop in responding to student views (paragraph 62). The examples of changes taking place across the sector are broad and numerous and continue to include: strategy and policy development; senior leadership and organisational restructure; curriculum content and innovations in learning, teaching, assessment and feedback practices; and significant strategic investment in estates, learning and teaching, social spaces for students, and IT and student-facing services.
70. The institutional reports indicate that a number of HEIs are, or have recently, been working on the development and publication of either new strategic plans (University of Aberdeen, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, University of St Andrews and University of the West of Scotland) and/or new strategies to support learning, teaching and assessment (University of Glasgow, University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University, University of St Andrews, and University of Stirling). It is interesting to note that several of the strategic plans developed cover extended time horizons, going beyond the five-year framework which has been typical for the sector.

71. Given that 2018-19 was the second year of the current ELIR 4 cycle, it is perhaps not surprising that 13 institutions²⁷ commented on the planning activities associated with their next review, participating in their review during session 2018-19, or on follow-up activities and reporting in response to their ELIR outcomes.
72. The reports confirm that the institutions have systems in place to support monitoring, analysing and sharing key performance indicators (KPIs), with 11 institutions specifically outlining their approach.²⁸ In 2017-18, seven institutions reported they were developing dashboards to enable staff and students to engage with KPI data. This year's analysis reveals a further three institutions taking forward dashboards to support the analysis and reporting of data (University of Edinburgh, University of Highlands and Islands, and University of the West of Scotland). The University of St Andrews continued with its development of 'teaching fact sheets' produced for each school. The University of the West of Scotland reported on using the learning analytics capability within their 'MyJourney' system to review student engagement and performance in order to more effectively support the University to identify 'at risk' students. The University of the West of Scotland also stated it now employs a dedicated staff group to consider learning analytics data.
73. As reported in 2017-18, the use of suites of data to support their ILR and annual monitoring processes continues to be a feature of institutional approaches. HEIs continue to carry out activities to improve both the quality and the level of granularity of these data sets. Many institutions are also working with programme teams to ensure these data sets are viewed as robust and trusted by colleagues to be a useful definitive information source. The information provided varies between institutions, typically including information linked to: admissions; student achievement, progression and retention and awards; the outcomes of key internal and external surveys, and so on. This year's analysis continues to suggest that subject areas and programmes/course teams are more routinely and explicitly being expected to use this evidence to support their reflective processes, and support action and change.
74. The annual reports confirm that institutions across the sector are actively engaged in the analysis of key external surveys including the National Student Survey (NSS) (commented on by 18 institutions), the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) (commented on by seven institutions), and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) (commented on by five institutions). Institutions employ a range of approaches to sharing this information with staff and students, including through committees, dashboards, websites, VLEs and newsletters. The University of Dundee and University of St Andrews reported taking part in the International Student Barometer; and the University of Aberdeen indicated that it participated in the Higher Education

²⁷ University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, Queen Margaret University, Scotland's Rural College, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, University of Strathclyde and University of the West of Scotland.

²⁸ University of Aberdeen, University of Abertay, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Open University and Queen Margaret University, University of Strathclyde and University of the West of Scotland.

Academy's United Kingdom Engagement Survey (UKSE). Institutions reported on taking forward a range of activities in response to their analysis of the survey outcomes.

75. In relation to the NSS, a number of institutions provided updates in their annual statements that questions in the NSS linked to assessment and feedback had been identified as an institutional priority, detailing a wide range of activities that were being undertaken to improve the experience for students. Several of these HEIs indicated that their performances in the 2019 survey provided evidence that these interventions were having a positive effect.
76. Three HEIs specifically commented on disappointing performance in the NSS overall satisfaction question and outlined the actions they would be taking forward (Glasgow School of Art, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Scotland's Rural College). As in previous years, all three institutions commented on the challenges they experience around small sample size and response rate as a result of the criteria governing student eligibility within the NSS. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's report also described challenges that arise in its specialist context from the framing of the NSS questions themselves. For example, questions that probe the 'intellectually stimulating' elements of courses, or the 'academic support' provided by the institution can be challenging in a performance-orientated environment. Terminological custom and practice in the Conservatoire sector has tended to separate out 'academic studies' elements of programmes from the practical, performance elements; and these latter being the students' vocation (for example, they want to be a professional flautist) result in 'academic studies' being seen (in some cases) as drier, theoretical study that students can struggle to regard as making a beneficial contribution to their practice. To address this challenge, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland has made advances in its praxis-led environment, which explicitly underpins practice with theory aimed at enabling students to gain a deeper understanding of how theory interacts with practice.
77. As well as engaging with the feedback from these external surveys, nine institutions²⁹ specifically reported on using a range of internal approaches to gathering student feedback, including surveys and focus groups. The use and development of a range of internal student satisfaction surveys were also reported on by eight institutions,³⁰ often linked to work being undertaken to enhance the experience of postgraduate students (University of Aberdeen, Glasgow School of Art, Queen Margaret University and University of St Andrews). The University of the Highlands and Islands confirmed that, during 2018-19, it was able to operate an internal survey for students (not in the NSS sample), on a regional basis with a common question set for the first time - supporting internal benchmarking and action planning.
78. Across the annual statements, institutions took the opportunity to comment on their analysis of other data sets, such as Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data

²⁹ University of Aberdeen, University of Abertay, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot-Watt University, University of the Highlands and Islands, Open University, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling and University of Strathclyde.

³⁰ University of Aberdeen, University of Abertay, Glasgow School of Art, University of the Highlands and Islands, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, University of St Andrews and University of Stirling.

(particularly the Destination of Leavers Data (DLHE)); data linked to widening access/participation (particularly for students from Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 20/40 backgrounds); data linked to student enrolment, performance, progression, retention and attainment; completion rates; and the insights HEIs are gaining from their own internal survey and feedback mechanisms. As was highlighted in the 2017-18 analysis report, the increased reporting on data and how HEIs are engaging with it reflects the increased focus on data and evidence across the sector including through SFC Outcome Agreements and the current Enhancement Theme.

79. Two institutions referred to their participation in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) (Open University and Robert Gordon University).

How is this information followed up?

80. This analysis is discussed in a range of sector forums including the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee and the Theme Leaders' Group. It informs development and enhancement activity in the sector, allowing examples of practice to be picked up and shared in greater detail as part of the Enhancement Theme, Focus On projects or by individual institutions.

81. In 2019-20 QAA Scotland will deliver the Focus On project: Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL). TEL was a recurring theme in ELIR 3 Outcome Reports and in the ELIR 4 cycle to date has appeared in four ELIR outcomes.

Commendations relate to:

- the effective use of academic skills support for staff and students using new technologies
- collaborative approaches to the development and delivery of online learning.

Recommendations have encouraged:

- consistent use of learning technologies and VLEs to promote engagement and facilitate sharing key information between staff and students
- in the context of online distance learning, developing guidance for programme teams on expected good practice in VLE design and use.

82. Focus On: Technology Enhanced Learning will emphasise connections between strategy and practice. The project will consider how different institutional approaches to TEL impact on a variety of areas, including topics highlighted by institutions and student associations during scoping:

- staff development
- lecture capture
- policy development
- virtual learning environments
- enhancing inclusion and access
- using technology to foster student participation in co-creation.

Annex

Institutions included in this report

- University of Aberdeen
- Abertay University
- University of Dundee
- University of Edinburgh
- Edinburgh Napier University
- University of Glasgow
- Glasgow Caledonian University
- Glasgow School of Art
- Heriot-Watt University
- University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI)
- Open University in Scotland (OUiS)*
- Queen Margaret University
- Robert Gordon University
- Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
- Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)
- University of St Andrews
- University of Stirling
- University of Strathclyde
- University of the West of Scotland

*the OUiS is not reviewed in the ELIR method but does participate in Enhancement Themes activity and provides an annual report to SFC

SFC annual statements on quality

Each statement is endorsed by the relevant governing body. Institutions also share these statements with QAA Scotland officers to inform the ELIR annual discussion meetings. In addition, the statements form part of the Advance Information Set (AIS) submitted to Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) teams before each review.

The SFC guidance asks HEIs to cover the following areas:

- providing a summary of the ILR outcomes from the preceding academic year (AY) including main themes, recommendations and/or commendations
- indicate the ways in which support services were reviewed or included in review processes, with regard to their impact on teaching, learning and the quality of the student experience
- indicate the role and nature of student engagement in ILR including at the self-evaluation stage during the AY
- provide a reflective overview, which highlights key findings from the reviews in the preceding year, comments on 'distance travelled' and identified any significant outcomes or actions relating to development needs or to good practice resulting from ILR processes
- relevant contextual information and key messages derived from monitoring and analysis of performance indicators, benchmarks and other collected data,

particularly those relating to retention, progression, completion, attainment and achievement, and graduate destinations

- the key messages from qualitative and quantitative analysis of feedback from students (including the National Student Survey and external surveys of postgraduate students) and actions taken/planned as a result.