

Shaping the Student Experience Together: 20 Years of Enhancement



QAA Scotland's 5th International Enhancement Conference
Shaping the Student Experience Together: 20 Years of Enhancement

Evaluation for All: The Scottish Enhancement Themes

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Evaluation Research Team: 20 Years of Enhancement
Themes



The Task

The **aim of this evaluation** work was to:

- Identify impact of Themes' activity on the student experience so that, at the end of Themes, it is possible to identify ways in which student experience has been improved, as well as recognising enhancements to policy and practice.

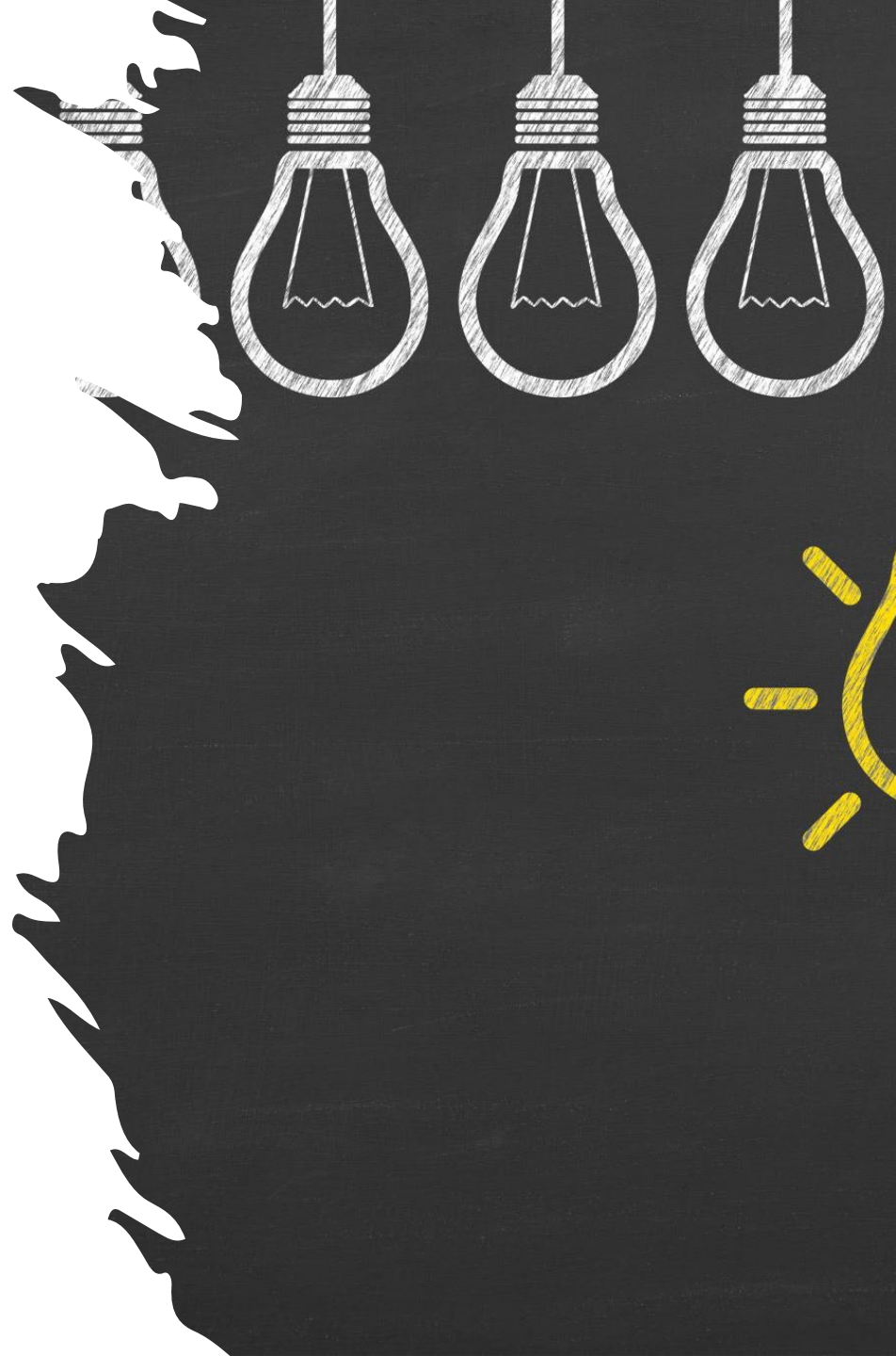
The **objectives of the evaluation** were:

- To undertake an integrative review of the Resilient Learning Communities (RLC) Enhancement Theme & 20 Years of Enhancement Themes.
- To design, test & implement a Universal Evaluation Framework (UEF) for use within QAA Scotland's RLC Theme, & beyond.
- To provide evaluation capacity-building opportunities for all involved in the RLC Enhancement Theme.



Changing Context from 2003 - 2023

- 20 years ago there was **no formal 'language' of evaluation** or body of knowledge & / or insights about the importance of outcomes & Theories of Change, to draw upon
- **Nobody talking about impact and effectiveness in 2003 &** for much of that decade
- This reporting is positioned within the proposed introduction by the Scottish Funding Council of **an overarching approach to accountability** as part of integrated & sustainable tertiary education





Evaluation Context

- Our expertise
- The Expert Reference Group (ERG) for accountability
- Evaluation ethics



Evidence Gathering

Retrospectively co-created Theory of Change

Contribution Analysis – mapping of range of evidence sources & outcomes

- 31 Themes-related reports & evaluative outputs documents analysed & gap mapping conducted
- Ratings of HE Providers' evaluation reports for evaluation design & impact assessment carried out each year for all HEI reports of present RLC theme
- 73 ELIR reports analysed
- Key contacts identified for lines of enquiry - 43 contacts identified directly
- Joint SHEEC/TLG requests for contacts - 17 contacts identified directly
- SHEEC requests for additional evidence via 19 HEP institutional leads
- Observations from attendance at TLG/TLT meets & 20 years Celebratory Events
- Final summative RLC Theme HEP reports x 19 to be analysed over the summer

Summative report at start of 23-24 Academic Year

The Journey so Far...

- Sector has **escalated use of evaluation evidence across recent Themes** & even better impact if this trajectory continues
- The Scottish sector did not have to evaluate the 20 years. **Shows desire to learn, take risks & enhance nationally** (representation of the Themes' ethos)
- We **may not get everything right** all of the time. This is ok!





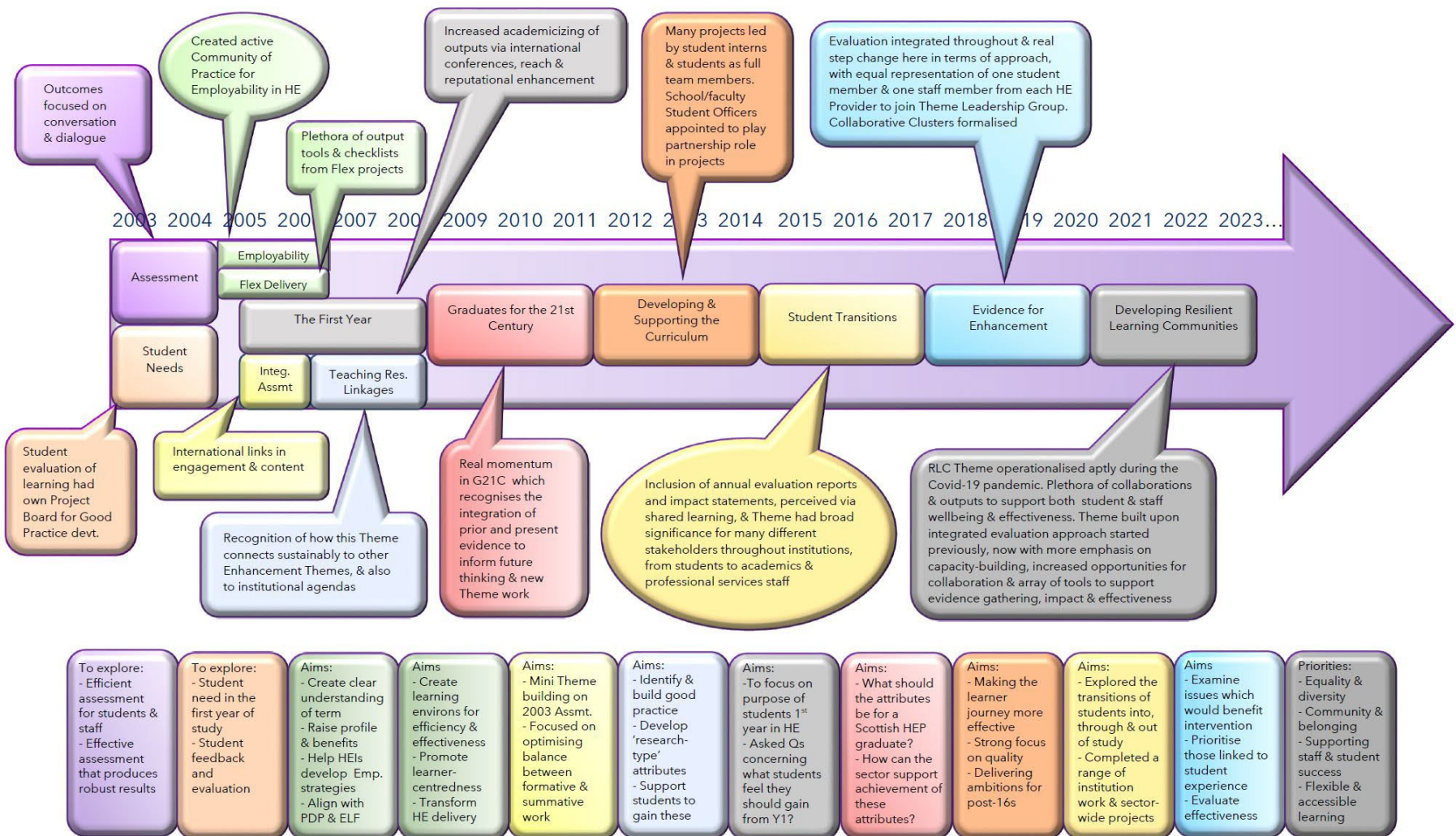
Reflections on the Journey

- Need for outcome setting & impact phrasing to be more specific.
- Recognise background challenges in recent years & the impact on data collection & on activity (both pandemic and evaluation challenges).
- Positive impact of embedding capacity building on this journey & legacy work

Time to celebrate some great things...



2003-23: Timeline of Innovations

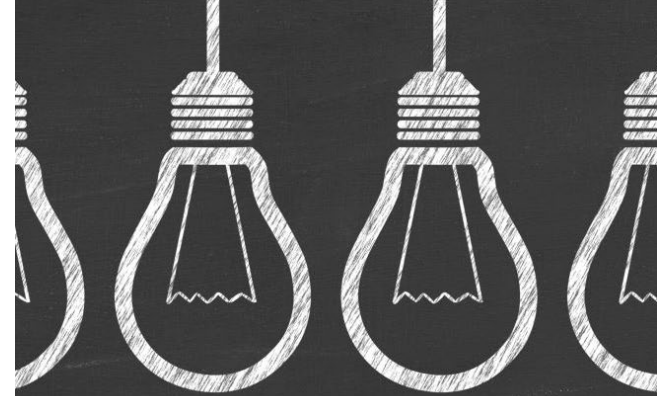


Emerging Evaluation Findings

Q Can the ETs evidence that the ownership of / & engagement in each ET by staff & students within institutions & across the Scottish sector creates an infrastructure to enable collaboration & sharing of good practice?

There is evidence of the development of awareness, understanding & Theme engagement in staff & students within institutions & across the Scottish sector. There is **particularly strong evidence of the varied systems & process which have been created to facilitate enhancement activity, & the resulting impact on collaboration & sharing of outputs.**

These contributions create the foundations for the infrastructure needed to progress widespread awareness & ownership of the enhancement agenda.





Q Can the ET evidence that collaboration & sharing across the sector leads to enhancements on behaviours for institutions, the sector, staff & students?

Emerging Evaluation Findings

There is evidence that the systems & process created for disseminating, sharing, & collaborating & the outputs generated from these activities have developed & been effective over the 20 years, such that there is an evidenced causal contribution linked to outcomes. **Collaboration & sharing can claim to be a key feature of the Scottish Enhancement Themes. Direct student involvement in Theme activity has led to changes in institutional strategies, policies & practices.** The specific impact on staff and students is most likely to be evidenced in recent Enhancement Themes, suggesting a trajectory of engagement & evaluative reflection.



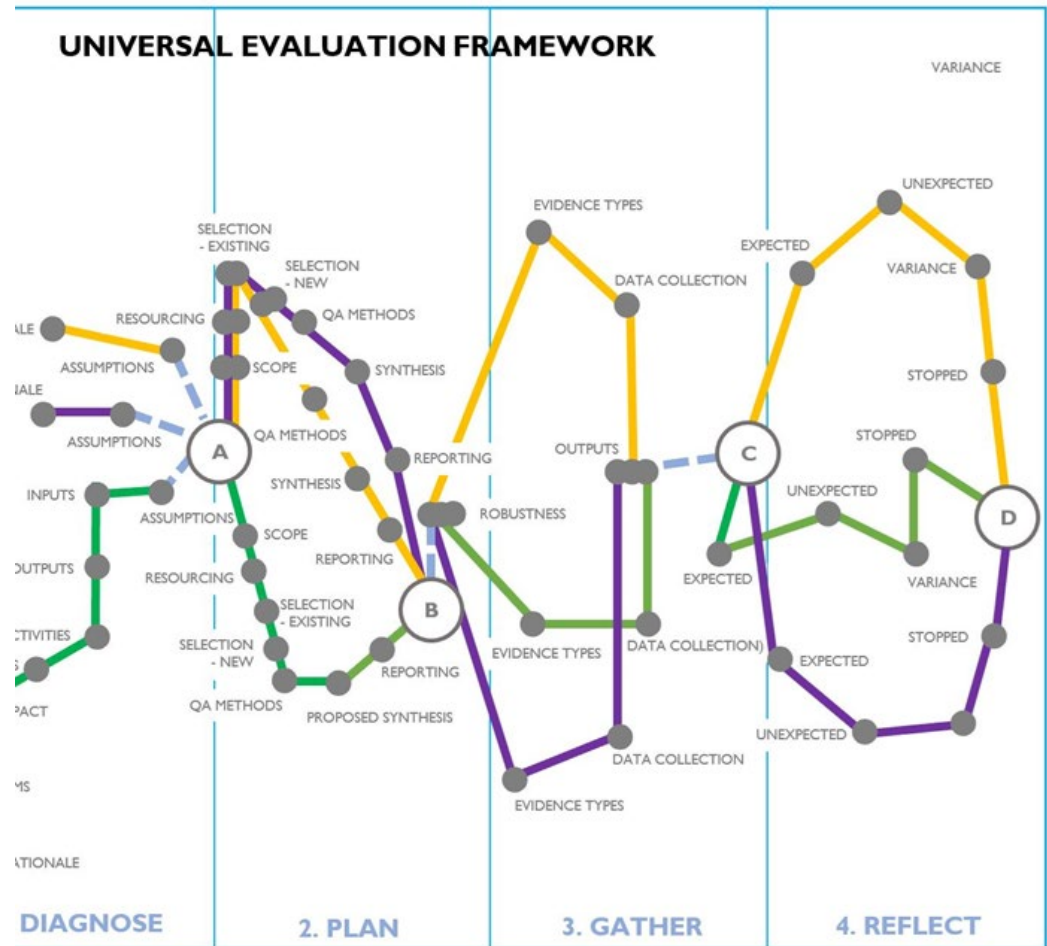
Emerging Evaluation Findings

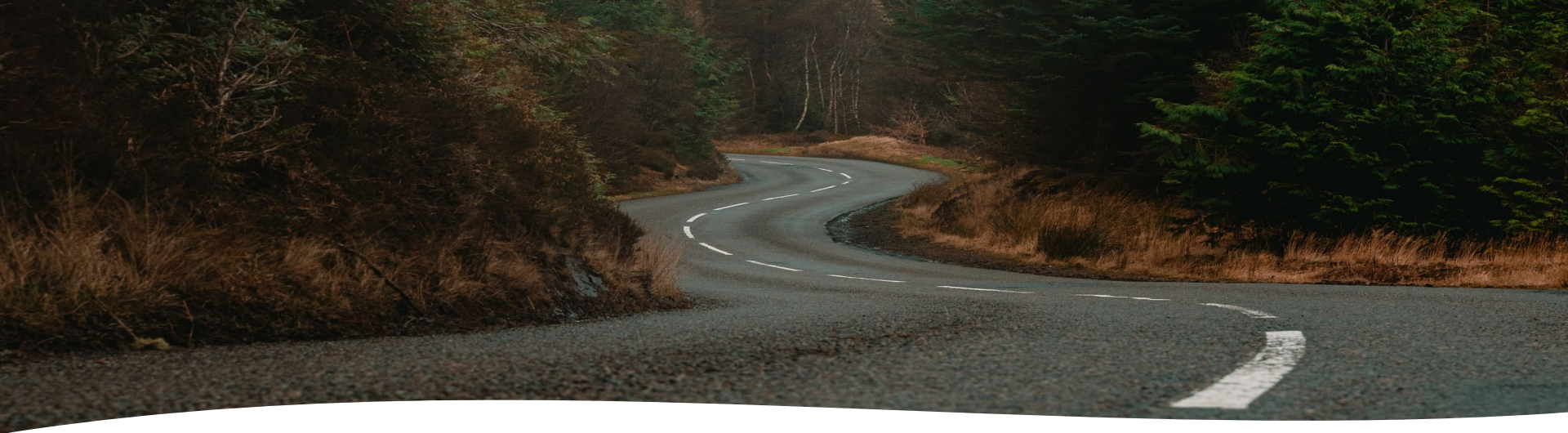
Q Can the ETs evidence that changing behaviours of institutions, the sector, staff & students leads to improved student learning experiences & outcomes?

The learning which has developed from the sharing & collaboration of ET good practice has made a significant positive contribution to institutional strategies, policies, & practices across the sector over the last 20 years. Collaboration & sharing across the Scottish sector has benefited individual institutions & provides a robust rationale for informed institutional change. The Scottish sector has also developed a reputation for enhancement which is admired & is globally influential. Collaboration across a range of spaces in ET activities evidences an impact on students & staff that have been directly involved in the ETs.

Evaluation Output: Universal Evaluation Framework

- Available for everyone
- Used for planning, evidencing & reporting
- Uses nudges & prompts at all levels of experience
- Piloted with 10 HE providers
- Big launch on **13th September 23 at Staffordshire University**
- Open access for next 2 years with individualised organisational accounts
- Find out more via QAAS Enhancement Themes' site
- 'evaluationforall' open link coming soon....





For Staff & Students

- Development of **meaningful student engagement in Theme activity**, Theme leadership & institutional strategic priorities should be continued as priority
- Sources of **expertise and advocacy should be sought out** & made accessible to Scottish staff & students.
- Develop **strategy for resource creation** & sponsored activity to ensure optimum impact.
- The ET should **encourage & support exploration of impact of innovative practice** on student experiences & outcomes.
- **Engagement in the ET has potential to benefit individuals' professional development** & can be great for engagement when balanced with institutional and sector priorities.

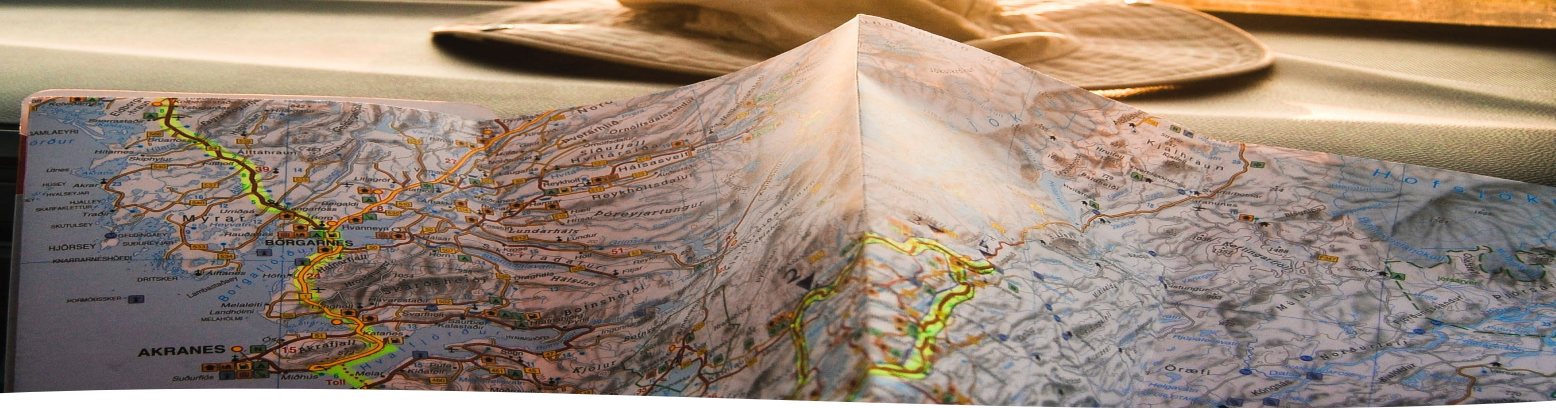
The Continuing Journey...



Continuing the Journey...

For Institutions

- Making connections between Enhancement Themes should enable sustained and continuous learning within institutions and across the sector.
- Enhancement Theme activity should be clearly promoted and integrated at all levels within institutions to enable cross institution awareness & avoid siloed engagement or pockets of activity.
- Institutions should continue to actively create a coherent infrastructure to enable the outcomes of the ET to be realised. These should be evaluated to ensure effectiveness.
- Creating dedicated systems and processes for evaluation and impact reporting are importance additions.
- Institutions should continue to encourage the engagement of staff in the ET beyond the known and active engagers to further develop institutional enhancement cultures.
- Institutional and sector level ET activity should be theorising how activities will impact on student outcomes and then measuring this theorised change against outcomes



For The Scottish Sector

- ETs should be structured so that longer term impact assessment can be conducted and reported.
- Alignment & integration of ET activity to strategy can impact on visibility of the ET. Awareness & ownership is crucial at a sector level.
- Senior leaders should agree meta evaluation processes at outset to ensure conformity regarding effectiveness at all levels.
- The ETs need to be inclusive of experiences of all institutions to ensure relevance across the Scottish Tertiary sector.
- Cross sector enhancement activity should preserve the embedded ethos of collaboration & sharing of good practice.
- Given the abundance of systems and process for engagement, collaboration & sharing, it is recommended that these structures are evaluated to ensure optimum effectiveness.
- The ET should encourage & support exploration of the impact of innovative practice on student experiences & outcomes. Collaboration & sharing across the Scottish sector has benefited individual institutions & provides a robust rationale for informed institutional change.
- The Scottish sector has developed a reputation for enhancement which is admired and is globally influential.

&
More



Our Thoughts about the Future...?

Structuring future enhancement activity for impact

- Create sector-level ToC to ensure leadership accountability at all levels
- Connect all institutional & collaborative activity to ToC intermediate & long-term outcomes & report annually
- Give sufficient time/capacity to evidencing longer-term impact
- Modelling of future work should be change based rather than activity focused. For example:
 - Y1 – Awareness & design
 - Y2 – Piloting & scoping
 - Y3 – Analyse what's working/not working?
 - Y4 – Learning & (re)focus



We have had an absolute blast so far...

In Summary

- More to complete re RLC evaluation
- Final reporting around September 23
- Lots of legacy resources generated on QAAS ET site
- UEF (Universal Evaluation Framework) launched formally on 13 September 2023 - for all





Final Words Go To....

“The enhancement themes have helped to raise the profile of people who are primarily teachers in our university. & that is fantastic.” (HEP rep)

“In my list of all the amazing things that the enhancement themes has given us, is the idea that we've been able to sense the mood of the sector & disseminate good practice among ourselves” (HEP rep)

“The Enhancement Themes lifted people’s heads up from the day job ... brought new people together & provided an accessible way to engage with new external developments ... Enhancement Themes gave us time for play, funding for collaboration outwith the perceived confines of the institution” (HEP rep)

“As I continue my journey into research and academia, I carry the motivation & confidence that the Enhancement Theme Team instilled in me – as a scaffolding to raise me higher” (Student rep)

Final Thoughts...

To take away...

- Importance of helicopter viewing & thinking
- Focus on relationship of evidencing & student outcomes
- Need to strategize outputs development

To think about?

- What to retain?
- What to lose?
- What to do differently in new Tertiary Framework?



Thank you

For listening & to all who
have given us their time,
interest & evidence over last
3 years

Contact us via scolpp@staffs.ac.uk

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