

Symposium: Constructing a 10 year roadmap
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What can TEF learn from the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework

Murray Saunders



The evidence base

- Longitudinal comparative dimension (revisiting, trajectories, repeat surveys) 2003-2015 in three phases
- Stakeholder voices (national ‘voices’)
- Cyclical site visits to all institutions (800 participants)
- Quantitative sampling of participants (course reps, teaching practitioners, middle managers, student institutional reps, staff with specific remit for quality, a sample of students ‘with no remit’)

Enhancement:

Involves deliberative practices towards making things better (improvement).

- ***Incrementalism***: doing the same only a little better, in other words improvement on existing practice clusters. Improving the quality of teaching materials might be an example.
- ***Innovative incrementalism***: addition of innovations to existing practices, for example adding an international dimension to a syllabus where none existed before, or a new teaching practice to a repertoire.
- ***Transformational***: radical understanding of enhancement involves a re-think of existing approaches, even fundamental purposes, and completely new practices.

Specific features of the Scottish Case

- Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR), coordinated by QAA Scotland (assurance dimension)
- A comprehensive institutional programme of internal subject level reviews
- Improved forms of public information about quality, the different needs of a range of stakeholders including students and employers (in practice a focus on NSS)
- A greater voice for students in institutional quality systems and learning experience,
- A national programme of quality enhancement themes, facilitated by the QAA, aimed at developing and sharing good practice in order to enhance the student learning experience.

Specific focus on the thematic approach

- Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience (2017- 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).

Theory of change in the QEF

*From its inception in 2003, the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF), coordinated by the Scottish Funding Council with the participation of the Scottish Universities themselves, attempted an **integrated approach in which 'enhancement' rather than 'assurance' was emphasised in its approach to the improvement of the quality of University teaching and learning.***

“a theory of educational enhancement and improvement that places more weight on consensual approaches than more coercive stances embedded in some quality assurance regimes with a shift away from top-down compliance-inducing processes to participative and critical supported self-evaluation”.

Why is the QEF an interesting case of teaching quality enhancement/improvement

- Balancing enabling mechanisms with compliance to quality standards
- An enhancement led national quality system means a shift in emphasis not mutual exclusivity between assurance and enhancement
- The enhancement of the student experience in higher education (means supporting practices associated with improvement, being innovative, being enabled through resources and a positive 'climate');
- partnerships between agencies and stakeholders;
- a theory of educational change that places more weight on consensual approaches than more coercive stances;
- shift away from top-down compliance-inducing processes to participative and critical supported self-evaluation.

Some issues arising:

- QEF and the student experience

Representative practices, surveys/focus groups suggest engagement

- QEF and the teachers' experience

Use of themes, culture of enhancement

- QEF and the Institutional experience

Strong framework, SHEEC representation,

- QEF and the sector experience

Alignment, buy-in and distinctiveness, control

Redefining indicators of excellence as descriptors of enhancement practice

What are the enhancement descriptors for?

- to bring together a framework which captures the core practices which express the Scottish approach to Enhancement and improvement.
- to coordinate and frame the way Enhancement might be described at national and institutional levels and act as a tool to integrate the various frameworks in use in the various review processes.

A guiding principle for the development of new descriptors was to identify *clusters of practices* which evoked the *distinctive character of the Scottish approach to enhancement* which set it apart from other more assurance driven designs.

The Descriptors

- 1. Enhancement descriptor: collaborative practice**
- 2. Enhancement descriptor: the use of national quality enhancement themes**
- 3. Enhancement Descriptor: learning from international experience**
- 4. Enhancement Descriptor: alignment and coherence**
- 5. Enhancement Descriptor: evaluative practice**
- 6. Enhancement Descriptor: student engagement in learning and Enhancement Descriptor: student engagement in decisions)**

Enhancement descriptor: collaborative practice

Context

Phrases used in the group included the “tendency to work together”, the understated emphasis on “competition” . The suggestion was that this ‘process’ characteristic was one which might be endorsed and highlighted through a separate category of consideration in the EDs of the institution’s capacity and involvement in this dimension of Scottish development e.g.

Example practice clusters

- Practices associated with cross institutional and internal collaborative working and learning with the purpose of intra and inter institutional development of teaching and learning**
- Practice associated with how the HEI works with other partners to support and sustain T&L developments**
- Practices associated with the use of external partners to enhance the student experience (employers work placements, internships)**

Enhancement Descriptor: Students as partners

6a Enhancement Descriptor: student engagement in decisions

Context

Enhancement refers to the involvement of students in policy and strategy development. This is a reference to practices which improve and develop student capacity to be a partner in decision making and review fora. It also refers to practices associated with building appropriate capacities on the part of students that enable them to participate effectively in democratic representation at all levels and the provision of time and space to effectively organise.

Example practices

- ❖ Practices associated with the way students are trained to develop their representational capacity**
- ❖ Practices associated with the development of representational opportunities**
- ❖ Practices associated with enabling easy access to decision making fora**

SWOT analysis on enhancement led approaches to quality and excellence

Strengths

- Buy-in
- Legitimacy
- Embedded culture of improvement
- Likely to lead to improved student experience

Weaknesses

- Lack of consistency
- Less standardization
- Rhetorical rather practice based change
- Comparative lacunae

Opportunities

- System wide cultural change
- Focus on practices
- Avoidance of strategic conduct
- Accountability based on real changes
- Shift away from binary approaches to teaching excellence

Threats

- Tendency to retreat to assurance away from enhancement (balance returns to control and management from the Centre)
- Lack of political courage in the face of international league tables
- Externally derived targets
- Funding conundrum (“when going gets tough, risk gets going”)

Takeaways

- Increased partnering with institutions (empowerment and buy-in)
- More student involvement (representation and engagement)
- Bring back enhancement and improvement strategies (enhancement themes)
- Consider practices not metrics
- Shift from binary to integrated system of excellence and improvement