

**SHEEC Theme on the Management of Quality: cultures of quality enhancement
and quality management systems and structures**

Final Report November 2008

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Summary

A strength of the Scottish higher education system is the diversity of the distinctive and diverse cultures of higher education institutions in Scotland and the systems, structures and processes that define and support those cultures together affect the ways in which quality is understood, managed and enhanced. The ability to recognise and reflect on the values that underpin assumptions and policies relating to quality is an important part of the development of an institution-wide quality culture.

The Scottish higher education community can rightly point to a wide range of both sector-wide and institutional activities that have had a positive impact on the quality of education provision and the student experience. Much has already been achieved to address inefficiencies or barriers associated with outdated decision-making structures, significant work has been undertaken to strengthen the mechanisms through which the student voice is heard and attended to, and institutions have responded positively to the Enhancement Themes and can offer multiple examples of good practice in many areas.

Findings from this study suggest that Scottish institutions continue to work towards the development of systems and structures through which they can effectively harness the commitment capabilities of institutional members. Progress, where it has been made, tends to occur in pockets of good practice rather than being widely-adopted. There is evidence that effective communication and knowledge transfer across faculties or disciplinary areas is often hard to achieve, particularly in large institutions. In smaller institutions, where effective communication is easier, there are resource barriers which can have an impact on the management of both quality assurance and enhancement activities.

Many of the stakeholders questioned for this study recognise that there is a significant challenge in creating a holistic commitment to a shared vision of quality that embraces not only staff members responsible for learning and teaching activities but those across the whole institution and beyond. Work is needed to create effective ways to develop the institution so that all its communities, including students, employers and other stakeholders can feel a real sense of ownership of activities. Whilst this might be partly achieved through reform of processes and structures, there remains the need in many institutions for cultural change through the effective transfer of ideas and appropriate reward for good practice. Key stakeholders including vice and associate deans for learning and teaching, directors of learning and teaching, heads of departments and heads of educational development units each have a crucial role to play in this institutional change process.

Many participants in this study noted the lack of useful data about the impact of learning and teaching activities and about the reality of the higher education experience for students and graduates. This goes beyond structural difficulties with cross-institution communication and requires instead an emphasis on locally-generated and owned research and evidence to support effective reflection and subsequent action as well as the effective use of good ideas from other institutions and communities.

The context

Prior to this study, the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) had identified a number of quality-related topics which it wished to be progressed as part of the quality enhancement approach in the Scottish sector. The two projects described in this report are *Cultures of quality enhancement* and *Quality management structures and processes in the reflective institution*.

Work on the first of these two projects has sought to gain insights from Scottish higher educational institutions that can inform sharing of practice, experiences and issues and discussions on the meanings of quality cultures, how they operate, and how they can evolve. The other related project has focussed on structures and processes, how these develop, how they relate to particular contexts, how they achieve effective engagement and how they gain widespread commitment.

For both projects, the focus has been on identifying key areas which participants believe need further developmental attention. This report includes a short summary of key messages from the literature, views expressed by different stakeholder groups across the Scottish sector and from each participating institution and recommendations for further work in this area.

Methodology

This report details the findings of a nine-month study conducted between January and September 2008 and commissioned by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) and QAA Scotland. The study was focussed on the general and key question of how to create and nurture cultures of quality enhancement and structures and systems to support quality enhancement in learning and teaching activities within higher education institutions. This work is informed by ideas of 'learner-centeredness' and reflection already promoted through the Scottish higher education sector's quality enhancement programme.

The conclusions in this report are based on data collected through telephone interviews with SHEEC members (usually Vice-Principals of Scottish higher education institutions with a remit for learning and teaching activities) and through a number of consultation events involving members of the SFC teaching quality forum, heads of educational development units, senior staff members with a strategic remit for learning and teaching, and with students.

Timetable of work conducted:

25 th January 2008	Plan of work agreed by SHEEC
28 th January 2008	Initial meeting with QAA
February – March	Preparation of literature review
8 th February 2008	Progress meeting with Kenny Miller, Chair of SHEEC
20 th March 2008	Progress meeting with QAA
11 th April 2008	Progress report to SHEEC
April – June	Telephone interviews with SHEEC members
May – July	Preparation of report on telephone interviews
24 th April 2008	Workshop with Teaching Quality Forum members
25 th April 2008	Workshop with Scottish Heads of Education Development
6 th May 2008	Progress meeting with QAA and Indicators Consultant
2 nd June 2008	Indicators of Enhancement Working Group meeting

30 th June 2008	Progress meeting with QAA and Indicators Consultant
3 rd July 2008	Workshop with SHEEC members
July – August	Preparation of report on workshops
3 rd August 2008	Progress meeting with QAA
15 th August 2008	Consultation with NUS Scotland members
August – September	Preparation of report on NUS Scotland consultation
15 th September 2008	Progress meeting with QAA
September – October	Preparation of final report
18 th September 2008	Consultation with Senior Managers
22 nd September 2008	Progress meeting with Kenny Miller, Chair of SHEEC
2 nd October 2008	Presentation of draft final report to SHEEC
24 th October 2008	Follow-up meeting with QAA

Views Expressed

SHEEC Institutional Contacts

Responses from institutional contacts suggest that the ELIR process and the Enhancement Themes remain the primary sources of ideas about effective practice and quality development for the majority of institutions. Many respondents noted that that the ELIR process has been both influential and extremely positive, helping to move institutions away from a compliance approach and towards a culture of enhancement. At the academic practitioner level, engagement with the appropriate HEA subject centre is recognised as an important component of development and at strategic level several Scottish institutions have been involved in HEA-facilitated dialogue around learning and teaching strategies.

A more critical interpretation of this response is that institutions are still strongly inclined to treat seriously only those activities which are a requirement of the SFC, QAA, HEA or other external bodies. If the reflective culture implied by ELIR has been truly adopted by Scottish institutions might it be expected that, for example, we would see a greater engagement with the theoretical literature, increased evidence of institutionally-developed ideas and initiatives and in other ways demonstrably less reliance on what is shaped by external review? Is there a danger that the work on indicators might be viewed a new mechanism to signal what is important to institutions, rather than enabling them to progress dialogues, articulate understandings and gain a more refined sense of direction and rate of travel in enhancement?

Many institutional representatives report that, whilst there is considerable evidence of “pockets” of good practice across their institutions, there are real difficulties in developing effective institution-wide initiatives or creating a “holistic” approach to an equitable high quality student experience. Institutions may need support in change management and this could be an area that SHEEC might investigate?

There is increasing recognition that areas of practice that were differentiated under the Enhancement Themes programme might, when implemented, be better consolidated into the same activities or principles (for example, developing student employability might also be about effective assessment or course design). “Big ideas” like the graduate attributes and r-t linkages agenda might be useful consolidation mechanisms, assuming the right vocabularies are found, and again this might be fertile ground for SHEEC? Otherwise there is a feeling that the external

landscape is “too busy” and staff members trying to implement all these ideas become confused.

Some institutions are involved in big strategic change initiatives that have the potential to take them into challenging areas that the current Enhancement Themes materials don't offer solutions to. This is particularly true of internationalisation and several respondents note that they feel that have barely “scratched the surface” of what this might mean for their institution, for their teaching practice or for the student experience.

Many respondents noted the importance of educational development units in risk management around the development of quality. These units are a focus for research, help to disseminate applicable theory and examples of useful practice across the institution and support academic staff in pedagogical interventions and their evaluation. In many cases, these units play an active role in the development of institutional policy and help to shape institutional culture. However it is important to note that these units operate within a particularly challenging environment, not least because persistent university reward cultures mean that even academic staff members who are most committed to improving the student experience may believe they need to concentrate their most significant effort towards research.

TQF, SHED and SHEEC Workshops

Responses from these exercises suggest a number of tensions in the Scottish higher education quality landscape. All three groups of respondents described an idealised culture of quality that might be an aspiration for institutions. These cultures encompassed ideas of free communication, collegiality, personal and collective responsibility and openness to innovation. None of these ideal cultural landscapes included quality assurance activities. Yet assurance is perceived, by senior managers at least, as a valid and on-going part of the enhancement framework. As one group put it, “assurance is concerned with the non-negotiables”. It might be argued that, in identifying that certain principles or practices are *a priori* non-negotiable, managers are already making the assumption that an enhancement culture must be constrained or bounded. Who has responsibility for deciding what areas could or should be enhanced and what areas must be assured? Are there dangers if assurance is perceived as being relatively static whilst enhancement is associated with images of experimentation and frequent adjustment, adaptation and innovation?

Much of the rhetoric around securing staff engagement in these discussions perhaps inevitably focussed on academic staff (and, more particularly, those in roles which include both research and teaching activities). There is a tendency to assume that academic cultures are the primary or sole focus of quality in higher education (“the goose that lays the golden eggs”) and must be nurtured. However, as one group pointed out, academic territories are not the only point of contact for students and other areas of institutional endeavour have the potential to profoundly affect the student experience. Administrative and support staff, contract researchers and others are part of the university community and might also be given the opportunity to reflect, engage in discussion and debate and enhance their practice, preferably in collaboration with academic colleagues. Otherwise there is a risk that enhancement remains the domain of a privileged few and the net impact on the student experience may be diminished.

Effective leadership is fundamental to the development of a quality of culture, but leadership roles in higher education are not necessarily always desirable career options for senior academic staff. In some ways, higher education resembles the National Health Service in its complexity and in the tensions inherent in balancing the needs and motivations of clinicians with the concerns of managers charged with creating an effective and efficient operational environment. Whilst academic credibility is a powerful element of the leadership armoury in higher education, leaders in universities are expected to demonstrate an exceptionally broad range of additional skills and are likely to need substantial support. For this reason, at least one group suggested that leadership courses and training could be a useful focus for further funding and exploration.

Similarly, academic staff require substantial support if they are to fully realise the potential of the enhancement agenda. Educational development units might have a crucial role to play in alerting academic staff to possibilities, supporting design and development activities, facilitating discussion and reflection and conducting formative evaluations. Academic developers also have the potential to act as agents of inter-connectivity in institutions, transcending disciplinary and functional boundaries and supporting cross-institutional endeavour. However, work is needed to challenge the widespread perception that these activities are peripheral to the real business of academia.

Students might be increasingly aware that they have a role to play in the development of a quality culture (and indeed have much to gain from engagement) but work is needed to find ways to break down barriers to engagement and to ensure that the student voice is harnessed effectively. There are some compelling arguments for the creation and use of good data to inform quality development and students are central to understanding the impact of learning and teaching activities. This might be an area that is ripe for further exploration.

Students (NUS Scotland)

Findings from discussions with students seems to suggest that, although there is still substantial room for improvement in student participation in quality-related activities, the general trend is positive. The responses suggest that some institutions have some way to travel. Those that have made progress in this area might need to address the perception that their quality activities are merely for show and don't result in any real change. One student noted that: "without students there is no university and this is something some academic staff sadly forget." Several students noted that although there was a strongly-articulated rhetoric around quality in their institutions, this did not extend beyond the need to "look good" to the outside world.

Of note is that many of the elements of the student experience that *have* been subject to revision or review as a result of student activities are not normally seen as central components of the learning and teaching domain. It is hard to know whether these changes are simply more visible to the student body, or whether teaching remains relatively impervious to change.

However, a number of students reported a new willingness among their peers and among staff members to engage in dialogue around learning and teaching. One student commented that "lecturers are starting to listen a little bit more to what the students have to say about the whole learning experience; they are also starting to act on suggestions made to them."

Key messages from the literature

Our rapidly changing landscape means that it is no longer helpful to think about quality merely in terms of maintaining standards (**Stensaker, 2007**). Instead, higher education institutions, like many other organisations, are being encouraged to take a developmental approach to quality (**Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2003**). This implies that organisations, as well as individuals within those organisations, are continually changing and learning as they cope with new situations and expectations. The ability of any organisation to adapt effectively is influenced by its culture. The most straightforward definition of organisational culture is “the way we do things around here” and it is easy to recognise that things are done differently in different organisations, even when those organisations share similar aspirations.

Over the last twenty years, the higher education sector has been subject to structural and cultural changes associated with a focus on accountability and value for money which have profoundly affected academic life (**Henkel, 2004**). Examples of these changes include a proliferation of central support units and centralised policy development activities, a shift towards short-term contracts and a managerial approach to employment (for example, the use of staff appraisal mechanisms). In this new reality the term ‘quality’ became synonymous with data collection, performance scrutiny and a perceived massive increase in bureaucracy.

Alternative approaches to revitalising the quality agenda have taken a number of forms in the UK and internationally. Many universities, particularly in the US, have adopted ideas from industry, most notably Total Quality Management (or TQM). However, using the language and methods of business to address the needs of higher education is controversial. Students are not the same as customers and their ability to judge the value of their higher education experiences may vary substantially according to what is asked and when it is asked; for example, students may be more able to assess the value of their education in enhancing their employability after several years in the workforce (**Yorke and Knight, 2000; Williams and Cappucini-Ansfield, 2007**).

The absence of clear data about the impact and value of higher education from outside means that responsibility for determining what is ‘good’ depends on the creative participation of academic and other staff across the institution. Learning together as an organisation to create a high quality, learner-focussed culture implies moving beyond improving existing processes or structures and moving towards a state in which review and reflection are an embedded and internalised way of life (**D’Andrea and Gosling, 2005**). This depends on institutional support for staff development and a focus on the learning experience through the lens of scholarly reflection and academic judgement and involves multiple stakeholders including students. An effective learning organisation recognises good ideas and expertises at all levels and encourages all members to develop their skills in an environment of trust, honesty and respect (**Yorke, 2000**).

For many universities, creating an effective learning culture means overcoming a considerable number of barriers including rigid hierarchies, functional divisions and stratified knowledge bases (**Avdjieva and Wilson, 2002**). Resource constraints and massification create further pressures for staff members, limiting the amount of time they can reasonably allocate to data collection, analysis or creative dialogue. Many institutions also suffer from poor physical design that prevents informal sharing of

knowledge between staff members or the development of communities of practice (**Randeree, 2006**).

Learning also means risk-taking. Collecting data about the student experience of teaching interactions may uncover uncomfortable revelations; sharing practice with colleagues requires trust. As **D'Andrea and Gosling (2005)** argue, these activities must take place in an environment free from the fear of punitive outcomes. Most importantly, developing a real culture of quality through effective learning means moving away from preserving what higher education already *is* towards an aspiration towards what it *could be*. (**Stensaker, 2005**)

In Europe, approaches to quality (for example, the EUA Quality Cultures Project¹) have moved away from earlier guiding principles of 'fitness for purpose' and 'value for money' towards the ideal of searching for excellence through the demonstration and sharing of best practice. The EUA projects reported that any quality culture was based on shared values, beliefs and expectations but also included a managerial element that defined processes, co-ordinated efforts and established responsibilities and goals.

A recent paper by **Harvey and Stensaker (2008)** offers the following taxonomy which may be useful as a way for institutions to recognise, reflect on and discuss their own cultures:

- **Responsive quality culture:** governed primarily by external demands, takes a positive approach to opportunities and seeks and shares good practice, but tends to view quality-related activities and strategies as a solution to externally-driven problems or challenges and lacks sense of ownership or control
- **Reactive quality culture:** driven primarily by compliance and accountability, seeks opportunities for reward, tends to delegate 'quality' to a delineated space (e.g. quality office)
- **Regenerative quality culture:** is focussed on internal development and has co-ordinated internal plans which include clear goals. External initiatives are recognised but are secondary to a taken-for-granted commitment to continual improvement and organisational learning. Embodies the potential for subversion of externally-driven initiatives
- **Reproductive quality culture:** manipulates situations to minimise disruption from externally-driven quality initiatives in order to maintain the status quo. Has established norms, good internal practices and quality are an encoded and unremarkable part of daily practice and professional conduct. Resistant to reflection or re-conceptualisation of goals.

Although Harvey and Stensaker recognise that most institutions will embody a number of these characteristics they argue that these differential orientations will result in very different approaches to quality activities. Approaches to developing sectorally-appropriate quality initiatives thus "depend on empirical investment into the culture, the identity and organisational climate of the given institution" (**Harvey and Stensaker, 2008**).

¹ See: <http://www.eua.be/index>.

The Scottish sector is making real progress in developing reflective cultures. The most recent ELIR reports describe re-designed buildings that help students and staff to learn and communicate effectively, new structures and simplified decision-making processes and training and staff development opportunities.

Areas for further attention include developing effective mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice, targeting resources to support enhancement and, importantly, promoting deeper staff and student (through student associations) engagement with enhancement. Of course, the particular mix will vary from institution to institution, as indeed will views about the desired trajectory and priorities for further development.

Systems and Structures

A familiar dilemma for all of those concerned with developing quality cultures in higher education is managing an effective balance between the attention paid to maintaining and developing systems and structures for assurance and the desirability of creating different opportunities to support developmental, enhancement focussed-activities.

Systems and structures for quality assurance do many things for universities, not all of which might be perceived by all stakeholders as immediately relevant to the quality of the student experience or even appropriate in a context of enhancement. **Elton (1992)** describes assurance (and its association with audit, accountability and assessment) as concerned with control, of people and of processes. Whether this perceived control is externally or internally applied it is likely to have negative connotations for many in the academic community. Moreover, assurance activities are expensive, often involving large numbers of senior staff and substantial bureaucracy. **Kember (1997)** casts doubt on the relationship between quality assurance mechanisms and any measurable improvement in educational provision and suggests that, viewed from the perspective that all systems and structures should be able to demonstrate an acceptable return on investment, quality assurance systems may be significantly over-resourced in many institutions. **Kember (1997)** argues that many universities retain ineffective quality assurance systems because they perceive that this is a political necessity.

However, two alternative perspectives on quality assurance systems might bear further attention. Both of these perspectives emphasise quality assurance as a matter of risk management. Firstly a strand of thought, familiar from the world of industry, is that standardisation of processes is a cornerstone of quality. This idea permeates the quality assurance industry (perhaps best exemplified by the International Standards Organisation as well as many disciplinary accreditation schemes) and many higher education institutions in the UK have developed or inherited systems (for example, those of the Council for National Academic Awards) which emphasise procedural fidelity. Many in the academic community may balk at the notion of standardisation of teaching practice but, as **Baird and Gordon (2008)** argue, there are many aspects of the student experience that closely intersect with teaching activities or are a central part of learning and teaching that are important loci of standardisation through procedural (and indeed legal) compliance: examples include entry standards and progression requirements, provision of programmes as described and attention to the academic qualifications of staff. These procedures are both a legal requirement and a protection and are directly analogous to other areas of university activity including, for example, health and safety compliance.

Secondly, much of what we might recognise as normative quality assurance (for example course approval procedures, assessment criteria, student evaluation of courses, plagiarism detection, external examiners or appeals and grievance procedures) is, in essence, about the business of risk avoidance. Many academic staff members involved in these processes may be inclined to perceive them as unnecessarily arduous and over-resourced in proportion to the likelihood of a risk event. The difficulty for institutions is that, whilst the likelihood of risk might be relatively small, the potential impact of a failure of assurance processes might be extremely large. As **McWilliam (2007, p. 313)** points out, university reputations are “very quickly imperilled [and] reputational rehabilitation is a long and often demanding climb back to respectability for the university concerned.”

However, as **McWilliam (2007)** argues, most academic staff members do not perceive themselves as risk managers and quality assurance activities are not generally perceived as motivating, inspiring or empowering, being instead concerned with compliance, standardisation and de-personalisation, in the sense that standardised procedures exist in part to defend against arbitrary behaviours. Whilst most academic staff members and managers recognise that that assurance is important, there remains a number of questions about how *much* assurance is desirable and at what point does the level of risk management become one of diminishing returns or worse, of negative consequences, not least sapping enthusiasm for innovation (**Kember, 1997**).

Institutions have responded to this challenge in a number of ways: many in Scotland have taken care to reduce bureaucracy associated with assurance, streamline decision-making processes and rationalise roles and responsibilities. Many institutions have also invested in systems and processes designed to support staff members to adopt an enhancement approach to learning and teaching activities. Common activities include professional development events, teaching award schemes, small grants for development projects and changes to systems for reward and recognition. Inevitably, however, these activities are likely to reach only a subset of the wider academic community.

Whilst the literature on quality cultures might advocate a shift from assurance to enhancement to promote improvements in the student learning experience, assurance still plays an important role in risk avoidance and few would argue for divesting it in full. Institutions need instead to manage a balanced portfolio of investments, allocating funds to each area of activity that ensure the best possible returns and avoiding over-investment, especially in areas which might have a negative impact (**Kember 1997**). It is, however, extremely challenging for institutions to properly evaluate the relative returns on investment associated with systems and structures for quality assurance and those designed to promote enhancement. Can the value of a staff development workshop, for example, be best judged by the number of participants it attracts or by an assessment of the impact of changes made to a future class, practice or policy because one keen participant adopted an innovation? **Kember (1997)** suggests that, in the absence of much in the way of meaningful measurements, spreading the risk of investment across many activities is the most likely source of acceptable returns but also makes an argument for better understanding of the costs and returns associated with assurance and (particularly) enhancement. The greatest challenge may in judging value rather than concentrating on identifying costs.

Conclusions

There is clearly a great deal of activity in Scottish institutions relating to the development of cultures of quality and their related systems and structures. The sector has made demonstrable progress since the first evaluation of the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework, which reported that institutions were facing challenges in assuming local ownership of quality enhancement structures. This study suggests that there is now a fairly widespread understanding of quality enhancement and the development of associated cultures and systems to support enhancement across the sector.

The majority of those we spoke to as part of this study recognised that further progress needs to be made on securing engagement from all those who need to be engaged with quality enhancement, whilst at the same time avoiding the creation of unwieldy and bureaucratic mechanisms for monitoring or reporting that are likely to be self-defeating.

Many participants in this study told us that they viewed systems for quality assurance as the “bedrock” on which quality enhancement activities are built. A focus on sound quality assurance systems remains therefore a key objective for institutions, but many are trying to make sure that those systems are as streamlined and straightforward as possible, with an emphasis on removing layers of bureaucracy and perceived burdens on academic staff and others. There is also evidence of work to ensure that systems work in a logical and seamless way and are not perceived as arbitrary or inefficient linkages of separate activities or administrative functions.

There is a strong feeling from senior academics that practitioners care deeply about the quality of educational provision. Inevitably, practitioners tend to define quality through the lens of their own discipline. A challenge for institutions is to develop environments in which high quality teaching can be encouraged, celebrated and rewarded and at the same time support effective marshalling of evidence to satisfy quality assurance requirements as well as supporting the development of communities of practice and providing materials for discussion, reflection and sharing across disciplinary boundaries.

Small, specialist institutions recognise that their size and distinctive missions are a significant advantage in developing cohesive and reflective cultures but they also struggle to dedicate resources to the management of quality assurance and quality enhancement. There has been an encouraging trend towards inter-SSI discussions around the concept of quality which have facilitated useful cross-fertilization of ideas and opportunities for innovation and the promotion of reflection. A number of SSIs also enjoy close relationships with larger higher education institutions and report that these relationships are very useful in helping to manage quality assurance as well as providing access to the support structures that facilitate enhancement activities.

It is believed that larger institutions face different challenges because the scale of large institutions heightens internal diversity and places additional stress on coupling roles across the structure. For many institutions, a typical response to these challenges is to devolve a great deal of responsibility for quality matters to departments and to use faculties, schools or colleges as the primary administrative mechanism to operationalise quality. Senior managers at the institution use this faculty or school level as their primary source of information about quality activities and as the conduit for information transfer to and from practitioners. Large institutions often supplement this structure by creating cross-institutional fora and

innovative opportunities including teaching fellowship awards or learning enhancement networks.

The student groups that we spoke to reported a mixed view of the development of quality cultures and systems at their institutions. Whilst students agreed that substantial work was underway in many institutions to enhance mechanisms for involving students more closely in quality activities, they reported concern about the efficacy of local consultative processes and a range of doubts about the effectiveness of communication between students and staff regarding quality issues.

Administrative staff members participating in this study were, understandably, primarily focussed on quality assurance processes and the effectiveness of those processes. Perhaps most significantly they were most concerned with the acceptability of quality processes within the academic community. Although the administrative staff we spoke to did not explicitly cite the acceptability of quality processes to students as a key concern, this will inevitably be most important to those staff members who have direct contact with student constituencies.

The picture that broadly emerged from our interviews with institutional contacts echoes that of the distillation of report from ELIR in identifying a number of key post-holders in each institution who have a particularly important role to play in the development of quality cultures. These post-holders include vice and associate deans learning and teaching, directors of learning and teaching in schools or departments and heads of educational development units.

Heads of educational development units are variously seen within their institutions as enablers, supporters, catalysers and brokers and often as a source of particular academic expertise, especially by senior staff. It may be useful to reflect on the degree to which this expertise is seen as fundamental to the development of a culture of quality in different institutions and to explore the implications of these differences in perception.

Recommendations

We have deliberately focussed on a small number of recommendations with the intention that each recommendation could form the basis for a number of activities help institutions to further progress in this area.

Our belief is that institutions could benefit from work to develop tools and support materials based on ideas from current literature² and from other higher education and public sector contexts that institutions could use to explore and share ideas both internally and with each other. We also believe that additional support in the form of consultancy or other facilitated activities may be beneficial to help institutions to reflect on quality issues and to develop effective plans for future action.

As well as creating tools and materials for use in institutions we hope that this work will, in a very modest way, address the challenge of developing a research agenda in learning and teaching laid out in the most recent evaluation of the Enhancement

² For example, work to further develop the taxonomy of institutional cultures suggested by Harvey and Stensaker. (Harvey, L and Stensaker, B (2008) Quality Culture: understandings, boundaries and linkages. European Journal of Education Vol 43, No 4)

Themes undertaken by the Centre for the Study of Education and Training at the University of Lancaster.

There is clear evidence of enhancement of systems and procedures and sustained endeavours to nurture cultures of quality in Scottish higher education institutions. Many factors have contributed to this position ranging from the intrinsic commitment of staff in the institutions to the provision of a high quality learning experience to the influence of the various components of the QEF and indeed to the steer from the SFC on the development of cultures of quality. SHEEC is an active supporter of these endeavours. Further emphasis could be given to reporting on these efforts, especially outside Scotland. Consideration could also be given to ways of heightening the visibility and influence of work in Scotland in European debates and deliberations. The distinctive expertise developed in Scotland may not be fully recognised as yet on the European stage. Indeed Scotland could usefully seek to promote an enhancement-focussed European approach to quality matters.

A first step might be to organise a European conference around some of the recent enhancement work in Scotland. A related goal should be to seek to lead a European project with an enhancement focus.

In the initial scoping for the twin projects there was a suggestion that the work should include consideration of approaches in other public sector organisations. In early discussions it was agreed to exclude this work from the current projects. It is for SHEEC to determine whether this topic is addressed in the next phase of activities. Arguably, there could be benefits in such exploration. These need to be weighed against dangers that the information was deemed irrelevant.

Our recommendations:

1. In order to gain real benefit from indicators of enhancement, institutions need to be able to draw on meaningful evidence relating to the development of quality cultures and systems. This implies active and supported development of institutional definitions of quality cultures and support for the development of recommendations for institutional actions to strengthen existing cultures and structures.
2. Institutions would similarly benefit from sector-wide (and perhaps institutional) work to establish processes and principles around data gathering and data use to inform better understanding of the impact of educational activities at different levels.
3. A number of important constituencies including students, practitioners, heads of departments, and educational development support units would benefit from clear and targeted recommendations for future activities to develop quality cultures and their associated structures. Further work is needed to develop appropriate advice and to create a roadmap for future action, drawing on the expertises and experiences of these constituencies
4. The Scottish higher education sector might benefit from further work exploring similar approaches to developing quality cultures and systems in the international higher education community.

5. The Scottish higher education sector might similarly benefit from further work exploring similar approaches to developing quality cultures and systems in other public sector contexts.

We do have ideas about the next phase of activities to address these issues and support institutions and will outline them in a separate paper.

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