Theme Launch Event Analysis
26 October 2017

This paper shares information from the analysis of views expressed at the launch event about the detailed scope and structure of the Enhancement Theme, Evidence for Enhancement: improving the student experience.

All 19 Scottish higher education institutions and a range of sector agencies provided views on: the topics and activities the Theme should include; and what success would look like.

Key views emerging

There was considerable support for the Theme to include topics around the three main strands previously identified:

  i. optimising existing evidence
  ii. student engagement
  iii. student demographics, retention and attainment

In addition, 15 institutions expressed interest in collaborating around learning/learner analytics. This could be incorporated within the main Theme strands and the Theme Leadership Team[1], in the first instance, will consider how this might be achieved.

Sector and institutional priorities:

Delegates identified institutional and sector priorities for the Theme. Five common priority areas were identified:

- approaches to evidence
- understanding evidence
- evidence skills and engagement
- student focus
- specific outcome measures (such as retention)

A detailed breakdown of these is provided in Appendix 1.

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[1] The Theme Leadership Team is: Professor Karl Leydecker (Dundee), Dr Martha Caddell (Edinburgh Napier), Professor Nicky Andrew (Glasgow Caledonian), Dr Ailsa Crum (QAA Scotland) and a student member (to be confirmed)

Theme support and activities:

There was substantial alignment in the areas where institutions requested support or other Theme activities:

- understanding the nature of evidence relative to the student experience and using evidence effectively
- learning from practice elsewhere (other institutions and/or outside Scotland)
- evaluating the Theme and Theme activities
- specific measures and measuring performance of different student groups/characteristics
- joint learning/sharing opportunities such as workshops, webinars and other events/activities.

Collaboration:

Institutions expressed a desire to collaborate in three main areas: student centred activity, understanding data/data methodologies and learner/learning analytics. These are, or can be, aligned closely with the three main Theme strands.

Expressions of interest in collaborative clusters were identified across a range of topics such as: employability; sense of community and dispersed HEIs/rural learning; online learning; creative industries; widening access; impact of student services; and graduate apprenticeships. While these are all important topics, it is unlikely they can all be resourced as part of the Theme in the first year. Further information on selecting and progressing collaborative cluster proposals will be provided in November.

What success will look like:

Evidence and activities that will signify success can be split into four broad areas:

- understanding and using evidence relative to student experience
- collaboration and sharing
- student-focused matters
- wider context, for example the political environment and other key sector initiatives.

What happens next?

Institutions are asked to continue developing their plans for the Theme – due for submission on **22 November**. The first meeting of the Theme Leaders' Group will take place on **7 December**. The Theme Leaders' Group provides the opportunity for one staff and one student member of each institutional team to meet and agree the sector-level programme of work.

Before then, the Theme Leadership Team, with QAA Scotland, is working to:

- develop a draft programme of work across the three Theme strands
- agree a framework for managing and selecting cluster bids
- develop the approach to evaluating the Theme
- establish the agenda for the first Theme Leaders' group meeting.

Theme strands

Institutions identified their **current and planned activities** which can be summarised around the three Theme strands as follows:

Optimising existing evidence

- manipulating evidence/looking at evidence in different ways, using data/data tools effectively/consistently, benchmarking against sector data, contextualising data, creating new data, mapping data, creating frameworks to help manage data
- mechanisms in place to respond to data/communication and dissemination
- specific data tools/systems (dashboards, warehousing) – Tableau, MyJourney
- learning analytics, graduate apprenticeships
- specific data measures/data sets: Teaching Enhancement Framework (TEF), National Student Survey (NSS), honours classification profiles
- reviewing processes such as subject review, annual monitoring in relation to data use.

Student demographics and success

- data processes – manipulating existing data, triangulation, linking existing data, integrating data
- data tools/dashboards
- learning analytics
- outcome measures and indicators; NSS, Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE), retention/success, gender, subject and student group differentials, mature learners, parents, carers, ethnicity
- impact of support services intervention on student outcomes, learning gain
- using data to respond to the needs and expectations of different student groups
- equality work, protected characteristics (for example, Athena SWAN)
- specific institutional initiatives/work – Go Global/Global Graduate 2023, integrated Course Portfolio Analysis, Learner Experience Framework, Strathclyde Online, Student Enhancement Action Plan, MyJourney Quality/Sustainability Grids, lecture recording evaluation, graduate apprenticeships.

Student engagement

- understanding how students use evidence
- communication with students linked to optimising evidence – visual treatment
- student involvement in decision making and planning change/practice, co-creation
- closing feedback loops, Student Partnership Agreements, student charters
- learning analytics (learning infrastructure analytics – Library, Moodle, other services), personalised learning, NSS
- specific student groups, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research and data slices gender, disability
- student belonging, community
- student representation structures, local and global
- student interns
- specific initiatives – Student Experience Action Plan, Open Learning Champions, student-led group taking an evidence based approach on student experience, tracking Cognos users.

Sector level enhancement of practice

Six areas were identified by institutions where the sector as a whole could enhance its practice or where activities could be more effective at sector level rather than being managed by each institution individually:

- understanding what data is, why it is collected, sharing data, benchmarking against typical sector data, for example Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO), dashboard development, appropriate response to data, non-traditional performance indicators, emerging expectations
- colleagues' preparedness for evidence-based enhancement including staff development and deriving impact from data
- data on student disengagement and understanding complex reasons for poor outcomes including withdrawal
- better measures of employability, placement and deprivation (better measure than Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) for rural areas)
- sector providing evidence for the impact of widening access and employability at national/regional levels
- engaging and support for Transnational Education (TNE) students, online/distance learners, taught postgraduates.

Activities/support institutions requested at sector level

Institutions wanted to see activity or support offered at sector level in eight areas:

- improving stakeholder skill in understanding and using data
- SFC to provide leadership in analysis and presentation of sector-level data
- learning from what is happening elsewhere in: learning analytics, use of key performance indicators, practice in using/reporting data for example, in USA, Australia and the TEF in England
- guidance about how to engage the wider student body (other than student reps) in the Theme and shape it in an accessible/simple manner
- online and distance learners and staff, including developing effective personal tutoring and advising for changing student demographics
- NSS and module survey data integrated into quality monitoring processes
- common evaluation for all Enhancement Theme projects
- more events like today (the launch event), workshops, webinars, joint learning/sharing opportunities, meetings accessible by video conference.

Topics for collaborative clusters

Topics for potential collaborative clusters were identified as follows:

- employability including DLHE and LEO (Abertay, Edinburgh Napier, Glasgow, Strathclyde)
- sense of community, dispersed Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and rural learning (UHI, Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt, SRUC, OUiS)
- online learners/learning (OUiS, Glasgow, Heriot-Watt, Strathclyde)
- creative industries (GSA, Dundee, RCS)
- widening access (Edinburgh Napier, SFC, UWS)
- impact of student services, mental health, student resilience, training and support, using data for intervention (GCU, Glasgow)
- graduate apprenticeships (Dundee, Strathclyde, SRUC).

In addition to these, institutions expressed interest in collaborating around three areas which are very likely to form part of the three main strands of the Theme:

- **Student voice, partnership, student representation, students and decision making** identified by **nine** institutions

- **Understanding data, data principles, evidence in decision making and data methodologies and approaches** identified by **six** institutions

- **Learning/learner analytics** identified by **nine** institutions as potential collaborative cluster work with a further **six** institutions expressing interest in learning analytics.

What Theme success looks like

Colleagues identified activities and evidence or outcomes that will demonstrate improvement in the student experience and student success. These are summarised here.

Understanding and using evidence relating to the student experience:

1. **Defining and understanding a good student experience and defining and understanding the (nature of) evidence** – having a shared understanding/definition of 'a good student experience'. Having a shared understanding of different forms of evidence, its meaning and context. Knowing what evidence to look at.
2. **Establishing a baseline of current data and learning from others** – auditing what evidence is currently collected in the Scottish sector and for what purpose. Learning from others within the UK and elsewhere. What is different and what is similar?
3. **Data presentation/visualisation** – presenting evidence in an accessible way to enhance its effectiveness.
4. **Data ethics and governance** – working with evidence in a way that is ethical, adheres to legislation and is well governed. Particularly important around learning analytics. A shared or common strategy might be established.
5. **Evidence approaches (general and specific)** – using evidence in an effective way (collecting, manipulating, presenting). Using quantitative and qualitative data appropriate to context.
6. **Stakeholder training and development** – staff and students confident in using and presenting evidence and using evidence to drive change. Upskilling, training and development activities are required including on data ethics, law and governance.
7. **Sector ambitions** – identify the Scottish approach to evidence-based enhancement as sector-leading.

Student engagement and student-focus:

8. **Engaging students with the Theme** – ensuring the Theme engages students in an accessible way.
9. **Impact on students** – focusing activity in a personalised way across the student body through a partnership approach and where it is most needed.
10. **Specific student groups** – using evidence effectively focused on different student groups/characteristics.
11. **Learning analytics** – personalising the student experience (learning and support) in an ethical way. Establishing a Scottish group to facilitate implementation of the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) project.

Collaboration and sharing:

12. **Collaborative working intra-institution** – sharing information and communicating effectively with all stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of evidence use.

13. **Cross sector collaboration** – extending an ethos of sharing information and communicating effectively across the sector.

Wider context:

14. **Culture change** – the evidence approach emphasises enhancement and not monitoring.
15. **Evaluating the Theme** – establishing a framework for measuring the impact of Theme activity.
16. **External influences** – recognising the importance of external factors within the sector (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Data Futures) and politically (Brexit).

Sector and institutional priorities for the Theme

Notes on table: (darker shading – blue, is sector priority, lighter shading - grey, is institution priority, as identified by institutions).

Approaches to evidence	Understanding evidence	Evidence skills and engagement	Student Focus	Specific outcome measures
Gather the right set of data to be able to evaluate and enhance the student experience. What data highlights the issues? **Edinburgh**	Understanding sector level data generally and specifically retention data. **Dundee**	Impact of staff as change agents. **RGU**	Student partnership voice; effectively engaging students as partners. **RGU**	Understanding sector level data generally and specifically retention data. **Dundee**
Use of meaningful data when needed. **Napier**	Understanding and contextualising data. **Abertay**	Support development of data skills. **Edinburgh**	Authentic student voice. **SRUC**	To improve our graduates' outcomes eg retention, attainment. **Abertay**
Effective methodologies. **GCU**	What data are we collecting? Why are we collecting it? How can we be confident that it is of high quality? **QMU**	Fear and trust in data (knowing what to do with it and how to use it); empowerment in evidence use. **Napier**	Student voice. **Dundee**	Progression and achievement. **SRUC**
Visual communication. Changing our enhancement language to better suit our community. **GSA**	Meaningful data for creative institutions. **RCS, GSA**	Programme engagement with data. **RCS**	Student centred learner analytics solution that promotes global equity. Full time and distance learning student data and student representative structures. **HWU**	Enhance our accessibility and flexibility (openness) whilst improving retention and positive student outcomes. **OUiS**
Common evaluation framework for projects. **UHI**	Having meaningful HEI data. **Strathclyde**	Good community involvement – students and staff. **StAndrews** Playing to existing strengths. **Organisations**	Learning analytics. **UHI**	Retention and success. **UWS**
Principles in using data. **Stirling** Use data more effectively. **Stirling**	Consistent department engagement and reflection with the data sets for enhancement linked to ILR. Enabling course leaders to engage/understand data. **Strathclyde**		Learning analytics. **Stirling**	Improving progression and success. **Glasgow**
Common method for gathering evidence to demonstrate/evidence teaching quality. **StAndrews**			Learning analytics. **UWS**	LEO data. DLHE at sector and HEI level. **Dundee**
Coherent, ethical data. **UWS**			Focus on human story of student experience. **OUi**	Evaluate UHI's ability to add value/learning gain. **UHI** Contextualised admissions and their relationship to attainment. **GCU**
Sharing good practice in using, analysing, presenting data. **Aberdeen**			What and why of data quality – what do students really want and what will help them? **QMU**	Impact of student support services (particularly mental health). **GCU**
Evidence based approaches (to student mental health). **Glasgow**			Scotland-wide approach to student belonging/community. **Organisations**	
What benchmarking might be possible (including by different demographics) – **Dundee**			Closing the feedback loop between staff and students. **Aberdeen**	
More segmented data, different demographics, impact of actions. **GCU**				
Predictive methodology for future success. **SRUC**				
Transparency of data use. **OUiS**				

Brief background on the launch event and this analysis

The Theme launch event attracted 110 delegates from 19 Scottish higher education institutions and partner organisations (HEA, NUS Scotland, Scottish Government, SFC, sparqs).

Delegates took part in two group discussion activities using dialogue sheets. The first activity was aimed at supporting institutions in their thinking and planning around Theme activities and developing institutional plans.

Dialogue sheet 1 questions were:

- Question 1: What Theme-related work are you currently doing in your HEI? And where does that best fit with the three Theme strands? Please highlight practice you would be willing to share.

- Question 2: What Theme-related work are you planning? And how do those plans best fit the Theme strands? Please highlight topics or practices you would like to develop.

- Question 3: Are there areas where the sector as a whole could enhance its practice? Or where activities could be more effective at sector level rather than managed by each HEI individually?

- Question 4: What kinds of activity or support would you like to see offered at sector level? For example, commissioning studies, learning from other countries, developing skills, events and workshops, webinars?

- Question 5: Would you like to progress work as part of a collaborative cluster? If so, which topics would that work involve and what would it seek to achieve? Which HEIs would you particularly like to collaborate with? And are you willing to lead or contribute to a collaborative cluster to develop policy and practice?

- Question 6: Please highlight your top priority for this Theme from an HEI and a sector perspective.

The second activity split delegates into seven functional groups and was aimed at identifying what success in the Theme would look like and what actions would be needed to get there. A series of question prompts supported delegates in this task.

Analysing the feedback received

NVivo software was used to support qualitative analysis of the text on the dialogue sheets, helping group similar text.

Feedback from the event plenary sessions was also used to inform this report.