

**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**

**Tuesday, 24 April 2007**

**CONFIRMED**

Minutes of the ninth meeting of the Enhancement Steering Committee for The First Year held at 13.30 on Tuesday, 24 April 2007, at St. Leonard's Hall, Pollock Halls, University of Edinburgh.

**Present:**

Professor Ron Piper (Chair), University of St Andrews  
Dr Pete Cannell, The Open University in Scotland  
Mr Tim Cobbett, Edinburgh University Students' Association  
Dr Andrew Eadie, Glasgow Caledonian University  
Dr Leona Elder, University of Abertay, Dundee  
Professor George Gordon, University of Strathclyde  
Dr Simon Guild, University of St Andrews  
Ms Erica Hensens, sparqs  
Mr Bill Johnston, University of Strathclyde  
Ms Rowena Kochanowska, University of Strathclyde  
Professor Terry Mayes, Glasgow Caledonian University  
Dr David McCausland, University of Aberdeen Business School  
Dr Anne McGillivray, University of Paisley  
Ms Sandie Randall, Queen Margaret University  
Dr Jonathan Weyers, University of Dundee

**Officers:**

Mr David Beards, Scottish Funding Council  
Mr Gerard Madill, Universities Scotland  
Dr David Bottomley, QAA Scotland  
Dr Christine Macpherson, QAA Scotland  
Ms Elizabeth Anderson, QAA Scotland

**Apologies:**

Ms Birgitta MacDonald, Edinburgh College of Art  
Ms Veronique Johnston, Napier University  
Ms Ruth Taylor, The Robert Gordon University  
Professor Martin Wilkinson, Heriot-Watt University

**1. Welcome**

**ACTION**

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

**2. Minute**

The minutes of the last meeting held on 16 February 2007 at the University of Stirling were confirmed as an accurate record.

**3. Matters arising not otherwise on the agenda**

There were no matters arising.

**4. Report on the ethics approval working group**

The Chair gave an oral report on the progress of the ethics approval working group. Obtaining ethics approval for cross-institutional projects (particularly but not exclusively those involving interviews of students) has been raised as an issue. The Universities Scotland Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) commissioned Professor Piper to set up and chair a small working group to propose a way to handle ethics approval in future. The group comprises Professor Piper, Dr Claire Carney, Dr Christine Macpherson, Dr Alastair Robertson and Dr Lorraine Walsh. A productive first meeting resulted in a request being made to each Higher Education Institution (HEI) to share their ethics approval procedures and policies. Most HEIs have already provided this information. The group has been referring to the guidelines of the British Education Research Association (BERA) and will compare these and all the other guidelines received to ascertain whether a set of guidelines can be adapted or adopted which would be acceptable to all HEIs. The group will also consider which body would be most appropriate for future project work to seek approval of. A report will be submitted to LTC in the autumn.

**5. Report on the annual enhancement themes conference**

Dr David Bottomley gave an oral report on the recent enhancement themes conference. He noted that the feedback was generally positive although some changes will be made for next year. Planning has begun for the next conference which will also be a two-day event in March 2008. As the First Year Theme will be concluding its dissemination work in spring 2008, it was suggested that the conference could form a part of this. Any further feedback on the conference would be welcomed.

The Committee noted greater student involvement at the conference than in previous years and the issue was raised as to whether the Committee has enough student involvement in its current work.

It was agreed that the case studies of different institutions' approaches to enhancement were interesting especially if participants were encouraged to see the underlying processes they illustrated.

There was discussion of the practice of repeating workshops. Some felt that a wider range of material could be covered if repeat sessions were minimised and that day two should build on sessions in day one, whilst others felt there was some usefulness

in running workshops twice.

It was noted that the international contributions were very welcome especially when reference was made to the Scottish context.

It was suggested that not everyone who attends the annual conference has bought into the enhancement agenda and that there was a place for sessions to inform and enthuse.

## **6. Review of progress and future programme of work**

### **Reflections on morning discussion**

- 6.1 The Chair noted that much of the morning discussion revolved around dissemination of project outcomes and suggested that this be discussed under item 7. Dr Bottomley noted that an outcome from the morning session was an awareness of the need for facilitating the project directors' interactions with each other in terms of support and feedback. One option is a shared webspace. It was suggested that highlighting the major themes emerging from the projects and the main priorities and points from institutional discussions would be useful.

DB/CM

### **6.2 Received project reports**

Professor George Gordon presented an interim report on project 1 (paper 09-02). The paper outlined the work completed to date and planned actions. Professor Gordon noted his intention to have an executive summary highlighting key themes, in addition to the more extensive report, stressing the importance of publicising initiatives that have been in place for some time, are embedded and are working well. It was noted that finding examples of good practice was easy as few initiatives have been written up. It is hoped that case studies from overseas might trigger people to come forward and share local practice. Professor Gordon welcomed any further feedback from the Committee on the report and agreed that it should be circulated to the institutional contacts and other project directors. It was noted that it had not been easy to obtain relevant information from some Higher Education Academy Subject Centres. Mr David Beards agreed to speak to Dr Robertson regarding the response from subject centres.

DBeards

The interim report from project 4 had not yet been received.

The Committee noted that a progress report on project 2 would be circulated outwith the meeting.

CM

Progress reports were received from projects 3, 6, 7 and 9 (paper 09-04)

Whilst project 3, Curriculum Design, proposed presenting an impressive number of case studies, the project 6 team investigating Personal Development Planning (PDP) was having difficulty identifying useful examples. It was recognised that PDP

is often context-specific and linked to employability, especially in the later years of a curriculum. It was suggested that examples of PDP used in secondary school might be a useful line of investigation. In considering the update from project 7, Personalisation, there was discussion around learning styles issues. Project 9, Transitions, had provided a statement about emerging outcomes and key themes which was welcomed by the committee. Contact between projects 9 and 6 was noted.

David Beards indicated a number of sources of possible case studies relevant to projects 3, 6 and 9 and agreed to forward details.

DBeards

Terry Mayes offer to distil information from the Scottish Funding Council's e-transformation programme for the benefit of the Theme.

TM

## 7. Theme outcomes and programme of dissemination

The Committee received paper 09-05 setting out an invitation to consider the types and format of the Theme's published outcomes and proposals for their dissemination phase running from autumn 2007 to spring 2008. Project teams have been asked to submit their final reports by the end of July 2007. It is anticipated that the publications will be available in late 2007.

The steering committee agreed that it would be helpful if the standard QAA contract took cognisance of the circumstances of the enhancement themes work in Scotland.

Theme outcomes:

The Committee noted that the Project Directors were seeking guidance to the form of the final report, audience(s) to write for and the types of publications anticipated. The morning's discussions with the project teams, institutional contacts and steering committee had concluded that publishing separate reports for each project would be useful. It had also been concluded that proposals within the reports should be structured in terms of the different audiences addressed.

It was agreed that it would also be useful to have one or more overviews of the nine projects. Emerging outcomes could feed into initial thinking on the overview structure although the final report(s) would follow after the project reports. It was agreed that it would be useful to commission this work soon, so that this could take place over the summer.

There was some discussion about the value of having various stakeholder groups respond to the overview report and/or the nine project reports. It was noted that the large number of stakeholders could make this logistically unfeasible. It was suggested that emerging outcomes could be reported to institutions via institutional contacts. It was suggested that some dissemination to students could form part of sparqs briefing meetings for student officers.

The Committee considered that some process of peer-review

would be valuable. There was discussion of whether project directors could be asked to peer review reports, especially as they have been chosen in part for their academic credibility. Another suggestion was to make review a task of an away-day event.

It was agreed that outcomes need to be useful to practitioners and that there was value in hard copy reports as well as web publication. The Chair suggested that outcomes for students would be useful and the involvement of sparqs in this would be very helpful.

#### Dissemination

It was agreed that whilst it would be good for outcomes to be used as needed, and not to overburden audiences with information, enough information would need to be given to colleagues in the sector for them to know what outcomes are available to them.

It was noted that there would be no enhancement-led institutional reviews in the next academic year and that this might allow institutions to focus on embedding the outcomes of themes.

A variety of events was suggested including institutional, regional and disciplinary groupings, as well as events for students/student officers. It was agreed that dissemination would be a focus of the next meeting.

CM/DB

### **8. Any other business**

Project 2, investigating the student experience, sought an extension to its conclusion because it had been proving difficult to arrange meetings with students in all HEIs and therefore it would not now be possible to visit all HEIs before the end of the current academic year. The team proposed submitting an interim report in July.

The committee discussed whether the visits needed to include all HEIs if the information gathered to date or the conclusions which could be drawn would be much altered by these final additions. It was agreed that an interim report should be submitted in July and that the remaining visits should be arranged early in the new academic year, with the final report following.

### **9. Dates of future meetings**

The First Year Steering Committee, Main Institutional Contacts and Project Teams will be meet on 17 September, venue to be confirmed.