

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

Monday 17 September 2007

CONFIRMED

Minutes of the eleventh meeting of the Enhancement Steering Committee for The First Year held on Monday 17 September 2007 held at St Leonard's Halls, Edinburgh First, (Edinburgh University) at 1330 hours.

Present:

Professor Ron Piper, University of St Andrews
Dr Andrew Eadie, Glasgow Caledonian University
Dr Leona Elder, University of Abertay, Dundee
Ms Monique Esingle, Dundee University Students Association
Mr Thomas Graham, Edinburgh University Students' Association
Ms Birgitta MacDonald, Edinburgh College of Art
Professor Terry Mayes, Glasgow Caledonian University
Ms Erica Hensens, sparqs
Dr Alastair Robertson, Higher Education Academy
Ms 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:

Mr Chris Baxter, Stirling University Students' Association
David Beards, Scottish Funding Council
Dr Pete Cannell, The Open University in Scotland
Dr Claire Carney, QAA Scotland
Mr Tim Cobbett, Edinburgh University Students' Association
Dr Simon Guild, University of St Andrews
Mr Bill Johnston, University of Strathclyde
Ms Veronique Johnston, Napier University
Mr Gerard Madill, Universities Scotland
Dr David McCausland, University of Aberdeen Business School
Ms Katy McCloskey, University of Strathclyde Students' Association
Dr Anne McGillivray, University of Paisley
Ms Sandie Randall, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh
Mr Gurjit Singh, University of Strathclyde Students' Association
Professor Martin Wilkinson, Heriot-Watt University
Ms Talat Yaqoob, Heriot-Watt Students Association

1 Welcome and apologies

ACTION

- 1.1 The chair welcomed everyone to the eleventh steering committee meeting of the First Year Enhancement Theme. Mr Steven Findlay had resigned as

student member and the chair confirmed the following student nominations had been received and accepted:

- Ms Monique Esingle, Dundee University Students Association
- Mr Thomas Graham, Edinburgh University Students' Association
- Mr Chris Baxter, Stirling University Students' Association
- Ms Katy McCloskey, University of Strathclyde Students' Association
- Mr Gurjit Singh, University of Strathclyde Students' Association
- Ms Talat Yaqoob, Heriot-Watt Students Association

1.2 Ms Esingle and Mr Graham were welcomed to their first committee meeting.

1.3 The chair also confirmed the resignation of Professor John Palfreyman as institutional contact for University of Abertay and noted a replacement would be confirmed as soon as possible.

1.4 Apologies were noted as above.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting and any matters arising

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting (QET-FY-11-01), on 1 June 2007, were confirmed as an accurate record.

2.2 Referring to 4.2 (QET-FY-11-01), the chair reported that the First Year International Conference in Hawaii had been a valuable event. Although European attendance was limited, there was strong representation from the USA, Hong Kong, Japan and Australia. Key topics of interest were retention (USA); engagement and challenge (Japan) and the move from a three- to four-year degree (Hong Kong).

2.3 The next European First Year Experience Conference will be in Wolverhampton, 7-9 May 2008. The 21st International Conference on the First-Year Experience will be in Dublin, 23-26 June 2008. These key conferences will provide opportunities for continued dialogue with the international community and promotion of the main findings and outcomes of the Theme. The chair would also welcome suggestions of key speakers to invite to Scotland.

All

3 General review of progress including the morning's discussions

3.1. At the morning meeting, many project directors and institutional contacts had discussed 3 key points from their work to date. These discussions had been informative, identifying common topics for further exploration over the coming months.

3.2 It was agreed that the general focus now would be on supporting institutional engagement with the outcomes. It was suggested that this could be strengthened by collaborative working where there were shared interests among institutions. Further funding would be made available for institutions to continue their discussions and consider the outcomes of the Theme during the next phase of work.

3.3 There was discussion of the idea of establishing a first-year network, to take forward interest and discussion, beyond the end of the final phase of the Theme. It was agreed to discuss this again at a later stage.

3.4 It was noted that the provision of Themes information to students needs to be developed. It was agreed that the project outcomes may benefit from a student response.

3.5 Received projects reports had been circulated. It was noted that the interim report from Project 2 (the student experience) remained outstanding, though it was expected shortly, and the final report is expected later in 2007. Part of the final report from Project 4 (formative assessment) would be circulated after the meeting. Another project report was awaiting

possible additional information, and it was agreed Professor Mayes and Dr Macpherson would liaise directly on how best to address this issue. TM/CM

4 Project 1: Nature and Purpose of the First Year

- 4.1 The committee discussed the report and its suggestions (section 11.18) in particular.
- 4.2 Paragraphs 11.18.1 - 11.18.3: there was discussion of how this work might be carried forward and in what context. The call for ‘targeted investigations’ might include (for example) the design of a staff CPD course on ‘learning & teaching for first-year students’, or mathematical skills (cf. 5.6.8) or a focus on formative feedback in first year—its timing, frequency, and detail—given the concern about feedback that emerged in the recent NSS. The value of the Theme’s work internationally was highlighted and the contribution this could make as a unique example of a system-wide discussion of the first year experience. Funding for ongoing initiatives, networks or international collaborations should be explored.
- 4.3 Paragraph 11.18.4: suggests the benefits of having an interactive website. The Themes website is being updated. Interactive aspects will be considered. It was noted that increased cross-referencing between the Enhancement Themes and Higher Education Academy websites could be beneficial. Dr Robertson and Dr Macpherson will discuss. AR/CM
- 4.4 Paragraph 11.18.5: this was being facilitated by the morning’s discussions, which sought to reveal common topics of interest amongst institutions.
- 4.5 Paragraph 11.18.6: Ms Hensens confirmed that two of the regular *sparqs* briefing days would be focused on the First Year and the Research-Teaching Linkages themes. *sparqs* plans to hold a residential event to introduce sabbatical officers to the Quality Enhancement Framework. It was agreed QAA and *sparqs* would liaise further regarding this. EH/CM
- 4.6 Paragraph 11.18.7: this was noted.
- 4.7 Paragraphs 11.18.8 and 11.18.9: these suggestions were discussed in terms of a framing rather than as an audit tool. Professor Mayes agreed to liaise with Lorraine Walsh to discuss raising this at the Learning & Teaching Educational Development Sub-Committee, which she chairs. TM
- 4.8 Paragraph 11.18.10: the link between the Leitch Report on skills and the Research-Teaching Theme was noted. It was suggested that the First Year Theme might work with the R-T Theme on areas of shared interest.
- 4.9 This report was seen as being very helpful in suggesting the agenda of the next phase of the Theme’s work. Making international connections is part of the wider development of the Themes, and it was suggested that this could be taken further at the annual Themes conference and that existing links with Ireland might be explored as a means of encouraging an international conversation.
- 4.10 In considering other points from this report, there was some discussion of the status of first-year teaching (paragraphs 1.8.1-5 and 11.16). It was agreed that this should be raised with senior managers during the engagement/dissemination phase of the theme.

5 Learning from international developments and practice

- 5.1 The chair invited the committee to discuss the development of a publication on international developments and practice in relation to first year. It was noted that internationalisation has been highlighted in the recent SFC quality review with particular reference to international benchmarking.
- 5.2 The committee agreed that Professor George Gordon should be invited to

provide the committee with an analysis of his findings on this topic, following on from his work relating to Project 1.

GG

6 Review and publication of the outcomes

6.1 It was noted that the two sector-wide projects would be peer-reviewed by the steering committee. Student input will be especially valuable in relation to the sector-wide project on the student experience. Two of the seven practice-focused projects are being reviewed with comments expected in the near future. Further nominations to act as peer reviewers are still sought from the steering committee, institutional contacts and project teams for the remaining projects.

All

6.2 The committee agreed it would be beneficial to publish project outcomes on the Enhancement Themes website as these become available. It was agreed an overview guide to the publications will be commissioned which will allow readers to focus on particular topics/publications based on their interests. It was also suggested documents could be produced at a later date to show further outcomes, capture the on-going institutional discussions and set an agenda for the future.

6.3 Publication would be supported by one or two events, and, whenever possible, these would include contributions from the project teams, probably by way of workshops.

7 Engaging with the outcomes of the Theme

7.1 Referring to QET-FY-11-03, the chair invited consideration of possible models of work for supporting engagement with the outcomes.

7.2 It was suggested that there were two main aspects to this phase of work: 'handing over' the outcomes to the sector and the more intensive phase of engagement with them. This would suggest that whilst the project work had largely finished, institutional engagement would continue, with the aim of involving project members.

7.3 The committee welcomed the suggestion of initial events or small conferences, continuing intra- and inter-institutional dialogue and engaging with students, with project team contributions to match the various institutional agendas. There was support for engagement linked to topics of shared interest rather than more general regional events.

7.4 Dr Bottomley reported that initial discussions with the Leadership Foundation indicated an interest in being involved in future institutional work relating to the Theme.

7.5 Further funding would be available to institutions to continue their discussions and to support contributions by the project teams. How this would be made available would be clarified by officers in due course, though one suggestion was to provide funds to institutions for their continuing discussions and to allow them to invite contributions from project teams.

7.6 The importance of the annual Enhancement Themes conference in March 2008 was highlighted. Workshops will provide opportunities for project teams to facilitate workshops around targeted issues.

7.7 It was suggested that Project 2 Directors might be involved in a plenary session, providing an opportunity for discussion of their key findings.

7.8 The chair invited expressions of interest from the committee to contribute to the conference.

All

7.9 The committee endorsed the need for students to be fully engaged with this phase of the Theme, including the conference.

7.10 *sparqs'* involvement in the conference workshops would be welcomed.

EH

- 7.11 The chair confirmed a meeting will be arranged between the six new student members of the committee, *sparqs* and QAA. CM
- 7.12 Following the morning meeting, the chair confirmed that all project directors and institutional contacts would be asked to provide the committee with three key project findings or institutional development needs/priorities arising from the Theme work to date to assist in planning events. CM
- 7.13 International contributions will be part of the next phase of the Theme, focusing especially on the European FYE and International FYE conferences in May and June 2008 respectively.
- 7.14 It was agreed that it would be good to have input from Randy Swing to give another perspective on the first year. It was noted that he is moving to a new post as Executive Director of the Association for Institutional Research (Florida) in the near future. CM
- 7.15 It was agreed that a series of events, based on emerging topics, will be developed and circulated to the committee. An early event is expected to be aimed at Vice-Principals in particular. CM

8 Future working of the Steering Committee

It was agreed that no committee meeting would be set for the near future. Contact would be maintained by email and future meeting dates would be circulated as soon as these were set.

CM

9 General update on work on Enhancement Themes

QET-FY-11-04 provided an update on the work of the Research-Teaching Theme. Following the recent publication of the Scottish Government's 'Skills for Scotland, A Lifelong Skills Strategy', it was confirmed that Mark Batho, of the Lifelong Learning Directorate of the Scottish Government would be speaking at a Research-Teaching event in November.

10 Any Other Business

There was no other business.