

CONFIRMED

Minutes of the first meeting of the Enhancement Steering Committee for The First Year on Monday 5 December 2005, held at QAA Scotland office, Glasgow.

Present:

Professor Ron Piper, University of St Andrews
Professor Terry Mayes, Glasgow Caledonian University
Dr Pete Cannell, The Open University in Scotland
Dr Andrew Eadie, Glasgow Caledonian University
Dr Leona Elder, University of Abertay, Dundee
Dr Simon Guild, University of St Andrews
Ms Veronique Johnston, Napier University
Professor David Lines, The Robert Gordon University
Dr David McCausland, University of Aberdeen Business School
Ms Birgitta MacDonald, Edinburgh College of Art
Dr Anne McGillivray, University of Paisley
Ms Sandie Randall, Queen Margaret University College
Dr Jonathan Weyers, University of Dundee
Professor Martin Wilkinson, Heriot-Watt University
Mr Tim Cobbett, Edinburgh University Students' Association
Mr Steven Findlay, Heriot-Watt University Students Association
Mr Gerard Madill, Universities Scotland
Mr Robert MacGregor, Scottish Funding Council

Officers:

Dr David Bottomley, Assistant Head of QAA Scotland
Ms Thelma Barron, Assistant Director (Enhancement)
Ms Laura White, Administrative Assistant

Apologies:

Mr Bill Johnston, University of Strathclyde
Dr Liz Thomas, Higher Education Academy
Mr Duncan Cockburn, Sparqs

1. Welcome

ACTION

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the members and officers to the first meeting of the Enhancement Steering Committee for The First Year.

2. Operating Framework of Steering Committee

- 2.1 The Chair suggested that the focus of this theme should be on the purpose of the first year, and how it could be developed into a more transformative experience. One of the first tasks for the group was to decide how it would most benefit the sector to focus and engage with the work, e.g. through workshops, sponsoring experts, and to develop an implementation strategy accordingly. One of the key questions for the theme is what we want students to get from their first year and what institutions can do to encourage this to happen.
- 2.2

The committee received paper 01-05 which provided information about the operating framework of the committee.

The theme's work plan follows a predictable agenda

commencing with the scoping of the topic. The strategic plan will detail the theme's aims and objectives, how to achieve this, and what development work to initiate. Project work should be completed by June 2007, with publications due in Autumn 2007. A budget of £30,000 has been allocated to the theme to cover all activities including steering committee meetings, travel and subsistence, fees and exploratory/commissioned work. There is, however, some scope for variation.

- 2.3 The immediate task for the Steering Committee, between now and March, is to decide where to focus the programme of work and create a plan of objectives. This would be considered more closely at the next steering committee meeting in January
- 2.4 Members were encouraged by early indications of the sector's interest and willingness to engage with this theme, as evidenced by two institutional events on the first year, which had been organised independently of the theme.

3. Preliminary Scoping Paper

3.1 The Committee considered paper 02-05, a preliminary scoping paper, prepared by Professor Terry Mayes. Presenting the paper, Professor Mayes advised the group that the aim of the paper was to clarify what is meant by the first year. The approach was conceived, not in terms of traditional concepts of support, but rather in terms of the curriculum, and how that can be developed to promote student empowerment and student engagement, with the overall aim of making the first year a transformational experience.

3.2 Consideration of the curriculum would focus on the balance between foundational knowledge and developmental skills, and how far the first year curriculum should extend beyond the conventional subject based programme, to prepare students better for progression. To more accurately reflect the nature of the curricular dimension, it was agreed that 'Core Curriculum' should be retitled 'Curriculum Design'

JTM

3.3 Empowerment was conceived as equipping students to use
3.4 available learning resources, including the internet, and to participate in communities of learners, to become more independent learners.

Engagement was conceived as encouraging students to achieve their full potential, by addressing particular issues of demotivation, which currently characterise the first year. The development of a peer-to-peer culture was seen as a powerful influence in this regard, together with close mentoring systems and early feedback on assessment

3.5

These three aspects also implicitly relate to the process of enculturation, at university and at subject level, which was a focus of some of the development work undertaken for the Responding to Student Needs theme. This work will serve as a helpful resource in the development of this theme. The work on

3.6

induction highlighted the need for institutional champions; this was seen as equally true for the work on the First Year.

- 3.7 The Chair confirmed that the first year was being taken to mean a first year entrant into a programme, as this is when most students have their first experience of higher education. This view had also been broadly supported in the Consultative meetings with senior managers. However it was acknowledged that some aspects of the Committee's work would have application in the context of articulation arrangements and thus would have relevance for direct entrants in later years. The point was also made that the theme should seek to address the needs of part-time as well as full-time students.

- 3.8 There was a general consensus that the status of first year teaching needs to be raised, as this is often accorded a much lower status than Honours teaching. It is important that staff teaching first year courses are inspiring and motivational to new students. It was also agreed that the benefits of student support networks be recognised.

- 3.9 The scoping paper had already been considered by the Integrative Assessment Steering Committee meeting, and the group agreed that as work progressed, close links with other themes, especially Integrative Assessment, would become evident. The importance of reporting between the various steering committees was noted.

- 3.10 Following a wide-ranging discussion, Committee members were invited to provide further feedback on the scoping paper before the next meeting, highlighting which key areas they would like the work to focus on. ALL

It was agreed that Professor Mayes would provide a revised version of the scoping paper, for consideration at the next meeting. JTM

4. Outcomes from Consultative Meetings

- 4.1 Thelma Barron briefed the group on the outcomes of the November consultative meetings, as detailed in paper 03-05, and confirmed she would continue to collect and distil feedback and comments following the workshops. TB
- 4.2 Professor Mayes noted that within the time constraints of the theme, it would not be possible to cover all areas of interest and that it would be necessary to identify a number of key issues on which to focus.
- 4.3 David Bottomley suggested that the proposed plan of work be discussed in the first year workshop at the January conference. The Chair agreed, suggesting that the workshop at the conference be used to announce the issues to be addressed together with a preliminary plan of activities TB/LW
- 4.4 Ms Barron agreed to set up a JISC mail base for the committee. TB/LW

5. Linkage With Other Enhancement Themes

- 5.1 The committee considered paper 04-05 and discussed how the first year theme would link in with other enhancement themes.
- 5.2 It was suggested that a joint event be held with the Integrative Assessment theme, which could look at e.g. how to use formative assessment in the first year, and how to give useful feedback to large groups. Professor Lines and Professor Mayes agreed to take this forward with the Integrative Assessment steering committee. DL/TM
- 5.3 It was agreed that progress on the Effective Learner theme would have to be closely monitored to avoid unnecessary duplication between the two themes.
- 5.4 While research-teaching linkages is not formally a theme as yet, it was recognised that areas of common interest are likely to emerge, once the scoping of this topic is complete.

6. Engagement With Students

- 6.1 The committee discussed the proposal in paper 05-05 to write to student associations inviting comment on the scoping paper and to follow this up with phone calls to Student Associations. However, it was suggested at one of the consultative meetings that it would be more beneficial to hold regional events enabling students to interact with each other. Tim Cobbett advised the committee that the response to telephone calls from students might be mixed, and very much dependent on interest. Forums were considered to be more useful as a way of getting groups together which represented a variety of subjects and years. Steven Findlay agreed, stating that telephone calls should act as a chaser to the forums, not as a question and answer session.
- 6.2 It was agreed that further discussions should be held with Tim Cobbett and Steven Findlay about how best to obtain student opinions. TB/LW

7. Engagement With Institutional Contacts

- 7.1 The committee discussed paper 06-05. Thelma Barron agreed to email the committee a list of the existing first year institutional contacts. TB
- The committee agreed with the suggestion to create a sub-set of institutional contacts comprised of those people who have direct responsibilities for the first year. Committee members were asked to identify appropriate individuals. ALL

8. Development of Implementation Strategy

- 8.1 The committee discussed paper 07-05. It was agreed that a 'launch' event should be held to make the sector aware that work on the First Year theme was underway and committee members were asked to submit thoughts and ideas about this proposed event. ALL

9. The Enhancement Themes Website

9.1 There was agreement that a First Year sub-section of the Enhancement Themes website needs to be created and kept up to date. Thelma Barron agreed to take responsibility for this. TB

10 The Enhancement Themes Annual Conference

The committee discussed paper 08-05 and agreed that the next steering committee meeting should be held in January to decide the focus of the workshop at the January conference. Steering committee members were encouraged to attend the conference.

11 Any Other Business

12 Date of Next Meeting

17 or 19 January, depending on availability of members, the precise arrangements to be confirmed by e-mail. LW