First annual report of the evaluation of the SFC quality enhancement framework to its QEF Evaluation Steering Committee

Deliverable D2 and D3

September 2009

Centre for the Study of Education and Training, Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University

The QEF Evaluation Team at Lancaster University comprises Professor Murray Saunders, Dr Joan Machell, Dr Neil Lent, Dr Paul Ashwin, Dr Sadie Williams, Professor Paul Trowler, Professor Mantz Yorke, Dee Daglish and Angela Gelston.

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An extended summary of findings

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Introduction

1. This report is Deliverable 2 and 3 from the quality enhancement framework (QEF) external evaluation team at Lancaster University. It is the first annual report to the QEF Evaluation Steering Committee – a progress report was discussed in March 2009.

2. What follows in this extended summary are the synthesised summaries associated with all the substantive reports on evidence gathering activities conducted during the 1st phase of the evaluation contained in the main report. The main report is a full and detailed account with a complete exposition of the data. This summary is designed to be self standing and includes all the principal findings.

Strategic issues for specific stakeholders

3. The evidence from the stakeholders who were asked to comment on aspects of the QEF either explicitly (in the case of the key informant interviews) or by reference to their experience of the quality of their learning experiences (in the case of students) or with reference to the way quality is described and 'visioned' in institutional policy documents is unambiguous in one important regard. The data points to the affirmation and support of the direction of travel embodied in the QEF strategy. It is important that the SFC acknowledge this affirmation and builds on the practice-based alignment with QEF aspirations found in the student experience. There were emerging synergies between the elements.

4. It is also important to acknowledge the worries that the key informants have over a change in direction in the broadly 'consensual development' acknowledged as highly desirable by all those we spoke to. This might suggest a confirmation of the approach from the 'centre' in such a way that ambiguity and uncertainty might be reduced.

5. The suggestions concerning emphasis, clarity and the difficulties of 'reach' imply issues of tactics and engagement rather than a strategic shift. There was little evidence of a desire for a more centralised or prescribed approach but this was not based on a protectionist or knee jerk resistance to system wide considerations but on the likelihood of real cultural change only occurring at 'institutional level when engendered by a strong sense of local ownership and adaptive capacity.

6. It was evident that there was ambiguity in the way that the discussion of 'indicators' was debated. It would be helpful if, in the light of the points made in 3, 4 and 5 above, the nature and use of indicators was made explicit. There was not resistance to the core idea, but there was some concern on the nature of the evidence that might be required to address indicators and the use to which they might be put. There was some consensus that indicators should be addressed in a rigorous yet methodologically 'pluralist' way and that their main use would be to strengthen and develop effective strategies for student learning. This stance is one that SHEEC might take up.

7. In terms of student experience, it is clear that the direction of travel suggested by the data in this report is positive. We point below to the way this positive trend is present within the data when comparisons are made with previous surveys. In our accompanying synthesis report we mention two

senses of the word 'engagement'. One sense is a reference to engagement in learning (what might the indicators of this be?). In another we report on engagement with 'representation' of students' perspectives etc. This relationship falls a little short of the 'partnership' model, at 'ground level', and might be an interesting focus for the student representatives at national level.

Key informants' perspectives

8. To date, interviews have taken place with 25 key informants and further interviews will be conducted throughout the course of the evaluation. All the interviews were recorded (with interviewees' permission) and took place either face-to-face or, in a small number of cases, by telephone interview. The recordings were then transcribed and analysed. The interview schedules used are included as an Appendix to the main report. The range of roles is the following:

- Senior officers of public and private sector organisations (e.g. Directors, Assistant Directors, Chief Executives, Deputy Chief Executives)

- National student association officers

- University senior managers (academics and administrators)

How the QEF in general is working

9. Overall, there was satisfaction with the progress of the Framework although a degree of 'patchiness' in the extent of engagement amongst academic staff was perceived. There were more frequent references to providing evidence of effectiveness and the use of indicators in the current round of interviews than was the case in 2003 and 2006.

10. Several informants spoke favourably of the increased sense of ownership of the Framework. There was an acknowledgement that the QEF incorporated a better balance between fulfilling accountability demands whilst also having a genuine 'use-value' to institutions.

11. It was emphasised that sectoral change takes time and, although considerable progress has no doubt been made, there is still some way to go before we see the full impact of the Framework.

12. We noted a tendency for informants to refer more to three specific dimensions of the QEF (ELIR, the QE themes and student engagement) rather than to the framework as a whole.

ELIR

13. Informants felt that although the format of ELIR was different from previous reviews, it was certainly as rigorous.

14. The ELIR approach is seen as representing a much more formative approach to quality assurance and enhancement.

15. Producing the Reflective Analyses provides opportunities for institutions to be honest and self-critical and, from the evidence of the first cycle of ELIR, most institutions appear to have engaged frankly and honestly with this (potentially risky) process.

16. The first cycle of ELIR has, in most cases, confirmed that the involvement of students on Review Panels has been particularly successful.

17. Overall, the inclusion of an international reviewer on Review panels is given a cautious welcome.

18. There were comments from some informants that the format of ELIR reports was not particularly 'user-friendly' in terms of some of the intended audiences.

Student participation

19. In general, most informants regard student representation and participation as a successful and welcome aspect of the QEF with Scotland regarded by some as leading the way in encouraging students to play a more active part in quality processes.

20. There is a general acknowledgment from informants that sparqs is making an excellent contribution to improving student representation in quality processes. Informants referred to some confusion between the respective roles and responsibilities of SLEEC and sparqs.

21. More than one key informant commented on the desirability of involving more 'rank and file' students in quality enhancement but recognised the difficulties of doing so. The point was made that the relationship between students and higher education providers is changing in that students are increasingly being seen as integral partners in the process of higher education.

22. Rather than concentrating on student representation in the sense of, for example, student membership of institutional committees and review panels, a number of informants suggested that the focus should now turn to other ways of encouraging student engagement.

Enhancement themes

23. Informants felt that some of the themes had produced excellent work and that there was now a greater awareness of the themes. As there is now a greater familiarity with the aims of the themes and how they operate, there is less wariness and more willingness to engage with the themes.

24. There was less certainty of the extent of the impact of the themes on the sector. However, it was recognised that the impact of some of the early themes was only now beginning to be discernible within some institutions.

25. The establishment of the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), which is made up of representatives from most HEIs, is considered to have strengthened a sense of 'ownership' of the themes by the sector.

26. The use and usability of the outputs of the themes is still seen as problematic by a number of informants with lengthy reports not being seen as particularly 'user-friendly'.

27. The current theme *Graduates for the 21st Century: Integrating the Enhancement Themes* is intended to consolidate and build on the previous Themes but some scepticism was expressed by informants that it would be interpreted in this way within the sector.

Public information

28. The views expressed on the provision of public information are similar in the present round of interviews to those of the 2003 and 2006 groups. The overall sense was that the sector, in the rest of the UK and not just in Scotland, had still not really worked through the implications of this dimension in terms of recurrent practices. There was a lack of clarity on the range, legitimacy, audience for, and use of, public information.

29. The point was made that students themselves were in the best position to say what kind of information potential students, for example, would find most useful. Informants felt that very few potential students would be interested in some of the information currently available.

30. The number of HEIs in Scotland taking part in the NSS has increased from 3 in 2006 to 12 HEIs participating in the most recent (2009) NSS survey.

Strategic considerations and context

31. There can be no doubt that, since the QEF was introduced in 2002/3, the general economic climate has undergone considerable upheaval. Public expenditure is under closer scrutiny from governments than was certainly the case in the early days of the QEF and informants felt that higher education would almost inevitably be affected by this.

32. Informants expressed concern over the emergence of a more interventionist stance towards higher education. This might imply more, and differently derived, evidence that higher education is spending the considerable funds it receives in the most efficient and effective ways.

33. The perception from a number of informants was that it was the 'pre-emptive compliance' of some members of the Funding Council over possible demands from Government for more tangible evidence of achievement that was fuelling rumours within the sector of a return to audits. Informants felt that, as part of the SFC's anxiety over the possible demand for more tangible measures of demonstrating effectiveness to Government paymasters, the Council might exert pressure on institutions to provide more quantifiable outcomes of achievements. There are fears that this could herald a return to audit-based quality systems – which, of course, provide conveniently quantifiable measures of performance.

34. Indicators have been criticised as more in line with assurance and quantifiable outcomes rather than with an enhancement-led approach. It was suggested that the reason for antipathy is not so much in the idea of using indicators *per se*, but in the underlying implications of greater external surveillance associated with such measures.

35. The general consensus was that the Scottish Government was more than satisfied with the way in which Scottish higher education was progressing and that there were no signs of advocacy of a move away from enhancement and back to audit. However, the recent recommendations from the Government's Future Thinking Taskforce concerning the expected contribution of higher education to the Government's economic agenda have done little to alleviate suspicions of the possibility of more external intervention in the business of higher education.

36. Since the merger of the two Funding Councils, the Council has undergone quite significant changes and, to our key informants, the impact of some of these changes suggests a need to rebuild the strong partnership between the Council and the sector.

37. There was a view that the Joint Quality Review had caused some turbulence within the sector. The relationship between the Council and the sector had been regarded as a partnership and there was concern expressed by informants that this sense of partnership had been put at risk with the 'imposition' of the Review and that this was a first indication of this reconfigured relationship.

38. Informants' responses to the issue of the extent to which 'cultural evolution' has permeated 'downwards' – that is, how far awareness of the quality enhancement agenda had filtered through institutions - reinforce our findings from previous evaluations. The level of awareness and commitment is felt to be high at senior management level, variable at middle manager level and patchy at practitioner level. However, a number of informants suggested that what was prescient was there was raised awareness of enhancing teaching and learning and improvements were occurring whether or not staff associated this with the label of the QEF. This is connected to the evaluative stance adopted here of looking for alignment rather than direct causal relationships in teaching and learning practices.

39. The concern persists that it is 'the usual suspects' who are the most engaged with QEF activities. The suggestion was made that efforts need to be maintained to extend awareness and involvement throughout institutions – and indeed, through all institutions within the sector. Informants also stressed the importance of having commitment at a senior management level if enhancement is to be taken seriously within an institution.

40. In the perceptions of key informants, winning the hearts and minds of middle management to the quality enhancement agenda remains a challenge that has not yet been fully addressed.

Futures

41. Although measures such as the provision of indicators had not, on the whole, been warmly received, it was considered that their use might well become inevitable in future. If this was to be the case, it was suggested that a more rigorous approach to developing measures of performance was needed.

42. Informants hoped to see signs of a more joined-up, holistic approach to enhancement developing within the sector. Informants hoped that the Scottish higher education sector would become more aware of, and prepared to learn from, international experiences of enhancement.

43. In terms of institutional culture, informants hoped that the QEF would continue to promote and encourage a high degree of reflection and self-criticism within institutions. Informants would hope to see more support for practitioners and more recognition of, and rewards for, high quality teaching. They stressed that students should continue to be involved in quality processes and that the level of student participation would continue to increase. Whilst the involvement of more 'rank and file' students (that is, other than course reps) was seen as desirable, there were doubts that this was practicable.

44. The context against which the QEF was developed allowed those involved in the Framework's planning to develop an approach to quality that was distinctive from that of the rest of the UK. Perhaps the most obvious benefit of the smallness of the sector is that it facilitates communication and a sense of collegiality between institutions.

45. Informants also pointed out that there were downsides to this degree of familiarity – for example, reluctance to criticise colleagues within the sector. Informants cautioned against the tendency for the

Scottish higher education sector becoming too complacent and self-congratulatory about its achievements.

46. There are encouraging signs that more links are being developed between agencies concerned with enhancement and this is perhaps most evident in the stronger role that the Higher Education Academy (HEA) is taking with regard to the Framework – and to the Enhancement Themes in particular.

47. Informants suggested that the perceptions of the relationship between the HEA and the Scottish universities may have been due to different ideas of the role of the HEA in Scotland compared to that of the HEA in England. The perception is that the Academy has a much higher profile and stronger presence in England.

48. The point was made that the HEA had provided considerable support for enhancement activities but academics may not have been aware of the Academy's part in these. Informants cautiously welcomed the Memorandum of Agreement between the QAA and the HEA which sets out how the two agencies will work together and, in particular, how the Subject Centres will support the themes.

49. The increasing emphasis on the contribution by HEIs to the economic growth and prosperity of Scotland sets new challenges for working with interest groups, agencies and stakeholders whose concerns need to be taken into account to a greater extent than has perhaps hitherto been the case.

QEF Alignment in Teaching and Learning Policy Documents

50. This section of the report is derived from documentary research of publicly available policy texts from HEIs and evaluative work on the use of the themes undertaken in 2008. Explicit reference is made to the thematic areas. As we have identified in the original design of the evaluation, we understand as a key indicator of the development of an embedded approach to quality enhancement, the extent to which 'strategic discourse' within institutional documents aligns with an enhancement approach. This shift is part of what we might call a culture change in the way in which quality is perceived in texts which are intended to frame future actions.

Assessment

51. As the outcomes of the Assessment theme were derived from discussions across the sector and conclusions and recommendations based on examples of good practice, there is alignment between recommendations arising from the Theme outcomes and the aims and objectives outlined in many LTA strategies.

52. Whilst the Assessment theme outcomes suggested making use of self and/or peer assessment as one way of reducing the assessment load, there were very few references to self-assessment in LTA strategies.

53. There are references made in LTA strategies to seeking to eliminate over-assessment, ensuring that assessment methods, tools and approaches are appropriate for the workload of students in any given period of the programme and are practicable for staff.

54. PDP is mentioned within the majority of LTA strategies but often within the context of employability rather than as an 'unthreatening' (that is, it is produced and owned by the students themselves) contribution to formative assessment.

55. All of the 'ancient' universities, and a smaller number of the other pre-'92 HEIs, specifically mentioned PDP in their LTA strategies but very few of the post '92 HEIs did so. Providing a wider range of assessment methods that are designed to give full opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills is a strategic aim identified by a number of HEIs. Comparatively few LTA strategies make reference to considering the greater use of ICT in assessment in this context.

56. There are several references in strategic plans to intentions of changing policies and practices to achieve a closer alignment between teaching, assessment and learning outcomes. Although LTA strategies make frequent references to introducing, or further developing, innovative teaching methods – in particular making greater uses of e-learning, Virtual Learning Environments and other related technologies – there are fewer references to using such technologies for assessment.

Employability

57. Employability is a theme which aligns well with the strategic priorities of many HEIs and enhancing employability was frequently cited in the majority, if not all, LTA strategies.

58. Within LTA strategies, most institutions recognise that the employability agenda should be intrinsically linked with, and embedded in, aspects of teaching rather than being seen as a supplementary or bolt-on activity.

59. In general, the terminology used by many HEIs tends to focus on the employability 'skills' to be fostered rather than how the institutions intend to help students to develop these.

60. The LTA strategies of the specialist institutions tend not to place a particular emphasis on employability as the programmes they provide are, by their very nature, geared to specific and specialised vocational areas.

61. A number of LTA strategies refer to developing the use of PDP (Personal Development Planning) as an important contribution to enhancing employability.

62. The Employability theme defines the 'co-curriculum' to be such activities as membership of sports clubs and other societies and membership of student-run 'welfare' schemes such as peer tutoring or mentoring, volunteering schemes and entrepreneurship and enterprise schemes designed to develop practical business skills.

63. Whilst there appears to be an increasing recognition on the part of HEIs of the opportunities provided by these 'co-curricular' activities, as yet comparatively few institutions have well-defined strategies for helping students to capitalise on these as a means of enhancing employability.

64. In terms of LTA strategies, a number of HEIs place considerable emphasis on the importance of enhancing employability through, for example, providing more opportunities for students to take part in employment-related activities such as work placements or work-related projects.

65. A number of LTA strategies made references to collaborations, or better exploitation of existing links, with employers or other agencies concerned with employability.

Flexible Delivery

66. The emphasis is on encouraging learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning rather than being passive recipients of teaching, with terms such as 'autonomous', 'independent', 'active learners' and 'learning by enquiry' appearing in many documents.

67. The terms 'active learning' or 'active learners' occur frequently in LTA strategies but are more likely to be used by the post '92 HEIs. The role of e-learning technologies is cited as a means of providing more flexible forms of learning that encourage and enable students to take a greater degree of control over their own learning. Often the adoption of such learning technologies is based on the assumption that using such technologies will enhance teaching and learning and that students now expect this kind of 'technologically-enhanced' teaching experience.

68. LTA strategies acknowledge that the widening participation agenda implies a greater degree of accommodation and flexibility on the part of institutions than was perhaps the case in the past.

69. Within their LTA strategies, a number of HEIs stated their intentions of creating more effective learning environments and exploring innovative ways of using these. In some cases, the distinctions between 'learning' and 'social' spaces are challenged. At the heart of many of these planned developments is the recognition that environments should strive to be 'learner-centred' rather than merely spaces in which students are taught.

Research Teaching Linkages

70. A number of LTA strategy documents refer to the use of staff research in teaching. This is the case with both the older universities with well-established traditions of research but also is a strong feature of the strategies of many of the post '92 institutions. As well as utilising research, LTA strategies refer to explicitly encouraging the development of research, or research-related, skills in their students.

71. Whilst we could trace comparatively few specific references to the term 'graduate attributes', a number of LTA strategies devote attention to developing employability skills which, in many cases, are quite similar in the way they are defined by institutions. It should also be noted that in some cases LTA

strategies pre-date the introduction of the Research Teaching Linkages theme and so there was perhaps not so specific a focus on this aspect of enhancement when strategies were published.

Reward, Recognition and Professional Development

72. Reward and recognition for teaching and the associated issue of professional development were strong themes in a number of LTA strategy documents across the range of HEIs.

73. In terms of having well-defined and clearly articulated strategies on reward and recognition, we did not notice any great variation according to type of HEI (i.e. ancient, pre '92, post '92 or specialist institution).

74. On the evidence of LTA strategies, it seems that only a minority of institutions have schemes in place whereby excellent teaching is rewarded. Examples of tangible rewards are a Principal's Award for Teaching Excellence offered by one of the post '92 universities and, in one of the older universities, the introduction of an Annual University Teaching Excellence Award.

75. Rather than having procedures already in place, a number of HEIs are, according to the LTA strategies, in the process of developing more explicit criteria for rewarding the contribution by academic staff through outstanding teaching and/or innovation in learning, teaching and assessment.

76. Rewarding practitioners by promotion to, for example, the level of professor based on excellence in teaching is still the exception rather than the rule in most HEIs. This is identified as an area for development in a number of LTA strategies.

77. There are other 'rewards' offered by various initiatives – such as the fairly modest funding available through some of the Enhancement themes to buy out time to allow staff to take part in project work or research or the Travel Fund offered by HEA Scotland. However, in some of the smaller HEIs, the specialist institutions for instance, releasing staff for CPD can be difficult.

Overview of 2nd year student representative survey

Introduction

78. We received 233 responses in total compared to 402 in 2005 (at an estimated response rate of 40%). In broad terms, 55.4% of responses were from pre-1992 universities, 35.4% of responses were from post-1992 universities and 6% of responses were received from specialist higher education institutions. Some respondents completed the questionnaire but failed to indicate which institutions they attended (3% of the total).

79. We understand these findings as useful in terms of focussing our evaluation activities rather than providing conclusive evidence of the extent to which a culture of enhancement exists in the Scottish higher education sector from the perspectives of class representatives. In that light the following highlights provide some 'risk taking' in terms of interpretation and are intended as discussion points.

80. Compared to the 2005 survey cohort we found increased levels of 'engagement' along a series of indicators with teaching and learning by this class rep. group. Their expectations had gone up and the perceived impact of being a rep. had increased.

81. Overall, the experience of the class representatives is evolving in a positive way. We have argued elsewhere that the time period over which genuine and sustainable changes become embedded as recurrent rule-governed practices is underestimated. If we compare the outcomes of this survey with those of the baseline survey in 2005, we can see positive advancement in the experience of class rep. training, the extent to which representatives are taken seriously as stakeholders in departmental life, the way in which staff respond to feedback and the extent to which students are committed to engagement. There are also positive signs of the 'relevance' of undergraduate studies, across all disciplines to life beyond University, in particular work and the way in which some generic capacities developed within courses of study provide the potential for resources for future practice.

Comparison with the 2005 survey

82. There was evidence to suggest that reps. were engaged in similar activities in both surveys although attendance at departmental meetings seemed to be less of a requirement for 2009 respondents.

83. Informal liaison with staff and raising complaints seemed to be the main activity for the 2009 cohort. That the complaints figure is relatively high may indicate that the reps. are mainly working reactively. This may mean that they are not working in as a close a partnership with staff as might be expected in a more established enhancement culture.

84. The 2009 survey showed higher rates of agreement on questions about the efficacy of reps. suggesting a positive shift in the levels of engagement. The 2009 respondents feel they were more likely to be listened to by staff than respondents in the 2005 survey. The results also indicate that staff were more likely to take action on issues raised than was implied in the 2005 survey. Changes brought about by reps. that were identified tended to be expressed in terms of changes in teaching style and course content, course administration and timetabling and in support services such as library and computer provision. However, more respondents in the 2005 survey seemed to feel that staff took them more seriously than do respondents in 2009.

85. The information on 'influence' is mixed but does provide some evidence to suggest that action is more likely to be taken when students raised issues in 2009 compared to 2005. There is also some evidence that institutional cultures may have influenced answers to the questions. For example we found that a greater proportion of post-1992 university respondents were likely to state that they had increased influence over teaching quality than respondents in other types of HEIs.

86. Overall there is good evidence to suggest that the 2009 cohort felt that most staff were interested in receiving feedback from students. 69% of our cohort agreed that this was the case (the rate of agreement was higher among female respondents than male). A large majority of respondents felt that staff and students should be working in equal partnership on quality issues. Bearing in mind issues with training and staff student-interaction, there is probably still some work to be done in preparing for representative work and in improving the quality processes in which they are involved.

87. Respondents indicated that having an impact/making a difference was the most cited benefit. Social and personal benefits were also mentioned. In terms of weaknesses of the system, there was some evidence from respondents that reps. are not always listened to and are sometimes marginalised by university and departmental cultures and procedures. There was also evidence to suggest that students are not always aware that they have reps. or what the role of class reps. is.

88. Overall we found evidence that reps. and their departments are operating in ways that are aligned with the ethos of quality enhancement. We also obtained evidence that may indicate areas where enhancement culture can be strengthened. These are particularly in terms of representative training, inclusiveness in meetings and procedures communication between departments and reps. and in raising awareness of the class rep. system among the general student population. These issues should be viewed as potential avenues of inquiry rather than concrete evaluation judgments at this stage of the evaluation.

Personal development

89. Examples of personal development to which there was a high level of agreement includes improved personal qualities such as increased levels of objectivity, tolerance, confidence, assertiveness and diplomacy. There is some evidence to suggest that female respondents are more likely to report increased confidence, tolerance and diplomatic skills.

90. There was also evidence of increased satisfaction with cognitive-organisational skills such as being clearer and more precise, analysing situations and building a convincing argument. Respondents also reported increased negotiation skills. It may be interesting to note that only 44% of respondents reported increases in their time management skills. There was a higher level of agreement that being a class rep. improved work-related skills (70%) than for improvement in academic skills (51%).

91. Overall there was some evidence to suggest that class reps. benefit personally from the activities in which they become involved. It would appear that respondents saw these benefits in terms of improved preparation for work rather than in improving their academic performance.

The more general student experience

92. We were interested to know respondents' opinions about the student experience more generally on issues relating to learning and teaching. Evidence suggests that respondents felt that students in general are interested in their teaching and learning experiences and have the time for such concerns. The level of agreement was particularly high among post-1992 university respondents.

93. Just over half of the respondents indicated that they thought students were viewed as recipients of teaching. This suggests that students may often be thought of as passive 'consumers' of education

rather than as active co-constructors. However this finding probably illustrates an area for further investigation rather than a clear area of concern at this stage of the evaluation.

94. Contradictory evidence that, for example, most respondents agreed that students are encouraged to manage their own learning, suggests a complex picture here. However there was less agreement that students actually do this. It may be that students often want to be more passive consumers of the education process rather than active co-owners.

95. Most respondents felt that staff were interested in student learning. Most respondents disagreed that lecturers are more interested in their research than teaching (female respondents more so than male) although this trend was not seen among pre-1992 university respondents. There was recognition from some respondents that where staff did appear more research-focussed this was often due to institutional pressures. Overall, staff were presented as engaged and interested in students and teaching. It was recognised that levels of interest will vary between individual staff members.

96. Overall we found evidence to suggest that students are interested and engaged at least to some extent in quality enhancement. Respondents also indicated that staff tended to be interested and engaged although this might be variable.

Preparation for work

97. We asked questions in the survey relating to how students are prepared for work by their higher education experience. High levels of career focus were shown by respondents. Most stated they had chosen their degree programmes with a particular career in mind. This was particularly so among respondents in medicine and health-related subject and Social Sciences. The lowest levels of this sort of career focus were seen in Science and Engineering.

98. There were also high levels of agreement that a degree should provide a general preparation for work. There was a lesser, though still a high, level of agreement that degrees should be providing preparation for specific jobs. Over 80% of respondents stated that they had gained knowledge that would be useful for work in general and for specific careers.

99. In terms of personal changes, most respondents indicated that they felt they were now more professional, more confident and more able to get the job that was right for them. More than 90% of respondents in Medicine and health-related subjects and 80% of respondents from Management subjects agreed they were now more able to get the types of job they wanted. The lowest level of agreement was among Science and Engineering respondents (57%).

100. The three most important things to learn as identified by the respondents were, respectively: transferable skills, suitable personal qualities and attributes and job/discipline specific knowledge. In terms of the three most important things they had learned from their degree programmes, respondents most often identified transferable skills, subject specific knowledge and development of personal qualities. This would seem to indicate a close match between what respondents thought they *should* be learning and what they actually think they have learned. It should be noted that the main aspects identified show a close match to factors identified as important in much of the literature related to employability policy.

101. Overall there were high levels of agreement that course materials link subject matter to employment. This was particularly high among respondents in post-1992 universities. There was a lower level of agreement on exactly how respondents were prepared for work. Respondents from post-1992 universities showed the highest levels of agreement that the ways in which they are being prepared for work are made clear to them. In terms of subject areas, Medicine and health-related respondents showed the highest levels of agreement and respondents from Science and Engineering showed the lowest levels.

102. There were relatively low levels of agreement that tutors linked their teaching to employment although these levels were higher among post-1992 university respondents. Agreement that tutors showed a high level of understanding of how subject matter relates to employment were highest among Medicine and health-related subjects and Management respondents and lowest in Social Sciences and Humanities respondents. Levels of agreement were much higher in post-1992 respondents than among pre-1992 and specialist institution respondents (both showed agreement levels of less than 50%).

103. Most respondents agree that they were learning about the kinds of work people in their subject areas do. Not surprisingly, this was particularly high among Medicine and health-related respondents. Most agreed that their tutors expected them to show professionalism and levels of agreement on this were highest among Medicine and health-related respondents and Social Science respondents.

104. The lowest levels of agreement were among Management students. Levels of agreement were also highest among post-1992 university students. Just over half of the cohort indicated that they had the opportunity to undertake work experience or a work placement. It would seem that Medicine and health-related respondents were well provided for in this respect. A high level of respondents from post-1992 universities also agreed that they had placement opportunities.

105. There may be some evidence to suggest that placement opportunities could be increased across non-medical subject areas and also in pre-1992 universities and specialist institutions. It may be noteworthy that low levels of agreement were seen in Management and Science and Technology subject area where there are likely to be high levels of vocational and applied degree schemes.

106. Overall we found that our respondents showed a high degree of career focus in terms of programme choice and agreement that higher education should be preparing students for work. There is also evidence that respondents had undergone positive changes in terms of preparation for work as a result of their student experiences.

Preparation for institutional visits

107. Rather than repeat the format of the institutional visits in our 2003-2006 evaluation of the QEF, successful as that was in allowing us to gain a considerable volume of data, in this phase of the evaluation we are taking a slightly different approach in three ways.

108. Firstly, as we are aware of concern over the limited engagement of practitioners with the QEF, we are concentrating far more on this group in our evaluation than has perhaps been the case previously. Working on the assumption that many practitioners[1] may not necessarily have explicit knowledge of the QEF, we are asking them to discuss aspects of their routine teaching practices from which we can infer 'alignment' with the aims of the Framework.

109. Secondly, we are aware that there are gaps in our knowledge of the extent to which 'rank and file' students – that is, those with no formal representational role in that they are not class or course reps or student association officers - are aware of the impact of the QEF. Again, we are assuming that most of this group will have little explicit knowledge of the QEF and so we are asking them to discuss aspects of their learning experiences from which we can infer 'alignment' with QEF aims.

110. Thirdly, we are now taking a more disciplinary-based approach which is intended to be sensitive to the potential for differences in impact across broad disciplinary categories. We are grouping subject areas under three broad categories: Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Science & Engineering and Medicine, Veterinary & Health-Related. These are, of course, very broad categories and we are aware of the need to adjust these to ensure that they reflect the disciplinary composition of particular institutions – for example the specialist institutions.

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[1] By 'practitioners' we mean those academic staff with no managerial responsibilities and whose main responsibility is teaching.

1.0 Introduction

This report is Deliverable 2 from the quality enhancement framework (QEF) external evaluation team at Lancaster University. It is the first annual report to the QEF Evaluation Steering Committee – a progress report was discussed in March 2009.

The report:

- Recapitulates our approach to the evaluation of QEF. It does this by presenting and commenting on the latest version of the Project Work-plan.

- Summarises our activities to date, against the plan.

- Gives our view of QEF achievements to date.

- Identifies evaluation priorities.

- Sets out some issues that we believe will be significant in the next two years.

It is based on:

- Key informant interviews completed between November 2008 and May 2009.

- A review of Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy documents with a focus on the Themes.

- The survey of course representatives completed by June 2009.

2.0   Our approach and work-plan

This section introduces and explains the current version of the Project Work-plan (see Appendix 1, page 110).

The aims and objectives of the evaluation project are given in Sections 1 and 2 of the Appendix. The work schedule of deliverables and milestones can be found in the table in Section 3 of the Work-plan and the operational plan is in section 4. It summarises the operational plan over the lifetime of the project. We now have more detailed plans of the main work-packages and have detailed (rolling) job lists running 2-3 months ahead. These are checked and extended at our monthly team meetings

The content of these four sections 1-4 is closely based on the requirements laid out by the SFC in the original Invitation to Tender.

Section 5 of the Work-plan shows how we have structured the evaluation activity into work-packages. Leadership responsibilities are shown. Section 5 summarises the operational plan over the lifetime of the project. We now have more detailed plans of the main work-packages and have detailed (rolling) job lists running 2-3 months ahead. These are checked and extended at our monthly team meetings

We can say that the work of year one of the evaluation plan has been completed on time and against the stated objectives in the operational plan outlined in section 4 of Appendix 1. However, there are some minor adjustments in the light of planning realities. The review of strategic documents of 19 of the Scottish higher education institutions was an extra activity not set out in the original work-plan but included to support the preparatory work for the pilot institutional visits. The contact lists have been established and we have regular contact with SHEEC (the network of PVCs leading work on teaching and learning within institutions) to introduce the aims of the evaluation.

The 1st phase of institutional visits has now been set up and a pilot visit to an institution for the purposes of trialling instruments and approaches has been completed. Interviews with key sector-level informants have been completed and are reported here. The student survey (course reps) has been designed and administered and is reported here. We have undertaken two meetings with Officers of the SFC and the Evaluation Steering Group. Iinterim reporting of D1 took place in March 2009. We have undertaken regular meetings with the LSN team.

3.0   Our activities to date

3.1   Key informant interviews

3.1.1 Introduction

We characterised the Key Informants' description of the Quality Enhancement Framework in 2004 as an attempt to rectify problems with quality assurance-led approaches. Amongst other things, it gave us a baseline against which achievements since then can be judged.

In their critique of quality assurance, informants were aligning the Scottish system with the work of scholars such as Barnett (2003) and Harvey and Newton (2004). The points they raised are a point of comparison for the analyses presented below.

As a point of comparison, we have undertaken in-depth interviews with around 30 key informants,[2] within and outwith the Scottish higher education sector. With the five dimensions of the QEF in mind, we selected informants who we thought would provide an interesting perspective on one or more of these aspects of the QEF. We also spoke to a number of informants who had a wider experience of the overall Framework.

To date, interviews have taken place with 25 key informants and further interviews will be conducted throughout the course of the evaluation. All the interviews were recorded (with interviewees' permission) and took place either face-to-face or, in a small number of cases, by telephone interview. The recordings were then transcribed and analysed. The interview schedules used are included as an Appendix to the main report. The range of roles is the following:

- Senior officers of public and private sector organisations (e.g. Directors, Assistant Directors, Chief Executives, Deputy Chief Executives)
- Officers of national student associations
- University senior managers (academics and administrators)

It is important to note that our intention in this part of the evaluation was to gain overall insight into the perspectives of these strategically placed individuals rather than to make detailed comparisons between them. We use quotes liberally in this section to offer the reader a serious opportunity to appreciate the perspectives offered by informants 'in their own words'.

As well as discussing particular aspects of the QEF, we asked informants for their views on a range of more general issues relating to quality enhancement. Their responses proved illuminating and have helped us to identify key issues to pursue during the course of the evaluation. We would like to express our thanks here to all those who so generously contributed to this phase of the evaluation through often quite lengthy interviews.

As part of the initial QEF evaluation by the Lancaster team, two sweeps of key informant[3] interviews were undertaken: one in 2003 and the second in 2006. We have, as far as possible, organised this section of our report using similar headings to those used when these interviews were reported in 2006. The observations of key stakeholders in 2003 and 2006 form useful points of reference against which to compare responses of the present group of informants.

3.1.2 Thematic summary of informants' responses

In this section of the report we begin by presenting informants' perceptions of how well they feel the QEF as a whole is working. We then look at the individual dimensions of the Framework and report on informants' views of these. Where appropriate, we compare the perceptions of the most recent group of stakeholders with those interviewed in 2003 and 2006. As comparatively few references were made to internal review processes, we have not reported on this dimension of the QEF in this section of the report. This will be an aspect of the QEF which is more relevant for discussion during the institutional visits and on which we will comment in more detail in a later report. Public information remains the dimension of the Framework of which informants still claim to have little understanding.

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[2] This number is fluid as we have added other informants to our original list on the recommendation of others.

[3] Some of the original 2003/2006 informants were interviewed as part of the present evaluation but it was not possible to re-interview all of the original group.

3.1.3 How the QEF is working

In general, there is a fair degree of satisfaction with the progress of the Framework. As we reported in 2006, the commitment to enhancement remains strong:

> *There's some real engagement with the issues of enhancement – serious engagement at a strategic level by institutions. So if it ever was lip-service, I think it's no longer lip-service.*

> *I think it has resulted in a higher level of engagement on the part of a larger group of the academic staff based in institutions than any previous quality system has managed to achieve and I think it has genuinely affected a cultural change.*

However, the use of the word '*some*' in the first quote signals the persistence of the perception, on the part of a number of informants, that there is still a degree of 'patchiness' in the extent of engagement amongst the 'layers' of academic staff. Concern was expressed that many teaching practitioners[4] are not yet engaging with the QEF to a satisfactory extent:

> *I'm very aware at times that our discussions, our context, our environment is one in which we are talking to people of similar minds and it's a fairly closed circle – relatively closed circle. It's the Vice Principals, it's the Quality Managers, it's our own reviewers and people involved in themes. Outside that circle there's a very large hinterland that doesn't really know what's going on – that this thing exists. I can imagine we could carry on like that for ever but that would be a shame because if we were serious about the whole quality enhancement approach and serious about it not only as a means of QAA or the Funding Council checking up on what institutions are doing, but more as a means of creating that culture of enhancement and supporting the development of a sector that takes ownership seriously, we need to step outside of that closed pool. We need to step out of that and get everyone involved.*

> *The extent to which the day-to-day practitioner is aware of enhancement - the extent to which we really engage with those people in supporting them - is slightly disappointing.*

This is, of course, an issue of which we are well aware from the outcomes of previous evaluations and, in our current round of institutional visits, we are placing a much greater emphasis on the perceptions and experiences of 'day-to-day' practitioners.

There are more frequent references to providing evidence of effectiveness and the use of indicators in the current round of interviews than was the case in 2003 and 2006. Examples include:

> *I think the difference between this cycle and the last one is we know that's where we are now and I think there's an interest in having sophisticated indicators that lead us in that direction.*

> *The kind of indicators that we've got to now are still about institutional engagement and we're a long way from saying 'as a result of that, things like learning outcomes have been more successful, retention will be improved'.*

> *People have to demonstrate that this has been done and, even more importantly, a recognition that there need to be observable consequences for the learning experience. But I think that's where we all struggle – to say we know what has happened as part of the learning experience.*

We are aware that the use of indicators is contested and has become a contentious issue. There is a sense in which the term has become associated by some with an idea of external control with a concomitant reduction in institutional autonomy. On a positive note, several informants spoke favourably of the increased sense of ownership of the Framework, seeing it as '*something that is clearly owned as a distinctive and valued part of the Scottish scene'.*

Also reflecting a change for the better, some informants regard the QEF as incorporating a better balance between fulfilling accountability demands whilst also having a genuine 'use-value' to institutions:

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[4] By 'practitioners' we mean those academic staff with no managerial responsibilities and whose main responsibility is teaching.

One of the difficulties with the old-fashioned TQA was that institutions found it genuinely difficult to be self-critical and the evidence does suggest that with this new methodology they are willing to be much more self-critical than they were before - and the self-assessments they generate are, as a consequence, much more useful.

As with all complex policy initiatives such as the QEF, sectoral change takes time and the point was made that although the Framework has now been in operation since 2003, and although considerable progress has no doubt been made, there is still some way to go before we see the full impact of the Framework:

These things are long-term agendas and I think one has to be patient. The risk is it might seem to the outsiders we're taking too long to get there but, given what we're talking about is culture change – and that's been a very helpful model to have all the way through – I'm not worried that people are starting to coast now.

I think it's probably taken longer than I would have liked to get all the institutions happy with the whole enhancement agenda...there was the need to establish consensus and concepts and understandings and so on.

One point to note was the tendency for informants to refer more to three dimensions of the QEF (ELIR, the QE themes and student engagement) rather than to the framework as a whole.

3.1.4 How the QEF in general is working: Summary points

- In general, there was a fair degree of satisfaction with the progress of the Framework.
- There is still a degree of patchiness in the extent of engagement amongst the various 'layers' of academic staff.
- There were more frequent references to providing evidence of effectiveness and the use of indicators in the current round of interviews than was the case in 2003 and 2006.
- Several informants spoke favourably of the increased sense of ownership of the Framework.
- There was an acknowledgement that the QEF incorporated a better balance between fulfilling accountability demands whilst also having a genuine 'use-value' to institutions.
- It was emphasised that sectoral change takes time and, although considerable progress has no doubt been made, there is still some way to go before we see the full impact of the Framework.
- We noted a tendency for informants to refer more to three dimensions of the QEF (ELIR, the QE themes and student engagement) rather than to the framework as a whole.

3.1.5 ELIR

Reporting on key informant interviews in 2006, we said that no-one thought ELIR was a light touch, although '*some were concerned at the beginning that it might be a bit of a get-out clause*'. This is reinforced by the responses of key informants in this round of interviews. Informants felt that although the format of ELIR was different from previous reviews, it was certainly as rigorous. Preparing for ELIR still requires considerable work on the part of those involved. ELIR was generally welcomed as a better alternative to previous forms of institutional review. As one informant says, one of the more negative aspects of past review processes was a tendency to see the review as a 'one-off' event to be got through as painlessly as possible:

Under the old system there must have been a temptation for some people to say 'well look, we're going to be subject to external scrutiny let's just concentrate the effort on making sure that everything looks good on the day and once they've gone we won't worry about it for another 4 or 5 years and we'll put in a bit of effort again'. I don't think that was a universal approach but that was the weakness of the old system.

By contrast, ELIR embodies a much more formative approach to quality assurance and enhancement. The experience of the first cycle largely confirms to informants that most institutions have approached reviews within this spirit:

It was new and the sector, although in many ways it's very confident about itself, when it's faced with these kind of processes, they do get terribly nervous – ridiculously so – about 'Oh, they'll

catch us out' or 'they'll misrepresent us' or whatever. So although there was maybe trust and respect for the individuals, there was a sense of 'oh well, that's all very well, but we'll see what it feels like in practice'.

As the second cycle begins, the perception of informants is that there is, not surprisingly, far less anxiety:

So I think coming on to the next round, I don't think there's an anxiety now because the message has been very much ELIR 2 is a variant on ELIR and the tweaks are ones which actually I think people are quite interested in – about focussing on international issues, on international perspectives, and maybe more emphasis on enhancement and embedding and less worry because they know they can do it. And I think also because it's a small sector, people know each other, they know the methodology of it better now.

A number of comments related to the value of the Reflective Analysis (RA) – both the value of the process of compiling it as well as the product itself. Producing the RA provides an opportunity for institutions to be honest and self-critical and, from the evidence of the first cycle of ELIR, most institutions appear to have engaged frankly and honestly with this (potentially risky) process:

I was suspicious of ELIR first time round and thought it's just another route for audit but I think as the ELIR reports developed over the first time frame people were genuinely self-reflective. There was a growing awareness of the enhancement agenda and a growing recognition that the best way to address this was to be genuinely self-reflective and self-critical. There is a greater candour and a greater candour than you would get from an audit approach. Within Scotland and Scottish HEIs I think there was a greater willingness to share information and good practice because it's not seen as competing with one another because it's a road that we're all travelling on, some at a faster pace than others.

The pulling together of the reflective analysis, it's a bit of a learning kind of thing for the institution. I remember at (our institution) some of the things that they had identified as problems as part of drafting the RA, they are actually starting to fix before the ELIR panel visit to the institution. Another good thing about ELIR is because people are having to think about their institution in this way it is trying to say, in quite a candid way, 'we do all of this but at the moment we're struggling with this, we don't know why. Issue X is causing us a problem, we know we need to sort it out and these are the ways we thought of doing this'. By doing that you are already starting to think about ways, you've identified the problem yourself in a way and the Panel coming in is a secondary kind of thing to look at the wider picture from an external point of view because sometimes you are too close to it to say 'why is that not working?'

The composition of ELIR panels attracted some comments. In general, the first cycle of ELIR has confirmed that the involvement of students on Review Panels has been a particularly successful innovation:

I think the big strength of ELIR is the fact that it is one of the first of the institutional review processes that actually actively involves students in all aspects of it so it means that you are getting that completely full picture. You've got the academics, you've got people that are senior administrators within the institution but then also you've got students who are, at the end of the day, the reason why all of this happens.

An important development of the second cycle of ELIR is the much stronger emphasis on international issues. Reflecting this, each Review panel now has an international member:

The international dimension is extended by including for the first time, in each ELIR team, a reviewer drawn from outside the UK. By adding an international reviewer to all ELIR teams, the range of experience and expertise is extended, and both institutions and the ELIR process will benefit from this wider global perspective. The international reviewer will bring international perspectives on quality assurance and enhancement and will generally be in a position to draw the enhancement and assurance discussions in ELIR on a wider canvas. In addition to the direct benefits, international reviewers will facilitate dissemination abroad of Scottish higher education quality and standards. In addition, international reviewers may be in a position to contribute to wider elements within the QEF, in particular the Enhancement Themes[5].

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[5] QAA Enhancement-led institutional review handbook: Scotland (Second edition), 2008

The reaction to this from informants is generally cautiously optimistic:

> *We'll see how it goes. There were some people who thought 'Oh, they'll never understand us, they'll come with their own baggage'. And I think other colleagues have said 'look, we've seen this in action or we've done it ourselves, folk can handle this – they can handle the differences and still be useful and reflective'. So that might throw up some interesting things but I don't think in a worrying way.*

Finally, from one of the student representatives we interviewed, there were some comments about the format of ELIR reports. They were not felt to be particularly 'user-friendly' to a student audience:

> *I think the actual end reports can be a bit inaccessible. You would never get a normal student reading an ELIR report. I think it would be quite good if they could do, say, like a one page summary of what's come out of it so that people like Student Unions or whoever, can use it with a more general audience rather than saying 'there's this 30-page document, it's a bit technical, full of QAA speak, you won't understand most of it but have a read'. It would be useful to take out one side, a summary of what happened and the findings of the panel and the things that came out of that just so that you can use it with a slightly wider audience. Also all the staff in the institution aren't going to read a 30-page document, but it would be good if they could see a summary. You would expect a lot of the staff to look at sections of the ELIR report but most of it will just be the 5% people in the institutions that read the whole thing, all the Learning and Teaching boys would look at it but it should really be more people than that. I can see why they don't read the full report but I think it will be beneficial for them to have a summary that came out of it.*

Another informant who is a University governor echoed this concern from his point of view:

> *(The report) tells a good story in terms of what's being achieved, but as I say I think the missing bit of the jigsaw in some respects is this, how's that information conveyed to the Court in such a way that they're not getting bogged down in the detail or in any sense micromanaging the performance management system but they are getting a report that is giving a note of the hot spots and perhaps the areas where progress is going even beyond the standards that have been set.*

As the second cycle of ELIR continues, we will be pursuing many of the issues raised by these interviews with key informants during the course of our institutional visits.

3.1.6 ELIR: summary points

- Informants felt that although the format of ELIR was different from previous reviews, it was certainly as rigorous.
- The ELIR approach is seen as representing a much more formative approach to quality assurance and enhancement.
- Producing the Reflective Analyses provides opportunities for institutions to be honest and self-critical and, from the evidence of the first cycle of ELIR, most institutions appear to have engaged frankly and honestly with this (potentially risky) process.
- The first cycle of ELIR has, in most cases, confirmed that the involvement of students on Review Panels has been particularly successful.
- Overall, the inclusion of an international reviewer on Review panels is given a cautious welcome.
- There were comments from some informants that the format of ELIR reports was not particularly 'user-friendly' in terms of some of the intended audiences.

3.1.7 Student participation

Key informants' responses to the issue of student participation in quality processes echo those of respondents reported in 2006. Most regard this aspect of the QEF as very successful and a welcome development. Scotland is regarded by some as leading the way in encouraging students to play a more active part in quality processes:

> *We're second to none in the world – that may be an exaggerated claim but I think there's good evidence for that. We're not within sight of the horizon – we're still in the foothills but it is very encouraging, I think.*

Central to the whole aspect of student participation is the role of sparqs (student participation in quality Scotland). There is general acknowledgment from informants that sparqs are making an excellent contribution to improving student representation in quality processes:

> *sparqs has been a great success in that it's still fairly unique. It has come in for a lot of interest from outside Scotland. Some countries have said 'we wish we could adopt this'. Others have said 'well, we don't want to do that but we applaud your aspiration'. And they've had interest themselves from South Africa and Eastern Europe and Wales and all sorts of places.*

> *I think one of the big differences about the real gains is the level of student engagement. If you really get meaningful student engagement then I think you're well on the way towards embedding improved practices. Again, while I certainly wouldn't say things were perfect, I think the new framework has exceeded expectations in terms of the level of student engagement that it has managed to deliver. In part we've been fortunate because of some of the individuals involved and the sparqs organization led by the NUS has been a remarkable success.*

Since our 2006 report, another agency has been set up with a remit which appears to have some overlap with that of sparqs. SLEEC – Student Learning Enhancement and Engagement Committee – aims to:

> *bring together all student officers across Scotland to form a national forum that will give student officers a voice in improving and shaping the student learning experience in Scotland. Two SLEEC groups will be created for each sector. SLEEC will be a student-led group working in partnership with the university sector. Membership of the group will consist of student officers and key individuals and agencies working in the university sector. The group will act as a sounding board between the sector and student officers on a range of quality enhancement issues. It is envisaged that SLEEC will address pertinent quality enhancement issues, and in partnership with the sector, will find ways in which to take forward student officer suggestions and insights[6].*

Recent staff changes within SLEEC may have contributed to the agency not perhaps having achieved as much as was initially envisaged. Some informants referred to confusion between the respective roles and responsibilities of SLEEC and sparqs. One informant succinctly defined these roles as '*SLEEC provides knowledge and sparqs provides skills'.* In terms of enhancing student participation in quality processes, if sparqs' main remit is improving student *representation*, then SLEEC's role could perhaps be summarised as improving student *engagement*:

> *SLEEC especially has quite a good role to play in the sector now it's expanded its remit slightly to improve student engagement because it's all very well having these policies and these structures and things but if it's not happening down on the ground then what does it matter and things like the enhancement themes are amazing but they just don't filter down either to academic staff or students.*

This is an important issue but one that may prove difficult to resolve. More than one key informant commented on the desirability of involving more 'rank and file' students in quality enhancement processes but recognised the difficulties of doing so. The point was made that the relationship between students and higher education providers is changing:

> *Students are central to the whole process. I think coming into it from that angle is terribly important. It's not about students as consumers, customers or whatever but students as integral partners in the whole process of higher education.*

> *I suppose you would, and I think this is borne out by experience, expect them to be interested in the quality of the learning experience they were having and I think increasingly students are interested in that. They have become much more interested in the careers they're going to have post-graduation and how their learning experience is going to equip them for their future life. I agree that's not the only interest that students have, of course, but I think it certainly has a higher profile than used to be the case.*

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[6] Taken from the NUS' website officeronline.co.uk

Whilst encouraging more 'rank and file' students to be more involved in quality issues may be a laudable objective, this suggests a number of challenges. Rather than concentrating on student representation in the sense of, for example, student membership of institutional committees and review panels (which is now almost universal practice in HEIs anyway), it was suggested by some informants that the focus should now turn to other possible ways of encouraging student engagement:

> *I think at some point we're just going to have to recognise that yes, of course student engagement is important but we also have to recognise that students have got four years or less in which, if they don't do well, that's it. They are there for four years and they have got to make the best use of that. Student engagement in quality is not necessarily going to be high on their agenda. And similarly even with sabbatical officers, they are only there for a year or so. There's always going to be that tension which we have to work with. We need to work with it, we need to support their interests rather than perhaps thinking that somehow all we've got to do is press the right buttons and they'll get involved in national interests. I think we need to be a bit smarter about our student engagement thinking. We need to try to get a bit more focussing and think more about how best – where and how best - can students get involved and not expect them to get involved in everything.*

> *I think there are ways of involving students with things which aren't necessarily being a class rep and if the institution wants to get people involved in curriculum design or whatever, then there are other ways of doing that. It doesn't have to be through meetings and all these kinds of things. There are roles for students to be involved in stuff but it doesn't necessarily have to be all these meetings.*

> *I think what they need to do is actually identify what student engagement is. I think one of the problems is that many people have narrowed the interpretation. Our interpretation of student engagement might be totally different to what the Funding Council's is and what the QAA's is. I think getting beyond the representation element, I think there is probably a lot of student engagement happening but some people maybe wouldn't call that student engagement. I would hope there is student engagement otherwise how are students getting their degrees, how are they learning, are they not talking to other students? They need to be clear on what the different types of engagement are.*

When we reported on Key Informant interviews in 2006, we drew attention to three issues for consideration:

1. Structural bars to student participation. The structure of student life is not well-aligned with the task of being a course or institutional representative. This was endorsed by some informants, none of whom had solutions to offer.
2. Raising ambitions. There was some, albeit not widespread, concern that student representatives should understand pedagogical possibilities so that they can contribute more deeply to departmental discussions. There is also a view that it is time to be more creative in imagining ways of engaging student participation in quality enhancement.
3. Participation of students in internal subject reviews.

The first two points still apply. In terms of the first issue, informants referred to increasing pressures on students today which act as barriers to greater involvement: many, if not most, students are in paid employment or, especially in the case of the more mature students, have family commitments that prevent them taking on any extra responsibilities. The same can be said in relation to the second of the three issues – it would probably require a significant time commitment on the part of students to undertake the necessary 'training' to develop a greater understanding of 'pedagogical possibilities'. Most students just do not have time to do this. However, in terms of the third issue - participation of students in internal subject reviews – progress has certainly been made on this. In many (if not most) universities, students now are members of internal review panels. We reported in 2006 that informants in 2006 were concerned that participation of students in review panels could be '*very disruptive of studies, especially given the amount of training that would be involved in becoming familiar with pedagogic matters*'. However, it is encouraging to note that in the present round of interviews as well as on the basis of evidence from previous institutional visits and survey data, we have not noted any indications that this has been the case.

3.1.8 Student participation: summary points

- In general, most informants regard student representation and participation as a very successful and welcome aspect of the QEF.
- Scotland is regarded by some as leading the way in encouraging students to play a more active part in quality processes.
- There is a general acknowledgment from informants that sparqs are making an excellent contribution to improving student representation in quality processes.
- Informants referred to some confusion between the respective roles and responsibilities of SLEEC and sparqs.
- More than one key informant commented on the desirability of involving more 'rank and file' students in quality enhancement but recognised the difficulties of doing so.
- The point was made that the relationship between students and higher education providers is changing in that students are increasingly being seen as integral partners in the process of higher education.
- Rather than concentrating on student representation in the sense of, for example, student membership of institutional committees and review panels, a number of informants suggested that the focus should now turn to other ways of encouraging student engagement.

3.1.9 Enhancement themes

The Enhancement Themes are, together with ELIR, one of the dimensions of the QEF of which there is probably the greatest level of awareness amongst key informants and which attracted considerable comments. Whilst informants identified a number of positive aspects and achievements of the themes, responses reflect a degree of dissatisfaction with some aspects. Informants acknowledged that some of the themes had produced excellent work and that there was now a greater awareness of, and engagement with, the themes:

> *I think we're doing reasonably well and I think we are now beginning to move from the position of 'Oh, yeah, I'm aware that there's something happening', to 'I understand that something quite important is happening, and that there's quite a lot of useful information which I as a practitioner can look to'.*

However, there was less confidence of the extent of the impact the themes had had on the sector overall. As we pointed out in a previous report[7] on the impact of the themes, attempting to sift out the specific effects from those of other drivers for change is an extremely challenging, if not impossible, task. Even so, some informants were critical of what they regarded as the limited extent of impact of the themes:

> *I'm still not sure that the impact of these things on everyday practice is either known or particularly strong. So you get two or three hundred people turning up to a conference, talking enthusiastically about it and then going back to the ranch and thinking 'what's next?' Now I don't know if there's a real answer to that. I kind of hope, I suppose, that there would be by now and I think that it's maybe beginning to come.*

> *I don't see much evidence that the work that's been done on the themes has actually been translated in (this university), but also in other universities that I know about, into things that are going to be genuinely useful for students. Huge amounts of paperwork have been produced, most of which nobody reads, all kinds of conferences have been had which are kind of mildly quite fun. But actually every university works to a slightly different agenda, different people have different priorities and so on, and I'm unconvinced that they've been all that useful. I mean no activity of that kind is ever going to be entirely useless, as people say that they are, but that's rhetorical. There are obviously some benefits but I don't think they are as great, I don't think they are actually intrinsically great enough to justify the amount of effort that has gone into them.*

> *I think we have got into a state of stultifying, parochial, self-congratulation about the whole thing, in which everybody goes around saying how wonderful it is and what a tremendous beacon to the rest of the world we are in Scotland and how terrific things are while most people actually know fine, that actually, as I've said, they've been of relatively little use. Clearly the sector is tremendously divided on this. Lots of really quite good work has been done but they are not as*

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[7] *Evaluation of the Impact of the Quality Enhancement Themes*. (2008) CSET, Lancaster University

wonderful as they are cracked out to be. It's part of the whole culture game of fantastic self-congratulation.

To counterbalance these criticisms, other informants referred to the often cited view that change in higher education takes time and that this needed to be taken into account. The impact of some of the early themes was only now beginning to be discernible within some institutions:

The enhancement themes - you will see the impact of that in this institution in the next couple of years. I think a time lag is something that is really important and the Funding Council and many people don't understand this.

These extracts demonstrate the differences in expectation that mechanisms such as the use of a targeted approach to thematic change involving a range of resources might have. They point to the perspective that involvement tends to be relatively 'enclaved'. This means that there are pockets of innovative practice that can be aligned to practices promoted in thematic activity, but there is less confidence that these pockets of practice are becoming more recurrent or embedded.

One of the tasks of the institutional visits will be to inform this estimation of effects in a more systematic way. We can say however that there is strong alignment with messages from thematic activity in the policy statements on teaching and learning at institutional level. These are important effects and set the 'cultural framework' for changes.

One informant felt that there needed to be a much closer relationship between the themes and ELIR. Although stressing that he felt that the themes were certainly moving in the right direction, there could be a danger that institutions were engaging with the themes on a somewhat superficial level:

I think there are questions about the enhancement themes in institutional review but from my observation, institutions are able to pay lip service to the way they engage with the themes and send comparatively junior people to the steering committee and have comparatively isolated pockets of engagement. I don't think in some of the institutions, particularly the 'ancients' in Scotland, senior management would have a clue as to how the institution as a whole is responding to the themes.

The establishment of the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), which is made up of representatives from most HEIs is seen as having strengthened a sense of 'ownership' of the themes by the sector. In the early days of the QEF, there was a feeling of resentment in some quarters that the themes had been 'imposed' with insufficient consultation. This seems to have been resolved through SHEEC taking over the responsibility for planning and managing the themes:

I think we've got a much better way of consulting through SHEEC, consulting with the sector to get their ideas about what they would say as being critical priorities because truly we don't want to be involved in work that isn't going to benefit institutions.

It's the VPs learning and teaching and their community who agree what the key issues are. So they decide what they're focused on and if you look back they're pretty well what's top of the agenda. So I think that's a real strength. It makes it a lot easier within institutions. It means that you don't get _automatic_ buy-in, but you're connected to the issues that are problematic for people.

As the sector is now much more familiar with the aims of the themes and how they operate, informants feel that there is less wariness and more willingness to engage with the themes:

They're moving in the right direction I think because they're now explicitly trying to get the institutions to take more responsibility for driving the things. Certainly I've seen a change since the Flexible Delivery theme and the First Year theme. They've certainly moved in the direction of trying to hand the responsibility for designing the activity with the theme to the institutions and to get a higher level of ownership in institutions of what happens in a theme.

I think it's a strength now that people are connected - they're familiar. Generally I think the majority of staff would have heard of them, and that's good. We're getting a bit more connected that the enhancement themes as the resource – the outputs. I don't know if they monitor the usage of their resources but people are getting a bit more familiar so I think that's really, really good.

On a rather less positive note, the format of the outputs of the themes is seen as problematic by a number of informants:

> *There are issues about the nature of deliverables – that there's still a heavy emphasis on documentation – paper. There are issues about shelf-life of what happens to all that stuff. What happens if I'm not ready for that now but in a year's time I will be? Who's keeping that on the boil? It feels to me that that's still unfinished business.*

> *If we take something like Research Teaching – it did have a discipline focus and each of those projects are producing 80 page reports! Now I know that even if you've got a report that's aimed at the medics, it's the enthusiasts who are going to pick up that 80 page report – even though it's got a discipline focus. So I was saying 'look, maybe what we should be doing is trying to have a bit of an initiative to take the theme outcomes that have come to date but can we re-package them in different ways? Can we actually create practical toolkits for staff development? Can we do DVDs? Can we just - not lose the findings - but do things in a very different way to try and engage and embed the work that's already gone?' And there would be opportunities for refreshing some of the outcomes. My feeling is this is what I think we should be doing.*

This issue of the most appropriate form of outputs for the themes was also raised in our previous evaluation of the impact of the themes. From that evaluation, the clear message which emerged was that there was a strong preference for theme outputs to take the form of much shorter 'snappier' reports that allow readers to access the key findings faster. This is an issue associated with the 'use' and 'usability' of outputs which is a perennial problem. There are plenty of axioms designed to address this problem:

> *Something that it short and sharp – one side of an A4 per theme but also links to where they can find more, identify more people, and then maybe also having awareness sessions either centrally or locally where you're exchanging ideas and disseminating good practice.*

Finally, we reported complaints from the 2006 key informants about '*the pace of movement from one theme to another.*' In the words of one of the current key informants:

> *When this started off we had this arrangement of enhancement themes that ran alongside the institutional review part of the process and I think we started off in a way that was possibly too ambitious. You were trying to run two major enhancement themes every year. I think over a period of time that became modified and a slightly different programme was organized.*

Most of the present group of key informants feel that this issue has been largely resolved by the willingness of the QAA to listen to the sector's concerns about this and subsequently reducing the frequency with which new themes have been introduced. Rather than have a year without a theme, as some informants would have liked, the new theme (*Graduates for the 21st Century: integrating the enhancement themes)* which has been introduced has a rather different set of objectives to previous themes in that it seeks to consolidate and build on the outcomes of previous themes:

> *I think essentially this is a big theme for us and is a shift in direction because it's not a new theme as such - it's actually consolidating and building on what we've done before. So we've not been out into new territory, we've not launched something on, say, research students, for example. We've actually sought to consolidate, build upon, enhance what we've already done and actually bring together the huge linkages that exist between the various themes we've undertaken and I think this is very important because I think in the past people saw them as stand-alone and that's not the case. They do interlink.*

Some informants, however, were not sure that the sector would appreciate the rationale for this theme and might misinterpret the objectives:

> *There's a strong feeling in the institutions that they've been too fast, that we ought to pause and take stock and try and integrate, build on what we've already done for the last few years rather than launching yet another theme. I think the new theme is an attempt to do that. As you probably know, there has to be a new theme for policy reasons. It is kind of attempting to be a theme that brings together all the previous themes which I think is right, I think that is what it should do. I think there is a danger that actually the new theme - the 21st Century Graduate - will*

seem like yet a new, another theme rather than what the institutions have been asking for - which is to pause and take stock.

I personally don't have my head around quite where the theme is going -.and this is just me personally speaking. My concern was that at the conference last week there was an awful lot of emphasis on the former (graduate attributes) and very little on the latter (integrating the themes). My feeling is that if we have graduate attributes as a banner – an overarching concept – that's fine but actually there's so much that we can be doing with integrating and embedding the enhancement themes.

As this section reveals, the enhancement themes aroused quite strong feelings amongst key informants. Given the considerable amount of effort that has gone into these and the excellent outcomes from some themes, it seems a pity that informants' responses are not more positive. During the institutional visits we shall certainly be pursuing perceptions and experiences of the themes amongst staff and students and will comment in future reports on the extent to which these align with the views of key stakeholders.

3.1.10 Enhancement themes: summary points

- The Enhancement Themes are, together with ELIR, one of the dimensions of the QEF of which there is probably the greatest level of awareness amongst key informants.
- Whilst informants identified a number of positive aspects and achievements of the themes, their responses reflect a degree of dissatisfaction with some aspects of the themes.
- On the positive side, informants felt that some of the themes had produced excellent work and as there is now a greater familiarity with the aims of the themes and how they operate, there is less wariness and more willingness to engage with the themes.
- There was less certainty that the themes have had a great deal of impact on the sector. However, it was recognised that the impact of some of the early themes was only now beginning to be discernible within some institutions.
- The establishment of the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) which is made up of representatives from most HEIs is seen as having strengthened a sense of 'ownership' of the themes by the sector.
- The use and usability of the outputs of the themes is still seen as problematic by a number of informants with lengthy reports not being seen as particularly 'user-friendly'.
- The current theme *Graduates for the 21st Century: Integrating the Enhancement Themes* is intended to consolidate and build on the previous Themes but some scepticism was expressed by informants that it would be interpreted in this way by the sector.

3.1.11 Public information

Finally, in this section on the dimensions of the QEF, we turn to the aspect of providing improved forms of public information about quality. In our 2006 report on key informant interviews, the provision of public information was seen as synonymous with the Teaching Quality Information (TQi) website, produced by HERO Ltd. This was launched in August 2004 in order to provide potential students with easy access to official information about the quality of higher education in UK universities and colleges. The comments we reported in 2006 from informants were not favourable, for example: *'a waste of space' and 'the best said about TQi is that it's impenetrable and so no-one can use it'.* Views on the provision of public information are similar amongst the present group of key informants to those expressed by the 2003 and 2006 groups.

The overall feeling was that this aspect was not working and that the sector, in the rest of the UK and not just in Scotland, had still not really worked out what was required:

Public information - I think we've flogged ourselves over this more than other people in that we are delivering public reports but I think we're all aware there's a huge disjunction between what that is and see as the intended purpose. So that's the one that, sometimes, I think we should just pull a plug on and say 'well, look that's not something we should be doing.

I think in terms of the other planks to the framework, the one that has always worried me that I don't think we've got right and it's something we were required to report on was the whole business of the freedom of information to stakeholders and we haven't cracked that yet. But I don't think it has been cracked south of the border either. I don't think it's been a success.

It was felt that the information that HEIs were required to submit was not the most appropriate in terms of providing '*potential students with easy access to official information about the quality of higher education in UK universities and colleges*'[8]. One informant made the point that students themselves were in the best position to say what kind of information would be most useful:

> *There are different sorts of issues students need to think about which will actually help them to engage with their learning more effectively when they arrive but it isn't about what's the entry grades, how many people get a First and so on. We've encouraged the NUS to come up with some policy document but we haven't really got there yet. I think that's one of our actions over the next 4 years – to say, well what does that mean?*

Informants were in strong agreement that the information in the public arena was not really relevant to the information needs of prospective students – as these quotes illustrate:

> *We were told to do these programmes specifications which to me are not terribly easy to understand but we all did them. We produced 450, they're all on our website but I'm not sure the world is a better place because of them, I don't think so, or more informed because of them - I don't think so!*

> *I think we've got bogged down in the technical discussions about Unistats and NSS and all this kind of thing. There's an industry now of generating these things which – I think increasingly makes sure that they've bugger all to do with quality, really.*

> *There are different sorts of issues students need to think about which will actually help them to engage with their learning more effectively when they arrive but it isn't about what's the entry grades, how many people get a First and so on.*

An informant who was a representative of a sector that employed large numbers of graduates emphasised that information had to meet the needs of a wide range of stakeholders and the kind of information that was publically available at the moment did not really do this:

> *I think we should have a more transparent approach to public information on quality to meet student demands, employer demands, parent demands and I think they could do more in that regard. I'm also very conscious of the fact that HMIE reports of colleges are public documents and I'm not sure personally if the QAA documents are public documents or not. Or, if they are, they may be in such language that the general public possibly wouldn't fully understand. I don't think there is a single metric for all of this. I think it's for the individual establishment to come up with a system that suits itself.*

We reported in 2006 of the decision of a minority of Scottish universities to participate in the National Student Survey. This number has increased to 12 HEIs participating in the most recent (2009) NSS survey. Like it or not, and it *has* attracted a number of criticisms, the NSS is the largest survey of student opinion on learning and teaching in the UK and the results are well-publicised and feed into TQi. It will be interesting to note, over the course of the present QEF evaluation, whether all HEIs in Scotland decide to participate in this survey.

3.1.12 Public information: summary points

- The views expressed on the provision of public information are similar in the present round of interviews to those of the 2003 and 2006 groups. The overall sense was that the sector, in the rest of the UK and not just in Scotland, had still not really worked through the implications of this dimension in terms of recurrent practices. There was a lack of clarity on the range, legitimacy, audience for, and use of, public information.

- The point was made that students themselves were in the best position to say what kind of information potential students, for example, would find most useful. Informants felt that very few potential students would be interested in some of the information currently available.

- The number of HEIs in Scotland taking part in the NSS has increased from 3 in 2006 to 12 HEIs participating in the most recent (2009) NSS survey.

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[8] Taken from the TQi's website

3.1.13 The sustainability of the QEF: issues from 2006

We now report on the question that uncovered issues which appear, to a number of informants, to threaten the future of the QEF. Informants were very frank and forthright in giving us their opinions and we have reported them here as faithfully as possible without, of course, identifying any individuals named by informants.

On the basis of our 2006 report on key informant interviews, we set out three conditions which would need to be met to assure long-term stability of the QEF. These were:

1. *Ministerial and funding council support must continue to be forthcoming. There were (in 2006) no indications that this would not be the case in the immediate future, although there was some trepidation about the ramifications of the formation of SFC.*

2. *There is a progressive cultural change in favour of scholarly and student-focused approaches to teaching; a need to 'get under the skin of day-to-day practice'. At the time we noted that it was clear that there was a considerable job to be done if cultural evolution was to permeate 'downwards' (or, in one informant's view, sideways, to less committed universities).*

3. *QEF is increasingly supported by self-organising groups. Mention was made of SHEEC and of self-organising subject-specific groups. One view was that QEF is not dependent on its advocates in SFC and QAA because 'the sector is committed to doing it [quality] differently and knows it must succeed or risk external intervention'.*

Informants in the current round of interviews provided a number of comments on the first two conditions: the nature of top-level support for the QEF (the first point above) and the idea of a progressive cultural change in higher education. In terms of the third condition, the 'risk of external intervention' is a growing concern in a political and economic climate which has undergone considerable changes since the QEF was introduced in 2003.

3.1.14 Strategic support for the QEF

Key informants in 2006 had expressed concerns for the future of the QEF following the merger of the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC) and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) into one body in 2005: the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). From the evidence of comments from the current round of key informant interviews, this anxiety appears to have increased and intensified. The main concerns centred on the possible re-introduction of an audit-based quality system. We report on the nervousness emerging in key informants' perceptions of the support for the QEF, and for enhancement in general. We then turn to perceptions of the Funding Council's role in supporting and championing the QEF.

Support from the Scottish Government

There can be no doubt that, since the QEF was introduced in 2002/3, the general economic climate has undergone considerable upheaval and, not surprisingly, the recession and serious financial situation have had knock-on effects on higher education. Public expenditure is under closer scrutiny from governments than was certainly the case in the early days of the QEF and informants felt that higher education would almost inevitably be affected:

> *We're entering a period where I suspect public spending is going to go down rather than up and that will be a change as we've had quite a few years where you could argue there was a manifest investment going on and whether we'll see that working the other way now, I don't know.*

> *I think those funds will come under scrutiny and we're working through this to a point where I think over the next two years, there will be increasingly critical scrutiny of everything – including enhancement themes – to say is this delivering for the taxpayer on something important? And I think there will be a defence saying 'yes, it's building capacity in a broad sense that people are focussed on high quality learning and teaching'. But there will be some things people say 'well, no, you'd get a bigger bang for your buck if you stopped doing this and started doing that'. So the sector will, I think, be nervous about this.*

This has led to anxieties in some quarters that this squeeze on funding might lead to Government[9] taking a much more interventionist stance towards higher education and, justifiably, requiring more evidence that higher education is spending the considerable funds it receives in the most efficient and effective ways. Informants would not see this as unreasonable given the sums of public money higher education receives:

> *I think the culture now in Scotland, and it's happening in England as well, is what are you getting for your money and that sense of outcomes for the nation now – in one sense are very materialistic things about economic development and helping us out of recession and so on - are coming to the fore. But more generally, I suppose, the public sector is a big drawer of money and how do we demonstrate to people that it's been properly spent?*

However, the general consensus was that the Scottish Government is more than satisfied with the way in which Scottish higher education is progressing and that there are no signs, at the highest levels, that a move away from enhancement and back to audit was being advocated:

> *I do check very regularly about the Minister and if she is getting nervous about these things, there is no indication of that at all.... So, at the moment, although the general environment is one where accountability is more important than it used to be, and accountability of a certain kind, there is no sign of our Minister or our Department wanting to go down that kind of road at all. They are still of the view that the road we are on in Scotland is correct.*

In the light of this positive support for the sector from Government, we asked why so many of those we interviewed were concerned about a possible shift back to audit based systems of assurance. The perception from a number of informants was that it was the '*pre-emptive twitchiness*' of some members of the Funding Council over possible demands from Government for more tangible evidence of achievement that were fuelling rumours within the sector of a return to audits. One informant felt that if the Funding Council responded by proposing a return to a TQA-style approach, the Government would support possible resistance from the higher education sector:

> *I suppose in a sense I was always confident about the outcome because I thought that if the Funding Council really went ahead with trying to make these changes the response from the sector would be so strong that they wouldn't actually be able to do it. It did alter the climate in the sector and give rise to some quite serious worries about what the Funding Council was up to. There was not any particular governmental pressure, this was a new Funding Council with new members, with much less expertise of university level education and the old HE Funding Council had a significant proportion of people who had some knowledge or experience of the HE sector. In the new Funding Council they were very much in the minority and those that were there were not particularly well-equipped to fight the fight on academic policy issues, they tended to have other areas of expertise like research.*

These perceptions were shared by a number of other informants who were concerned that the relationship between the SFC and the sector in future was somewhat less comfortable than it had been in the past.

The recent developments around the Government's Future Thinking Taskforce have done little to alleviate suspicions of the possibility of more external intervention in the business of higher education. The Taskforce was asked to consider:

- *How to optimise and shape the contribution which the Scottish university sector can make during the next 20 years to the Scottish economy, to Scottish culture and society, and to the political priorities of the Scottish Government*

- *What opportunities can be created and what barriers will need to be overcome to achieve that*

- *What resources will be needed and how they will be provided[10]*

The Taskforce's recommendations focus strongly on economic contribution. One of their recommendations is that universities should be a key economic sector in their own right, becoming the

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[9] References to 'government' in this section refer to the Scottish government.

[10] From the Scottish Government's news release 'New Horizons' for universities, 17/11/2008.

'seventh sector' in Scotland. Fiona Hyslop, the Education and Lifelong Learning Secretary, is quite clear over the sector's role within the Governments' economic strategy:

> .....the taskforce has recommended they should become a key sector of the economy in their own right. In return for that, we expect them to ensure the activity we fund is aligned with our purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth - an issue more critical than ever given the current economic climate[11].

Not surprisingly, informants expected a mixed reaction to this from colleagues within the higher education sector. As the second informant quoted below points out, the issue of vocationalism in higher education is a contentious issue in some quarters:

> Some things have changed but I do think there are still reasons for optimism and I think one of the recent changes which is affecting HE which may affect their view of QEF is particular demands, quite explicit demands of government in terms of responding to economic conditions for example. So, for example, recently we've had members of our government say to universities that they are part and parcel of economic recovery and what might that mean and the universities interpret that very much as a skills-based agenda. Some of our universities are very comfortable with that and some or our universities are not comfortable with that kind of agenda.

> People are worrying it's instrumental but I think no-one has the luxury of saying 'I don't care about this'. And the rhetoric is lining up in a quite polarised way – you've got people like the UK Skills Commission saying 'some of the sector is committed to these notions, others aren't' and I think that's grossly unfair, I don't know anybody who doesn't care about the students but if we get into a debate that sees there's an academic/vocational divide, then my worry is all the money will go the vocational way.

This concern for a more explicit economic contribution is not necessarily at odds with enhancement. It could be argued, for example, that recent themes fit this agenda very well, in particular Employability and the current theme of Graduates for the 21st Century. However, to those who fear that the freedom of the Scottish higher education sector to govern its own affairs is threatened, any perceived indication of attempts on the part of Government (or the Funding Council) to have a greater influence over the sector will be seen as menacing rather than supportive.

Support from the Funding Council

As we noted above, since the merger of the two Funding Councils, the Council has undergone quite significant changes and, to our key informants, the impact of some of these changes has somewhat weakened the previously strong relationships between the Council and the sector.

One of the first significant actions on the part of the newly merged Council was the commissioning of a Joint Quality Review Group (JQRG) in 2006 to look at the Council's policy on quality issues. This was not particularly well-received by some within the sector and seems to have set alarm bells ringing in some quarters that the SFC was set on taking a more interventionist approach in its dealings with the higher education sector. The relationship between the Council and the sector had been regarded as a partnership and there was strong concern expressed by informants that this sense of partnership was at risk:

> I can see that there is a danger and there is a concern in the sector about Funding Council behaviour which is not limited to academic policy matters, a fairly strong feeling that since the merged Funding Council for the two sectors was created and the appointment of its current chairman, the Council is much more minded to try to plan the sectors and to be more interventionist in its approach and to adopt less of a partnering approach than it did in the past. I think the emergence of the QEF is perhaps the single most striking example of the success of the partnership approach that existed five, six or seven years ago.

The 'imposition' of the Review was seen by some as a first indication of the erosion of this good working relationship. In the words of one informant, there was a feeling that the Review had been 'foisted' on the sector. The following comments typify informants' reactions to the JQRG:

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[11] Ibid.

We had the Joint Quality Review Group in Scotland and that's what actually put me on my guard at first because the naivety and the ignorance from some of the stuff that came out of that was absolutely shocking and so that for me was the big issue and I don't know if that's been put to bed or not.

You'll have picked up the Quality Review was definitely seen as the Council strongly intervening in something that wasn't as much of a partnership as people had been led to believe. It left a remnant and I think it has in some ways set us back.

The Joint Quality Review Group – the JQRG – by and large was a very unhappy experience. I think it's never a waste of time to review what you're doing but it was largely a waste of time to do it in the way it was done because it started off assuming that things were broken and needed fixing rather than starting off assuming that we've achieved a huge amount, let's just stand back a bit and see exactly where we stand and how we can make it better. Ultimately that's what we came out with but that journey was a wee bit tortuous. It took a huge amount of effort. It set us back. Just by the effort that had to go into that, you lost effort in other ways.

The reasons for commissioning this Review were seen as connected with ensuring that institutional systems were robust enough to stand scrutiny if the sector was to be asked to supply evidence of providing the best possible returns for public funding. However, the Council had previously demonstrated their trust in the sector through support and encouragement rather than through what was perceived as 'interference' through a review such as this. One informant offered the possibility that the recent actions of the SFC (or, more accurately, certain factions within the Council) appear to suggest that the Council is set on assuming a quite different role for itself vis-à-vis the sector: it seems to be moving away from supporting the *universities* as agents for sectoral change to taking on *for itself* the role of an agent of change.

This implies a very different relationship between SFC and the higher education sector that has so far existed:

The Funding Council has just issued its latest draft corporate plan and ....it talks about itself as an agent of change and the implication is that something external to the sector is needed to bring about change within the sector. It's just not very tactful about the language they use. If instead they talked about supporting the sectors they fund to carry out their roles as agents of change, that would go down perfectly well but there is a kind of feeling that the Funding Council wants to be more interventionist, wants to plan the sectors in a more direct way, nobody wants that to happen - partly because they don't like being directed but also partly because of the well-founded suspicion that that sort of planning approach has got a pretty awful track record and it doesn't really work very well.

The Council has changed quite a lot in that first of all, the individual members have moved on but also the merger has created a Council with a much wider constituency – much less direct representation from the sector and, in political terms, much more of an appetite to be interventionist.

Other informants considered that an aftermath of the Review has been to confirm suspicions that the enhancement framework could be under threat. Informants felt that, as part of the SFC's anxiety over the possible demand for more tangible measures of demonstrating effectiveness to Government paymasters, the Council might exert pressure on institutions to provide more measurable outcomes of achievements.

Connected to the issue of 'measurability' is that of 'indicators'. Indicators have been criticised as more in line with assurance and quantifiable outcomes rather than with an enhancement-led approach. However, they can also be seen in the context of a means of consolidating the sustainability of the enhancement approach in the face of the threat of a return to audit-based quality systems. The indicators that SFC commissioned SHEEC to produce are presented in such a way as to provide a formative means of institutions reviewing their progress but also provide evidence (should it be needed) that enhancement is taken as seriously as, and is not seen as an easier option to, previous quality systems:

If somebody comes up with a better model, there'll be a risk. So the more arguments we can have about pay-off, the better and simply a kind of terribly academic thing about autonomy and interference will not be useful. So that's where we are. Scary actually! Some of this is like – I'm

trying to think of a good analogy – I suppose the Health Service. You don't want to spend a lot of money on cleaning hospitals - that isn't by itself doing anything - but you accept that if you don't keep a hospital clean all your fancy surgery doesn't work. I don't think that's a fair analogy with where enhancement fits but you need a capacity for reflection and learning and change and sensitivity to student needs but just to sit there and say 'because we've got all that, we deserve every penny we get' isn't going to work.

Although in previous evaluations we have been told of the general antipathy towards using indicators, one informant felt that the reason for this is not so much in the idea of using indicators *per se,* but in the implications of greater external surveillance associated with such measures:

I don't think there's a nervousness at all about these indicators themselves. There's a nervousness about the mentality that wants to see indicators. And that all stems from the JQRG and the view of (some of those in the Council). It's entirely traceable to that. But it's interesting again that the Council issued an edict that they had to be produced – that set of indicators of enhancement. But at least they were sensible enough to know that if <u>they</u> tried to produce them, that would be entirely the wrong thing to do and so they asked SHEEC to produce them. And when we look at what's actually been produced, actually I think they're really quite good. They give some useful questions to think about at various different levels within institutions. And I think that is generally recognised and in some cases. I am told universities are very keen to use them in all sorts of different ways internally.

The extent to which the indicators developed by SHEEC *will* be used by institutions remains to be seen. The hope was expressed that institutions would see their value in supporting enhancement rather than as a return to superficially 'ticking the boxes':

We have to be careful because it's not about us measuring how fast so and so's gone but I think getting some comfort that people themselves are applying the indicators which are now being developed and are not just saying 'well, we've done that piece of work, tick the box, it's gone'. I think we need to retain the notion that quality's owned by them out there but they need to demonstrate that they are actively managing that process in the sense of if we said to them 'what are the challenges facing you in embedding quality enhancement', they would know what the answer to that question was and they would know how they would know if they were getting better, in their sense, and there must be some way to report that back as the sector as a whole making some progress that avoids mechanistic things about pass rates as the only indicator of quality – or the number of firsts as indicators of standards or whatever. And that will be tricky because I think it's obviously happening at a time where resources will be shrinking rather than growing and yet we can't afford to let people just say 'well, what do you expect – you don't pay us enough?'

The question then is, well, what happens now? So it's not that SHEEC is going to score the sector every year but I hope that those indicators are out there as a resource and we'll find them being picked up in internal institutional practice and described to us as part of ELIR reports or some other way. My slight worry is people think 'Oh, we've done that job'. I hope internally people will say 'as the person in charge of quality, I need to figure out how I would know if we're moving and this will give me possible indicators but also points to bits of leverage. If I can make this happen, that will be helping us to move in that direction'. So without SFC being too directive in saying 'you've all got to use them', I think the kind of gentlemen's agreement, if you like, through SHEEC is that they're there to be used.

In terms of the extent to which we can say that one of the main conditions for the sustainability of the QEF we identified in 2006 – that '*ministerial and funding council support must continue to be forthcoming'* – was being met, the perceptions of key informants suggest that there are indications that the picture is now seen as more unsteady than was the case three or four years ago. More recent staff changes within some of the key agencies involved in enhancement will almost certainly have repercussions for the long-term future of the QEF – particularly as many of those moving on or leaving the higher education sector have been staunch champions of the QEF and whose support will be greatly missed.

3.1.15 A progressive cultural change?

To the 2008/9 group of stakeholders, the indications of the emergent cultural change that we noted in 2006 appear to be progressing satisfactorily. One informant defined the discernible signs of such a change as:

> *I think it is the approach of reviewing what you've been doing and analyzing and thinking seriously about how it could be made better, being prepared to be quite honest about the aspects that perhaps aren't working quite so well and to think about how those can be improved and I think it's that willingness to always believe that things can be made better. But that's the biggest change that I think you're looking for rather than just say 'well everything's Ok, carry on as before'.*

In our tender for the current evaluation, we suggested that it was useful to focus on what is happening with day-to-day practices which might align with quality enhancement, rather than attempt to establish direct causal links between the effects of QEF activities and changes in institutional practices. We referred to the '*lost cause of cast iron attribution'*. Related to this point, a number of informants questioned whether, as long as there was raised awareness of enhancing teaching and learning, it really mattered whether or not staff associated this with the 'label' of the QEF.

> *There may be some managers who'd take issue with this, but I've spoke to several who've said to me 'we don't actually care whether our staff are interested in, or talk about, enhancement themes in the coffee room – we are interested in them talking about their learning and teaching'.*

> *To my mind, what we should be looking for in a quality enhancement framework is something that's a bit intangible – it is a certain culture. And I think people don't necessarily know about or need to know that there is something called the enhancement framework but if it <u>does</u> impact and it <u>does</u> create that buzz then that's sufficient. There is a danger, I suppose, that we think the QEF will be a key driver and that if you pull certain levers the sector will change in some ways. Institutions don't really work like that and there's maybe a danger that there's a trap that we will fall into. Some voices on the Funding Council might well expect that if you implement something, certain things will then change and they can change the sector. It doesn't work like that.*

> *To be blunt, I'm less worried that all our staff know what the QEF is but I would be very concerned if they were not on message with where we see we want to take the student experience in this university and the approach to teaching and learning. That has slightly been informed through, and helped shaped by, the external agenda. But ultimately people are more familiar with their own environment. It's like saying to staff do they know everything in our QA handbook? Again, they should know it's there but more importantly are they doing things the right way?*

We addressed the issue of the extent to which '*cultural evolution'* has permeated '*downwards*' by asking informants how far they felt awareness of the quality enhancement agenda had filtered through institutions. Their responses reinforce our findings in previous evaluations: the level of awareness and commitment is felt to be high at senior management level, variable at middle manager level and patchy at practitioner level:

> *If I have to speak to a chancellor, a vice chancellor, or a senior team of a university, they will absolutely tell me they are committed to working with the framework, they will absolutely tell me they are committed to making sure it's a quality product. As you filter down through layer and layer and layer, if I was talking to the person delivering that class in whatever, I don't always find that. And I think that is one of the difficulties because it is a small community, you do get quite a lot done in sort of 'darkened rooms'. I don't think that always filters down in a good model in terms of people lower down the organisation actually understanding. Whilst boards and senior teams absolutely understand the point of quality enhancement - not just the content, but what the point is – I meet people who are much lower down who kind of understand the content of it but they don't really get it in some ways. And I think that's a big problem. I don't think that's just specifically for the HE sector, I think that's always a bit of an issue. How do you actually imbue people throughout the organisation with that ownership of this is an enhancement theme that we are as a whole organisation committing to and we have to actually embed it through everything that we're doing? That can be patchy.*

The concern persists that it is 'the usual suspects' who are the most engaged with QEF activities and efforts need to be maintained to extend awareness and involvement throughout institutions – and indeed, through all institutions within the sector:

> *I'm very aware at times that our discussions, our context, our environment is one in which we are talking to people of similar minds and it's a fairly closed circle – a relatively closed circle. It's the vice principals, it's the quality managers, it's our own reviewers and people involved in themes. There's a very large hinterland that doesn't really know what's going on or that this thing exists. I can imagine we could carry on like that for ever but that would be a shame because if we were serious about the whole quality enhancement approach and serious about it not only as a means of QAA or the Funding Council checking up on what institutions are doing, but more as a means of creating that culture of enhancement and supporting the development of a sector that takes ownership seriously, we need to step outside of that closed pool. We need to step out of that and get everyone involved.*

> *You do get the usual suspects syndrome - you get that everywhere – where those universities that you absolutely know are just, you know, quality coming out of their pores, constantly looking for ways to self-reflect, evaluate, enhance what they are doing. How do you actually get the others who are sitting to the side – either not particularly engaged or being quite complacent about 'actually we don't need to engage in this'?*

If enhancement is to be taken seriously within an institution, informants stressed the vital importance of having commitment at a senior management level:

> *I think cultural change is fundamental to this and to make it happen I think you have to have a lead from the top. I think the court and the senior management of the establishment have to be committed to the concept and they have to be committed to working with staff at all levels and working in partnership with students. I see the strategic plan of the establishment as being the fundamental building block. To get the strategic plan and to get ownership of that by everybody, they have to have a mechanism that ensures that everybody is involved.*

In our previous evaluation of the impact of the QE themes[12], we drew attention to the issue of engaging middle managers more effectively with the themes. We suggested that information often reaches this level of staff but is not being filtered down, in a number of institutions, to practitioners. In the perceptions of the present key informants, winning the hearts and minds of middle management remains a challenge that has not yet been fully addressed:

> *I do know that probably a key group is going to be the middle managers. We work at all levels but I think we work very strongly with individual staff and we do work with senior managers but probably with middle managers there's less engagement and less awareness. Similarly, the QAA works with vice principals or their equivalent. Middle managers – they've got all these competing agendas so it does require a culture shift but it's not going to happen overnight.*

> *Middle managers would know about ELIR, I think more and more of them know about themes but whether or not more and more of them are thinking in terms of enhancement and thinking that there is this infrastructure of the themes, ELIR and just this general national agenda which is there, it provides a supporting context for them – I just don't know.*

> *The problem I think essentially is for senior managers to really get the middle managers, the vice deans, heads of departments, people like that to get people to engage - try and get academic champions within units to support this and that's the kind of work that we can't do. We can support those initiatives but essentially that's work that has to be done in the institutions. One way of actually getting people to genuinely engage in quality assurance is if they think there's something in it for their students or something in it in terms of their own pedagogy.*

The engagement of practitioners remains, to informants, equally patchy. However, as we cautioned above, as with so many practices in higher education, more may be happening than is being made explicit and the influence of, for example, the quality enhancement themes may be far more widespread at the grassroots level than is often assumed:

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[12] *Evaluation of the Impact of the Quality Enhancement Themes.* (2008) CSET, Lancaster University

That's the area that I think we need to keep on working on. I think we need to get a higher proportion of practitioners actively engaged. But I think we're well on the way there because I think most practitioners are culturally attuned to that kind of approach and it is easier to engage them.

I think the critical thing now is actually this process of embedding and getting much more practitioner engagement than we've got. I think we're working very hard on that and working very hard with institutions to do that. At the most recent theme conference, I was incredibly impressed by the number of relatively young people that were there so I think we are catching some people's imagination in this. Maybe the older colleagues of longer standing maybe have seen it all, I don't know.

Practitioner engagement is certainly an aspect that we are exploring through the institutional visits where the focus on practitioners is much greater than in our previous evaluations. Although it is too early to report on the visits in this report, our initial experience of discussions with practitioners has so far resulted in some very stimulating and productive debate.

3.1.16 progressive cultural change: summary points

- There can be no doubt that, since the QEF was introduced in 2002/3, the general economic climate has undergone considerable upheaval and, not surprisingly, the recession and serious financial situation have had knock-on effects on higher education. Public expenditure is under closer scrutiny from governments than was certainly the case in the early days of the QEF and informants felt that higher education would almost inevitably be affected by of this.
- Informants were aware of anxieties in some quarters of a more interventionist stance towards higher education by the Government. They thought that this might imply more, and differently derived, evidence that higher education is spending the considerable funds it receives in the most efficient and effective ways. Depending on the detail, informants would not see this as unreasonable given the sums of public money universities receive.
- The perception from a number of informants was that it was the '*pre-emptive twitchiness'* of some members of the Funding Council over possible demands from Government for more tangible evidence of achievement that was fuelling rumours within the sector of a return to audits.
- The general consensus was that the Scottish Government was more than satisfied with the way in which Scottish higher education was progressing and that there were no signs, at the highest levels, that a move away from enhancement and back to audit was being advocated.
- The recent recommendations from the Government's Future Thinking Taskforce concerning the expected contribution of higher education to the Government's economic agenda have done little to alleviate suspicions of the possibility of more external intervention in the business of higher education.
- Since the merger of the two Funding Councils, the Council has undergone quite significant changes and, to our key informants, the impact of some of these changes has somewhat weakened the previously strong relationships between the Council and the sector.
- The Joint Quality Review had not been particularly well-received within the sector and seems to have set alarm bells ringing in some quarters that the SFC was set on taking a more interventionist approach in its dealings with the higher education sector. The relationship between the Council and the sector had been regarded as a partnership and there was strong concern expressed by informants that this sense of partnership had been put at risk with the 'imposition' of the Review was seen as a first indication of the erosion of the hitherto good working relationship.
- The point was made that there was evidence of a change in stance from the Council in that it seems to be moving away from supporting the *universities* as agents for sectoral change to *itself* taking on the role of an agent of change*.*
- Informants felt that, as part of the SFC's anxiety over the possible demand for more tangible measures of demonstrating effectiveness to Government paymasters, the Council might exert pressure on institutions to provide more quantifiable outcomes of achievements. There are fears that this could herald a return to audit-based quality systems – which, of course, provide conveniently quantifiable measures of performance.
- Indicators have been criticised as more in line with assurance and quantifiable outcomes rather than with an enhancement-led approach. It was suggested that the reason for antipathy is not so much in the idea of using indicators *per se,* but in the underlying implications of greater external surveillance associated with such measures.

- More recent staff changes within some of the key agencies involved in enhancement will almost certainly have repercussions for the long-term future of the QEF – particularly as many of those moving on or leaving the higher education sector have been staunch champions of the QEF and whose support will be greatly missed.
- A number of informants questioned whether, as long as there was raised awareness of enhancing teaching and learning, it really mattered whether or not staff associated this with the label of the QEF.
- Informants' responses to the issue of the extent to which '*cultural evolution'* has permeated '*downwards*' – that is, how far awareness of the quality enhancement agenda had filtered through institutions - reinforce our findings from previous evaluations. The level of awareness and commitment is felt to be high at senior management level, variable at middle manager level and patchy at practitioner level.
- The concern persists that it is 'the usual suspects' who are the most engaged with QEF activities and efforts need to be maintained to extend awareness and involvement throughout institutions – and indeed, through all institutions within the sector. Informants also stressed the vital importance of having commitment at a senior management level if enhancement is to be taken seriously within an institution.
- In the perceptions of key informants, winning the hearts and minds of middle management to the quality enhancement agenda remains a challenge that has not yet been fully addressed.

3.1.17 How might things look in 2012?

A question we posed to informants which attracted some very interesting responses was '*what changes within the HE sector would you expect to see, say in four years' time, which would convince you that the Funding Council's strategy for QE was achieving its aims and objectives'*? It should be noted that, in some cases, the views expressed were more aspirations than expectations.

Informants cautioned that the next few years would be challenging for the sector:

> *In negative terms – and I'm taking a slightly negative view – if the whole enhancement approach and, if there is one, a growing enhancement culture, if that survives the next few years and it survives against the potential background of government priorities and maybe even more pressure for accountability, it that enhancement culture still survives and thrives in spite of that background, then I think that is a significant achievement in itself.*

> *I just think the next four years are going to be tougher than the last four years for the public sector in all sorts of ways. I know the universities argue they're not public bodies but the view is they have an awful lot of public funding and that sense of scrutiny is going to come out quite a lot.*

Consequently, informants felt that it was probably inevitable that institutions would be expected to provide more tangible evidence that enhancement remains effective than has been the case so far:

> *I think increasingly the bottom line will be one which says 'this is genuinely a sector which is continually improving' and maybe the key shift is 'and we have evidence to demonstrate that' - and not just from folk like yourselves but in some broader sense of visible stuff.*

As we noted above, although the introduction of measures such as the use of indicators had not had a particularly warm reception to date from many within the sector, informants felt that their use might well become inevitable in future. If this was to be the case, it was suggested that a more rigorous approach to developing measures of achievement was needed:

> *If universities, as they do in the States, had a more serious view of their own research and development needs as purveyors of HE and spent more money looking in detail at exactly this question – what are the indicators of lifelong learning and student success and student engagement - these are difficult research issues so the attempt to pluck simple indicators out of the air! I don't like the term 'indicators' I'd want to talk about it as data and research evidence and think of it as a research problem deserving of serious research effort and not seeing it as most institutions do – as the business of administrators to collect student questionnaire data or something - but have proper research departments within universities looking at these questions themselves.*

Assuming that the QEF *will* survive beyond the present cycle, informants would expect to see signs of a more joined-up, holistic approach to enhancement developing within the sector. Within institutions, this would involve thinking '*seriously about communities of practice, getting everyone involved, the systems that need to be set up'*.

Informants hoped that the Scottish higher education sector would become more aware of, and prepared to learn from, international experiences of enhancement:

> *The whole enhancement agenda needs to be supporting the HE sector in learning from and being part of that international agenda. It's not internationalisation of the curriculum – although that's one aspect to it – but it's generally that 'how best can the enhancement framework support the HE sector in learning from and sharing with international developments?' I think we need to do more of that.*

In terms of institutional culture, informants hoped that the QEF would continue to promote and encourage a high degree of reflection and self-criticism within institutions:

> *We would expect a much more self-critical environment, so that people would test things out and be honest about how successful we were. So I think we would have greater self-criticality, if there is such a word, at institutional level but also amongst the practitioners.*

> *We talked earlier about the reflective analysis becoming more reflective, I'd like to see that being ramped up so that there is more evidence of serious self-reflection in these documents.*

Informants would hope to see more support for practitioners and more recognition of, and rewards for, high quality teaching:

> *I think we will be in an environment whereby people will genuinely reflect more than they have, will recognize the importance of teaching, that it's not just an add-on after you've done your research. Bring the research to the teaching of course, but recognize parity of esteem between research and teaching and that also means institutions have to look at their policies with regard to issues about reward, advancement, promotion, all these kind of issues.*

The hope was expressed that students would continue to be involved in quality processes and that the level of student participation would continue to increase. Whilst the involvement of more 'rank and file' students (that is, other than course reps) was seen as desirable, there were doubts that this was practicable:

> *In terms of the work of sparqs, I'd like to see that progressing further. I'd like to see that involving more engagement of students. But again, you've got to be realistic in these things. I don't want to go and measure what proportion of students are involved in quality committees or whatever because I don't want 100% of students to be involved – I want them to be enjoying their time at university and being well-served but enough effective students involved so that constructive dialogue is happening in the institution with students about the curriculum, about assessment, about all these things not just about a consumer satisfaction survey – how good was it for you? So I think we should see, again, if we're successful in this, at the end of four years, we would want to see the students involved in a wider array of things within the universities.*

It is interesting to compare how key informants in 2006 expected things within the Scottish higher education sector to look in 2008 with the reality of the situation today. In the section below, we compare responses in 2003, 2006 and 2008/9 to this in more detail as well as to other key aspects of the QEF. In general, 2006 expectations have been met and, in some cases, exceeded, or good progress is being made towards meeting longer-term aspirations.

3.1.18 How things might look in 2012: summary points

- Informants recognised that the next few years would be challenging for the sector.
- Although such measures as indicators had not been given a particularly warm reception to date by many within the sector, it was felt that their use might well become inevitable in future. If this was to be the case, it was suggested that a more rigorous approach to developing measures of performance was needed.

- Informants hoped to see signs of a more joined-up, holistic approach to enhancement developing within the sector.
- Informants hoped that the Scottish higher education sector would become more aware of, and prepared to learn from, international experiences of enhancement.
- In terms of institutional culture, informants hoped that the QEF would continue to promote and encourage a high degree of reflection and self-criticism within institutions.
- Informants would hope to see more support for practitioners and more recognition of, and rewards for, high quality teaching.
- Informants hoped that students would continue to be involved in quality processes and that the level of student participation would continue to increase. Whilst the involvement of more 'rank and file' students (that is, other than course reps) was seen as desirable, there were doubts that this was practicable.

3.1.19 Distinctiveness and connections

As well as the main issues reported so far in this section of the report, informants commented on two other areas of interest: the extent to which the QEF continues to be a distinctive approach to quality enhancement and the issue that we reported in previous QEF evaluation reports as causing some concern amongst stakeholders – the extent to which other agencies or initiatives connect with the QEF.

The distinctiveness of the QEF approach

As we indicated in our Final evaluation report of the first phase of the QEF evaluation (2006), Scotland has the distinct advantage that the higher education sector comprises just twenty higher education institutions. This, as we have repeatedly been told, has greatly facilitated the development of a distinctively Scottish approach to quality enhancement and assurance practices.

The point was made that the context against which the QEF was developed allowed those involved in the Framework's planning to develop an approach to quality that was distinctive from that of the rest of the UK. It came at a time when:

> ....for various political reasons, England abandoned that UK-wide approach and, quite coincidentally, we'd been thinking in Scotland that there must be something better than repeating the sort of cycle of going through subject-level reviews, institutional reviews and just constant checking. There must be something better. I think we'd just been thinking more and more about that and then, because England had turned away the UK-wide approach, that gave us the opportunity to talk to the Funding Council and Universities Scotland about developing something that was more productive, that was enhancement-focussed and student-centred. And I think the institutions as well recognised that. I think there was a general recognition that there was a lot of time and money being spent on repeating the cycle of simple quality assurance – not necessarily the best way of using your resources.

In the light of the considerable changes in the political and economic climate which have taken place over the life-cycle of the QEF, it is interesting to speculate whether such an enhancement-led approach to quality would be as readily accepted by Funding bodies if it were to be introduced in the present context.

Whilst key informants raised the small size of the higher education sector in Scotland as a positive factor in terms of the future sustainability of the QEF, there were comments that this could also have negative effects. Perhaps the most obvious benefit of the compactness of the sector is that it facilitates communication and a sense of collegiality between institutions:

> There's a kind of Scottish consensus that's very, very effective and there's a very Scottish thing about not standing on ceremony and trying to all work together.

It is often said that representatives of all the HEIs in Scotland can all sit together around the same table. Whilst this no doubt helps to build up the spirit of collegiality which is so strong a feature of Scottish higher education, informants also pointed out that there were downsides to this degree of familiarity:

> It being such a small place that you know, literally, if a university got a bit of a black mark from somewhere, people would know about it very quickly - very quickly and very openly.

People are sometimes a bit nervous about being critical because people are so well-known to each other and they meet in so many different environments.

If you were mischievous you might say that it's got a bit too cosy in Scotland. We've moved perhaps a bit too far towards not upsetting any of the apple carts.

There is no doubt, as we reported in a previous section of this report, that there has been considerable interest in the QEF approach outwith Scotland. However, informants cautioned against the tendency for the Scottish sector becoming too complacent and self-congratulatory:

One downside is complacency because you can get sucked into the 'it's fine here, we know it's OK'. So there are real strengths in being a small country and small sector and capitalising on that but there are also weaknesses that we have to be constantly minimising.

We've also built I think, a view of ourselves, which is quite prevalent in Scotland and we use this phrase 'wha's like us - gey few!' is our attitude! And it happened to us in the school sector where Scotland has said 'we're tremendous, our education system's second to none'. Not true anymore. Third World countries are now overtaking us in terms of pupil performance and international measures such as that so we're taking a tumble to ourselves in that sector. So perhaps in the HE sector we need to really look outside ourselves and perhaps have some better international comparators because there is a tendency to reinforce each other in terms of being positive because we don't want the alternative.

Certainly, complacency about the achievements of the QEF could well be a threat to the future of the Framework. If there really is a general assumption that all is as it should be, this would be counter to the spirit of enhancement - as the following informant neatly summarises:

I think it is the approach of reviewing what you've been doing and analyzing and thinking seriously about how it could be made better, being prepared to be quite honest about the aspects that perhaps aren't working quite so well and to think about how those can be improved and I think it's that willingness to always believe that things can be made better.

It should be noted that these concerns of complacency were expressed by informants with both an overall (sector-level) view of the Framework as well as by informants more closely involved at an institutional level.

Connections with other agencies

Key informants reported in 2006 felt that there was value '*in integrating better the initiatives and agencies committed to teaching quality enhancement in Scotland'*. Whilst this issue was also raised by informants in this current phase of the evaluation, we noted encouraging signs of a shift in perceptions towards acknowledging greater attempts at bringing together more effectively the efforts of these various agencies and initiatives. As well as informants directly involved in higher education, we interviewed stakeholders from a wide range of agencies and organisations with an interest in, or connection, to higher education. In order to preserve interviewers' anonymity (and also that of people they named in interviews), contrary to our usual practice, we have slightly re-worded some of the quotes in this section to ensure that individuals cannot be identified.

We start this section with a quote from an informant which asks the question that has been of concern almost from the early days of the QEF:

It's beginning to look as though there isn't room for all the agencies - the Leadership Foundation, HEA and the QAA - all to pursue independent agendas. You could reasonably ask the question in Scotland why have we got these separate agencies because in a way they all ought to be working together to support the enhancement themes.

Whilst there is considerable potential for a more 'joined-up' approach between the activities of different agencies, there are encouraging signs that more links *are* being developed. This is perhaps most evident in the stronger role that the Higher Education Academy (HEA) is taking with regard to the Framework and, in particular, with the Enhancement Themes. Initial tensions between the HEA and agencies involved in the QEF were acknowledged:

Because of the potential overlap, there was definitely some tensions there and some people were concerned that HEA was going to be trying to take over or muscle in rather than trying to contribute helpfully and add value – which is where I would like to think that HEA were coming from - but I think because of sensitivities the Academy was felt to be a threat in one or two quarters.

Certainly, any fears of the HEA 'muscling in' seem to have proved to be unfounded. Indeed, the reverse perception has often been expressed – that the HEA could have been more proactive in supporting the QEF in the past. Informants suggested that part of the problem concerning the relationship between the HEA and the Scottish universities may be due to different perceptions of the role of the HEA in Scotland compared to that of the HEA in England:

I think HEA in Scotland has never been quite what it is down South and I think because it is slightly different sectors it works slightly differently. So there's some involvement but I don't think it's as involved as it is down South. I think in England there's a lot more work with HEA than there is up here.

I tend to think that HEA needs to have a Scotland agenda which is potentially quite different from the one in the rest of the UK. It's not for me to say really, but I would imagine that they could have tensions within HEA about that. But if they had a clear HEA Scotland – or for some mechanism for relating to working directly with practitioners, as it were – it would make an enormous difference.

The relationship to the agencies is very different in Scotland than it is in England, maybe you think that's a good idea or not, it depends on what agency perspective you take I suppose. I imagine that the Academy is quite concerned it doesn't have the same profile in Scotland as it has in the rest of the UK and that's because the space that the Academy occupies of driving learning and teaching is largely taken in Scotland by these enhancement themes.

The most obvious connection between the interests of the HEA and the QEF is through the enhancement themes and, according to informants, there have been moves, as the last informant says, to strengthen this connection. For example, we were told that there is now a Memorandum of Agreement between the QAA and the HEA which sets out how the two agencies will work together and in particular how the Subject Centres will support the themes:

We've moved on quite a lot – at least in airing the issues. But I don't think we've quite solved that – either in terms of York or the interaction with the Subject Centres. But, to be fair, we now at least have an explicit obligation on the Academy as from this year that Subject Centres should find ways to align with Themes so that's something better than we had before and I think there's a realisation in York that they need to be reaching out in this way to keep Scotland happy.

Some informants had reservations about whether the agreement went far enough in ensuring greater alignment between the HEA and the QEF:

Personally, I just don't think it goes far enough. It's all about how they (HEA) *will make information available and they will put stuff on their Subject Centre website – although I gather that will take some time to arrange. In practical terms it will help a bit. The agreement is that at the start of a theme everything that they've been doing in relation to that theme would be put there – which is useful. It saves someone a bit of time from looking through various networks and websites. That's fine as far as it goes but if I think if HEA Subject Centres had specific agendas to support practitioners and provide a means of supporting practitioners getting involved in themes, it would make an enormous difference.*

Informants broadly welcomed this formalising of the relationship but cautioned that there were challenges ahead in making this partnership work effectively. If these challenges could be overcome, this relationship would have considerable mutual benefits:

It's early days of that operating to know whether that's actually going to deliver or not. I would say there are signs of us being in no worse and probably a better place and my only reason for not being more positive about that is it's early days. Getting these things to actually work on the ground, they are quite challenging.

In the first instance it would be really helpful if the Academy, at the beginning of a Steering Committee's work, says what is the knowledge or understanding or challenges? What are the issues in the Subject Centres – and indeed in the other areas of the Academy's work – on this topic? What can we bring to the table in terms of challenges, issues, knowledge, understanding, outcomes from research projects and so on? So that would be a kind of early days thing, that would be a useful start. Whoever is on the Steering Committee from the Academy – and there always will be someone – in the past their role wasn't very clear but their role in the future has to include feeding into the Subject Centres what is happening and then giving stuff back so there's a two-way communication going on through the whole process. And jumping to the other end, when there's some outcomes from the work of the themes, making sure that these outcomes are going into the Subject Centres and the Subject Centres are thinking about these things in a subject context and disseminating that through the subject network and so on.

Whilst the Memorandum sets out far more explicitly the expected relationship with the HEA and the Enhancement themes, the point was made that the HEA had provided considerable support for enhancement activities but academics may not have been aware of the Academy's part in these:

What's the Academy doing to support the themes? A heck of a lot. But are we talking about implicit or explicit support? When you speak to academic staff you might not hear about enhancement themes but you might hear they are very interested in assessment practices or different ways of delivering in terms of use of technologies – flexible delivery. In the case of all the enhancement themes, the Academy or its predecessor organisation, LTSN, was involved in development work way before it was an enhancement theme and indeed since it was an enhancement theme. One of the things that perhaps HEA hasn't done is to run enhancement theme events. So you will see Subject Centres run events related to assessment but it's not badged as an enhancement theme event because HEA would then be accused of duplicating the enhancement theme's work. If you badge it – if you sell the event to academic staff as 'we've got an enhancement theme event' – they won't come!

The increasing emphasis, from the Scottish government and others, on higher education as a major contributor to Scotland's economic growth and prosperity has set new challenges for higher education in working with interest groups, agencies and stakeholders whose concerns need to be taken into account to a greater extent than has perhaps hitherto been the case:

The Economic Development Agencies in Scotland have now been re-organised into something called Skills Development Scotland and I guess that what we hope is that what we do joins up as much as possible with these things – more so perhaps than it did in the past. It's probably more relevant for what goes on in Colleges because it's clearly linked to employer needs but increasingly I think the rhetoric of higher education – they've bought into the sense of employability as 'a good thing' and that brings benefits in that they are recognised as a major contributor to the knowledge economy and economic growth and hence a good return on public investment. But that does bring in a whole new range of stakeholders, like employers, who then say 'well, these students aren't ready for work' and so on. A rather sterile debate sometimes but nevertheless there are new stakeholders out there who I think would say 'my definition of quality includes those notions about fitness for purpose and employability'.

References were made by informants to how the employability agenda was bringing together recent enhancement themes, the employability agenda and the HEA. The following quote illustrates how these interests have productively converged:

On things like, for instance, on Employability, the exit strategy from a Theme to an embedded piece of work, I think was quite elegant in that the Theme finished leaving a network of Employability people which is now supported by the Academy. Then the Funding Council came along and said here is something we want to carry on with, here's an institutional-level grant for employability which builds on the work of the national theme and it's supported by the Academy network and that does provide you with a full year exit strategy, I suppose, to embed all this.

There are mixed responses from informants to the extent of alignment between the QEF and the various agencies with similar enhancement agendas or interests. However, comparing the responses of this group of informants with, for example, those we interviewed as part of the first phase QEF evaluation in 2003-2006, there are encouraging indications that progress has been made in connecting up these strands more coherently.

3.1.20 Distinctiveness and Connections: summary points

- The context against which the QEF was developed allowed those involved in the Framework's planning to develop an approach to quality that was distinctive from that of the rest of the UK.
- Perhaps the most obvious benefit of the smallness of the sector is that it facilitates communication and a sense of collegiality between institutions.
- Informants also pointed out that there were downsides to this degree of familiarity – for example, reluctance to criticise colleagues within the sector.
- Informants cautioned against the tendency for the Scottish sector becoming too complacent and self-congratulatory about its achievements.
- There are encouraging signs that more links *are* being developed between agencies concerned with evaluation and this is perhaps most evident in the stronger role that the Higher Education Academy (HEA) is taking with regard to the Framework.
- Informants suggested that perceptions of the relationship between the HEA and the Scottish universities may have been due to different ideas of the role of the HEA in Scotland compared to that of the HEA in England. The perception is that the Academy has a much higher profile and stronger presence in England.
- The point was made that the HEA had provided considerable support for enhancement activities but academics may not have been aware of the Academy's part in these.
- Informants cautiously welcomed the Memorandum of Agreement between the QAA and the HEA which sets out how the two agencies will work together and, in particular, how the Subject Centres will support the themes.
- The increasing emphasis, from the Scottish government and others, on higher education as a major contributor to the economic growth and prosperity of Scotland sets new challenges for higher education in working with interest groups, agencies and stakeholders whose concerns need to be taken into account to a greater extent than has perhaps hitherto been the case.
- References were made by informants to how the employability agenda was effectively bringing together recent enhancement themes, the employability agenda and the HEA.

3.1.21 Overview: Comparisons between 2009 and 2006 responses

In the tables below, the responses of key informants in 200306 and 2008/9 are compared in terms of three key issues. To capture these differences explicitly, we have used the indicators of success collaboratively derived from the original evaluation as a basis for comparison.

- Indicators of the QEF achieving its objectives.

- Connectivity – that is, factors supporting connectivity between the quality enhancement framework, academic practices and student learning;

- Risks and/or challenges to the QEF

Table 1: *The QEF would be working if (key success indicators):*

Indicator	2003/6	2009
Student learning is improved.	Too early to evaluate this.	Informants could not really comment on this but we intend to pursue this in depth during the institutional visits.
Students are more participative and active in the design and delivery of their educational experience	Some mentions have been made of student activity in design and delivery but they are exceptional and not necessarily attributable to QEF.	This remains an aspiration rather than actual practice in most HEIs.
Students become more independent as learners	Too early to evaluate this.	Again, this is an aspiration rather than actual practice in most HEIs.
Student unions report that there are good class representative systems which involve lecturers and students	Generally, there are reports of improvements here and of some strong systems.	There have been significant improvements on the number of class reps recruited and trained.

Retention rates improve	Too early to evaluate this.	Informants did not comment on this.
New graduates have a commitment to lifelong learning	Too early to evaluate this.	Informants did not comment on this.
There are better quality enhancement systems	There is consensus that enhancement is a priority and that systems for it are better than they were.	There is widespread support for the QEF and a strong believe that it is preferable to former systems
There is a shift from maintaining quality to facilitating it so that quality becomes an embedded concern, exemplified by a continuing cycle of reflection, planning and action, which can be tracked through plans, outcomes, and records of deliberations of future actions	There were plenty of reports that this is a direction that Scottish higher education is taking. Earlier comments about the degree to which QEF has been absorbed throughout the system need to be set against the views of these key informants in senior positions.	Progress on this continues to be made and is facilitated by the degree of reflection on practices required by ELIR and internal review processes.
There is evidence of problems (identified by students) being addressed and rectified	There is a view that ELIR and internal subject reviews are generally doing this. Our case study data will illuminate it.	Student informants are generally satisfied that student concerns are taken into account through the class rep. system
Schools' and departments' annual processes are adept at dealing with problems	We have no evidence here, since the evaluation has hitherto concentrated on the upper levels of university staff.	Informants did not comment on this
Heads of department and their colleagues see themselves as partners in design, not simply as deliverers of education	We have no evidence here, since the evaluation has hitherto concentrated on the upper levels of university staff.	Informants were unsure of the extent of explicit engagement with enhancement at middle manager level and practitioner level.
Schools and departments are pro-active in setting their own agenda for ELIR	There are some reports that universities are taking a more empowered or pro-active line to ELIR. We cannot tell how far institutions are allowing Schools and Departments to shape the ELIR agenda.	As the sector is now moving into the ELIR 2 cycle and there is more familiarity with the process, we may see more evidence of this. This was not an issue on which informants had a view.
Participants at the chalk face are more aware of and more participative in events and development	There is almost certainly greater awareness but informants are consistent in saying that awareness of the enhancement approach has not permeated far enough.	Informants said much the same on this as we reported in 2006 – permeation is limited.
Academic staff accept that it is not a weakness to talk about things that need improving and are ready to applaud self-critical reporting	There is some evidence of this happening in ELIR and internal subject reviews. We are not in a position to comment on academic staff in general.	Informants felt that institutions were more ready to be self-critical. Experience of ELIR 1 may have increased confidence that there were few risks in being self-critical.
There is greater coherence between all the areas – academic and support – that contribute to the whole student learning process	There may be scintilla of evidence but there is not enough to support any claims in respect of this indicator.	This was an area on which informants felt that there was still work to be done.
Good practice is shared across disciplines	Not yet, notwithstanding the work of the enhancement engagements.	There is still work to be done to ensure that there is more effective dissemination of – for example – the theme outcomes.
There is parity of esteem for teaching and research	If so, it is restricted to certain departments and schools.	This was an issue that informants felt has yet to be resolved. Rewards for, and recognition of, excellent teaching are not yet sufficiently developed across the sector.

Within three years relationship can be traced between the enhancement themes and policies & practices	This is reckoned to be running more slowly than had been hoped. There is now a feeling that institutions are beginning to find ways of making these links but also that a lot needs to be clarified and done.	There is anecdotal evidence that connections *are* being made but there was concern that the outcomes of the themes are not being disseminated to the sector in the most useful way for them to be used to inform practices.
The development of a body of knowledge around the enhancement themes and the emergence of a research dynamic around them and other learning, teaching and assessment issues. This might be expressed in an on-line QEF journal	Theme working groups have published but it would be arguable whether there is yet a 'research dynamic'.	The same point applies as above – a vast resource of information has accumulated through the often excellent activities of themes but there is little evidence of 'the emergence of a research dynamic'.

Table 2: Connectivity

Indicator	2003/6	2009
Good feedback from students: useful feedback that leads to a review of practices	There is a belief that feedback from students is more systematically connected and that the student voice is more heard now than in the past. Participation in the NSS may have an effect.	This view holds true within the present group of informants. Responding to the 'student voice' is seen as increasingly important.
Reaching heads of department	The interviews do not directly illuminate this, although survey data reported in August 2005 suggest that middle managers know about QEF. A 2006 follow-up will be available in the summer.	This is seen as patchy – middle managers are seen as the gatekeepers who control the flow of information down to practitioners.
Raising academics' awareness of the QE agenda	Informants speak of 'patchy' awareness and the evidence suggests a lot more is to be done here.	Awareness is still seen as patchy but informants speak of a culture of enhancement permeating institutions that is aligned with, if not perhaps directly attributable to, the QEF.
A re-examination of educational and professional development	Some heads of educational professional development are working on this but theirs appears to be a rather isolated venture.	Informants did not comment on this but our experience largely confirms the views of 2006 informants.
Connect up different policies in an institution	Interview evidence sheds little light on this, although informants have said that they have problems engaging with all the enhancement themes.	Connections between the various themes and institutional priorities are being made – particularly in terms of the increasingly important employability agenda.
A re-appraisal of the enhancement engagements	Although there have been re-appraisals, most recently with SHEEC's January 2006 paper, it is not clear that informants believe that fundamental issues have yet been resolved.	There were still doubts expressed of the effectiveness of the themes and concerns that they have had limited impact.

Table 3: Risks and challenges

Indicator	2003/6	2008/2009
That institutions treat enhancement as 'assurance by another name'	Informants tend to reject this.	This is certainly not the case. Informants recognise the distinctiveness of enhancement and feel that institutions have risen to the challenge of the self-criticism and honesty that characterises an enhancement-led approach.
The QEF system will be seen to be ineffectual	No evidence that informants believe this to be so.	There is certainly no evidence from informants to suggest that this is the case but there is an increasing awareness that 'hard' evidence of effectiveness may be demanded in the near future.
The research assessment exercise.	Some informants agree that in all or part of their universities, this is a real challenge to teaching and learning quality enhancement.	The relatively low status of teaching vis-à-vis research was again raised as a concern by informants. It was felt that little was being done in most institutions to redress the balance.
The challenge of producing enhancement materials and engaging staff	Comments on the enhancement engagements suggest that there have been – and may still be – difficulties here.	This remains an issue that is yet to be resolved.
Failure of the enhancement engagements to stimulate widespread enhancement activity	See earlier comments about patchiness. According to informants, at senior levels within institutions this fear is ungrounded.	Widespread enhancement activities have certainly taken place as a result of the themes but informants questioned the extent to which these have had significant impact on day-to-day practices.
The lack of performance indicators, both at national and institutional levels	Performance indicators have been developed by the sector.	This remains a thorny issue! Indicators are viewed with suspicion in some quarters who fear they may herald a return to audit-based, tick box systems.
A fear that the merger of the HE and FE funding councils might take attention away from QEF.	There remain concerns about this.	The merger and associated staff changes have caused unrest and tensions within the sector.

3.2 Institutions' Teaching, Learning and Assessment (LTA) Strategies: degrees of alignment (with a particular focus on the enhancement themes)

3.2.1 Introduction

As part of the preliminary work of the evaluation of the QEF, we undertook a review of the content of institutional LTA strategies as a way of best encapsulating intentions in the key areas of learning, teaching and assessment. An overview of the strategies suggests they contain brief references to internal review processes, student involvement in quality processes, ELIR and public information. In the light of this, we have focussed on just one dimension of the QEF – the Quality Enhancement themes.

In looking for examples of alignment between institutional LTA strategies we have concentrated on four of the QE themes as being most relevant in the context of teaching, learning and assessment strategies. These are:

- Assessment (including Integrative Assessment)
- Employability
- Flexible Delivery
- Research Teaching Linkages: enhancing graduate attributes

Also relevant to the enhancement of teaching and learning is the issue of reward and recognition for teaching and, associated with this, professional development. We summarise how LTA strategies address these concerns.

The ease with which LTA strategy documents can be accessed via websites varies considerably. In the case of two of the smaller institutions, it was impossible to find LTA strategies, or any reference to such strategies, on their websites. We report, therefore, on LTA strategies from 17 of the 19 HEIs that are the focus of our evaluation. The strategy documents vary considerable in length and in detail. In some cases, the LTA strategy is included as part of the Institution's wider Strategic Plan. Some strategy documents, albeit a minority, describe at some length structures and processes that are *already* in place with comparatively less focus given to future plans. Others offer very detailed action plans of how they intend to address strategic objectives.

As we have identified in the original design of the evaluation, we understand as a key indicator of the development of an embedded approach to quality enhancement, the extent to which 'strategic discourse' within institutional documents aligns with an enhancement approach. This shift is part of what we might call a culture change in the way in which quality is perceived in texts which are intended to frame future actions.

The methodology used to undertake this analysis consists of textual analysis of the LTA strategies in order to highlight institutional interpretations of thematic priorities across the 17 institutional strategic texts. The section is organised around the four themes and enlivened by illustrative quotes from the strategies themselves.

3.2.2 The Quality Enhancement Themes

The Quality Enhancement Themes are one of the five inter-related elements of the Quality Enhancement Framework. The aim of the themes programme is to enhance the student learning experience in Scottish higher education by identifying specific areas for development and encouraging academic and support 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) which manages the programme of enhancement theme activity in the context of a five-year programme. Since the inception of the themes, the strategy for supporting institutional engagement with the themes and for promoting the outcomes of theme activity has been revised. There is now a greater focus on SHEEC's role in creating a context and framework of support for HEIs in their own consideration of theme issues[13].

3.2.3 Assessment

The first section considers the degree of correspondence between LTA strategies on assessment and the Assessment and Integrative Assessment themes.

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[13] This is taken from *Evaluation of the Impact of the Quality Enhancement Themes*. (2008) CSET, Lancaster University

Assessment was one of the first two Quality Enhancement Themes (2003-2004). The main focus of the theme was improving efficiency and effectiveness. 'Efficient' assessment was defined as assessment that does not take up an excessively burdensome amount of time for either students or staff whilst 'effective' assessment was defined as producing a result that is informative, valid, just and robust. The key issues arising from the work of the theme were:

1. The need to avoid over-assessment and find ways to reduce the assessment load;
2. The need to redress the balance between formative and summative tasks with the former to be increased at the expense of the latter;
3. The need to provide effective student feedback and develop methods for improving its quality;
4. The need to ensure that there is a better match between teaching, assessment and learning outcomes;
5. The need to develop and implement innovative assessment techniques.

Suggestions are provided on ways in which each of these issues might be tackled[14].

In 2005, the theme of Integrative Assessment was introduced. This stemmed from, and built upon, the work of the Steering Committee on Assessment and was commissioned specifically to address the second of the key issues identified by the Assessment theme – that of the relationship between formative assessment (assessment *for* learning) and summative assessment (assessment *of* learning).

It is appropriate to begin with the issue of assessment as this has been the aspect of learning and teaching which has attracted most negative feedback in National Student Surveys (NSS) – in which increasing numbers of Scottish HEIs are now participating. In fact, the most recent NSS results reveal that more than a third of students (in England) who responded to the survey are dissatisfied with the feedback and assessment they receive[15]. One of the HEIs whose strategy we have referred to in this report responded to the NSS results by taking a number of specific measures to address the issue of assessment. For example, it distributed an in-house First Year Student Experience questionnaire to gain insight into students' learning experiences. The data from this survey corroborated the NSS results in that assessment and feedback was also highlighted as a significant concern. As a result of these findings, action was taken in all Faculties. This involved working with students to gain more insight into students' key problems and to plan appropriate activities. The latter included focus groups with final year students and discussions of NSS data at all Staff Student Liaison Committees to identify and agree how improvements might be made. Assessment and Feedback was the theme of a conference held by the institution's Learning and Teaching conference. A code of practice on obtaining and responding to student feedback was subsequently developed and disseminated across the University.

3.2.4 Over-assessment and reducing the assessment load

Whilst the theme outcomes suggested making use of self and/or peer assessment as one way of reducing the assessment load, there were very few references to self-assessment in LTA strategies[16]. Of these, one of the 'ancient' universities specifically cites '*responding to recommendations identified through quality enhancement activities'* as one of its strategies for achieving objectives in terms of LTA, as is building the capacity of students to learn by enquiry and monitor learning by self-assessment. In another HEI, again one of the ancient universities, some Schools have been granted permission to include a limited amount of peer (student), computer-aided and self-assessment into particular courses. Related objectives of other HEIs include striving to eliminate over-assessment by ensuring that assessment methods, tools and approaches are appropriate for the workload of students in any given period of the programme and are practicable for staff.

One of the suggestions for alleviating over-assessment resulting from the Assessment theme is that HEIs consider re-structuring modular systems through long, thin modules that require end-of–session examinations rather than assessment at the end of the first semester. This has the associated advantage of reducing the tendency for students to see learning in *'bite-sized chunks'.* One university recognises this tendency to over-assess and points out that although assessment must reflect what it is that modules and programmes intend to deliver:

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[14] Reflections on Assessment: Volume I **-** Complete PDF(1.75MB) Main outcomes Summary Paper

[15] '*1 in 5 students unhappy with university course',* The Independent, Friday 7 August, 2009.
[16] However, as we noted at the start of this section, institutions' Assessment Policies generally provide the finer details of strategic aims and such references may very well be set out more fully in these rather than in LTA strategies.

> *not every element of every programme has to deliver on all that the programme sets out to achieve: the properties of various modules combine to deliver on the programme.*

This is an important point that is often overlooked in the shift from traditional academic patterns of study to modularisation.

Assessing learning at more appropriate times and by giving more thought to what actually *needs* to be assessed would not only meet the demands for more efficient summative assessment but might also provide more effective formative assessment. One LTA strategy recognises the danger of fragmentation inherent in over-assessment at the modular level and suggests '*consideration of how best to use assessment opportunities to consolidate and integrate learning in potentially fragmented modular structure'.*

Another HEI stated its intentions of providing:

> *better feedback to students on assessed and non-assessed work in terms of timing of formative feedback (early in the semester), frequency of formative feedback and detail of formative feedback;*

In an earlier evaluation report[17] that looked specifically at the impact of the QE themes, we quoted a Dean who stressed that, although the QE themes had provided the added impetus to make improvements to assessment practices, changes were slow to filter through:

> *New grading scheme, attempts to reduce over-assessment in terms of changing policy and guidelines on assessment, attempts to increase the amount of formative assessment. We're still at the working-through basis. You don't need me to tell you getting academics to change practice in assessment is not easy!*

3.2.5 Redressing the balance between formative and summative assessment

As we note above, drawing attention to the need for an appropriate balance between formative and summative assessment was the focus of the Integrative Assessment Quality Enhancement theme. The Assessment theme outcomes suggested that HEIs might consider doing this by, for example:

> *the progressive weighting of assignments so that at the start of a course the summative element is a relatively small proportion compared to the formative, to a situation at the end where the proportions are reversed.*

There are indications that some institutions are certainly considering ways of reducing over-assessment of modules whilst increasing the (hopefully more useful) formative assessment given to students.

As the Assessment theme suggests, the use of Personal Development Planning (PDP) also offers opportunities, to:

> *embed the notion of an ongoing process, using a variety of sources as evidence, including formative assessment tasks.*

PDP is certainly mentioned within the majority of LTA strategies but often within the context of employability rather than as an 'unthreatening' (in the sense of being produced and owned by the students themselves) contribution to formative assessment. Interestingly, all of the 'ancient' universities, and a smaller number of the other pre-'92 HEIs, specifically mentioned PDP in their LTA strategies but very few of the post '92 HEIs did so. This could be, of course, that PDP is an integral and established aspect of institutional practice and so is not singled out for specific mention.

Although improving and increasing formative assessment is seen as desirable from the point of view of enhancing student learning, this does seem to imply extra pressures of work for academic staff to produce appropriately detailed and useful feedback. It is also debateable as to whether most students make the best use of formative feedback. In our interviews with academic staff we frequently hear the

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[17] CSET, Lancaster University (2008) *Evaluation of the Impact of the Quality Enhancement Themes.*

complaint that today's students are much more instrumental and tend to be more interested in the grade they achieve rather than in their tutors' comments. It may well be that if HEIs *do* move towards a greater emphasis on formative assessment, staff may require support in helping them to provide effective assessment that does not require them to spend too much of their time writing copious amounts of feedback. Students may also need help in making the most effective use of such feedback.

3.2.6 Providing effective, high quality student feedback

Not surprisingly, as one of the outcome reports from the Assessment Theme pointed out, there are inevitably overlaps in this objective of providing effective, high quality student feedback and other objectives outlined above – for example, providing alternative or additional assessment through the greater use of self and peer-assessment, computer-aided assessment or informal forms of formative assessment during staff-student contact times. A number of strategy documents refer to the provision of a wider range of assessment methods designed to give full opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. One institution sums up its assessment strategy as being:

> *(to) develop and evaluate strategies for assessment that ensure: that all learning outcomes are assessed appropriately; that we utilise diverse, creative and innovative methods of assessment so that all learners, including those students with disabilities, can demonstrate their achievements; that we strive to eliminate over-assessment; and that we promote learning through assessment and feedback.*

Some, but comparatively few, LTA strategies make reference to considering the greater use of ICT in assessment in this context.

3.2.7 Matching teaching, assessment and learning outcomes

Where institutions have separate assessment policies or strategies, the objective above may be covered at more depth in these. However, we noted a number of references to intentions of achieving a closer alignment between teaching, assessment and learning outcomes. One institution expressed this aim as ensuring:

> *educational philosophy, aims, programme specifications, learning outcomes and assessments are in alignment to ensure the achievement of programme aims.*

Other LTA strategies made reference to, for example, ensuring that programme and module assessment strategies are explicitly mapped to learning outcomes in module descriptors and handbooks.

3.2.8 Innovative assessment techniques

The Assessment theme outcome report suggested that:

> *Innovative techniques can be used to reduce the assessment load or to switch from summative to formative tasks; they can offer better and quicker feedback and they can provide an improved match between teaching, assessment and learning outcomes.*

Although LTA strategies make frequent references to introducing, or further developing, innovative *teaching methods* – in particular making greater uses of e-learning, Virtual Learning Environments and other related technologies – there are fewer references to using innovative techniques for *assessment purposes*. There are references to using a wider range of assessment techniques but with little indication of whether, or in what ways, these are innovative. We noted at least two references to online assessment and feedback and making more use of ICT generally in the provision of formative feedback. The use of such technologies may perhaps be innovative in the HEIs who referred to doing this whereas they may be regarded as taken for granted practices elsewhere in the sector.

In our evaluation of the impact of the QE Themes, we noted that Assessment was one theme which seems to have been particularly influential in terms of impact and which fitted well with institutional priorities. Perhaps not surprisingly, as the outcomes of the theme were derived from discussions across the sector and conclusions and recommendations based on examples of good practice, there does seem to be considerable alignment between recommendations arising from the Theme outcomes and the aims and objectives outlined in many LTA strategies.

3.2.9 Assessment: summary points

- As the outcomes of the Assessment theme were derived from discussions across the sector and conclusions and recommendations based on examples of good practice, there does seem to be considerable alignment between recommendations arising from the Theme outcomes and the aims and objectives outlined in many LTA strategies.
- Whilst the Assessment theme outcomes suggested making use of self and/or peer assessment as one way of reducing the assessment load, there were very few references to self-assessment in LTA strategies.
- There are references made in LTA strategies to seeking to eliminate over-assessment, ensuring that assessment methods, tools and approaches are appropriate for the workload of students in any given period of the programme and are practicable for staff.
- PDP is mentioned within the majority of LTA strategies but often within the context of employability rather than as an 'unthreatening' (that is, it is produced and owned by the students themselves) contribution to formative assessment.
- All of the 'ancient' universities, and a smaller number of the other pre-'92 HEIs, specifically mentioned PDP in their LTA strategies but very few of the post '92 HEIs did so. This could be, of course, that they are an integral and established aspect of institutional practice and so are not singled out for specific mention.
- Providing a wider range of assessment methods that are designed to give full opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills is a strategic aim identified by a number of HEIs. Comparatively few LTA strategies make reference to considering the greater use of ICT in assessment in this context.
- There are several references in strategic plans to intentions of changing policies and practices to achieve a closer alignment between teaching, assessment and learning outcomes.
- Although LTA strategies make frequent references to introducing, or further developing, innovative teaching methods – in particular making greater uses of e-learning, Virtual Learning Environments and other related technologies – there are fewer references to using such technologies for assessment.

3.2.10 Employability

Together with Flexible Delivery, Employability was one of the Enhancement themes which were introduced for 2004-2005. This is a theme which is congruent with the strategic priorities of many HEIs. Enhancing employability was frequently cited in the majority (if not all) LTA strategies. As we mentioned previously, we have concentrated on LTA strategies and omissions of certain aspects of employability from LTA strategies need not imply that this is not an institutional concern, it could simply mean that this is most likely to be covered within an Employment or Employability Strategy.

Since the theme was introduced, global recession and the consequent worsening of the economic climate have inevitably affected graduate employment. Many large firms have cancelled their graduate recruitment schemes for 2009. Against this gloomy background, enhancing students' employability prospects becomes an even more pressing concern for HEIs and, not surprisingly, most LTA strategies refer to this as one of their main strategic objectives. Adding further weight to the importance of addressing employability, the Funding Council's four-year programme of strategic funding to develop graduate employability requires each institution to provide evidence by the end of the funding period that it has:

> *looked systematically at all of its provision; developed its curriculum, teaching and learning approaches, and support services accordingly (in ways appropriate to each function and discipline); and made continuing development of their provision's contribution to learners' employability a systemic part of how the institution operates;*

In the long-term, it is hoped that this investment will be:

> *reflected through increasingly positive feedback from the graduates who take part in longitudinal surveys, and evidence of greater satisfaction among employers in terms of graduates' generic skills and attributes and readiness for work.*

Using as headings the three aspects of employability under which the Employability theme groups the case studies that were conducted, we turn now to the ways in which LTA strategies are addressing, or intend to address, employability. These headings are:

- Embedding employability in the curriculum
- Enhancing students' employability through the co-curriculum
- Engaging Employers

3.2.11 Embedding employability in the curriculum

There are numerous lists of the nature of these employability attributes or skills. One institution provides the following list which incorporates the most often cited attributes (such as problem solving and teamwork) but adds to these other aspirational characteristics which are mentioned less frequently in similar lists:

- *Creativity and intellectual agility, with problem-solving and team-working skills which allow them to analyse complex problems and develop solutions both independently and through collaboration with other professionals*

- *Respect and an appetite for learning which continues far beyond their university studies*

- *An understanding of the global business, cultural and physical/natural environment and can apply their knowledge in an international context*

- *Willingness to participate and contribute in their career fields and their communities with self-assurance and a professional attitude*

- *Technical and business skills and knowledge to operate at the cutting edge of their professions*

- *The ability to develop themselves and their careers to achieve their full potential.*

Various research studies (many of which are cited by Knight, P & Yorke, M. in *Embedding employability into the curriculum* as part of HEA's Learning and Employment series [Series 1]) highlight the greater effectiveness of embedding within the curriculum opportunities for students to acquire a good range of employment-related capabilities[18] rather than through 'bolt-on' activities. Within LTA strategies, most institutions recognise the desirability of embedding employability within the curriculum. Strategies made reference to increasingly, and more explicitly, embedding generic skills within the curriculum at all SQF levels, improving the focus on employability in admissions and recruitment materials and in School Handbooks and embedding employability skills into the curriculum and learning outcomes of all undergraduate programmes making use of HEA subject employability profiles.

In general, the terminology used by many HEIs tends to focus on the 'skills' to be fostered rather than *how* they intend to help students to develop these, for example:

- *Develop in our learners: independence of thought, self-confidence and leadership capability, the ability to tackle and solve problems, a creative and entrepreneurial approach to the challenges of life, and the capacity for critical analysis.*

- *Promote and support the development of active, responsive, reflective, confident and rigorous learners*

The LTA strategies of the specialist institutions tend not to place a particular emphasis on employability presumably because the programmes they provide are, by their very nature, geared to specific and specialised vocational areas.

A number of LTA strategies refer to developing the use of PDP (Personal Development Planning) as an important contribution to enhancing employability. All of the 'ancient' universities, and a smaller number of the other pre-'92 HEIs, specifically mention PDP in their LTA strategies but very few of the post '92 HEIs do so.

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[18] There are numerous variations on the correct terms: 'skills', 'attributes', 'competencies', 'transferable skills', 'generic skills', 'capabilities' etc. It is not within the scope of this report to discuss the accuracy of such terms nor to set out our arguments for the merits of one over others.

3.2.12 Enhancing students' employability through the co-curriculum

The Employability theme defines the 'co-curriculum' as activities such as membership of sports clubs and other societies (or more importantly perhaps management responsibilities in these), student-run 'welfare' schemes such as peer tutoring or mentoring, volunteering schemes and entrepreneurship and enterprise schemes intended to help students acquire practical business skills. One of the ancient universities recognises the value of such activities and states within its LTA strategy its intention to:

> .... encourage the unique role of informal student activities, including those associated with the Students' Association, in providing a rich texture of experiences and skills, and a genuine preparation for future life.

One HEI sets out a specific example of a co-curriculum activity: the university recognised that many students at that institution needed to earn money whilst they were studying and so intended to set up a student shop to provide opportunities for part-time work for students.

3.2.13 Engaging Employers

In terms of LTA strategies, a number of HEIs place considerable emphasis on the importance of enhancing employability through, for example, providing more opportunities for students to take part in employment-related activities such as work placements or work-related projects. One institution stated its aim of achieving a 10% increase in part-time employment opportunities and the provision of 50 opportunities for work-based projects.

Other HEIs' strategies emphasise the importance of recognising the beneficial nature of these employment-related activities as learning opportunities by, for example, attaching credits to these experiences. Overseas exchanges also provide excellent developmental opportunities for those students undertaking them and one HEI aimed to increase the value of these exchanges by requiring students to explicitly share their experiences with other students on their return.

Within a number of LTA strategies, references are made to collaborations, or better exploitation of existing links, with employers or other agencies concerned with employability. For example, through:

> an annual survey of employer and graduate opinion on the relevance of the graduate attributes and the employability of (our) graduates;

> more active involvement of alumni and employers in providing an input to the University's educational provision and supporting the University with work placements, mentoring and links to the professions or workplace.

One of the post '92 HEIs sets out clearly its strategic intentions of building '*students' competencies in the skills demanded by employers in a global knowledge economy'*. It intends to do this through augmenting '*existing links with employers across a range of contexts within the global environment, to provide students with authentic learning experiences integrated within relevant curricula which prepare them for the modern workplace'*. The programmes that students undertake:

> will ensure students' work-related learning experiences are appropriate to their area of study as well as assisting them to capitalise on the diverse independent work experiences in which they may engage. We will develop high quality systems and structures which truly support access to, and engagement in, flexible learning opportunities and networking among staff and students. This robust infrastructure will also facilitate the integration of workplace, campus-based, social and virtual learning.

It would be interesting to find out the extent to which the published outcomes from the Employability Theme (and, indeed, other QE themes) have actually been referred to by those who have written their institutions' Strategy documents. In so many instances, the themes have already conducted a considerable amount of research and practical activities which institutions could be making use of and building upon in their strategic planning. In our evaluation of the Impact of the QE themes, academic staff stated that they want practical examples of how other HEIs have tackled common issues:

> It's the actual practical outcomes that are important and those have to be presented in a way that I can, as a director of teaching in the School, say to my colleagues 'look, this is actually

something we can do, the reason we are doing this is because of this and so on...'. So it's the practical outcomes that are the really really important thing.

I think I would have liked to have seen a little bit more practical help. So there might well be sort of templates and suggestions to do with wording of things and how you would incorporate a statement about some of these themes in your documentation. Real practical stuff I would have liked to have seen more than the – the reports were interesting but I would have liked that to have been followed up with maybe pulling out some key things.

If this *is* the case, then the guides produced by the Employability theme provide exactly this and have the potential to be an aid to both policy-making and to enhancing practices at practitioner level.

3.2.14 Employability: summary points

- As with the Assessment theme, Employability is a theme which would seem to have been well-chosen in terms of its correspondence to the strategic priorities of many HEIs and enhancing employability *was* frequently cited in the majority, if not all, LTA strategies.
- Within LTA strategies, most institutions recognise that the employability agenda should be intrinsically linked with, and embedded in, aspects of teaching rather than being seen as a supplementary or bolt-on activity.
- In general, the terminology used by many HEIs tends to focus on the employability 'skills' to be fostered rather than how the institutions intend to help students to develop these.
- The LTA strategies of the specialist institutions tend not to place a particular emphasis on employability presumably because the programmes they provide are, by their very nature, geared to specific and specialised vocational areas.
- A number of LTA strategies refer to developing the use of PDP (Personal Development Planning) as an important contribution to enhancing employability.
- The Employability theme defines the 'co-curriculum' to be such activities as membership of sports clubs and other societies and membership of student-run 'welfare' schemes such as peer tutoring or mentoring, volunteering schemes and entrepreneurship and enterprise schemes designed to develop practical business skills.
- Whilst there appears to be an increasing recognition on the part of HEIs of the opportunities provided by these 'co-curricular' activities, as yet comparatively few institutions have well-defined strategies for helping students to capitalise on these in terms of enhancing employability.
- In terms of LTA strategies, a number of HEIs place considerable emphasis on the importance of enhancing employability through, for example, providing more opportunities for students to take part in employment-related activities such as work placements or work-related projects.
- A number of LTA strategies made references to collaborations, or better exploitation of existing links, with employers or other agencies concerned with employability.

3.2.15 Flexible Delivery

The QE theme of Flexible Delivery ran at the same time as the Employability theme (2004-2006). In this section of the report we look at the ways in which LTA strategies address two key areas identified by the theme and which are mentioned most frequently in LTA strategies: learner autonomy and exploring effective learning environments.

3.2.16 Learner autonomy

The LTA strategies of many HEIs make frequent references to the attitudes to learning they wish to develop in their students. The emphasis is very much on encouraging learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning rather than being passive recipients of teaching, with terms such as 'autonomous', 'independent', 'active learners' and 'learning by enquiry' appearing in many LTA strategies.

One strategy document sets out how that particular institution defines the characteristics of an 'autonomous, self-aware learner':

- *self-awareness as a learner*
- *self-seeking of new knowledge and understandings*
- *self review and monitoring*
- *independence and responsiveness*
- *self-responsibility and motivation*
- *self-reliance and confidence*
- *recognise self as part of a wider learning community*

The terms 'active learning' or 'active learners' occur frequently in LTA strategies but are more likely to be used by the post '92 HEIs. For example, one such institution refers to the specific objective of:

> *Fostering inquiry-based learning and active learning which will develop students' skills in analysis, critical thinking, information processing and problem solving.*

Another HEI states as one its 'core values' the aspiration that students should become:

> *.... learners rather than passive students, challenging and enquiring and developing their skills for employment and lifelong learning.*

The role of e-learning technologies is cited as a means of providing more flexible forms of learning that encourage and enable students to take a greater degree of control over their own learning. Often the adoption of such learning technologies is based on the assumption that using such technologies will enhance teaching and learning. Another assumption is that students now expect this kind of 'technologically-enhanced' teaching experience:

> *Many students coming into the institution have grown up with constant access to a stream of information and technologies and unprecedented opportunities for communication and networking via these technologies. Our teaching methods need to reflect changes in the way they learn.*

> *Students now expect technologically enhanced ways of learning, and on-line learning is developing quickly. Consequently, we need to ensure that our learning environment provides seamless integration between the best of classroom-based methods of teaching and other approaches.*

Whilst many young people coming to university may be familiar with a range of technologies and are comfortable with using them, a number of the older generation of academic staff might not share this familiarity and might need considerable 'hand-holding' in the form of specific staff development activities and on-going support to enable them to feel sufficiently confident about exploiting the media in the teaching context. To this end, one university, that is already making significant use of its virtual learning environment, requires each of its Schools to produce plans for future uses of the VLE in programme delivery and also to provide plans for staff development in relation to Blackboard and the university's e-learning strategy.

During the institutional visits, we have already touched upon both staff and students' attitudes to, and expectations of, teaching methodologies – including e-learning. Given the emphasis attached to this form of flexible delivery within LTA strategies, this is clearly an important issue for many HEIs within the sector. We will continue to explore this as the visits progress and we will comment on this issue more fully in future reports to SFC.

Although perhaps not strictly associated with learner autonomy, the widening participation agenda implies the need to look at more flexible means of delivering programmes to meet the demands of a much more diverse student population. Many of the 'non-traditional' entrants, and many international students, will have different ways of learning and expectations of their higher education experience. Increasingly, as participation in higher education widens, HEIs need to take these needs increasingly into account within their strategic planning:

> *A diverse student body....brings with it a responsibility to provide appropriate learning support, to provide a high quality infrastructure that meets a range of needs and which can be responsive to current and future demands. This extends to library facilities, VLE and teaching and learning accommodation.*

(The institution) aims to enable opportunities for a diverse range of students, including mature students, students in full-time employment, students from a range of ethnic backgrounds or those who require increasing flexibility of admissions, assessment and delivery.

In terms of teaching delivery, the widening participation agenda implies a greater degree of accommodation and flexibility on the part of institutions than was perhaps the case in the past.

3.2.17 Exploring effective learning environments

The term 'effective learning environment' within the Flexible Delivery theme is used in the context of the application of technology to flexible delivery and how this can be most effectively combined with other forms of learning. As we have already referred to the uses of e-technologies in the sections above, we will focus here on 'environment' in the wider sense of physical learning spaces.

Within their LTA strategies, a number of HEIs stated their intentions of creating more effective learning environments and exploring innovative ways of using these. In some cases, the distinctions between 'learning' and 'social' spaces are challenged:

We will keep the current provision under constant review and we will invest in flexible, multi-functional and accessible learning and social spaces and other learning resources that enable a learner centred model of higher education.

Planning for new informal student learning spaces in order to promote student-initiated and collaborative learning opportunities.

One HEI details substantial plans for the re-development of its learning and teaching accommodation:

- *Upgrade and refurbishment of learning spaces to maximise availability of high quality learning spaces;*

- *Establish "future learning spaces" on all campuses to provide access for staff and students to experiment with and evaluate innovative technologies which might enhance learning, teaching and assessment;*

- *Develop and roll out a new minimum specification for learning and teaching accommodation.*

At the heart of many of these planned developments is the recognition that environments should strive to be 'learner-centred' rather than merely spaces in which students are taught.

3.2.18 Flexible Delivery: summary points

- The emphasis in many LTA strategies is very much on encouraging learners to take greater responsibility for their own *learning* rather than being passive recipients of *teaching*, with terms such as 'autonomous', 'independent', 'active learners' and 'learning by enquiry' appearing in many documents.
- The terms 'active learning' or 'active learners' occurs frequently in LTA strategies but are more likely to be used by the post '92 HEIs.
- The role of e-learning technologies is cited as a means of providing more flexible forms of learning that encourage and enable students to take a greater degree of control over their own learning. Often the adoption of such learning technologies is based on the assumptions that using such technologies will enhance teaching and learning and that students now expect this kind of 'technologically-enhanced' teaching experience.
- LTA strategies acknowledge that the widening participation agenda implies a greater degree of accommodation and flexibility on the part of institutions than was perhaps the case in the past.
- Within their LTA strategies, a number of HEIs stated their intentions of creating more effective learning environments and exploring innovative ways of using these. In some cases, the distinctions between 'learning' and 'social' spaces are challenged. At the heart of many of these planned developments is the recognition that environments should strive to be 'learner-centred' rather than merely spaces in which students are taught.

3.2.19 Research Teaching Linkages: enhancing graduate attributes

Finally, in this section on the alignment between QE themes and LTA strategies, we turn to one of the most recent themes - that of '*Research Teaching Linkages: enhancing graduate attributes'.* The focus of the theme was on taught programmes and looked at how the '*links between research strategies and activities can support the student learning experience in ways that can enhance learner achievement of research-type attributes[19]*'. A wide definition of the term 'research' was adopted. This could include:

> *practice/consultancy led research; research of local economic significance; contributions to the work of associated research institutes or other universities and various types of practice-based and applied research including performances; creative works; and industrial or professional secondments.*

There are obvious overlaps between this theme and that of Employability in that some of the 'research-type attributes' are similar to 'employability' attributes.

3.2.20 Incorporating research expertise

A number of LTA strategy documents refer to the use of staff research in teaching. This is the case with both the older universities with well-established traditions of research but also is a strong feature of the strategies of many of the post '92 institutions. The statement below comes from a research-intensive HEI:

> *The research-intensive nature of the University should not be perceived by staff or students as competing with the agenda for learning and teaching, but rather as contributing to the quality of the student learning experience. This contribution should be positively promoted and not simply assumed to exist.*

The next quote is from the LTA strategy of one of the post '92 HEIs:

> *Active engagement with relevant national and international networks and external bodies will ensure that practice is appropriately informed by high quality research and scholarship....Research and knowledge transfer in learning and teaching will become central to our activities signalling a step change in our approach. All curricula will be appropriately underpinned by research evidence both from the subject area and in relation to the learning, teaching and assessment strategies adopted. We will make transparent the existing research teaching linkages and enhance our approaches to embedding research attributes and outputs in the curriculum. We will foster an evidence-based, action research approach to educational development that disseminates and embeds successful innovations in curriculum design across the university. Scholarly activity will be supported and enhanced through the creation of institution-wide networks of shared experience.*

This – and similar quotes from LTA strategies - serves to illustrate the commitment, shared with other such institutions, to building up a strong research base to inform teaching.

3.2.21 Graduate Attributes

As well as utilising research, LTA strategies refer to explicitly encouraging the development of research, or research-related, skills in their students. One strategic plan, for example, states the institution's intention of fostering inquiry-based learning and active learning in order to develop students' skills in analysis, critical thinking, information processing and problem solving.

Whilst we could trace comparatively few specific references to the term 'graduate attributes', as we reported above in the section on employability, a number of LTA strategies devote attention to developing employability skills which, in many cases, are quite similar in the way they are defined within strategic plans. It should also be noted that in some cases LTA strategies pre-date the introduction of Research Teaching Linkages theme and so there was perhaps not so specific a focus on this aspect of enhancement when strategies were published.

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[19] From the overview of the theme on the QAA's QE themes website

3.2.22 Research Teaching Linkages: summary points

- A number of LTA strategy documents refer to the use of staff research in teaching. This is the case with both the older universities with well-established traditions of research but also is a strong feature of the strategies of many of the post '92 institutions.
- As well as utilising research, LTA strategies refer to explicitly encouraging the development of research, or research-related, skills in their students.
- Whilst we could trace comparatively few specific references to the term 'graduate attributes', a number of LTA strategies devote attention to developing employability skills which, in many cases, are quite similar in the way they are defined by institutions.

3.2.23 Reward, Recognition and Professional Development

Reward and recognition for teaching and the associated issue of professional development were strong themes in a number of LTA strategy documents across the range of HEIs. On the basis of evidence from previous evaluations, we aware that many academics claim not to be actively seeking any reward other than the intrinsic satisfaction of providing the best possible teaching for their students. However, some recognition and acknowledgement from their institutions would almost certainly be appreciated from even the most dedicated teachers.

Reward and Recognition

In terms of having well-defined and clearly articulated strategies on reward and recognition, we did not notice any great variation according to type of HEI (that is, the 'ancients', pre '92, post '92 or specialist institutions). Some, albeit a minority of institutions, already have schemes in place whereby excellent teaching is rewarded. Examples of tangible rewards are a Principal's Award for Teaching Excellence offered by one of the post '92 universities and, in one of the older universities, the introduction of an Annual University Teaching Excellence Award.

On the other hand, rather than having procedures already in place, a number of HEIs, according to the LTA strategies, are in the process of developing more explicit criteria for rewarding the contribution by academic staff through outstanding teaching and/or innovation in learning, teaching and assessment. Rewarding excellent teachers by promotion appears to be happening in a comparatively small number of institutions but is identified as an area for development in a number of LTA strategies:

> *To ensure that good practice is rewarded and disseminated within the University, including reviewing the criteria for academic promotion to ensure that excellence in teaching and professional contributions to the discipline are rewarded, and that significant achievements in teaching are recognised and disseminated.*

To address the above, the HEI quoted above sets out specific actions such as making clearer and more explicit the promotion criteria and procedures by which staff may achieve the grade of Professor on the grounds of outstanding teaching and contribution to their subject area.

In addition, specific incentives to reward excellent teaching are planned:

> *An annual award for excellence in teaching will be developed, involving student nomination and evidence to be judged by a joint student/staff panel. A lifetime achievement award for contributions to teaching will be developed for senior teachers who over a lengthy period of time have continued to provide leadership in teaching and mentorship for new teachers.*

However, in the majority of HEIs promotion to, for example, the level of professor based on excellence in teaching is still the exception rather than the rule. In a previous report, a senior manager we quoted summed up the situation in such universities:

> *The university itself, although there has been some promising practical developments through the last couple of promotion rounds, it's still the case that the kind of attitude to teaching is that if you really can't hack it as a researcher, you might as well be a teacher. With this environment, it's extremely difficult to get people to engage with development. The thing that surprises me often is how many people are prepared to engage with teaching despite that because there's not much positive outcome to it.*

Examples of 'rewards' offered by various external initiatives are the fairly modest funding available through some of the Enhancement themes to buy out time to allow staff to take part in project work or research or the HE Academy Scotland travel fund for academic staff. The latter is aimed at encouraging the exchange and dissemination of good practices, at the discipline level, throughout the UK and is specifically aimed at enabling staff (and students) in Scottish HEIs to engage with colleagues from other parts of the UK and to support their institution's priorities and developments in learning and teaching. The funding may be used to help staff to attend conferences, network meetings and special interest groups organised (or jointly organised) by the Higher Education Academy and its Subject Centre network, that are being run in England, Wales or Northern Ireland[20].

However, in some of the smaller institutions – the specialist institutions for instance – releasing staff to take advantage of such 'rewards' can be difficult. This is an important issue that we return to in the section below.

Professional Development

Linked to the issue of reward and recognition is that of professional development. Most LTA strategies contain references to the aim of continuing to meet professional development needs. A number of institutions refer to specific internal organisations such as Centres for Teaching, Learning and Assessment or Centres for Learning and Teaching as the main bodies responsible for providing continuing professional development (CDP). The terminology employed in several strategy documents suggests that rather than regarding professional development as a condition of employment, the HEIs concerned place more emphasis on supporting and encouraging staff to take part in CPD:

> *The University currently does not require its teaching staff to undertake either an academic qualification in teaching in higher education, or a programme of study accredited by a sector body. However, academic staff are encouraged to consider this route as career development and opportunities for them to undertake a programme of study are available.*

Other HEIs, such as the ancient university cited below, actively supports staff in making use of the CPD opportunities offered by external agencies, most notably the Higher Education Academy:

> *The University owes its staff the opportunities throughout their careers to improve and refresh their skills in learning and teaching. This is all the more important for staff (whether fixed-term or on standard contracts) at the start of their careers, some of whom may have had little previous formal training in teaching. The University will therefore move towards an accredited programme of staff development for learning and teaching in higher education, in collaboration with the Higher Education Academy and based in so far as possible on an individual needs basis (recognising the different levels of experience of new-career staff).*

The university concerned will also consider the recognition of such accreditation in promotion processes.

Although these are praiseworthy intentions in terms of providing professional development for staff but, as we noted above, there can be barriers to CPD opportunities being taken up by staff in some HEIs. To quote a previous report, some staff do not have the time to attend even short courses:

> *I've been here since about 1990 – and in the first few years I was here when you see an event like this coming up, you might fairly casually say 'okay I could probably go to that. I will reshuffle a few things, I may even have to cancel a lecture, there is flexibility in my workload to do it'. Now that is not true, not true. I have been up to my eyes, but the thing is when I look around at my colleagues and especially the engaged colleagues, this is the usual suspects issue – they are all working their socks off, frankly. I sometimes look four or five weeks ahead and someone says 'can you come on this day' and I know already I can't. It's impossible.*

This quote will no doubt ring true for many academics today and, unfortunately, few LTA strategies address the challenges posed by these competing pressures of time and the take-up of CPD.

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[20] Information taken from HEA's website http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/aboutus/scotland/events/travel_fund

3.2.24 Reward, recognition and professional Development: summary points

- Reward and recognition for teaching and the associated issue of professional development were strong themes in a number of LTA strategy documents across the range of HEIs.
- In terms of having well-defined and clearly articulated strategies on reward and recognition, we did not notice any great variation according to type of HEI (i.e. ancient, pre '92, post '92 or specialist institution).
- On the evidence of LTA strategies, it seems that only a minority of institutions have schemes in place whereby excellent teaching is rewarded. Examples of tangible rewards are a Principal's Award for Teaching Excellence offered by one of the post '92 universities and, in one of the older universities, the introduction of an Annual University Teaching Excellence Award.
- Rather than having procedures in place, a number of HEIs are, according to the LTA strategies, in the process of, or have the intention of, developing more explicit criteria for rewarding the contribution by academic staff through outstanding teaching and/or innovation in learning, teaching and assessment.
- Rewarding excellent teachers by promotion to, for example, the level of professor based on excellence in teaching is still the exception rather than the rule in most HEIs. This issue is identified as an area for development in a number of LTA strategies.
- There are other 'rewards' offered by various initiatives – such as the fairly modest funding available through some of the Enhancement themes to buy out time to allow staff to take part in project work or research or the Travel Fund offered by HEA Scotland. However, in some of the smaller HEIs, the specialist institutions for instance, releasing staff for CPD can be difficult.
- Few LTA strategies address the practical difficulties some staff have of taking advantage of professional development opportunities.

3.2.25 Overview

It is encouraging to note the alignment between the issues identified through the Themes dimension of the QE Framework and institutional priorities as set out in LTA strategies. This suggests that, counter to some criticism in the first few years of the themes' introduction; sectoral concerns have informed the selection of QE themes. In terms of strategic planning, the outcomes of the themes have the potential of providing a useful and highly relevant source of information on key aspects of teaching. As well as supplementing the evaluation data collected so far from the student survey and the stakeholder interviews, synthesising the main institutional priorities, as they are set out in LTA strategies, has helped us to focus the issues that we are further exploring both in the institutional case studies and in the staff and student surveys. This analysis points to an integration of the discourse of teaching and learning between policy pronouncements and resources through the themes and the way in which institutions accommodate and absorb key messages into their own institutional rhetoric. Previous international research has suggested the importance of strong institutional rhetoric as a *necessary* (but of course not *sufficient*) dimension of the change process.[21]

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[21] Saunders M, Bonamy J and Charlier B (2005) Using evaluation to create 'provisional stabilities': bridging innovation in Higher Education change processes in *Evaluation: the International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, Vol. 11, No 2, pp 37-55

3.3 The second year student class representative survey

3.3.1 Introduction

The survey of 2nd year courses reps was similar to that carried out in 2005 as part of the original QEF evaluation. This allowed us to establish a baseline for the current evaluation and also allowed us to make some comparisons with the findings of the 2005 survey. We are in a position to make some cautious observations on how the experience of being a class rep has changed during the lifecycle of the Quality Enhancement Framework. This includes how respondents rated the quality of their training, the kinds of activities they were engaged in as reps and how effective they felt they were in these activities.

The class reps were also asked to comment more generally on the experience of ordinary students and asked for their opinions on how they perceived staff attitudes to students and teaching in general. Methodologically, we understand the class reps to have the status of 'key informants' with the capacity to offer an overview of students' general experience. These issues were similar to ones covered by the 2005 survey.

The approach used in addressing these issues varied between the two surveys so direct comparisons were not always possible. There were also some important differences in the content of the two surveys. In 2005 we were very concerned with 'who' class reps were. We asked questions about their personal and educational backgrounds, their motivations and other extra curricula activities. We were also interested to know how much knowledge they had of the QEF itself. In 2009 we were less concerned with these issues. We based this on the idea that the QEF is essentially about bringing about a cultural change in the Scottish HE sector from an assurance culture to an enhancement culture. This gives a much greater degree of ownership of quality to institutions and, if successful, should be marked by a shift in quality-related practices in the sector.

This change has an impact on how we conduct the evaluation. Rather than assurance being the responsibility of individual staff members with a quality remit, responsibility for enhancement becomes more distributed through institutions. Ultimately it is at the level of tutors and their students where enhancement can be 'seen'. Therefore we would expect to see some impact in the experience of students. Also when the responsibility for quality is distributed in this way the potential arises for enhancement to take on different forms between different institutions and also between different academic disciplines. It is of course unnecessary for students to have formal knowledge of the QEF for their experiences to be enhanced. We are therefore concerned with how ***aligned*** our responses were with values that might be associated with enhancement. Similarly when we carry out our survey of lecturers in 2010 we will be asking about their approaches to teaching and learning, how they perceive the role of their students and the opportunities and constraints they experience in their work.

The survey therefore has three objectives:

- To provide comparisons with the results of a similar survey carried out in 2005 as part of the original QEF evaluation. This would enable some sense of how implementation of QEF has fared over time.

- To provide baseline information relating to current student opinion on the experience of being a class rep and being a student in general.

- To highlight issues that will inform the design of more in-depth qualitative measures and the design of subsequent surveys undertaken as part of the evaluation.

3.3.2 Background to the survey

The survey of class reps was issued on 27th February 2009 and remained open until 31st May 2009. The survey was web based. Second year class reps were sent a link to the web-based questionnaire via

Students' Association or university contacts. A version of the survey instrument can be seen in Appendix Four. Prior to distribution, contacts who were able and willing to distribute the email link to the online survey to class reps were identified. This contrasts with the 2005 survey where around 56% of reps were contacted directly by the Lancaster evaluation team. Because distribution was outsourced and not all institutions were able to give us their total numbers of 2nd year class reps it was not possible to estimate either the numbers contacted or the response rate. We received responses from reps in all but one institution. It is of note that lack of knowledge of who are class reps and ownership of the class rep system were raised as issues of concern at this year's SLEEC conference. We received 233 responses in total compared to 2005's 402 (at an estimated response rate of 40%). The complete breakdown of responses received can be seen in Table 4 below. In broad terms, 55.4% of responses were from pre-1992 universities, 35.4% of responses were from post-1992 universities and 6% of responses were received from specialist higher education institutions. Some respondents completed the questionnaire but failed to indicate which institutions they attended (3% of the total).

3.3.3 Demographics

Table 4 Responses received by institution

Institution	Number of responses	Percentage of total
University of Aberdeen	15	6.4
Abertay University	4	1.7
University of Dundee	9	3.9
Edinburgh College of Art	1	0.4
University of Edinburgh	39	17.3
University of Glasgow	29	12.8
Glasgow Caledonian University	22	9.4
Glasgow School of Art	2	0.9
Heriot-Watt University	5	2.1
Napier University	8	3.4
Queen Margaret University	2	0.9
Robert Gordon University	15	6.4
Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama	0	0
Scottish Agricultural College	11	4.7
UHI Millennium Institute	4	1.7
University of St Andrews	4	1.7
University of Stirling	9	3.9
University of Strathclyde	17	7.3
University of the West of Scotland	30	12.9
Unidentified	7	3
Totals	**233**	**100**

When responses are broken down by broad subject area we can see that most respondents were either Science and Engineering students (28.8% of the total) or from Arts and Humanities (27% of the total). The full breakdown can be seen in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Responses by subject areas

Subject area	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Arts and Humanities	63	27
Social Sciences	32	13.7
Management	24	10.3
Medicine, Veterinary and Health	41	17.6
Science and Technology	67	28.8
Missing	6	2.6
Totals	**233**	**100**

As can be seen in table 6, more responses were received from women (63.9%) than men (35.6%). This reflects the make up of the 2005 survey results where 61% of respondents were women and 39% men.

Table 6 Responses by gender

Gender	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Male	83	35.6
Female	149	63.9
Not given	1	0.4
Totals	**233**	**100**

In Table 7 below, it can be seen that female respondents outnumbered male respondents in all disciplinary areas. The areas where they were most balanced were Social Sciences and Science and Engineering.

Table 7 Respondents by gender and subject area

	Arts and Humanities	Social Sciences	Management	Medicine, Veterinary and Health Related	Science and Engineering
Male	34.9%	43.8%	39.2%	17.1%	45.5%
Female	65.1%	56.3%	70.8%	82.9%	54.2%

When the responses are broken down by age, it can be seen that most respondents were in the 18-20 age group (54.1%). This differs from the 2005 survey where 63.5% of respondents were in this age group. It is hardly surprising that students in what might be thought of as the 'standard' age range for 2nd year undergraduates should be in the majority but the reduced percentage may be an indication that older students are more able to become class reps than in 2005. This result needs to be dealt with cautiously as they may also indicate that older students were more likely to take part if the survey.

Table 8a Age range of respondents

Age range	Number of responses	Percentage of total
18-20	126	54.1
21-25	57	24.5
Over 25	50	21.5
Totals	**233**	**100**

In Table 8b it can be seen that there was a tendency for a greater proportion of pre-1992 university respondents to be in the 18-20 age range.

Table 8b Age range by institution

	18-20	21-25	Over 25
Post 92	42.4	22.4	35.3
Pre 92	63	27.6	9.4
Specialist	35.7	14.3	50

3.3.4 On being a class rep

This section of the report deals with the activities undertaken by class reps that are part of their role. Issues covered include:

- Reps assessment of their training.
- Their responsibilities and activities undertaken in their role.
- Their assessment of effectiveness of their work as reps and of the system in which they work.
- How it 'feels' to be a class rep.
- Judgments on how staff perceive reps and the importance of the class rep system.

Training for class reps is important. Firstly, training may be seen as necessary to enable them to discharge their duties as reps. It can also be seen as a 'pay off' for taking on the role by providing skills that may be useful in wider university life and also in employment. Training provision may also be seen as a marker of how seriously the role of class reps is taken both by institutions and the reps themselves. The provision of adequately trained reps may also be a necessary condition that enables enhancement to take place. Quality enhancement implies a cultural change in the Scottish HE sector and this in turn implies changes in practices at all levels within the institution. The culture and practices associated with enhancement have been linked to widespread shared ownership of processes, openness and a willingness to take on new ideas. This potentially gives students a much more 'hands on' role than might be expected before the implementation of QEF. Training may be necessary for reps to take full advantage of this.

Similarly, the kinds of responsibilities held and activities undertaken by reps might be important. We might expect to see reps taking a more active role in contributing to departmental life and, more generally, promoting the student perspective on arising issues. Linked to this is how the reps themselves rate the effectiveness of their work.

This, of course, does not necessarily provide an objective measure of actual effectiveness but does give a sense of the levels of efficacy experienced. This theme was extended in some questions where we were interested in what it feels like to be a class rep. We also ask questions on how staff perceive the class reps and the representative system as a whole. Traditionally staff have had ownership of teaching and learning matters so there is the potential for the values of QEF to challenge this hegemony. As this survey is concerned with the views of class reps rather than staff, we are interested in how the respondents' view staff perceptions and attitudes towards class reps. As the evaluation proceeds, these issues will be explored from the perspectives of a number of different stakeholder with a view to moving towards a more holistic understanding the relationships between staff and students within the QEF context.

The first issue of concern in the survey was training. We took a less in-depth approach to this particular issue than in the 2005 survey. In 2009 we were concerned with how many of our respondents had received training and how they rated the effectiveness of this training.

From Table 9 below it can be seen that the biggest single group of respondents were those who claim not to have received any training for their class rep role (39.1% of the total sample).This contrasts favourably with the results of the 2005 survey where 69.1% of respondents claimed not to have received training. Of those that had received training, 79.8% agreed that their training was either very or fairly useful just over 20% agreed that their training was either not very useful or not useful at all. The closest comparison from the 2005 survey is that 20.5% of respondents who received training agreed at least to some extent that their training had been a waste of time.

These data support a view that overall participation in training has increased and that levels of satisfaction with this training among those who had been trained are at about the same level as in 2005. There is also a suggestion that there is still a sizable minority of reps not receiving training. If training is important to effectively undertaking the class rep role then it would appear that there may still be progress to be made.

Table 9 Effectiveness of training

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Very useful	27	11.6
Fairly useful	84	36.1
Not very useful	21	9.0
Not useful at all	7	3.0
I didn't have any training	91	39.1
No response	3	98.7
Total	**233**	**1.3**

Respondents were invited to make any other comments on training in an opened ended response question. This gave an opportunity for them to expand on the fixed-response questions or to add comments on any issues they thought were not covered by the fixed-response questions. 61 responses were received. There were eight positive comments that tended to emphasise the usefulness of training. For example:

> *Put me in perspective - I believe the training is necessary for every rep to undergo.*

> *The sparqs training we received in first year was particularly useful*

> *I found the training done by SPARQS to be excellent. I thought the training done by SPARQS and the students' association training both made me feel more confident in my ability to take problems to the staff of the university and also made me more proactive in canvassing students for opinions and problems.*

> *The class rep training was very thorough and covered aspects of being a class rep that I had not considered. It also allowed us to participate to practice the methods we were being taught*

There were 20 responses that suggested that the respondents would like to have gone to training but were unable to due to other commitments. In the main these comments were either negative in tone or pointing out that the respondent had been unable, or in one case, unwilling to attend training.

Of the 61 responses, 28 responses were more critical.

These included responses that stated training was not useful in general, for example:

> *I can't imagine how training could be useful in any case*

> *Sparqs training was a complete waste of time - learnt much more directly in the department*

Or that it added nothing new to what reps already knew:

> *The training simply stated the obvious, i.e. our role is to promote communications between students and staff. I would like to have seen a more practical application in the training, e.g. how to send emails using the generic student email and maybe a dedicated meeting with staff to start creating relationships*

> *It is questionable whether I learnt anything at the training that I didn't already know. However, it may have helped me focus on important issues a wee bit more*

> *I did not feel that I benefited anything extra from it. The majority of the help that was given seemed to be quite a lot that really depended on common sense*

Others thought that the training was badly organised:

The training was aimed at students who had no other commitments. As a mature student who is a Course Rep in a class with a high number of mature students I found it patronizing and a waste of time. We were informed of the compulsory training 2 days before hand, which did not provide enough time to make arrangements for my other commitments.

Others claimed that they were not offered training:

We didn't have any sort of training. University conducted 2 meetings for last year where we can bring our complaints which will be resolved.

Class reps were also asked about their various responsibilities. These questions were mostly the same as in the 2005 survey except that respondents were also asked if they were expected to make specific comments on curriculum content. This question was intended to help illustrate the extent to which the students might have 'ownership' of teaching and learning processes. As can be seen in Table 10, dealing with complaints and informal liaison with staff seem to form the most common activities for class reps who took part in the survey. Attendance at departmental meeting seemed to be less common for the 2009 respondents than for the 2005 respondents (62.9% versus 72.5%) whereas attendance at faculty level meeting seemed more common for the 2009 cohort (33% versus 25.7%).

From Table10 it can be seen that reported levels of active participation in departmental meetings were down in 2009 compared to 2005 but higher for faculty level and university level meetings. Although this may be an indicator of structural or procedural changes since 2005 the finding must be dealt with very cautiously because of the lower response rate for the 2009 survey. It may also indicate uncertainty over what actually constitutes a 'departmental meeting'. The additional question in the 2009 survey indicated that nearly 45% of respondents commented on curriculum content as part of their activities as class reps.

Table 10 Main responsibilities as a class rep

Activity	Number of responses	Percentage of total	2005 percentage
Students bring complaints about staff / courses to me	214	92.8	93.9
I liaise informally with staff on behalf of students	182	78.1	73.5
I follow formal set procedures when representing students' interests	67	28.8	33.4
I am expected to attend departmental meetings	149	63.9	72.5
I am expected to attend faculty meetings	77	33	24.7
I actively participate in departmental meetings	119	51.5	58.8
I actively participate in faculty meetings	62	26.6	20.9
I am expected to attend various university committees	48	20.6	17.6

I actively participate in various university committees	52	22.3	11.3
I have taken part/ will take part in internal reviews	53	22.7	23.9
I have taken / will take part in an ELIR	19	8.2	10.2
I make specific comments on curriculum content	104	44.6	Question not asked

Respondents were also given the opportunity (in the form of an open-ended question) to add other responsibilities not covered in the fixed-response questions. In all 26 responses were received, seven of which were reiterations of activities covered by the fixed-response questions. Of these responses five mentioned other formal activities and 11 referred to activities related to networking and informal gauging of student opinions.

For example:

> *I also am part of the Student Subject Networks Committee (run by SPARQS and the Higher Education Academy), which was set up for class representatives in certain subject areas to liaise with each other.*

> *I have also made a petition and am currently collecting student and staff signatures to change a regulation back to how it used to be last year as the students and some staff feel they are unhappy with the change. I have enjoyed doing this.*

> *Organising social events, for example our "Half-wall Ball" and a Halloween party.*

The reps present a view of their activities that follows a similar pattern to the response received in 2005. The bulk of their activities are focused on putting forward complaints and informal liaison with staff. It might be that informal liaison has replaced some of the work done in formal departmental meetings which may be a factor contributing to the apparent reduction in expectation that reps will attend these. This in turn may indicate that staff and students are working together in a more equal partnership. However such speculation goes beyond the data but does raise a question for further investigation throughout the evaluation.

The participants in the survey were also asked about how effective they felt their work as class reps was. The questions relating to this were framed in terms of how departments dealt with issues that were raised by class reps. We used a similar pattern of questions to those used in the 2005 survey. As in 2005 we were interested in whether respondents felt that they were listened to when they raised issues, whether they were taken seriously, whether action was taken as a result of issues raised and whether changes resulted from action taken. Each question can be taken as indicating a level of effectiveness for reps.

Just over 90% of respondents felt that the views of class reps were listened to at least some extent (Table 11). This indicates that for most respondents there was a basic level of effectiveness in that staff were willing to listen to what class reps have to say.

Table 11 'Staff in my department listen to the views of course reps'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Considerable extent	129	56.1
Some extent	79	34.3
Little extent	17	7.4
Not at all	5	2.2
Total	**230**	**100**

Nearly 91% of respondents who answered stated that when concerns were raised these were taken seriously at least to some extent (see Table 12 below). This is an increase compared to the 2005 survey where fewer than 81% stated their concerns were taken seriously. This may suggest an increased level of effectiveness compared to the 2005 survey. These respondents at least felt that issues raised were taken seriously by staff and were therefore worthy of consideration. This would seem to be a necessary precursor to any action taken by a department to deal with an issue that has been raised.

Table 12 'When course reps raise issues with staff in my department, our concerns are taken seriously'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Considerable extent	138	60.5
Some extent	69	30.3
Little extent	16	7
Not at all	5	2.2
Total	**228**	**100**

The responses seem to indicate a high level of effectiveness in this regard across the sector. Of course this may vary between institutions. Unfortunately the response rate for the survey precluded investigating the differences between different institutions but we were able to make some very broad categorisations. We divided responses by institution type. These were pre-1992 universities, post-1992 universities and specialist institutions such as the art colleges. The breakdown of responses by institution type can be seen in Table 13 below.

Table 13 'Our concerns are taken seriously' broken by HEI type

HEI type	Considerable extent	Some extent	Little extent	Not at all
Post 92	64.3	29.8	2.4	3.6
Pre 92	58.9	31.5	8.1	1.6
Specialist	53.8	15.4	30.8	0

From Table 13 it can be seen that respondents from specialist institutions reported a much lower likelihood that their concerns would be taken seriously. Respondents from pre-1992 institutions reported slightly lower levels. These data were crosstabulated and the association between responses given were significant when subjected a Chi-square test. However because of the low number of responses from specialist institution reps this finding is not reliable and therefore must be treated with caution. The responses to this question were also broken down by broad disciplinary area but no significant differences were found.

When these results were crosstabulated with gender and subjected to a Chi-Square test as significant association was found (Chi-Square= 9.9, df=3, p<0.05). As can be seen in Table 14 below, female respondents were more likely to agree that course reps' concerns are taken seriously with around 94%% either strongly agreeing or agreeing compared to around 85% of male respondents.

Table 14 'Our concerns are taken seriously' broken by gender

Gender	Considerable Extent	Some Extent	Little Extent	Not at all
Female	61.4	32.4	6.2	3.2
Male	58.5	26.8	8.5	6.1

Another important question to ask was whether action is actually taken regarding issues that are raised by class reps. To address this we asked respondents if they were listened to when issues were raised but no action was taken. 37.5% of respondents agreed to at least to some extent that they felt feedback, while noted, was not acted upon (Table 15). This compares with 13.3% in the 2005 survey. This may indicate a reduction in rep effectiveness (or in the effectiveness of the class rep system). It might also be

that an overall reduction was due to factors that relate to differences between institutions or disciplines. The results for this question were crosstabulated with both HEI type and broad disciplinary area but no significant variations were found.

Table 15 'Feedback from course reps is listened to but not acted upon by my department'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Considerable extent	22	9.6
Some extent	64	27.9
Little extent	80	34.9
Not at all	63	27.5
Total	229	100

However, when asked if direct changes have occurred as result of issues being raised by reps, nearly 78% agreed that this was the case at least to some extent (Table 16 below). In the 2005 survey 61% agreed that changes had taken place to some extent. This seems to indicate an increase in effectiveness. Again crosstabulations with broad disciplinary area and HEI typed yielded no significant variations. The data obtained for these two questions can be interpreted as giving a mixed message about how departments react to feedback. The two sets of responses may indicate that not all issues raised are taken seriously but that action is more likely to be taken on those issues that are.

Table 16 'In my department, changes take place as a direct result of those issues raised by course reps'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Considerable extent	61	26.9
Some extent	115	50.7
Little extent	42	18.5
Not at all	9	4
Total	227	100

When crosstabulated with gender a significant result was found (Chi-Square= 23.3, df=3 p<0.01). As can be seen from the breakdown in Table 17 around 61% of males respondents agreed or strongly agreed that changes did take place compared with around 87% of female respondents. It would appear that female respondents were more likely to feel that changes had taken place on the basis of issues raised by class reps.

Table17 'In my department, changes take place as a direct result of those issues raised by course reps' broken down by gender

Gender	Considerable Extent	Some Extent	Little Extent	Not at all
Female	27.1	59.7	11.8	1.4
Male	26.8	34.1	30.5	8.5

However, caution is urged in drawing concrete conclusions from these. These are the perceptions of the respondents not an objective measure of whether issues are taken seriously or not. The responses received are a more robust measure of how the respondents feel about their roles rather than an indication of the actual impact. However, this in itself may be an issue that needs to be addressed. If reps feel they are less effective than they actually are this may be demotivating for those already in post and a disincentive for those thinking of standing for election as class reps.

This theme of perception was explicitly addressed in the next question. Respondents were asked to answer questions about how they felt they were perceived by staff in their departments. Only around

18% of respondents felt they were patronised by members of staff (Table 17) which can be taken as more evidence of reps opinions and work being taken seriously by departments. Around 23% (Table 18) felt like they were the 'token' student in the committees they attended. This may imply that students are seen as essential and integral to the department's committees in ways that imply active membership not just attendance. However, the 18% figure compares poorly with the 9.6% of respondents who felt patronised in the 2005 survey. Again there may be mixed messages contained here that may be related to HEI type and disciplinary area although no significant relationships were found with this data.

Table 17 'As a course rep I feel patronised by staff'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Considerable extent	11	4.8
Some extent	31	13.6
Little extent	46	20.2
Not at all	140	61.4
Total	228	100

Table 18 'I feel like the 'token' student on departmental committees'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Considerable extent	12	5.3
Some extent	39	17.3
Little extent	51	22.7
Not at all	123	54.7
Total	**225**	**100**

One question not asked of the 2005 respondents was the degree of influence felt over the quality of teaching in departments. From Table 19 below it can be seen that around 59% of respondents stated that they felt reps were influential in the quality of teaching. The extent to which class reps should have direct influence over teaching and learning processes is debatable but students are an easily recognised stakeholder group who should have some input in to this area. From the data it would appear that the respondents did indeed feel that they had a measure of agency when it comes to teaching quality.

Table 19 'Course reps have influence over the quality of teaching in my department'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Considerable extent	33	14.5
Some extent	101	44.7
Little extent	71	31.4
Not at all	21	9.3
Total	226	100

Once again, differences in institutional cultures may have an influence on sense the agency and efficacy felt by course reps. As stated above we were unable to analyse responses by institution in a meaningful way but we were able to breakdown responses received into broad HEI categories.

Some significant differences were found. Nearly 54% of post-1992 university respondents reported that course reps influence teaching quality to at least some extent while nearly 67% of pre-1992 university respondents reported that course reps have at least some influence. Only around 31% of respondents from specialist institutions agreed that reps have influence over teaching quality to at least some extent. The crosstabulation of the data in Table 20 indicated that these differences were significant (Chi-

Square= 18.4, df=6, p<0.05). Notwithstanding the low response rate we can be reasonably comfortable in suggesting it would appear that respondents from post-1992 universities felt that they had more influence over teaching quality than those in the other types of HEI. We must be tentative however, as the observed trend may be related to particular institutions with the HEI categories.

Table 20 'Course reps have influence over teaching quality' by HEI type

	Considerable extent	Some extent	Little extent	Not at all
Post 92	15.5	38.1	38.1	8.3
Pre 92	14.8	50.8	27	33.3
Specialist	15.4	15.4	30.8	38.5

Respondents were also asked about their perception of staff attitudes in general (i.e. not just in committees). It should be noted that these responses are treated as expressions of respondents' opinions rather than as objective observations of staff attitudes and behaviour. As the evaluation progresses these data will be revisited and considered together with survey data gathered from teaching staff.

Around 17% of respondents felt that members of staff were not interested in hearing their views (Table 21) but just over 70% felt that staff were interested in feedback from students (Table 22). Just over 69% agreed that staff take action on the basis of feedback received (Table 23). These data follow the trends observed in the answers given to the questions about efficacy of the rep system above.

Respondents were also asked if they wished to make any further comments in an open-ended question. There were 31 responses to this question. Some were impressed with the way issues are dealt with by departments:

> *Staff in my department took concerns very seriously and were acted upon very quickly which a lot of students were very pleased about.*

Others were reasonably impressed:

> *Fairly good response from department, usually. sometimes it's hard to act upon issues raised, sometimes the department could do more, but in general am feeling like our views are very much listened to.*

Others felt they were not listened to properly:

> *There seems to be a 'Rubber Ear' attitude amongst staff, if they don't like what is brought up by reps they just gloss over it.*

Some felt that the degree to which reps were taken seriously depended on the level of the meeting:

> *Our views are taken seriously at staff and student level but it seems to me that the Business School board hardly ever takes us seriously, which is very annoying when we are trying to make things happen for the benefit of both staff and students in a compromised solution that fits all.*

Others felt that the role of reps was cosmetic rather than integral to departmental activity:

> *Student Reps in Electronic & Electrical Engineering are only there to make the department look like they care.*

Overall the mix of answers given probably reflects the variety of experiences of reps across different disciplines and institutions.

Respondents were also asked to comment on their perception of staff attitudes in relation to class reps and student feedback in general. The picture obtained largely supports a view that staff tend to be interested in students' opinions on their learning experiences. For example only around 17% of respondents agreed that staff are not interested in students' opinions (Table 20).

Table 21 'When it comes to the quality of teaching, staff are not really interested in the views of students'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	15	6.7
Agree	23	10.2
Not sure	44	19.6
Disagree	94	41.8
Strongly disagree	49	21.8
Total	225	100

Similarly it can be seen from Table 22 that around 71% of respondents agreed to at least some extent that staff are interested in receiving feedback from students.

Table 22 'In general, staff are really interested in feedback from students'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	65	30.1
Agree	89	41.2
Not sure	40	18.5
Disagree	19	8.8
Strongly disagree	3	1.4
Total	216	100

As can be seen in Table 23 female respondents tended to agree with the statement more often than male respondents. Around 75% of female respondents agreed or strongly disagreed with the statement compared with around 64% of male respondents. This variation proved to be significant (Chi-Square=12.7, df=4, $p < 0.05$).

Table 23 'In general, staff are really interested in feedback from students' broken down by gender

Gender	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Female	31.2	44.2	19.6	5.1	0
Male	27.3	36.4	16.9	15.6	3.9

Around 69% of respondents agreed to at least some extent that staff acted on the feedback they received (Table 24). These results provide some general evidence that in general student reps feel that they are listened to, student feedback is taken seriously and that action is taken on the basis of this feedback.

Table 24 'In general, staff act upon student feedback'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	38	17.0
Agree	117	52.2
Not sure	45	20.1
Disagree	17	8.8
Strongly disagree	7	1.4
Total	224	100

The results of the questions were crosstabulated with both broad disciplinary categories and HEI types but no significant variations were found. Therefore we cannot suggest that the perceptions reported by respondents may be influenced by their subject areas or institution attended. However, the small size of the sample does suggest that such effects cannot be totally precluded.

Significant variation was found when the data when crosstabulated with gender (Chi-Square=17.4, df=4, p<0.01). As can be seen in Table 25 around 70% of female respondents agreed or strongly agreed compared to around 67% of male respondents. The main differences occurred in levels of disagreement with the statement. Female respondents were more likely to be neutral (around 23%) whereas male respondents were more likely to disagree with the statement around 19% compared with around 6%. Nevertheless, it can be seen that most respondents agreed that staff do act on feedback from class reps.

Table 25 'In general, staff act upon student feedback' broken down by gender

Gender	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Female	18.6	51.7	23.4	6.2	0
Male	12.8	53.8	14.1	10.3	9

Respondents were also asked to comment on the view that students should be in an equal partnership with staff. Around 89% agreed that this should be the case to some extent (Table 25). The idea of an equal partnership between staff and students can be seen as potentially problematic. Firstly, staff mark the students' work and assign grades and are therefore in a position to 'sanction' students. They are also expected to be experts in the areas they teach so it is reasonable to suppose an inequality in terms of subject knowledge and levels of experience. This is not to suggest that there is not or should not be partnership between students and staff during learning and teaching processes. However a more detailed investigation of the nature of such partnerships may be warranted.

Table 26 'Good learning at university is dependent on an equal partnership between students and staff'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	111	49.1
Agree	86	38.1
Not sure	22	9.7
Disagree	5	2.2
Strongly disagree	2	0.9
Total	226	100

Nevertheless, the high levels of agreement with the statement among respondent suggests that, for this group of reps at least, partnership between staff and students is a good thing.

As well as the above fixed response questions, respondents were asked to identify the benefits and weaknesses of the class rep system and to identify examples of positive changes that have occurred as a result of student feedback (Tables 24, 25, and 26 respectively). Responses received were content analysed and placed in broader categories that are presented in the tables. It should be noted that each separate statement was subject to analysis. Therefore there were multiple responses from some participants and none at all from others.

Table 27 Categories derived from Question 10: benefits of the course rep system

Category	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Impact	116	57.7
Career/ personal development	33	16.4
Institutional insights	16	7.9
Social	5	2.5
Negative	14	7
Others	17	8.5

As can be seen in Table 28 the majority of respondents (nearly 58%) framed the benefits of the class rep system in terms of making an impact. This impact tended to be framed in terms of getting the student 'voice' heard by staff. For example:

Occasionally you are listened to and able to affect change

The benefits are great to actually get to speak to the heads of the departments. and between the meetings, almost all issues or concerns are sorted, or at least looked into. then at the next meeting feedback is given, knowing that the department has tried its best to sort out any problems.

It gives students a voice and an active role in their education.

I would consider making a positive difference to the experience of others a benefit and would like to think, if required, I would manage to do that.

Others saw the benefits in terms of either employability or personal development. In relation to employability this was either in terms of gaining new skills or material to enhance CVs. When framed in terms of personal development outside of an explicit concern with employability development of confidence was most usually mentioned. For example:

It's a good thing to put on your CV, you get to know staff better and become familiar with some of the lecturers or heads of departments, you get to have your views heard.

Liaison between 'groups' of people, be it students and lecturers or companies, is a useful skill which demands confidence. The Course Rep system increases this confidence and gives the class rep experience of formal proceedings of feedback etc - making that class rep more aware of what is helpful / necessary to change and what is not

There aren't any real benefits apart from something that can be put on your CV.

It is beneficial to gain confidence in areas of life other than academia and to get to know staff members and students alike

You become more confident talk in public and you create links with staff and other students.

Others felt that being a class rep gave insights into how departments and institutions actually work:

Students begin to recognise and some respect you for being more involved in the university. The staff and my current lecturers get to know me on a more personal level which helps when I have problems with coursework as they remember me more than other students.

Well, I understand more the hoop jumping that happens in the management of the school. which allows me to navigate better though the bureaucracy.

It has given me greater insight into the course and lets me address problems that everyone has been affected by

The wider benefits were seen as social for some. This was usually framed in terms of building relationships with staff members and / or raising one's own personal profile in the department:

> *Allows you to build better relations with staff members. You become an actual person not just another student in the crowd.*

> *There are so many. It's a unique opportunity to stand out from the crowd when you could be in a class of 200 people. You will have a name to your lecturers and taking the chance and stepping*

Respondents did have a view on where the system was not working so well. When asked about weaknesses in the class rep system, responses indicated dissatisfaction with the way the system works in practice or with lack of preparation or lack of time to undertake the role rather than suggesting class reps are unnecessary. For example:

> *If it worked it would be a start*

> *There are none, more work is required and we have had no training*

As well as the benefits of the system reps were asked about weaknesses in the system in an open-ended question. There were 176 responses received to this question, which were content analysed. There were nine categories of response derived from the analysis.

Table 28   Categories derived from Question 11: weaknesses of the course rep system

Category	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Reps not listened to / excluded	52	29.5
Lack of awareness	33	18.8
Lack of time	13	7.4
Training	10	5.7
Communication issues	26	14.8
Lack of incentive	6	3.4
Poor quality reps	10	5.7
None	7	4
Other	19	10.8

From Table 28 it can be seen that that the largest single category (29.5% of responses) indicated that respondents felt that class reps were not listened to, taken seriously or otherwise felt excluded from decision making processes. For example some respondents felt intimidated or marginalised due to the seniority and power of staff members:

> *The students are likely to feel like outsiders in meetings with departmental staff. Also, many problems in my particular department have been with individual members of staff, having to discuss with them problems to with their teaching or work is very intimidating and feels slightly wrong.*

> *Staff should always strive to encourage reps to put forward views. It can be very intimidating to have to speak before a Faculty committee of staff with 10/20/30+ years experience under their belt.*

Or through being excluded by the institution's bureaucracy or the way business is transacted:

> *I never knew when I was supposed to be at meetings, and sometimes found out very last minute. Therefore I have only been able to come to one meeting, and I wasn't even asked if I had any issues*

> *Yes, becoming a token student at board of studies meetings. Just used to justify meetings and decisions. Sometimes meetings are so overcomplicated and formal it's difficult to keep up and stand your ground. I often feel as though I don't actually have right to argue my point.*

Other respondents indicated that they felt they were not listened to or taken seriously when they did make contributions:

> *Not listened to by many members of staff often seems like very little point to the meetings*

It isn't taken seriously by staff or students. Students just don't understand how much influence they can have when they raise an issue together and staff advertise course rep positions as a 'legal requirement' which is just a shame really.

Some heads of school don't listen. In my opinion the system falls as soon as we stop listening.

They don't listen to us - we don't have any real power. We are not represented on the final decision making committee, we are just there to input.

In my institution (faculty?), as previously mentioned, there is very much a staff attitude of 'if we don't like it we don't listen to it' which leaves a feeling of 'why bother?'

The next largest category (18.8% of responses) indicated a lack of awareness of what class reps do or can do:

Not everyone on your course is made aware of who the course rep is and what they do - some problems students are having may not be getting expressed.

Unfortunately, the class rep is given the task of converting the apathetic views of classmates to active participation which can be extremely difficult.

Currently my year come to me and not the other rep I think more awareness of who exactly the reps are would help a great deal.

Non-rep students don't know enough about the system so don't use it. And it shouldn't all be down to the Course Reps' to make sure that they are aware of it.

Perhaps related to lack of awareness, poor communication was another category identified from the responses (14.8% of all responses to this question).

not all students are keen to give their view to course rep

getting the other student to have an active interest in there leaning environment. students tend to not want to air their views in case it's seen as being a nuisance or rocking the boat.

Hardly anyone ever reports to the class rep, even if you stand up at the beginning of a class or give out your email, there is very little feedback from students

Nearly 6% of responses indicated that lack of training may be an issue for some:

There is no training and students don't ever seem to come forward with comments and suggestions: it has to be forced out of them

I have only been class rep since 3rd year and have thoroughly enjoyed it, however the students that were class reps before us seemed to get little guidance.

No training.

Perhaps training for Course Reps will enable us to be better at performing our responsibilities.

Other felt that some class reps did not do a good job (5.7% of responses):

some reps do not take their roles seriously and don't even go to training and aren't overly efficient with their contributions.

A lot of class reps are passive and do little to actively engage with student opinion.

Issues were raised over time as well (7.4% of responses). This was either that that respondents thought students felt excluded from the course rep system by either the workload of their timetable (mentioned in the case of part-time students) or that departmental meetings were badly timetabled.

We are spread out in different departments and disciplines within the school so we have very little student community between ourselves. Many of us have family and outside commitments that impinge on this as well

As a single parent, I find it difficult to arrange extra child care if the meetings are outwith my uni time table.

The meetings are always positioned at times where students (reps) are busy with exams and are less likely to attend.

Training and social events are often planned at the last minute leaving some missing out because they have other commitments.

Most Staff-Student Liaison meetings are few and far between, particularly in second semester. By the time the meeting came around this semester we only have two weeks left of term.

Or that the time taken for changes to occur means that current students do not benefit:

It seems to benefit the people the year after, so that is not so good for us

While these categories have been presented separately it is likely that the actual issues raised are interrelated. For example, reps may feel marginalised through of lack of training in dealing with university processes. This may add to any feelings of marginalisation felt when undertaking the class rep role. This may of course be made worse if a department's communication with reps and the wider student body is poor. Poor communication may also contribute to apathy to and lack of awareness of the rep system and what it can achieve. Lack of awareness and training may also contribute to poor performance by class reps.

We are in no position to make a definitive judgment about the effectiveness of the class rep system on the basis of these data. However, we can begin to appreciate the complexity of relationships between some of the various issues that are likely to be important in building and maintaining a culture of enhancement from the perspective of class reps.

Respondents were also asked to give examples of where they thought positive changes had occurred as a result of student feedback. There were 165 separate categorisable responses to this question (see Table 29). Of these, 30% referred to changes relating to teaching practices or course content, another 20% referred to improved course administration such as changing coursework deadlines or timetabling issues and 6.7% referred to improved feedback and information on assessment. Improvements in support services such as the Library and computer services were also mentioned (10.9%). It should also be noted that 24% (the second largest category) of responses explicitly stated that the respondent could not think of any examples of positive changes.

Table 29 Categories derived from responses to Question 12: Examples of positive change as a result of student feedback

Category	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Support services	18	10.9
Improved course admin/timetabling	33	20
Teaching / course content	50	30
Feedback/assessment info	11	6.7
Other	13	7.8
None	40	24.2

Some examples of positive changes in teaching and course content include:

We had an entire course restructured because of significant problems with it. This was a result of rep and general student feedback

Some teaching/learning methods have been changed in some courses so the students can get a better grasp of concepts and methods

Yes, last semester in the digital media lab, students made the suggestion that they would like to expand on their digital photography skills, and as a result in this semester we have had a comprehensive workshop on digital studio photography.

Examples of improved administration:

Yes, an essay deadline was changed as it was too close to a Saturday skills day and time management is a big issue for day release students. A large group of students voiced this complaint to me, the staff listened and were happy to help out. The next trimesters timetable was also altered to take into account this issue.

Class module guides for some classes were confusing and students weren't sure what they were meant to be learning for that module. Issue was raised and module guides were made more clear and students were happy.

Feedback and assessment:

Students feel we don't get enough feedback on our work - there is now a student's association campaign to make this better

Support services:

Library opening hours have been extended

The students were annoyed that there were not enough computers. There now are more computers. I have also noticed that after a meeting the matters discussed in that meeting have already had impact on the way we are studying at the university within as little as a few weeks which is a great turnaround.

The only change we've really had is the provision of more copies of library books at the request of the student

These examples serve not to so much to indicate areas of improvement or areas that have improved but more to illustrate some of the respondents' concerns and to provide concrete examples of where respondents felt the class rep system had achieved successes. It is of interest that the second biggest category identified was where no positive changes occurred. This may indicate that, effective though the various class rep systems may be, there is still room for enhancement. It may also be the case that the experience of positive change (or lack of) may be related to which institution the rep attends and / or what subject area they study in. In common with the rest of the data presented here we are unable to make a judgment on these issues due to the small sample size.

3.3.5 Personal development

One main reason to encourage students to become class reps is that it aids their personal development. This is usually expressed in terms of developing new skills such as diplomacy and persuasive communication skills and also developing and improving various personal qualities such as confidence. Therefore we decided to ask questions related to such personal development. The questions dealt with general personal development and whether the reps had learned skills that made them both more effective as reps that could be associated with the activity of being a class rep. The questions asked were intended to provide insights about any personal learning and development that respondents attributed to their class rep activities. Issues raised in the survey included:

- Changes in personal outlook and dispositions
- The development of personal skills
- The development of academic and work-related skills

It should be noted that we were concerned with respondents' perceptions and attributions of development not whether any such development had actually occurred as a result of being a class rep.

The first questions dealt with possible positive outcomes that may relate directly to taking part in committees, raising issues, and achieving desired outcomes. Some questions dealt with what might be thought of as the development of personal qualities. For example, around 63% of respondents agreed to at least some extent that they had learned to become more objective as a result of their work as a class rep (Table 27). Similarly nearly 57% of respondents agreed that they had become more tolerant as a result of their class rep work (Table 28). Around 70% agreed that they had become more diplomatic since becoming class reps (Table 29). A smaller number of respondents (around 54%) felt that they had

learned to respond to challenges as part of being a class rep (Table 30).

Table 30 'I have learned to be more objective'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	43	18.9
Agree	101	44.5
Not sure	55	24.2
Disagree	24	10.6
Strongly disagree	7	1.8
Total	227	100

Table 31 'I have learned to be more tolerant'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	31	13.8
Agree	94	41.8
Not sure	55	22.4
Disagree	37	16.4
Strongly disagree	8	3.6
Total	225	100

Table 29 'I've learned to be more diplomatic'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	53	23.2
Agree	106	46.5
Not sure	39	17.1
Disagree	24	10.5
Strongly disagree	6	2.6
Total	228	100

Table 30 'I've learned how to respond to challenges'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	40	17.8
Agree	88	36.1
Not sure	50	22.2
Disagree	40	17.8
Strongly disagree	7	3.1
Total	225	100

It would appear therefore that many respondents tended to associate their work as reps with some improvement in their personal abilities. It might be interesting to note that more female respondents agreed that they had become more tolerant since becoming a class rep than did male respondents (61% versus 45%) This variation is significant (Chi-Square= 17.9, df=4, p<0.01) and the full breakdown of responses can be seen in Table 31 below.

Table 31 'I have learned to be more tolerant' broken down by gender

Gender	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Female	11.1	50	22.9	15.3	0.7
Male	17.5	27.5	27.5	18.8	8.8

Similarly around 70% of respondents agreed that they had become more self-confident in general and in public situations (Tables 32 and 34 respectively). A similar percentage of respondents agreed that they felt more confident in putting forward their own point of view (69%, Table 33).

Table 32 'I have gained more self-confidence'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	54	23.5
Agree	107	46.5
Not sure	41	17.8
Disagree	20	8.7
Strongly disagree	8	3.5
Total	230	100

Again there was a significant gender difference to be found (Chi-Square= 12, df=4, p<0.01). Around 74% of female respondents stated they had become more self-confident compared with around 64% of male respondents. See table 33 for the full breakdown of responses. This was also the case when the data in Table 29 above was crosstabulated with gender. Around 70% of female respondents and 60% of male respondents agreed that they had become more diplomatic since they became class reps (Chi-Square= 10.04, df=4, p<0.05). The full breakdown of responses can be seen in Table 34 below.

Table 33 'I have gained more self-confidence' broken down by gender

Gender	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Female	21.8	51.7	17	8.8	0.7
Male	25.6	37.8	19.5	8.5	8.5

Table 34 'I've learned to be more diplomatic' broken down by gender

Gender	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Female	23.4	51.7	14.5	9.7	0.7
Male	22	37.8	22	12.2	6.1

Table 35 'I feel more confident in public situations'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	51	22.3
Agree	109	47.6
Not sure	39	17.0
Disagree	24	10.5
Strongly disagree	6	2.6
Total	229	100

Table 36 'I am more confident of stating my own point of view'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	49	21.7
Agree	106	46.9
Not sure	36	15.9
Disagree	29	12.8
Strongly disagree	6	2.7
Total	226	100

Again, many respondents seemed to associate their activities as class reps with an increased sense of personal confidence and efficacy.

Some of the questions asked dealt with what might be thought of as the development of more general cognitive abilities relating to organising, preparing and presenting arguments. These questions were chosen as it is plausible that some of the activities associated with work as a class rep may promote the use and development of such abilities.

For example, around 58% of respondents agreed that they had become more organised in their thinking (Table 37). More specifically, around 61% agreed that they had learned to be clearer and more precise Table 38). Nearly 64% agreed that they had become better at analysing situations (Table 39) and nearly 63% agreed that they were had learned to formulate convincing arguments (Table 40).

Table 37 'I have learned to organise my thinking'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	29	12.7
Agree	104	45.6
Not sure	55	24.1
Disagree	35	15.4

Strongly disagree	5	2.2
Total	228	100

Table 38 'I've learned to be clear and precise'

Response	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly agree	32	14.1
Agree	106	46.7
Not sure	52	22.3
Disagree	30	12.9
Strongly disagree	7	3.0
Total	227	100

Table 39 'I've learned to analyse situations more effectively'

Response	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly agree	40	17.6
Agree	105	46.3
Not sure	55	24.2
Disagree	21	9.3
Strongly disagree	6	2.6
Total	227	100

Table 40 'I've learned to formulate a convincing argument in support of my views'

Response	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly agree	48	21.1
Agree	95	41.7
Not sure	51	22.4
Disagree	29	12.7
Strongly disagree	5	2.2
Total	228	100

For many respondents development these various cognitive and analytic abilities was associated with being a class rep.

Two of the questions dealt with specific named skills that might be required by employers. 59% of respondents agreed to some extent that they had learned negotiation skills as a result of being a class rep (Table 41). Most positive responses to these questions had been in the 60-70% range apart from those asking about organising thinking, responding to challenges and developing negotiation skills. All these had positive response rates of over 50%. This changed with the question on time management skills. Less than 44% of respondents agreed that they had learned time management skills as part of their role as a class rep. It is possible that they feel they have learned such skills elsewhere. It is also debatable as to whether such skills development should actually be expected as a result of undertaking the class rep role. It is clear that being able to make claims about likely personal development may encourage students to take up class rep positions.

Table 41 'I've developed my negotiation skills'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	48	21.1
Agree	88	37.9
Not sure	50	22.0
Disagree	35	15.4
Strongly disagree	8	3.5
Total	228	100

Table 42 'I've learned time management skills'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	24	10.5
Agree	74	32.5
Not sure	64	28.1
Disagree	49	21.5
Strongly disagree	17	7.5
Total	228	100

Overall, respondents appeared to associate their rep work with improved negotiations skills to some extent but most did not associate their class rep activities with developing better time management skills.

Respondents were also asked whether, in general they had learned skills that were useful in their academic work and also when they began work after graduation. Around 51% indicated that they felt they had learned some academically useful skills (Table 43). More female respondents agreed with this than male respondents 956% versus 43%). This difference was found to be significant (Chi-Square= 17.6, df=4, p<0.01). The full break down of responses can be seen in Table 44 below.

Table 43 'I've learned skills that will help me in my academic work'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	38	16.7
Agree	79	34.6
Not sure	61	26.8
Disagree	35	15.4
Strongly disagree	15	6.6
Total	228	100

Table 44 'I've learned skills that will help me in my academic work' broken down by gender

Gender	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Female	16.6	39.3	24.1	17.9	2.1
Male	15.9	26.8	31.7	11	14.6

Around 70% indicated that they had developed useful work related skills (Table 45). This suggests that the practical benefits of being a class rep are seen more in terms of preparation for work rather than improving academic performance by our respondents.

Table 45 'I've learned skills that will be useful in my career after I leave university'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	62	27.4
Agree	97	42.9
Not sure	36	15.9
Disagree	25	11.1
Strongly disagree	6	2.7
Total	226	100

As well as the fixed-response questions dealing with the issues discussed above, respondents were asked what personal benefited they had gained through being a class rep. This took the form of an open-ended question. There were 239 separate categorisable responses to this question after content analysis (see Table 46). The benefits listed included insights into to the cultures and practices of departments and institutions (19.7%), CV development (5%), development of skills and personal qualities (15.5%). Also listed were actually having an impact and effecting positive change (15.1%), increased personal confidence (15.5%) and social benefits (11.3%).

Table 46 Categories derived from Question 9: personal benefits of being a course rep

Category	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Insights into department	47	19.7
CV development	12	5
Skills-personal development	37	15.5
Making a difference	36	15.1
Increased confidence	37	15.5
Social reasons	27	11.3
Negative comments	23	9.6
Other	20	8.4

Examples of gaining insights into the department or institution include:

> *Seeing how the department is run, and to see how to put through ideas to higher powers about what students think could be improved. good to see that things are being taken up by staff and the things that can't be improved as reasonably articulated why this is so.*
> *yes, wider knowledge of what goes on within the college, outwith my course.*

> *Have benefited by being actively involved in decision making processes and therefore more involved in things which affect my chosen course.*

Examples relating to CV development tended to be clear and to the point:

> *Additional evidence for C.V. and Professional C.P.D*

> *Free lunches and it looks good on the CV.*

Statements regarding skills development tended to be a little more in-depth:

> *I developed my communication and negotiation skills.*

> *Most of all I have benefited personally. I have greatly developed negotiation skills and devotion to the issue I am raising*

> *I have learned to work as a team with the other course reps. I have attended many seminars which have broadened my academic skills. It has given me the opportunity to take part in the student leadership programme.*

> *I have learned to work as a team with the other course reps*

Increased confidence:

> *My confidence has increased and I have became more organised and with events organised for the class, everyone is a lot closer and feel at ease when coming to myself with concerns.*

> *It has made me come out of my shell and improved me as a person*

Statements indicating that making an impact was important included:

> *I have been able to bring some issues to the attention of staff that I was not happy about and that probably would not have been passed on otherwise.*

> *Through liaising between students and staff I have learned to present the views of others rationally, increasing my confidence in talking with both my peers and with members of staff.*

> *Satisfaction from being useful and successful at getting issues heard*

Being a class rep also had a social function for some:

> *Everybody in the class knows who you are and it made it very easy to make friends within section.*

> *Got to know everyone on the course....and more one on one time to talk to members of staff.*

Others saw no benefits to being a class rep:

> *No, a complete and utter waste of time - it was nothing other than a token gesture to meet university requirements I'm certain.*

Clearly there were a variety of benefits perceived by respondents that covered academic development, personal development, career development, social advantage. It may be of interest to note that making a difference as a rep was identified as a personal benefit for some respondents as well as a positive judgment on the class representative system.

3.3.6 The wider student experience

In this part of the survey respondents were asked for their opinions on the views of ordinary students (i.e. not class reps) on issues relating to quality and teaching and learning. Questions asked covered issues such as:

- Time constraints faced by students
- The level of interest in learning and teaching issues among the general student population
- The perceived attitudes of staff towards students and teaching

The reasons behind asking the class reps about the experiences of the wider student population were twofold. Firstly we gained information on the respondents' perception of the wider context in which they worked as class reps. We also gained information relating to the general experience of students.

As well as the fixed-response questions discussed below, respondents were also invited to answer an open-ended question asking if they had any further comments to add. These were then content analysed. There were 38 categorisable answers given. 42% of these referred to issues that related to departments. These included how there can be variable attitudes to students and their representatives between departments in the same institution. 18% of responses referred to poor communication between staff and students. 16% referred to constraints placed on the class rep system such as non-standard students being isolated, general student apathy and personal time constraints. As the number

of responses was so low they have not been presented in tables. However some have been chosen to give a little more nuance to the discussion of the responses to the fixed response questions below.

Of interest, was whether class reps take on their roles because other students do not have time to devote to teaching and learning issues? This may be especially pertinent where students are part-time or where they have to take just to subsidise their studies. 52% of respondents disagreed when it was suggested that students generally do not have time to be concerned with learning and teaching issues (Table 47). It is also possible that even if they have the time most students are unconcerned with teaching and learning issues. The results displayed in Table 48 suggest that this is not the case: respondents mostly stated that students were concerned with the quality of their learning (72.5% disagreed with a statement suggesting they were not).

Table 47 'Students haven't time to worry about decisions on teaching and learning'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	13	5.8
Agree	43	19.1
Not sure	52	23.1
Disagree	91	40.4
Strongly disagree	26	11.6
Total	225	100

The data in Table 47 suggest that, in the view of respondents, students do mostly have the time to be concerned with decisions over their teaching and learning. When broken down further by institution type and broad disciplinary area no significant differences were found.

Table 48 'Students are not really interested in improving the quality of teaching'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	11	4.9
Agree	22	9.8
Not sure	29	12.9
Disagree	103	45.8
Strongly disagree	60	26.7
Total	225	100

Likewise, the data in Table 48 suggest that respondents feel that students do tend to be interested in the quality of their teaching. No significant differences were found between disciplinary areas.

The results obtained from these questions were broken down by institution type and broad disciplinary area. No significant differences were found except in when the responses in Table 48 were broken down by HEI type. It can be seen in table 49 that around 66% of respondents from post-1992 universities disagreed at least to some extent with the statement 'Students are not really interested in improving the quality of teaching'. This compares with nearly 78% of respondents from pre-1992 universities and around 64% of respondents from specialist institutions. From these results there seems to be a tendency for respondents from pre-1992 universities to think that their fellow students are more likely to be interested in improving the quality of their teaching and learning experiences. Although respondents from the specialist institutions showed the lowest level of disagreement, they also showed the lowest level of agreement with the statement (14.3%). When combining the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' categories.

Table 49 'Students are not really interested in improving the quality of teaching' by HEI type

HEI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Post 92	8.4	10.8	14.5	33.7	32.5
Pre 92	1.6	10.7	9.8	52.5	25.4
Specialist	14.3	0	21.4	50	14.3

Some claimed that it was difficult as a class rep to get other students interested in being more active:

> *Within my class I struggle to get my classmates involved, most of them aren't really interested*

These respondents also had the highest level of strong agreement with the statement. Respondents from pre-1992 universities showed the lowest levels of agreement. From the results it would appear that respondents from pre-1992 universities were more likely to view the general student population in their institutions as interested in teaching and learning improvement and those from specialist institutions least likely. The highest levels of agreement came from post-1992 university respondents although most stated that they disagreed with the statement to at least some degree. The results were crosstabulated and subject to a chi square test and were found to be significant (Chi-Square=16.2, df=8, $p<0.05$). These identified trends do need to be considered cautiously as the overall sample is small (particularly for the specialist institutions) and because there may be effects that relate more to individual institutions rather than the HEI type grouping used here.

Respondents were also asked about their perceptions of staff attitudes towards student learning in general. In particular we were concerned to know about perceptions of how interested teaching staff are in student learning. We were also concerned with whether students were viewed as largely passive learners by tutors in the opinion of the respondents. The first question asked whether tutors showed an equal level of interest in individual student learning to that of students (Table 50).

Table 50 'My tutors are just as interested in my learning as I am'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	45	19.9
Agree	105	46.5
Not sure	42	18.6
Disagree	23	10.2
Strongly disagree	11	4.9
Total	233	100

In terms of perceived staff attitudes most respondents agreed at least to some extent that tutors are just as interested in student learning as the students themselves (66%). The data in Table 50 was crosstabulated with both disciplinary area and HEI type and no significant differences were found.

In terms of student passivity, most respondents agreed to at least some extent that students are seen as recipients of learning by staff (around 55%, see Table 51). This may be an indicator that the respondents felt that students are viewed as passive 'consumers' by tutors. However Table 46 shows that most respondents felt that tutors were actually just as interested in students' learning as the students themselves (66%). The notion of staff regarding students as passive learners is challenged by the results displayed in Table 52 where 87.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students in general are encouraged to manage their own learning.

It was noted by respondents that levels of interest can vary between tutors:

> *Most of the staff are very interested in teaching students, there's just some staff that can't be bothered with students and are not really interested in their feedback.*

Table 51 'Staff regard students as 'recipients' of teaching and learning'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	27	12.0
Agree	97	43.1
Not sure	74	32.9
Disagree	22	9.8
Strongly disagree	5	2.2
Total	225	100

The data in Table 52 was crosstabulated with disciplinary area and HEI type but no significant differences were found. The apparently contradictory results in Tables 51 and 52 may indicate a view among respondents that does not associate the word 'recipient' with passivity (which was an assumption in the design of the instrument).

Table 52 'Students are encouraged to manage their own learning experience'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	75	33.3
Agree	122	54.2
Not sure	20	8.9
Disagree	6	2.7
Strongly disagree	2	0.9
Total	225	100

We also asked whether students were actively engaged in making decisions about their learning. Again we were interested to gauge respondents' views on how actively engaged the *wider* student population was in their learning. 41% of respondents stated that they thought students were actively engaged in decision making about their learning experiences (Table 53). It may therefore be the case that, although encouraged to actively manage their learning experiences, students are not actually likely to do so in the opinion of respondents. It could also be that respondents did not see managing their own learning experiences and participating in decisions about their learning experiences as the same thing. Bearing in mind that the respondents in this survey were all class reps it is very possible that they associated decision making with their own roles as reps and therefore beyond the activities of an 'ordinary' student. Managing the learning experience may have been viewed as more day-to-day activity.

While managing one's own learning can be seen as active engagement in teaching and learning processes it can also be seen as staff shirking their responsibilities:

> *Students are encouraged to "manage their own learning experience". In my university's case that means a single lecture a week, sometimes a tutorial too. Very little actual TEACHING. Why are students paying so much to be handed a reading list and little more? It's infuriating.*

Table 53 'Students actively participate in decisions about their learning experiences'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	26	11.6
Agree	67	29.8
Not sure	58	25.8
Disagree	62	27.6
Strongly disagree	12	5.3
Total	225	100

We were also interested in the wider relationships between staff and students beyond the formal activities of the class reps. Around 64% respondents agreed that good communication systems were in place between staff and students (Table 54). Respondents also seemed to feel that staff were flexible when it came to the need to make changes (Table 55). Just under 18% of respondents stated that they thought staff were resistant to change. Only around 17% stated that they thought staff were more interested in their research than their teaching (Table 56). This suggests that a 'traditional' complaint that staff are more research focused than teaching focused may not be all that well founded in the view of the sample as a whole.

Table 54 'There are good systems of communication between students and staff'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	43	19.0
Agree	102	45.1
Not sure	44	19.5
Disagree	30	13.3
Strongly disagree	7	3.1
Total	226	100

The issue of good communication could be seen as an individual quality:

> *I have selected 'neutral' to the communications question as there is such a mix it would be a lie to say communications is 'good' as I have experienced lecturers not emailing back about coursework etc as have others on my course. The same is true for 'staff seem resistant to change' the younger more computer-literate want change but the oldies are not keen*

Or sometimes part of a department or institutional culture:

> *Beyond scheduled 'contact time' it can be a challenge to get a hold of any particular lecturer inside the hours most students (who travel to uni) have free ...*

Overall respondents seemed to present a picture of staff as engaged with students and interested in student issues. They also present a view of staff as willing at least to some extent to change their practices to accommodate student needs.

Table 55 'In general, staff seem resistant to change'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	12	5.4
Agree	32	14.3
Not sure	57	25.6
Disagree	88	39.5
Strongly disagree	34	15.2
Total	223	100

There were some significant gender difference in the answers to this question (Chi-Square= 17.27, df=4, p<0.05) in that female respondents seemed more likely to disagree that staff are resistant to change. Around 60% of female respondents disagreed with the statement to some extent compared with around 44% of male respondents. The full break down of responses can be seen in Table 56 below.

Table 56 'In general, staff seem resistant to change' broken down by gender

Gender	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Female	2.1	9.8	28	43.4	16.8
Male	11.4	22.8	21.5	31.6	12.7

Not all respondents presented staff as welcoming change. Particularly as a result of student feedback:

> *The students try to give suggestions on courses and other types of learning that would make more sense for our program to be doing but they are never listened to*

To check whether the expressed perceptions of respondents were related to either disciplinary and / or institutional cultures the data for these three questions were crosstabulated with HEI type and also with broad disciplinary area. No significant associations were found except in the case of the data presented in Table 58.

Table 57 'Most staff are more interested in their research than in teaching'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	10	4.4
Agree	29	12.9
Not sure	61	27.1
Disagree	89	39.6
Strongly disagree	36	16.0
Total	225	100

When crosstabulated with HEI type and subjected to a Chi-Square test significant differences were observed in levels of agreement between the three broad institutional categories (Chi-Square= 20.99, df=8, p<0.01). While 73.5% of respondents from post-92 universities disagreed with the statement that

staff were more interested in research than teaching. Only 46.7% of respondents from pre-1992 universities disagreed and 30% gave a neutral answer. 50% of respondents from specialist institutions disagreed, while 42% gave a neutral answer. Specialist institution respondents also showed the lowest levels of agreement with the statement (7.1%). It would appear that respondents from the sub-sector containing the most research active universities were more likely to agree that staff prioritised research over teaching.

Table 58 'Staff are more interested in their research than teaching' by HEI type

Institution type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Post 92	2.4	9.6	14.5	48.2	25.3
Pre 92	6.6	16.4	30.3	36.9	9.8
Specialist	0	7.1	42.9	28.6	21.4

A significant gender difference was also found (Chi-Square=17.2, df=4, p<0.01) where female respondents (around 60%) were more likely to disagree with the statement than male respondents (around 44%). The full break down of responses can be seen in table 59 below.

Table 59 'Staff are more interested in their research than teaching' broken down by gender

Gender	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Female	2.8	14.6	19.4	45.8	17.4
Male	7.5	10	41.3	27.5	13.8

There was recognition that staff interest in prioritising research could reflect institutional pressures:

> *For "Most staff are more interested in their research than in teaching" my tutors are willing to admit that this is becoming more the case and they are very open with us that research has to be their main priority due to the financial system that requires them to publish in order to keep the department running. However, they try their very best to keep the students important.*

There was also recognition that staff are individuals and behave as such. Therefore their levels of interest may vary in ways that make generalisation difficult:

> *Staff are individuals, as are students. The level of interest and area of interest vary with each individual, also the amount of time shared between research and teaching.*

3.3.7 Post university-career

In the UK the Government has recognised the economic importance of higher education through explicit linkage of HE to industry and enterprise. Furthermore the HE sector has been recognised by the Scottish Government as an economic sector in its own right. One reason for this is the role of HE in preparing students to be effective members of the national workforce once they graduate into an increasingly risky economic world. Questions asked in this section were concerned with:

- Reps' career focus in choosing a course
- Their opinions on how programmes of study should prepare students for work in general and for specific careers
- What skills have been learned by respondents
- Whether any personal changes that relate to work have taken place

In asking questions about the career aspirations and plans of the respondents we moved away from considering them in terms of their class rep activities. Essentially respondents were viewed as 'ordinary' students for this part of the survey. However, we recognise that undertaking a class rep role may help career focus and preparation for respondents. This of course has been explicitly recognised in some of

the answers given in previous questions and was identified as an incentive for becoming a rep by some respondents.

We began by asking respondents if they had chosen their degree programmes with a particular career in mind. This gave a baseline indication of the career focus of this choice for the sample.

Table 60 'I chose my course with a particular career in mind'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	118	52.2
Agree	50	22.1
Not sure	16	7.1
Disagree	30	13.3
Strongly disagree	12	5.3
Total	226	100

As can be seen in Table 60 just over 74% of respondents agreed that they had chosen their programmes of study with a particular career in mind. This suggests a strong career focus among many of the reps who took part in the survey. For many respondents the choice of degree programme was related to choice of career.

Table 61 'I chose my course with a particular career in mind' by broad disciplinary area

Disciplinary area	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Arts and Humanities	41.9	21	3.2	25.8	8.1
Social Science	65.5	13.8	10.3	6.9	3.4
Management	50	21	12.5	16.5	0
Medicine & Health related	73	17	2	4.9	2.4
Science and Engineering	33	14	5	9.4	7.8

When broken down by disciplinary area (see Table 61 above) some differences in the response patterns were observed. Around 63% of Humanities respondents, 80% of Social Sciences respondents 61% of Management respondents, 90% of Medicine and health-related respondents and 47% of Science and Engineering respondents agreed to at least some extent. These data were crosstabulated and subjected to a Chi-Square test. Although the trends were found to be significant the result is unreliable due to low expected cell counts. Nevertheless there is a clear trend for respondents in medicine and Social Sciences to give more career-focused answers.

One might expect agreement to be clustered around more vocational subject areas. Indeed the highest levels of agreement were observed in Medicine and health-related disciplines but the lowest levels of agreement were observed among Science and Engineering respondents. This may be due to a mix of theoretical and applied programmes in this area or perhaps a 'pure' interest in the subject rather than a vocational focus. In may be interesting to note that the agreement level from Management respondents was relatively low from what might be viewed as a vocationally orientated disciplinary area. The differences between agreement and disciplinary area were found to be significant.

Table 62 'I chose my course with particular career in mind' by HEI type

Institution type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Post 92	66.7	19	6	8.3	0
Pre 92	46.3	23.6	5.7	17.1	7.3
Specialist	28.6	35.7	14.3	7.1	14.3

When responses were broken down by institution type (see Table 56 above) we found that nearly 86% of post-1992 university respondents agreed to at least some extent that they had chosen their programmes of study with a particular career in mind compared to nearly 70% of pre-1992 respondents and around 64% of specialist institution respondents. There seemed to be a clear trend in post-1992 respondents to give a career focused-answer to this question. When crosstabulated this association between career focus and institutional type was found to be significant (Chi-Square=19.94, df= 8, p<0.05).

As well as career focus in programme choice we also asked respondents about their career plans once they had graduated. This was in the form of an open-ended question. The responses obtained were content analysed and a number of categories were derived from the data. There were 199 separate categorisable responses in five separate categories (see Table 63). Of these, around 40% stated they intended to take up a particular named career such as Social worker, podiatrist, Civil Engineer or Army Officer. Around 30% of responses indicate that the respondent had identified a clear area of work but had not named a particular job. Areas named included working for the civil service, working for an NGO, working in the conference industry and 'something in Psychology'. Another 15% indicated they intended to go on to further study. This category included those responses that mentioned undertaking postgraduate degrees both taught and research-based. This did not include those responses that named a particular job that would probably require further study such as law, teaching and Clinical Psychology. Less than 15% of responses indicated that the respondent was unclear on their career aims. A number of these responses indicated that he respondent intended to keep their career options open at this time. The single 'other' response was given in Gaelic.

Table 63 Content analysis categories for Question 16: 'What are your career plans once you've graduated?'

	Specific job	Clear area of work	Further study	Undecided	Other
Number of responses	80	59	30	29	1
Percentage of total	40.2%	29.6%	15.1%	14.6%	0.5%

As well as asking about career focus in programme choice we also asked respondents whether they felt a degree should provide direct but general preparation for work (Table 64 below). As can be seen, over 80% of respondents agreed to at least some extent that the role of a degree is to prepare students for work. No significant differences were found when responses were crosstabulated with HEI type and disciplinary area.

Table 64 'A degree should directly prepare students for work in general'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	77	34.2
Agree	104	46.2
Not sure	23	10.2
Disagree	17	7.6
Strongly disagree	4	1.8
Total	225	100

Respondents were also asked if a degree should provide preparation for specific types of work this level of agreement dropped to just over 63% (Table 59 below). Again no significant differences were found between HEI types or disciplinary areas.

Table 65 'Degrees should directly prepare students for work in specific types of jobs'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	56	24.9
Agree	86	38.2
Not sure	41	18.2
Disagree	30	13.3
Strongly disagree	12	5.3
Total	225	100

It would appear that most respondents felt that degrees should have a role in preparing students for entering the world of work. However, despite the number of respondents stating that they chose their course with a particular career in mind, there was less agreement with the notion that degree programme should provide career-specific preparation. It is perhaps noteworthy that no significant differences were found between subject areas. With the categorisation used in the survey one might expect management and health-related areas to show significantly higher rates of agreement on specific career preparation as these disciplines include degree schemes that prepare students for specific careers.

The next two questions were concerned with respondents' employment related learning. Firstly respondents were asked if they had gained subject specific knowledge that they thought would be useful in work. Nearly 85% of respondents stated that they had learned specific subject knowledge that would be useful in the work they hoped to go on to do (Table 65).

Table 65 I am learning specific subject knowledge that will be useful in my future career

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	95	41.9
Agree	97	42.7
Not sure	18	7.9
Disagree	13	5.7
Strongly disagree	4	1.8
Total	227	100

Respondents were also asked if they had gained knowledge that would be generally useful in work. Nearly 83% agreed that they had gained knowledge applicable to work in general (Table 66).

Table 66 I am learning skills and knowledge that can be applied to work in general

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	84	37.0
Agree	104	45.8
Not sure	24	10.6
Disagree	10	4.4
Strongly disagree	5	2.2
Total	227	100

It would seem therefore that the majority of respondents felt they were gaining knowledge that was useful both in specific careers and for work in general. No significant differences were found between responses to either question for HEI type and disciplinary area.

We were also interested to know if respondents felt they had undergone personal transformation to any extent in relation to work. We were particularly interested in whether respondents felt more professional and worker-like and whether their levels of confidence had changed in relation to getting a job and embarking on their chosen careers. In terms of personal change just over 65% of respondents agreed that they were beginning to feel more professional to at least some extent (Table 62).

Table 67 'I have started to feel more like a 'professional person'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	70	31.0
Agree	77	34.1
Not sure	42	18.6
Disagree	27	11.9
Strongly disagree	10	4.4
Total	226	100

It would appear therefore that for many respondents their time as students can be associated with a developing sense of professionalism. This also seemed to go together with an increased sense of career focus for a large proportion of respondents. In terms of knowing what they want to do nearly 72% of respondents agreed that they felt more confident about the sort of work they want to do (Table 68).

Table 68 'I am becoming more confident in knowing what work I want to do'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	74	33.0
Agree	87	38.8
Not sure	33	14.7
Disagree	23	10.3
Strongly disagree	7	3.1
Total	224	100

Perhaps linked to growing confidence in knowing what sort of work they want to do nearly 73% of respondents agreed that they felt more confident that they would actually be able to undertake the work in their chosen careers (Table 69).

Table 69 'I am becoming more confident about being able to do the work I want to do'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	75	33.0
Agree	90	39.6
Not sure	37	16.3
Disagree	21	9.3
Strongly disagree	4	1.8
Total	227	100

A significant gender difference was found when the data in Table 69 was crosstabulated with gender (Chi-Square= 15.28, df=4, $p < 0.05$). Female respondents were more likely to agree with the statement (around 77% than male respondents (around 64%). The full break down of responses can be seen in Table 70 below.

Table 70 'I am becoming more confident about being able to do the work I want to do' broken down by gender

Gender	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Female	30.8	46.6	13.7	8.9	0
Male	37.5	26.3	21.3	16	5

Around 68% of the cohort agreed that they felt more able to get the right job for them (Table 71). From the data presented it would seem, that for this particular cohort of reps at least, the university experience has been marked by increasing levels of confidence in deciding the right career and also in being able to pursue that career.

Table 71 'I feel more able to get the job that is right for me'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	73	32.2
Agree	82	36.1
Not sure	49	21.6
Disagree	18	7.9
Strongly disagree	5	2.2
Total	227	100

However it can be seen in Table 72 below that there was a variation between responses from different disciplinary areas. 68% of Humanities respondents, around 66% of Social Science respondents, around 80% of Management respondents, around 93% of Medicine and health-related respondents and around 57% of Science and Engineering respondents agreed to at least some extent. The highest levels of agreement were in obviously vocational areas and the lowest in an area that does contain some vocational programmes. The relationship between disciplinary area and level of agreement was found to be significant when crosstabulated (Chi-Square= 39.5, df= 8, $p<0.05$).

Table 72 'I feel more able to get the job that is right for me by broad disciplinary area'

Disciplinary type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Arts and Humanities	17.7	40.3	30.6	9.7	1.6
Social Science	34.5	31	27.6	6.9	0
Management	37.5	41.7	16.7	4.2	0
Medicine & Health related	51.2	41.5	4.9	3.3	0.9
Science and Engineering	29.2	27.7	24.6	13.8	4.6

A significant gender difference was again observed when the data in Table 71 were crosstabulated with gender (Ch-Square= 11.56. df=4, $p<0.05$). Female respondents were more likely to agree with the statement (around 73%) than male respondents (around 60%). The full break down of responses can be seen in Table 73 below.

Table 73 'I feel more able to get the job that is right for me' broken down by gender

Gender	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Female	34.2	38.4	19.2	8.2	0
Male	28.8	31.3	26.3	7.5	6.3

Having asked respondents what they intended to do and also having gauged their thought s on confidence and preparedness for work we were also interested to know what they thought were the most important factors in getting graduate level work. We asked an open-ended question where respondents

were asked to name what they thought were the three most important things to learn in order to get a graduate level job. We content analysed the responses and obtained 409 separate categorisable responses in seven different categories (see Table 74).

Table 74 Content analysis of responses to Question 18: 'What do you think are the three most important things to learn in order to get a good graduate job?'

	Job/ discipline	Trans- ferable skills	Personal qualities	Professional qualities	Academic knowledge and skills	Ability to get a job	Other
No. of responses	70	130	107	60	15	20	7
Percentage	17.1	31.8	26.2	14.7	3.7	4.9	1.7

Of these responses, nearly 32% mentioned transferable skills such as time management, presentation skills and high levels of literacy. Around 36% of responses referred to personal qualities such as confidence, flexibility and self-discipline. Just over 17% of responses referred to specific technical knowledge to do particular jobs or having actual experience of the job itself. Just fewer than 15% of responses referred to what might be called professional qualities. These included good time-keeping, dressing appropriately and behaving in a 'professional' manner. Nearly 5% of responses mentioned the ability to get work in the first place. Responses in this category mentioned issues such as doing background research into specific jobs and employers, building useful social networks and conduct in during selection processes. Just fewer than 4% of respondents rated academic skills and knowledge among the top three factors involved in getting a good graduate level job. The 'other' category included one answer in Gaelic and what might be viewed as a challenge to some assumptions behind the graduate employability agenda. One respondent challenges the idea that employment should be the primary motivation for doing a degree:

> *Your question assumes the purpose of my time at university is to get 'a good graduate job' whatever that means. It's not. I like what I study that's enough. and surely it depends on the job, a generic set of criteria seems a bit pointless.*

Some had no intention of working for anyone else and were critical of the survey design in this respect:

> *Why would I want to get a job? I want to start my own business, I've no interest in selling my time by the hour. Faulty questions aside, I would hazard a guess that confidence, practical experience and team working skills.*

While another respondent notes that being a graduate does not confer an automatic right to a graduate job:

> *Graduates have no automatic entitlement to a graduate position*

In the survey we were also interested in whether a clear link was made between study and work in course material and teaching practices. The next batch of questions dealt with more formal structures and activities undertaken on courses and how these relate to preparation for work. Although respondents had indicated rising levels of career confidence this does not seem to be associated with high levels of career focus in terms of course structures and materials in general. Only around 48% of respondents agreed that course materials make it clear that students are being prepared for work (Table 75).

Table 75 'It is clearly stated in course materials (e.g. course handbook, website) that we are being prepared for work'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	53	23.5
Agree	56	24.8
Not sure	47	20.8
Disagree	51	22.6
Strongly disagree	19	8.4

When these data are broken down by institution type it can be seen that around 70% of respondents from post-1992 universities agreed that course materials clearly linked study with preparation for work (see table 69 below). This compares with around 36% of pre-1992 respondents and specialist institution respondents. The data were crosstabulated and this variation was found to be significant (Chi-Square= 31, df=8, p<0.01). However caution is urged in interpretation of the data as the sample is small and the categorisation used may obscure effects related to individual institutions. It may be interesting to note that no significant effects were observed when data were broken down by broad subject area.

Table 76 'It is clearly stated in course materials (e.g. course handbook, website) that we are being prepared for work' by HEI type

Institution type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Post 92	40.5	27.4	14.3	11.9	6
Pre 92	15.6	20.5	24.6	28.7	10.7
Specialist	0	35.7	28.6	35.7	0

We then asked if the ways in which preparation for work was carried out were made clear to respondents. Around 46% of respondents agreed that these were being made clear to them (Table 70). When the data in Table 77 were broken down by institution type (Table 78) around 61% of post-1992 respondents agreed.

Table 77 'The ways in which we are being prepared for work are made clear to us'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	40	17.8
Agree	64	28.4
Not sure	48	21.3
Disagree	56	24.9
Strongly disagree	17	7.6
Total	226	100

This level is rather less than that shown in Table 76. It would appear that, although it is being made clear through course materials that students are being prepared for work, exactly how is unclear. Around 36% of pre-1992 respondents agreed with the statement thus showing a similar level of agreement to that shown in Table 69 Around 50% respondents from the specialist institutions agreed. This increase may indicate that although course material may be unclear on preparation for work, other course activities make clear how students are being prepared for work. These data were crosstabulated and the associations identified were found to be significant (Chi-Square= 24.9, df=8, p<0.05). Similar caution is urged in using these data from table 71 for the same reasons as in the data from Table 76.

Table 78 'The ways in which being prepared for work are made clear to us' by HEI type

Institution type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Post 92	32.1	28.6	20.2	14.3	4.8
Pre 92	9.1	26.4	23.1	31.4	4.8
Specialist	14.3	35.7	14.3	35.7	0

A significant relationship was also found when this question was crosstabulated with broad disciplinary areas (Chi-Square= 29.4, df=8, p<0.05). In medicine and health-related subjects 61% of respondents agreed that the ways in which they were prepared for work were made clear. Around 58% of management respondents, 55% of Social Science respondents, 42% of Arts and Humanities respondents and 37% of Science and Engineering respondents agreed (see Table 79 below). There was a clear bias towards Medicine and health-related subjects together with management and Social Sciences in terms of respondents agreeing with the statement.

Table 79 'The ways in which being prepared for work are made clear to us' by Broad disciplinary area.

Disciplinary category	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Arts and Humanities	11.7	30	23.3	23.3	11.7
Social Science	17.2	27.6	20.7	31	3.4
Management	20.8	37.5	20.8	16.7	4.2
Medicine & Health related	41.5	19.5	17.1	22	0
Science and Engineering	7.7	29.2	21.5	29.2	12.3

As well as course materials we were also interested to hear whether tutors themselves linked their teaching to work and preparation for work. Over the whole cohort, nearly 41% of respondents agreed that tutors linked assessment tasks to employment (Table80).

Table 80 'Our tutors link assessment tasks and subject matter to employment'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	36	15.9
Agree	56	24.8
Not sure	48	21.2
Disagree	54	23.9
Strongly disagree	32	14.2
Total	226	100

When broken down by Institutional type just over 52% of respondents from post-1992 universities agreed that assessment tasks and subject matter are linked to employment (see Table 81). This compared to around 33% of pre-1992 respondents and 29% of specialist institution respondents.

Table 81 'Our tutors link assessment tasks and subject matter to employment' by HEI type

Institution type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Post 92	27.4	25	22.6	19	6
Pre 92	9	23.8	18.9	27.9	6
Specialist	14.3	14.3	42.9	14.3	14.3

This association was found to be significant when the responses were crosstabulated with institution type (Chi-Square= 23.66, df=8, p<0.01). It may be interesting to note that in this case no significant differences were found between broad disciplinary categories. This provides evidence to suggest that tutors in post-1992 universities may be more vocationally orientated in their approach to teaching. This finding should not be viewed as conclusive, but rather as something that can be explored further as the evaluation progresses.

We were interested to know if respondents felt that, in general, tutors displayed a good understanding of how their subject relates to work. In Table 82 it can be seen that 54% of respondents agreed that tutors showed a good understanding of how subject matter relates to work while around 25% disagreed.

Table 82 'Our tutors show a good understanding of how the subject relates to work'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	53	23.5
Agree	69	30.5
Not sure	47	20.8
Disagree	39	17.3
Strongly disagree	18	8.0
Total	226	100

When broken down by subject area (Table 83), 41% of Humanities respondents agreed that their tutors showed a good understanding of how their subject relates to work. Around 48% of Social Sciences respondents, 62% of Management respondents, 73% of Medicine and health-related respondents and around 51% of Science and Engineering respondents agreed. Levels of agreement seemed to be highest in areas with the most vocationally orientated programmes. This relationship between discipline and level of agreement was found to be significant (Chi-square= 26.29, df=16 p<0.05). There was a clear bias towards medicine and health-related and Social Sciences students to agree with the statement.

Table 83 'Tutors show good understanding of how subject relates to work'

Disciplinary category	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Arts and Humanities	21.3	19.7	26.2	19.7	13.1
Social Science	20.7	27.6	20.7	24.1	6.9
Management	20.8	41.7	25.0	12.5	0
Medicine & Health related	46.3	26.8	9.8	12.2	4.9
Science and Engineering	13.8	36.9	21.5	23.6	29.5

When the results were broken down by institution type (Table 84 below) we found that 75% of respondents in post-1992 universities agreed compared to around 40% of pre-1992 respondents and around 43% of specialist institution respondents. There would appear to be an association with the post-1992 respondents being more likely to agree that their tutors showed a good understanding of how their subject relates to work. This relationship was found to be significant (Chi-Square=23.66, df=8, p<0.01).

Table 84 'Our tutors show a good understanding of how the subject' relates to work by HEI type

Institution type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Post 92	36.9	38.1	11.9	11.9	1.2
Pre 92	14.8	25.4	23.8	23	13.1
Specialist	21.4	21.4	42.9	7.1	7.1

As well as gauging respondents' opinions on how subjects are linked to work we were also interested to gain some information on respondents' own learning in relation to work. We began by asking if respondents were gaining insights into the types of work students in their subject areas go on to do after graduation.

Whereas the levels of linkage between course activities and content seem to be low for the cohort, over 70% of respondents agreed that they were learning about the sort of work people in their subject areas do (Table 85). This may indicate a high level of awareness in the general student population which can be tested in subsequent survey work.

Table 85 'I am learning about the sort of jobs that people in my subject area do'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	66	29.2
Agree	93	41.2
Not sure	27	11.9
Disagree	32	14.2
Strongly disagree	8	3.5
Total	226	100

We found some variation between disciplinary area and level of agreement (Table 86). In Table 78 it can be seen that 64% of Humanities respondents agreed to some extent, around 72% of Social Science respondents, around 63% of management respondents, around 88% of Medicine and health-related and around 66% Science and Engineering respondents agreed to at least some extent that they were learning about career pathways in their subject areas. The highest levels of agreement were for Medicine and Health-related and the association between subject areas and level of agreement was found to be significant (Chi-Square= 37.28, df=16, p<0.01).

Table 86 'I am learning about the sorts of jobs people in my subject area do' by discipline

Disciplinary category	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Arts and Humanities	23	41	9.8	21.3	4.9
Social Science	24.1	48.3	10.3	17.2	0
Management	20.8	41.7	25	12.5	0
Medicine & Health related	63.4	24.4	4.9	4.9	2.4
Science and Engineering	20	46.2	13.8	13.8	6.2

As well as work-related knowledge we were also concerned to know if there was any transformation in behaviour among our cohort. Specifically we wanted to know if respondents felt they had become more 'worker-like' in outlook and behaviour. We first asked if respondents felt they were expected to behave

like professionals staff in their institutions. Nearly 58% of respondents agreed that students in their subject areas were expected to behave in a professional manner (Table 87).

Table 87 'We are expected to behave like professionals'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	55	24.3
Agree	75	33.2
Not sure	60	26.5
Disagree	25	11.1
Strongly disagree	11	4.9
Total	226	100

These responses were broken down by broad disciplinary area (see Table 88). Around 46% of Humanities respondents, 66% of Social Sciences, 38% of Management, 88% of Medicine and health related 54% of Science and Engineering respondents agreed that they were expected to behave like professionals. The relationship between subject area and answers given was found to be significant (Chi-Square=.46.2, df=16, p<0.01). Respondents from medicine and health related subject were most likely to agree they were expected to behave like professionals.

Table 88 'We are expected to behave like professionals' by disciplinary area

Disciplinary category	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Arts and Humanities	19.7	26.2	34.4	11.5	8.2
Social Science	24.1	41.4	20.7	10.3	3.4
Management	8.3	29.2	41.7	16.7	4.2
Medicine & Health related	58.5	29.3	7.3	2.4	2.4
Science and Engineering	12.3	41.5	29.2	13.8	3.1

Responses to the question were also broken down by HEI type (see Table 89). Nearly 75% of post-1992 respondents agreed that were expected to behave like professionals. This compares with around 49% of pre-1992 respondents and around 47% of specialist institution respondents. This provides some evidence for an increased emphasis on professional behaviour in post-1992 universities. The relationship between institution type and levels of agreement among respondents was found to be significant (Chi-Square=24.3, df=8, p< 0.01).

Table 89 'We are expected to behave like professionals' by HEI type

HEI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Post 92	36.9	38.1	16.7	6	2.4
Pre 92	16.4	32.8	31.1	12.3	7.4
Specialist	14.3	32.8	31.1	12.3	0

As well as general behaviour we were also interested in respondents' approach to work, in particular whether they were expected to have a professional outlook on this. When asked nearly 72% of respondents agreed that they were (Table 90).

Table 90 'We are expected to have a professional outlook on our work'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	70	31.0
Agree	92	40.7
Not sure	42	18.6
Disagree	17	7.5
Strongly disagree	5	2.2
Total	226	100

When the data for this question were broken down by broad disciplinary areas around 65% of Humanities, 86% of Social Sciences, 59% of Management, 89% of Medicine and health related and 69% of Science and Engineering respondents agreed to at least some extent (see Table 91). The relationship between subject area and the spread of answers was also found to be significant (Chi-Square=33.6, df=16. p<0.01). It is perhaps unsurprising that in Medicine and health related subjects there should be a strong association with taking a professional outlook and also together with professional behaviour. Many of the courses undertaken in this area will include professional training and students will be assessed on this.

Both Management and Humanities showed low levels of agreement on professional behaviour but higher levels of agreement on taking a professional outlook on work. With Humanities respondents it might be that what constitutes professional behaviour is unclear but taking a professional outlook on work is clearer. It may be that these respondents are able to measure professional outlook in terms of what constitutes good undergraduate level work in their departments but are less clear on how to conduct themselves 'professionally' beyond this. Interestingly, Social Science respondents show higher levels of agreement to both questions. This may indicate that these respondents were more able to link their student activities to those that might be carried out by professionals in their subject areas.

Table 91 'We are expected to have a professional outlook' by disciplinary area

Disciplinary category	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Arts and Humanities	24.6	41	19.7	13.1	1.6
Social Science	27.6	58.6	10.3	3.4	0
Management	20.8	37.5	25	16.7	0
Medicine & Health related	58.5	29.9	7.3	2.4	2.4
Science and Engineering	24.6	43.1	26.2	3.1	3.1

On the face of it much higher levels of agreement might be expected from Management students, particularly regarding behaving like professionals. This may be indicative of a gap between the applied and less applied areas of management for the respondents.

Medicine and health related respondents showed the highest level of agreement to both questions but this maybe be expected because of the professional training aspects of many of the programmes within this category. More Science and Engineering respondents agreed that they were expected to take a professional outlook to their work then agreed that they were expected to behave like professionals. Again this may indicate that, for the respondents, it was easier to understand what constitutes professional work over what constitutes professional behaviour.

One might expect professional behaviour and outlook to be concentrated in those subject areas that are most obviously vocational. This seems to hold true for Medicine and health-related subjects but not for

Management. In the case of Social Science and Science and Engineering results may be affected by each disciplinary area containing programmes that are vocationally focused and programmes that are considerably less so.

We also broke the responses down by HEI type and found that over 84% of post-1992 respondents agreed to at least some extent (table 92). This compares with around 66% of pre-1992 respondents and around 57% of specialist institution respondents. This variation was found to be significant (Chi-Square= 19.2, df=8, $p<0.05$). Again this provides some evidence to suggest that professionalism may be more valued in post-1992 institutions. However, these results should be dealt with cautiously and like all the findings from the survey should perhaps viewed as providing informed lines of enquiry rather than irrefutable evidence.

Table 92 'We are expected to have a professional outlook on our work' by HEI

HEI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Post 92	46.4	38.1	9.5	4.8	1.2
Pre 92	22.1	43.4	23	8.2	3.3
Specialist	21.4	35.7	28.6	14.3	0

One clear expression of a commitment to preparing students for the world of work is the provision of work placements and internships. We were therefore interested in whether or not our respondents would have the opportunity to undertake a period of work placement as part of their degree programmes. Nearly 53% of respondents reported that they get the opportunity to undertake periods of work experience or work placement (Table 93). We found different response patterns between disciplines. This may not come as a surprise as some programmes will contain compulsory placements while in others undertaking work experience will be encouraged but not expected. Also some subjects will have clearer career paths and more obvious placement opportunities than others.

Table 93 'We have the opportunity to undertake periods of work experience/placement'

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	61	27.4
Agree	56	25.1
Not sure	48	21.5
Disagree	31	13.9
Strongly disagree	27	12.1
Total	223	100

In Table 94 it can be seen that around 41% of Arts and Humanities respondents agreed that placement opportunities were available compared to around 52% of Social Sciences, 48% of Management, 83% of Medicine and health related and around 46% of Science respondents. This variation between subject areas was found to be significant (Chi-Square= 46.5, df=16, $p<0.01$). It may be noteworthy that management and Science and Engineering exhibited quite low levels of agreement considering that both include highly vocational subject areas where placements might be highly desirable. However, Science especially includes highly theoretical subject areas where placements in 'industry might be less highly regarded.

Table 94 'We have the opportunity to undertake periods of work experience/placement' cross tabulated with discipline

Disciplinary category	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Arts and Humanities	21.3	19.7	18	19.7	21.3
Social Science	24.1	27.6	13.8	13.8	20.7
Management	26.1	21.7	30.4	17.4	4.3
Medicine & Health related	60	22.5	7.5	10	0
Science and Engineering	15.6	29.7	34.4	12.9	0

We also broke the responses down by institution type and found that nearly 66% of post-1992 respondents agreed that they had the opportunity to undertake work placements (Table 95 below). This compared to around 45% of pre-1992 respondents and around 53% of respondents from specialist institutions. This pattern of difference was significant (Chi-Square=36.04, df=8, p<0.01). This provides some evidence to suggest that the post-1992 universities may have better provision for offering work placement opportunities or that these are considered more important. Alternatively it may be that these universities have more degree programmes on offer where this is an essential or highly desirable feature. However, once again it may be better to view these findings as refinements of questions the evaluation team will be seeking to answer over the whole life cycle of the project.

Table 95 'We have the opportunity to undertake periods of work experience/placement' by HEI type

HEI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Post 92	48.8	17.1	14.6	9.8	9.8
Pre 92	15.7	28.9	24	19	12.4
Specialist	27.6	24.9	20.7	14.3	28.6

At the end of this survey section on preparation for employment we were interested to know what respondents felt were the most important things they had learned in terms of their future careers. We asked respondents to list the three most important things they had learned in relation to their future careers (Table 96). The question was open-ended and 289 categorisable responses were obtained that were placed in eight different categories.

Table 96 Content analysis of responses to Question 20: 'The three most useful things for my future career I have learned on my course are?'

	Transferable skills	Analytic/ critical ability	Professionalism	Subject specific	Personal development	Writing skills
Number of responses	77	33	19	64	46	13
Percentage of total	26.6	11.4	6.6	22.1	15.9	4.5

Fewer than 27% of responses received mentioned transferable skills such as time management and communication skills. Around 22% of responses mentioned degree subject skills and knowledge. Around 16% of responses mentioned the development of personal qualities, these referred to developing qualities such as confidence, resilience and patience. There were also statements that were perhaps less clear but seemed to be referring to personal qualities. For example:

> I am less afraid to ask questions if I don't fully understand something and I think that this is the most important thing to me...after all, if you don't ask you will never know!

This also includes the need to be independent and not rely on assumption:

Take nothing at face value, look out for yourself and don't expect anything on a plate.

Around 11% of responses highlighted the importance of critical and analytical abilities. The development of these abilities is often associated with degree-level study. Fewer than 7% of responses referred to the development of professional qualities. Responses placed in these categories referred to developing general professional qualities such as good time-keeping as well as specific professional behaviour such as learning to deal with patients for medical students. Around 5% of responses indicated that the respondent felt they had improved their job hunting ability and around 5% of responses mentioned improved writing ability.

There were also responses that did not fit the main categories identified and these made up 7.6% of the total number of responses received. This included challenges to the perceived underlying assumptions of this part of the survey:

That I don't want to be a fxxxxxg banker, a 'professional' arsehole or otherwise, or be fitted in to your pretty little statistical analysis of data from a bad survey that forces me to answer as if my career were the most important reason for being at university.

There was also doubt cast over the idea that students at this stage in their studies actually know what parts of their learning will be useful in their future careers:

Wouldn't this be better if it was asked after I'd been working for a year or two? How am I to determine which of my skills will be most valuable if I've not actually got the practical experience to back me up?

3.3.8 Overview of survey findings and implications

From the results presented above we can extract a number of pertinent yet cautious highlights. We were unable to account for factors such as institution attended and subject studied by respondents other than by using a very broad categorisation system. The survey was designed to elicit perceptions and attitudes to provide longitudinal comparisons with our baseline from 2005. Because of this our findings are useful in terms of focussing our evaluation activities rather than providing conclusive evidence of the extent to which a culture of enhancement exists in the Scottish higher education sector from the perspectives of class representatives. However, this survey provides indicative evidence of degrees of alignment with the broad aspirations of the QEF.

3.3.8.1 Comparison with the 2005 survey

There were a number of interesting comparisons to be made with the findings of the 2005 2nd year class representative survey. Compared to the 2005 survey cohort we found increased levels of participation in training and increased levels of satisfaction with the training although there was still a substantial minority that had not undertaken training.

When comparing the 2005 and 2009 surveys we found that the respondents were engaged in similar activities in both surveys although attendance at departmental meeting seemed to be less of a requirement for 2009 respondents. Informal liaison with staff and raising complaints seemed to be the main activity for the 2009 cohort. The emphasis on 'complaints' may be an indication that the class reps are still working relatively 'reactively'. This may mean that they are not working in as close a partnership with staff as might be expected in a fully realised enhancement culture. This issue is a focus we will be following up during the institutional visits.

The 2009 survey showed higher rates of agreement on questions about the efficacy of reps. The 2009 respondents seem to feel they were more likely to be listened by staff than respondents in the 2005 survey. The results also indicated that staff were more likely to take action on issues raised than implied in the 2005 survey. Changes brought about by reps that were identified tended to be expressed in terms of changes in teaching style and course content; Course administration and timetabling and in support services such as library and computer provision. However, more respondents in the 2005 survey seemed to feel that staff took them more seriously than in 2009. The data on this issue are mixed but does provide some evidence that action is more likely to be taken when students raised issues in 2009 compared to 2005. There is also some evidence that institutional cultures may have influenced answers to the questions. For example we found that a greater proportion of post-1992 university respondents were likely to state that they had increased influence over teaching quality than other respondents. This issue of institutional cultures will be followed up in the institutional visits undertaken as part of the whole evaluation.

Overall there is good evidence to suggest that the 2009 cohort felt that most staff were interested in receiving feedback from students. 69% of our cohort agreed that this was the case. A large majority of respondents felt that staff and students should be working in equal partnership on quality issues.

In terms of benefits of the class rep system, respondents indicated that having an impact or making a difference was the most cited benefit. Social and personal benefits were also mentioned. In terms of the way the system might be improved, there was some evidence that class reps are not always listened to and are sometimes marginalised by university and departmental cultures and procedures. There was also evidence to suggest that students are not always aware that they have class reps or what the role of class reps is.

Overall we found evidence that class reps and their departments are operating in ways that are aligned with the ethos of quality enhancement. We also obtained evidence that may indicate areas where enhancement culture can be strengthened. These are particularly in terms of representative training, inclusiveness in meetings and communication procedures between departments and class reps and in raising awareness of the class rep system among the general student population.

3.3.8.2 Personal development

The survey identified a number of areas where respondents felt they had developed as a result of their class rep activities. Examples of development included improved personal qualities such as increased levels of objectivity, tolerance, confidence, assertiveness and diplomacy.

There was also evidence of increased satisfaction with cognitive-organisational skills such as being clearer and more precise, analysing situations and building a convincing argument. Respondents also reported increased negotiation skills. It may be interesting to note that only 44% of respondents reported increases in their time management skills. There was a higher level of agreement that being a class rep improved work-related skills (70%) than for improvement in academic skills (51%).

Overall we have some evidence to suggest that class reps benefit personally from the activities they become involved in. it would appear that respondents saw these benefits in terms of improved preparation for work rather than in improving their academic performance.

3.3.8.3 The more general student experience

We were interested to know respondents' opinions about the student experience more generally on issues relating to learning and teaching. Evidence suggests that respondents felt that students in general are interested in their teaching and learning experiences and have the time for such concerns. The level of agreement was particularly high among post-1992 university respondents.

Just over half of the respondents indicated that they thought students were viewed as recipients of teaching. This suggests that students may often be thought of as passive 'consumers' of education rather than as active co-constructors. The enhancement ethos would imply a more active role and greater levels of ownership than this result shows. However, this finding probably illustrates an area for further investigation rather than a clear area of concern at this stage of the evaluation. For example most respondents agreed that students are encouraged to manage their own learning. There was less agreement, however, that students actually do this. It may be that students often want to be more passive consumers of the education process rather than active co-owners.

Most respondents felt that staff were interested in student learning. Most respondents disagreed that lecturers are more interested in their research than teaching although this trend was not seen among pre-1992 university respondents. There was recognition from some respondents that where staff did appear more research-focussed this was often due to institutional pressures. Overall, staff were presented as engaged and interested in students and teaching. It was recognised that levels of interest will vary between individual staff members.

Overall we found evidence to suggest that students are interested and engaged at least to some extent in quality enhancement. Respondents also indicated that staff tended not be interested and engaged although this might be variable.

3.3.8.4 Preparation for work

We asked questions in the survey relating to how students are prepared for work by their higher education experience. High levels of career focus were shown by respondents. Most stated they had chosen their degree programmes with a particular career in mind. This was particularly so among respondents in medicine and health-related subject and Social Sciences. The lowest levels of this sort of career focus were seen in Science and Engineering.

There were also high levels of agreement that a degree should provide a general preparation for work. There was a lesser, though still high, level of agreement that degrees should be providing preparation for specific jobs. Over 80% of respondents stated that they had gained knowledge that would be useful to work in general and for specific careers.

In terms of personal changes most respondents indicated that they felt they were now more professional, more confident and more able to get the right job for them. More than 90% of respondents in Medicine and health-related subjects and 80% of respondents from management subjects agreed they were now more able to get the types of job they wanted. The lowest level of agreement was among Science and Engineering respondents (57%).

The three most important things to learn as identified by the respondents were transferable skills, suitable personal qualities and attributes and job / discipline specific knowledge respectively. In terms of the three most important things they had learned from their degree programmes respondents identified transferable skills, subject specific knowledge and development of personal qualities most often. This would seem to indicate a close match between what respondents thought they should be learning and what they actually think they have learned. As the respondents have yet to enter the job market we cannot be sure that they have actually identified learning that will be useful. It should be noted that the main aspects identified show a close match to factors identified as important in much employability policy related literature.

Overall there were high levels of agreement that course materials link subject matter to employment. This was particularly high among post-1992 university respondents. There was a lower level of agreement on exactly how respondents were prepared for work. Respondents from post-1992 universities showed the highest levels of agreement that the ways in which they are being prepared for work are made clear to them. In terms of subject areas medicine and health-related respondents showed the highest levels of agreement and respondents from Science and Engineering showed the lowest levels.

There were relatively low levels of agreement that tutors linked their teaching to employment although these levels were higher among post-1992 university respondents. Agreement that tutors showed a high level of understanding of how subject matter relates to employment were highest among medicine and health-related subjects and management respondents and lowest in Social Sciences and Humanities respondents. Levels of agreement were much higher in post-1992 respondents than among pre-1992 and specialist institution respondents (both showed agreement levels of less than 50%).

Most respondents agree that they were learning about the kinds of work people in their subject areas do (particularly high among medicine and health-related respondents). Most agreed that they were expected to show professionalism by their tutors. Levels of agreement on this were highest among medicine and health-related respondents and Social Science respondents. The lowest levels of agreement were among management students. Levels of agreement were also highest among post-1992 university students. Just over half of the cohort indicated that they had the opportunity to undertake work experience or a work placement. It would seem that medicine and health-related respondents were well provided for in this respect. A high level of respondents from post-1992 universities also agreed that they had placement opportunities. There may be some evidence to suggest that placement opportunities could be increased across non-medical subject areas and also in pre-1992 universities and specialist institutions. It may be noteworthy that low levels of agreement were seen in Management and Science and Engineering subject areas where there are likely to be high levels of vocational and applied degree schemes.

Overall, we found that our respondents showed a high degree of career-focus in terms of programme choice and agreement that higher education should be preparing students for work. There is also evidence that respondents had undergone positive changes in terms of preparation for work as a result of their student experiences.

We also found evidence to suggest that subject area and type of institution attended may affect the extent of linkage between degree subject matter and work and also the availability of work placement opportunities.

3.3.8.5 Conclusions

These data suggest that the experience of the class representatives is evolving in a positive way over the last four years. We have argued alsewhere that the time period over which genuine and sustainable changes become embedded as recurrent rule governed practices is underestimated. If we compare the outcomes of this survey with those of the baseline survey in 2005, we can see positive advancement in the experience of class rep training, the extent to which representatives are taken seriously as stakeholders in departmental life, the way in which staff respond to feedback and the extent to which students are committed to engagement. There are also positive signs of the 'relevance' of undergraduate studies, across all disciplines to life beyond university, in particular work and the way in which some generic capacities developed within courses of study provide the potential for resources for future practice.

3.4 Preparations for institutional visits: the pilot visit

3.4.1 Introduction

As in previous evaluations of the QEF that we have undertaken, the main method of collecting qualitative evaluation data is through visits to each of the 19[22] HEIs in Scotland. From past experience, we consider the use of institutional studies to be an extremely effective means of accumulating rich data and an ideal methodology when an holistic, in-depth investigation is needed. In terms of the issues to be addressed during these institutional visits (and, indeed, by the overall evaluation), the underlying core questions are:

- To what extent is the agenda of quality enhancement being embedded within institutions?

- What are the factors that impede or support this embedding process?

3.4.2 Method

Rather than repeat the format of the institutional visits in our 2003-2006 evaluation of the QEF, successful as that was in allowing us to gain a considerable volume of data, in this phase of the evaluation we are taking a slightly different approach in three ways.

Firstly, as we are aware of concern over the limited engagement of practitioners with the QEF, we are concentrating far more on this group in our evaluation than has perhaps been the case previously. Working on the assumption that many practitioners[23] may not necessarily have explicit knowledge of the QEF, we are asking them to discuss aspects of their routine teaching practices from which we can infer 'alignment' with the aims of the Framework.

Secondly, we are aware that there are gaps in our knowledge of the extent to which 'rank and file' students – that is, those with no formal representational role in that they are not class or course reps or student association officers - are aware of the impact of the QEF. Again, we are assuming that most of this group will have little explicit knowledge of the QEF and so we are asking them to discuss aspects of their learning experiences from which we can infer 'alignment' with QEF aims.

Thirdly, we are now taking a more disciplinary-based approach which is intended to be sensitive to the potential for differences in impact across broad disciplinary categories. We are grouping subject areas under three broad categories: Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Science & Engineering and Medicine, Veterinary & Health-Related. These are, of course, very broad categories and we are aware of the need to adjust these to ensure that they reflect the disciplinary composition of particular institutions – for example the specialist institutions.

3.4.3 The format of the visits

Rather than conduct intensive one-day case studies in all institutions, the visits extend over three days for the larger institutions to one day in the case of some of the smaller institutions. Our aim is to explore and record the experiences and perceptions of a wide range of stakeholders from vice principals to students.

Institutional key informants

During each visit the first day involves interviewing 'key informants' – that is those at senior management-level with institutional or faculty-level quality enhancement responsibilities. Generally, those interviewed will be:

  i. A Vice Principal Teaching and Learning or his/her equivalent
  ii. Deans
  iii. Associate Deans Academic or their equivalent (up to four)
  iv. Director of Educational Development Units or equivalent

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[22] We are aware that there are 20 HEIs in Scotland but, as the structure of the Open University is so different from 'conventional' HEIs, we have omitted this institution from the visits.

[23] By 'practitioners' we mean those academic staff with no managerial responsibilities and whose main responsibility is teaching.

v.   Director of Student Support Services or equivalent
vi.   Director of Quality or equivalent
vii. The Student Association President or equivalent with a remit for education or quality issues

Issues for discussion include[24]:

- Structures for managing quality
- Student engagement
- Reward and recognition for staff
- Perceptions of a 'quality culture'
- Devolution of 'ownership' of quality
- New developments linked to the Quality Enhancement Framework
- Perspectives on the degree of prescription, central control or devolution of quality management

Bearing in mind the need to address the five dimensions of the QEF as well as gaining perceptions of enhancement in general, we ensure that within the interviews reference is made to the relevant dimensions of the strategy: the QE themes, ELIR, Internal Reviews, student engagement and public information on quality.

Managers, practitioners and students

On subsequent days, we conduct separate focus groups with managers, teaching staff and students. As our aim is to select participants for the focus groups as 'randomly' as possible (not just the 'usual suspects'), we use information available on institutions' websites to pick out the names of staff that we would like to invite to participate in the groups. We then send these suggestions to our institutional contacts well in advance of the proposed visit. Information on websites is not always up-to-date so changes to our initial suggestions for focus group participants sometimes have to be made. In this case, we do this in consultation with the institutional contacts. As we do not have access to such publically-available information on students, we rely on our institutional contacts to organise the composition of the groups.

In terms of academic staff, we hold separate focus groups with middle managers and then with teaching practitioners. The first group is made up of staff such as heads of School (or their equivalent), directors of Teaching and Learning, heads of departments and programme/course Leaders. The second group is composed of lecturers who hold no formal quality remit beyond their own pedagogical duties. In total, we conduct six staff focus groups –each of which is made up of staff from the same broad disciplinary area.

For the focus groups, we piloted an approach during our visit institutional visit of providing the groups with a number of quotes relating to aspects of teaching and learning and used these to stimulate discussion. As this method worked very well in providing us with very rich and useful data, we intend to continue to use this in subsequent institutional visits. As we noted above, we are working on the assumption that, certainly amongst practitioners and students, there may well be little direct knowledge of the QEF. As we said in our proposal for the evaluation:

The practices and ways of thinking embodied in the Quality Enhancement Strategy may not be attributable by stakeholders to the strategy itself. This means that evaluations must use an 'inferential' approach where evidence of embodied practice is sought rather than a simplistic notion of attributability. Our approach puts a premium on what is happening, rather than the lost cause of cast iron attribution.

The approach we are using for the focus groups illustrates how we are taking this methodological challenge into account.

So far we have completed one pilot institutional visit and, at the time of writing, arranged dates for visits to 11 of the remaining 18 institutions. These will take place between October 2009 and spring 2012.

We consider that the visit completed so far went very well. We were particularly pleased that the approach we piloted with the focus groups resulted in such interesting dialogues with teaching staff and students in particular. As we have only completed one visit so far, we will not report on the findings in this report as this would breach confidentiality as the institution, and informants involved, would be too easily identifiable.

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[24] Examples of instruments used are included as an Appendix

4.0   Evaluation priorities for 2009/2010

Our work plan will focus on the following areas during the period October 2009-September 2010

Continuation of the institutional visits (October 2009-September 2010)
- Refining indicators of enhancement
- Continuation of analysis of student (course reps) survey
- Design and administer teaching practitioners' survey (February 2010)
- Begin data analysis of focus group data
- Progress and interim reporting (D4,5,6)
- Meetings with advisory group to disseminate progress and seek feedback
- Consultation with FE contractors to integrate findings, disseminate progress and seek feedback

- The data in this report suggest an evaluative agenda during the next academic year that will focus on the key issues identified below. The underlying preoccupation is the extent to which the QEF is able to sustain momentum in such a way that it can convince its various stakeholders that it is an approach that yields a culture of improvement, practices that bring such a culture alive and that these practices bring clear benefits for the improved learning experience for students.

- The student data suggest that there is alignment between the kinds of core experience of students and the kinds of expectations and aspirations the QEF dimensions suggest they should have. The levels of student engagement, as suggested by the indicators provided in the survey, show an upward trajectory. The survey data suggest that the trajectory may vary between institutions and disciplinary areas. These indicators and how they appear to work in varying institutional and disciplinary contexts will be explored further in the institutional visits.

- The extent to which the positive student experience, as evidenced in the survey, is commonplace and recurrent in the lives of ordinary students, will be a focus of the institutional visits. Our focus here will be particularly on those who do not have a representational role.

- Similarly, the fears concerning shifts in the ownership and control on quality and improvements that was ceded to institutions and their representatives identified by our key informants will form a rolling agenda of attention. Much will depend on the extent to which the approach overall is yielding concrete improvements in teaching and learning quality and these shifts are identified by practising lecturers who are experiencing a supported and dynamic teaching environment. In particular we will be interested in how institutional cultures and practices either enable or inhibit lecturers' opportunities to develop their work in ways that are aligned with the values of enhancement.

- We will therefore be paying particular attention to the recurrent practices that can be understood as 'enhancement-oriented'. This means asking for narratives, descriptions and experiences that demonstrate the various mechanisms and resources 'front-line' lecturers call upon and produces in their day-to-day work.

- In line with the current emphasis on integration and consolidation of themes, we will be looking for examples of where the idea of 21st century graduate is being played out in integrative practice within institutions.

- Over the course of the evaluation we will be seeking to bring together the separate strands of our research to gain a 'big picture' of quality enhancement in Scotland. We aim to gain as much understanding as possible of the relationships and networks involved in building an enhancement culture in the sector. It is likely that in future our reports will be built around particular emergent nodes of interest that will draw on all relevant evaluation activities rather than the current format where we report on our activities in separate sections.

Appendix One: project work-plan

1. Aims of the evaluation

1. to provide independent formative evidence of the overall effectiveness of the QEF at national level in the HE sector to the Council and its partners;

2. to provide independent summative evidence of the overall effectiveness of the QEF to the Council and its partners;

3. to offer an analytic account of the experience of the QEF from the perspective of a wide range of stakeholders;

4. to be responsive and flexible enough to capture unintended outcomes and unanticipated effects;

5. to further develop, on the basis of existing and on-going work in this area, criteria and impact measures for each of the five aspects of the QEF;

6. to provide, in conjunction with the FE evaluation team, a summative overview across both sectors which can inform future reviews of the Council's approach to quality.

2. Objectives

The evaluation will

- provide an account and an on-going analysis of the experience of the strategy from the perspective of key stakeholders (with particular emphasis on the experience of practitioners and students);

- be responsive and flexible enough to capture unintended outcomes and unanticipated effects;

- take into account work already undertaken in this area, the development of evaluation criteria and impact measures for the strategy as a whole as well as for each aspect of the strategy;

- provide summaries of progress of the strategy, highlighting strengths, weaknesses and areas of development;

- be guided by an approach based on the idea of 'practice change' which will form the main indicators of an overall shift in culture in the way quality is sustained in teaching and learning within Scottish Universities;

- provide feedback on the individual dimensions of the strategy but will also assess the extent to which they combine to affect a culture shift in the approach to quality.

3. Deliverables and milestones

The Table below lists the main deliverables and milestones for the evaluation project. See also Section 3.3 above, which gives further details about the work to be undertaken in preparing these deliverables.

No.	Description	Date
M1	**Evaluation Project Starts: Phase one begins**	6 October 2008
D1	1st Bi-annual progress report	March 2009
D2 +D3	1st Annual report including 2nd progress report	September 2009
M2	**Phase two begins**	October 2009
D4	3nd Bi-annual progress report	March 2010

D5 +D6	2nd Annual report including 4th bi-annual progress report	September 2010
M3	**Phase three begins**	October 2010
D7	5rd Bi-annual progress report	March 2011
D8 + D9	3rd Annual report including 6th bi-annual progress report	September 2011
M4	**Phase four begins**	October 2011
D10	7th Bi-annual progress report	March 2012
D11	4th Annual and final report	October 2012
M5	Current phase of the evaluation ends	October 2012

Table 2: Deliverables and Milestones

Note: The nature of these and any additional deliverables will be agreed with SFC in the first month of the project. Dates of deliverables can be fine-tuned to meet the needs of the relevant committee timetables. It is also recognised that further work may be required after the 6 October 2012 date which can be negotiated.

4. Outline operational plan Phase One: October 2008 – October 2009 (391 days)

Completion and confirmation of evaluation goals, framework & methodology
Dialogue with FE partners to devise the cross-cutting themes to provide a common framework for the evaluations

Instrument design
Literature review
Establishing contact lists
Initial contact with HEIs to introduce the evaluation
Establishing the advisory group
Setting up first phase of institutional visits
Setting up and interviews with key sector-level informants
Three Evaluation Engagement activities (half day regional fora for key institutional stakeholders)
Design and administer student survey (course reps)
Begin institutional visits
Progress and interim reporting (D1)
Meetings with advisory group to disseminate progress and seek feedback

Phase Two: October 2009 – October 2010 (391 days)

Continuation of the institutional visits (October 2009-September 2010)
Refining indicators of enhancement
Continuation of analysis of student (course reps) survey
Design and administer teaching practitioners' survey (February 2010)
Begin data analysis of focus group data
Progress and interim reporting (D4,5,6)
Meetings with advisory group to disseminate progress and seek feedback
Consultation with FE contractors to integrate findings, disseminate progress and seek feedback

Phase Three: October 2010 – October 2011 (391 days)

Continuation of the institutional visits
Complete data analysis of focus group data

Analysis of teaching practitioners survey data

Analysis of student (institutional-level reps) survey data

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Design and administer 'staff with a remit for quality' survey

Design and administer student survey

Progress and interim reporting
Meetings with advisory group to disseminate progress and seek feedback
Consultation with FE contractors to integrate findings, disseminate progress and seek feedback

Phase Four: October 2011– October 2012 (249 days)
Middle manager (HoDs) interviews

Completion of data collection

Analysis of 'staff with a remit for quality' survey data

Analysis of student survey data

Case study data analysis

Integration of all data sets

Final report writing (D11)
Final meetings with advisory and steering groups to disseminate findings
Begin dissemination
Consultation with FE contractors to integrate findings

5. Workpackage responsibilities

The project will be co-directed by Professor Murray Saunders, Dr Joan Machell and Dr Neil Lent.

Professor Murray Saunders

Workpackage 1

Responsible for overall project management, including management of staff and budgets, liasing with the steering groups and all external management processes and for the production of the regular reports.

Dr Joan Machell

Workpackage 2

Operational Manager; responsible for day to day management, field work and data analysis and contributions to regular reports.

Neil Lent

Workpackage 3

Research Co-ordinator; responsible for operational coordination of all research activities, integrating research activity, data collection and analysis, contributions to report writing.

Dr Sadie Williams

Workpackage 4

Co-ordinate the middle manager and students' survey undertake data analysis, contribute to report writing.

Dr Paul Ashwin:

Workpackage 5

Strategic summary of common or divergent dimensions of the HE and FE evaluations. Advise on evaluation instruments; contribute to analysis of data and the formation of the formal yearly reports and contribute professional and domain expertise particularly with international comparisons and with analogous initiatives.

Professor Mantz York, Professor Paul Trowler

Workpackage 6

Advise on evaluation instruments; contribute to analysis of data and the formation of the formal yearly reports and contribute professional and domain expertise particularly with international comparisons and with analogous initiatives.

Workpackage 7

Dee Daglish and Angela Gelston will provide administrative and data preparation support for all aspects of the evaluation

Appendix Two: Interview schedules for Key Informants

Key Stakeholder Interviews (The overall QE Framework)

1) Please summarise your own role and responsibilities within (QAA/SFC/US/SHEEC).

2) How does Quality Enhancement in HE connect with your other areas of professional interest?

3) Why was the QEF introduced? What were the main drivers? Why at that time?

4) In terms of how the QEF has developed since its introduction, how satisfied are you with progress?

5) Do you think the different parts of the strategy form a coherent whole?

6) Which of the five dimensions of the QEF do you think are most successful? Least successful?

7) To what extent has the QEF suffused HEIs – are there still 'hard to reach' stakeholder groups?

8) As an overall strategy for enhancing the quality of HE, what do you think are the strong points of the QEF? Weaker points?

9) How well does the QEF connect with other agencies or initiatives that are also concerned with QE?

10)   Have there been any shifts in direction in the QEF? Should there be?

11)   (If not mentioned above) Are you aware of any political pressures behind the QE agenda in Scotland? If so, how have these affected the direction of the strategy?

12)   How do you see the difference between QA and QE? Do you think there is an appropriate balance between QA and QE within the strategy?

13)   Do you think the QEF is an effective strategy for enhancing quality in HE? Is it cost-effective? Alternatives?

14)   How sustainable is this approach to quality?

15)   What changes within the HE sector would you expect to see, say in four years' time, which would convince you that the QEF is achieving its aims and objectives?

Other comments?

Key Stakeholder Interviews (ELIR Reviewers)

Background:

1) Please summarise your own background (academic, student, Scottish, non-Scottish etc)

2) Please summarise your role and responsibilities as an ELIR reviewer.

3) How does ELIR compare to previous methods of institutional review in Scotland (or to reviews elsewhere if reviewer is not Scottish)? What are the main differences?

4) How do you see the difference between QA and QE? Do you think there is an appropriate balance between QA and QE within ELIR?

5) As a means of reviewing institutions, what do you think are the strong points of ELIR? Weaker points?

6) What do you see as the main challenges for ELIR in the future?

7) What do you understand the wider QEF to be about?

8) Do you think the QEF is an effective strategy for enhancing quality in HE? Is it cost-effective? Alternatives?

9) What changes within the HE sector would you expect to see, say in four years' time, which would convince you that ELIR and the QEF are achieving their aims and objectives?

Other Comments?

Key Stakeholder Interviews (QE Themes)

1) Please summarise your own background (role & responsibilities within institution)

2) Please summarise your own role and responsibilities as a QE Theme Chair.

3) Why did you become Chair of QE Theme?

4) In terms of how the QE Themes have developed since their introduction, how satisfied are you with their progress?

5) (If not covered above) Have there been any shifts in direction? Should there be?

6) What do you hope the themes will achieve?

7) What do you think are the strong points of the QE Themes? Weaker points?

8) What do you see as the main challenges for the QE Themes in the future?

9) Do you think the Themes are a cost-effective strategy for change within the HE sector? Alternatives?

10)	As a strategy for enhancing the student experience in HE, what do you think are the strong points of the QEF? Weaker points?

11)	How well do you think the strategy is working as a coherent whole rather than five distinct elements?

12)	Do you think the QEF is an effective strategy for enhancing quality in HE? Is it cost-effective? Alternatives?

13)	How sustainable is this approach to quality?

14) How do you see the difference between QA and QE? Do you think there is an appropriate balance between QA and QE within the strategy?

15)	What do you see as the main challenges for the QEF in the next five years?

16)	What changes within the HE sector would you expect to see, say in four years' time, which would convince you that the QEF is achieving its aims and objectives?

Other Comments?

Key Stakeholder Interviews (stakeholders external to HE)

1) Please summarise your own background (role & responsibilities within institution)

2) How does Quality Enhancement in HE connect with your areas of professional interest?

3) In terms of your own professional interests in HE, how satisfied are you with the quality of Scottish HE in general? What improvements would you most like to see and why?

4) How familiar are you with the Funding Council's strategy for QE?

5) Do you think this is an effective strategy for enhancing quality in HE? Is it cost-effectiveness? Alternatives?

6) How sustainable is this approach to quality?

7) How do you see the difference between QA and QE? Do you think there is an appropriate balance between QA and QE within the strategy?

8) Is there adequate – and appropriate – public information on the quality of HE provision?

9) What changes within the HE sector would you expect to see, say in four years' time, which would convince you that the Funding Council's strategy for QE was achieving its aims and objectives?

Other Comments

Key Stakeholder Interviews (Student representatives)

1) Please summarise your own background (role & responsibilities within institution)

2) How does Quality Enhancement in HE connect with these responsibilities?

3) How familiar are you with the Funding Council's strategy for QE?

4) Do you think it's an effective strategy for enhancing the quality of HE? Is it cost-effective? Alternatives?

5) How are students participating in decisions about their learning experience? Is there a potentially stronger role that students might play? How?

6) (This may have been covered above) How has student participation in quality processes been strengthened as student representation systems have matured?

7) From the students' perspective, is there adequate – and appropriate – public information on the quality of HE provision?

8) What changes within the HE sector would you expect to see, say in four years' time, which would convince you that the Funding Council's strategy for QE was achieving its aims and objectives?

Other Comments

Appendix Three: Interview Schedules for site visits

Vice Principal Teaching and Learning, Deans, Associate Deans, Director of Educational Development Units, Director of Quality

1. Structures for managing quality
   a. What are they?
   b. How effective are they? Any developments needed?
   c. How will you know that you have structures that are managing quality effectively?

2. New developments linked to the Quality Enhancement Framework – particularly the Themes
   a. Have there been any institutional developments linked with the QEF? (Prompts: follow ups from ELIR or IRPs, QE Themes, student engagement, public info)
   b. In terms of contributing towards enhancement, what's been the most influential dimension of the QEF here? Least useful?

3. Student engagement
   a. How are students engaged in decision-making on learning and teaching policies, strategies and practices?
   b. How would you like to see the engagement of students developing in future?
   c. Challenges?
   d. How does the increased involvement/engagement of students contribute towards enhancing teaching and learning?
   e. In your view what should a Scottish HE graduate be like?

4. Reward and recognition for staff
   a. How is the contribution of staff to teaching recognised and rewarded?
   b. What do you think the institution should be aiming for in future in this respect?
   c. Challenges?
   d. How important do you think it is, in the context of enhancement of teaching and learning, that there should be a system of reward and recognition in place?

5. Perceptions of a culture of enhancement
   a. How would you define a 'culture of enhancement'?
   b. What would you expect to see if such a culture was in place?
   c. To what extent does this institution support such a culture?
   d. What are the factors that encourage such a culture here/what are the barriers?

6. Perspectives on the degree of prescription, central control or devolution of quality management
   a. To what extent do you think quality management is prescribed and controlled by policy makers? (Prompt: extent to which it has been devolved to institutions)
   b. Degree of connectivity between agencies concerned with quality in HE?
   c. Is the QEF a sustainable approach to quality management in HE? (Prompts: any threats/challenges?)

7. Other Comments?

Interview Schedule for Director of Student Support Services & Student Association President

1. In terms of enhancing the student experience here, what is your role?
2. Challenges you face?

3. **The student experience**

For Director of Student Support Services:
   a. Do you think students' experience of HE here has changed in any way over the last five years? In what ways?
   b. What (other) changes would you like to see to improve the student experience here? Barriers?

For SA President:
   a. Since you've been a student here, have you noticed any changes in students' experience over the years? In what ways?
   b. What (other) changes would you like to see to improve the student experience here? Barriers?

4. **Student engagement**

   a. How are students engaged in decision-making on learning and teaching policies, strategies and practices?
   b. How would you like to see the engagement of students developing in future?
   c. Challenges?
   d. How does the increased involvement/engagement of students contribute towards enhancing teaching and learning?
   e. What do you think has been the most significant contribution of the QEF to enhancing the student experience?
   f. Other comments?

5. **Both:** In your view what should a Scottish HE graduate be like?

Appendix Four: Student Survey Instrument

Quality Enhancement Strategy

2nd Year Course Rep. Survey

The SFC (Scottish Funding Council) wants students to have a greater involvement in quality processes. To this end, we would like you to tell us how your involvement, as a Course Representative, is helping this to come about.

Q1   **Institution:**

❏ *University of Aberdeen* ❏ *Queen Margaret University*

❏ *University of Abertay* ❏ *Robert Gordon University*

❏ *University of Dundee* ❏ *Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama*

❏ *Edinburgh College of Art* ❏ *Scottish Agricultural College*

❏ *University of Edinburgh* ❏ *UHI Millennium Institute*

❏ *University of Glasgow* ❏ *University of St Andrews*

❏ *Glasgow Caledonian University* ❏ *University of Stirling*

❏ *Glasgow School of Art* ❏ *University of Strathclyde*

❏ *Heriot-Watt University* ❏ *University of the West of Scotland*

❏ *Napier University*

Q2   **Which broad disciplinary group do you represent?**

❏ ***Arts & Humanities*** *(Applied Social Sciences, Archaeology, Religious Studies, Drama, Economics, Education, History, Languages, Law, Media, etc.)*

❏ ***Social Sciences*** *(Sociology, Politics, Psychology etc.)*

❏ ***Management*** *(Marketing, Business Studies, Accountancy, Human Resources etc.)*

❏ ***Medicine, Veterinary & Health Related*** *(including Biomedical Sciences, Clinical Sciences, Community Health, Dentistry, Nursing, Sports etc.)*

❏ ***Science & Engineering*** *(including Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Computing, Electronics, Environmental Science, Maths, Natural Sciences, Physics etc.)*

Other, please state

_____
_____

Q3   **Gender**

❏ *Male*

❏ *Female*

Q4   **Age**

- ❏ *18-20*
- ❏ *21-25*
- ❏ *Over 25*

Q5   **How useful was the training that you received as a Course Rep?**

- ❏ *Very useful*
- ❏ *Fairly useful*
- ❏ *Not very useful*
- ❏ *Not useful at all*
- ❏ *I didn't have any training*

Please add any comments about Course Rep. training here:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Q6   **What are your main responsibilities as a Course Rep? Please click on all the following that apply to you**

- ❏ *1. Students bring complaints about staff/courses to me*
- ❏ *2. I liaise informally with staff on behalf of students*
- ❏ *3. I follow formal set procedures when representing students' interests*
- ❏ *4. I am expected to attend departmental meetings*
- ❏ *5. I am expected to attend Faculty meetings*
- ❏ *6. I actively participate in departmental meetings*

- ❏ *7. I actively participate in Faculty meetings*
- ❏ *8. I am expected to attend various university committees*
- ❏ *9. I actively participate in various university committees*
- ❏ *10. I have taken part/will take part in Internal Reviews*
- ❏ *11. I have taken/will take part in an ELIR (Enhancement-led Institutional Review)*
- ❏ *12. I make specific comments on curriculum content*

13. Other responsibilities (please explain)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

From the above list, which responsibility   _____
*do you feel is the **MOST important**.*
Please indicate your choice by writing
the number in this box.

Q7   **Please indicate the extent to which Course Reps. have had influence on in the following areas:**

	considerable extent	*some extent*	*little extent*	*not at all*
Staff in my department listen to the views of the Course Reps	❏	❏	❏	❏
When Course Reps raise issues with staff in my Department, our concerns are taken seriously	❏	❏	❏	❏
Feedback from Course Reps is listened to but not acted upon by my department	❏	❏	❏	❏
In my department, changes take place as a direct result of issues raised by Course Reps	❏	❏	❏	❏
As a Course Rep, I feel patronised by some staff	❏	❏	❏	❏
I feel like the 'token student' on departmental committees	❏	❏	❏	❏
Course Reps have influence over the quality of teaching in my department	❏	❏	❏	❏

Are there any comments you would like to add to this section? If so, please provide them here.

_____
_____
_____

Q8   **What have you learned as a result of being a Course Rep?**

	strongly agree	*agree*	*not sure*	*disagree*	*strongly disagree*
I have learned to be more objective	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

I have learned to be more tolerant	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I have gained more self confidence	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I feel more confident in public situations	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I've learned to organise my thinking	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I've learned to be clear and precise	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I've learned time management skills	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I've learned to analyse situations more effectively	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I am more confident of stating my own point of view	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I've learned to formulate a convincing argument in support of my views	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I've learned how to respond to challenges	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I've learned to be more diplomatic	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I've developed my negotiation skills	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I've learned skills that will help me in my academic work	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I've learned skills that will be useful in my career after I leave university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Are there any comments you would like to add to this section? If so, please provide them here.

_____
_____
_____

Q9 **How have you benefitted from being a Course Rep?**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Q10 **How would you describe the benefits of the Course Rep. system?**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Q11   **How would you describe the weaknesses of the Course Rep. system?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q12   **Do you have an example of a positive change, in relation to teaching and learning, that has occurred at your university as a result of feedback from students?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

We are interested in finding out what students think about the teaching and learning in your university. As a Course Representative, we are asking you to make a judgement about how students in your subject area might be experiencing teaching and learning.

Q13   **In my subject area....**

	strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
Students haven't time to worry about decisions on teaching and learning	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Students are not really interested in improving the quality of teaching	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
When it comes to the quality of teaching, staff are not really interested in the views of students	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
In general, staff are really interested in feedback from students	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
In general, staff act upon student feedback	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Good learning at university is dependent on an equal partnership between students and staff	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
My tutors are just as interested in my learning as I am	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Staff regard students as 'recipients' of teaching and learning	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Students are encouraged to manage their own learning experience	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
There are good systems of communication between students and staff	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Students actively participate in decisions about their learning experiences	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
In general, staff seem resistant to change	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Most staff are more interested in their research than in teaching	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

Q14   **If you have any further comments to make about being a Course Representative or your experience of learning at your university, please do so here.**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

The Scottish Government believes that Scottish universities and colleges have a crucial role to play in preparing students for graduate-level professional jobs. We are interested in your experiences so far in relation to this view and the following questions will help us understand this.

Q15 **How do you feel about the following statements...**

	strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree
I chose my course with a particular career in mind	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
A degree should directly prepare students for work in general	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Degrees should directly prepare students for work in specific types of jobs	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

Q16 **What are your career plans once you have graduated?**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Q17 **As a student on my course:**

	strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
I am learning specific subject knowledge that will be useful in my future career	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
I am learning skills and knowledge that can be applied to work in general	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
I have started to feel more like a 'professional person'	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
I am learning about the sort of jobs people in my subject area do	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
I am becoming more confident in knowing what work I want to do	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
I am becoming more confident about being able to do the work I want to do	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
I feel more able to get the job that is right for me	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

Q18 **What do you think are the three most important things to learn in order to get a good graduate job?**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Q19 **As part of my programme of study:**

	strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
It is clearly stated in course materials (eg course handbook, website) that we are being prepared for work	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
The ways in which we are being prepared for work are made clear to us	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Our tutors link assessment tasks and subject matter to employment	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Our tutors show a good understanding of how the subject relates to work	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
We are expected to behave like professionals	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
We are expected to have a professional outlook on our work	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
We have the opportunity to undertake periods of work experience / placement	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Q20 **The three most useful things for my future career I have learned on my course are**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Q21 **If there are any other issues that you would like to comment on, then please do so in the space provided.**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____