

QAA Enhancement Themes: The First Year Experience

Programme of project work

Invitation for expressions of interest

This document outlines projects relating to the QAA First Year Enhancement Theme.

It is intended that these projects will be commissioned by the end of July 2006, with completion of reports by July 2007.

There are nine projects, each attracting a payment of £10,000

Closing date for expression of interest in any of these is Monday 12 June 2006

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QAA Scotland: First Year Experience Enhancement Theme

Programme of projects

Background

- 1 The overall aim of the Quality Assurance Agency's Enhancement Themes is to provide a means of identifying and building on 'good practice' to improve the student experience in Scottish higher education. 'Good practice' is a vague and sometimes problematic concept but from the point of view of the Enhancement Themes we can use a concept of any approach that leads to a significant and demonstrable enhancement or improvement of the student learning experience.
- 2 The themes encourage academic and support staff and students to share current good practice and collectively to generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching.
- 3 The outcomes of themes need to be sufficiently general for further and specific application across the sector and the diversity of institutions and subjects represented.

The First Year Experience Theme

- 4 Work on the first year theme began late in 2005, with sector-wide consultative meetings and the appointment of the steering committee, chaired by Professor Ron Piper, Vice Principal of St Andrews University. As part of this foundational work, Professor Terry Mayes of Glasgow Caledonian University, expert adviser on the committee wrote a scoping paper on the first year experience. This paper drew on the earlier discussions with the sector including outcomes of workshops at the enhancement themes conference in January 2006, and addressed the fundamental question 'What do we want students to get from their first year?' The focus therefore was not to be on issues such as retention, but rather on those aspects which contribute to a successful first year. In considering this question, it was recognised that it has resonance for different stakeholders within higher education, including students. There was recognition that in hearing the student voice, there was a second question, 'How can we align student and institutional perspective and expectations for the first year?'
- 5 Responses to the scoping paper identified specific areas of relevance and interest to the Scottish higher education community. These areas have been refined and will be considered in the learner-centred terms of student engagement and empowerment in the first year.
- 6 In addition to each institution having a nominated main contact, for the first time in the work on the enhancement themes, a network of practitioners with an interest in the theme has been established.
- 7 In April 2006, a meeting of the steering committee, main institutional contacts and network of practitioners, with keynote speaker Dr Betsy Barefoot, Co-Director, Policy Center on the First Year of College, Brevard, North Carolina, further confirmed and refined the topics for consideration.

First year experience enhancement theme

Topics

- 8 The topics for the first year theme will include a general strand comprising **an ongoing sector-wide discussion, reflecting on and exploring the nature and purposes of the first year**. Importantly, this will include a discussion and exploration of **student expectations, experiences and reflections on their first year** and consideration of the **status of first year teaching**. This overarching strand will run simultaneously with and be informed by a series of **'practice-focused' strands** considering:
- Curriculum design for the first year
 - Formative and diagnostic assessment and feedback
 - Peer support in the first year
 - Personal development planning
 - Personalisation of the first year
 - Introducing scholarship skills
 - Transition

Approach to the topics

9 Sector-wide discussion

The proposed approach to the sector-wide discussion is based on a combination of:

- 9.1 Individual institution-based discussions and documentation of: the nature and purposes of the first year; student expectations, experiences and reflections on their first year and the status of first year teaching.
- 9.2 Periodic meetings to consider the on-going institutional discussions. These will take place as 2-3 seminars for the institutional contacts with the steering committee to share and explore the issues emerging from their respective institutional discussions.
- 9.3 Engagement of a consultant to review the literature, taking into consideration findings of the recent Higher Education Academy (HEA) review; to look for relevant and innovative approaches within the UK and internationally, and at institutional or subject level through HEA subject centres, and to synthesise outcomes and issues highlighted at the above seminars.
- 9.4 Inviting international experts to contribute to these seminars with the option of the expert being invited to be available to contribute to discussions at individual institutions. Such a visit could, for example, be part of the on-going institutional discussion.
- 9.5 Student focus groups or forums. These will gather evidence of the student experience and expectations of first year. They will be arranged on an institution-by-institution basis and within this framework meetings might be grouped in a variety of ways: by current year group or by subject, for example, depending on the institution. Outcomes from forums would be written up and, in addition to providing input to the individual institutional discussion, would feed into the wider considerations of the theme on the nature and purpose of the first year and contribute to the work on the practice-focused topics. Topics for consideration will include those identified as topics within this document but may include additional areas as identified by students, such as, for example financial issues.

First year experience enhancement theme

10 Practice-focused strands:

In addition to the activities outlined above, the sector-wide discussion will be informed by the outcomes of the seven 'practice-focused' projects. Each of these projects will take a broadly similar approach, each strand having a Project Director with a similar remit to undertake the following activities:

- 10.1 Review the literature to identify useful and innovative approaches that have been used to address the issues in question, taking into consideration the outcomes of the recent review on behalf of the HEA.
- 10.2 Identify case studies of interest and applicable to practice including cases from Scotland or the rest of the UK, drawing on HEA Subject centres for example, or from further afield and potentially including live case studies.
- 10.3 Organise a workshop on the topic under consideration. This event to be open to the Scottish higher education sector, including students and involve:
 - a An initial presentation on the topic – defining the issues/problems which the topic is addressing
 - b Presentation of ideas that have emerged from the literature review
 - c Case study presentations (2 or 3), which, as well as Scottish examples, could include case studies from the rest of the UK, identified through HEA subject centres, or international case studies.
 - d Breakout discussion of the issues as explored in the presentations to clarify ideas and practice for further development.
- 10.4 Write up all of the above for publication, setting out ways in which higher education institutions (HEIs) might change and enhance practice in respect of the specific practice-focused strand, drawing on the literature, case studies and workshop discussions.

Projects

- 11 The outcomes of all the above will be collated and synthesised by the Steering Committee into a series of publications which will identify and explore the issues that have emerged throughout the discussions and projects and which put forward a set of proposals for new approaches to the first year.

Timetable

- 12 For all the projects outlined, the following timetable applies:

Monday 12 June 2006	Closing date for bids to take forward any of the above projects
By end of July 2006	Projects commissioned
During 2006 – 2007	Interim reports to Steering Committee
By July 2007	All projects to be complete and written up
Thereafter	Publication and dissemination of outcomes by way of a series of printed publications along with publication on the web-site and workshops and other meetings

The next annual Enhancement Themes Conference is due to take place in spring 2007. This is likely to be a 2-day event and will provide an opportunity for workshops focused on the progress of the First Year Theme and emerging outcomes.

Funding and arrangements for institution-based discussions

- 13 Initial arrangements for these discussions (see paragraph 9.1) will be made through the main institutional contacts and could take many different formats, for example the discussion may be incorporated within existing committee structures and processes. Alternatively or in addition, these may be arranged as institutional seminars or workshops and may utilise the availability of international experts.
- 14 Each main institutional contact will be asked to undertake or make arrangements for the undertaking of this project within the institution.
- 15 Each HEI will be provided with funds to support their institution-wide discussion

Funding for the other projects

- 16 The funding available for each project will be paid to the successful applicant in a series of payments, an initial proportion being paid on signing of the contract of agreement and the remainder, in instalments on successful completion of identified stages in the project work.

Taking forward the projects

- 17 Individuals are now sought to take forward the work outlined above and set out in more detail in the remainder of this document.
- 18 This information is being sent to Vice Principals of Teaching and Learning, the first year steering committee, main institutional contacts and to the network of first year practitioners, in addition to being posted on the Enhancement Themes website. Though this list of key colleagues is considerable, it is likely that these projects will be of interest to others undertaking work within the Scottish higher education sector and therefore it would be helpful if those who receive this information would circulate it to interested colleagues.
- 19 Expressions of interest should be made to Christine Macpherson at QAA Scotland, 183 St Vincent Street Glasgow G2 5QD, by the closing date of Monday 12 June 2006 and should include the following information:
 - Full name and title
 - Post held
 - Full postal address
 - E-mail address
 - Telephone number
 - Statement (no more than 500 words) indicating relevant qualifications, relevant experience in the specified area of the project and current involvement in the area, as well as any other information you would like to provide.
- 20 All expressions of interest will be considered after the closing date when further information may be sought before work is commissioned.
- 21 Successful applicants will be expected to carry out and complete the work as outlined, within the timetable indicated.

Sector-wide discussion

The nature and purposes of first year

The aim of this project is to stimulate a discussion within and between HEIs about the nature and purposes of the first year, in terms of engagement and empowerment of students and including the status of first year teaching.

This Project Director will work with and support the steering committee in particular through:

- Review the literature, with reference to the recent HEA review on the first year experience, to look for innovative approaches within the UK and internationally, at institutional or subject level through HEA subject centres
- Contribute to and assist in organising the seminars to be held for the main institutional contacts and steering committee (see paragraph 9.2) to share and explore the issues that have emerged within their respective institutional discussions
- Synthesise and report on the seminar outcomes
- Report in writing on progress to each steering committee meeting

Funding

£10,000

Sector-wide discussion

Discussion and exploration of student expectations, experiences and reflections on the first year

The aim of this project is to investigate how to encourage student engagement and empowerment by gaining a clearer understanding of student expectations and experiences of the first year in Scottish higher education.

The Project Director will:

- Run student forums to be organised on an institution-by-institution basis and may be grouped in a variety of ways: current first year students, current fourth year students, or by subject, for example
- Forums to gather student reflections on the first year in terms of the other outlined topics for the first year theme and others such as finance which may arise
- Provide a report on the outcome of student forums taking place meetings for individual HEIs, to assist with the institutional discussion
- Provide regular updates on meetings to the First Year Steering Committee to monitor progress and to inform the committee's on-going discussions
- Write up outcomes of the student group meetings to provide part of the individual institutional discussion, to inform the wider discussions and to draw implications for the first year

Funding

£10,000 plus additional funds for book-tokens for participating students

‘Practice-focused’ development project

Curriculum design for the first year

The aim of this project is to consider how students might be engaged and empowered by investigating aspects first year curriculum design. This will include consideration of aspects such as modularisation, types of modules (short-intense or prolonged-moderate, for example) and apparent constraints on curriculum design

The Project Director will:

- Review the literature, with reference to the recent HEA review on the first year experience, to identify useful and interesting approaches that have been used to address the issues around first year curriculum design
- Identify first year case studies of innovative and useful practice including cases from Scotland (drawing on HEA Subject centres for examples)
- Organise a workshop on the first year curriculum design. This event will be open to the higher education sector and involve:
 - A presentation on the curriculum design in relation to the first year – defining the issues/problems associated with this aspect of the first year experience
 - Presentation of ideas that have emerged from the literature review
 - Case study presentations (2 or 3), which, as well as Scottish examples, could include case studies from the rest of the UK, perhaps identified through HEA subject centres, or from the international literature
 - Discussion of the issues as explored in the presentations with the aim of clarifying ideas and practice for further development.
- Submit interim written reports on work to date to the steering committee
- Write up all of the above for publication, setting out ways in which HEIs might change and enhance practice to engage and empower students in respect of curriculum design, drawing on the literature, case studies and workshop discussions.

Funding
£10,000

‘Practice-focused’ development project

Formative and diagnostic assessment and feedback

The aim of this project is to consider student engagement and empowerment in the first year in relation to formative and diagnostic assessment and feedback

The Project Director will:

- Review the literature, with reference to the recent HEA review on the first year experience, to identify useful and interesting approaches that have been used to address the issues around formative and diagnostic assessment and feedback in the first year
- Identify first year case studies of innovative and useful practice including cases from Scotland (drawing on HEA Subject centres for examples)
- Organise a workshop on formative and diagnostic assessment and feedback in the first year. This to be open to the higher education sector and involve:
 - A presentation on formative and diagnostic assessment and feedback – defining the issues/problems associated with this aspect of the first year
 - Presentation of ideas that have emerged from the literature review
 - Case study presentations (2 or 3), which, as well as Scottish examples, could include case studies from the rest of the UK, perhaps identified through HEA subject centres, or from the international literature
 - Discussion of the issues as explored in the presentations with the aim of clarifying ideas and practice for further development.
- Submit interim written reports on work to date to the steering committee
- Write up all of the above for publication, setting out ways in which HEIs might change and enhance practice to engage and empower students in respect of formative and diagnostic assessment and feedback in the first year, drawing on the literature, case studies, workshop discussions and the outcomes of work already being undertaken by the Integrative Assessment Enhancement Theme.

Funding
£10,000

‘Practice-focused’ development project

Peer support in the first year

The aim of this project is to consider student engagement and empowerment in the first year in relation to peer support

The Project Director will:

- Review the literature, with reference to the recent HEA review on the first year experience, to identify useful and interesting approaches that have been used to address the issues relating to peer support in the first year
- Identify case studies of innovative and useful practice including cases from Scotland (drawing on HEA Subject centres for examples)
- Organise a workshop on the topic of peer support in the first year. This event will be open to the higher education sector and involve:
 - A presentation on peer support– defining the issues/problems associated with this aspect of the first year experience
 - Presentation of ideas that have emerged from the literature review
 - Case study presentations (2 or 3), which, as well as Scottish examples, could include case studies from the rest of the UK, perhaps identified through HEA subject centres, or from the international literature
 - Discussion of the issues as explored in the presentations with the aim of clarifying ideas and practice for further development.
- Submit interim written reports on work to date to the steering committee
- Write up all of the above for publication, setting out ways in which HEIs might change and enhance practice in respect of the specific practice focused strand, drawing on the literature, case studies and workshop discussions.

Funding

£10,000

‘Practice-focused’ development project

Personal development planning

The aim of this project is to consider student engagement and empowerment in the first year in relation to personal development planning.

The Project Director will:

- Review the literature, with reference to the recent HEA review on the first year experience, to identify useful and interesting approaches that have been used to address the issues relating to personal development planning in the first year
- Identify first year case studies of innovative and useful practice including cases from Scotland (drawing on HEA Subject centres for examples)
- Organise a workshop on personal development planning in the first year. This event will be open to the higher education sector and involve:
 - A presentation personal development planning – defining the issues/problems associated with this aspect of the first year experience
 - Presentation of ideas that have emerged from the literature review
 - Case study presentations (2 or 3) which, as well as Scottish examples, could include case studies from the rest of the UK, perhaps identified through HEA subject centres, or from the international literature
 - Discussion of the issues as explored in the presentations with the aim of clarifying ideas and practice for further development
- Submit interim written reports on work to date to the steering committee
- Write up all of the above for publication, setting out ways in which HEIs might change and enhance practice in respect of the specific practice focused strand, drawing on the literature, case studies and workshop discussions.

Funding

£10,000

‘Practice-focused’ development project

Personalisation of the first year

The aim of this project is to consider student engagement and empowerment in the first year in relation to personalisation of the experience, particularly in relation to diversity within often large cohorts of students

The Project Director will:

- Review the literature, with reference to the recent HEA review on the first year experience, to identify useful and interesting approaches that have been used to address the issues relating to personalisation of the first year experience
- Identify case studies of innovative and useful practice including cases from Scotland (drawing on HEA Subject centres for examples)
- Organise a workshop on the personalisation of the first year. This event will be open to the higher education sector and involve:
 - A presentation on personalisation of the first year experience – defining the associated issues/problems
 - Presentation of ideas that have emerged from the literature review
 - Case study presentations (2 or 3), which, as well as Scottish examples, could include case studies from the rest of the UK, perhaps identified through HEA subject centres, or from the international literature
 - Discussion of the issues as explored in the presentations with the aim of clarifying ideas and practice for further development.
- Submit interim written reports on work to date to the steering committee
- Write up all of the above for publication, setting out ways in which HEIs might change and enhance practice in respect of the specific practice focused strand, drawing on the literature, case studies and workshop discussions.

Funding

£10,000

‘Practice-focused’ development project

Introducing scholarship skills

The aim of this project is to consider how students might be engaged and empowered by the introduction of various scholarship skills in the first year. This will include not only the skills in acquiring information but also the skills in appraising and coping with the volume of the information found.

The Project Director will:

- Review the literature, with reference to the recent HEA review on the first year experience, to identify useful and interesting approaches that have been used to address the issues around the introduction of scholarship skills in the first year
- Identify first year case studies of innovative and useful practice including cases from Scotland (drawing on HEA Subject centres for examples)
- Organise a workshop on the scholarship skills in the first year. This event will be open to the higher education sector and involve:
 - A presentation on the introduction of scholarship skills – defining the issues/problems associated with this aspect of the first year experience
 - Presentation of ideas that have emerged from the literature review
 - Case study presentations (2 or 3), which, as well as Scottish examples, could include case studies from the rest of the UK, perhaps identified through HEA subject centres, or from the international literature
 - Discussion of the issues as explored in the presentations with the aim of clarifying ideas and practice for further development.
- Submit interim written reports on work to date to the steering committee
- Write up all of the above for publication, setting out ways in which HEIs might change and enhance practice in respect of the specific practice focused strand, drawing on the literature, case studies and workshop discussions.

Funding
£10,000

‘Practice-focused’ development project

Transition

The aim of this project is to consider the engagement and empowerment of students by investigating aspects of transition to the first year.

The Project Director will:

- Review the literature, with reference to the recent HEA review on the first year experience, to identify useful and interesting approaches that have been used to address the issues relating to transition
- Identify case studies of innovative and useful practice including cases from Scotland (drawing on HEA Subject centres for examples)
- Organise a workshop on the transition to first year. This event will be open to the higher education sector and involve:
 - A presentation on transition – defining the issues/problems associated with this aspect of the first year experience
 - Presentation of ideas that have emerged from the literature review
 - Case study presentations (2 or 3), which, as well as Scottish examples, could include case studies from the rest of the UK, perhaps identified through HEA subject centres, or from the international literature
 - Discussion of the issues as explored in the presentations with the aim of clarifying ideas and practice for further development.
- Submit interim written reports on work to date to the steering committee
- Write up all of the above for publication, setting out ways in which HEIs might change and enhance practice to engage and empower students in respect of the transition to the first year, drawing on the literature, case studies, workshop discussions and work already published in relation to the Enhancement Theme, Responding to Student Needs.

Funding

£10,000