



The role of HEFCE in teaching and learning enhancement: a review of evaluative evidence

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I. Executive summary

This report was commissioned by the Higher Education Academy in May 2013 at the request of The Higher Education Funding Council for England. This final report was delivered at the end of January 2014.

The focusing questions for the review were:

- 1 What do previous evaluations and current stakeholders' opinions suggest were the key strengths and weaknesses of HEFCE-funded learning and teaching enhancement initiatives, both at the strategic and the tactical level, over the period 2005-2012?
- 2 What does the evidence suggest are the future needs of the HE sector in relation to the direction of learning and teaching enhancement initiatives?
- 3 What are the options available for HEFCE's future role (if any) in learning and teaching enhancement initiatives for the future?
- 4 What alternatives, beyond a role for HEFCE, exist in learning and teaching enhancement initiatives for the future?
- 5 What does the evidence suggest are likely to be the most effective choices among these?

The methods of data collection involved 15 telephone interviews with key stakeholders and an extensive review of the relevant literature on learning and teaching enhancement.

The review considers selected aspects of HEFCE-initiated enhancement activities including the various Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund initiatives: Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Teaching and Learning Research Programme, the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme, support for institutional learning and teaching strategies, targeted funding allocation for teaching and learning enhancement (but not the retention element) through Support for Teaching Enhancement and Student Success (TESS). The report also takes into consideration the National Student Survey and Key Information Sets. A range of areas are not included in the review due to resource limitations. These include enhancement initiatives concerned with widening participation and retention as well as open learning and e-learning. The Higher Education Academy itself receives limited attention because a parallel study was being undertaken at the time of this review. The fact that its work is not highlighted in this report should not be taken to mean it is not significant; it certainly is.

Underpinning the review is a conceptual and theoretical perspective on the nature of learning and teaching enhancement and the implementation of change. This perspective provides a lens for the consideration of initiatives reviewed in relation to a theories-of-change approach.

Key findings related to HEFCE's initiatives in the past derived from the telephone interviews are as follows:

- there is a need for better data about enhancement requirements, prioritisation of efforts and good evaluation of outcomes and effects;
- there is a need for better knowledge exchange in relation to what we know about good learning and teaching practices and about effective implementation of change into the policies, priorities and actions of government and enhancement-related bodies. The development of a good, explicitly stated theory of systemic change is important in this;
- enhancement initiatives have tended to arrive hermetically sealed and so there is a need for policy links or increased joined-up activity with other initiatives and with the resources already in place on the ground;
- despite many local successes, aspirations and expectations at the level of system-wide enhancement of learning and teaching have not been achieved;
- there is a need for deeper and wider engagement of students and their representatives in decision making about, and the implementation of, enhancement initiatives;
- large, high-profile projects often do not represent good value for money. In times of fiscal constraint and resource depletion, better thinking about small but effective initiatives would be beneficial.

The report also contains an analysis of the strengths and deficiencies of different types of initiatives, as identified by respondents.

Key findings related to HEFCE's initiatives in the past derived from the review of the literature highlight the following:

- the significant importance of HEFCE's teaching enhancement initiatives in signalling the centrality of teaching and learning in higher education;
- the significant benefits that individuals across the sector gained from their involvement in these initiatives;
- the tendency to focus on raising the profile of, and rewarding, teaching rather than on the strategic development of teaching and learning across the sector;
- the way in which these initiatives tended to focus on innovations and educational specialists rather than developing everyday university teaching and teachers;
- the lack of a cohesive strategy that brought together HEFCE's different quality enhancement initiatives.

Overall, our review of the literature has suggested that while HEFCE's enhancement initiatives have played an important role in signalling the centrality of teaching as well as supporting individuals in developing their innovative practices (often to the benefit of students), it has been far less successful in promoting the strategic development of quality enhancement across the sector as a whole. Thus while some very innovative teaching practices have been supported, the impact on day-to-day teaching across the sector has been much more limited.

It should be noted there was a large degree of correspondence of findings from the two data sources.

The review team considers that 'high definition' visions of the future are unhelpful and that innovations are best developed and owned by stakeholders within a 'low definition' scoping of needs, aims and constraints. Accordingly the report notes that the broad critical success factors for an effective enhancement strategy for England in a future context of resource constraint are that it:

- has efficient and effective ways of establishing need and of measuring the real costs (including 'hidden' costs) and effects of interventions;
- once established, priorities are addressed consistently, with clear leadership, over extended periods of time and with consistent attention paid to long-term sustainability;
- makes best use of the particular specialisms and missions of the different bodies focused on enhancement by encouraging a 'joined-up' enhancement strategy;
- is inclusive of the student voice and collective student interests;
- has adequate planning times and planning processes which made provision for engagement *across* the sector, based on a robust causal theory of change and mindful of usability characteristics;
- is nuanced enough to take account of different institutional missions and contexts in doing that;
- is effective in converting politicians' sometimes unrealistic visions into realistic proposals. Is effective too in mitigating the effects of politicians' predilection for big, high-profile, expensive projects involving 'tape-cutting' media events by reshaping them into effective innovations;
- is able to effect changes beyond the 'usual suspects' to those deep in the heart of day-to-day teaching and learning, effecting a culture change across the system which incorporated a genuine commitment to evaluate practices, to address deficiencies and to build on successes.

The report elaborates on the challenges and opportunities represented by these factors.

The report acknowledges that in an environment of severely reduced resources, with much funding coming from student fees, the options for the future are constrained. Any prospective approach to enhancement must address the future needs of the sector identified in the report, to build on the successes of the past and to learn from less effective approaches. The report concludes that removal of responsibility for enhancement by HEFCE would be deleterious in a number of ways. However the data indicate there is little appetite for a much more strongly engaged HEFCE than is currently the case, and that some other resources and possibilities have been under-utilised to date. The review team elaborates on the potential benefits of a Learning and Teaching Enhancement Council (LTEC) in drawing together priorities and focusing effort in cost-effective ways.

2. Introduction

In May 2013 the Centre for Higher Education Research and Evaluation at Lancaster University (here@lancaster) team was commissioned by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) to review initiatives for the enhancement of learning and teaching in England, a review promoted by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

The retrospective aspect of the research covers the period 2005-2012 and the prospective aspect covers the period 2014-2019. Appendix 1 sets out the parameters of the study. The focusing questions are as follows:

1. What do previous evaluations and current stakeholders' opinions suggest were the key strengths and weaknesses of HEFCE-funded learning and teaching enhancement initiatives, both at the strategic and the tactical level, over the period 2005-2012?
2. What does the evidence suggest are the future needs of the HE sector in relation to the direction of learning and teaching enhancement initiatives?
3. What are the options available for HEFCE's future role (if any) in learning and teaching enhancement initiatives for the future?
4. What alternatives, beyond a role for HEFCE, exist in learning and teaching enhancement initiatives for the future?
5. What does the evidence suggest are likely to be the most effective choices among these?

This report is Deliverable 2 (D2) from here@lancaster and is the final report to the HEA Steering Group. It summarises our data analysis and conclusions, drawing broad strategic implications arising from the review of the available data.

It has the following purposes:

- it reports on the main outcomes of our evaluation which have drawn on the following sources:
 - 15 key informant interviews;
 - an overview of the literature evaluating and commenting on key initiatives;
- the material in the analysis of interviews in the interim report, D1, contained 'fine-grained' illustrative quotes and analyses to offer a genuine evocation and flavour of the preoccupations of the interviewees. This report (D2) offers a more summative analytical commentary on the implications for the evidence for the role HEFCE has played in teaching and learning enhancement across the sector;
- this report indicates an overview of the evidence of HEFCE's role and also a clear indication of some emerging themes for consideration in the future;
- although the project plan did not include analysis of examples of enhancement approaches within the international context, some reference is made to this here.

Parameters of the study

Inclusions

In setting parameters for the research, given the limited resources allocated to it, the team and the Steering Group agreed the study should focus on selected aspects of HEFCE's enhancement activities including the various Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF)¹ initiatives, which included Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs), The Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS), limited consideration of some of the HEA's responsibilities (for example the United Kingdom Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)), support for institutional learning and teaching strategies, targeted funding allocation for teaching and learning enhancement (but not the retention element) through Support for Teaching Enhancement and Student Success (TESS). We take into consideration the National Student Survey (NSS) and Key Information Sets (KIS).

¹ Please see Appendix 4 for a glossary of acronyms.

Exclusions

Necessarily omitted from this study is a considerable range of effort and resource expenditure on the part of HEFCE. The research design does not address enhancement initiatives concerned with widening participation, retention, open learning, and so on, though some interview respondents did stray into these areas. e-Learning was not specifically addressed, although we did examine some literature in that area and again some respondents did discuss that. Study of the policies, instruments and mechanisms in use in other countries were specifically excluded by the funding, though the team did spend some time researching these because of their illuminative value. We recommend further comparative analysis of this type to learn lessons from other countries.

Despite its significant role in learning and teaching enhancement, the HEA itself receives very limited attention in this report because it was being evaluated in a parallel study at the same time as the here@lancaster team was undertaking this study and reporting. The fact that it receives relatively little attention in this report should not be taken to imply it is not significant in the mix of enhancement initiatives; it certainly is.

The HEFCE-funded Changing the Learning Landscape (CLL) project, 2012-2014, is an initiative that several respondents mentioned, always positively. We have not given sustained attention to this because it is focused on bringing about change in institutions' strategic approaches to technology in learning and teaching and so is outside the scope of the study. However we do note it as an implementation model that has been well received, largely because of its successful collaborative nature and clear goal-directed management. It could be seen as a model of success: this was certainly the view of many respondents.

Finally, this report does not address HEFCE's role in quality assurance (as opposed to enhancement), which it largely achieves through commissioning the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to do this work.

3. Background to the study: conceptual and theoretical underpinning

Throughout the report we refer to enhancement policies, instruments, mechanisms and effects. This framework (see Figure 3.1 below) is derived from an overview of policy change² and forms the basis of distinctions between the different levels in HEFCE strategy. It is outlined with more detailed examples in Section 4.

Figure 3.1: HEFCE policy levels

Enhancement policies: specification of principles and actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning (*the logic of policy intention*).

Enhancement instruments: particular approaches to resource or support improvements eg the HEA, formula funding, bid-and-deliver initiatives (*the logic of the theory-in-action of funded and targeted development*).

Enhancement mechanisms: specific activities embedded in particular instruments eg workshops, websites, seminars, project grants etc (*the logic of the theory of change embedded in specific instruments*).

Enhancement effects: changes in teaching and learning practices at different levels and contexts brought about intentionally or otherwise by policies, instruments and mechanisms.

The word 'enhancement', which features above and in the title of this report, is much used but rarely defined in the sector. We consider it very important to deconstruct the use of the word to identify the multiple meanings it can convey. The dictionary definition of enhancement is "an increase or improvement in *quality, value, or extent*".

² Saunders, M. (2011) Capturing effects of interventions, policies and programmes in the European context: a social practice perspective. *Evaluation: the International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*. 17 (1), pp. 89-103

For our purposes it is conceptualised as a continuum which shades from limited into more radical change, at which point it ceases to be enhancement and becomes reinvention.

Figures 3.2 to 3.6, below, illustrate how enhancement policy is shaped at its base by educational ideology, that is by structured sets of values and attitudes regarding the appropriate prioritisation for the allocation of resources of different kinds in regard to education. These are realised in policy aims which are translated (via a usually tacit theory of change) into policy instruments and mechanisms.

Figure 3.2 depicts the spectrum of different meanings of ‘enhancement’, which range from small increments to current practices to very major changes in what is done and how.

Figure 3.2: The enhancement continuum: scale and scope

| Enhancement as incrementalism (Reform agenda) | | Enhancement as reinvention (Transformational agenda) | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Do the same in the old way but better | Add new things to old things and do them in the old way | Do completely different things in the old way | Do completely different things in some new ways | Do completely different things completely differently |

The broad scope of these differing enhancement agendas does not easily map onto the various enhancement instruments and mechanisms developed by HEFCE, as Figure 3.3 shows. Any one of the instruments and mechanisms exemplified in Figure 3.3 could serve to support either a reform or transformational agenda.

Figure 3.3: Policy instruments and mechanisms

| Instruments | Pilot or beacon projects (eg CETLs) | Bid-and-deliver (eg NTFS) | Allocated formula funding (eg TESS) | Conditional funding (eg enhancement themes) | Professionalization of teaching (eg UKPSF) | Consumer empowerment (eg KIS, NSS) |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|--|--|
| Mechanisms | eg Mini projects, web resources | eg Developing curricular materials and resources | eg Teaching projects, piloting new approaches | eg Embedding a teaching theme across curriculum | eg Qualification frameworks for staff | eg Instruments to measure ‘satisfaction’ |

Similarly if we look at the logic of the theory of change (see Figures 3.4 and 3.5) and how they connect with the enhancement agenda, the instruments and the mechanisms (Figures 3.2 and 3.3), we can see that in Figure 3.4, the various theories of change (the line of determination between strategy X and effect Z), any of these theories may have a transformational or more incremental effect.

Figure 3.4: Theories of change in HEFCE interventions (how)

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contagion from good examples - rational choice based on ‘what works’ | Technological determinism – changing artefacts shape behaviours | Resource-driven – rewards and sanctions shape behaviour | Rhetorical support from institutions – mission-based approaches | Professional imperative – individual drivers derived from professional values | Market-driven – consumer empowerment and choices shape system |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|

In Figure 3.5 below we chart the broad aims of the various interventions. Any one of these aims might result in reformist or transformational effects depending on the extent to which it is applied.

Figure 3.5: Aims (what)

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|---|---|
| Add to the curriculum | Increase efficiency, effectiveness or economy | Increase equity of outcome | Increase equity of experience | Change student outcomes | Change student experience | Increase equity of access | Change teaching and learning practices | Change the environment, artefacts to become more enabling | Change power relations between students and staff |
|-----------------------|---|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|---|---|

In Figure 3.6 we identify from earlier work by Trowler³, as well as the interviews and the desk-based research, an array of ideological positions that underscore and influence the approaches described above. These do not map mechanistically onto the contents of the figures above, but do have a loose connection to some aspects of them. For example, we can say that interventions with a transformational agenda are more likely to be influenced by a social reconstructionist stance, and that those with a market-driven theory of change are likely to be influenced by the enterprise ideology.

Figure 3.6: Educational ideologies (why)

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| Traditionalism (discipline-driven, knowledge-focused) | Progressivism (personal-development driven, student-focused) | Enterprise (neo-liberal, market-driven, enrichment-focused) | Social reconstructionism (equity-driven, change-focused) |
|---|--|---|--|

It is clear that some educational ideologies are more challenging of traditional practices than others (for example social reconstructionism strongly challenges the status quo). What is interesting about this modelling exercise is that the nature of the strategies emanating from HEFCE has been diverse and heterogeneous. Much depended on the situated circumstances of the intervention at institutional level. These connections help to explain why it was that the combined effects of the strategy tended to have different outcomes in different locales and made it difficult to determine whole-system effects.

4. HEFCE's enhancement initiatives: a selective recent history

The report of the National Committee of Inquiry into higher education (the Dearing report) in 1997 presaged changes in HEFCE's approach to teaching and learning. The Learning and Teaching Standing Committee of HEFCE was set up following the report's publication to 'advise the funding council on developing a learning and teaching strategy and the funding mechanisms to do this'. Six key aims were identified by the committee. These were:

- raising the profile of learning and teaching in higher education;
- enhancing public confidence in the quality of learning and teaching in higher education;
- enhancing the quality of learning and teaching;
- responding to global competition;
- promoting the efficient and effective use of resources;
- encouraging research to support learning and teaching in higher education.

The 1998 HEFCE strategy and funding proposals document recognized there were "many agencies, institutions, individuals, initiatives and programmes concerned with improving the quality of learning and teaching. There [was] competition, duplication and lack of co-ordination and coherence between initiatives".

³ Trowler, P. (1998) *Academics Responding to Change*. Buckingham: Open University Press/SRHE.

In addition it recognized that some initiatives had proved ineffectual. A 1998 consultation document proposed a new integrated approach to the funding of improvements in teaching quality: the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF). The TQEF would provide funding at three levels: the institution, the academic subject and the individual.

The HEFCE annual conference in 1998 indicated a preference for funding for “excellence and enhancement through bidding schemes, rather than by formula”. This probably indicated a fear of teaching enhancement funding being absorbed into the main teaching grant. However the funding council’s strategy of 1999 included funding to support institutional learning, teaching and assessment strategies. At this point HEFCE announced five main purposes for their learning and teaching strategy:

- encouragement and reward;
- co-ordination and collaboration;
- disseminating and embedding good practice;
- research and innovation;
- building capacity for change.

Institution-level funding would provide support for the implementation of institutional learning, teaching and assessment strategies. Funding would be done by formula, based on student numbers. The total amount provided for this level of funding was just over £48 million for the three-year period 1999-2002. A similar sum was distributed in 2002 for the 2002-2005 period.

Funding at the subject level was focused on the creation of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) of 24 subject centres and a generic centre, and on the continuation of the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL). Later these centres became part of the Higher Education Academy (HEA), the successor to the LTSN and other bodies. Its mission, as stated at the time of writing is:

To use our expertise and resources to support the higher education community in order to enhance the quality and impact of learning and teaching. We do this by recognising and rewarding excellent teaching, bringing together people and resources to research and share best practice, and by helping to influence, shape and implement policy.

(<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/about>)

The subject centres were defunded in 2011, much to the chagrin of much of the sector at the time. However alternative provision at the disciplinary level was subsequently made available through discipline-specific initiatives and support:

We continue to develop and deliver the subject-specific services that are most valued by the sector, including: workshops and seminars, teaching development grants, journals, support and guidance for staff new to teaching, resources and networking opportunities.

(<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/disciplines>)

A further aspect of the HEA’s work concerns professional recognition, particularly the United Kingdom Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). HEIs can apply these standards to their professional development programmes for lecturers, ensuring they meet the standards and they approach learning and teaching with an enhancement-focused perspective instilled through a set of explicit professional values.

HEFCE funding at the level of the individual was focused particularly on the creation of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS), which awarded three-year fellowships worth £50,000 to ‘excellent’ higher education teachers, the first awards being made in July 1999. Subsequently the funding per award was reduced, eligible categories of staff widened and requirements for funding changed. But the scheme is still in place.

In 2004 the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) were set up. Their purposes, as stated by HEFCE in 2004, were:

- to reward practice that demonstrates excellent learning outcomes for students;

- to enable practitioners to lead and embed change by implementing approaches that address the diversity of learners' needs, the requirements of different learning contexts, the possibilities for innovation and the expectations of employers and others concerned with the quality of student learning;
- to enable institutions to support and develop practice that encourages deeper understanding across the sector of ways of addressing students' learning effectively;
- to recognize and give greater prominence to clusters of excellence that are capable of influencing practice and raising the profile of teaching excellence within and beyond their institutions;
- to demonstrate collaboration and the sharing of good practice and so enhance the standard of teaching and effective learning throughout the sector;
- to raise student awareness of effectiveness in teaching and learning in order to inform student choice and maximize student performance. (HEFCE 2004, p. 4)

The Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) which ran from 1999-2009 was also set up as part of the TQEF initiative. Administered via the Economic and Social Research Council, its aims were to conduct research for improved learner outcomes; to improve research capacity and approaches in this area; to improve educational policy and practice; to increase and deepen the relevant knowledge base.

In addition from 2009 there was targeted funding allocation to universities for teaching and learning enhancement through Support for Teaching Enhancement and Student Success (TESS). This included a retention element, which is not considered by the present study. HEFCE's website says the following about TESS:

This allocation brings together funding previously associated with the allocation for improving retention and the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund. The allocation demonstrates a more strategic approach to the overall enhancement of learning and teaching. It acknowledges that funding for improving retention is used to support the learning of all students and that improving retention is often achieved through enhancing the student experience.

(<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/howfund/supportforteachingenhancement/>)

The retention and some other elements of TESS continue, however those aspects directly relevant to this study have now terminated.

In 2005 the National Student Survey (NSS) was instigated by HEFCE. The NSS is run by Ipsos MORI and is commissioned by HEFCE on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), the Department for Employment and Learning DELNI, Health Education England, National College for Teaching and Leadership and participating private higher education providers and Scottish higher education institutions. The survey runs across all publicly funded higher education institutions in England and is available to those in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, as well as further education colleges in England and further education institutions (FEIs) in Wales.

HEFCE states the purposes of the NSS to be threefold. They are "to contribute to public accountability, help inform the choices of prospective students and provide data that assists institutions in enhancing the student experience".

(<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/publicinfo/nationalstudentsurvey/>).

The NSS questions to final-year undergraduate students cover the following areas: course teaching; assessment and feedback; academic support; organisation and management; learning resources; personal development; overall satisfaction. These are supplemented by open-ended questions to capture any particular positive or negative aspects the student wishes to highlight.

The second of the NSS purposes, informing student choice, is reinforced by the Key Information Sets (KIS), introduced in 2012 and also administered through the Unistats website. The purpose is to "offer comparable sets of information about full-time or part-time undergraduate courses and are designed to meet the information needs of prospective students".

(<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/publicinfo/kis/>)

5. The key informant interviews

5.1. Method

Fifteen recorded telephone interviews were conducted with key stakeholders concerned with enhancement of learning and teaching in higher education in England. These included: senior university leaders; leaders of relevant quality and enhancement-related national bodies representing students, staff, sectoral interests and functions; holders or past-holders of significant enhancement-related positions; senior current and past HEFCE post holders.

Interviews lasted from between 45 minutes to 75 minutes. They were transcribed and analysed shortly after being conducted. An iterative overview analysis was conducted during the period over which the interviews were held resulting in a large dataset organized thematically.

5.2. Commonalities: shared perceptions of HEFCE interventions and their implications for future needs

1. Most respondents suggest there has been a sense of ‘shooting in the dark’ in terms of the enhancement of teaching and learning (T&L) in HE in England. They suggest a need for better data about enhancement requirements, mixed with good understanding of priorities and desires across the sector to foreground more effectively evidence-based prioritisation of enhancement activity.
2. This extends to the need to consider priorities among the many enhancement-related policy areas which include: widening access and success (and the focus on different groups within that, including but extending beyond black and minority ethnic (BME) students); the push to e-learning; responsiveness to students and the collective student interest; engagement with effective educational practices across the sector; student employability; internationalisation in the curriculum; sustainability in the curriculum.
3. The interviews suggest an imperative for better knowledge exchange in relation to what we know about good learning and teaching practices and about effective implementation of change into the policies, priorities and actions of government and enhancement-related bodies. This was particularly the case in times of resource deficit; the ‘hard-edged future’ as one respondent put it. Energies need to be focused on clear, prioritised issues *and* how to effect them well. This was considered particularly important at a time when there are new types of HE providers with little experience of the sector. Finally, a more marketised sector (shorthand for more intensive external and internal competition and a more consumer-focused approach) poses dangers in relation to its effects as well as its benefits.
4. There was a perception that enhancement initiatives arrive hermetically sealed and so there is a need for *policy links* or increased *joined-up* activity with other initiatives and with the resources already in place on the ground. This lack of continuity and *policy memory* is well recognised in government departments as well as quasi-independent agencies like HEFCE. It results in duplication, ‘jerky’ policy-making and an inefficient use of resources.
5. Respondents agree that despite many local successes, the level of system-wide enhancement of learning and teaching has been disappointing. The results of very considerable expenditure and effort appear to be patchy and in jeopardy of diminishing sustainability in difficult and turbulent times. Individual people and some institutions have sometimes benefitted in various ways, but systemically the impact has been superficial.
6. Many respondents noted that ‘enhancement’ as a concept tends to be framed by particular sets of values and priorities, by ways of thinking. For example, some noted that the actual voices of students were missing in many policies and initiatives, that when students’ interests were discussed in them it was often on the basis of attribution rather than evidentially. This is of course true too of many government pronouncements: for example the white paper ‘Students at the Heart of the System’ (2011) deployed a model of student needs and interests, not the voices of actual students or their representatives.
7. Some respondents noted the need to “think small, but more strategically”. The actions taken by the National Union of Students (NUS) in support of its *Manifesto for Partnership* have taken this approach, with small but effective interventions on the ground. Some respondents suggested that the political desire to be seen cutting tape, opening big ‘shiny’ manifest projects sometimes resulted in expensive high-profile projects with limited

effects – sometimes referred to in the literature as the ‘Christmas tree’ policy approach⁴. One respondent said: “now is the time to press reset on enhancement policy”, suggesting that now was the time for a fundamental change in the approach to enhancement in the HE sector.

5.3 Commonalities: shared perceptions of specific interventions

We offer below an overview of the respondents’ perceptions of different kinds of *instruments* used by HEFCE (see Section 2 on the nature of enhancement).

Pilot-based ‘beacon’ project approaches (such as CETLs) embodying enclaves of innovative practice

1. Timescales for planning, doing and evaluating enhancement projects have been too short. Project planning processes, in particular, are often curtailed by the need to spend money quickly: the Comprehensive Spending Review procedure has resulted in the past in successions of boom and bust periods, with large amounts of money needing to be spent quickly. More time and attention needs to be appropriated by the project design phase and to planning the engagement and impact dimensions of projects. We elaborate on this in Figure 7.2 below.
2. Too little evaluation of actual impact of projects in terms of improvements. There need to be clear indicators of success for each initiative. (The HEA has been developing ways of improving the establishment-of-impact function⁵.)
3. That a project-based approach is probably not the most effective for multiple reasons (including the difficulty of ‘scaling up’ from the project base, which is often left unaddressed and the issue of effective planning for the post-funding continuation).
4. Not enough collaborative activity among the various agencies involved, with a few exceptions (Changing the Learning Landscape is often cited as one of these exceptions).
5. The aims of projects have been ill-defined, or contested, meaning mission-creep and difficulties in evaluation.
6. Projects create ‘industries’ and enhancement identities which can be ghettoised, unhelpful and inefficient.
7. Lavishly-funded projects often result just in more waste and ineffective wider influence.
8. Poor, non-explicit, theories of change often underpin the hypothesised effects of projects, which are not realised (eg scaling up to system-wide level).
9. Projects often attract enthusiasts but fail to extend beyond that group, who tend to move from one project to the next.
10. Projects often raised the status of learning and teaching, but this was fragile and dependent on situated circumstances. There is a need to change reward and recognition structures in academia for more sustained cultural change in terms of priorities.
11. Government funding for HEFCE to support projects can involve ideologically-influenced (rather than pedagogically-influenced) intentions and theories of change, with deleterious consequences.
12. Political involvement can also have deleterious consequences – politicians may want tangible artefacts to open and showcases to point to, which may not be effective.
13. However there can be invisible benefits from big projects which are difficult to evaluate, for example in the careers of individuals who go on to have broader influence.
14. And big projects such as CETLs raise the profile, if not the status, of teaching and learning (as against research) in universities.

Bid-and-deliver–based approaches (such as TLRP, NTFS and FDTL phases 1-5)

1. These create bidding fatigue and it can be difficult to persuade good candidates to give time to that process.
2. Funding levels and chances of winning funding can become unreasonably low and inhibit participation.
3. There can be demotivating effects on ‘losers’.
4. They are easier to evaluate and conditionality can mean that engagement and impact activities are included in a planned way.

⁴ Because it involves a number of bright, shiny policy initiatives which attract attention but are short-lived and disconnected.

⁵ Stoakes, G. (2013) Re-configuring impact assessment: the HEA case. In Bamber, V. (2013) *Evidencing the value of educational development*. London: SEDA, p. 35-38.

Allocated, categorical formula funding approaches (such as TESS)

- 1 These give assured funding over longer periods of time, allowing achievement of goals.
- 2 Goals can become subverted to institutional ends.
- 3 They have little systemic effect (ie tend to remain enclaved).

Conditional funding approaches (such as enhancement themes)

- 1 These allow the funding body to set the framework, for example requiring collaboration, requiring engagement and impact activities.
- 2 Priorities are set top-down meaning they are inappropriate for some and lack ownership locally.
- 3 Priorities can be framed broadly ('low resolution') to allow for this, but this can lead to subversion of intentions and muddled goals if not done carefully.

Evaluative instrument-based approaches (such as the NSS, and its subsequent use in league tables)

- 1 These can have real and immediate influence on institutional behaviour.
- 2 However they can distort priorities if badly designed or inappropriately interpreted and used.
- 3 Like projects, they are very subject to political influence and so the distorting power of ideology.
- 4 There are huge hidden costs within institutions associated with the work done to perform well in the NSS. Though not directly relevant here, the Research Excellence Framework REF is the prime example.
- 5 Such instruments need to be constantly reviewed to ensure they are still relevant and meeting needs. The NSS may not now be appropriately attuned to online forms of learning, for example. Alignment, and periodic realignment, of instruments in relation to sectoral developments and needs is crucial.

Professionalisation of teaching in HE

- 1 A few respondents saw this as a good enhancement strategy, eg through the UKPSF.
- 2 To date the process of moving towards 100% qualified teaching staff with a regulatory and qualificatory professional body (the vision for some) has been derailed by institutional rivalries, by other interests and by the prioritisation of research (partly because of the REF).
- 3 Reward and recognition structures for teaching (as against research) are not currently fit for the purposes of enhancement.

The constellation of enhancement-related bodies in England

- 1 Most agree that the current set of bodies is fit for purpose and are engaging in more, and more valuable, co-operation and collaboration than in the past. There is little enthusiasm for Browne-like rationalisation⁶ (as the Regulatory Task Force is keen to do).
- 2 There have been 'missed tricks' in terms of lack of effective collaboration embedded in new initiatives with, for example, the NUS and educational developers within institutions.
- 3 All agree that quality audit and learning and teaching enhancement activities need to be kept separate.

⁶ Browne proposed that the four existing higher education bodies (Higher Education Funding Council for England, Quality Assurance Agency, Office for Fair Access, and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator) would be abolished and replaced by a single Higher Education Council. The new body would be responsible for investing in priority courses, setting and enforcing quality levels, improving access and attainment for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring students benefit from increased competition in the sector, and resolving disputes between students and institutions.

All new academics with teaching responsibilities should undertake a teaching qualification.

An Access and Success fund should be set up to help universities recruit and retain students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The HE Council should have the power to bail out struggling institutions.

It would also explore options such as mergers and takeovers if institutions are facing financial failure.

- 4 There is one gathering that meets (roughly) twice a year which involves many of the bodies involved: Higher Education Development Community. This is informal and there is considerable scope for more of this, with an expanded remit and more resources, in order to address some of the problems identified above.

6. Overview of secondary data: desk-based mapping of HEFCE's enhancement initiatives and their legacies

6.1 Method

In conducting this review we have examined 54 evaluative reports, published articles, book chapters and policy documents on the following aspects of HEFCE's enhancement initiatives (see Appendix 2 for the full list of sources):

- the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF) as a whole;
- the supporting of the development of institutional learning and teaching strategies;
- HEFCE's e-learning strategy;
- the Learning and Teaching Subject Network (LTSN);
- the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL);
- the Higher Education Academy (HEA) including UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and the Supporting of Learning (UKPSF) and the HEA Change Programme;
- the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP);
- the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS).

We also examined 11 sources relating to other national systems of quality enhancement (see Appendix 2 for the full list of sources).

In setting out the themes, two issues should be noted. First, the amount of evaluation and research literature on these different initiatives is uneven. This unevenness does not reflect the strategic importance of the different initiatives. For example, there is a much greater amount of evaluation and research literature over this period that focuses on the CETLs and NTFS than on the overall TQEF and the HEA. While the vast majority of the literature was published between 2005 and 2013, in some cases we have augmented the review with literature published prior to 2005 in order to strengthen our analysis.

Second, the focus of the majority of this literature is on the evaluation of particular projects. This makes it difficult to assess the extent to which the enhancement activities as a whole have led to sustained changes to institutional teaching and learning cultures. To help address this gap, we have drawn on additional literature and reviews examining teaching excellence and the recognition and reward of teaching in higher education as these provide important outcomes relating to the valuing of teaching in universities over this period. However, this gap suggests a longitudinal examination of the impact of enhancement initiatives as a whole would be invaluable in deepening our understanding of the extent and nature of cultural change across the sector.

6.2 Themes from the review

We identified the following themes from our review of evaluative reports and the research literature:

- the significant importance of HEFCE's teaching enhancement initiatives in signalling the centrality of teaching and learning in higher education;
- the significant benefits individuals across the sector gained from their involvement in these initiatives;
- the tendency to focus on raising the profile of, and rewarding, teaching rather than on the strategic development of teaching and learning across the sector;
- the way in which these initiatives tended to focus on innovations and educational specialists rather than developing everyday university teaching and teachers;
- the lack of a cohesive strategy that brought together HEFCE's different quality-enhancement initiatives.

We examined each of these themes in turn. In doing so, it is clear they are inter-related and build on each other in a number of ways.

The significance of HEFCE's teaching enhancement initiatives in signalling the importance of teaching and learning in higher education

HEFCE's enhancement initiatives have played a vital role in signalling the importance of teaching and learning in higher education. This is clear from the overall evaluations of the TQEF (Higher Education Consultancy Group and CHEMS Consulting 2005), as well as from the individual elements of it, such as institutional teaching and learning strategies (Gibbs et al 2000) and the NTFS (HEA 2012). Similarly, HEFCE's e-learning strategy was seen by staff in the sector as sending an important message about the significance of e-learning for higher education (Jenkins et al 2011).

Thus HEFCE's funding and involvement in teaching enhancement initiatives appears to play an important role in highlighting the importance of teaching in universities.

The significant benefits individuals across the sector gained from their involvement in these initiatives

The benefits individuals gained from HEFCE's enhancement activities were clearly evident. These benefits included the development of new and improved practices, improvement in using a range of technologies and materials, the opportunity to work with like-minded individuals and enhanced professional capacity. The benefits are apparent from evaluations of TQEF as a whole (Higher Education Consultancy Group and CHEMS Consulting 2005) and particularly from the evaluations and articles relating to CETLs (Gosling and Hannan 2007; Bluteau and Krumins 2008; Clouder et al 2008; Saunders et al 2008; Turner et al 2008; SQW 2011; Turner and Gosling 2012). Similarly, they come across strongly in the evaluation of the TLRP (Baker et al undated) and evaluations of different aspects of the HEA's change programmes (HEA undated; Mayes undated; Glenaffric 2010; Wray 2013).

The tendency to focus on raising the profile of, and rewarding, teaching rather than on the strategic development of teaching and learning across the sector

Related to the previous theme was the tendency in HEFCE enhancement initiatives to reward and raise the profile of teaching rather than focus on the strategic development of learning and teaching across the sector. This can be seen most clearly in the reviews and literature relating to the NTFS, where there is a lack of clarity about whether the award was a reward for good teaching or a grant to further develop teaching (Higher Education Consultancy Group and CHEMS Consulting 2005). Similarly, it is argued that this lack of strategic development might be reflected in the status of the knowledge produced by NTFS fellows, where there is a lack of underpinning knowledge of pedagogical research (Skelton 2004). Thus, while the role of the NTFS in raising the profile of teaching and rewarding excellent teaching is clear, the role it plays in strategically developing teaching and learning across the sector is much less so. While it should be noted that strategic development across the sector was not an explicit aim of that programme, this is in itself revealing of the approach taken.

The way in which these initiatives tended to focus on innovations and educational specialists rather than developing everyday university teaching and teachers

The previous themes give a good sense of how the individual initiatives were successful in engaging and benefitting individual institutions and academics. However, the current theme emphasises the ways in which these initiatives tended to focus on enthusiasts and specialists rather than developing everyday teaching and teachers. For example, Gosling (2013) identifies this as a central issue in his overview of quality enhancement in England but it also comes across in evaluations and reviews of different strands of HEFCE's quality enhancement initiatives.

Evaluations of, and articles relating to, the CETL initiatives are in strong agreement that while individuals benefitted, this did not have a wider impact on teaching across the whole higher education sector. Turner and Gosling (2012) argued that while they had important outcomes for individuals, CETLs reinforced the divide between everyday teachers and those who were very interested in teaching and learning. Similarly Gosling and Hannan (2007) argued that while the intention of CETLs was to change the standing of teachers across the sector, it mainly increased funding for those who were already highly engaged in innovative teaching.

The focus on specialists rather than everyday teachers also comes across strongly in a series of HEA reviews of reward and recognition for teaching in higher education (HEA and GENIE 2009a, 2009b; Cashmore et al 2013). These highlight that while awareness of particular strands of HEFCE's enhancement initiatives were high, the

impacts of both were perceived to be low (HEA and GENIE 2009a). While between 2009 and 2013, there was an increase in policies that would reward and recognise teaching within promotion, the 2013 report still found a lag in implementation (HEA and GENIE 2009b; Cashmore et al 2013). This suggests that despite specialist educational development staff and institutions developing these kinds of policies they are not enacted consistently. This means they are unlikely to have a significant impact on day-to-day teaching practices.

These issues are also reflected in relation to debates around teaching excellence. For example, Gunn and Fisk (2013) argue that, within debates around teaching excellence, there has not been a clear articulation of the differences between a threshold quality of teaching and teaching excellence. It could be argued that the tendency to elide the two reinforces a focus on specialists, for whom teaching excellence is the aim, rather than everyday teachers who might be more focused on ensuring they are aligned with and exceed threshold levels of quality.

One unintended consequence of this tendency to focus on innovations and educational specialists is that the barriers to engaging a greater range of teachers in improving their pedagogic practices tend to be overlooked. This means there is less focus on the contextual issues that need to be addressed if all teachers in higher education are to be engaged in enhancement activities as opposed to those who are already interested in such issues. Chalmers (2011) provides a helpful discussion of these in terms of the dominance of research assessment, changing employment practices and the resistance to disciplines to changing their teaching practices.

Overall, this theme highlights the tendency of HEFCE's enhancement initiatives to focus on particular innovations and educational specialists rather than developing day-to-day teaching across the sector.

The lack of a cohesive strategy that brought together (integrated) these different initiatives

The final and overarching theme generated from this review was that there was a lack of an overall strategy that brought together the different elements of HEFCE's quality enhancement initiatives. There were two aspects of this theme. The first aspect was the lack of a consistent agenda being pursued by the different initiatives. This involved the lack of co-ordination between the different elements (Gosling 2013) as well as issues of policy and strategy overload experienced by those who were subject to the policies (Newton 2003). There were also competing models of teacher development underpinning some of the initiatives, for example in institutional teaching and learning strategies (Clegg and Smith 2010). Finally, within and between some initiatives there was a lack of deep collaboration between the parties involved (Higher Education Consultancy Group and CHEMS Consulting 2005). Together these aspects of this theme suggest there was not a consistent message sent about quality enhancement by the different HEFCE initiatives.

The second, and related, element to this theme was the lack of a convincing 'theory of change' that underpinned the different elements. In general, the theory of change was seen to be poorly theorised (Gosling 2013) and focused on seeking to change individuals and then expecting them to change practices within the sector. This is variously described as a 'transfer' (Skelton 2002, 2004; Taylor 2007) or 'contagion' (Saunders et al 2005) of change. The overall impact of this weak theory of change appears to be that the enhancement initiatives have had more impact on individuals than on changing cultures across the sector.

For example, studies of the CETL initiative stress that the main benefits were to individuals but that the initiative did not address the wider issue of status of teaching across the sector (Clouder et al 2008; Bluteau and Krumins 2008; Saunders et al 2008; Turner et al 2008, SQW 2011). This pattern of findings is also evident in reviews of the HEFCE's e-learning strategy, where the degree to which it has impacted on the consciousness of the sector is questioned (Glenaffric 2008). Similarly, the 2008 HEA review (Oakleigh Consulting 2008) also suggested that while individual projects, such as the NTFS, had a high profile, the HEA was yet to establish itself as a strategic change agent across the sector as a whole.

Similarly, reviews of more recent initiatives also appear to find much more impact in relation to individuals rather than strategic change. The initial findings from the Strategic Change Programme (Cullen 2013), which involves the Leadership Foundation, NUS, HEA, Advanced Learning Technology (ALT) and Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and aims at whole institutional engagement, suggest that while the programme is working well and changing individuals, there is so far limited evidence about whether it is impacting on institutional cultures. This finding may be explained by the Strategic Change Programme being in the early stage of its development, but it is striking how much it chimes with the findings of evaluations of other initiatives. A similar issue is raised within the evaluation of the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning (UKPSF) (Turner et al 2013). While key informants were aware of the UKPSF, 53% of the teaching staff who responded knew nothing

about it. While the key informants considered that UKPSF was felt to be high on an individual level, only 15% of the teaching staff (182 out of 1051 respondents) believed it had an impact at an institutional or departmental level.

This issue is also reflected in the recent review of the impact of educational development programmes (Parsons et al 2012), where the strongest evidence for positive changes to teaching that have been supported by such programmes are at the level of individual conceptions and attitudes. The weakest evidence is in relation to organisation change.

There is some evidence of strategic institutional development through the projects in the HEA's Change Programme that focused on working with institutions on particular projects over a sustained period of time. Glenaffric (2010) and Mayes (undated) suggest the 'Enhancement Academy', now known as the Change Academy, was effective in producing some significant institutional-wide changes. McCoshan and Martin (2012) and Wray (2013) also found some development of institutional policies. It is also noteworthy that a wide range of institutions have been involved in different projects in the Change Academy. A survey of those involved in Change Academy projects from 2004-2012 suggested around a third of the impacts identified were changes in practices at the level of institutions or beyond. However, the very low response rate to this survey (6%) means these outcomes must be treated with extreme caution. As the other reviews of the Change Programme cited are evaluations of single projects and based on the accounts of project participants, they are unable to show the extent to which the Change Programme as a whole has supported sustained cultural change in teaching and learning.

The central issue across both the elements of this theme seems to be that rather than focusing on how to enhance teaching quality across the sector as whole, the different enhancement initiatives focused on single issues and sought to engage individual institutions or departments in relation to these issues. These individuals were then expected to lead to changes across the sector. All of the available evidence suggests that while this approach has had benefits in particular enclaves, there is no evidence that HEFCE's enhancement initiatives have led to sustained sector-wide cultural changes in teaching and learning in universities. In drawing this conclusion, the scarcity of evidence relating to the overall impact of the enhancement initiatives as a whole should be noted.

6.3 HEFCE's future role in quality enhancement

Overall, our review of the literature has suggested that while HEFCE's enhancement initiatives have played an important role in signalling the centrality of teaching as well as supporting individuals in developing their innovative practices, it has been far less successful in promoting the strategic development of quality enhancement across the sector as whole. Thus while some very innovative teaching practices have been supported, the impact on day-to-day teaching across the sector has been much more limited.

In many ways these issues are recognised in HEFCE's 'Future Principles of Enhancement' (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/enh/futureprinciples/>). There are four core principles:

- a commitment to enhance learning and teaching and to raise the status of teaching;
- a focus on supporting innovative practice;
- a belief that enhancement should be a mainstream activity for all institutions that is built into the 'fabric of HE';
- the need to focus on strategic priorities and to demonstrate value for money.

The key issue is how HEFCE will put these principles into practice, so that its future approach to enhancement does lead to sustained changes in day-to-day teaching practices across the sector. A major challenge posed by the four principles is how to ensure that enhancement activities become mainstream when, as the fourth priority states, "pressure on [HEFCE's] funding is escalating".

In thinking about this issue, we have examined a number of other national approaches to quality enhancement. We identified three different national models of quality enhancement that may offer some ways of thinking about HEFCE's future role:

- greater integration between quality enhancement and quality assurance;
- performance-based funding models of quality enhancement;
- institution-focused models of quality enhancement within a market system.

Greater integration between quality enhancement and quality assurance

Scotland has a much more integrated approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement than is the case in England. The Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) brings together quality assurance and enhancement in a way that is focused on improving practices across the sector. It is made up of a number of elements: institutional reviews, enhancement-led reviews, public information, student representation and enhancement themes (for example see Land and Gordon 2013a). The enhancement themes offer the sector opportunities to work as a whole on strategically important areas of quality enhancement. The QEF is built on a sustained partnership between the funding council, NUS Scotland and the Scottish QAA. While there are some issues raised about the QAA's dual role as reviewer and agent of enhancement and the same tension between teaching and research as in England (Land and Gordon 2013a), this represents the bringing together of a coherent strategy for enhancement across higher education. Saunders (2009a) argues that there is a unified change theory throughout with a commitment to consensual development and working in partnership to change institutional cultures. In terms of HEFCE's four core principles for the future enhancement of learning and teaching outlined above, the Scottish approach offers a commitment to enhance teaching and learning and to mainstreaming enhancement. Through the enhancement themes, it also offers a way of focusing on strategic priorities. However, the focus on innovative practice is less clear as is whether the approach fits with the funding regime in England.

Performance-based funding models of quality enhancement

A more performance-based funding model of quality enhancement can be found in the Australian system of higher education. This is undergoing a period of change. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency's (TEQSA) powers came into effect in January 2012. Historically, Australia has a national system of performance-based funding for learning and teaching using measures such as student satisfaction as well as responses to the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) (Krause 2013). Krause (2013) argues that the place of quality enhancement within the new arrangements is currently unclear but the early indications are that mission-based compacts between institutions and the government offer a way of rewarding quality enhancement while also recognising institutional diversity. These compacts are negotiated between the government and each university in terms of annual funding levels. A series of indicators and measures are used as the basis for negotiation. Those indicators and measures include an indicator of success in relation to targets set by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

In relation to HEFCE's four principles, this approach has a commitment to enhancing learning and teaching and again, through funding levers, offers a mainstream approach to quality enhancement. However, it is less clear how it provides a focus on strategic priorities and the use of funding levers does not fit with the current funding regime in England.

Institution-focused models of quality enhancement within a market system

In the US, quality enhancement is largely focused within institutions, as part of a market system of higher education. The quality of provision across the higher education sector is measured by a whole host of league tables, with the provision of some government funds available to support quality enhancement such as the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). Through its different competitions, FIPSE seeks to support innovations in teaching practices, to evaluate their effectiveness and to disseminate them across the sector. This means that the focus on quality enhancement largely comes from within institutions seeking to maintain their market position. Sorcinelli and Garner (2013) argue that quality enhancement in the US is entering the 'Age of Networks' given reductions in allocations to higher education, increasing use of technology-enhanced learning, as well as changes in faculty roles and the ways courses are accredited. They argue that faculty developers and teaching and learning centres are the hubs of these networks.

In many ways, this model of quality enhancement has parallels with the situation in England given the new funding regime. In relation to HEFCE's four principles of enhancement, it provides support for innovative practice and builds enhancement into the 'fabric of HE'. However, it does not provide a way of focusing on strategic priorities and whether enhancement is on the agenda at all is dependent on the higher education market.

6.4 Overview

Overall, the literature offers no easy answers to developing HEFCE's future role in quality enhancement. The review of previous enhancement initiatives shows how hard it is to have a strategic impact on day-to-day teaching practices across the higher education sector. With potentially fewer funding mechanisms at its disposal in the future, finding a way to develop a more effective approach in the future looks even more challenging. However, four key and related elements of a future strategy are evident from our review. These are:

- the need for a coherent theory of change to underpin future approaches to quality enhancement;
- related to this, the need for policies to be 'joined-up'. This is not simply in terms of quality enhancement policies but also in terms of other areas of higher education policy, such as research assessment, which have a direct impact on the success of quality enhancement initiatives;
- a much fuller recognition of the contextual barriers to engagement in quality enhancement activities and a greater focus on the practices of everyday teachers in higher education, rather than educational specialists;
- the need to evaluate the impact of enhancement initiatives as a whole and across the sector rather than only evaluating individual initiatives from the perspective of those who participate in them.

7 Responses to the focusing questions: strategic themes

This section draws together the work undertaken in the two activity streams, addressing in turn the focusing questions which guided the review.

Focusing question 1: What do previous evaluations and current stakeholders' opinions suggest were the key strengths and weaknesses of HEFCE-funded learning and teaching enhancement initiatives, both at the strategic and the tactical level, over the period 2005-2012?

Strengths

- **The use of a multi-programmatic approach (not a single 'one-off' approach). This of course is understood both as a strength and a weakness.** This has increased the significance of good quality learning and teaching as a concern for universities in England, in other words it has achieved 'mainstreaming' of this dimension of their work. Since the Dearing report the various initiatives situated at different levels in the sector, were seen as key to the foregrounding of teaching and learning, at least in the policy rhetoric, but often in practices at the level of the institution.
- **Establishing an environment for experimentation.** While 'patchy', most institutions have engaged in experimentation, under the aegis of one or other of the initiatives, in new ways of teaching and learning and new foci for the HE curriculum. This is an achievement in a sector jealous of its autonomy, strident in its desire to direct itself and confident in its own capacity to produce solutions. It is also indicative of a sea change in priorities in higher education in England, with the emergence of teaching and learning as a legitimate core professional concern for the academic community.
- **The relatively non-directive approach which acknowledged and ran with the grain of institutional autonomy is seen as appropriate.** This was essentially a policy of 'letting 100 flowers blossom'. The balance between acting as a conduit for central policy and providing responsive support for institutional development is difficult to manage and there is an argument for sustaining a strong awareness of their separate functions and effects.
- **Partnership.** At present, HEFCE can be depicted as in partnership with institutions in professional problem solving and in developing the learning, teaching and assessment area with a level of influence and legitimacy. It plays an appropriate, and generally appreciated, role in co-ordination and policy awareness. It is potentially the victim of its very wide remit and it is in this breadth that tension has been felt most strongly.

Weaknesses

- **Scaling up to sector-level change (the challenge of moving on from interesting enclaves of practice) is a perennial problem.** The general research on change within HE (strongly supported by our review of reports and evaluations) suggests this is a real problem. We identify an inappropriate theory of change as at the heart of this problem, one which uses metaphors such as 'beacon'. The light from the beacon is meant to illuminate the darkness around it. The causative mechanism is assumed to be that providing

'practical' examples of useful, interesting or innovative practice will produce changes in individuals and institutions who are interested in adapting their practice or who feel change is inevitable or have other pressures to change. The idea of 'contagion' or the metaphor of epidemiology is also sometimes used to describe this theory.

- **The theory of change embedded in this 'dissemination from a beacon' conception is relatively weak in that how and under what conditions an exemplar would create changes within the wider system is often not made explicit or remains opaque.** The following issues have been inadequately addressed to date: moving from changed practice exemplar projects to replicate it as mainstream more broadly; creating bridgeheads from the enclave that projects often become; determining the number of new enclaves required in order to achieve critical mass for mainstreamed and sustained practice change across the sector. Connected to this issue are some implementation realities, for example, initiative timescales were often primarily determined by the resources available within a limited time frame rather than by the imperative to plan carefully and properly consider enhancement mechanisms. This put pressure on the capacity of project planners to design wider engagements leading to the ineffective legacy planning of initiatives. In some cases it also meant poorly-planned approaches.
- **Change has often mainly been associated with early adopters or teaching and learning activists.** This enhancement approach relies on the idea that the professionalism, enthusiasm and agency of innovators will spread to others who see their success. It is assumed, for example, that because 'good' teachers will be motivated to provide up-to-date, interesting, well-supported material and processes that aid and deepen intellectual development, often collaboratively, they will be interested in using, experimenting and developing innovations which take advantage of possibilities offered by enhancement initiatives. The problem is that this 'speaks' to a relatively small group of people. Part of this issue is understood to be the wider cluster of rewards and non-rewards for different academic pathways. Most respondents felt that while important progress had been made, there remained a strong hierarchy of rewards and status with research success firmly at the top and success in teaching roles considerably behind, and that reward and recognition criteria still needed to be addressed.

There is a suite of issues arising from inadequate co-ordination of disparate initiatives and different parts of the same initiative, also reflected in different national approaches within the UK. This is the 'dark' side of the strength identified above. It connects to the lack of co-ordination and the lack of a coherent theory of change and the difficulties of developing an accumulation of knowledge and skills over time. One example is in the area of student engagement. Despite sporadic collaboration between some of the different agencies involved in this initiative (for example the HEA and the NUS or the QAA and the NUS), there is much independent work being done. The QAA has a new chapter on the topic; the HEA continues to work on it, as does the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFFHE) and the NUS, as well as others. The results of the Scottish enhancement theme on the topic and the activities of Student Participation in Quality Scotland (SPARQS) are rarely drawn on in England. In times of austerity such a situation is difficult to justify. The setting up of the 'student engagement partnership' in England does indicate movement in this area, however.

Focusing question 2: What does the evidence suggest are the future needs of the HE sector in relation to the direction of learning and teaching enhancement initiatives?

Responding to this question first requires a sketch of the likely characteristics of higher education in the next five years, and beyond. Futurology is inexact at best, particularly in relation to such a turbulent environment as the higher education sector. However certain broad features appear to be likely. A brief sketch of these follows:

Figure 7.1: A sketch of the future

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is likely to have a real-terms reduction 19.2% cut in resources from 2015-2018, meaning a reduction of up to 42.5% between 2010-2018⁷. Within this straitened context the HE system is likely to become more diversified and stratified⁸.

⁷ Westwood, A. (2013) *Austerity, the Spending Review and a crisis in human capital*. Available from: <http://www.wonkhe.com/2013/05/07/austerity-the-spending-review-and-a-crisis-in-human-capital/> [date accessed 10.4.14].
⁸ Huisman, J., de Boer, H., Bótas, P. and Pimentel, C. (2013) Where Do We Go from Here? The Future of English Higher Education. *Higher Education Quarterly*. **66** (4), 341-362.

There will be tensions between neo-liberal laissez-faire competitive pressures and a social democratic push towards collaboration and more central direction of providers. Institutions will become more adept at managing the 'competitively co-operative' environment. However it is unlikely that the new public management approach to managing the public sector will become less significant, so the emphasis on performance measurement, monitoring, and management and audit systems, rather than on self-regulation will probably continue, despite its likely lack of fit with a changing, diversified, system.

Technological change will bring new opportunities and challenges to provision, but history suggests it is unlikely this will be of tectonic proportions, as is sometimes predicted. Technological developments will bring increased opportunities for collaboration of various sorts, but movement in this direction is not a foregone conclusion.

The student body will change, bringing new challenges to some providers, but these are likely to be concentrated in particular institutions and places rather than evenly distributed across the system. In a continuing fees-based funding system the demands of students for high quality provision will continue.

The distinction between selective and recruiting institutions will sharpen, and this difference will be significant in this respect⁹.

In such a context, and taking account of the strengths and weaknesses of HEFCE-funded enhancement initiatives as set out above, we can say the critical success factors for an effective enhancement strategy for England in such a context are that it:

- has efficient and effective ways of establishing need and of measuring the real costs (including 'hidden' costs) and effects of interventions;
- once established, priorities are addressed consistently, with clear leadership, over extended periods of time and with consistent attention paid to long-term sustainability;
- makes best use of the particular specialisms and missions of the different bodies focused on enhancement by encouraging a 'joined-up' enhancement strategy;
- is inclusive of the student voice and collective student interests;
- has adequate planning times and planning processes which made provision for engagement across the sector, based on a robust causal theory of change and mindful of usability characteristics;
- is nuanced enough to take account of different institutional missions and contexts in doing that;
- is effective in moderating politicians' often unrealistic ideologically-driven proposals and in mitigating the effects of politicians' predilection for big, high-profile, expensive projects involving high-profile 'tape-cutting', reshaping them into effective innovations;
- is able to effect changes beyond the 'usual suspects' to those deep in the heart of day-to-day teaching and learning, effecting a culture change across the system which incorporated a genuine commitment to evaluate practices, to address deficiencies and to build on successes.

The primary data from the interviews and the secondary data from the literature we examined indicate that the following list represents some of the challenges to be addressed in meeting these needs, and the opportunities this represents.

- **Engaging students more effectively (both in their learning and in decision making).** This is a reference to the 'engagement' agenda and the systems and practices that embody a repositioning of individual students, student unions and the NUS as collaborators or partners in the university experience within the new funding regime. This need not, and probably will not, have fundamental consequences for the HE lecturer's role as knowledge mediator and arbiter of academic quality. Rather it is likely to be a very important dimension of a general change in the nature of provision which in many locations already entails the closer involvement of a wider range of professions than just academics in the detail of learning and teaching processes and decision making about them. In some locations students and student unions are part of this too, and this will increase.

⁹ The team thanks Professor Roger Brown for the valuable comments on the history of enhancement efforts, on the operating framework and on future regulation that he provided them with.

This goes beyond 'student charters' and even student representation, but involves students in many aspects of their experience at a day-to-day level¹⁰.

- **Meeting/managing/engaging student expectations.** This is a reference to a view which repositions students as 'paying customers' and what they may legitimately expect of their university experience. However, while consumerism is not necessarily a dominant value held by students, they do want 'value for money'. They are also interested in a rewarding university experience, in many senses, as the QAA (2013) report cited immediately above demonstrates.
- **Improving the experience and attainment of BME students and others.** This is a reference to the continued under-representation of certain social and ethnic groups from universities and the relatively stubborn persistence of the traditional profile of university entrants despite widening participation efforts. There are different patterns in this among undergraduate compared with postgraduate students and so they need to be addressed differently.
- **Catering for new types of institutions to the HE scene without the beneficial legacy of experience, HEFCE advice or funding.** This new challenge is that of ensuring good quality learning and teaching, and its continuous development, with new providers in the sector. These include private universities, the closer ties with private corporations with HEIs, the increase in incorporated international higher education providers, the continuing movement of the further education sector into higher education provision as well as the expansion of sub-degree and preparatory courses.
- **Effective and appropriate use of learning technologies and modes of provision.** Encouraging the use of digital technologies to allow access to university courses in remote communities (both literally and figuratively) and the longer-term implications of funding and pedagogic models which encourage openness and mass participation.
- **More national strategic direction is required with more sophisticated ways of establishing and discerning diverse needs and priorities** resulting in more focused initiatives (no longer 100 flowers blossoming), with clearer direction in specific areas of need, fewer of them, with strong evidence of cost-effectiveness.
- **Better communication to change agents of research findings and evidence on pedagogy, change management, effectiveness, etc.** This requires a more sophisticated understanding of the usability of the designs and how evaluative and research outputs might be used. More evidence of the impact of initiatives and better evaluation of policies, mechanisms and instruments, not just individual initiatives.
- **Developing improved and explicit theories of change and its implementation, both at sector-wide level and within institutions.** In particular there is a dearth of well-worked-through 'use strategies' associated with initiatives which have as their purpose sector-wide influence. As in the point above, there is a need to develop 'engagement strategies' which connect users and research evidence in order to make explicit practice-based implications.
- **Better planning, clearer identification of purposes and improved co-ordination of individual initiatives and suites of initiatives.** This is a reference to the need for '*programme or project memory*' at national level. At institutional level developmental memories also need attention to ensure continuing engagement. What has sometimes been a 'fire-and-forget' approach to change initiatives cannot be sustained in an environment of austerity.
- **Better learning architectures within institutions are needed** (Dill¹¹ 1999) so that different committee structures (for eg teaching and research) operate in a co-ordinated way. This means institutions should be encouraged to work through the coherence and continuity between the different arms of university action. Within this reward and recognition structures for all categories of staff may need to be reconsidered.

Focusing question 3: What are the options available for HEFCE's future role (if any) in learning and teaching enhancement initiatives for the future?

We note that as of January 2014 HEFCE has made a number of statements about its future role. For example:

Over the last decade we have maintained significant investment in quality-enhancement activity in higher education (HE), *and will continue to do so.* (Emphasis ours.)

¹⁰ QAA (2013) Student Expectations And Perceptions Of Higher Education. Available from: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/learningteaching/kli/research/student-experience/student-expectations-perceptions-HE.aspx> [date accessed 10.4.14].

¹¹ Dill, D. (1999) Academic Accountability and University Adaptation: The Architecture of an Academic Learning Organization. Higher Education. **38** (2), 127-154.

In addition we noted above that HEFCE has already set its four Future Principles of Enhancement (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/enh/futureprinciples/>). HEFCE therefore appears committed to having a future role in learning and teaching enhancement initiatives in the future.

Clearly any alternatives would need to be fit for the purpose of addressing the future needs of the sector, outlined above, and rectifying the weaknesses of past enhancement initiatives while drawing on the strengths and lessons from the successes, also outlined above. In particular future initiatives need to be underpinned by an explicit and workable theory of change. Figure 7.2 elaborates on this.

Figure 7.2: Theories of change, use and usability

Strengthening the theory of change: inserting use and usability into intervention design

Whatever mode of support and enhancement emerges from these deliberations, an underlying imperative is to address the design weaknesses associated with poor or inexplicit theories of change. This observation is supported by the evidence.

This problem mainly arises from the uncertain relationship between the excellent or innovative models of practice that might emerge from a funded intervention and the wider case. In other words, how do funded projects improve practice across the board?

The main problem from our perspective lies in understanding this issue as one of ‘dissemination’. A much more fruitful way of seeing this issue is one of the use and usability of intervention outputs. By ‘use’ we refer to the extent to which HEIs have the capacity to respond to new resources and how intervention design might include a careful ‘engagement’ strategy based on what we know about how HEIs respond to change. By ‘usability’, we refer to the design of the outputs themselves so that they present easily assimilable messages, embodiments of new practice, etc, which are user-friendly.

Taken together, insisting on these design elements (use and usability) would plug the theory of change gap in intervention designs and provide the authentic link between funded interventions and change in the wider case.

Saunders, M. (2012) The use and usability of evaluation outputs: a social practice approach. In *Evaluation: the International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*. 18 (4) 421-437.

We envisage three possible broad scenarios for this future, each of which involves HEFCE to different extents. Our theoretical position, rooted in social practice theory, as well as our long experience of evaluative and other projects in higher education, tells us that realities and outcomes are shaped on the ground. Contextual contingencies and processes of negotiation mean details emerge differentially in locales. High-definition specifications of future scenarios are therefore unrealistic and unhelpful. Instead we offer ‘low-definition’ outlines.

Scenario 1 (HEFCE as major player)

1. The further expansion of the ‘bid-and-deliver’ instrument as the dominant approach to enhancement-focused funding. HEFCE to provide the funding and to establish and monitor requirements for funded projects which meet the needs of the future as set out above – for example in relation to collaboration across the sector and other requirements integrated into the tender as appropriate by the funding body.

This *HEFCE-controlled bid-and-deliver model* would permit conditionality attached to funding and would allow HEFCE to have considerable control over the direction of enhancement activities. HEFCE could also plan the range of appropriate enhancement *mechanisms* it wished to fund within this broad instrument.

However, considered alone, the danger is that a range of different projects funded in this way would be too atomistic in character, despite conditionality for collaboration, and so could fail to achieve the desired co-ordination, prioritisation and focused management requirements set out above. This danger would be compounded if the bid-and-deliver model were applied without a strong controlling hand centrally.

- 2 Institutional funding conditional on meeting enhancement-based targets, regularly reviewed. This *HEFCE-controlled targeted institutional-funding model* would have the advantage of being congruent with the new public management approach utilised throughout the public sector in England, and already familiar at other levels in the HE sector. It is in place in Scotland through the outcome agreements there.

Again, within Scenario 1 it would be possible for HEFCE to apply this instrument with careful consideration of the types and purposes of the mechanisms that could be deployed as a result of this funding.

However again considered alone it would have the weakness of an atomistic approach, being oriented to individual institutions and so would be in danger of failing to achieve sectoral change.

Scenario 2 (HEFCE as adjudicator)

3. Sectoral realignment (for example with universities collaborating along regional lines¹²) with funding conditional on certain behaviours, the achievement of targets and so on. This *regionalised model* would have the advantage of better addressing local needs and could establish centres of excellence in different areas of practice. It also has the advantage of being congruent with the probable institutional mergers or at least alliances in the future. It follows the approach taken by the ESRC in establishing Doctoral Training Centres, which often involve collaborations among multiple universities, moving to a regional rather than an institutional model. However, as applied to learning and teaching the regionalised model would not address the key issue identified in the report of scaling up enhancement initiatives to the sector.
4. HEFCE or the QAA organizing the implementation of a limited number of sequenced enhancement themes, along the lines established in Scotland and now being adopted in Wales. This *enhancement themes model* would have the advantage of addressing issues of prioritisation and focus identified in the report. However there was little appetite for it among respondents (though there did appear to be some misapprehensions concerning how it is practised in Scotland). While this may be the case, the themes approach has grown out of a model which echoes the idea of the Enhancement Council below. The different foci for the themes (targeted areas of development given priority by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee see below) have been developed over the last ten years or so in consultation with HEIs. Identifying nine themes in total, teams of academics have produced materials, ideas, conducted workshops and worked within institutions. This framework has high legitimacy in the institutions but, more importantly is the principle vehicle for enhancement support. Among recent themes are: graduates for the 21st Century; developing and supporting the curriculum; the First Year: engagement and empowerment.
(<http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes>).
5. Higher Education Academy given greater responsibility, with increased injunction to focus and prioritise its activities. This *enhanced HEA model* has the advantage of making use of resources already in place. However it does not, considered alone, address issues of co-ordination and collaboration identified above.

Scenario 3 (limited role for HEFCE)

6. Enhancement through the Operating Framework alone. This would be an augmented market model in which the provision of information for students and prospective students as well as opportunities for redress and competition between suppliers will bring about enhancement without deliberate intervention. It includes the QAA's *UK Quality Code for HE* and evaluative instruments such as the NSS and PTES. This *strong neo-liberal market model* has the advantage of congruence with many recent developments in the sector including political initiatives currently in train. However it is based on a simplistic and flawed model of the decision-making processes of students and others. Moreover many respondents expressed deep concern about consequences for the sector as a whole in a system founded on survival of the fittest. These respondents considered it unlikely that learning and teaching standards would be lifted across the sector as a whole in such a system, and expressed the view that intervention would be required to prevent probable deleterious consequences of this approach. Experience in the schools sector, where such a model is further developed, is not encouraging on this point.

¹² Garzoni, A. (nd) *Regional Integration and University Cooperation in The Adriatic-Ionian Basin*. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/pd8brow> [date accessed 10.4.14].

7. Central specialist enhancement council set up as a combined parliament and executive, bringing together current bodies to establish priorities, achieve co-ordination of effort in consensual directions and combine resources to those ends. In this *enhancement council model* policies would be implemented by other actors, including the HEA, co-ordinated and evaluated with reporting lines to the council. It would differ from HEFCE's Teaching Quality and Student Experience and Teaching Quality Standards committees in involving a broader range of stakeholders and including student representatives in a more significant role (ie not simply as observers). A Learning and Teaching Enhancement Council (LTEC) could have a remit to agree principles and priorities for action on enhancement in England.

A nascent example exists in the informal body called the Higher Education Development Community. This has somewhat irregular meetings and has no power or funding, but does attempt to communicate initiatives across some of the interested parties (though not students, ironically). Another indicative model already in existence is the Changing the Learning Landscape initiative, which involves the collaboration of numerous bodies under a focused and effective leadership structure to widely acknowledged (among respondents) good effect. A third model exists in Scotland: the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Council (SHEEC). SHEEC co-ordinates most activities associated with enhancement, in particular, as we note above in Scenario 2, the Enhancement Themes. It has representatives from all institutions, QAA and the student bodies and meets three times a year to co-ordinate and prioritise enhancement efforts, set strategic direction and to implement initiatives. The last evaluation of the Themes approach in 2009¹³ suggested that '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'. (p. 5).

In order to address the issues of 'joining up' policies and initiatives and developing enhancement priorities identified earlier in this report, the council's membership could include a selection of representatives including from HEFCE, the HEA, the QAA, the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC)/ Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC)/Vice Principal (VP) Network, LfHE, Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), ALT, Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE), Heads of Educational Development Group (HEDG), Standing Conference on Academic Practice (SCAP), JISC, Universities United Kingdom (UUK), one of the two recognised representative bodies for higher education in the UK (GuildHE), professional bodies, employers' representatives and include students (minimally, the NUS). The new council could bring together temporary affiliations of different bodies to address specified needs and commission specialists to advise where necessary.

Its terms of reference, powers, funding streams and the roles of different bodies within it would need careful planning to mitigate the dangers to its operation set out above. This would be a co-ordinating council, not a rationalisation of agencies, for which there was little appetite among respondents.

Focusing question 4: What are the alternatives, beyond a role for HEFCE, for learning and teaching enhancement initiatives in the future?

This question could be interpreted in a number of ways. The here@lancaster team interprets it to mean "other than those initiated and funded by HEFCE, what enhancement initiatives might be suitable in the future, and how would they be implemented?"

Above, we set out a picture of the probable shape of the future higher education sector in England. We can go further in the risky practice of futurology and suggest that such a scenario would mean the following:

- the HE sector is entering a new phase¹⁴ with the likelihood of mergers as well as alternative providers¹⁵, new approaches to provision and new requirements from students. With funding increasingly coming from student fees and less central resourcing, the locus of control and management of enhancement initiatives is changing;

¹³ Saunders, M. et al (September 2009) Report to SFC on evaluation of QEF. Available from: http://www.sfc.ac.uk/reports_publications/reports_publications.aspx and Enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in Scottish Universities (SFC, Edinburgh).

¹⁴ Kubler, J. and Sayers, N. (2010) *Higher Education Futures: Key Themes and Implications For Leadership And Management*. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education/Association of Commonwealth Universities. Available from: http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/filemanager/root/site_assets/research_resources/research/series_2/S2-4.1%20Kubler%20&%20Sayers%20-%20Higher%20Education%20Futures.pdf [date accessed 10.4.14].

¹⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/205355/bis-13-903-alternative-providers-specific-course-designation-guidance-for-applicants-criteria-and-conditions.pdf [date accessed 10.4.14].

- it is likely that a 'mode II'¹⁶ type of structure will become more significant than in the past, involving temporary affiliations of different bodies to address specified needs. However there are dangers around lack of co-ordination and the protection and inclusion of the less-advantaged students and institutions if this happened;
- there is limited appetite for a Browne-like 'rationalisation' of the constellation of agencies. Such a move would require central direction, though on the ground there are few who perceive a major problem with the current situation. However funding pressures will probably result in the merging of institutions and combination of institutional roles;
- the NUS will become a more significant player among the constellation of relevant bodies than has been the case to date.

A number of respondents had suggestions for or offered examples of ways in which learning and teaching enhancement across the sector could be augmented. These included:

- examples from the National Union of Students of initiatives which involved student representatives at the local level engaging in low-cost practices. The NUS appears to be adept at generating considerable amounts of activity on limited resources by concentrating on local incentives and the outcomes. An example given by one respondent was providing a small amount of money to student representatives to take academic staff for coffee to discuss issues around a forthcoming course review committee;
- comments about the educational development community as an under-utilised resource. For some respondents this community had change-agency expertise which was not being effectively deployed (though recent JISC initiatives were mentioned as an exception to this);
- there were very mixed feelings about a dominant role, without HEFCE, for the Higher Education Academy or similar body. For some respondents the HEA had become an over-large, over-expensive, over-bureaucratic and over-centralised organization which had limited impact in relation to its cost. Its purposes had become too diffuse, it lacked self-confidence and was unwilling to learn from the expertise of others.

Yet for others the HEA represented a very significant concentration of learning and teaching expertise and for these respondents any reduction in the resources allocated to it or in its influence would be extremely deleterious to the sector as a whole. The celebration of innovation, the allocation of resources to pedagogical research and then applying results to improve practices was something the HEA does well, according to this view.

Focusing question 5: What does the evidence suggest are likely to be the most effective choices among these?

Like the past, the future is another country; but it is certain to be one recognisable to us today. In education, revolutionary change does not happen - not even in unprecedented times of technological acceleration. In schools and universities the legacies and discourses of the past – even the distant past - remain in contemporary contexts, layered with more recent developments. The next few years of higher education in England are unlikely to be an exception to this experience.

However a constellation of factors is shifting the higher education sector into unfamiliar territory. These include further technological change, globalisation, marketisation, funding changes, the fiscal crisis and the changing shape of the economy and careers as well as many other developments. Individually these are factors familiar to us already, but taken together they represent a powerful new vector.

There is a sufficient evidence base and an adequate understanding of change processes to enable us to make statements about choices that have a chance of building on previous successes, of avoiding the bear traps that await, and of being effective.

It is always tempting to make decisions based on a technical-rational understanding of change processes. However, we know that micro-political and macro-political processes as well as the robust defence of turf, careers, reputations and position mean that change is more often a process of 'muddling through' in a loosely-coupled way than a rational process of successive goal setting and achievement. It is clear that the situation depicted by complex-adaptive systems theory¹⁷ is closer to the reality of higher education in England than the picture painted by more rationalistic theories.

¹⁶ Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P. and Trow, M. (1994). *The New Production of Knowledge: The dynamics of science and research in contemporary societies*. London: Sage

¹⁷ Holland, J. (2006) Studying Complex Adaptive Systems. *Journal of Systems Science & Complexity*. **19** (1), 1–8.

Building on the best of the past while attempting to rectify anomalies and deleterious practices is a strategy that has more chance of success than imposing completely new models.

It is clear to the team from the evidence that HEFCE's continued strategic role in the enhancement of learning and teaching in England is vitally important to sustain strategic direction and to moderate the vicissitudes of political ideology. Given the resource constraints that are a very predictable feature of the future, HEFCE needs to prioritise its enhancement efforts. One respondent contrasted the current situation in England with the way the Scottish (and now Welsh with its *Future Directions* policy document) enhancement themes give a degree of stability, direction and unity of purpose to enhancement efforts in institutions.

If we ask the question "what has been the most cost-effective mechanism that has changed learning and teaching practices on the ground?" the answer would almost certainly be the National Student Survey. There is general agreement that, like the REF in the research field, the NSS is the object of close attention from, and often rapid response by, institutions. It has focused attention and helped institutions prioritise enhancement efforts. This is not to say that it is not in need of amendment, nor that it has not had some deleterious effects; only that it has had a demonstrable impact across English higher education.

However there is no appetite in HEFCE to become the dominant player, nor to coalesce into itself the expertise necessary to achieve the enhancement goals discussed in this report. It seems likely, therefore that Scenario 2, *HEFCE as an adjudicator among other change agents*, is the one most likely to succeed.

The evidence suggests, however, that in playing this role HEFCE needs to reconsider the instruments and mechanisms it has deployed at a distance in the past. This could be done with a view to addressing some of the deficiencies identified in this report. It could also focus on learning the lessons from successful interventions such as Changing the Learning Landscape and low-cost models such as those initiated by the National Union of Students. Better use of resources that are already available and a more joined-up approach to the agencies and policies already involved in enhancement would seem both feasible and would harness enthusiasm and good practice already in place.

There are political and practical issues concerning the implementation of an enhancement council such as the LTEC discussed above, particularly around funding issues and control of funding: it is clear there would be major difficulties in shifting the control of funding in the direction of such a body. However, strong consideration could be given to this proposal. In doing so it should be noted, as pointed out above that this would be a policy *instrument* and that the determination of particular *mechanisms* as well as issues around determination of funding and funding streams lie outside the remit of this report and would be the subject of considerable negotiation. It should also be noted that the options set out here are not mutually exclusive and that the process of negotiation could involve a blending of different elements of these options.

Finally, in conducting this review the here@lancaster team has identified two areas in which further research would be helpful in assisting policymakers in developing more effective enhancement strategies:

- detailed comparative research into the international experience of policy and practice at the national level in addressing the enhancement of learning and teaching;
- the development of an approach to reviewing the impact of enhancement initiatives which goes beyond atomistic evaluations of particular innovations to examine processes and outcomes longitudinally, particularly in relation to the development of practices beyond project enclaves.

Appendix I: approach

AI.1 Aims of the review

The nature of higher education in the UK is changing in fundamental ways, with students bearing more of the cost and the quality of their experience and outcomes becoming the central focus of HE policy.

Underscoring the approach we adopt below is an assessment of the ‘theory of change’ embedded in the various strategies within the specified time period. This concern operates at various levels:

- at sector level, it will assess the efficacy of national agency (the role, position and effectiveness) of HEFCE as a change agent;
- at the level of programme intervention, it will assess the efficacy of the intervention strategy (targeted funding, dispersed funding, centres of excellence, etc);
- and finally, it will assess the efficacy of the specific mechanisms for change and support within specific programme practice (web development, small-scale R&D projects, workshop programmes, material production, etc).

The aims of this review, then, are to establish whether previous policy frameworks aimed at enhancing the student experience were and are still fit for purpose in the current and likely future HE environments. The review process aims are as follows:

to provide independent formative evidence of the overall effectiveness of the initiatives in the designated period to HEFCE and its partners;

1. to provide independent formative evidence of the overall effectiveness of the initiatives in the designated period to HEFCE and its partners;
2. to provide independent summative evidence of the overall effectiveness of the various strategies;
3. to offer an analytic account of the experience of the strategy from the perspective of key informants;
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, factors to consider in the development of strategy.

In order to achieve these aims we have designed the following five focusing questions:

1. What do previous evaluations and current stakeholders’ opinions suggest were the key strengths and weaknesses of HEFCE-funded learning and teaching enhancement initiatives, both at the strategic and the tactical level, over the period 2005-2012?
2. What does the evidence suggest are the future needs of the HE sector in relation to the direction of learning and teaching enhancement initiatives?
3. What are the options available for HEFCE’s future role (if any) in learning and teaching enhancement initiatives for the future?
4. What alternatives, beyond a role for HEFCE, exist in learning and teaching enhancement initiatives for the future?
5. What does the evidence suggest are likely to be the most effective choices among these?

AI.2 Deliverables and milestones

| Deliverables and milestones | | |
|-----------------------------|---|-----------------|
| No. | Description | Date |
| M1 | Evaluation project starts: phase one begins | 6 May 2013 |
| | | |
| D1 | An interim report outlining key preliminary findings: 1,000 words | 19 July 2013 |
| D2 | Draft final report: 10,000 words | 2 December 2013 |

AI.3 Outline operational plan

The summary below details the phasing of the main activities to be carried out within the review.

The project runs from 6 May to 1 December 2013

Work package 1, secondary data:

Desk-based mapping of HEFCE's enhancement initiatives, its origins, aims and their legacy. Review of published literature in relation to HEFCE's quality enhancement initiatives.

6 May - 31 October 2013.

Package lead: Dr Paul Ashwin.

Time allocated to package: 10 days.

Work package 2, interim report:

Preparation of interim report, based on initial findings from work package 1.

6 May–19 July 2013 - draft interim report.. 1 August – final interim report (D1).

Package lead: Prof Murray Saunders.

Time allocated to package: 2 days.

Work package 3, primary data:

Digitally recorded telephone/Skype interviews with key policy-makers and with key stakeholders and sector experts to: triangulate findings; discuss the future enhancement needs of the sector; review the options for addressing these.

6 May to 1 October 2013.

Package lead: Prof Paul Trowler.

Time allocated to package: 10 days.

Work package 4, final report:

Preparation of draft final report.

Complete by 2 December 2013.

Package lead: Prof Paul Trowler.

Time allocated to package: 4 days.

AI.4 Methodological approach (from bid document)

1.4.1 Our methodological approach: introduction

The research is central to the HEA's role in enhancing the student experience in higher education.

We envisage the research involving both primary data and secondary data.

The primary data will be derived from interviews with up to 15 key informants, including at HEFCE, UUK, Association of Colleges, HEA as well as with relevant specialists in the HE sector. The secondary data will involve a

review of the findings of evaluative reports and academic literature on the effectiveness of the TQEF and TESS initiatives. In conducting this literature review we will ask three questions:

- what was successful, and why?
- what features led to negative outcomes, and why?
- what are the implications of the above for this review?

The final report will be structured in this way:

- historical background to the TQEF and TESS, and likely trajectories of enhancement needs (we cover much of the background to 2005 in Trowler et al 2005);
- models of systemic enhancement, policy instruments and theories of change, including those underpinning TQEF and TESS initiatives;
- review of the initiatives from the literature (both formal reviews and the academic literature), structured around the three questions above;
- evidence from interviews;
- broad conclusions;
- options available and commentary on the probable effectiveness.

We see a key element of this review being the development of an understanding of the theories of change which underpinned these attempts to enhance learning and teaching, and the development of different models of systemic (national) enhancement. We note this review has multiple purposes:

1. Conduct an independent review of [HEFCE's] *approach* to enhancement.
2. Provide a critical reflection on HEFCE-funded *enhancement initiatives*.
3. Provide a critical reflection on *specific* HEFCE-funded enhancement initiatives
4. Provide a critical reflection on HEFCE's *future* role in [enhancement initiatives] in the new funding and regulatory environment.
5. Assess the future enhancement needs of *the sector*.
6. Review the *options for addressing these [needs]*, including whether HEFCE should continue to have a role.
7. [Map] HEFCE's *enhancement initiatives*, their origins, aims and their legacy.
8. *Synthesize the evaluations* already undertaken.

1.4.2 What is distinctive about the Lancaster Approach?

This research complements and builds on the considerable body of evaluative and research work into Learning and Teaching policy and practice in the UK conducted from Lancaster's Department of Educational Research. These include:

- an evaluation of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (HEFCE funded) 2000-2002;
- an evaluation of the Scottish HE Quality Enhancement Framework (SFC funded) 2003-2007;
- an interim evaluation of the Centres for Excellence in Higher Education (HEFCE funded) 2007;
- research into student engagement (HEA funded and a subsequent project LFHE funded) 2010-2011;
- evaluation of the use of enhancement indicators by Scottish universities (QAA funded) 2012-13;
- an examination of pedagogic quality and inequality in undergraduate degrees (ESRC funded November 2008 – January 2012).

In brief, it combines two powerful traditions of evaluation – *utilization-focused evaluation* and *theory-based evaluation*:

- utilization-focused evaluation is well suited to the task of providing key stakeholder groups with evidence they can use to judge the value and worth of strategy for teaching quality enhancement. It takes seriously the needs of commissioners of evaluations and has a strong sense of the need that evaluations have usability. This means that outputs show stakeholders readily where improvements, adjustments, successes, problems and achievements in the strategy might lie;
- theory-based evaluation focuses on the connections between strategies and intentions. It has a firm basis in evidence but is open to unintended and unanticipated processes and outcomes. It helps to articulate the informal theories of change embedded in policy strategies and the adaptations and modifications which occur

as a policy is created in practice. Theory-based approaches also recognise the importance of a strong theoretical framework within which, in this case, change might be understood;

- critically, we have the benefit of having undertaken several evaluations of initiatives;
- an existing knowledge of the UK HE policy environment. This is built on an existing operational network of contacts with students, staff, HE managers and other key stakeholders;
- methods, concepts and tools that will provide a very useful baseline for comparing both qualitative and quantitative changes in attitudes, perceptions and experiences of the initiatives;
- experience of regularly sharing findings and provisional commentaries with a number of stakeholders.

Appendix 2: list of sources for literature review

Sources for Review of HEFCE's Enhancement Initiatives 2005-2013

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Appendix 3: interview schedule for key informants

Interview sheet and schedule for HEA/HEFCE study

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this project. It might be helpful to our meeting if you have sight in advance of the interview schedule I propose to use. These questions are designed to be a starting point for what I hope will be a fairly free-ranging discussion.

You will have had the ethical information sheet, and I hope that's all OK. I'd like to record the interview for data analysis purposes, but of course everything said will be anonymised and the recording destroyed.

We are particularly interested in HEFCE's role, past and future, in the enhancement of learning and teaching in universities. In order to draw boundaries around the review we will not be reporting on initiatives concerned with widening participation, retention, open learning and so on. So we are looking at initiatives such as the various TQEF initiatives, including CETLs, TLRP, NTFS, the HEA as well as targeted funding allocation for T&L enhancement through Support For Teaching Enhancement and Student Success (but not the retention element).

Our discussion may stray into territory which is formally outside of our remit, however. This is fine because we are also interested at a general level in the effectiveness of policies for the enhancement of learning and teaching within which HEFCE is involved. We are interested in the instruments and mechanisms through which they were effected, and so any comments you have will be relevant.

We are particularly interested in 'big' picture issues, and futures. We want to think about the question "if not HEFCE, then by what mechanism(s) should the sector be supported to improve?" We also want to think about the 'best' or 'proper' relationship between national agencies and the institutions as far as change/improvement is concerned.

Past

- What was/is your involvement in the kinds of areas we are interested in?
- How do you see the outcomes of HEFCE's initiatives in terms of what was successful?
- What do you see as the reasons for success?
- What about those that were less successful?
- Why were they less successful, from your point of view?
- Are there things that could have been done, but weren't ("missed tricks")?
- Are there ways in which reach and impact of the outcomes could have been improved?

Future

- How do you see the learning and teaching enhancement needs of the sector developing?
- What do you think might be the best way of addressing those future needs (for example the agencies involved, the strategies to be used, the application of lessons from the past)?
- Could you explain why you see it that way?
- What do you think HEFCE's role should be in the enhancement of Learning and teaching? Why?

Appendix 4: acronyms used in the report

ALDinHE: Association for Learning Development in Higher Education
ALT: Advanced Learning Technology
BME: black and minority ethnic
CEQ: Course Experience Questionnaire
CETL: Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
CLL: Changing the Learning Landscape
DVC: Deputy Vice Chancellor
FDTL: Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning
FINHEEC: Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council
FIPSE: Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education
GENIE: Genetics Education Networking for Innovation and Excellence. A Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Genetics, University of Leicester.
GuildHE: one of the two recognised representative bodies for higher education in the UK
HE: higher education
HEA: Higher Education Academy
HEI: higher education institution
HEDG: Heads of Educational Development Group
HEFCE: Higher Education Funding Council
HERE: Higher Education Research and Evaluation (Research Centre at Lancaster University)
JISC: Joint Information Systems Committee
LFFHE: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education
LTEC: Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee or Learning and Teaching Enhancement Council
LTSN: Learning and Teaching Subject Network
NSS: National Students Survey
NTFS: The National Teaching Fellowship Scheme
NUS: National Union of Students
PRES: Post Graduate Experience Survey
PTES: Post Graduate Taught Experience Survey
PVC: Pro-Vice Chancellor
QAA: Quality Assurance Agency
QEF: Quality Enhancement Framework
SCAP: Standing Conference on Academic Practice
SEDA: Staff and Educational Development Association
SPARQS: Students Participation in Quality Scotland
T&L: Teaching and Learning
TEQSA: Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
TESS: Support for Teaching Enhancement and Student Success
TLRP: The Teaching and Learning Research Programme
TQEF: The Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund
TQSC: Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (of HEFCE)
TQSE: Teaching Quality and Student Experience Committee (of HEFCE)
UKPSF: UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and the Supporting of Learning and Strategic Change
UKPSF: United Kingdom Professional Standards Framework
UUK: Universities United Kingdom. One of the two recognised representative bodies for higher education in the UK
VP: Vice Principal

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