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Evaluation of Year 2 of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Background

The Quality Assurance Agency Enhancement Themes identify specific development areas to enhance the student learning experience in Scottish higher education. A team at the University of Dundee was commissioned to evaluate the second year of the Student Transitions Theme. This evaluation work had three key research questions:

- 1 How do stakeholders perceive the impact of the Student Transitions work in Year 2?
- 2 What are the barriers or facilitators to the successful development of projects?
- 3 What are the priorities moving into the final year of the Theme?

Study Design

Data were collected during two overlapping Phases. In Phase 1, 30 participants, who had national or institutional leadership roles associated with the current Enhancement Theme took part in semi-structured telephone interviews. In Phase 2, 43 online questionnaires were completed by individuals nominated by institutional representatives. Across both phases, professional/support/academic staff and student representatives from all 19 Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs) participated. Thematic framework analysis and descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data.

Results

Seven overarching areas were developed:

- Definitions of transitions
- Staff engagement
- Student engagement
- Impact
- Enabler
- Challenges, and
- Year 3 priorities.

Participants felt Student Transitions work was fundamental for HEIs and were invested in the activities. Although the activities conducted across the sector were diverse, participants felt that the work on the Theme had broadly enhanced awareness of, reflection on, and engagement with transition issues. However, participants identified that capturing direct impact was challenging at this stage and proposed that the significance of the work may take several years to evidence.

Broadly, participants reported that the sector was a supportive and collaborative community where ideas and resources for the Student Transitions work had been openly shared. Participants identified a number of challenges to advancing Enhancement Theme activities, such as limited time and other important agendas, such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) competing for confined resources. Institutions were seen to play an important role in advancing the Theme work, providing structure for the work as well as further resources to support the projects.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Overall, the findings highlight the complexity of integrating the Theme within institutions and across the sector more broadly. The evaluation report highlights six key recommendations for Year 3 and beyond:

- 1 Emphasise identifying impact as a priority for Year 3
- 2 Integrate the Theme into other agendas such as TEF
- 3 Expand pockets of activity in a sustainable and collaborative way
- 4 Enhance student involvement through the identification of areas of good practice
- 5 Enhance collaboration by developing clear definitions of collaboration and specific outcomes to target in Year 3
- 6 Consider how to integrate this Theme (which was considered very relevant and successful) into the next Theme.

Report

1 Background

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Enhancement Themes aim to enhance the student learning experience in Scottish higher education by identifying specific areas (Themes) for development. The Themes encourage staff and students to share current good practice and collectively generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching. The work of the Enhancement Themes is planned and directed by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC).

The current Enhancement Theme is Student Transitions running from summer 2014 for three academic years to summer 2017. The work is managed by QAA Scotland working with the Theme Leaders Group (TLG), which comprises members from each higher education institution plus student members. To support the work of the Theme QAA commissioned a team from the University of Dundee to undertake an evaluation of its second year.

1.1 Evaluation aims and questions

The aim of this evaluation was to explore work that has been achieved in Year 2 of the Theme and perceptions of how these activities are impacting on the student experience of transition. In addition, this evaluation aimed to identify areas of focus for the final year of the Theme.

The evaluation focused on the following questions:

- 1 How do stakeholders perceive the impact of the Student Transitions work in Year 2 on students, staff, and institutions?
- 2 What are the barriers or facilitators to the successful development of the student transitions projects?
- 3 What are the priorities moving into the third (and final) year of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme?

2 The evaluation study design

The evaluation team undertook a mixed-methods study from mid-February to late-April 2016. There were two Phases of the study that overlapped. The initial findings in Phase 1 helped inform the design of Phase 2. Figure 1 outlines the evaluation process.

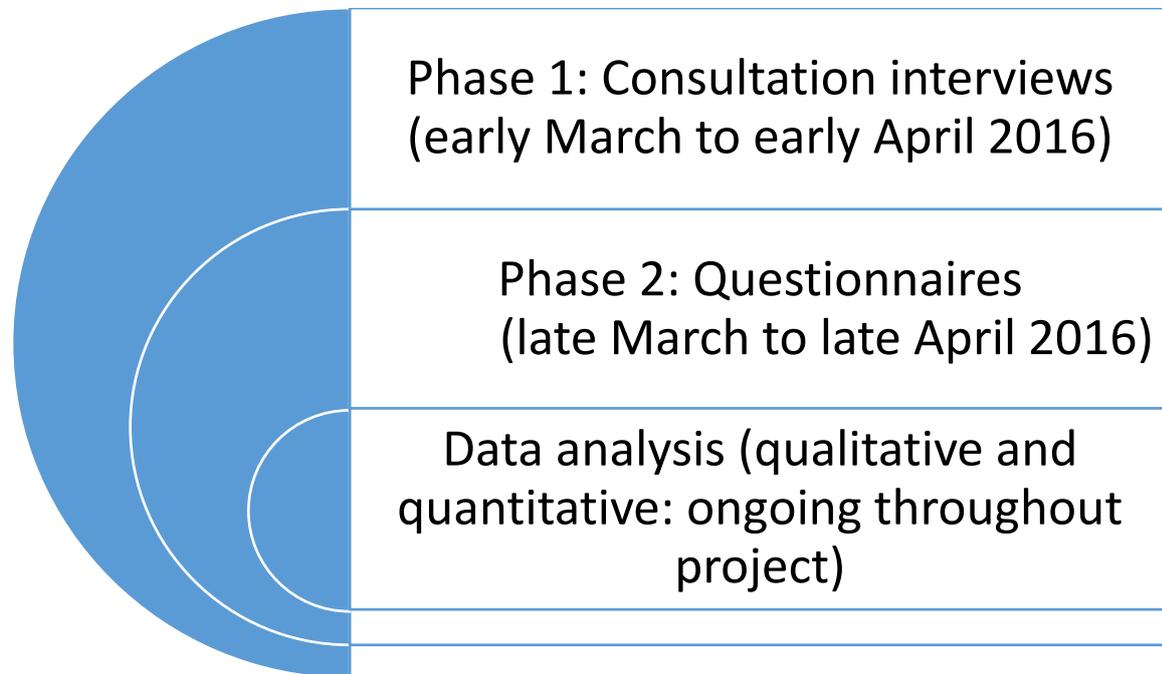


Figure 1: The evaluation process

3 Data collection

Data collection occurred across the two Phases. All data were stored on an encrypted hard drive with access limited to the evaluation team.

3.1 Phase 1: consultation interviews

An initial interview topic guide based around the evaluation questions was developed and then sent to a reference group at QAA to comment on. Semi-structured interviews were then undertaken using the finalised topic guide (see Appendix A). All members of TLG and SHEEC were invited to take part in consultation interviews. Participants were contacted by email and invited to participate and email reminders were sent on a weekly basis.

Participants were provided with a guidance sheet detailing information such as participation was voluntary, they had the right to withdraw, and that personal and institutional anonymity would be maintained in the reporting of the findings. Before the interview, participants returned a consent form and completed a short participant details questionnaire (asking for basic demographic and professional information) via email. All interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 22 and 41 minutes.

3.2 Phase 2: questionnaires

Initial qualitative analysis of a sample of Phase 1 interviews informed the development of the Phase 2 questionnaire. Bristol Online Surveys was used to design and administer the questionnaire which was a mixture of Likert scale and free-text answers (see Appendix B). Basic demographic and professional information was also collected. A representative from each of the 19 Scottish HEIs was identified to support dissemination of the questionnaires. These representatives agreed to distribute the questionnaire (by email) to up to 20 people (a mix of both staff and students: up to 380 people in total) within their institution. The representatives were asked to disseminate to those they perceived had had a role in Year 2 of the student transitions Enhancement Theme. Phase 2 consent was implied through participants' completion of the online questionnaire.

4 Data analysis

4.1 Phase 1 data analysis

A team approach to data analysis was undertaken. In the initial phase of the analysis, Dr Dennis and Dr Gordon listened to a selection of interviews individually and then worked together to negotiate and agree on a thematic framework which was subsequently discussed and confirmed with the wider evaluation team (Prof Jindal-Snape and Dr Howden). Computer software (ATLAS.ti Version 7) was then used to assist with organisation of the data. This allowed the evaluation team to explore patterns within the data. The audio-recordings were imported to ATLAS.ti and Dr Gordon coded all the audio-recordings using the agreed thematic framework.

4.2 Phase 2 data analysis

For the qualitative data, free text answers, we used the thematic framework developed in Phase 1 to code the data. All questionnaires were uploaded to ATLAS.ti for this purpose. This allowed the team to explore the qualitative data from Phase 2 alongside the Phase 1 data. For the quantitative data descriptive statistics (for example means) were used to describe the data in tabular and graphical format.

4.3 Participant characteristics

In Phase 1, 18 of the 19 Scottish HEIs participated. A total of 30 participants took part in 29 interviews (one interview was undertaken with two participants). Twelve participants identified themselves as SHEEC members and 20 identified themselves as TLG members (two participants sit on both committees). Two participants were student members, who were also members of the Theme Student Network. In Phase 2, 14 of the 19 Scottish HEIs participated (including the university that didn't take part in Phase 1). A total of 43 questionnaires were completed by 17 professional and support staff; 14 academic staff; and 10 student representatives.

5 Findings

5.1 Defining student transitions

Overall, after reviewing data from both the interviews and the questionnaires, Student Transitions was seen to be highly relevant to the core business of participants' institutions. The Theme was seen to be wide ranging, allowing institutions to focus on aspects of student transitions that were most relevant to them.

Participants typically used the linear 'In-Through-Out' model to define transitions (this model related well to the transitions map that is under development)¹. Of particular focus in the interviews and questionnaires was educational transitions. Participants conceptualised a 'journey' through different academic levels. Indeed, common to the descriptions was the concept of the 'learner journey' or 'academic life-cycle'. Transition was associated with change and progression throughout a student's higher education experience.

Some recognised that student transitions occurred at differing 'levels'. Participants described 'big' educational transitions, for example entering university for the first time or 'micro-level' educational transitions, for example, transitioning between modules or out to work-based placement and back into university.

'...it can be the big sort of meta-level transition I suppose which is the Theme focus 'the in, the through and out' but I also see it at really quite a granular level...we [a student and R2] were talking about the transitions that the [name of profession] students have on a very regular basis...every few months they are transitioning from study to practice and then back again...they're transitioning from being a student here in the university to becoming that kind of proto-professional...so at that granular level there are a lot of transitions going on as well.' [R02: staff]²

However, for some participants, transition was seen as non-linear and a more complex, messy process. Participants saw that running alongside educational transitions, students could be experiencing life and workplace transitions which impacted on each other. Definitions such as these are more in keeping with the current theoretical literature on transitions.³ For some participants, transition was seen as an individual, personal experience, involving fluid and changing identities. Examples participants gave included a distance-learning student with children who is working full-time and may transition between the workplace, being a parent to being a student in one day, or an international student coming to Scotland for the first time and experiencing a new culture as well as a new course.

'For me it covers a multitude of points, occurrences or experiences. There are temporal transitions from one year of registration to the next, or stages of the doctorate (start, middle, end, pre and post-submission of thesis and so on). There are experiential elements such as self-identifying as a member of your discipline (feeling you belong as an historian, a physicist and so on - no longer an impostor). Crossing thresholds of understanding or capability. Being able to do new things and so on.' [R84: staff]

¹ Information about the transitions map available at:

www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/current-enhancement-theme/transitions-map.

² The identifier attributed to each quote includes the participant's unique ID number and whether they are staff or student.

³ Jindal-Snape, D and Ingram, R (2013) Understanding and Supporting Triple Transitions of International Doctoral Students: ELT and SuReCom Models, *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 1(1), 17-24.

'...and also what we've found through our work is that students' personal and academic transitions are intertwined for them, it's not something that you can necessarily separate for them it's part of their student life and it's something that we've certainly picked up on through our work...it's not linear...like a sausage factory you know in through and out it doesn't work like that for staff and students....it's far more complex than that'. [R12: staff]

Participants saw that institutions needed to be responsive to the complexities of transition. Conceptualising transition in this way, revealed the potential challenges associated with transition and aspects such as resilience and receiving support were identified as an important part of coping with transition.⁴

5.2 Year 2 activities

Institutional activities

When describing activities, student and staff participants were generally very positive and enthusiastic about the activities that were going on in their institution. The three years of the Theme were seen as a learning process in which institutional teams had been challenged to think differently. Participants were keen to express what was unique about their institution and how this had led to decisions about what would be their focus. Student transitions were seen to be a key responsibility for institutions and many described the development of institutional groups and reporting structures that led to Theme activity throughout their institution. Staff saw the Theme as directly related to curriculum annual review and monitoring and a useful lens for programme design. For some, scoping and mapping activities that had occurred in Year 1 of the Theme had informed priorities for Year 2 activities. However, participants also expressed that while institutionally-focused, activities were also aligned to sector-wide discussions.

'...there was a lot of good work going on that we weren't aware of...everybody was kind of doing their own thing around transitions and really the Theme has prompted us to try and bring all of those things together and heighten people's awareness of the stuff going on across the university...everybody's got a role to play in transitions, so it really is a whole university thing'. [R19: staff]

Activities described were diverse. Many had used the monies received from the QAA to fund small projects.⁵ This was seen as a good way to use the resource and have direct impact on the student experience of transition. Participants perceived that a lot could be done with a small amount of money and that the activities were reaching a lot of people within the institutions.

'I hope that we can reach lots of different people, you know a little bit of pixie dust on a large number of people rather than two or three things that are just very concentrated or focused'. [R32: staff]

⁴ Jindal-Snape, D and Rienties, B (2016) *Multi-dimensional transitions of international students to Higher Education*, New York, Routledge.

Jindal-Snape, D (2016) *A-Z of Transitions*, Basingstoke, Palgrave.

Jindal-Snape, D and Miller, D J (2008) A challenge of living? Understanding the psycho-social processes of the child during primary-secondary transition through resilience and self-esteem theories. *Educational Psychology Review*, 20, 217-236.

Newman, T and Blackburn, S (2002) *Transitions in the lives of children and young people: Resilience factors*, Edinburgh, Scottish Executive Education Department.

⁵ The range of activities that have been undertaken as part of Year 2, available at: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/resources/case-studies.

Participants also described resource development and websites that were used by both staff and students to support student transitions. Institutional events had been very well received with broad attendance (including those external to the institution).⁶ These events were seen as an opportunity to showcase Theme-based activities. Some participants described specific institutional roles that had been created to work on the Theme (for example scholarships, internships, academic roles) or tailored interventions that were directed at specific student groups. The opportunity to include students in Theme-based activities had been taken, and participants felt student views had been sought and many were involved as project leads or undertaking student internships.

However, concern was raised about sustainability and reach of the small projects. Staff and student participants hoped that when projects ended the work would continue, but this was seen to be challenging. In addition, participants thought that the specificity of some of the projects did not extend beyond the immediate locale and were seen as 'enclaves of practice'. There was a desire to be more 'joined up' across an institution.

'...projects can be really helpful but of course the other side of them is that, one, when the project ends and the person stops being sponsored to do the work, then the work ends. And then the other problems is that the findings or the work done or produced by the project don't extend beyond that immediate locale. So project work is really helpful but how you then make both sustainable and extendable is a lot more challenging.' [R01: staff]

Inter-institutional activities

Participants acknowledged the emphasis on inter-institutional collaborations during Year 2 of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme and expressed enthusiasm and commitment to collaboration. Participants expressed that efforts had been made to explore collaborations but that this was a process that took time to evolve. Many participants had identified 'similar but different' institutional focus and had identified potential collaborations based on similar institutional priorities (for example, commuting students or student resilience). Participants reported that more 'conversations' were happening between institutions and best practice was being shared through email, meeting up or attending other institutions' events. Some staff participants had been providing peer review and feedback on project applications for other institutions.

However, there was a general feeling that collaboration was patchy and struggling to gain momentum. Participants stated that while activities in TLG meetings related to collaboration generated ideas and intention, once back in their institutions participants found limited opportunity to put ideas into practice, often due to their 'day job'. Others described how organisations outwith the 19 HEIs were more relevant for exploring collaboration (for example schools or further education institutions) and their collaborative activities were focused there. Some participants seemed to suggest that inter-institutional collaboration was seen to be something additional rather than core to the Enhancement Theme work particularly when collaboration outside of the 19 institutions was seen as more relevant. It could be surmised that at this stage, staff participants recognised and had taken part in early conversations about collaboration in Year 2, but that this was perhaps more difficult to sustain or embed.

'I've had discussions with various institutions and I have noticed that particularly with this Theme that there's more conversations...now, the problem then is getting these conversations to move into something concrete, you know we go to a TLG we have these great meetings and I think 'Oh yeah, I could do this'...but actually it's

⁶ Available at: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/events.

then quite difficult to keep that momentum going...you know what it's like you go back to the day job, when you're away at these kind of meetings you're away from emails and phone calls and any other distractions and you get a lot of thinking done into the benefit of what you can do and then you just kind of get dragged back down into the day-to-day...' [R10: staff]

Sector-wide activities

Participants perceived that the size of the sector in Scotland made it possible to undertake sector-wide activity. Participants perceived that the work of the Enhancement Themes had created an environment of trust between institutions, the QAA and other participating organisations (for example the HEA and sparqs, as well as other parts of the Theme such as the Student Network). This made the exchange of ideas and practices possible and networking activities such as the annual conference and TLG/SHEEC meetings were valued. In addition, resources such as the website, the transitions map and the new logic model meant that anyone interested in enhancing student transitions did not have to start the process from scratch. For example, participants described how the transitions map could be used to highlight gaps in practice, highlight areas of good practice, and drive focus.

'What has evolved is a culture, and it's a culture of exchanging ideas and I think it's also, and this is very strange there's a culture of trust. So that institutions can say things in front of each other but weirdly and I'd never have thought I would've said this, there is a trust in the fact that the people working at the QAA have a pretty good idea of what they're doing and that it's not going to harm us in ELIR if we admit that our - let's say our personal academic tutor system isn't working as well as it could. So I think that's quite unusual...the cultural change over the years has led to a sector that talks across the sector between the institutions but also talks with the QAA [Scotland Enhancement Team Staff]...' [R01: staff]

5.3 Engagement during Year 2

We explored perceptions of engagement during the Year 2 activities through both the interviews and questionnaires. Within the questionnaire, participants were asked to rate on a Likert scale from 1-6 (1 = no engagement, 6 = complete engagement), how well they thought the staff, students, and their institution were engaging in the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme. Institutional engagement (M = 4.88, SD = 0.90) was rated highest then staff engagement (M = 4.07, SD = 1.16), followed by student engagement (M = 3.34, SD = 1.09). We also explored the views of staff and students as separate groups in how they perceived engagement across these three groups (See Figure 2).

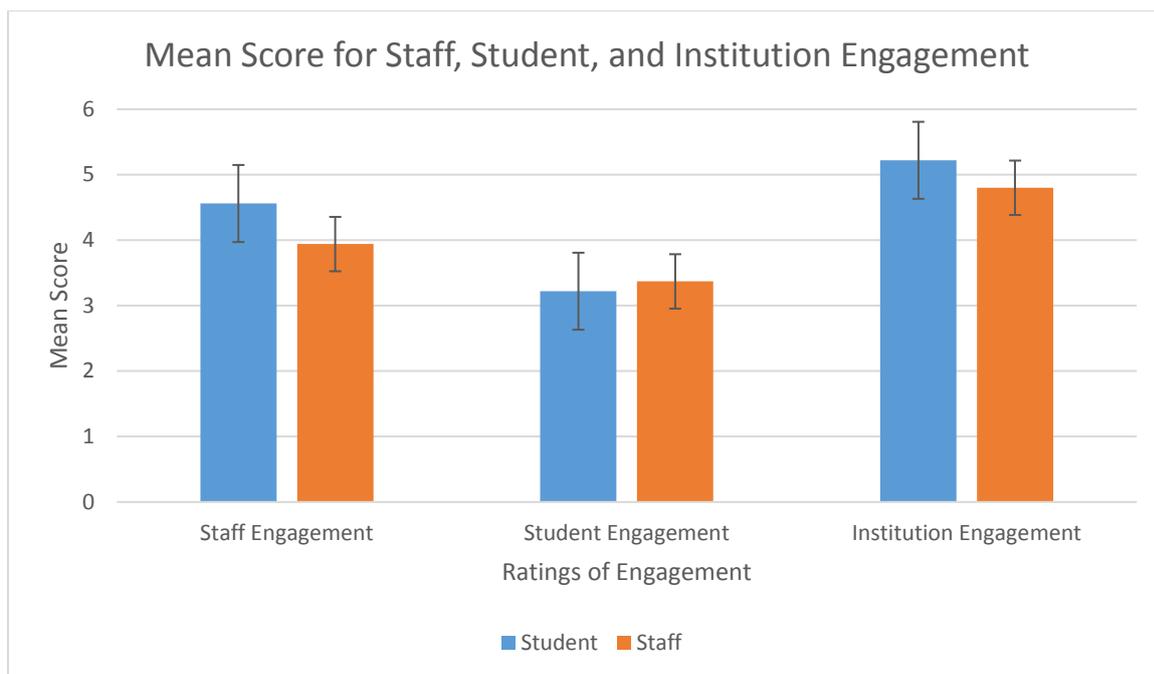


Figure 2: Perceived engagement during Year 2 activities

Staff and institutional engagement

Within the qualitative data, participants indicated that they felt there was a good level of staff engagement. Student Transitions was seen as an Enhancement Theme that had engaged a wider range of staff than previous Themes. Participants identified that Student Transitions had captured wide interest and that there was 'something for everyone'. In addition to academic staff, professional and support services staff were identified as having a central role in developing and undertaking activities related to the Theme. The Theme was seen to be 'tangible' and broad, which allowed staff to contextualise the Theme and engage with Student Transitions in a range of ways. Participants reported good attendance at Theme-related events, increased applications for project monies and wide-ranging networking within their institution.

'[the Theme's] very current and it hits the universities at institutional level but it also filters down to targets that exist at school level and programme level. So, if you can do that, then that's an elegant design in terms of trying to get somebody to engage.'
[R14: staff]

However, participants perceived that although there was wide-ranging engagement with the Theme through direct participation in activities (for example as part of the institutional team: or as a project lead), wider institutional awareness remained a challenge, particularly in larger institutions. Participants described 'pockets of engagement' and times when staff may be undertaking Student Transitions activity but might not recognise this as part of the Enhancement Theme. Participants questioned whether this 'label' for activity was important; for some it was, for others not. Participants described the need for a continual 'drip feed' to raise and maintain the profile of Theme activities (for example through reminder emails or newsletters). Time was another aspect that was seen to potentially limit engagement, with Enhancement Theme activities being seen as an added extra and not necessarily the 'day job' for most staff.

'Often Enhancement Themes appear as add-ons. Staff are so busy coping with the multitude of external drivers and requirements that they are in an impossible position. There's some distrust as to whether they really mean anything profound. And we're all exhausted!' [R79: staff]

Student engagement

Overall, there was a general feeling from the staff participants that students had been well represented and included during the Year 2 activities, events and projects. Staff were positive about student involvement for the added insight and point of view it provided. Student-led projects were seen to be high quality and students had been highly responsive to calls for project proposals or intern applications. This was seen to be more so than in previous Enhancement Themes. Student engagement was generally brought about through the Student Associations, the Student Network and specific projects. There was acknowledgement that it was difficult to engage the wider student body although students were seen to be very involved and engaged when projects were discussed directly with them. Broadly, staff perceived that student engagement was very dependent on the activity and priorities of their local student association and that the yearly turn-around of officers meant that staff-student relationships and activity related to the Theme could change year on year.

'Relatively, a lot of the work that we are seeing as part of the Theme itself is around the student interns because they're the ones who are actually focused on this if you like as a job of work so inevitably we see more of them than the other students...but all students are concerned with this and this is the beauty of this Theme...all staff are concerned with student transitions and all students are concerned with student transitions and that is a very different perspective to some of the previous Enhancement Themes...' [R26: staff]

However, student participants reported that they had found it challenging to drive activity from their perspective. The lack of resource directly allocated for student time meant that there was little incentive to be involved in non-credit bearing activity. Some student participants felt that the tasks that students had been given as part of the network were a little 'tokenistic' and that there was little opportunity for students to be heard at a more strategic level. Student participants stated that outside of student officers there was little engagement and recognition of Enhancement Theme activity.

'...but I think often when you are looking at things like the student network...you're asking officers or students to do it in their free time...in terms of allocation of resource...I think that's the difference between having students involved and engaged to students being partners... I think with the student network it's kind of the case that 'we'll go and get you to do two projects and that's your student engagement done.' Yes we have engagement at an institutional level but actually at that higher level that strategic level, that's where there's a lack of real voice and decision making I think sometimes that's timing but I think it also comes down to a how do you make it easier to integrate...' [R21: student]

5.4 Enablers

This section discusses some of the key enablers for Year 2 activities that were identified across the data. It is valuable to note that identification of enablers (and challenges discussed in the next section) are integral across the findings and therefore effort has been made here to minimise repetition.

Support for activities

One aspect that was explored in the questionnaire was the level of perceived support individuals had felt they had received. The questionnaire asked participants to reflect on the support they had received from various groups (Peers, Institution and QAA) for engaging in their activities related to the Enhancement Themes using a Likert scale from 1-6 (1 = no support, 6 = completely supported). Broadly, perceptions of level of support were positive. Institutional support received the highest rating (M = 4.69, SD = 1.24), followed by QAA (M = 4.47, SD = 1.38), and peers (M = 4.30, SD = 1.45). We also explored how staff and students viewed the support across these groups (See Figure 3).

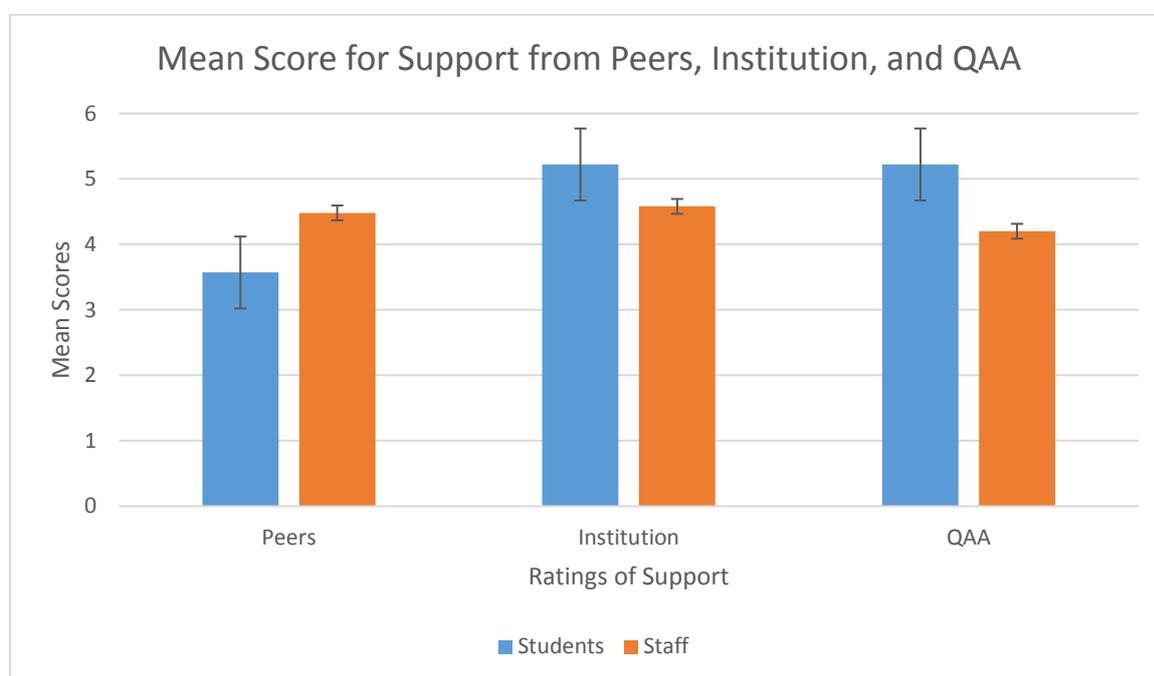


Figure 3: Support for activities

Enablers: sector-wide

Staff participants commonly identified enablers at sector level. As previously discussed, the sector was seen to be well-placed for working together and the collegiate approach led to open sharing of ideas and resources that had been developed. Several participants had stated that they had come from other UK countries to work in the Scottish sector and had found the 'market' more free-flowing and there to be less of a sense of competition, conducive to sector-wide Enhancement Theme work. The activities undertaken in the TLG meetings were seen as invaluable for development work. In particular, the 'classified ads' session held late in 2015 was well received.

'I think the strengths of the Scottish system and the Enhancement Themes play a big role in that in getting us to work collaboratively rather than competitively in the sector is very much one of the strengths of it...I moved up from England where there's much less collaboration on learning and teaching matters...it's [collaboration] much more embedded here...it smooths over the different mission

groups it doesn't feel like 'Oh they're post-92 or they're Russell Group' and all that sort of stuff, the divisions are not so apparent...' [R31: staff]

'...at the TLG, the space and time to speak to your counterparts about their approach and what they are doing is just invaluable and there's always time set aside in those meetings just to have a discussion around out tables about how you are doing. Because you'll just be amazed you might be at completely different institutions on the face of it but we're still struggling with the same things or we could learn from one another so that is something that I'd really say has been a massive positive, sharing the reports as well, I'm constantly emailing my counterparts and know I could pick up the phone to ask them so that strong network is something that's absolutely key.' [R12: staff]

Despite comments in the previous section about student engagement seeming a little 'tokenistic', student participants did appreciate sector-wide efforts to see things from a student point-of-view. Those students involved, were positive about endeavours of the Student Network, seeing it as a chance to link in with Enhancement Theme activities across Scotland.

'...it's a good network [the Student Network], it's one of the few where we do see universities that aren't members of NUS engaging...that's really useful it's been good to create...it's also been really useful to be able to understand the contexts...seeing the different discussions and the different areas where the focus is and actually the reality of where there's strengths and where there's weaknesses...it does have the sharing, it does feel to be a genuine community there where people do want to try and improve things as a whole. It's not a... 'us and them' it's very much 'everybody need us to be there'...they use institutional priorities but they are able to share around them...that is particularly unique to the Scottish sector and it is nice to be part of...' [R21: student]

'...some of the issues that the students come up with are really quite different to what we might have imagined. And I think that's important to see from the students' point of view rather than us thinking 'this is what the issues are'...' [R18: staff]

Staff and student participants perceived that they were well supported by the QAA (see Figure 3). In addition to the funding, participants had found the team in the QAA accessible, involved and communicative. Provision of clear directions and deadlines was seen as helpful. The overarching concept of Enhancement Themes had led to the development of good working relationships between the QAA and institutions over the years.

'... the staff have been really good with the...they emailed me to ask how the project was coming along ...the QAA and sparqs are both keen on getting constant updates...when I let them know the project was running pretty slow because of all the things going on the QAA were saying 'that's fine just basically send us the stuff and we'll send out a reminder.' They've been brilliant at making sure the project can continue.' [R22: student]

Enablers: institutional level

Staff and student participants identified a key enabler and source of support as being their institutions (see Figure 3). Institutions were seen to have taken a systematic approach to work on this Enhancement Theme, with, as previously mentioned student transitions appearing on committee agendas at all levels. This was perceived to raise the profile of Enhancement Theme work and participants talked about moving Enhancement Theme work forward through the networking that occurred as a result. In addition, many participants stated that institutions had provided further resources to support project development and

new staff roles. The opportunity to undertake institutional projects was seen to be available to all and enabled innovative work to be shared cross-institutionally.

'...[What] I've really appreciated about this Enhancement Theme particularly over all of the others...it's captured core business and allowed us to focus on a really fundamental issues which has concerns I think for every member of the university community whether you are a student or a staff member...because of that it's kind of captured a great deal of enthusiasm and it's been really very well supported and far more positively received than perhaps some of the more abstract Themes that ...if I was to you know have a recommendation it is that future Enhancement Themes focus on similarly kind of an area of core business of student learning and student experience...' [R26: staff]

In contrast to earlier comments, some students also identified that they were included by institutions and that the student experience was taken seriously. At institutional level, student involvement was seen to be positive and enabling. For example, student-focused questionnaires (for example the National Student Survey) were used to drive and develop Enhancement Theme work at institutional level.

'Hiring student interns to help with the research process for transitions project. Our student interns have been able to use their networks to give us real insights into the transitions experiences of our students.' [R66: staff]

Enablers: staff level

In addition to robust staff engagement (see section 5.4, Support for activities), specific staff were seen as key enablers to the success of the Enhancement Theme activities. At the institutional level, it was identified that institutional leads were enthusiastic and well chosen. This had led to good internal networks and communication structures. In addition institutional leads were seen as vital in ensuring visibility of the Enhancement Theme work (for example, ensuring Student Transitions was a standing item on meeting agendas).

'...having a mechanism that allows us to put in place a person for a period of time, whether that's full or part-time, or whatever of a role who's responsibility is for that [Enhancement Theme work] and that alone, I think that the consistency that that brings is invaluable in trying to make sure that you can still drive things forward...what it does allow us to do is have that consistency regardless of whatever changes take place that individual still goes through and takes that work forward.' [R11: staff]

'My role was created as part of the University's commitment to enhancing the student experience and I truly believe that I have been supported by my colleagues as well as the institution at large.' [R44: staff]

Notably, participants were also positive about the overall Theme leadership. It was stated that this had enabled open discussion and collaboration and encouraged wide engagement with the Theme.

'...she's very inclusive, she's very centred on the work of the Theme Leaders' Group, on the student and making sure that we all feel involved and engaged with what we're doing...' [R2: staff]

5.5 Challenges

Challenges sector-wide

Directly related to the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme, participants identified several sector-wide challenges. Some expressed concern that while wide ranging, some areas were being missed out. Examples included discipline specific activity, focus on equality and diversity, international students and a closer look at transitions from an individual perspective. It was suggested that analysing current resources might highlight areas that require further investigation.

Participants expressed that development of new sector-wide resources, in particular multi-media case studies would be difficult without guidance. In addition, participants identified engagement sector-wide challenging with the current resources and there was suggestion that metrics on current resource usage (including the transitions map) would help inform how to move forward with engagement. Participants were keen to ensure that these resources were not static.

'...I know the QAA have been very active, they're building this map of transitions and I think that will be quite valuable but I think they do need to think about how they're going to engage the sector and people in institutions with this because otherwise I have concerns that they'll build this wonderful resource and how will it be used?...as a sector...we need to think about how we will engage that input and how it'll be used. And I guess that's more a comment on the Theme work in general we all put time in to outputs that we deliver within our teams and we use them with staff and things like that, but I guess there are a whole range of outputs that we deliver to the QAA, I know next year that they want us to provide multimedia case studies ...but maybe thinking about how they think they're going to engage folk with those resources so they're used...and maybe feed into a culture of people being able to contribute other things to the resource...I would hate to see something that was built and then was static and then wasn't necessarily used beyond the Theme...' [R8: staff]

Another challenge was identifying time and space to pursue and develop collaborations. Some suggested that some Year 3 funding should be 'siphoned off' to facilitate collaboration. However, other participants thought that collaboration was not necessarily a priority for Year 3.

'I did kind of feel that we are now beginning to overemphasise trying to make people collaborate. I think we've probably we should have done enough by now people should be by this stage clear who and when and why they want to collaborate and we shouldn't be trying to engineer the Theme Leaders' Group meeting around yet another merry-go-round of who should be talking to who...that just needs to move on now.' [R04: staff]

Participants acknowledged that there were a lot of changes occurring sector-wide that posed a challenge for Enhancement Theme work. Participants were acutely aware that agendas such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and Commission on Widening Access could impact on priorities for the future. SHEEC-member participants had noted that Vice-principals for Learning and Teaching were not attending meetings due to wider pressures and what were described as the 'distractions' of TEF and diminishing resource. It was thought that a discussion on how these sector changes would impact on Enhancement Theme work in the future was required.

'I think we are in a unique period of time in terms of what's going on politically. So, I'm really conscious of the Green Paper down South and the impact that that could have on us in Scotland around whether we even have a QAA in the future...I think the political landscape and the financial landscape could have quite a dramatic effect on what happen to us in relation to TEF, in relation to student mobility, in relation to policy decisions south of the border that impact to us in Scotland. And trying to think about transitions in that landscape is quite a challenge because it feels at this moment in time that the priority for us as institutions is really looking at how we show the rest of world and benchmark our student experience in university in a way that's understood politically...' [R36: staff]

Challenges Institutionally

Staff resourcing, including time to deliver Enhancement Theme resources, was identified as an institutional challenge. The cost of institution-wide engagement was seen to be higher than the resources available (including time and financial). Staff-wide perception of the relevance of the Theme work was also recognised as a challenge, again other priorities taking precedence, making it difficult to get buy-in. Competing demands included KPI focused activity, institutional reconfiguration and differing priorities at different times of the academic year (for example exams). Some questionnaire respondents stated that there was a perception that the Enhancement Theme work was for a 'self-selecting few' and thus not valued by wider staff: one participant described a 'language barrier' between those working on the Theme and the wider staff community.

'I think it is more challenging to reach those who are not directly involved with transitions projects that is the wider academic and professional support staff groups. I am not sure that there is widespread understanding of what the Enhancement Themes are about/purpose. There are efforts to raise awareness for example through online/physical notifications. Getting ET onto the agenda, as part of programme development/enhancement is challenging in the face of competing items/team experiencing frequent change.' [R73: staff]

Participants also identified the challenge of managing the Theme across the institution, in particular multi-campus institutions or very large, developed institutions. Participants described a 'matrix-management' approach. Others expressed concern that the success of the Enhancement Theme work across an institution was dependent on the sphere of influence of those involved.

In relation to challenges of student engagement, some students talked about feeling unheard, while staff talked about identifying how students could be heard. There was some concern about alignment between staff and student activity. Some described a 'theory-practice gap' between talk about student engagement and what actually happened. Additional challenges revolved around engagement of the student community beyond student officers and how to deal with the lack of continuity of student officers across the three years of the Theme.

'...an example of this is the work done around...the leaflets that have been put together around skills and so on for student transitions and I think they've either been driven by research bases or what staff felt actually with very little relevance to students so...[the terminology] meant nothing to students so it felt one step removed if that makes sense...actually having that strong voice and being able to direct...those are strategic areas that have been decided upon by groups...but actually if they'd involved student maybe they'd have been different and maybe they'd have been much more affective because...looking at the end product that's too late...' [R21: student]

5.6 Impact

On the whole, it was felt that there was a need for better definition and agreement of what was meant by meaningful impact and that this activity was the next stage in their institutional work (over the course of Year 3). Across the dataset, participants talked about impact less often than other aspects of the evaluation (for example current activities, enablers and challenges).

'How do you define impact? I know I'm sorry that's a very academic answer....there are outcomes in terms of reports about activities...Impact is such a funny question...the thing is we're being asked...to demonstrate that money isn't just going down the pan. For me it's about direct impact and it's about longitudinal impact, so I would say that there has been longitudinal indirect impact over the years.' [R15: staff]

In terms of immediate, institution-level impact, there was a general expectation that concrete and sustainable outputs would be delivered as a result of ongoing Year 2 and 3 work (for example the production of resources and project reports). In particular, impact was anticipated at a very local level through the outcomes of specific projects.⁷ A few participants commented that they had made use of the logic model (see Appendix C) to help them explore impact and could see value in its use as they moved into Year 3. However, it is important to note that of more than 1,000 coded quotes across those data, the logic model was only mentioned five times.

'I think it's hard to say at the moment, I think it [impact] might be more visible next year than it is right now, I think that all of the work we are doing now will be implemented over the summer, rather than as it's been going along. So, right now, I can see movement but I don't think anyone who's outside of the group will see movement...right now if you're behind the curtain it looks great but you probably don't know what's going on until it happens.' [R22: student]

Participants suggested that the work of Year 2 of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme had led to: improvement in practices; a better understanding of transitions; an increased awareness and reflection among staff of the student transition experience; and a sharing and an emergence of new ideas and developments in relation to the Theme and it was anticipated that this would lead to positive impact on the student experience.

The level of engagement of staff and student officers was viewed positively as a key output from the work of the Theme. In particular, participants identified that because Student Transitions had been embedded into core institutional activities, there was expectation that this would lead to impact at an institutional level. For example, in many institutions, enhancement of student transitions was placed on institutional committee agendas and was seen as a strategic priority. It was noted some participants questioned whether this was due to the Enhancement Theme, or would have occurred anyway as a result of shifting sector priorities.

'...the Learning and Teaching Committee the other day for example and there was a lot of talk around TEF and what that means for Scotland and also the Commission on Widening Access. And in some ways, the commission is a real opportunity for the Theme because they have legitimated some of the wishes that we might have for ensuring that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are supported...I think we would be silly not to take on board the implications of it in that we are going to

⁷ To explore the range of activities that have been undertaken as part of Year 2 please use this link to the Enhancement Theme website, available at: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/resources/case-studies.

be increasingly tasked with demonstrating the impact of whatever we do we are going to be increasingly accountable...' [R01: staff]

Overall, however, there was a general view that it was too soon to be able to fully explore the overall educational impact of this Enhancement Theme's work, and how this would influence policy, practices sector-wide, and most importantly the student transition experience. Consensus was that educational impact on student transitions was a 'slow burn', taking several years to have an effect. In addition, participants anticipated that the specific impact of Enhancement Theme work on the overall student experience of transitions would be hard to measure and isolate from institutional and sector-wide activity that would have occurred anyway.

'Identifying those practices which have impact, and identifying impact is the hardest thing with a lot of these things because you're probably talking about more than two or three years before you can actually see the outcomes rather than the outputs and that's the problem. This is why I always think we ought to be looking one Theme back because we probably can see the outcomes.' [R25: staff]

5.7 Year 3 priorities

Much focus of discussion about Year 3 priorities was on concrete outputs at both an institutional level and sector-wide. At institutional level, completion of the various ongoing projects was viewed as essential, but participants talked about the importance of 'mainstreaming' these activities so that work of these projects became part of core institutional business. Participants also talked about roll-out of Year 1 and 2 activities across their institution. Other participants thought that there should be focused activity on areas that they identified as less explored during Years 1 and 2 (for example discipline specificity or equality and diversity). It was seen as important that the work of the Theme yielded practical deliverables (for example briefing papers; online resources; local mapping as well as sector-wide mapping) that would facilitate change institutionally. Participants talked about taking time in Year 3 to extract the learning from the transitions work at institutional and sector levels.

'I think around a lot of this work we need to do a fairly significant piece which shows that this potentially has impact. If it's not going to make a difference I think we maybe shouldn't be doing it. I suppose one of the thoughts...there's a huge amount of work around widening access and there's a lot of thought about...impact and more targeted intervention...I think we probably need to do a wee bit more work on that because so much of the student transitions work for many institutions actually is built around widening access and participation and things like articulation...I'm not convinced we really truly understand what's making a difference and what's not and we need to better understand that...any funding for this kind of thing in the future will be much more targeted and we need to know what to target it on.'

[R4: staff]

Discussion around outputs at a sector-wide level often centred on the web-based resources. Participants were aware of the expectation that they were to produce some sort of multimedia output but stated that more guidance was required as to what this was to be. In addition, participants reported that there was some work to do on the current QAA web-based resource. The case study approach was seen to be a little onerous to engage with and to improve, participants suggested something more interactive, focused on community engagement. Exploration of website metrics would help identify the areas that site visitors found useful. Participants thought that the production of a concrete set of recommendations for staff, students and institutions about what 'good transitions' looked like

with resources to support (for example a framework of strategies, or toolkits) would support sustainability and assist with mainstreaming the work.

Sustainability was seen as a key priority for Year 3. A strategy for continuing engagement and activity focused on student transitions beyond the Theme was deemed vital. Evaluating the impact of the work would facilitate this as well as provide important guidance as to how to support sustainability of activities or embed new practices. Some participants identified a risk that this work would get lost when the next Theme work started, and a suggested solution was that this Theme should lay the groundwork for identification of the next Theme, this layered approach ensuring sustainability. Questions around the future of Enhancement Theme work arose relative to the changing environment sector-wide. It was suggested that a discussion around the impact of the TEF on Enhancement Theme work would be an important Year 3 activity.

'It probably needs to focus on evaluation but also that whole notion of wider engagement one of the things I feel quite strongly about in terms of dissemination is to move away from a baton model-type of thing where you know that it's a simple transfer, you know 'here's the results go forth for yourself and your practice' and that's why I think it needs that continual engagement strategy throughout the lifetimes of projects...we are looking at sustainability and legacy of the work after the projects...' [R16: staff]

'Ensure that the good points made in the first two years are not lost at the end of the Enhancement Theme period. There is a potential downside to all these Enhancement Themes that the good work starts to get 'lost' when the Theme ends.' [R67: staff]

'Actually in some ways as we move forward in that is how do we continue...I think it's easy to come across as being pessimistic as I say the strengths are where we are at the moment is that there's at least a community and while it may not be functioning fully it's definitely there and I think building on that...with each year... is absolutely [vital]...' [R21: student]

6 Conclusions and recommendations for Year 3

6.1 Summary of key findings

We undertook analysis of 29 interviews and 43 questionnaires. In order to address the evaluation questions, we identified seven overarching areas: Definitions of transitions; staff engagement; student engagement; impact; enablers; challenges; and Year 3 priorities. Below we present a summary of our key findings in relation to the evaluation questions.

How do stakeholders perceive the impact of the Student Transitions work in Year 2 for staff, students, and the institution?

Broadly, participants perceived that Student Transitions was now core to institutional business and were enthusiastic about Year 2 activities, locally and sector-wide. Participants identified that the diverse range of activities conducted across the sector in Year 2 had enhanced awareness, reflection, and engagement with student transition issues for staff, students and institutionally. However, participants highlighted that identifying impact, while important, was hard to evidence at this stage and that seeing educational impact of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme work may take a few years.

What are the barriers and/or facilitators to the successful development of Student Transitions projects?

Participants identified a few key barriers and facilitators at sector-wide, institutional and staff levels. At a sector-wide level, it was felt that the sector was a good place to work together and that there was an open sharing of ideas and resources. Participants queried whether certain important areas of student transitions had been missed across the sector. In addition, there were concerns about the time and space to develop collaborations across the sector as well as the broad pressures the sector was under related to agendas like the TEF. At an institutional and staff level, there was a range of perspectives around staff engagement, where, on one hand, participants rated staff engagement positively and highlighted key points such as institutional leads being positive drivers for the Theme. On the other hand, participants discussed issues around reaching and engaging the wider staff and student community within institutions and that this could sometimes be problematic. Staff resourcing was also highlighted as a key challenge related to issues such as time. Yet participants broadly agreed that institutions could play a very positive role in providing a systematic approach to developing the Theme as well as providing additional resources to support projects.

The final research question explored, 'what are the key priorities moving into Year 3 of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme.' The findings for this question will be discussed in the next section exploring implications and recommendations for Year 3.

6.2 Implications and recommendations for Year 3 and beyond

Impact

Broadly, an emphasis on 'impact' should be a key focus for Year 3. We suggest that developing clearer definitions of 'impact' would be helpful. Additionally, the logic model, while needing more time to be assimilated into conversations about impact and planning, should be prioritised as having an important role in these aspects. Another key point raised in this evaluation was the question about length of time to see impact. Perhaps there is value in conducting a follow-up evaluation to explore issues around sustainability of activities or new practices and potential longer-term impact. However, this may be difficult given the perceived problems in capturing long-term impact. One way would be to focus on setting up points of measurement in Year 3 that could be evaluated in the future. We recommend that any follow-up impact evaluation takes place in two to three years' time and could include for

example exploration of student experience questionnaires, aspects of recruitment and retention, exploration of Student Services' day-to-day activities in relation to student transitions, and staff CPD activities in relation to student transitions.

Integrating the Theme into other agendas

We recommend considering how Student Transitions can be strategically aligned with other key sector wide agendas. For instance, developing a mapping exercise in Year 3 to highlight how the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme work aligns with other key higher education agendas such as the Commission on Widening Access may be of value not only to promote the Theme but to explore issues of sustainability.

Expanding 'pockets of activity'

We recommend Year 3 focus on identifying how to expand pockets of activity in ways that are sustainable within institutions and also across the sector. This should be done in a way that ensure that activities are modified to 'fit' each area of roll-out, whether that is within an institution or through collaborations with other institutions.

Enhancing student involvement

We recommend for Year 3 an exploration of ways that students can become more involved in the Theme, moving beyond the 'tokenistic' involvement students described. Due to lower numbers of students on this evaluation, it may be valuable to undertake some work to identify places of good practice where students feel more engaged and heard. Students highlighted the desire to be more involved in some of the strategic decision making, and we recommend a review of student involvement.

Enhancing collaboration

Participants felt that a lot of collaboration as far as idea sharing and discussion was happening across the institutions though questions about whether this counted as collaboration were raised. Meaningful collaboration requires sustained working together to support transitions, and involves not only collaboration between the professionals from the higher education sector, but also with students, families and professionals from other sectors such as further education and schools.⁸ We recommend exploring definitions of the term 'collaboration' and to identifying key outcomes that institutions should be targeting in this regard.

Integrating the next Theme

Participants felt this had been a particularly successful Theme that was very relevant to institutions. We recommend considering the next Theme 'spinning off' from this Theme and using Year 3 as an opportunity to seamlessly transfer focus to the next Theme.

⁸ Jindal-Snape, D (2016) *A-Z of Transitions*, Basingstoke, Palgrave.

7 Conclusions

Overall, the findings from this evaluation highlight the complexity of integrating the work of the Enhancement Themes within institutions and across the sector more broadly. However, the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme has been seen as a key aspect of the work of higher education institutions across Scotland. This evaluation has provided opportunity to explore work that has been achieved in Year 2 of the Theme and stakeholders' perceptions of how these activities are impacting on the student experience of transition. Through this evaluation, we have been able to make recommendations for work moving into Year 3 of the Enhancement Theme and beyond.

8 Acknowledgements

The evaluation team would like to acknowledge the participants who engaged with this evaluation in Phase 1 and Phase 2. In addition, we would like to acknowledge support from QAA and the TLG 'sounding board' who provided valuable feedback at all stages in this evaluation process.

Appendix A: interview topic guide

**Title: Evaluation of Year 2 of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme
Telephone Consultation Interview guide for stage 1 participants
(Version 2: February 25 2016)**

Welcome

Welcome and thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this evaluation. I appreciate how busy you are and the time you have taken to do this. This study aims to evaluate Year 2 of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme across institutions in Scotland on the behalf of the QAA.

Introduction

Anonymity and right to withdraw

- The interview will be audio-recorded, but I would like to assure you that the discussion will be anonymous.
- Following the interview you will be assigned a participant number and so will remain anonymous.
- The files will be kept securely and I would like to remind you that you have the right to withdraw at any time.
- If you do not wish to answer a question then you do not have to. If you find anything that we have discussed upsetting we can discuss further how this can be addressed.

Some basic interview ground rules:

- Ensure focus is on the topic of inquiry (Evaluation of Year 2 of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme)
- Care should be taken not to disclose colleagues' names, identifiable characteristics of other people involved in any situations described (if any names are inadvertently mentioned these will be removed before any dissemination)
- Confidentiality (not to be discussed outside the interview)
- There are no right or wrong answers, all points are valid

Do you have any further questions before we start?

Body of interview

Then, turn on audio-tape (make sure participant is aware this is happening).

- 1 To begin, what do student transitions mean to you and your institution?
- 2 I wonder if you could briefly summarise your understanding of the different activities that have occurred as part of the Year 2 Student Transitions Enhancement Theme?
 - a. What do you perceive to be happening Scotland-wide?
 - b. What do you perceive to be happening inter-institutionally?
 - c. What do you perceive to be happening within your institution?
- 3 How do you think the activities are progressing to date?

Facilitative questions could include:

- How have last year's experiences and outcomes (e.g. from the Enhancement Theme conference) influenced this year's goals, activities and progress?
- How well do you think staff have engaged in the process?
- How well do you think students have engaged in the process?
- In what way do you think that this work has had an impact on students' experiences of transitions?
- Are there any demonstrable outputs from Year 2 work? Can you give an example of changes as a result of Year 1?
- What resources have you accessed to support work on this Enhancement Theme (e.g. work developed by Enhancement Themes or elsewhere)?
- What have you learned from engagement with this Theme?

- 4 What do you perceive has gone well? And what do you perceive has not gone as well?

Facilitative questions could include:

- Why do you think that was the case?
- How do you think the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme activities could be better facilitated/supported in Year 3?

- 5 Moving forward, what priorities do you think Year 3 of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme should be addressing?

- 6 Are there any final things you wanted to talk about in terms of the Year 1 & 2 work that you have not mentioned yet?

If participant is an institutional lead, they will be asked at this point if they would be willing to help with distribution of Phase 2 questionnaires (by email) within their institution.

Conclusion

Thank you for participating. I think that this interview has been very successful. Have you got anything to add before I conclude?

I will switch the tape off now.

Appendix B: questionnaire



Student transitions enhancement theme evaluation: Phase 2

Page 1: Evaluation of Year 2 of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme: Information

Thank you for your interest in this project. Please read this information carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. By completing the questionnaire you are agreeing to participate. However, if you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the aim of the project?

This study aims to evaluate year two of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme across institutions in Scotland on the behalf of QAA. We are interested in the views and experiences of this theme from the various stakeholders that are involved in the projects.

What will participants be asked to do?

You are asked to participate in an online questionnaire. We would like our participants to reflect on the student transitions enhancement theme work with a particular focus on year 2. In addition, participants will be asked to provide basic demographic information and information about their professional background.

Why me?

As a stakeholder on the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme work at your institution, you can provide valuable information that can help us evaluate year two of this work.

Anonymity & Confidentiality

Everything that you say during the study will be kept anonymous and, whilst we will be reporting the findings in general, personal confidentiality will be maintained.

Can participants change their mind or withdraw from the project?

Please be aware that you are free to stop the questionnaire at any time without explanation, and without disadvantage to yourself. However, due to the anonymous nature of the survey, any data that you submit upon questionnaire completion cannot be withdrawn.

What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?

Only direct members of the research team (Dr Ashley Dennis, Dr Lisi Gordon, Dr Stella Howden, and Professor Divya Jindal-Snape) will have access to the data. The data will be securely stored and the raw data will be destroyed 10 years after publication in accordance with research governance guidelines.

We will be writing a report about the findings and presenting them to QAA Scotland, the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee, and the Theme Leadership Group. Additionally, the results may be published and/or presented at conferences. It is important to note that any data included will be anonymous and not individually/institutionally identifiable. We anticipate this study will contribute to future developments in year 3 of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme project.

Are there any advantages or disadvantages to participating in the study?

We anticipate that some people will benefit from having the opportunity to participate. For example, the study will give you the opportunity to reflect on your experiences with the Student Transitions Enhancement Themes work. Additionally, the findings from the project will directly inform year 3 of the

project. The major disadvantage to this study is time.

What if you have any questions?

If you have any questions either now or in the future please contact Lisi Gordon:

Dr Lisi Gordon
Research Fellow
Centre for Medical Education
University of Dundee
The Mackenzie Building
Kirsty Semple Way
Dundee, DD2 4BF
Email: l.y.gordon@dundee.ac.uk
Phone: 01382 381974

The University Research Ethics Committee of the University of Dundee has reviewed and approved this research study

1 Please indicate that you have read this information page and you are happy to continue

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Yes
Happy to continue	<input type="checkbox"/>

Page 2: Section 1: Year 2 activities

2 To start, what does the term 'transitions' mean to you in the context of the current enhancement theme?

3 Can you *briefly describe* any activities at your university you have been involved in or are aware of as part of Year 2 of the student transitions enhancement theme work?

Page 3: Engagement with the student transitions enhancement theme

4 To what extent do you think there has been engagement with this theme?
(1=no engagement at all, 6=complete engagement)

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	don't know
By staff	<input type="checkbox"/>						
By students	<input type="checkbox"/>						
By your insitution	<input type="checkbox"/>						

4.a Why do you think this is?

Page 4: Support for work on the student transitions enhancement theme

5 How well supported are you in undertaking activities related to this enhancement theme? (1= not at all supported, 6= completely supported)

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	don't know
By your peers	<input type="checkbox"/>						
By your institution	<input type="checkbox"/>						
By the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
By others (please specify in free text comments)	<input type="checkbox"/>						

5.a Why do you think this is?

6 What do you think have been the key enablers when undertaking the student transitions enhancement theme activities?

--	--

7 What, if any, have been the challenges when undertaking the student transitions enhancement theme activities?

--	--

Page 5: Impact of the student transitions enhancement theme

8 What do you think the impact of the student transitions theme activities in year 2 has been?

8.a For students?

8.b For staff?

8.c For your institution?

8.d Beyond your institution?

Page 6: Moving forward to Year 3

9 What do you think the three key priorities for Year 3 of the students transitions enhancement theme should be?

9.a Why?

Page 7: Section 2: Demographic Details

Please note that the details that we ask for in this section are for our records only and you will not be identifiable when we report the results of the questionnaire.

10 Please identify your institution:

11 Please indicate your role in your institution:

+ More info

11.a If you selected Other, please specify:

12 Please specify your role in the student transitions enhancement theme Year 2 work

Key for selection options

10 - Please identify your institution:

University of Aberdeen
Abertay University
University of Dundee
University of Edinburgh
Edinburgh Napier University
University of Glasgow
Glasgow Caledonian University
Glasgow School of Art
Heriot-Watt University
University of the Highlands and Islands
Open University in Scotland
Queen Margaret University
Robert Gordon University
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
Scotlands Rural College
University of St Andrews
University of Stirling
University of Strathclyde
University of the West of Scotland

11 - Please indicate your role in your institution:

Undergraduate Student
Postgraduate Student
Student Association representative
Academic Staff
Support Staff
Other

Appendix C: logic model

Student Transitions Enhancement Theme: Logic Model

AIMS: To enhance the student transition experience in Scottish higher education, and promote associated practices within and beyond Scotland

OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES	STRATEGIES	EXAMPLE ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	IMPACT INDICATORS
<p>We want to: Improve our understanding of successful Student Transitions</p> <p>Engage the Scottish higher education (HE) sector in using what we have learnt to improve/reflect on how Student Transitions are supported in practice</p> <p>Embed student engagement into the Theme work</p> <p>Further enhance the reputation of the Scottish HE education in the rest of the UK & internationally by showing how we work collaboratively as a sector</p> <p>Show how our work effects change, supporting more successful student transitions</p>	<p>By the end of this Theme, we will have: Discovered, documented and developed transitions ideas and practices from a wide range of sources, to support those working and learning across the Scottish HE sector.</p> <p>Supported effective sharing of, engagement with and uptake of ideas, resources and activities</p> <p>Learned from students' experiences of navigating transitions</p> <p>Promoted and learnt from collaborative working across the Scottish HE sector</p> <p>Instigated and supported change in transitions practices</p>	<p>Our approach is to: Identify and develop good practice examples from Scotland and further afield</p> <p>Ensure wide engagement of the Scottish HE sector</p> <p>Facilitate joint leadership and ownership by SHEEC and TLG</p> <p>Ensure wide engagement of students in Theme groups at sector and institutional level, and in the wider work of the Theme</p> <p>Promote networks, collaborations and interest groups</p> <p>Interrogate and challenge existing practices</p> <p>Inform Theme development, by periodic evaluation</p>	<p>We will do this by: Identifying good practice examples of how transitions are supported at three stages: pre-entry, during and preparing to leave the course</p> <p>Producing a repository of good practice and contacts</p> <p>Producing short briefing papers on aspects of transitions and how they are exemplified in specific locations to support student success</p> <p>Dissemination and engagement events</p> <p>Defining criteria for good practice in transitions</p> <p>Establishing a strong student network</p> <p>Sector-wide discussions</p> <p>Inter and intra-institutional sharing</p>	<p>Our outputs will include:</p> <p>Case examples</p> <p>National and institutional project outputs</p> <p>Transitions map</p> <p>Website with multilevel functionality</p> <p>Briefing/guidance papers</p> <p>Engagement and Dissemination Plan to engage the HE community with the resources and ideas produced</p> <p>Students' transition voices present through various media)</p> <p>Inter-institutional projects</p> <p>Benchmarking data for sustainability enhancement work</p>	<p>Our success will be seen in: A comprehensive collection of practice and resources supporting student transitions from Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs) and further afield identified, produced and published on Enhancement Theme website. Evidence of their usefulness to the wider sector demonstrated.</p> <p>Evidence of engagement with Theme by both staff and students</p> <p>Demonstration of where students' experiences of transitions have impacted on Theme outputs</p> <p>Evidence of students and the Student Network learning from their engagement with the Theme</p> <p>Inter-institutional work outputs collected and published with demonstrable benefit evidenced in institutional practices</p> <p>Evidence that resources have been used to enhance practice to support for student transitions in Scottish HEIs</p>

Student Transitions Enhancement Theme

Context

Student Transitions is the 2014-17 Scottish Enhancement Theme. The Enhancement Themes are selected by the Scottish higher education sector and provide a means for institutions, academic staff, professional services staff and students to work together in enhancing the learning experience. Each Theme facilitates both sharing and learning from current and innovative national and international practice. In addition, the Themes promote the collective development of new ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching.

Underpinning Principles

The principles which underpin our work are enshrined in the SHEEC [Enhancement Descriptors](#):

- Collaborative practice
- Learning from international experience
- Alignment and coherence
- Evaluative practice
- Students as partners.

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