enhancement themes

Evaluation of Year 3, and the full three-years of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Background

The Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAAS) Enhancement Themes aim to enhance the student learning experience in Scottish higher education by identifying specific areas (Themes) for development. The Themes encourage staff and students to share current good practice and collectively generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching. A team working across the University of Dundee and University of St Andrews was commissioned to evaluate the third year of the 'Student Transitions' Theme. The aim of this evaluation was to explore transition activities that had been undertaken in Year 3 of the Theme and perceptions of how these activities have impacted/might impact on the student experience of transition. In addition, this evaluation aimed to explore the effectiveness of the Enhancement Theme over its full three-year period, providing an opportunity to critically reflect on its strategic approach and leadership; its reach; and to capture learning from the process to inform planning for the next Theme.

Research Questions

The Year 3 evaluation focused on the following research questions:

1 How have conceptualisations of student transitions changed over the course of the Theme?
2 How do stakeholders perceive the impact of the student transitions work in Year 3, and across the full three years of the Theme for students, staff, and institutions?
3 What are the barriers or facilitators to the successful development of the student transitions projects?

Study Design

Data was collected during two overlapping phases. In Phase 1, 32 participants, who had national or institutional leadership roles associated with the current Enhancement Theme took part in semi-structured telephone interviews. In Phase 2, six focus groups captured the views of 45 staff and student members who had been less closely involved in the management work of the Theme. Across both phases, professional/support/academic staff and student representatives from all 19 Scottish institutions participated, as well as one student support organisation. Thematic framework analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data from Phases 1 and 2 to draw out emerging themes. The coding process and thematic framework development was an ongoing and iterative process during the project.

Results

In addressing the first research question on conceptualisations of transitions, the data show that Enhancement Theme work has broadened understandings of student transitions, highlighting that they are multiple, multi-dimensional and individual. In turn, the social and pastoral aspects of transitioning have been illuminated, alongside academic transitions. In addition, staff participants also spoke of their own transition processes, which unfolded alongside those of the students.

In response to the second research question, and in respect to the impact of the Theme, participants noted that this was often difficult to measure due to the breadth of the topic and also

the often intangible nature of transitions work. However, participants reported changes to process and practice in key institutional activities as a result of the Theme, as well as the creation of new student services, and the development of award winning initiatives. Impact was largely perceived through shared learning, but challenges remained in embedding these new understandings across institutions, and beyond those groups of people closely involved in the Theme.

Inter-institutional work emerged as a key challenge for the Enhancement Theme, inhibited by a lack of resource, in particular staff time. However, participants welcomed the opportunities for shared learning, and the sense of community that the Theme Leaders Group (TLG) provided. It was felt that institutions across Scotland were working towards shared goals, and that a commitment to quality assurance and enhancement stood Scotland in positive light with its national and international counterparts. It was anticipated that the legacy of the Theme would be borne out through sharing learning, and embedding this learning in the operations of the wider institutions.

Considering the third research question, and the barriers or facilitators to transitions work, it was felt that the Theme had broad meaning to a number of different stakeholders throughout institutions, from students to academic and professional services staff. Many institutions already considered themselves to have been engaging in student transitions work, and the Theme had provided a focus for developing this further. There remained a need to engage with a broader subset of staff across institutions, as well as strengthening Theme work in regard to encouraging student participation.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The evaluation report highlights seven key recommendations for developing future Enhancement Themes: 1) develop definitions of impact and expectations of these definitions early in the Theme; 2) consider the adoption of a communications strategy to engage individuals beyond individuals directly involved in the Enhancement Theme; 3) explore incorporating induction/mentorship programmes for student representatives of TLG to promote inclusion and enhance engagement; 4) highlight clear definitions and expectations of collaboration activity earlier in the life of the Theme; 5) explore resource requirements for the legacy of this Theme, and consider a transition period between Themes to help institutions embed and evaluate the work of each Theme; 6) make representation to institutions to fully support the work of the Theme through adequate resourcing; 7) consider adopting a 'toolkit' approach to reporting, which enables institutions to play to their strengths and resource availability.

1 Background

The Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAAS) Enhancement Themes aim to enhance the student learning experience in Scottish higher education by identifying specific areas (Themes) for development. The Themes encourage staff and students to share current good practice and collectively generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching. The work of the Enhancement Themes is planned and directed by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC).

The Enhancement Theme 'Student Transitions' ran from 2014-15 to 2016-17 (three academic years). The work was managed by QAA Scotland working with the Theme Leaders' Group (TLG), which comprises one staff and one student member from each higher education institution (HEI) in Scotland. To support the work of the Theme, QAAS commissioned a team from the University of Dundee and University of St Andrews to undertake an evaluation of its third year and the three years of the Theme as a whole.

1.1 Evaluation aims and questions

The aim of this evaluation was to explore transition activities that had been undertaken in Year 3 of the Theme and perceptions of how these activities have impacted/might impact on the student experience of transition. In addition, this evaluation aimed to explore the effectiveness of the Enhancement Theme over its full three-year period, providing an opportunity to critically reflect on its strategic approach and leadership; its reach; and to capture learning from the process to inform planning for the next Theme. To explore the effectiveness over the three years, participants in Year 3 were asked not only to reflect on activities in Year 3 but also across the three years to provide a holistic view from their perspective taking cognisance that impact can only be seen over the long term. We will report here on Year 3 activity as well as activities that spanned the whole three years of the Theme. Additionally, other sources of data, particularly the Year 2 evaluation (Gordon et al. 2016), will contribute to reflections on longitudinal developments.

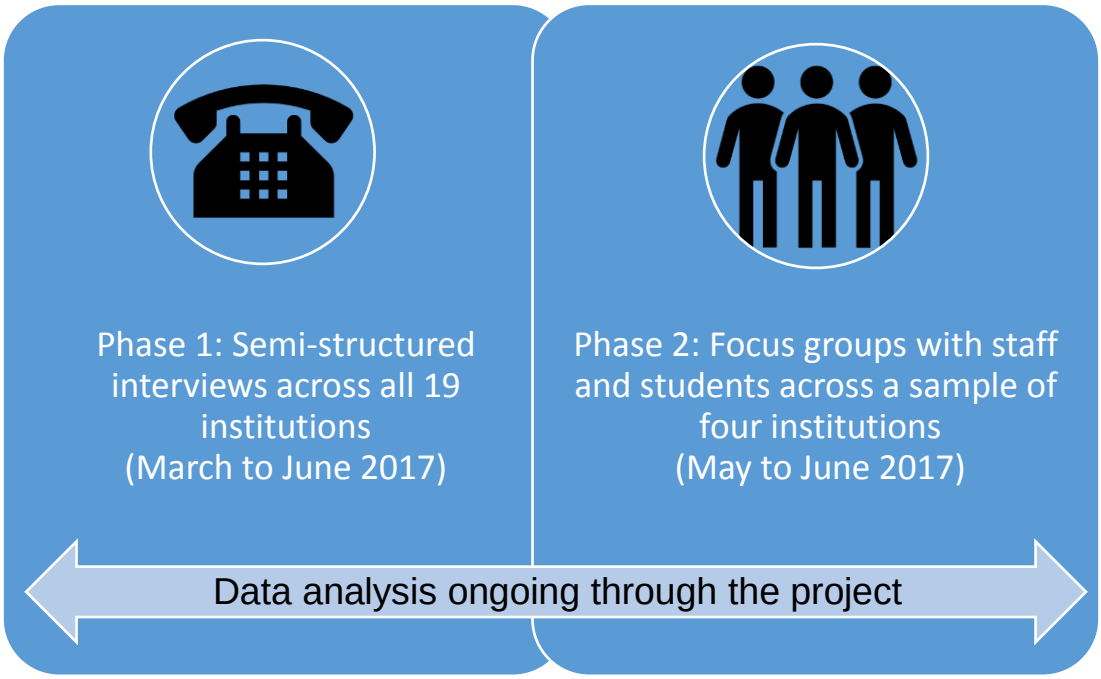
The Year 3 evaluation focused on the following research questions:

1 How have conceptualisations of student transitions changed over the course of the Theme?
2 How do stakeholders perceive the impact of the student transitions work in Year 3, and across the full three years of the Theme for students, staff, and institutions?
3 What are the barriers or facilitators to the successful development of the student transitions projects?

2 The Year 3 evaluation study design

The evaluation team undertook a qualitative study from mid-March to mid-June 2017. There were two phases of the study, which overlapped. The initial findings in Phase 1 helped inform the design of Phase 2. Figure 1 outlines the evaluation process. The research design was based on progressive focusing; after collecting data from all 19 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Scotland, we collected further in-depth data from six focus groups across four HEIs. Phase 1 data sought the reflections of the representatives from HEIs across Scotland, who sat on management groups such as Theme Leaders' Group (TLG), Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), Teaching Quality Forum (TQF), and the Working Group on Student Engagement (WGSE). Phase 2 focused on gathering the views of a wider body of staff and students who had been less involved in the management of the Theme, and who had varying levels of experience of Theme activities.

Figure 1: The evaluation process



3 Data collection

All data were stored on an encrypted hard drive, with access limited to the evaluation team. Prior to taking part, participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, that they had the right to withdraw at any time, and that personal and institutional anonymity would be maintained in the reporting of the findings. Before the interview and focus groups, participants returned a signed consent form and completed a short participant details questionnaire (asking for basic demographic and professional information) via email or in person. Ethics approval for the evaluation project was received by the University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee.

3.1 Participant characteristics

In Phase 1, all 19 Scottish institutions participated, and one student support organisation. A total of 32 participants took part in individual consultation interviews, which were conducted on the telephone or face to face. In Phase 2, four of the 19 Scottish institutions participated. The staff and students who took part in the focus groups had various levels of participation in the Theme including; institutional team member; event participant; funding recipient; and those with no direct involvement in the Theme.

3.2 Phase 1: Semi-structured interviews

An initial interview guide to help inform the evaluation questions was developed. This was sent to a reference group at QAAS to comment on. All members of TLG and SHEEC were invited to take part in the telephone interviews. Participants were contacted by email and invited to participate. Regular email reminders were sent and the research team attended a scheduled TLG meeting which they used as an opportunity to encourage further participation. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken using the finalised interview guide (see Appendix A). A total of 32 interviews were conducted across 19 HEIs (Table 1). All interviews were audio-recorded and the recordings subsequently transcribed. Each lasted between 17 and 56 minutes, with an average time of 37 minutes.

Table 1: Participant characteristics Phase 1

Role	Number of participants
Students	5 (three Students' Union/association representatives)
Staff	27
Total	32
TLG*	21
SHEEC*	7
TQF/WGSE*	8

*Participants could be members of more than one group so numbers do not add up to total participants. Theme Leaders Group (TLG), Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), Teaching Quality Forum (TQF), and the Working Group on Student Engagement (WGSE).

3.3 Phase 2: Focus groups[1]

Initial qualitative analysis of a sample of Phase 1 interviews enabled the research team to draw out key themes for discussion in Phase 2 focus groups, which informed the development of the focus group interview schedule (See Appendices B and C). The research team used maximum-variation sampling for the institutions to obtain a greater range of understandings and experiences across HEIs in Scotland. Focus group participants were recruited with the help of institutional leads at four institutions that all differed in terms of age and type of institution (for example ancient, small specialist, multiple campus). A total of six focus groups (Table 2, page 8) were undertaken: two staff only, two student only, and two mixed where both staff and students were invited. All focus groups were audio-recorded and these recordings subsequently transcribed. Focus groups lasted between 38 and 53 minutes, with an average time of 46 minutes.

[1] The design of Phase 2 differed from the Year 2 Enhancement Evaluation, in which a survey was undertaken (details of the Year 2 evaluation process can be found in Appendix D). Focus groups were undertaken to allow the research team to explore issues with participant groups who were less involved in the management and strategic direction of the theme in more depth than the 2016 survey had allowed.

Table 2: Participant characteristics Phase 2

	Number of participants	Focus group 1 HEI 1	Focus group 2 HEI 1	Focus group 3 HEI 2	Focus group 4 HEI 2	Focus group 5 HEI 3	Focus group 6 HEI 4
Students	20	-	14	-	4	1	1
Staff	25	9	-	7	-	5	5
Total	**45**	**9**	**14**	**7**	**4**	**5***	**6**
Role breakdown by focus group							
Institutional team member	16	5	1	2	-	2	6
Funding recipient	9	-	2	4	-	2	1
Event or project participant	5	3	-	-	2	-	-
Other	18	2	11	1	2	2	-

*One individual identified as having both a staff and student role so numbers do not add up to total participants

4 Data analysis

A team approach to data analysis was undertaken. Members of the evaluation team looked at a subset of data separately then came together to negotiate and agree a thematic framework. Computer software (ATLAS.ti Version 7) was then used to assist with organisation of the data. The interview transcripts were imported to ATLAS.ti and Dr Brown coded the data using the initially agreed thematic framework. For the focus group transcripts the team used the thematic framework developed in Phase 1 to code the data, again using ATLAS.ti to organise the data. This allowed the team to explore the qualitative data from Phase 2 alongside the Phase 1 data and draw out emerging themes. The coding process and thematic framework development was an ongoing and iterative process during the project.

5 Results and Discussion

This section addresses the key findings that have arisen in response to the three overarching research questions reported in the introduction.

5.1 Research Question 1: Conceptualisations of Transitions

Rather than changing understandings, working with the Enhancement Theme has broadened or created a more nuanced understanding of the type of transitions that students might experience. For example, participants reported becoming more aware of the complexity - and granularity - of the student journey.

> 'I think certainly the transition Theme work has broadened me out to think of transitions that I hadn't really thought about so a good example that I had just really not considered [is] that I'd thought about transitions out onto placements but I hadn't thought about transitions for students who've been out on placement and been acting as a professional to then come back in to be students again and I hadn't really thought of that as a transition [but] obviously it is.' (Staff Interview, Respondent 9)

As a whole, participation in the Theme has highlighted that transitions are multiple, multi-dimensional and individual: no two student journeys will be the same. This was a sentiment that resonated with staff beyond the institutional teams and TLG.

> 'Every student's different and unique and some students go the scenic route [and] but each and every student needs all the scaffolding they need it every different stage to get them to where they need to be and it's about understanding that learner's individual needs and getting it right pre-entry before they come in and making sure that all the scaffolding's in place at each stage.' (Staff Focus Group 1)

The spotlight of the Enhancement Theme on student transitions has also led to a developed understanding of the in-through-out journey that students make, which allows for a much more prominent focus on issues such as: widening participation and student retention; the transition between undergraduate 3rd and 4th year studies; the journey from university and to and from work-based placements; and from university to employment. This allowed institutions to explore the experiences of specific student groups including: international students adapting to studying in Scotland; home students who do not live in student accommodation; and care experienced students coming into university.

In addition to academic transitions, the Theme has highlighted the social and pastoral aspects of transition, thereby an increased understanding of holistic transitions. For example, settling in a new country; dealing with new social and legal norms; understanding accents; finding somewhere to live; feeling included when living off campus; and managing caring responsibilities.

> '[students] telling their individual story was so powerful I remember everything from you know international students coming in and her first experience she left her bin out for a day too long and got fined fifty quid from the Council... [I] think there's just so many transitions… and the fact that academic and pastoral are not separated as well the whole student transition and that can be a bit daunting I think first of all realising, well

> how can we possibly hope to try and support students through all these [transitions].' (Staff Interview, Respondent 7)

Data from Year 2 shows that this is not new understanding for Year 3, but one that has evolved throughout the work of the Theme.

Finally, participants spoke of their own personal transitions that often happened alongside student transitions. This raised awareness of staff transition needs, both indirectly and directly through participating in the student transitions work of the Theme.

> 'We have the same journey as [the students] half the time we're constantly having to adapt to what your teaching method in a class or whether it's a sport or doing something extra for them you know speaking to careers advisers or whatever it is or signposting you're constantly having to kind of think on your feet and … run about like a mad thing trying to find the person that could maybe answer the question that you can't.' (Staff Focus Group 1)

5.2 Research Question 2: Impact

5.2.1 Enhancement theme impact

Participants discussed the impact of Year 3 and the Enhancement Theme in an integrative way within their conversations, which will be reflected in the discussions in this section of the report. Supporting the comments from the Year 2 evaluation, it was acknowledged by Year 3 interview participants that the impact of transitions activity is often difficult to measure. Interviewees suggested that this was due to the breadth of the topic, the often intangible nature of Theme activity (for example sharing good practice), as well as the various perspectives of different stakeholders. Despite this, participants reported new initiatives that had been formed as a result of the Theme, including developing new processes, strategies, services for students, and identifying areas for support. In particular, respondents reported a sense of community - and being joined up - for those working in institutional teams, and on TLG.

> 'there's changes to discourse there's changes to strategy, there is greater linkage between people across the university and awareness of what each of them is doing because if you give people you know a particular bus to get on they suddenly find they're on the bus together and then they can talk to each other about the journey that they're on in trying to support student transitions so that has been helpful.' (Staff Interview, Respondent 10)

Across institutions the transitions activity has led to changes in process and practice in activities such as, for example, induction, internal evaluations (that is student satisfaction surveys), and widening access. Some of these activities will be described in more detail within the next subsection (*see* 5.2.2). In addition, during Year 3, many institutions adopted a 'funded projects' model, which facilitated staff and student collaborations, which would not otherwise have happened. Through funded projects, staff and students have piloted ideas, developed study aids, run events, and developed workshops to help students transition between stages of study. In one instance, a new student support service was developed as a direct result of transitions work, which did not previously exist; and one institution has won an award for its work on widening participation. The impact of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme was generally anticipated to be long term.

Impact was perceived largely through shared learning within institutions, across TLG, and the increased recognition of the types of transitions students encounter and how these can be best supported. The challenges lie in embedding these new understandings across each institution, beyond those staff and student members directly involved in the Theme.

> 'I mean there are an awful lot of good resources on the QAA website [but] I'm not sure academic staff necessarily know about… there's an awful [lot] of stuff there about transitions an awful lot of background research [as well as] how students make the transition and the kind of resources you need to put into place and we've used that for some of our modules we run from student services, frankly… I'm not sure how widely known that stuff is and its useful stuff that they've got… they might not be advertising or sharing it well enough.' (Mixed Focus Group, 5)

Despite the challenges in engaging across institutions, and as highlighted above, the impact of the Theme appears to be fundamentally underpinned by the growing awareness of student transitions, the challenges that students face, as well as staff development, and shared learning - especially for those participating in the Theme's networks and groups. This suggests a developing recognition of individual as well as collective roles in supporting student transitions.

> 'There's a huge amount of awareness building for me personally and professionally. It has helped me to foster relationships with colleagues around the institution, lecturers at all levels, administration… in terms of students it has helped me to foster close working relationships with the Students' Union, our sports facilities, Estates... It has also given me opportunities for my own professional development [as well].' (Staff Interview, Respondent 4)

5.2.2 Year 3 activities

This section highlights activities at various organisational levels including: local institutional; inter-institutional; sector-wide; and national/international engagement.

Institutional activities

As in Year 2, when describing Theme activities, staff and student participants were generally very positive about the events and projects that their institutions had supported in Year 3. Institutional teams linked the Theme to institutional priorities to help facilitate staff and student engagement. Staff also understood the importance of student transitions in relation to the wider policy context, and the priorities of Scottish Government. Reporting structures varied in institutions, with institutional buy-in also differing across institutions. For example, with some giving dedicated resource, and others adopting responsibilities as additional extras.

> 'It's just looking at the um what's your core role and expectations of that and what realistically can be fitted [in] as an extra'. (Staff Interview, Respondent 6)

> 'Actually it was built into my job … actually having that feature as part of someone's official role description … I guess that made a big difference and I came in … as a more of a kind of coordinator role.' (Staff Interview, Respondent 12)

While some enjoyed support and engagement across the institution, others took a more top-down approach:

> 'Although this has been supported at a very high level I don't know if it's been communicated down the way the importance at school and college levels for example um or even within the services so I think there's been we've been very proactively supporting this and working hard to drive this forward I think we've had very clear support from the people at the top but I'm not sure whether that that need for people to engage has necessarily filtered down through the different levels.' (Staff Interview, Respondent 17)

Similar to Year 2, many institutions adopted the funded projects model in Year 3, giving small amounts of funding to student-led or staff-student collaborative projects based on the Theme. It was recognised by participants that a lot of Enhancement Theme work had been carried out unknowingly. That is, staff and students were not aware of the underlying, broader-reaching purpose of their activity, but rather saw it as part of their role in developing learning and teaching, and/or student experience. This was a key discussion point that came through the focus groups where, participants did not necessarily have a direct Enhancement Theme remit, and demonstrates the varying levels of engagement, and awareness, across institutions.

This was reflected in some of the Phase 1 interviews, where participants reported engaging in activity related to student transitions, but not necessarily 'branded' under the Theme.

> 'Though I see the importance of transitions and the relevancy to the Enhancement Theme I don't think everything we've done has been specifically with the Enhancement Theme in mind [though] probably to kind of caveat that it basically falls in with the Enhancement Theme it's just not necessarily something that you know we're specifically thinking right that ticks that box … I've kept that in the back of my mind [that it] does actually contribute to that Theme though it might not be the main purpose of it to try and tick that Enhancement Theme box at least the projects have been relevant to it'. (Student Representative Interview, Respondent 19)

Some institutions reported that they had found that 'branding' events as Enhancement Theme discouraged involvement from students in particular, as it was seen as 'jargon'.

> 'If you said to everybody 'what are you doing for the Enhancement Theme?' they might not have an automatic response but if you said 'how is student transition being considered in your programme team meetings?' then they will have an answer.' (Staff Interview, Respondent 8)

Inter-institutional activities

Respondents reported that inter-institutional work had been challenging in Year 3, and that the requirement to collaborate had come late in the overall process. This reflects similar findings from Year 2, where participants felt that the introduction of collaborative activity had come late in the Enhancement Theme timeline. Some considered collaboration in their institutions was in itself challenging, as reflected in the earlier discussion about embedding Enhancement Theme work in the institution. As a result, inter-institutional activity across the Theme has not been characterised by jointly-led projects or outputs, but rather through sharing of practice.

> 'The focus on partnerships, the focus on collaboration I felt like that came when you were already halfway through the Theme where you'd already kind of maybe sort of started to think where you were going and what [you] were doing and the partnership

> thing kind of tagged on so it was very difficult to then sometimes develop partnerships when you were already so far along on your own process'. (Student Representative Interview, Respondent 14)

Collaboration was also reported to be further inhibited by a lack of resources, mainly in staff time. It was generally acknowledged that although institutions had shared interests, it was often challenging to work on projects that matched the priorities of diverse institutions. In turn, it was noted that such activity could not be 'forced', but rather would emerge where the need arose.

> 'I think like everybody that's been really hard… it's challenging enough to try and get people to engage in the Enhancement Theme in our institution… to try and make that happen inter inter-institutionally is almost impossible… it's not because there isn't a willingness I have to say you know in the early days of transition we had a lot of discussions about possible collaborations… the reality is that when it comes to it finding the time and the capacity to make that happen in reality is quite tough so we had a lot of aspiration to do that but really didn't succeed too well.' (Staff Interview, Respondent 13)

Despite very few collaborative projects or 'sustained partnerships' emerging from sector discussions, many respondents welcomed the learning they had gained from sharing experiences and best practice across institutions. Throughout Year 3, many TLG members visited other institutions, participated in events and conferences, developed databases, and acted as 'critical friends'. Despite the lack of concrete outputs from collaborative work, it was felt that this sort of engagement was beneficial.

> 'We have learnt from the institutions and we've had a couple of really good institutional team days where I've come away and my team's come away [and] said you know that was really useful really interesting and we made a lot of contacts and a lot of thoughts going forward and then you go back to the day job and it becomes difficult to actually progress all these great ideas'. (Staff Interview, Respondent 15)

> 'In terms of networking opportunities this Theme has been fantastic… I've made links with a number of different HEIs across Scotland which has been fantastic… I felt I learnt quite a lot about how no matter what you're studying… or where you come from, or what your background is the journey can be very similar… I think that was quite enlightening, rather than sort of categorising people into groups we're just enhancing the journey through the transition into professional life, but regarding everyone in the whole … rather than [sort of] as a different subsets'. (Mixed Focus Group, 6)

Sector-wide activities

The core sector activity recorded in the Phase 1 interviews was the work of TLG. Participants welcomed the network and community that this provided. Like Year 2, a culture of sharing was apparent in Year 3. It was noted that institutions across Scotland were not in competition, but rather working towards a common goal through the Enhancement Theme.

> 'It's about sitting round the table and you know I don't feel there's much competition between universities when it comes to this because we all recognise that you know there are improvements to made and we all sit down and work on them together and learn from each other.' (Student Representative Interview, Respondent 3)

One of the key sectoral projects noted in the interviews was the Transitions Map. This was generally considered to be a useful tool, which linked to the many resources developed over the life of the Theme. There was some concern raised about the legacy of the Map, and the available capacity to ensure that it remained 'live', and did not become redundant.

National and international activities

The national and international conferences were highlighted in many discussions with interview participants. These were seen as positive events that not only attracted staff and student engagement, but also increased Scotland's profile in both the UK, and internationally.
The sense of collaborative working, and a commitment to quality assurance and enhancement stood Scotland in a positive light with its international counterparts.

> 'Scotland has within the international context it has kind of got that status as a country that is doing quality provision, quality enhancement, quality assurance very well and I think that's something to be very proud of the fact that we have developed something like the quality enhancement framework that other countries aspire to have in their own version of … I think internationally it's something that we continue to kind of improve [I think] it's something that we continue to inspire other countries to want to kind of do as well.' (Staff Interview, Respondent 14)

5.2.3 Legacy

Institutional plans for legacy are, in the main, speculative. This is broadly due to the fact that at the time of interview many Year 3 projects were still ongoing. Proposed legacy activity included continuing new initiatives set up during the Theme, embedding the work of the Theme across the institution, developing and maintain existing resources, such as case studies and the Transitions Map, while also continuing to evaluate and enhance student transitions experience.

Legacy was broadly considered through two themes: sharing learning; and mainstreaming activities. On the whole many felt that the legacy of the overall Theme would bear out in the learning that had been undertaken through the work of the Theme.

> 'I don't think anyone would ever forget student transitions after this Theme. I don't think anyone working in an institution the last few years and at the moment would ever say that they do not know what student transitions mean or how students make different transitions and the different transitions they do make and the kind of assistance they need. I don't think anyone could ever say it because I think in general it has been a successful Theme'. (Staff Interview, Respondent 4)

In particular institutions were interested in how they could embed this learning in the operations of the wider institution, rather than just the select few who had participated in the Theme.

> 'The knowledge that we've gained from this … that understanding that we now have about student transitions and the kind of experiences that the students have and making that considerations for the development of learning of teaching programmes…going forward so it's about having that awareness of the transition and the work that we've undertaken through this to get inform our future operations.' (Student Representative Interview, Respondent 3)

One of the impacts of the Theme, as reported in section 5.2.1, was the sense of development and personal growth for those staff members who were involved in the work of the Theme. In turn one potential legacy of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme was the continued professional development of staff members to enable them to support students through multiple and complex transitions.

> 'We should be constantly thinking about us, how do we improve, how do we move to another stage in our learning, our development … the services that we provide, can we get to that next checkpoint to improve representation, improve facilities we provide for students to help them. I think [the ET] is something that also has to have that impact on staff as well as it does on students'. (Student Representative Interview, Respondent 19)

As the Student Transitions are central to the work of many institutions, participants were confident that the work would continue. However, many did highlight the risk that work could 'get lost' as institutions moved towards and began to engage in the next Enhancement Theme. This was particularly pertinent given the lack of existing, dedicated resource in most institutions. In addition, participants expressed a desire for the Transitions Map, and website to be maintained and updated. In turn they indicated a need for sufficient resourcing of this aspect of the Theme's potential legacy.

> 'there's no point in having these Themes if they all after the period of time that they've been focused on and they disappear and they're not continuously living and breathing I mean because again it goes back to the ironic thing I guess about it is that if we're talking about transitions being more of a circular cycle rather than a linear thing then right now we're really just doing a linear process now we've got to the end of two or three years piece of work let's move on to the next thing so it's like well no that's just because we've reached the end of this doesn't mean to say we've got it right (laughs) you [know] we need to, definitely need to, find a way of embedding .... this Enhancement Theme and previous Enhancement Themes in some form living and breathing documentation which is consistently updated and [developed] over that period of time.' (Student Representative Interview, Respondent 19)

5.3 Research Question 3: Barriers and facilitators

This section discusses the barriers and facilitators to doing Enhancement Theme work. It explores some of the challenges that staff and students faced in Year 3, but also across the whole three years of the Theme. It also addresses the potential opportunities to facilitate transitions in future Themes.

Meaning of transitions Theme

In alignment with Year 2, participants in Year 3 conveyed the idea that the Theme had wide ranging meaning to a number of different stakeholders. The Student Transitions Theme was seen as being broad enough to encapsulate a number of different views, and allow different Schools, departments and job roles across institutions to 'put their stamp on it'. Many institutions considered themselves to be already engaging in student transitions work, and so the Theme provided impetus to consider the existing issues more widely. Hence student transitions was seen as a concept that had meaning for everybody involved, which was a real strength for the Theme as a whole.

> 'I think this has probably been the best one I've seen … I think it benefits from it being easy to see what it is, but also flexible enough to be interpreted and applicable to a very wide range of disciplines and styles of programmes and types of students so the benefit is very in your face … the argument doesn't have to be made … it's clear that if you're more effectively support people as they move through different transitions they will get on better.' (Staff Interview, Respondent 9)

Engaging with Student Transitions and Enhancement Themes across institutions

Because it was felt that 'student transitions' could be interpreted in a variety of ways, this facilitated understanding and engagement. It was generally perceived that staff engagement had been good and that the Theme has resonated with a broad range of staff members across institutions. The Theme has had particular resonance with professional and support services staff. However, staff and student interviewees questioned whether key messages were being effectively disseminated and embedded across institutions. For example, during the focus groups, very few staff members outside of the institutional teams knew what Enhancement Themes were. Interview respondents reported that the Enhancement Theme work was usually undertaken by a core group of enthusiastic staff and students, but engagement was not presently embedded across the whole institution. This created a cultural barrier to being part of the work of the Theme. This is particularly pertinent in light of the resource barriers, and engaging staff and student members to do something additional to their core job role.

> 'It's brilliant to have fifteen per cent, twenty per cent, thirty per cent, forty per cent of your academic workforce doing amazing leading edge thing, but we would be much better off if we were in a position where we could drive forward that kind of enthusiasm, that innovation, that creativity across the whole of our workforce um and that's something I think which we are still reflecting on. You know how do we get from those really great practitioners, the ideas, the enthusiasm, the creativity and then how support that practice to be adapted to adopted just to be implemented across the whole university.' (Staff Interview, Respondent 6)

Within their institutions, staff members reported good levels of student engagement across Year 3 activities, as well as a higher level of engagement across the whole Theme than in previous years. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that the merging of the Student Network with TLG mid-way through Year 3 had been a positive step in strengthening the work of Theme activity, and engaging students. However, there was some recognition that engaging with the wider student body, beyond student representatives, continued to be a challenge.

Much student transitions activity went on, but not under the Enhancement Theme banner. In fact, very few student participants of the focus groups had awareness of the Theme. However, they were all able to talk about activities in which they had participated in that were related to Enhancement Theme work. In most cases student involvement and understanding of the Theme came from their interaction with staff members. There was disagreement as to whether this was important, with some considering it less so, while others felt it was a priority for getting people - and especially students - to engage.

> 'I don't know whether it's the pressures on students now or whether they're paying more for their education … but it just seems harder to get them to participate … the student reps have been absolutely fantastic but it has been harder to get involvement from the students outside of that group.' (Staff Interview, Respondent 17)

> 'I'm a PhD student here and I mean what I know at least about the Enhancement Themes is that well they change every three, four years anyway … I think the current one is for student transition and Enhancement Themes are meant to support various projects … financially support various projects that help students progress from one stage to another for example… I'm not sure how well the previous [Theme] was marketed but it was simply because I was working with somebody who knew about it having been in the university for longer and kind of been part of the current administrative structures that know about (.) those things, but in terms of this one I didn't really know much'. (Student Focus Group 4)

Student representatives of the TLG network reported difficulties for students in being able to engage and access the Theme. Similar to Year 2, student representatives saw there to be a need for student engagement not to seem tokenistic. Additionally 'language barriers' regarding the jargon of educational practice and the Enhancement Themes were seen as difficult to decipher and a barrier to inclusion.

> 'My impression of coming into it is that, even as a concept, it's pretty impenetrable like all the names and phrases … the jargon words that are being used are understood by most of the group but as the (laughs) minority it's really challenging to get through those layers [and] you know what does this word mean what is the purpose of this what is this project about and then by the time you get down there you're kind of already like really struggling to understand.' (Student Representative Interview, Respondent 24)

In general, it was noted that communication could be improved across institutions - and the TLG network - in order to involve students and help them understand the relevance and importance of the Themes, and the work of QAAS. In addition, staff members outside of TLG commented on the large volume and frequency of email notifications, which meant that events or important messages often got missed.

> 'It depends how attentive you are to the Themes that are being sent around and [advertised] and spoken about because it's very easy to miss we do get a lot of emails and you know it's very easy to miss something that could potentially be interesting because a lot of them look alike and you end up going delete, delete, delete so I think you do have to pay a lot of attention to seek out the ones that will be useful and interesting.' (Staff Focus Group 3*)*

TLG network

As previously discussed, TLG was seen as a valuable resource, and facilitator to transitions work, by institutions across the sector. Interview respondents, in particular staff members of TLG, welcomed the merging of the Student Network with TLG. Although this was a recent change to the constitution of TLG, respondents unanimously supported continuing these arrangements into future Themes. However, as in Year 2, it was acknowledged by staff and student respondents that the annual turnover of student representatives proved challenging. This was made apparent on two levels: firstly for students to be able to 'hit the ground running' so as not to limit the opportunity for effecting change; and secondly, in the continuity for TLG. Although these challenges were highlighted they were not seen as preventative, or negative, but rather as an organisational reality that required some management, or 'tweaking' to ensure that students felt able to fully participate. It was noted that this support could extend beyond TLG to the wider student representative body in institutions to help students engage in the Enhancement Themes process and feel able to participate.

> 'Build a little bit more into the preparation in training for our student representatives as well their role is really important because the data they collect the advocacy that they provide for students whether it be that as union officials or whether they're school representatives is really important. [Because] the feedback that they provide that they collect the advocacy work that they might do on behalf of students is all contributing to that that next bit of it helping students get to that next checkpoint … I think there's still tweaking that needs to be done there to ensure that that does happen and that student involvement and student engagement is meaningful and is not tokenistic at both an institution and at a sector level.' (Student Representative Interview, Respondent 19)

Reporting structures

Whilst TLG Members welcomed the variety in reporting outputs for example, written reports, multi-media, case studies, and research papers, at a Sector level participants found reporting onerous, and not insignificant in relation to the levels of funding received. There was a desire for requests for written reports to be issued in good time, well in advance of deadlines to allow input from the Institutional Team as well as the Institutional Lead. Early planning of the variety of outputs required across the duration of the whole Theme would also be welcomed. In addition, more flexibility on what type of output an institution produces to demonstrate impact would be helpful as some formats of outputs proved more challenging for some institutions, for example multi-media.

> 'The opportunity to be able if you like to present the output of your work in different ways is really exciting which of course this Theme and in fact previous Themes have enabled [so] that that's great I think what I still would say though on that is that people should be given a choice I know I know for example the media output for example has challenged some of our colleagues in the sector because they they're not as well placed [to maybe] do something … I think when things are imposed on people I think that's wrong I don't think that works so well [I think] it's best that people are given options and choices and allowed to bring their own creativity to how they might present an output or the impact that something's having.' (Staff Interview, Respondent 13)

There was much discussion around the length of the Theme, with many suggesting it was too long, while others felt that three years was enough time. It was noted that other institutional arrangements (for example exams and semester dates) truncated the time available for active participation in events by staff and students. Suggestions were made around having a period of transition between Themes, to allow for the previous Theme to be embedded before the next was launched.

Collaboration

Participants were enthusiastic about the potential for collaboration, but had found it difficult to develop connections, or sustained relationships in the time available. It was felt that the requirement to collaborate came late in the life of the Theme, and that more time could be made available during TLG meetings to network informally with TLG members. An adjustment to the focus of collaboration from institutions to the sector could facilitate future work, through developing Themes or work strands around which institutions could collaborate. This would enable TLG to promote the sector, rather than the individual institutions. In addition, some suggested that more resource could enable collaborative work.

> 'What there needs to be and to draw on to say why we should promote ourselves collectively and I think at the moment because of the wider context of them saying there is that need or there is that opportunity to actually say come together and let's look at higher education in its totality in Scotland rather than at the institutional level.' (Staff Interview, Respondent 8)

Resource

The common barrier to Enhancement Theme work is resource, and in particular staff time which links to some of the facilitators and barriers already highlighted in this section. As noted previously, many institutions do not allocate dedicated resource to Enhancement Theme work, and much of the institutional and sector activity is done on the 'good-will' of institutional team members and a wider subset of colleagues. This was a sentiment that resonated with student members. Often staff and students were required to participate in the work of the Enhancement Theme as an extra, or as the 'icing on the cake'.

> 'Staff and students have a million and one other things that they have to do within their own institutions or students associations and trying to convince them then to you know force some sort of inter-institutional collaboration when they don't have extra time or they don't have extra resources or extra money to do it is extremely difficult and I think that that's one of the reasons that some of the projects in the student network just couldn't happen because of more pressing priorities within their institutions and Enhancement Theme has been one of a number of priorities that they have and actually it's been quite far down that list [and] … for a lot of student officers I think it's extremely difficult.' (Student Representative Interview, Respondent 11)

Many interview respondents discussed the need to travel for meetings, especially those in more remote areas of Scotland, where lengthy journeys were required to attend meetings in person.

> 'Having access to that network is excellent I do wonder if there could be more engagement between meetings. I don't know if they've considered the use of like online meetings or [webinars] maybe like trying to think through how we could have a more effective almost like a community of practice and what the mechanisms might be to facilitate that without bringing together everybody in one [location].' (Staff Interview, Respondent 1)

6 Conclusions and recommendations for Year 3

6.1 Summary of key findings

Following the analysis of 32 interviews and 6 focus groups, a total of 76 participants, a summary of findings in relation to the evaluation questions is presented below. This section summarises the key findings from Year 3, comparing them with findings from Year 2, where appropriate, to reflect on conclusions and recommendations for future Enhancement Themes.

6.1.1 How have conceptualisations of student transitions changed over the course of the Theme?

The Enhancement Theme has broadened or enhanced understanding of student transitions and the complexity of its definition. It has highlighted that transitions are multiple, multi-dimensional and individual as discussed in the transitions literature (Jindal-Snape, 2012). The complexity of transitions has illuminated the pastoral and social aspects of student transitions, as much as the academic transitions that had perhaps been more obvious to some than others (Jindal-Snape and Ingram, 2013, see Educational and Life Transitions model). Further, some staff were able to reflect on their own transitions that were triggered as a result of students' transitions (see Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transitions model, Jindal-Snape, 2012, 2016; Dennis et al. 2017).

6.1.2 How do stakeholders perceive the impact of the student transitions work in Year 3, and across the full three years of the Theme for students, staff, and institutions?

As discussed by participants in both Year 2 and Year 3, the impact of transitions activity has often been difficult to measure (Dennis et al. 2017; Gordon et al. 2016), which links with broader literature in higher education (Parsons et al. 2012). This may be reflective of the depth of the subject and the various perspectives of different stakeholders. The reported impact for individual institutions was varied, depending on the resource available and the ability for information about the Enhancement Theme to be disseminated across the institution. For example, for some institutions the transitions activity has led to changes in process and practice through the development of new student support services, academic workshops and practice-sharing forums, the implementation of new forms of cross-disciplinary teaching, and recognition through Scotland-wide excellence awards. Other institutions reported greater challenges in getting staff and students to engage. Therefore it is difficult to make a set of statements around impact of the Theme for student experience collectively, across institutions. However, participants considered the shared learning emerging from Theme work to be a central outcome of the Enhancement Theme. This included a more nuanced understanding of the scope and complexity of student transitions within an institution, across institutions, and in the TLG network. In turn, participants felt that the Theme had enabled them to develop an increased awareness of how student transitions can be best supported and facilitated.

Across both Years 2 and 3, participants articulated that challenges lie in embedding these new understandings across each institution, in particular beyond those staff and student members directly involved in the Theme. The data suggest that identification of impact has become more concrete between Years 2 and 3 as presented in the examples above, though there is recognition that it may still be a few years before the full impact is realised. Participants in Year

3 were more focused on the legacy of the Theme as a whole, and what might happen to the activities and outputs related to student transitions, for example, the Transitions Map, mainstreaming of funded projects, and the continued focus on student transition, as attention moves towards the next Enhancement Theme.

6.1.3 What are the barriers or facilitators to the successful development of the student transitions projects?

Participants interviewed in both Years 2 and 3 reflected an enthusiasm about activities and felt the Theme was relevant to multiple stakeholders across institutions. This was a key facilitator to student transitions and the work of the Theme. Ensuring awareness and enhancing communication to individuals outside of the Enhancement Theme network was considered a key barrier in particular through the language of the Theme.

Across both years, stakeholders perceive the Theme Leaders' Group (TLG) to be an enduring and valuable network. The inclusion of the student representatives on this group mid-way in Year 3 has been unanimously welcomed and encouraged; though more support for student representatives was highlighted as a way to enhance meaningful participation. A key theme that has arisen across the Theme has been the sense of generous sharing and support across the sector, which has been felt to be a key facilitator. It is noted that Enhancement Theme reporting structures could be streamlined, in particular there is a desire to receive requests for written reports earlier in the process, and for annual outcomes to be agreed at the outset of each Theme. Moving beyond the sharing of practice into collaborative, inter-institutional projects was highlighted as a key challenge in both Years 2 and 3.

Resources were seen as a barrier to transitions work, which arose as a key theme in both years. Most Theme Leaders and staff participated in transitions work as an 'extra' responsibility, outside of their core job description, and/or in addition to primary job responsibilities. There is therefore a need to align Theme work with the existing priorities of the institution. It is felt that time, space and financial resource to carry out Enhancement Theme work is finite, and often relied on the 'goodwill' of colleagues. The allocation of resource and formality of responsibility in job roles regarding Theme work varies significantly between institutions.

6.2 Implications and recommendations for Year 3 and beyond

6.2.1 Impact

Participants highlighted the key challenges around identifying and defining impact across both years 2 and 3 (see section 6.1.2 and Gordon et al. 2016).
It is recommended that:

- Early in the first year of each Theme, consider sharing fuller definitions of 'impact' such as those described in the Logic model across all Enhancement Theme Groups (that is SHEEC, TLG, and institutional teams).
- Relatedly, provide clear expectations of outputs in relation to these definitions at this early stage as supportive guidance.
- Furthermore, consider developing an evaluation plan from the inception of Theme work which incorporates these definitions of impact and expectations of outputs.

- Finally, explore the possibility of extending the evaluation of impact beyond the formal conclusion of the Theme.

6.2.2 Communication strategy

For individuals in the Enhancement Theme network, and its representative groups (that is SHEEC, TLG and TQF), there was a clear sense of good communication regarding the Theme and its progression across the years. For those not involved in this network, strategies currently utilised by institutions were not always effective in reaching them, leaving them unclear as to the aims and outcomes of the Enhancement Theme work.

It is recommended that:

- Consideration is given to develop a communication strategy from the inception of future Themes aiming to enhance how Enhancement Theme work is shared throughout institutions and across institutions to raise awareness and enhance engagement.
- Ensure that Enhancement Theme institutional teams have been embedded in key committees and groups across institutions to aid dissemination of key information organisation wide.

6.2.3 Enhancing student involvement

Although there was a feeling that student involvement had been enhanced in Year 3 with the integration of more students into the TLG, this was an area that could be improved further.

It is recommended to:

- Explore whether a rolling induction programme for student members to TLG may help to orient them to the priorities, key issues and terminology used by TLG and that associated with the wider Theme.
- Consider developing a mentoring system for student TLG members that would aim to encourage inclusion and enhance engagement.

6.2.4 Enhancing collaboration

Like Year 2, Year 3 participants reported collaboration in the sense of valuable discussion and sharing of ideas within and between institutions. Participants felt the focus on inter-institutional collaboration was implemented part-way through the Enhancement Theme.

It is recommended that:

- TLG develop clear definitions and expectations around collaborations early in the Theme life cycle.
- Consider reviewing the resources required to develop and prioritise successful inter-institutional collaborations.

6.2.5 Transition to the next Enhancement Theme

The Student Transitions Enhancement Theme was positively received overall and participants felt that it had been of value to individuals, institutions, and the sector as a whole.

Participants raised concerns about the long-term legacy of the work, and the risk of valuable work and resources being lost over time.

It is recommended that:

- Institutions explore whether resources are needed to maintain the legacy of the Student Transitions Theme over the coming years.
- Consideration is given to introducing a transition period between Themes that may help embed the work of each Theme within institutions, before the requirement to adopt and progress the next Theme. This could help institutions to implement policy changes, further engage staff and students in Theme-generated initiatives, and evaluate the process ahead of the incoming Theme.

6.2.6 Staff resources for Theme work

While the Theme was associated with a significant number of valuable projects, and engaged many in learning, many institutions did not have dedicated Enhancement Theme job roles. This meant that many Theme Leaders carried out work associated with the Theme as an 'added extra' and similarly relied upon the good will of their colleagues in order for Theme activity to be carried out in their institutions.

It is recommended that:

- Institutions are lobbied to fully support the work of the Enhancement Theme through resourcing for dedicated Enhancement Theme job roles.
- When relevant, technology is used to facilitate virtual meetings of the TLG; this may help reduce travel cost and time and enhance engagement.
- Theme work is distributed throughout the calendar year, for example, by setting reporting periods during the summer months, staff may have more capacity to engage beyond their core work commitments.

6.2.7 Different modes of reporting on Theme work

Finally, the evaluation team recommend that:

- A 'toolkit' approach (that is a choice of different formats) to reporting on Theme work should be considered, this would allow institutional groups to select the format of reporting that suits institutional strengths and resource. For example, some may prefer a multi-media reporting method over case-studies.
- Reporting requirements should be set out early in the Theme to facilitate successful transitions work, especially where collaborative projects are anticipated.

7 Acknowledgements

The evaluation team would like to acknowledge the participants who engaged with this evaluation in Phase 1 and Phase 2. In addition we would like to acknowledge support from the QAAS and the TLG 'sounding board' who provided valuable feedback at all stages in this evaluation process.

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Appendix A: Interview Topic Guide

Title: Evaluation of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme

Telephone Consultation Interview guide for stage 1 participants

(Version 1: 21 February 2017)

Welcome

Welcome and thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this evaluation. I appreciate how busy you are and the time you have taken to do this. This study aims to evaluate the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme across institutions in Scotland on the behalf of the TLG and QAA.

Introduction

Confidentiality and right to withdraw

The interview will be audio-recorded, but I would like to assure you that the discussion will be confidential.

Following the interview, you will be assigned a participant number.

The files will be kept securely and I would like to remind you that you have the right to withdraw at any time.

If you do not wish to answer a question then you do not have to. If you find anything that we have discussed upsetting we can discuss further how this can be addressed.

Some basic interview ground rules:

Ensure focus is on the topic of inquiry (Evaluation of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme)

Care should be taken not to disclose colleagues' names, identifiable characteristics of other people involved in any situations described (if any names are inadvertently mentioned these will be removed before any dissemination)

Confidentiality (not to be discussed outside the interview, I will have to disclose to the PI anything that suggests risk or harm to anyone. If you have any concerns following the interview please contact the PI whose contact details are on the information sheet provided)

There are no right or wrong answers, all points are valid

Do you have any questions before we start?

Body of interview

Then, turn on audio-tape (make sure participant is aware this is happening).

To begin, what do 'student transitions' mean to you, and to your institution?

How has your understanding of transition changed over the course of the Enhancement Theme work?

Can you give me an example?

Has this been influenced by a specific experience?

What has been the reach of the activities of the Enhancement Theme locally, institutionally, sector-wide and internationally? Can you provide a specific example?

Facilitative questions could include:

What do you perceive to be happening Scotland-wide?

What do you perceive to be happening inter-institutionally?

What do you perceive to be happening within your institution?

How does this work reflect on Scotland's reputation internationally in the HE sector?

Can you give me an example of an Enhancement Theme activity that you have been involved in either in the past year or, over the whole three years of the Theme?

Facilitative questions could include:

How do you feel this has worked?

How have previous year's experiences and outcomes (e.g. from the Enhancement Theme conference) influenced this year's goals, activities and progress?

How well have staff engaged in the process?

How well have students engaged in the process?

What have you learned from your experiences of working with this Theme? Can you provide a specific example?

Facilitative questions could include:

If you were involved in previous Themes, how does this Theme compare?

How do you think the Theme activities could be better facilitated/supported across future Themes?

What do you perceive will be or should be the ongoing legacy of this Theme moving forward?

What are you and your institution doing, or plan to do, to make this happen?

Are there any final things you wanted to talk about that you have not mentioned yet?

If participant is an institutional lead, they will be asked at this point if they would be willing to help with recruitment for Phase 2 within their institution.

Conclusion

Thank you for participating. I will switch the tape off now.

Appendix B: Focus Group Interview Schedule - Staff

Project Title: Evaluation of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme

Focus group interview schedule - staff members

(Version 1: 10 May 2017)

Welcome

Welcome and thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this evaluation. I appreciate how busy you are and the time you have taken to do this. This study aims to evaluate the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme across institutions in Scotland on the behalf of the TLG and QAA.

Introduction

Confidentiality and right to withdraw

The interview will be audio-recorded, but I would like to assure you that the discussion will be confidential.

Following the interview, you will be assigned a participant number.

The files will be kept securely and I would like to remind you that you have the right to withdraw at any time.

If you do not wish to answer a question then you do not have to. If you find anything that we have discussed upsetting we can discuss further how this can be addressed.

Some basic interview ground rules:

Ensure focus is on the topic of inquiry (Evaluation of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme)

Care should be taken not to disclose colleagues' names, identifiable characteristics of other people involved in any situations described (if any names are inadvertently mentioned these will be removed before any dissemination)

Confidentiality (not to be discussed outside the interview, I will have to disclose to the PI anything that suggests risk or harm to anyone. If you have any concerns following the interview please contact the PI whose contact details are on the information sheet provided)

There are no right or wrong answers, all points are valid

Do you have any questions before we start?

1. Can you tell me about Enhancement Themes?

What they are?

How they might benefit staff and/ or students?

What the current Theme is?

2. What do transitions mean to you?

Can you give an example of a student transition?

Can you give an example of a staff transition?

3. Can you tell me about how [your institution] supports student transitions

What structures/resources are in place internally to support student transitions?

Have you been involved in, or are you aware of, any specific events or initiatives to support these types of transition?

Do you have a sense of what goes on outside the institution at a sector level?

Have you been to or are you aware of any events that involve an international audience?

4. What might be barriers to supporting student transitions? Can you give a specific example?

5. How has Enhancement Theme activity influenced the way that you approach, or have approached, learning and teaching, or think about and support student experience? How might this influence what you do in the future?

Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Schedule - Students

Project Title: Evaluation of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme

Focus group interview schedule - students

(Version 1: 10 May 10 2017)

Welcome

Welcome and thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this evaluation. I appreciate how busy you are and the time you have taken to do this. This study aims to evaluate the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme across institutions in Scotland on the behalf of the TLG and QAA.

Introduction

Confidentiality and right to withdraw

The interview will be audio-recorded, but I would like to assure you that the discussion will be confidential.

Following the interview, you will be assigned a participant number.

The files will be kept securely and I would like to remind you that you have the right to withdraw at any time.

If you do not wish to answer a question then you do not have to. If you find anything that we have discussed upsetting we can discuss further how this can be addressed.

Some basic interview ground rules:

Ensure focus is on the topic of inquiry (Evaluation of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme)

Care should be taken not to disclose colleagues' names, identifiable characteristics of other people involved in any situations described (if any names are inadvertently mentioned these will be removed before any dissemination)

Confidentiality (not to be discussed outside the interview, I will have to disclose to the PI anything that suggests risk or harm to anyone. If you have any concerns following the interview please contact the PI whose contact details are on the information sheet provided)

There are no right or wrong answers, all points are valid

Do you have any questions before we start?

1. Can you tell me about Enhancement Themes?

What they are?

How they might benefit staff and/ or students?

What the current Theme is?

2. What do transitions mean to you?

Can you give an example of a transition you have experienced?

4. Can you tell me about how [your institution] supports student transitions

What structures/resources are in place internally to support student transitions?

How have you been involved in, or are you aware of, any specific events or initiatives to support these types of transition?

Do you have a sense of what goes on outside the institution at a sector level?

Have you been to or are you aware of any events that involve an international audience?

5. What have you learned through your involvement in Enhancement Theme activities?

How has this changed the way you approach or have approached university life?

How might this influence what you do in the future?

Or if no involvement: How have the activities discussed today changed the way you might approach university life?

How might they influence what you do in the future?

6. Thinking about the transitions activities we have discussed, how can these be facilitated to support you as you continue with the student journey?

Appendix D: Summary of Evaluation Method from 2016

The 2016 evaluation team undertook a mixed-methods study from mid-February to late-April 2016. There were two phases of the study that overlapped. The initial findings in Phase 1 helped inform the design of Phase 2. Figure 1 below outlines the evaluation process.

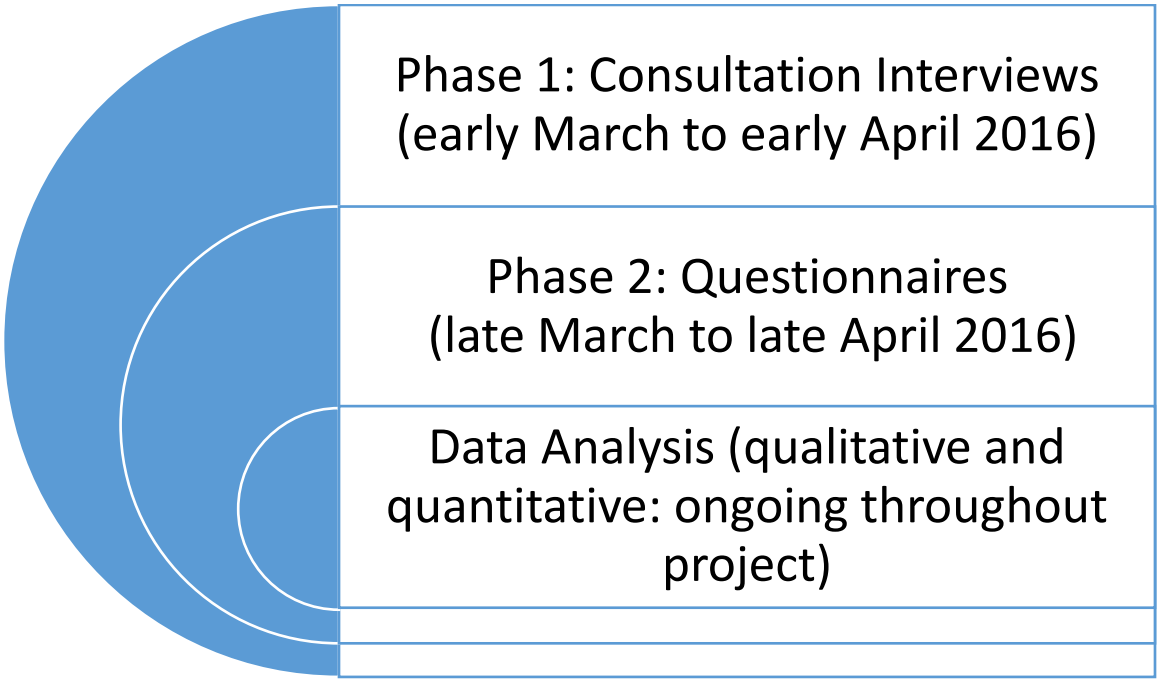

Figure 1: The evaluation process

Data Collection

Data collection occurred across the two phases. All data were stored on an encrypted hard drive, with access limited to the evaluation team.

Phase 1: Consultation Interviews

An initial interview topic guide based around the evaluation questions was developed and then sent to a reference group at QAA to comment on. Semi-structured interviews were then undertaken using the finalised topic guide (see Appendix A). All members of TLG and SHEEC were invited to take part in consultation interviews. Participants were contacted by email and invited to participate and email reminders were sent on a weekly basis. Participants were provided with an information sheet detailing information such as participation was voluntary, they had the right to withdraw, and that personal and institutional anonymity would be maintained in the reporting of the findings. Before the interview, participants returned a consent form and completed a short participant details questionnaire (asking for basic demographic and professional information) via email. All interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 22 and 41 minutes.

Phase 2: Questionnaires

Initial qualitative analysis of a sample of Phase 1 interviews informed the development of the Phase 2 questionnaire. Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) was used to design and administer the questionnaire which was a mixture of Likert scale and free-text answers (see Appendix B). Basic demographic and professional information was also collected. A representative from each of the 19 Scottish universities was identified to support dissemination of the questionnaires. These representatives agreed to distribute the questionnaire (by email) to up to 20 people (a mix of both staff and students: up to 380 people in total) within their institution. The representatives were asked to disseminate to those they perceived had had a role in Year 2 of the student transitions enhancement theme. Phase 2 consent was implied through participants' completion of the online questionnaire.

Participant Characteristics in 2016 evaluation

Groups	**Phase 1**	**Phase 2**
Institutions involved (of a possible 19)	18	14 (including the institution that didn't participate in Phase 1)
SHEEC members	12	-
TLG members	20	-
Academic Staff	-	14
Professional and Support Staff	-	17
Students	2	10
Total	34 (note some participants identified as belonging to more than one group: 30 participants were interviewed)	41 (note 43 questionnaires returned- two did not identify their group)

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