

**QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

**First Year Experience Quality Enhancement Theme**

**Meeting of Steering Committee**

**St Leonard's Hall, Pollock Halls, University of Edinburgh**

**Friday 1 June 2007**

**CONFIRMED**

Minutes of the tenth meeting of the Enhancement Steering Committee for The First Year held on the afternoon of Friday 1 June 2007 at St Leonard's Hall, Pollock Halls, University of Edinburgh.

**Present:**

Professor Ron Piper, University of St Andrews (Chair)  
Professor Terry Mayes, Glasgow Caledonian University  
David Beards, Scottish Funding Council  
Dr Pete Cannell, The Open University in Scotland  
Professor George Gordon, University of Strathclyde (Project 1)  
Ms Erica Hensens, Sparqs  
Mr Bill Johnston, University of Strathclyde  
Ms Rowena Kochanowska, University of Strathclyde (Project 2)  
Dr David McCausland, University of Aberdeen Business School  
Ms Birgitta MacDonald, Edinburgh College of Art  
Dr Alastair Robertson, Higher Education Academy (HEA)  
Ruth Taylor, The Robert Gordon University  
Dr Jonathan Weyers, University of Dundee

**Officers:**

Dr David Bottomley, QAA Scotland  
Dr Christine Macpherson, QAA Scotland  
Ms Marjorie Craib, QAA Scotland

**Apologies:**

Dr Claire Carney, QAA Scotland  
Mr Tim Cobbett, Edinburgh University Students' Association  
Dr Andrew Eadie, Glasgow Caledonian University  
Dr Leona Elder, University of Abertay, Dundee  
Mr Steven Findlay, Heriot-Watt University Students Association  
Dr Simon Guild, University of St Andrews  
Ms Veronique Johnston, Napier University  
Mr Gerard Madill, Universities Scotland  
Dr Anne McGillivray, University of Paisley  
Ms Sandie Randall, Queen Margaret University College  
Professor Martin Wilkinson, Heriot-Watt University

**1 Welcome and apologies**

**Action**

The Chair welcomed the members and officers to the tenth meeting of the Enhancement Steering Committee for The First Year. Apologies were received as noted above.

## 2 Minute

There were no amendments to the minutes of the last meeting held on 24 April 2007, and these were duly approved.

## 3 Matters arising not otherwise on the agenda

There were no matters arising not otherwise on the agenda.

## 4 Review of Progress

### 4.1 Received project reports:

#### **Interim report Project 2: the student experience (QET-FY-10-08)**

It was confirmed that the paper consists of raw data but that each section's number of quotations represents the proportion of overall information received and had been prepared to provide an indication of issues students find problematic.

Areas highlighted in the report and discussions include:

- the idea of taking part in higher education is now the norm;
- an apparent lack of intellectual challenge during first year reported by some students;
- a substantial proportion of suggestions made by students to improve their experiences of the first year would appear to be relatively easy to instigate;
- an absence of reference to personal development planning; and
- the reporting by students taking part in the meetings that they liked the methods used and would prefer this to questionnaire surveys.

The project team would welcome feedback from the steering committee in relation to the content but also regarding the usefulness of the categories of information as set out in the report and whether there are others that would be helpful.

All

It was confirmed that the topics identified will provide opportunities for debate between institutional policy-makers (including SHEEC), practitioners and students as well as other groups such as employers. The data represent meetings undertaken at 11 of the 21 Scottish higher education institutions and there was discussion around the usefulness of trying to arrange sessions at the remaining sites. Points raised focussed on whether the sample already obtained could be seen as broadly representative of the sector; whether undertaking these meetings with a different cohort, or the same cohort at a different stage in their curricula would be beneficial.

These points were balanced with the desire by the project team to complete the planned work, albeit outwith the original timetable, to obtain a 'full set' of data.

It was confirmed that the project team has specifically raised points with student groups that have been highlighted to them by the steering committee and project teams.

Further points discussed included the question of how the outcomes of this project will compare and contrast with other published literature on the student experience, including how different methods can provide different results.

It was confirmed that the project team is looking at these issues.

Whilst focus was on areas for change, it was pointed out that there was a good deal of positive comment being made and that these would also need to be highlighted. It was also pointed out that many of the positive

aspects of the first year were not mentioned because students are content and therefore the topics were not discussed. The project team will provide each institution visited with an individual report.

Further discussion of how to take forward the work of this project in relation to the other work of the theme took place under item 8, below. It was agreed that a meeting with officers should be held to discuss this.

CM

#### **Interim report Project 4: Formative and diagnostic assessment and feedback (QET-FY-10-02)**

Terry Mayes had provided feedback separately on this report. The committee found this to be a clear and useful report. In particular, positive comment was made in relation to: its focus on clear audiences; suggestions made to address the recommendations made in the report; key questions and strategies which would be very helpful to readers as practical guides.

CM

#### **Project updates from other projects (QET-FY-10-03)**

##### **Project 1: Sector-wide discussions**

George Gordon confirmed he has had information from 10 HEA subject centres and that Alastair Robertson had agreed to provide further contacts. He also confirmed whilst he has received substantial information from some institutions; it would be good to expand upon that from others.

The Chair indicated that the institutional reports would be very useful to Project 1. During the morning discussions institutional contacts had been keen to know what activities other institutions were undertaking. A potential issue around timing was raised: some institutional contacts would like an end of July reporting date, while an end of June deadline would assist Project 1. Details in the contracts will be checked and advice sent to institutional contacts.

CM

##### **Project 3: Curriculum design**

It had been proving difficult for this project team to obtain relevant references in relation to modularisation of curricula and the final report may highlight this as a gap in the literature.

It was suggested that if committee members know of relevant resources, then they should contact Project 3. George Gordon indicated that there may be discipline-specific information, mentioning engineering in particular. In addition, he mentioned the work of the Burgess Committee as being potentially relevant and literature outside higher education which may be useful. Alastair Robertson suggested direct contact with the HEA Subject Centre.

All

CM

##### **Project 7: Personalisation**

It was noted that an interim report from this team had been submitted separately, following the last steering committee meeting. Feedback had been sent by Terry Mayes, incorporating comments from the steering committee.

Discussion at the meeting included suggestions to provide additional sources of information to this group. George Gordon indicated that he knew of relevant Israeli literature and the work of Angelo on student engagement could be useful. Rowena Kochanowska mentioned work in mechanical engineering at Strathclyde by Jim Boyle, working with large

classes.

David Beards indicated that he had been on a JISC group looking at personalisation/personal learning environments and that he may have some relevant resources to pass on.

DB

If any steering committee members know of relevant resources, then they should contact the project team directly.

All

It was agreed that a meeting should be arranged with the project team to discuss options.

CM

### **Project 9: Transitions**

A very detailed report was received indicating that this project is on target for completion.

CM

## **4.2 International Conferences (QET-FY-10-04)**

The Chair invited Bill Johnston to comment on the recent contributions to the 2<sup>nd</sup> European First-Year Experience conference, held in Gothenburg.

He commented that it had been an interesting conference and that it was interesting to see that certain countries did not seem to have many representatives: France and Germany for example.

There had been a good deal of discussion in the various sessions including debate around the aim of having 50% uptake of higher education.

It was clear that there was a strong link between the conference and the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at South Carolina.

The Chair commented on a workshop by Dutch representatives, reporting on another national-level initiative, emanating from the governmental department of education, looking at the key factors in the first year, with a particular reference to retention. Pre-entry and peer support were seen to be important factors in terms of student retention. He indicated that the Scottish approach was distinctively different.

The Chair indicated that the 3<sup>rd</sup> conference would be taking place in Wolverhampton and that consideration should be given to interactions with this event in 2008.

The Chair and the Project 1 Director will be representing the Theme and making a presentation at the forthcoming 20<sup>th</sup> International First-Year Experience conference, in Hawaii in July.

## **5 Theme Outcomes**

### **5.1 Paper on process of editing and peer review options (QET-FY-10-05)**

It was confirmed that this item would be better titled 'Theme Project Outcomes'.

It was confirmed that the project group had sought further clarification of points of house style. This will be sent.

CM

The Chair referred to paper QET-FY-10-05 and invited comment, indicating that there was an issue around Project 2's late submission.

In the light of suggestions in the paper, it was further suggested that the steering committee might act as peer reviewers for Projects 1 and 2 where these would benefit from a contextual review, and that Projects 3 – 9 could be reviewed by the project teams or by others.

There was discussion around the timing of peer review and release of the final documents by the steering committee for publication. There was also concern that peer reviewers might take conflicting views of the

reports to that of the steering committee if undertaken in series. Several options were considered, but it was agreed that a scheme of review would be devised by the Chair and officers, taking into account the steering committee's discussions.

RP/DB/  
CM

It was confirmed that the review process was to identify any major omissions or to make any additional points and should not be an onerous task.

It was confirmed that copy-editing would be arranged by officers.

CM

It was acknowledged that peer review, however it is carried out, would delay publication a little.

## 5.2 Institutional Discussion Reports

This had been the topic of discussions at the morning meeting. The issue of timing of reports was discussed. It was suggested that the report in June might be seen as an interim report with a further report on how institutions had engaged with the outcomes. Engagement with the outcomes could fit with the forthcoming interim year,

It was confirmed that for the purposes of QAA internal audit, it would be necessary to give an outline of how the funds for institutional discussion have been used.

It was noted that some institutions were having difficulties spending the funds in the time allocated.

Contract details regarding timing of reports will be checked and confirmed with institutional contacts.

CM

## 5.3 Developing an overview publication

There was a suggestion that there might be a meeting after all the reports were available, so that an overview briefing paper with a Scottish dimension might be developed and that along side this, it might be interesting to have an international author to write a reflection on this collective piece, with the aim of producing a stimulating document including a comparison with other places.

In addition, there was a need for a short, succinct document with key messages for policy makers and key change agents within institutions, which could be used initially at a meeting specifically for this group.

It was pointed out that key messages will not become apparent until the project outcomes become available.

Another form of overview suggested was a tool in the form of a short series of reflective questions or headings, for institutions or groups to ask themselves, similar to one developed for the Research-Teaching Linkages Theme, which provides a structure which seems to be useful.

Whilst this was seen as a potential outcome, it was noted that discussions of this type of tool in the morning meeting with institutional contacts has highlighted concern around any aspects of an audit or benchmarking type. Institutional contacts were clear that they would wish to be free to use such a tool as they saw fit – or not as the case may be.

A further suggestion indicated that it would be useful, at the end of the Theme to produce a summary of the projects and institutional discussions with the emerging themes of these endeavours.

In addition, it was suggested that there might be some reflection and evaluation on being part of a Theme steering committee. To a certain extent this has taken place in the past, and it was agreed that this

would take place at the end of the First Year Theme.

DB/CM

## 6 Dissemination of Outcomes (QET-FY-10-06)

The Chair confirmed dissemination activities had been discussed at the morning session with institutional contacts and project teams.

There were several possible types of activities suggested during the morning discussions.

1. Senior management and other key change agents in institutions were identified as an audience to be addressed early, to provide them with a briefing on the main outcomes in an engaging way, to allow these groups to advance the outcomes in their institutions. It was pointed out that many institutions now have groups relating to first year or enhancement activities in general which would also be key to successful engagement with the outcomes. It was suggested that a meeting for these groups could be separate from or combined with the one above.
2. This led to the idea of a First Year Change Academy approach for teams from institutions.
3. Institutional contacts had expressed an interest in support for events they will run rather than having to attend outside events, possibly requesting input from project teams. This would seem to be supported by project teams. It was further suggested that this external input might include others such as international visitors contributing to institutional engagement.
4. Student participation in this phase of the work is crucial. It was confirmed that sparqs would be keen to be involved. There are three student briefing days and it was suggested that the first, in October might focus on First Year outcomes, as well as part of the focus at the second (in early 2008) being on First Year, along with Research-Teaching, which would be the focus of the third meeting.
5. Institutional contacts had expressed interest in collaboration where common themes were identified. (This might be aided by Project 1.) They would be particularly interested in task-oriented events or workshops.
6. Support from the HEA Subject Centre support for discipline specific consideration would be welcome. There was a suggestion that there might be greater cross-reference between the HEA and Enhancement Themes websites.
7. Some institutional contacts would like materials for staff development. They would like project reports to be available electronically in a format accessible to them, so that they can be adapted for individual institutions. There was considerable discussion around this topic. It was the intention that the publications would be useful and that any manipulation of them could result in confusion, other than taking whole sections, with appropriate acknowledgement. It was suggested that to be able to do this, the case studies and summaries might be provided on-line in a non-PDF form, as well as PDFs. In addition, it was suggested that the steering committee might ask project directors to highlight where there are staff development issues.

CM

It was agreed that the activities above would amount to an ambitious programme. In addition it was pointed out that the international conferences in Wolverhampton and Dublin could provide opportunities to bring speakers to Scotland and mark the end of the Theme. It was

suggested that institutional contacts make colleagues aware of these forthcoming opportunities for sending delegates to these conferences and to plan to put aside funds so to do.

CM

It was confirmed that there would be a meeting with the Chair of the Research-Teaching Linkages Theme to discuss dissemination.

RP/CM

There was discussion as to whether there was a continuing 'life' to the Theme beyond the formal end of activities, around June 2008. Though there was agreement that the role of the Themes is to stimulate interest and discussion, there was perhaps an interest within the sector for some form of continued discussion or network beyond the Theme. It was felt that there should continue to be a distinctly Scottish dimension to any future endeavour. It was suggested that this topic might be revisited at a later date.

## **7 Update on other enhancement work (QET-FY-10-07)**

This paper was received for information.

## **8 Any Other Business**

The timetable for the final reporting of the project investigating the student experience was discussed. The option of presenting the information to date as a sample from across the sector, whilst fulfilling the commitment to individual institutions by arranging meetings for the autumn with those remaining to be visited and providing these with individual reports was discussed. This was balanced with the desire of the project team to present full representation of the sector in their final report. The need to coordinate project reports to be available for any overview publications was identified. It was agreed that a meeting should be arranged to discuss the best way forward.

TM/DB/  
CMM

A request was made for minutes to be sent within a fortnight if possible.

CMM

### **Dates of Future Meetings**

- 11 September 2007: Scottish visit by Professor Kerri-Lee Krause. Venue and nature of meeting to be confirmed
- 17 September 2007: steering committee, institutional contacts, project teams. Venue to be confirmed