A guide to the Enhancement Themes for institutions

Table of contents

1. The Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF)

The Quality Enhancement Themes are one of five inter-related elements of Scotland's Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF), which was developed in 2003. The framework has been designed to support higher education institutions in Scotland in managing the quality of the student learning experience and to provide public confidence in the quality and standards of higher education.

From its inception, the QEF has supported the development of an enhancement-led approach to quality in the Scottish higher education sector. QAA Scotland has worked closely with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Universities Scotland, NUS Scotland, sparqs and the Higher Education Academy to develop an integrated collaborative approach to quality enhancement in Scotland. The QEF comprises the following five main elements:

- a **comprehensive programme of institution-led reviews**, carried out by higher education institutions with guidance from the SFC
- **Enhancement-led institutional review**: external reviews run by QAA Scotland that involve all Scottish higher education institutions over a four-year cycle
- **improved forms of public information about quality**, based on addressing the different needs of a range of stakeholders including students and employers
- **a greater voice for student representatives,** involving **students in quality management** in higher education. **sparqs** (student partnerships in quality scotland), hosted by NUS Scotland, assists and supports students, students' associations and institutions to improve the effectiveness of student engagement in quality processes and provides advice to the SFC and institutions on good practice in student engagement
- **a national programme of Enhancement Themes**, managed by QAA Scotland. The programme encourages academic staff, support staff and students to share current good practice and collectively generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching.

This collaborative approach to quality is unique in many respects: in its balance between quality assurance and enhancement; in the emphasis which it places on the student experience; in its focus on learning and not solely on teaching; and in the spirit of cooperation and partnership which has underpinned all these developments.

Enhancement is conceived of as 'taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement' and the Enhancement Themes programme aims to encourage academic and support staff and students to work collectively and actively to generate innovation in learning and teaching.

2. The Enhancement Themes

Since 2003, the Enhancement Themes have focused on a variety of learning and teaching areas identified by the Scottish higher education sector.

To date 9 Enhancement Themes have been completed:

- Assessment (2003-4)
- Responding to Student Needs (2003-04)
- Employability (2004-06)
- Flexible Delivery (2004-06)

- Integrative Assessment (2005-06)
- The First Year: Engagement and Empowerment (2005-08)
- Research-teaching Linkages: enhancing graduate attributes (2006-08)
- Graduates for the 21st Century: Integrating the Enhancement Themes (2008-11)
- Developing and Supporting the Curriculum (2011-2014)

The current Enhancement Theme, 'Student transitions' is just beginning, and will run from 2014 to 2017. The outputs from each Theme are published on the Enhancement Themes web-site, and constitute a large repository of resources, including reports, discussion papers, toolkits, presentations, and videos. These resources, together with information about events and ongoing work may be found at:
http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/

The Themes have undergone substantial evolution since their introduction over a decade ago. In that time they have developed from short one-year projects to longer three year undertakings and their focus has widened more effectively to encompass the diversity of institutional mission and ethos in the Scottish higher education sector. The ways and means by which the Themes have been implemented have evolved too, informed by the findings of general evaluations of the Themes as a component of the QEF.

3. The operating structure of the Enhancement Themes

The operating structure for delivery of the Enhancement Themes comprises committees and groups at three different levels: senior managers at Vice Principal level; middle managers e.g. Directors of Academic Practice; Deans, Heads of School; senior support staff; and individual experts with specific knowledge, skills and experience relating to the Theme. There is student representation at each of these levels, together with a Student Network, comprising all the student members of the Institutional Enhancement Teams, together with student members of SHEEC and of the Theme Leaders' Group. Each of these groups operates at sector level as well as linking back to institutions.

SHEEC

Institutional Teams   **Theme Leaders' Group**   **Student Network**
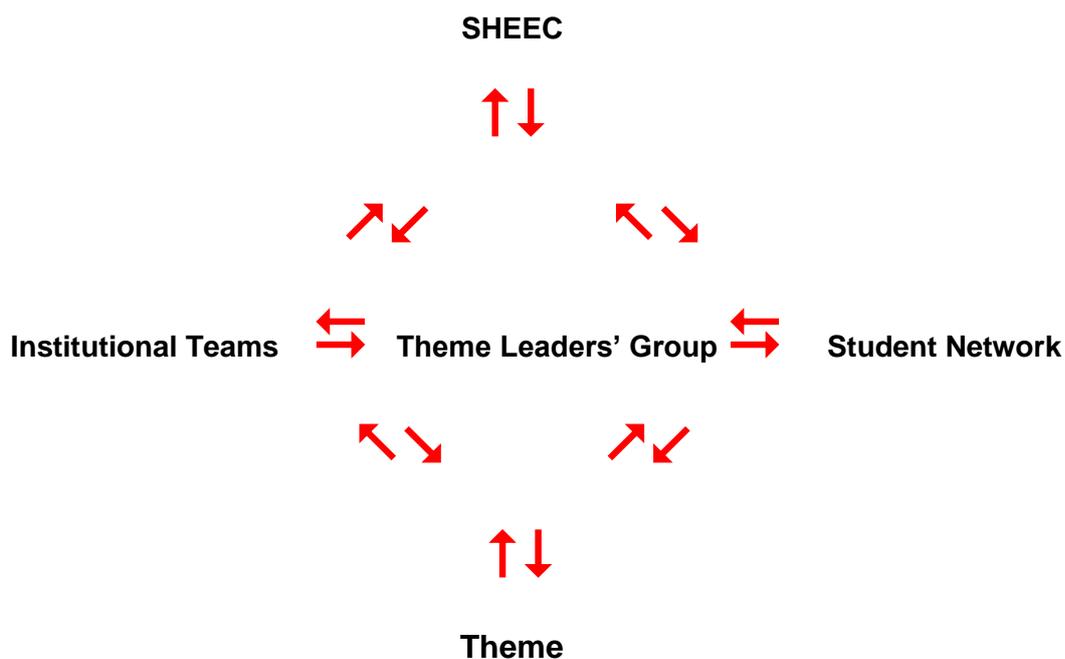
Theme

4. SHEEC

The selection, strategic direction and oversight of the Enhancement Themes are carried out by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), and managed by QAA Scotland. SHEEC members are predominantly Vice-Principals or Assistant Principals for Learning and Teaching drawn from each of the Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs).

SHEEC members collectively perform a central role at national level, but individual SHEEC members also play a key role at institutional level, since they have the authority to drive activity locally – 'to make things happen' in a way that institutions' Theme Leaders' Group members alone, and generally operating at lower levels, cannot. From both national and local perspectives, fostering and maintaining engagement in SHEEC at senior level is considered to be supremely important.

SHEEC's strategic aim is to ensure that our HEIs work together to develop, foster and embed a culture of quality enhancement in learning and teaching, through effective partnerships involving staff, students and other stakeholders.

Collectively and individually, the role of SHEEC is to support and promote quality enhancement of the student learning experience within Scottish higher education and to ensure that higher education in Scotland continues to be at the forefront in terms of developing and enhancing the student learning experience and student success. This is achieved by:

- providing a developmental and supportive environment for SHEEC members to consider key policy issues and how to support and manage change in institutional quality cultures, including supporting the Themes themselves

- continuing to review the areas/topics to be pursued through the Enhancement Themes and other related SHEEC work and projects

- supporting in turn HEIs' enhancement work and enabling sharing of innovative practice between HEIs

- supporting the evaluation of the effectiveness of the Themes and other SHEEC work and projects in supporting HEIs' enhancement work

- embedding effective enhancement-led approaches to managing quality within HEIs

SHEEC's activities are based on shared values and principles which underpin the work of the Scottish HE sector. These include:

• **Quality:** all students should have a high quality learning experience

• **Partnership working:** all students should have a voice in shaping and engaging with their learning

• **High quality teaching:** all our institutions support and reward professional commitment by our staff to high quality teaching
• **Reflective approach to improvement:** we seek to continually improve and innovate L&T practice, leading the way nationally and internationally

• **Access:** we seek to provide access and learning opportunities for the widest possible range of learners who can benefit from our programmes

• **International outlook:** while taking pride in Scotland's educational heritage, we work in a global context and seek to learn from good practice wherever it can be found.

SHEEC's strategic aim is to ensure that our HE institutions work together to develop, foster and embed a culture of quality enhancement in learning and teaching, through effective partnerships involving staff, students and other stakeholders. In order to achieve this aim, we have identified specific objectives relating to different dimensions of the work of SHEEC.

SHEEC works in close partnership with the Theme Leaders' Group, which reports to SHEEC. SHEEC chooses the broad topic for each Enhancement Theme programme, but the detail of how that will be worked out in practice is a matter for each Theme Leaders' Group. SHEEC meetings receive updates on the work of the Theme, and where appropriate, SHEEC can, and does, offer guidance to the Theme Leaders' Group on an ongoing basis.

Effective linkage between SHEEC and the Theme Leaders' Group is very important in the delivery of the Theme. The Chair of the Theme Leaders' Group is drawn from the SHEEC membership and appointed by SHEEC. A strong and clear relationship between individual SHEEC members and their institutional counterparts on the Theme Leaders' Group is highly desirable. To this end, joint meetings between the two Committees are held annually, and local level meetings between the institutional members on each committee help to strengthen the links between senior and middle management, in exploring institutional challenges and how to address them, and in developing mutual support. Joint meetings are likely to support a sense of shared endeavour and understanding in progressing the Theme, and local level meetings between the SHEEC and Theme Leaders' Group members are likely to underline the context for activity, at the same time as ensuring first hand exposure to implementation issues, positive and negative. Both types of engagement should serve to supply a secure and informed base on which SHEEC can select and direct future Themes.

Through its support for and promotion of quality enhancement, the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee ensures that higher education in Scotland remains at the forefront of developing and enhancing the student learning experience and student success

 See SHEEC Terms of Reference, Annex 1

Establishing a new Theme

A recent evaluation highlighted the following as key considerations for SHEEC and the Theme Leaders' Group when establishing a new Enhancement Theme:

- giving conscious consideration to its objectives, dimensions and parameters, possibly through a scoping exercise, and making these explicit;

- from this, deciding on the appropriate delivery processes and developing specific objectives for each one;

- clarifying and making these objectives explicit in terms of reference, guidance and other statements as appropriate for each process, and continually reinforcing this; and

- making explicit and putting in place clear, straightforward arrangements - processes and procedures - for monitoring Theme progress against objectives and ensuring

accountability for any funding/other resources; and ensuring those charged with responsibility in these areas understand and remain aware of it.

5. Theme Leaders' Group

The Theme Leaders' Group (hitherto known as the Theme Steering Committee) is seen as the 'powerhouse' of Theme delivery. Its name has recently been changed from Theme Steering Committee to capture the revitalised approach being taken to the Student Transitions Theme and to reflect the expectation that members will be, or become, leaders within their institutions.

Each institution is invited to nominate their institutional representative on the Theme Leaders' Group. Nominees to the Theme Leaders' Group combine their role as institutional representatives with being the institutional contact who also co-ordinates the institution's work on the Theme, through an Institutional Team. They will therefore play a key role both in scoping and designing the work of the Theme at national level, whilst also leading and coordinating their institution's work on the Theme.

To this end, Theme Leaders' Group members need to be operating within their institutions in posts from which they can exert influence and, while previous experience of Theme work can be advantageous, there is also a need to seek to extend involvement with it and to engage fresh perspectives. Its membership is an important consideration, particularly in ensuring it comprises individuals in sufficiently senior roles to take activity forward locally through their Institutional Teams, as well as contributing to discussions nationally.

The Theme Leaders' Group is a pivotal element of Theme delivery and, along with the Institutional Teams, is key to the effective design, delivery and progress monitoring of the Theme. The fact that the Group's membership comprises representation from all higher education institutions (HEIs) in Scotland is regarded as 'positive factor', which means the whole sector is involved. Everyone has the opportunity to see the other's perspective, and that each institution faces similar challenges, albeit in a different context. It is also regarded as a place for networking, a crucial element in development and enhancement work.

See draft Terms of Reference for Theme Leaders' Group, Annex 2

6. Institutional contract

Institutions' SHEEC members annually sign a QAA contract in which they undertake to engage with the current Enhancement Theme, by setting up an Institutional Enhancement Team to develop and carry out a programme of work relating to the current Theme in the context of their institutional priorities, plans and students' needs. The Institutional Team includes both the SHEEC member and the institutional member of the Theme Leaders' group, who is the institutional contact for the Theme, together with student members. The remaining Institutional Team members may be drawn from senior academic and support staff in a range of areas depending on the focus of the Theme.

On signing the contract, institutions receive a fixed annual fee to support their Themes work and wider staff and student engagement with the Theme. All institutions receive the same amount, which is seen as a positive feature.

The institution's contractual obligations include providing a three-year plan of work, comprising a more detailed plan of work for the current year, with an indication of how funds will be allocated, and an indicative plan for subsequent years. Institutional plans are posted to the Enhancement Themes web-site, as are specific outputs of institutional work.

See standard institutional contract, Annex 3

7. Institutional Teams

The Institutional Teams are the 'cornerstone' of Theme delivery, through their promotion of institutional engagement, which is central to the Theme. The funding made available for the Teams has been a significant enabler of, and support to, participation both within the institution and the wider community. Contact with project consultants and with Theme management structures – QAA Scotland officers, SHEEC and Theme Leaders' Group members in various combinations affords additional positive support. Despite considerable achievements within institutions in terms of Theme–related work, diffusion of outcomes throughout the wider institution remains a concern and an ongoing challenge for some. In addition, the meaningful engagement of students stands as a challenge to almost all.

The following extract of institutional activities relating to a previous Theme provides a useful summary of the variety of approaches which institutional take to Themes work.[1]

Strategies for enhancement

The second principal outcome of the G21C Theme is perhaps less visible, but deserves full recognition. It takes the form of the robust toolbox of strategies that Scotland's HEIs have developed throughout G21C, individually and collaboratively, to advance and embed within institutional practice their enhancement of the student learning experience.

Scotland's higher education sector is recognised as the global pioneer of the pursuit of quality enhancement in parallel with quality assurance. Nonetheless, the development of these strategies for embedding enhancement represents a considerable achievement.
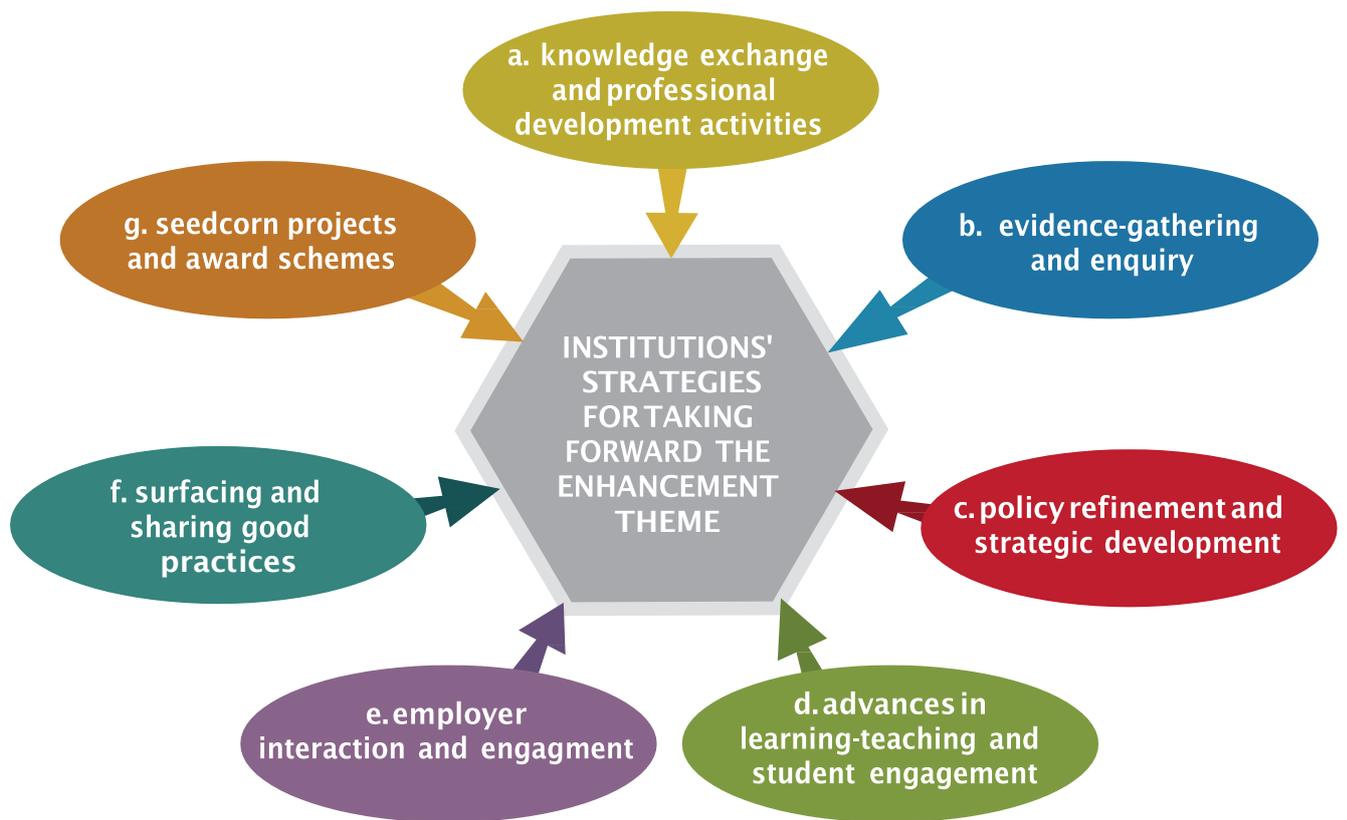
Rising to that challenge of advancing and embedding enhancement has meant testing and refining strategies for pursuing enhancement that go beyond rhetoric and aspiration to make enhancement a 'lived reality' - and as with graduate attributes themselves, a one-size-fits-all approach would be neither appropriate nor productive. Nonetheless, institutions have been successful at learning from and with one another while crafting strategies tailored to their own needs and internal structures.

They have done so by actively exchanging information about their activities and initiatives, initially in workshops and conference presentations and subsequently distilled through a rich array of case studies, in which each higher education institution systematically documented examples of its G21C activities that others might learn from.

Reviewing these case studies, seven main types of institutional strategies were adopted to take forward the G21C Theme, as summarised in Figure 2.

---

[1] Graduates for the 21st Century, Integrating the Enhancement Themes, Professor Dai Hounsell, Vice-Principal. Academic Enhancement , University of Edinburgh, QAA, 2011
http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/publications/graduates-for-the-21st-century-institutional-activities.PDF

The diagram shows a central hexagon labeled "INSTITUTIONS' STRATEGIES FOR TAKING FORWARD THE ENHANCEMENT THEME" with arrows pointing toward it from surrounding ovals:

- a. knowledge exchange and professional development activities
- b. evidence-gathering and enquiry
- c. policy refinement and strategic development
- d. advances in learning-teaching and student engagement
- e. employer interaction and engagment
- f. surfacing and sharing good practices
- g. seedcorn projects and award schemes

8. Institution-based meetings with QAA officers

Recently instituted annual meetings between QAA Scotland Officers and the institution's SHEEC and Theme Leaders' Group members provide a useful forum for discussion of particular issues or challenges which the institution is experiencing, or issues and questions emerging from the Theme Leaders' Group in terms of the strategic direction and scope of the Theme.

9. Student Network

Student engagement is fundamental to the higher education quality assurance partnership work in Scotland. The student member(s) on each HEI's institutional team is also automatically a member of a Student Network[2] that is administered and coordinated by QAA Scotland with support from sparqs. This aims to enable the student representatives involved in the Theme to discuss issues among themselves and to feed into the Theme Leaders' Group, helping to shape the work of the Theme, as well as leading project work on specific areas of student interest.

---

[2] See draft Terms of Reference for the Student Network, Annex 4

Student members of the Theme Leaders' group will be nominated from and by the Student Network to bring the student perspective to the Enhancement Theme. The Student Network advises, takes direction from and reports into the Theme Institutional Leadership Group, thereby playing a key role in the Theme.

10. Student engagement

Informal discussions with institutional Theme leaders, as well as committee discussions at the close of the last Theme, suggest that meaningful sustained student engagement in the Themes often presents a challenge both at institutional level as well as at sector level. The Student Network provides a mechanism to facilitate the deployment of student perspectives into the Theme, as well as a focus for the design and implementation of student-led projects.

Most institutions appear to have increased student representation in institutional and departmental committees, and there are a number of innovative ways in which institutions have involved students in enhancement work, in projects to enhance learning and teaching, many of which are beneficial for students' future employability.

Annex 5 provides an overview of different approaches taken to student engagement within the most recent Enhancement Theme, Developing and Supporting the Curriculum. It should be noted that in many of the examples, it is the student body which has instigated engagement. However, all approaches are considered here, in terms of how Institutional teams might use examples to encourage student engagement within the current Theme of Student Transitions.

It is important for Institutional Teams to be mindful that student engagement with the Themes needs to go beyond membership of a committee or group; it needs to be an active process, and something meaningful for students as well as useful.

11. Events, activities and the Enhancement Themes Conference

Events and activities represent another important strand of the processes employed by the Theme. They encompass variously: conferences; workshops; written outputs; commissioned work on selected topics; a change management toolkit; the establishment of project topics; and consultant visits. Events are a popular, well known and well used means of disseminating practice and ideas within the sector. The volume and the diversity of these in the Themes are considered to be a source of strength by most participants. The multiplicity of Theme events and activities afford plenty of scope for institutions to engage, and at a level and in a way that suits them - Theme, institution or discipline.

The annual Enhancement Theme Conference has become a major event, which is well supported by the sector. Two very successful international Enhancement Themes Conferences have been held to date, under the auspices of SHEEC: the first in 2013, celebrating 10 years of the Enhancement Themes, and the second, in June 2015. The next Enhancement Themes Conference will be a one-day national event, targeted principally at the Scottish HE sector, and will take place on 9 June, 2016, at the John McIntyre Conference Centre, University of Edinburgh. Further details may be found on the Enhancement Themes web-site
http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/conference

Communications

12. The Enhancement Themes web-site, commissioned work and publications, are the main communication mechanisms employed by QAA Scotland Officers and are vital to those working on the Theme - the website, particularly so, since it hosts 1000+ resources, and includes a helpful search facility. They also assist with dissemination of the Theme - beyond those who are directly participating - to other parts of the institution. In addition, the Enhancement Themes Newsletter, which is produced quarterly is a means of keeping the extensive wider community informed about the work. We also maintain a register of consultants who are included, whenever we put out a call for external consultancy on project work. A more recent development has been our forays into social media – Twitter, LinkedIn, Flckr and U-tube

13. Evaluation

From the outset, external evaluation has been an important feature of the Themes work, and external evaluations of the impact of the Themes have been commissioned every few years. External evaluations initially commissioned by SFC, and more recently by SHEEC, have been conducted by Professor Murray Saunders and his Team, of the Centre for Higher Education Research and Evaluation, Lancaster University. The most recent external evaluation of Themes impact was undertaken during 2013-14 and the report has been published on the Enhancement Themes web-site. http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/sheec/theme-evaluation-project/evaluation-of-the-enhancement-themes)

A key finding was that the influence of the Themes is enduring, inculcating a mind-set or helping to establish a culture in which professionals reflect on their practices and continually seek to improve these. In most Thematic areas, the resources and activities associated with each Theme have provided important sources for learning and teaching developments both within and across institutions in the Scottish HE sector.

Professor Saunders concludes that there is good alignment between the Themes and institutional strategies for learning and teaching. Although the Themes may not necessarily reflect all of an institution's priorities, they don't appear to be running counter to institutions' overall aims. In general, teaching staff are aware of the underlying philosophy of enhancement, though are not necessarily always familiar with the content, focus and language of the Themes. For academic teaching staff, their experience of the Themes is largely mediated through institutional strategies and policies. However, in the most thematic areas, the resources and activities associated with each Theme have provided important resources for teaching and learning developments both within and across HEIs in Scotland. To that extent, he concludes, the strategy has been successful and the evidence of this success is clear.

Summative evaluation, through externally commissioned projects, has been a feature of the current Enhancement Theme as it progresses. The Theme Leaders' Group has developed a Logic Model to assist in monitoring the progress and impact of the Theme, and the extent to which the Theme's strategic objectives are being achieved. Regular evaluation by the Theme Leaders' Group will enable us to adjust or refine approaches in response to particular issues arising.

Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee

Terms of reference

1. The **role** of the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement committee is to support and promote quality enhancement of the student learning experience within Scottish higher education and to ensure that Higher Education in Scotland continues to be at the forefront in terms of developing and enhancing the student learning experience and student success. This will be achieved through:

    embedding effective enhancement-led approaches to managing quality within HEIs sharing innovative practice between HEIs;
    continuing review of the areas/topics to be pursued through the Enhancement Themes and other related SHEEC work and projects (such as Learning from International Practice and Learning from ELIR projects) in supporting HEIs' enhancement work;
    supporting the evaluation of the effectiveness of the Themes and other SHEEC work and projects in supporting HEIs enhancement work;
    providing a developmental and supportive environment for SHEEC members to consider key policy issues and how to support and manage change in institutional quality cultures.

2. The work of the Committee will draw on and be informed by national and international developments This will include the maintenance of productive working relationships nationally with Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) [1]partners: the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council, National Union of Students Scotland, Student Participation in Quality Scotland, Universities Scotland and the Higher Education Academy, as well as with other relevant national and international groups.

3. The **work** carried out by the Committee will be concerned with:

    developing approaches to the institutional strategic management of quality enhancement. Topics within this could include how best to: engage with/embed an enhancement-based approach to quality; embed innovation; engender an enhancement-led culture and practice and engage staff and students at all levels within the HEI; facilitate the development of the reflective institution and taking forward the outcomes of these.

    engaging with and supporting the Themes and other SHEEC work and projects. This will include Themes work institutionally and across the sector, including support for events such as the annual Themes conference

    maintaining a sector-wide overview of institutional strategic priorities and plans in respect of the Themes and other SHEEC work and projects

    periodic revisiting of the overall outcomes from Themes and consequent new developments/practices emerging across the sector as HEIs embed new approaches. This 'revisiting could also include some element of review or scanning of developments elsewhere including nationally and internationally) and from ELIR reports through thematic overview reports.

regular review of the programme and timetable of Themes, projects and other work.
reviewing the overall impact of the Themes and other SHEEC work and projects in contributing to enhancement of the student learning experience.

4.   The **outcomes of this work** are intended to have a major and long term benefit in terms of
> supporting the embedding of an enhancement-led approach to quality within HEIs both individually and collectively;
> supporting HEIs in their work to enhance practice in particular areas;
> gaining an overview of the overall impact on the student learning experience in Scotland;
> providing a developmental and supportive environment for SHEEC members to consider key policy issues and how to support and manage change in institutional quality cultures.

5.   The Committee will make reports and, where required, recommendations to the Universities Quality Working Group. It will receive regular reports from the Themes and related SHEEC projects on their progress and any substantive issues arising.

6.   In order to help inform its programme of work, the Committee will also receive summary reports on general enhancement issues and potential topics including those identified through the reports of Enhancement-Led Institutional Reviews.

7.   The Committee will be resourced along the same lines of the existing Theme committees with a budget for such things as workshops and conferences including the annual conference, and the commissioning of reviews, research and development work.

Membership

8.   Members of the committee are senior colleagues from across the sector who have institutional responsibility for teaching and learning (e.g. Vice-Principals, Assistant Principals or other staff with similar institution-wide responsibilities) and have a pivotal role in supporting the embedding of effective enhancement-led approaches to managing quality in higher education institutions

9.   Every Scottish HEI has a representative on the committee. There is also a student member and observers from NUS, sparqs, US, TQF and HEA. Any committee member who is unable to attend more than one of the three meetings for the year should arrange to nominate another senior colleague as an alternate and notify QAA officers accordingly.

10.   The committee will meet at least 3 times a year and will have where appropriate workshops related to key policy areas

**Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee
Membership**

	Members	
Chair	Professor Peter McGeorge Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching	University of Aberdeen
Institutional members	Professor Veronica Bamber Director, Centre for Academic Practice and Chair of Theme Leaders' Group	Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh
	Dr Gary Campbell, Dean of Learning & Teaching	University of the Highlands and Islands
	Dr Martha Cadell Depute Director (Learning and Teaching)	The Open University in Scotland
	Professor Sara Carter, Professor of Entrepreneurship and Head of the Hunter Centre for Entrepreneurship	University of Strathclyde
	Professor Frank Coton Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching	University of Glasgow
	Mr James Dunphy Head of the Department for Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment	The Robert Gordon University
	Dr Victoria O'Donnell, Director of Learning Innovation and Reader in Higher Education	University of the West Scotland
	Professor Vicki Gunn Head of Learning and Teaching	Glasgow School of Art
	Mr Andrew Comrie Director of Academic Innovation	Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
	Professor Karl Leydecker Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching)	University of Dundee
	Professor Lorna Milne Vice-Principal (Proctor)	University of St Andrews
	Professor Tina Harrison Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance	University of Edinburgh
	Dr Alastair Robertson Director of Teaching and Learning Enhancement	University of Abertay, Dundee

	Professor John Sawkins Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching)	Heriot-Watt University
	Dr Chris Smith Academic Development Manager	Scotland's Rural College
	Dr Tim Whalley Dean of Student Affairs	University of Stirling
	Professor Valerie Webster Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Student Experience and Vice Principal.	Glasgow Caledonian University
Student Members	Conor Marshall President of Students' Association,	Abertay
	Maria Roberts Vice-President Higher Education, HISA	UHI
	Michael Stephenson Student President	Glasgow Caledonian University
Observers	tbc	Chair, Teaching Quality Forum
	Rob Henthorn Vice President Education	NUS Scotland
	Kirsty Conlon Head of Learning and Teaching and Widening Access Policy	Universities Scotland
	Eve Lewis Head of sparqs	sparqs
	Murray Hope Policy Officer for HEA in Scotland	Higher Education Academy
	tbc Senior Policy Officer Learning, Governance and Sustainability	Scottish Funding Council
QAAS Officers	Ms Rowena Pelik Director of QAA Scotland	QAA
	Thelma Barron Assistant Director	QAA
	Ms Ailsa Crum Head of Reviews	QAA
	Debra Macfarlane Assistant Director	QAA

	Sarah MacGregor Administrator (Enhancement Themes)	QAA
	Vivienne MacMurray Administrator (Enhancement Themes)	QAA
	Dr Christine Macpherson, Assistant Director	QAA
	Ms Caroline Turnbull, Assistant Director	QAA

Theme Leaders' Group

Draft Terms of reference and membership

Role

The Student Transitions Theme Leaders' Group (TLG) is central to delivering the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme. The TLG will determine, direct, support and evaluate the work undertaken for the Theme. In short, it will lead the Theme throughout its three year period of existence.

Membership

Institutional members

The Theme Leaders' Group has been deliberately named to capture the revitalised approach being taken to this Theme and to reflect the expectation that members will be, or become, leaders of change within their institutions. It comprises a representative from every higher education institution in Scotland. For institutional representatives, this Theme Leaders' Group role is combined with being the institutional contact who also co-ordinates the institution's work on the Theme, via an Institutional Team (IT).

Student members

Students must be fully at the heart of this Theme. There are two student representatives, drawn from the Student Network, on the Leaders' Group.

Other stakeholders

Representatives of key stakeholder organisations and agencies have observer status on the Theme Leaders' Group principally the Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland, the National Union of Students Scotland, the Higher Education Academy and sparqs.

QAA Scotland

QAA Scotland Enhancement Team members will work closely with TLG and with the chair in particular to support and participate in the Theme Leaders' Group meetings.

Frequency of meetings

The Theme Leaders' Group will meet three times in its first year and four times a year thereafter.

Work

The Theme Leaders' Group will:

- Shape and refine the aims and objectives for the Theme
- Determine the content of the Theme and the work programme required to deliver it
- Co-ordinate and direct the various groups and actors that will undertake the work

- Drive thinking on the key issues, bringing intellectual rigour and challenge to the arguments
- Commission work to inform discussions, as appropriate
- Manage and deploy a modest budget
- Specify desired outcomes, their dissemination and sustainability
- Commission and receive formative and summative evaluation reports on progress with the Theme
- Act as a support network by promoting and encouraging the development of leadership skills among its member community

In relation to other groups it will:
- Report to SHEEC and advise SHEEC on any strategic issues arising from the work
- Advise on the work of Institutional Teams (ITs), receive reports and act as accounting body for the resources allocated to them
- Advise on externally commissioned work, receive progress reports and act as an accounting body for resources allocated to them.
- Direct the work of the Student Network, receive reports and act as accounting body for the resources allocated to this group.

In pursuit of this, members of the Leaders' Group must:
- Think strategically, widely and creatively about the issues
- Constructively challenge existing practice and thinking
- Act as leaders of change both within their institutions and across the sector
- Seek actively to engage and maintain productive links with and between the different partners and stakeholders

**Theme Leaders' Group
Membership**

Chair	Roni Bamber	Queen Margaret University
Deputy Chair	Lorraine Anderson	University of Dundee
Institutional members	Rosalind Campbell	St Andrews University
	Andrew Comrie	Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
	Liam Waldron	Robert Gordon University
	Mark Ellis	University of Strathclyde
	Julia Fotheringham	Edinburgh Napier University
	Kerr Gardiner	University of Glasgow
	Alison Gilmour	Open University in Scotland
	Peter Honeyman	University of the Highlands and Islands
	Lesley Howie	Scotland's Rural College
	Marcella Kean	University of the West of Scotland
	Nichola Kett	University of Edinburgh
	Irene Malcolm	Heriot-Watt University
	Alison Nimmo	Glasgow Caledonian University
	Shona Paul	Glasgow School of Art
	Julie Blackwell-Young	University of Abertay
	Jo Rowley	Queen Margaret University
	Kath Shennan	University of Aberdeen
	Ruth Watkins	University of Stirling
Student members	Michael O'Donnell	University of Strathclyde
	Michael Stephenson	Glasgow Caledonian University
Observers	Kirsty Conlon	Universities Scotland
	Murray Hope	Higher Education Academy
	tbc	Scottish Funding Council
	Hannah Clark	sparqs
QAAS Officers	Thelma Barron	QAA
	Linzi Crawford	QAA
	Heather Gibson	QAA
	Sarah Logie	QAA
	Christine Macpherson	QAA
	Rowena Pelik	QAA

Institutional contract

Southgate House,

Southgate Street

Gloucester

GL1 1UB

26 November 2015

E-mail: r.pelik@qaa.ac.uk

Dear [VP L&T or equivalent]   [cc'd to SHEEC member if different]

Student Transitions Enhancement Theme

Institutional work, Year 2, 2015-16

I write to confirm the areas of work to be supported at [INSTITUTIONAL NAME] during 2015-16, in relation to the Enhancement Theme, Student Transitions, which is now in the second of its three year course, ending in summer 2017. Much of the content of this letter reiterates the contract letter for last year in terms of direction of travel and progression of the Theme, but is worth repeating. None of the activities sought are outwith areas discussed during the course of the first year, as useful to institutional teams.

This work will be carried out under contract number [CONTRACT NUMBER]

Student Transitions

Student Transitions continues to be an ambitious Enhancement Theme. It will encapsulate some topics already identified, including specific transitions such as application and first year, college to HE articulation, transitions to honours, postgraduate study and employment; as well as related areas such as widening access, international student transitions and student mobility, and the supporting technology and change processes. The Theme has student engagement at its centre. The Theme supports HEIs' ongoing work in addressing the drive to build a flexible and responsive higher education experience which is accessible to all through managed transitions between schools, FE, HE, employment or further study. Through its work, the Theme will influence strategy and practice in your institution as well as the wider Scottish higher education sector (and beyond).

The Theme will deliver a number of outcomes including the development of a transitions framework for the Scottish higher education sector, supported and informed by the development of a Transitions Map. This will not be a fixed or rigid structure, but a set of approaches: a flexible and pragmatic set of outcomes including a common language for discussing transitions, identification of the key transition points and a picture mapping where transitions take place. By the end of the Theme, the framework will be complete, and transitions practices (within and beyond the higher education sector) identified, developed and widely shared. The institutional work will continue to feed into this work and shape it.

Evaluation, both formative and summative, as well as opportunities for reflection, are an integral aspect of the Theme. Evaluation of the first year will inform the Theme Leaders' Group and institutional teams, and help them adapt their approach for the remainder of the Theme. A further evaluation will be commissioned during the second year of the Theme.

Student Transitions will cross sectoral boundaries and we expect it will increasingly involve schools and colleges, employers and other stakeholders with interests in the different transitions experienced by students, across Scotland and internationally. This will require collaboration not only with other sectors but between institutions, and we hope that the collegiality so evident in Themes to date will continue to grow during Student Transitions. For example, we know during the first year, teams were making use of the institutional web pages on the Themes website to investigate work going on elsewhere, to inform their own practice. Inter-institutional collaboration will be a key area of work in this second year and should inform your approach.

Last year, work was commissioned to support the Theme: considering the support for cared-for students and investigating the skills and strategies which can be developed for successful transitions; further work will be commissioned this year.

Student engagement

Student engagement remains a vital aspect of the Theme. Students will be able to engage with the Theme in a number of different ways, for example through:

- full membership of the [INSTITUTION] team

- contributing to the institutional work on the Theme

- supported participation in the Theme Student Network (which includes all student institutional team members from across the sector). The Network has funds allocated to carry out its own work

- membership of the Theme Leaders' Group

- participation at Enhancement Theme events, including the conference

- sharing information with the wider student population through social media and other lines of communication, for example

The evaluation of year one has shown how the Theme is providing many rich opportunities for student engagement both within institutions and in sector-led projects; we look to

institutions to promote, support and sustain positive student engagement in their own development work.

Institutional team composition

The institutional team and its work are at the heart of the Enhancement Theme, and each institutional team is critical to the success of the Theme. With this in mind, you are asked to consider your team membership; a suggested composition was shared with SHEEC in June and included the following:

- SHEEC member

- Institutional member of the central Theme Leaders' Group (TLG)

- Student members

- First year leaders/tutors

- Staff involved in student recruitment and marketing and admissions

- Staff involved in widening participation and articulation arrangements

- Library and learning support staff

- Directors of learning and teaching at school/discipline level

- Careers and employability staff

- Staff working with students new to higher degree study and research degrees

- Student association staff

This is not an exhaustive list, and even as it stands, represents a wider team than in previous Themes. I acknowledge that this may prove a challenge for institutions particularly where Themes work is in part the remit of existing committee which would not necessarily include such a diverse group.

Institutional work

You and your institutional team at [INSTITUTION] are asked to develop and carry out a programme of work for 2015-16 relating to Student Transitions, in the context of your institutional priorities, plans and students' needs. This will be a development from the work carried out during the first year of the Theme.

In developing this plan, you are asked to make any adjustments to your initial three year plan of work (which included: aspects of ascertaining existing transitions practice at [INSTITUTION]; identification of areas for consideration with a view to changing practice and work to carry out the change; indications of how practice will be disseminated within the [INSTITUTION] and shared with the sector; and dissemination and evaluation of your planned institutional work). Within the three year plans specifically, you may wish to update your outline for the third (final) year of the Theme, and in relation to the overall outcomes your institution intends for its Theme work, as well as in terms of the impact you hope to

demonstrate by the end of the Theme, by June 2017: what will be different – and better – as a result of the Theme work.

For this second year, you are asked to:

- continue to support your nominated institutional representative, institutionally and on the Theme Leaders' Group, and your named TLG alternative for [INSTITUTION]

- continue with your institutional team and ensure all members (including students) are involved in developing your plan of work

- confirm or update the details of your institutional team membership including student membership by email to QAA Scotland (by 14 December 2015)

- develop and carry out a programme of Student Transitions related work, during 2015-16 and update your three year plan for the Theme

- provide QAA Scotland with your plan of work for 2015-16 (for posting to the Enhancement Themes website), a separate indication of how funds for 2015-16 will be allocated and the outcomes you expect to achieve, an indicative plan for 2016-17, and an update of your three year plan (if adjusted) (by 14 December 2015)

- return signed contract to QAA Scotland (by 14 December 2015)

- identify areas on which your team plan to work collaboratively with other institutional teams to develop shared solutions or changes in practice (by 14 December 2015)

- support active engagement in the Theme Student Network by your student team member(s) and provide evidence of this in your end of year report

- encourage and support students and staff to participate in Themes activities including active participation in the Enhancement Themes conference

- support staff and student engagement in all aspects of the Theme including participation in events such as the institutional team event, 1 December 2015

- engage staff and students within [INSTITUTION] in the work of the Theme and actively disseminate outcomes and resources internally and to the sector

- provide updates on the [INSTITUTION's] work through active participation in the Theme Leaders' Group deliberations on institutional transitions developments

- provide at least five, short examples of current transitions practice at the [INSTITUTION], which you know work, to be shared through posting to the Enhancement Themes website (by 26 February 2016, details and template will be provided separately)

- contribute to the Theme through taking part in the evaluation of the Theme

- provide an end of year synopsis of the [INSTITUTION's] work and engagement with the Theme (including student contributions) and the changes brought about to date, which may be described in terms of combinations of strategy, policy or practice, to QAA

Scotland for posting to the Enhancement Themes website and sharing on social media (by 17 June 2016).

While this letter marks only the beginning of the second year of the Theme, it is worth noting that provision of a multimedia resource to illustrate your institutional work is not sought specifically during 2015-16, this will be asked for as part of your final outputs. It should reflect the work undertaken at [INSTITUTION] and its effects. Experience indicates that this type of activity is best done when factored into Theme planning processes from an early stage and is a group endeavour, not the responsibility of just one person.

The activities for 2015-16 outlined above should be delivered according to the following timescale, and payments will be staged as detailed below:

Services	Timescale	Payment
Confirm institutional team membership including student member(s) Return signed contract to QAA Scotland Provide institutional plan of Theme work 2015-16; indicative plan for 2016-17 and updated three year plan (if amended) Provide indication of allocation of Theme funds for 2015-16 by 14 December 2015		£6,000
Identify area of work and other institution(s) for collaborative work and how this will be carried out By 14 December 2015		
At least five examples of transitions practice for posting to the Enhancement Themes website By 26 February 2016		
Report on progress of your work By 11 April 2016		

Services	Timescale	Payment
Active participation in Enhancement Themes conference	By 9 June 2016	
End of year synopsis of institutional work and engagement All areas of work listed under 'Institutional work' (above) completed by stated date, otherwise by 17 June 2016	By 17 June 2016	£3,000
Total		£9,000

These services will be carried out for a fixed fee of £9,000 inclusive of any VAT. All costs and expenses incurred by you will be covered in this fee.

Guidance and templates will be provided for update reports, where appropriate. All the outcomes listed above (plans of work, for example) will be shared with the Theme Leaders' Group and will be posted to the public Enhancement Themes website.

If any of the institutional work proposed could be considered to be research, then please take cognisance of the modified British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines, previously agreed for use in relation to Enhancement Themes work.

Please sign and return one copy of this letter to confirm that you are content with these terms and the terms of the related contract.

If you have any questions about this contract please contact Dr Christine Macpherson (c.macpherson@qaa.ac.uk) at our QAA Scotland offices.

Yours sincerely

Rowena Pelik   Liz Rosser

Director, QAA Scotland   Director of Resources (Interim)

Encl.

Contract

Annex 1 Payment Schedule

Annex 2 Additional information

Modified BERA Guidelines

cc TLG member

Theme Student Network

Draft Terms of reference and membership

Role

The Theme Student Network will contribute the student perspective to the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme. It will advise, take direction from and report into the Student Transitions Theme Leaders' Group, as well as undertaking or commissioning its own strand of Theme work. As such it has a key role in the Theme.

Membership

Institutional student members

The Theme Student Network comprises at least one student representative from every higher education institution in Scotland. Usually, at least one of these students will also be a member of their HEI's Institutional Team.

The Theme Student Network will appoint two or more of its members as student members of the Theme Leaders' Group.

Chair

TBC

Support

The Theme Student Network is administered and co-ordinated by QAA Scotland with support from sparqs.

Frequency of meetings

The Student Network will meet around four times a year as well as making use of virtual meetings if appropriate. Because so many members will only serve one term, the Network's work programme will be organised on an annual basis.

Work

The Theme Student Network will:

- Bring the student perspective to bear on the Theme
- Advise on proposals as determined by the Leadership Group
- Identify some key issues to inform the development of the Theme overall and, as part of the work of the Theme, determine a work programme for the Network, including student-led projects
- Through QAA have a modest budget to support its work

In relation to other groups it will:
- Report to the Student Transitions Theme Leaders' Group and advise it on any issues arising from the work
- Feed into and from the work of the Institutional Teams (ITs)

- Feed into and from the work of the two Tracks established to provide extra-sector and professional perspectives on the issues

In pursuit of this, members of the Student Network must:
- Think widely, creatively and constructively about the issues
- Constructively challenge existing practice and thinking
- Using their Student Network knowledge and experience, act as ambassadors for the student perspective within their Institutional Teams.

Institutional approaches to engaging students in the Enhancement Themes

(as reported during Developing and Supporting the Curriculum)

The following overview of institutional approaches has been compiled by reference to institutional team updates and end of year reports to the DSC Steering Committee. These were mined for the examples they contained of institutional engagement of students in the Enhancement Themes.

In many examples, it is the student or student body rather than the Institutional Team which has instigated engagement. However, this is being written for the benefit of the wider membership of Institutional Teams, and so the approaches are considered in terms of how the Teams might use examples already in use to encourage student engagement with the Student Transitions Theme.

There are several different ways in which students have become engaged with the Themes within their institutions. However within the reports there are a few cautions which are worth keeping in mind. Student engagement needs to go beyond membership of a committee or group; it needs to be an active process, and something meaningful for students as well as useful.

Institutional teams:

This is the most obvious means of student engagement: there is at least one student as a full member of the institutional team. This is often the Student Association representative for education.

Full membership of the Institutional Team leads to another means of engagement: supporting those students to be active members of the sect oral Student Network. For some, Team membership also meant membership of the Theme Steering Committee (analogous with the Student Transitions Theme Leaders' Group).

These forms of engagement are vital, but only engage a small number of students from any institution. Therefore, Institutional Teams have developed a number of ways of engaging a much greater number of students in a wider variety of activities. These are set out below.

Institutional Theme-related activities:

Student engagement is apparent in a number of different ways, with many using existing networks through the student association and wider student representatives within programmes.

Though all the examples below are cited in the institutional reports, many of them arise from wider institutional work rather than the Theme work specifically. Nonetheless, the many different means of engaging students provides a wide variety of options for consideration.

The different approaches have been used in specific ways in different institutions, but in general the type of approach is given rather than detail other than where there have been quite diverse uses of a particular type of activity or initiative.

Projects:

- Student-led or student association-led (research) projects on aspects of curriculum content, graduate attributes, how students make sense of their journey through HE, or how undergraduates engage with staff research
- Staff-led projects where student involvement is encouraged or required – as team members, as interns or with postgraduate students running projects
- Staff-led projects which sought student perspectives or input
- Learning and teaching project funding open to staff and to students
- Student association working with professional services (Careers Service, Library Services for example) on Theme related projects
- Students working on videos for institutional website and/or as part of the institutional multimedia elements for the Theme
- Student association project on student engagement
- Collaborative staff-student projects

Curriculum and shaping the learning experience:

- Students involved in developing or redesigning curricula
- Students as members of teams reviewing programmes
- Students as part of the team working on programme handbooks, with sections written by students
- Learning related student guidance written by students

Events:

- Discipline-specific events with student input/presentations
- Academic staff induction developed and delivered in part with students
- Student association conferences: with Theme-relate items on programme and discussion of student engagement
- Student contributions to institutional learning and teaching events and conferences
- Theme-related workshops for students
- Institutional Theme events run with students/student association
- Workshop to consider institutional vision for student engagement
- Week of activities to highlight students as partners
- 'Student engagement' as the topic for staff learning and teaching conference
- Student-led conferences: on careers or sustainable development, for example
- Student-led national undergraduate subject related conference
- Student-led staff-student discussions

Other initiatives:

- Student-led teaching awards; and subsequent discussions to explore students perceptions of 'excellence' in teaching
- Working with student association to involve the wider student representative network in the Theme work

- Theme-related competition for students
- Students engaged as research assistants or interns
- Student publication, presented at staff learning and teaching conference
- Student association working with reps to research current practice
- Students evaluating PDP, teaching
- Student peer support development through one to one or online provision