Learning Analytics Collaborative cluster activity in Years 2 & 3

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Keywords: Online learning; learning analytics; sector collaboration; group working

Abstract: The Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) agreed at its 18th September 2017 meeting that the new Enhancement Theme would be Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience. It was proposed that groups of institutions would work collectively together as Collaborative Clusters on an area related to the Theme that would be beneficial to their own institution but has the potential to add value for the whole sector.

QAA Scotland provided support for the facilitation of scoping activity workshops that brought institutions together with a shared interest in the key area of learning analytics. The purpose of these workshops was to create the space for institutions that are committed to specific areas related to the Theme to come together, and discuss in detail what areas of work they are keen to pursue in collaboration with other institutions.

This presentation will report the collaborative cluster formed through these workshops, the work of these clusters, and outline the anticipated outcomes and impact as a result of this work.

Key messages:

1. Knowledge of the learning analytics collaborative cluster work to be undertaken in Years 2 & 3 of the Theme.
2. An overview of strands of learning analytics work, their activities and anticipated outcomes.
3. An understanding of how a scoping workshop approach can be used as a method to facilitate collaborative working.

Background

Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience is the current QAA Scotland Enhancement Theme. The Enhancement Themes involve students, staff and institutions working independently and collaboratively to generate and share new ideas in teaching and learning practice.

This is achieved through institutional activity, collaborative clusters, and sector strands, and is displayed graphically below.
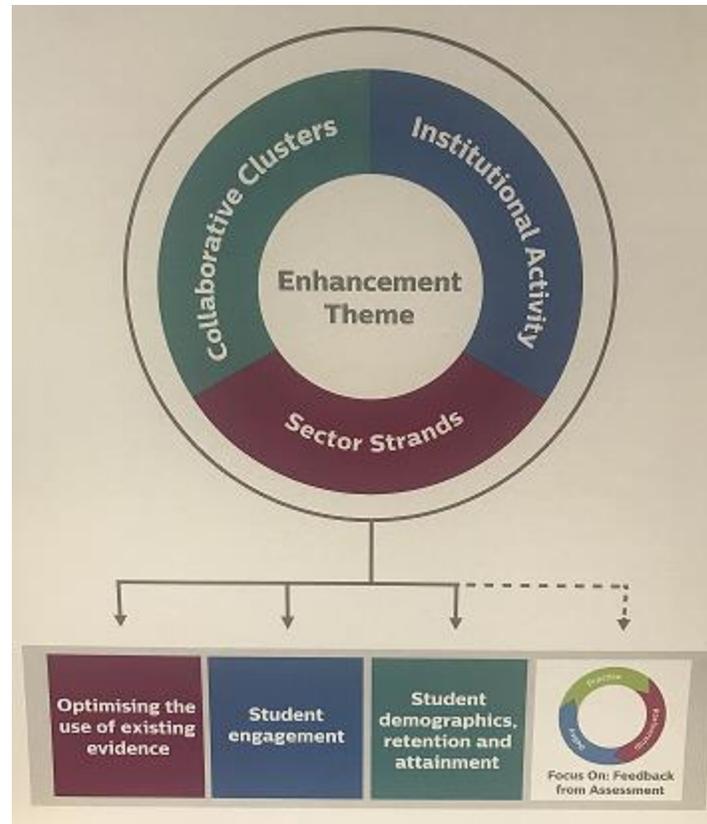
Collaborative clusters involve groups of institutions working together to progress an area under the Theme that will have a benefit to the overall sector. At the QAA Enhancement Theme Launch Event, in the First Year Plans submitted by institutions, and in discussions at the first Theme Leaders Group meeting, there was clearly a large appetite across the sector for further understanding and activity in learning analytics, which stood out as the leading area of interest in the overall Enhancement Theme.

Following these events and discussions within our institution, the University of Strathclyde expressed an interest in leading the activity and hosting two workshops to develop a programme of work examining this area for the benefit of the Scottish HE sector. This fits firmly within the student demographics, retention and attainment strand of the Enhancement Theme. These workshops were designed and facilitated to identify pathways of work within the learning analytics field with the output of these workshops clearly defined strands of activity that fit within the wider learning analytics remit. It was clear that the investigation of learning analytics is a priority for the sector as a whole and as such, could result in a substantial impact on advancing the sector's knowledge in this area.

Within the activity, three student interns were included to undertake the background research for the newly identified strands of work that would be carried forward into Years 2 and/or 3. Interns would also be required to collaborate with each other to ensure that information and activity is shared across the learning analytics contributing workstreams. QAA Scotland generously funded these workshops and student intern opportunities.

Workshop 1 – 27th February 2018

The workshop was well attended with 20 representatives from 12 HEIs. These were: University of Aberdeen, University of Dundee, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, Napier University, Open University in Scotland, Robert Gordon University, University of St Andrews, SRUC, University of Stirling, University of Strathclyde, University of the West of Scotland and the QAA Scotland were also present.

The workshop was designed to be highly participative and there was a large amount of engagement in the room with activities provided to scope our understanding of learning analytics by the professional facilitator.

At the end of the day, five broad themes were identified by the participants in the room. These were:

- Data governance (transparency, data protection, ethics)
- Student engagement (student ownership/empowerment, data literacy)
- Staff engagement (staff ownership/empowerment, data literacy)
- Learning analytics framework (institutional strategy, policies, definitions)
- Applications of learning analytics (driving enhancement, providing examples of best practice and identifying the potential to impact on commercial providers)

Workshop 2 – 15th May 2018

The second workshop would focus on the year 2 and/or year 3 work proposed under these themes and how the three student interns could support the work of these themes in summer 2018. It was also well attended with 16 representatives from University of Aberdeen, Abertay University, University of Edinburgh, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, Open University in Scotland, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, University of Strathclyde and QAA Scotland again present. SRUC and sparqs were unable to attend but had expressed an interest in collaborating in further work.

At the outset, following discussion and review, it was agreed that data governance would be superseded into the other themes. It was also agreed that student and staff engagement should be combined into an overall 'engagement' theme. Discussion resulted in consensus around three clear themes, or strands of work that would be proposed to QAA Scotland to advance the learning analytics investigation for the benefit of the sector.

1.   Learning Analytics Framework

Workshop participants identified a need for a mechanism by which to share good practice around the learning analytics framework. This would include:

- Oversight/governance
- Institutional strategy
- Definitions
- Policy/guidelines
- Lessons learned
- Implementation strategy

- Where HEIs are in the development journey.

It is anticipated that two student interns, to be based at the University of Stirling, would develop and implement an information gathering strategy, collecting an overview of the operational framework used by Scottish institutions when implementing the use of learning analytics.

It is proposed that in year 2 of the Enhancement Theme, a resource be developed, that would be populated with the research gathered by the interns to enable this sharing of and promotion of good practice across the sector.

Year 3 of the Enhancement Theme could result in work being undertaken to evaluate the evidence gathered from the interns and produce sector-wide policy/guidance/best practice framework documents, that could be released under a Creative Commons licence, for institutions to modify and use when implementing learning analytics.

2.   Engagement

Workshop attendees grouped staff and student engagement into one complimentary strand of work. Discussions focused on data literacy of staff and students, however it was felt that this aspect of work would be covered by the QAA Scotland Sector Strand activity. There was also a discussion around the ethics of using data in this manner and the impact that may have on student wellbeing and student mental health. It was suggested that a new collaborative cluster focused on student mental health may be formed in the 2018-2019 which would be best placed to take this area of work forward.

Consultancy and buy-in was discussed, for both staff and students, but it was also identified that there is a need for tangible examples of learning analytics that can be used when engaging staff and students.

It was suggested that a piece of research surrounding the different categories of students and the needs of these categories from learning analytics would be a useful starting point to engage with students. A student intern, to be based at the University of Strathclyde, would undertake research to establish the different categories of students, in order that any strategy developed within an institution would support all student groups, and not just those deemed 'at-risk' from failing or leaving the university.

It is proposed that in year 2 of the Enhancement Theme, a sector wide project be undertaken to gain student views on learning analytics and the specific needs required by each group of students.

A similar project for staff could be undertaken either in tandem in year 2 or independently in year 3 of the Theme.

3.   Application of Learning Analytics

The importance of sharing examples and information was highlighted and it was suggested at the workshop that a 'show, tell and share' approach to the applications strand would be an advantage. This would provide a platform for institutions to demonstrate and share good practice in terms of the implementation of their learning analytics framework and tools they have developed/introduced to support their strategy for learning analytics implementation.

It was suggested that the focus for the interns and for year 2 of the collaborative cluster would be the framework and engagement strands, and that work on the application strand would commence in year 3 of the theme.

Recommendation

The learning analytics collaborative cluster recommendation, for work to be undertaken by collaborative clusters or as sector strand activity, to QAA Scotland would be:

- The development of a tool to share knowledge and practice in learning analytics framework activity throughout the Scottish sector
- The development of policy/guidelines/best practice guides, released under Creative Commons licences, that are specifically targeted at Scottish institutional priorities
- That research be undertaken into the different categories of students and staff and the development of a needs analysis for each category with regards to learning analytics for sharing throughout the sector
- Development of a mechanism to share the knowledge, resources and activities developed to support individual institution's learning analytics strategies.