



## 20 Years of the Enhancement Themes: An Evaluation of Impact

October 2020

### Summary

1 The Quality Assurance Agency invites expressions of interest for the provision of an evaluation of the Enhancement Themes, one of the five elements of the [Quality Enhancement Framework](#).

2 The evaluation project will run for the duration of the current Theme - Resilient Learning Communities - which started in August 2020 and will finish at the end of July 2023. The evaluation should include within its scope, the impact of the current and all previous Enhancement Themes and related activity. The completion of the project will coincide with the Scottish sector celebrating 20 years of Enhancement Theme activity.

3 QAA Scotland is looking for an individual/group to evaluate the current, and previous, Themes. This is likely to include developing a model/framework/approach that may be formed from existing approaches and practice used in evaluation and impact studies/research. The evaluation and the approach should be informed by the wide array of evaluations that have been conducted of previous Enhancement Theme activity in the Scottish sector.

4 We want the evaluation to focus on identifying the impact of the Theme activity on the student experience so that, at the end of the Theme, it is possible to identify the ways in which the student experience has been improved, as well as the enhancements to policy and practice.

5 This document provides information on the Quality Assurance Agency and sets out its requirements for the evaluation work. The document is in five sections:

- **Section 1:** provides information about the Quality Assurance Agency
- **Section 2:** summarises the background of the Resilient Learning Communities Enhancement Theme and its context in Scottish higher education
- **Section 3:** provides the contract specification
- **Section 4:** details the instructions for the submission of the expression of interest
- **Section 5:** sets out the information required from the applicant.

6 This document is designed to ensure that all expressions of interest are given equal and fair consideration. It is important, therefore, that you provide all the information requested in the format and order specified in Section 5 (paragraph 41).

## Section 1: The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

7 The Quality Assurance Agency is an independent, not-for-profit organisation. QAA works across all four nations of the UK to protect the standards and improve the quality of higher education. QAA tailors the way it works across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in order to meet the needs of each nation. This approach is essential because each nation has devolved responsibility for education, different higher education sectors and differing funding and policy contexts. QAA also uses its expertise to support the development of quality assurance systems worldwide.

8 The purpose of QAA is to safeguard academic standards and ensure the quality and global reputation of UK higher education. QAA fulfils its purpose by working with higher education providers, regulatory bodies and student bodies with the shared objective in supporting students to succeed. Further information is available in QAA's current [strategy document](#).

9 Information on QAA's range of activity can be found through QAA's [web pages](#).

## Section 2: Scottish higher education and the national Enhancement Themes programme

10 The Scottish higher education sector takes a unique approach to assuring quality and enhancing higher education. To best meet the needs of students and providers in Scotland, QAA has a dedicated team - QAA Scotland - who ensure that the approach meets both Scotland's distinctive needs and delivers UK-wide comparability.

11 QAA Scotland's work is enhancement-led, in line with the [Quality Enhancement Framework \(QEF\)](#) which has been in place since 2003 and continues to develop under the guidance of the Quality Arrangements in Scottish Higher Education (QASHE) group. QASHE membership includes the Scottish Government and all key partners to the QEF: Universities Scotland, the National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland, Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs), the Scottish Funding Council and QAA Scotland.

12 Our work covers a broad range of review and enhancement activity aimed at inspiring excellence and promoting a high-quality student experience. A strong feature of QAA Scotland's work is partnership. We work closely with staff and students throughout the higher education sector.

13 Engaging with students is integral to what we do. Our review method - [Enhancement-Led Institutional Review \(ELIR\)](#) includes a full student member on every review team. Students are also represented on all our working groups and committees. We work closely with NUS Scotland and sparqs.

14 We aim to ensure that our work is informed by international perspectives and contributions, including developments in the Bologna Process and across the European Higher Education Area. We deliver many events in person and online including, periodically, a significant international conference, and many one-day or half-day events, symposia and conferences. We commission work that seeks to learn from the best of national and international practice and regularly receive visitors from universities and quality assurance agencies from around the world.

15 Our national programme of Enhancement Themes encourages academic staff, professional services staff and students to share current good practice and collectively generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching. The Themes are part of

Scotland's commitment to excellence in higher education and to providing an outstanding student learning experience. The following Enhancement Themes have been completed:

- Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience (2017-20) (completion end of October 2020)
- Student Transitions (2014-17)
- Developing and Supporting the Curriculum (2011-14)
- Graduates for the 21st Century: Integrating the Enhancement Themes (2008-11)
- Research-Teaching Linkages (2006-08)
- The First Year (2005-08)
- Integrative Assessment (2005-06)
- Flexible Delivery (2004-06)
- Employability (2004-06)
- Responding to Student Needs (2003-04)
- Assessment (2003-04).

Details of all Enhancement Themes, their work and the resources associated with them can be found on the [Enhancement Themes website](#).

16 The following provides further background material on Enhancement Theme activity:

- the 2014 [Evaluation of the Enhancement Themes](#) (an independent research piece evaluating the impact of the Enhancement Themes)
- the 2019 [Trends in Leadership of Quality Enhancement in the Scottish University Sector](#) (an independent research piece commissioned by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC))
- [Evidence for Enhancement 2017-20](#) (short video)
- [resources supporting evaluation](#) of impact for the Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience Enhancement Theme
- the Student Transitions reports on [overall and year 2 evaluation](#)

17 [Resilient Learning Communities](#) is the current Enhancement Theme, running for three academic years from August 2020. This is a timely Theme exploring the changing needs and values of an increasingly diverse student community, and a rapidly changing external environment. The key questions informing the Theme work are:

- What will our learning communities look like by 2023? And how can we prepare for the learning communities of the future?
- Who are our students and how will they want to learn? How will we gain a clear understanding of the nature and learning needs of our current and likely future student population? What granular information do we need to enable us to support their learning better?
- How can we capitalise as a sector on the attributes students bring into their learning?
- How do we ensure we are able to support our diverse learning communities? What might this mean for our staff and our infrastructure?
- How should we anticipate, influence and respond to the changing external environment? How can we engage with our stakeholders and ensure we are influencing strategy and policy both in Scotland and beyond?

18 During the Theme, each of the 19 Scottish higher education institutions takes forward a plan of work that both supports and informs the work of the Theme.

19 The Enhancement Theme work is managed by QAA Scotland, working with the Theme Leaders' Group (TLG), which comprises staff and student members from each higher education institution, in addition to observers from our partner organisations. This Group is chaired by Professor Clare Peddie, University of St Andrews, who is the Theme Leader. She is supported by a Theme Deputy, Professor Ruth Taylor from the University of Aberdeen and also Mr Alex Hedlund, Student Leader (session 2020-21) and together they comprise the Theme Leadership Team.

20 The Theme Leaders' Group is central to delivering the Enhancement Theme. TLG staff representatives usually also coordinate their institution's work on the Theme, through an institutional team. In addition, representatives of key stakeholder organisations and agencies have observer status on TLG: the Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland, Advance HE and sparqs. QAA Scotland officers participate in TLG meetings as part of their role in managing the delivery of the Theme.

### **Section 3: Contract specification**

21 QAA Scotland is looking for an individual/group to evaluate the current and previous Themes. This is likely to include developing a model/framework/approach that may be formed from existing approaches and practice used in evaluation and impact studies/research. The evaluation and the approach should be informed by the wide array of evaluations that have been conducted of previous Enhancement Theme activity in the Scottish sector.

22 We want the evaluation to focus on identifying the impact of the Theme activity on the student experience so that, at the end of the Theme, it is possible to identify the ways in which the student experience has been improved, as well as the enhancements to policy and practice. We expect the approach to incorporate qualitative and quantitative evidence. The approach needs to inform the work of the Theme in a longitudinal way so that we can share learning from the activities on an ongoing basis. The approach needs to be developed in consultation with the sector.

23 We are seeking an individual/group to take forward the work outlined above. You must be able to provide strong evidence of the following:

- the ability to develop a thorough understanding of the work for which you are tendering, which includes the enhancement approach in Scottish higher education, the operation of the Enhancement Themes, and partnership with stakeholders
- a proven record of: analysing and distilling complex information; independent work; and excellent organisational skills
- the ability to produce high quality work to budget
- demonstrated expertise in research methods including qualitative and quantitative techniques
- demonstrated expertise in evaluation and measuring change and impact
- substantial experience of writing up results and presenting these effectively in a range of ways to different audiences

- the ability to engage with key stakeholders across the Scottish higher education sector to ensure the final outputs reflect the depth and breadth of the Enhancement Theme impact
- the ability to take part in regular meetings with QAA Scotland officers to inform staff of progress, and participate in other meetings, such as TLG, as deemed necessary
- a good, current knowledge of the Scottish higher education sector, along with the capability to engage with it through meetings and events.

Potential applicants should note that travel and subsistence is included within the fee for this work.

## **Key aims**

24 The key aims are to:

- develop or adapt a framework/approach/model, in consultation with the sector, that will measure the impact of the current, and previous, Themes on the student experience and which is capable of capturing activity within institutions as well as at sector level
- use the framework to measure and report on the impact of the Theme and related activity
- use the framework to measure impact on a longitudinal basis so that learning from activities can be shared on an ongoing basis
- identify how the framework could be used or modified to measure the impact of future Enhancement Themes.

## **Methodology**

25 While it is the responsibility of the individual/group to fully describe their proposed methodology within their submission document, it is expected that the work will include:

- undertaking desk-based research and analysis of existing publicly available documents and institutional plans/reports produced in support of the Theme, to better understand the key aims of this commissioned work
- developing a robust framework/model/approach for measuring impact of the Theme on the student experience using a range of qualitative and quantitative metrics; this framework should be sustainable and able to be customised in future years
- engaging with a cross section of staff and students from across the 19 Scottish institutions, and QAA Scotland partner organisations, to ensure the approach is developed in partnership with key stakeholders
- preparation of progress reports to keep the sector informed of ongoing learning and present key findings in an engaging manner
- presenting work at appropriate QAA conferences and events
- developing evidence-based recommendations to enhance the work of the Enhancement Themes and inform thinking on the next Theme

- attending meetings including with QAA Scotland staff and meetings of key sector groups, as required.

26 The work will be managed by QAA Scotland staff, supported by the TLG. Clare Parks ([c.parks@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:c.parks@qaa.ac.uk)) will be the main point of contact.

27 Reports on progress of work activities must be provided for Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee and TLG meetings, which the author(s) may be required to attend.

28 QAA Scotland will provide further guidance and support to the appointed individual/group.

### **Fees/budget**

29 The fee for this work will be up to £100,000 which is inclusive of any VAT, travel and subsistence. This fee will be paid in instalments upon satisfactory progress in delivering the work. Applicants will be expected to provide a proposed total cost for their proposed project work, as well as a detailed cost breakdown over the three years of the evaluation.

### **Section 4: Instructions for submission of the expression of interest**

30 Please do contact Clare Parks if you require further information. Contact details are:

Dr Clare Parks  
email: [c.parks@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:c.parks@qaa.ac.uk)  
Tel: 0141 5723447

### **Timetable and administration arrangements**

31 Initial timescales are outlined in the following table:

| <b>Activity</b>  | <b>Timescale</b>  |
|--|---|
| Publication of the call for expressions of interest  | Week commencing 12 October 2020   |
| Return of expressions of interest  | 30 November 2020 by 17.00 GMT   |
| Applications reviewed  | By 7 December 2020  |
| Interviews with applicants (TBA)   | Week commencing 14 December 2020*   |
| Expected date of award   | Prior to 18 December 2020   |
| First meeting between selected individual/group and QAAS to discuss the project; agree broad timescales for key project deadlines and deliverables | January 2021 (date TBC)   |
| Receive signed contract from chosen individual/group   | By end February 2021  |
| Submission of an end of year report on the project work  | Prior to 31 July 2021 (date to be agreed along with dates for interim reporting/other deliverables) |

\*This will depend on availability and may affect the forward schedule of dates.

32 Key deadline dates will be incorporated into the contract once the methodology has been presented by the individual/group and discussed with QAA Scotland and the Theme Leadership Team.

### **Evaluation criteria**

33 The expressions of interest will be evaluated fairly to ascertain which represents the best value for money in terms of the criteria.

34 Your response to our requirements will be evaluated under the following headings:

- evidence of your capability, skills, capacity and experience to deliver the requirements of the work
- how you will deliver the work within agreed parameters of quality, budget and timescales
- evidence of your understanding of our business
- how you will ensure value for money
- how you will ensure depth and breadth in stakeholder engagement across the sector.

(Please note that the order in which the criteria are listed does not imply relative importance.)

### **Administration arrangements**

35 Submission of expressions of interest - the expression of interest should be submitted by email to [ARCAAdmin@gaa.ac.uk](mailto:ARCAAdmin@gaa.ac.uk) by 17.00 GMT on 30 November 2020.

36 Receipt of expressions of interest - expressions of interest will be received up to the time and date stated. QAA Scotland does not undertake to consider any expressions of interest received after that time.

37 Acceptance of expressions of interest - by issuing this invitation QAA is not bound in any way and does not have to accept the lowest, or any expression of interest.

38 Confidentiality - all information supplied by QAA to you must be treated in confidence and not disclosed to third parties except insofar as this is necessary to obtain sureties or quotations for the purpose of submitting the expression of interest. All information supplied by you to QAA will similarly be treated in confidence except that references may be sought from banks, existing or past clients, or other referees submitted by the proposer.

39 Please respond to the requirements within this document fully and as concisely as possible. All expressions of interest should be made using the appropriate order and format specified in paragraph 41. Expressions of interest received which are not within this order and format are likely to be rejected.

40 QAA will not reimburse any costs of preparing any expression of interest.

## Section 5: Information required from applicants

41 It is important that you provide all the information requested below. Please provide it in the order and format indicated.

- Part 1: Information about you/your organisation
- Part 2: Details of the service and details of the individual/group who would be working on the project
- Part 3: Breakdown of prices and rates
- Part 4: Quality monitoring
- Part 5: Additional information

The application form can be found at the end of this document. Please complete the Word version which is available separately. Expressions of interest submitted in any other format are unlikely to be considered.



# Application form



## Evaluation of the Resilient Learning Communities and 20 Years of Enhancement Themes

We will also accept expressions of interest solely for one of the two different project strands. Please make it clear whether you are bidding for both elements or just one of the elements - evaluation of Resilient Learning Communities or evaluation of the entirety of Enhancement Theme activity.

### Part 1: Details about you/your organisation

| Main contact and leader                  |            |         |
|--|------------|---------|
| Title                                    | First name | Surname |
|  |            |         |
| Post                                     |            |         |
| Institution/organisation (if applicable) |            |         |
| Address                                  |            |         |
| Telephone                                |            |         |
| Email                                    |            |         |

Please include here information about your organisation including number of staff, management structure, a description of the nature of the work carried out by your organisation, and any other information which may be of assistance in considering your expression of interest.

Please also indicate any European or British quality standards achieved or being sought.

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## Part 2: Details about the service and the individual/group who would be working on the contract

- 1 Give details of the resources you expect to use to service the contract, including the number of staff you expect to use for providing the service.
- 2 Indicate in each case whether you expect staff to be drawn from within your organisation, be newly recruited or sub-contracted.
- 3 Please enter the names, position held by, and experience of, key staff involved in the contract. (If applicable, copy the staff details table below for each person.)

### Resource details

|                  |
|------------------|
| Resource details |
|                  |

### Staff details

| Title                             | First name | Surname |
|-----------------------------------|------------|---------|
|                                   |            |         |
| Post                              |            |         |
| Institution (if applicable)       |            |         |
| Experience                        |            |         |
| Newly recruited or sub-contracted |            |         |

Please provide evidence of your expertise in/examples of:

- the areas of work:
  - evaluation/evaluation of impact
  - research methods (qualitative/quantitative)
- undertaking this type of work: developing evaluation models/approaches
- ensuring delivery of completed project work to deadlines.

**Maximum of 500 words per question**

Demonstrate your knowledge and expertise in the areas of work by providing a short outline of your background and interest in these areas.

|  |
|--|
| Demonstrate your knowledge and expertise in the areas of work by providing a short outline of your background and interest in these areas. |
|  |

Demonstrate your expertise in evaluation approaches and reporting of findings.

In addition, please include three example texts that you have already produced to publishable standard (hyperlinks are preferable).

Provide evidence of having successfully run project work to required deadlines.

### Part 3: Breakdown of prices and rates

Insert here your breakdown of prices and rates (pounds sterling). This should include an overall cost for the contract and specific details of costs, for each year, for:

- professional services
- administration
- travel and subsistence\*
- meetings

\*Arrangements must comply with government COVID-19 requirements

### Part 4: Quality monitoring

Set out your proposals for the monitoring and reporting on the quality of the services delivered including the performance checks you will carry out, their frequency and scope, and who will perform them.

Note: your quality monitoring will not itself form part of the contract, but any elements within it which the parties agree to be essential to the delivery of the service will be incorporated within the contract specification and form part of any contract resulting from your expression of interest.

## Part 5: Additional information

Set out any additional information you think would be helpful in support of your proposal, including any additional facilities not included in the specification that you could or will offer that will add value to the service that you will provide.

To apply, please complete the Word version of this form and email it to [ARAdmin@gaa.ac.uk](mailto:ARAdmin@gaa.ac.uk) using the subject line:

**Enhancement Theme Evaluation Project - Expression of Interest.**

Please return this form no later than **17.00 GMT** on **30 November 2020**.