


# Evaluation of the Enhancement Themes 2014: Final Report

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

1 This report outlines the findings of an external evaluation of the impact of Quality Enhancement Themes on teaching and learning in Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs). The evaluation was conducted by members of the Centre for Higher Education Research, Evaluation and Enhancement, Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University. It was commissioned by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) and funded by QAA Scotland.

2 Conclusions are based on data gathered via two evaluation activities, as follows.

- Interview and focus groups undertaken during visits to seven HEIs between February and May 2014, with informants ranging from 'everyday' students to Vice Principals. The sites were chosen to represent the diversity of institutions within the Scottish sector.
- Electronic questionnaires disseminated to colleagues in all of Scotland's 19 HEIs between March and April 2014, resulting in responses from 10 institutions (N = 57).

3 The report:

- builds on the evaluation of Themes undertaken in 2008 by the same team
- is informed by interim reports undertaken during this current evaluation in 2013 and 2014
- reports on the findings from the two sources identified in paragraph 2
- identifies key themes
- suggests options for the future.

## The general view of enhancement

4 For the most part, managers, middle-managers and lecturing staff agreed the following in relation to the concept of enhancement.

- It is **an ongoing process** - over three quarters of managers and lecturers felt Themes were time limited but had enduring influence. In contrast, a minority (under a quarter) felt there was not enough time to embed one Theme before the next was introduced.
- It is **aimed at inculcating a mindset** or helping to establish a culture in which professionals reflect on their practices and continually seek to improve them.
- It is **different to an audit approach**, which is seen to be backwards-looking; a checking device which focuses on 'passing or failing' and does little to encourage enhancement work.
- The use of the Enhancement Themes to help raise the profile and rewards of teaching is noteworthy.

## The Enhancement Themes: impact on practice

### Usability

5 An important consideration in the impact of Themes is in the extent to which colleagues in Scottish HEIs considered the resources and opportunities they enabled were usable and helpful.

6 Those at the highest level of the implementation staircase felt the Themes had value for practice and have undertaken a lot of work to embed Themes into institutional and departmental strategies, policies and practices.

7 Managers and lecturers across the sample agreed that there is a good sense of fit between the Themes and institutional approaches and priorities. Thus, although Themes may not necessarily reflect all of an institution's priorities, they did not appear to be running counter to institutions' overall aims.

8 The Themes were presented more in terms of alignment and synergy with institutional policy, providing context and backdrop for enhancement work, rather than as separate drivers for change

9 In general, managers reported that teaching staff were aware of the underlying philosophy of enhancement and, accordingly, the Themes, though not necessarily always familiar with the content, focus and language of them.

10 Teaching staff were reported to be aware of and demonstrated understanding of the underlying philosophy of enhancement. However, they may not always necessarily be familiar with the documentation and language of the Themes.

11 It appeared that the 'everyday' academics' experience of the Themes was largely mediated through institutional strategies and policies. For example, the Themes were re-tooled in light of institutional needs and priorities, and put into a language familiar to the staff.

### Use

12 A second consideration in the impact of Themes is in the extent to which colleagues in Scottish HEIs were able to embed the resources and opportunities into routine practices.

13 Themes were used in institutions' enhancement work:

- as a starting point for engaging colleagues in discussion and encouraging inter-disciplinary work around a common agenda
- as a checking device to ensure that course and module (re)designs and learning outcomes reflect elements of the Themes
- as a legitimising tool to support or augment the value of ongoing work, or strengthen the case for funding for pedagogical research.

14 Themes were positioned as part of a wider resource base or framework, which involved institutional strategies, accreditation stipulations from professional bodies and professional development such as PG Cert courses.

15 Although the Themes were considered an important part of a resource base or enhancement framework, some staff felt that their agendas and those of senior management teams were shaped more by harder indicators, such as KIS and NSS scores. For example, assessment and feedback emerged as a key concern in all of the HEIs, yet it appears that low NSS scores had highlighted the issues, and that the concerns tended to be around raising these scores.

## Use of specific Enhancement Themes

16 Of the various Enhancement Themes, Employability, Graduates for the 21st Century and Assessment gained the most mention from the sample. It could be argued that these highlight institutions' most salient concerns and foci for enhancement. However, as mentioned, it appears that the retention of assessment and feedback on enhancement agendas is motivated by concerns regarding low NSS scores across the sample.

17 Employability and Graduates for the 21st Century were suggested to be primary concerns for students given that many come into higher education with a specific career in mind. In addition to providing access to subject/disciplinary knowledge bases and 'academic' skills, departments had undertaken a great deal of work to embed 'real-world applicability', as well as self-reflective, meta-cognitive and interpersonal skills into their curricula. This was supplemented by cross-institutional efforts by Students' Unions/Associations and educational development units.

18 Many lecturers felt that the Developing and Supporting the Curriculum Theme had been helpful to apprise staff of the potential implications of Curriculum for Excellence in the compulsory educational sector but was too broad to engage with. Some student leaders felt that this Theme excluded their members from an input into enhancement work.

## Challenges to use

19 Although staff generally had positive attitudes to the concept of enhancement and the influence of the Enhancement Themes, intensification and lack of time were cited as barriers to engagement. For example:

- **time** - competing demands and heavy workloads
- **priority** - research-teaching disconnections
- **privilege** - enhancement involves the few, not the many
- **ownership and agenda** - whose enhancement, for what purpose?

## Student engagement

20 All HEIs stressed their commitment to student engagement in teaching and learning and, in many cases, Students' Association/Union leaders concurred. Student leaders claimed they generally felt valued and supported by managers, and felt they were an equal partner on staff-student committees.

21 Since 2008, at the time of the last evaluation, most HEIs appeared to have increased student representation on both institutional and departmental committees. There was also a number of innovative ways in which HEIs have involved students in enhancement work. One of these was employing students as researchers on projects aimed to improve teaching and learning, which, HEIs stressed, was good for these students' future employability.

22 In some HEIs there were suggestions that student representation was not as efficient as it could be.

23 Many students (who did not have a representational role) were sceptical that their feedback was acted upon or listened to. In a couple of HEIs this was explained by student leaders as a problem of communicating enhancement/innovations back to the student body, which had been addressed through, for example, poster campaigns. In others, student leaders admitted that sometimes work was not being taken forward due to changes in personnel and lack of efficient handover.

## Overview

24 The detailed analysis of the data sets within the report suggests the influence of the Thematic approach to enhancement is **profound but mediated**. It is important that the realities of these processes are understood, and that 'crude' attempts to ascribe 'impact' are resisted and this more subtle analysis holds sway. However, in most Thematic areas, the resources and activities associated with each Theme have provided important sources for teaching and learning developments both within and across HEIs in Scotland. To that extent, the strategy has been successful and the evidence of this success is clear.

25 The **theory of change** underscoring the strategy has real strengths. In summary these are:

- the use of a coordinating committee (SHEEC), including representation from all institutions and other key stakeholders from the sector, has resulted in a consensual and integrated approach to the development of Themes, with high levels of ownership in the leadership of institutions
- the design of resources that help inform institutional policies and provide resources for practice which are accessible and usable
- the use of mediators and interpreters of Themes within institutions, which enable a situated and relevant response to their messages in terms of institutional priorities
- a searchable archive of relevant and useful material, which has accumulated over time and continues to be accessed, addressing some of the problems associated with the timing of change, for example, changes can reflect institutional needs.

26 The evidence suggests that staff and students engaged in day to day teaching and learning were less likely to ascribe change or practice directly to the use of Themes, in comparison with those holding a specific quality 'brief'. However, this is to be expected as resources for policy on teaching and learning practice within institutions are mediated by important key individuals within disciplines and at institutional levels. This can be seen as part of a successful strategy in which the cadre of individuals working within institutions are part of a strong national network that is tasked with interpreting, reconstructing and situating nationally relevant resources in the realities and needs of individual HEIs.

27 Policies on assessment, employability, graduateness, and so on have their embodiments in 'front-line' practice, with the agenda shaped by Themes, mediated and translated by organisational priorities and then appearing as specific practice, taking into account the logic of disciplinary cultures. The following processes and practices are typical of the relationship between the Themes and T&L practice:

- legitimating ('doing the right thing', 'on the same page', 'moving in the right direction')
- checking ('in line with current thinking')
- procuring resources ('guidance for putting in bids for resources for T&L')
- consensual development ('working with colleagues collaboratively')
- steering ('guiding the direction of travel and development')
- space for reflection ('justifying use of time on T&L developments')

- raising the profile of T&L concerns ('providing a legitimate platform for the use of time and resources on T&L')
- planning and design ('use in validation documents')
- external and internal referencing ('being part of wider agreement on orientation and design').

28 Those directly engaged in teaching and the experience of students will translate (or reconstruct) the Thematic emphases into practice as they make decisions about what to do on a day to day basis or in terms of course reviews and new designs put forward for validation. Other drivers will be the external examining process, which will be informed by the yearly examination process.

29 Institutions were clear that student involvement in teaching and learning had been enriched and enhanced by the Themes, although, once again, these processes were mediated by the institutional, school/department and then course or modular interpretations. Our interpretation of this is not that this suggests a deficit but that this set of translations is inevitable and desirable.

30 Comparisons with the evaluation of 2008 suggest the following:

- the overall positive reception of the strategy in 2008 continues to be demonstrable in the current evaluation
- what was billed as a problem of 'the usual suspects' in 2008 is better described in the current evaluation in terms of the mediating role played by a cadre of individuals within institutions tasked with a quality enhancement brief
- the Themes have been consolidated as one of the principal sources for teaching and learning developments within institutions
- the role of students has also been consolidated although the mediating role between student representatives and the general student body is less visible
- the range of uses to which Themes are put within institutions has increased and become more embedded.

31 The issues of ownership and control on the selection of Themes have diminished in prominence. The representative nature of SHEEC, which acts as a cross institutional forum for Theme development, ensures a strong connection with institutional leaders. All institutions have mediation practices in place as we suggest in paragraph 21. This means the influence of Themes operates differently at different levels within an institution.



## Acknowledgements

The Lancaster Team would like to thank QAA Scotland and the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) for engaging us to undertake this evaluation. We thank colleagues who completed the online questionnaire, and all students, staff, and managers who gave up their time to participate in the institutional visits, often at busy times of the academic year. We are grateful to the administrative staff in each of the case study institutions who facilitated the visits despite competing demands on their time, and whose hospitality made this project an enjoyable one on which to work. Finally, thank you to Dee Daghish for her efficiency, patience and good-humour in organising the institutional visits.

# 1 Introduction

1.1.1 This report details the findings of an external evaluation of the impact of Quality Enhancement Themes on teaching and learning in Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs). The evaluation was conducted by members of the Centre for Higher Education Research, Evaluation and Enhancement, Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University. It was commissioned by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) and funded by QAA Scotland.

1.1.2 The conclusions are based on data gathered via two evaluation activities, as follows.

- Interview and focus groups undertaken during visits to seven HEIs between February and May 2014, with informants ranging from 'everyday' students to Vice Principals. The sites were chosen to represent the diversity of institutions within the Scottish sector.
- Electronic questionnaires disseminated to colleagues in all of Scotland's 19 HEIs between March and April 2014, resulting in responses from 10 institutions (N = 57).

1.1.3 The report:

- builds on the evaluation of themes undertaken in 2008 by the same team
- is informed by interim reports undertaken during this current evaluation in 2013 and 2014
- reports on the findings from the two sources identified in paragraph 1.1.2
- identifies key themes.

## 2 The context for the Quality Enhancement approach in Scottish higher education

### 2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The Quality Enhancement Themes are one of the five inter-related elements of Scotland's Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF), which was developed in 2003 through QAA Scotland working closely with the Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland and NUS Scotland to develop an enhancement-led approach to quality in the Scottish higher education sector. The Themes are supported by QAA Scotland, planned and directed through the SHEEC.

### 2.2 The Quality Enhancement Framework

2.2.1 From its inception, the QEF attempted an integrated approach in which 'enhancement' rather than 'assurance' was emphasised in its approach to the quality of university teaching and learning. This approach was welcomed by the sector as an improvement on the previous, assurance-based engagement.

2.2.2 The five dimensions of the QEF are:

- a comprehensive programme of institution-led reviews, carried out by HEIs with guidance from the Scottish Funding Council
- [Enhancement-led Institutional Review](#) - external reviews run by QAA Scotland that involve all Scottish HEIs over a four-year cycle
- improved forms of public information about quality, based on addressing the different needs of a range of stakeholders including students and employers (see the [Scottish Funding Council](#) for guidance on the public information requirements in Scotland)
- a greater voice for student representatives in institutional quality systems, supported by a new national development service - [spargs \(student participation in quality Scotland\)](#), hosted by NUS Scotland, assists and supports students, Students' Associations and institutions to improve the effectiveness of student engagement in quality processes, and provides advice to the Scottish Funding Council and institutions on good practice in student engagement
- a national programme of Enhancement Themes, managed by QAA Scotland - the programme encourages academic staff, support staff and students to share current good practice and collectively generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching.

2.2.3 From the start of the QEF, there was awareness that dissatisfaction with quality assurance processes, which was quite common in the UK (Saunders, et al., 2006, p 5), and the wish to do something different, was no guarantee that a feasible and better approach could be created. However, in Scotland, there was the advantage that their self-governing system comprised of a relatively small number of HEIs at the time. This made it possible to assemble a distinctively Scottish alternative to current quality assurance practices. Since control of higher education was located with the Scottish Assembly (now the Scottish Government) and since there was considerable interest amongst officials and agencies in the creation of a distinctively Scottish approach to quality, the scene was set for new thinking. Therefore, the QEF rests on a cultural and sectoral analysis that attempts to set itself apart from an overly managerial approach to quality management and development and build on a strong sense of appropriateness, pragmatism and collegiality.

## 2.3 The Enhancement Themes

2.3.1 In line with the overarching conceptualisation of enhancement as 'taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement' (Mayes, 2013, p 3), and building on the attributes of appropriateness, pragmatism and collegiality, the Enhancement Themes programme aims to encourage academics, support staff, and students to work collectively and actively to generate innovation in learning and teaching.

2.3.2 Enhancement Themes are planned and directed by the SHEEC, which balances its activity between aiding HEIs to form enhancement projects, to disseminating Theme outcomes and supporting HEIs in engaging with these to best meet their needs. The strategy is characterised by its focus on activity taking place 'on the ground' and by cross-sector sharing. SHEEC's role is, therefore, to create a context and framework of support for HEIs to engage in enhancement activity guided by the Theme, but broadly aligned to each HEI's needs and priorities.

2.3.3 Since 2003, the foci of the Themes have been as follows:

- Assessment (2003-04)
- Responding to Student Needs (2003-04)
- Employability (2004-06)
- Flexible Delivery (2004-06)
- Integrative Assessment (2005-06)
- The First Year: Engagement and Empowerment (2005-08)
- Research-Teaching Linkages: Enhancing Graduate Attributes (2006-08)
- Graduates for the 21st Century: Integrating the Enhancement Themes (2008-11).

2.3.4 The Theme Developing and Supporting the Curriculum ran from 2011 and is due to end in July 2014. The next Enhancement Theme, Student Transitions, was officially launched at the SHEEC conference on 12 June 2014, and will run for three years.

## 3 The evaluation approach

### 3.1 Overview

3.1.1 The evaluation aimed to gain independent evidence of the impact of the Enhancement Themes strategy on shaping teaching, learning, and support for learning in the Scottish HE sector. Drawing on accounts from key stakeholders, the overall aim of this study was to examine how the national Enhancement Themes strategy is understood and translated into practice at 'local' (institutional) levels. Its specific foci were to:

- consider whether the Themes are considered to have **usability** in addressing the needs, priorities, and concerns of policy makers and staff with regard to teaching and learning
- highlight the **use** of the Themes in enhancing teaching, learning, and support for learning
- identify **barriers** experienced by stakeholders in developing and embedding an enhancement approach in their teaching and learning practices
- capture unintended outcomes and unanticipated effects of the Enhancement Themes strategy, and to recommend how this strategy might be developed in the future.

### 3.2 Utilisation-focused evaluation

3.2.1 Our study combines 'utilisation-focused' (Patton, 2008) and 'theory-based' (Weiss, 1998) approaches to evaluation. The former ensures that the design and processes of the evaluation are negotiated with end-users, so that the outcomes will enable sponsors and other key stakeholder groups to assess the impact of the Quality Enhancement Theme strategy. In this sense, the approach and instruments used in our evaluation study were developed in consultation with members of the Enhancement team at QAA Scotland.

### 3.3 Theory-based evaluation

3.3.1 As the name suggests, theory-based evaluation connects our study to both the formal and informal theories of change inherent in policy strategies. This highlights not only a need to consider the underlying intentions and discourses of a given policy, but also to examine how these intentions and discourses may be received by stakeholders 'on the ground', and consider whether and how they impact on their social practices. Social practices are important because they are tied to the way in which people understand, gain affect from, and attach meaning to what they do in a particular locale (although this understanding may go unnoticed or remain tacit). They are, therefore, indicators of organisational cultures (Reckwitz, 2002). Thus, if practices change in a particular locale, we can infer that the underlying culture of that environment has also undergone change.

3.3.2 A policy or strategy might be conceptualised as a formal and systematic attempt to inculcate or encourage change in the practices of members of a specific culture towards a particular end. So, in this sense, the Quality Enhancement Themes strategy represents QAA Scotland's and SHEEC's attempts to change teaching and learning practices for the better in Scottish HEIs. However, change is complex in that:

- it involves challenging the way people think and feel about their organisation, norms, values, statuses, and practices (Deal and Kennedy, 1982)
- individuals within an organisation can be both recipients and agents of a change strategy.

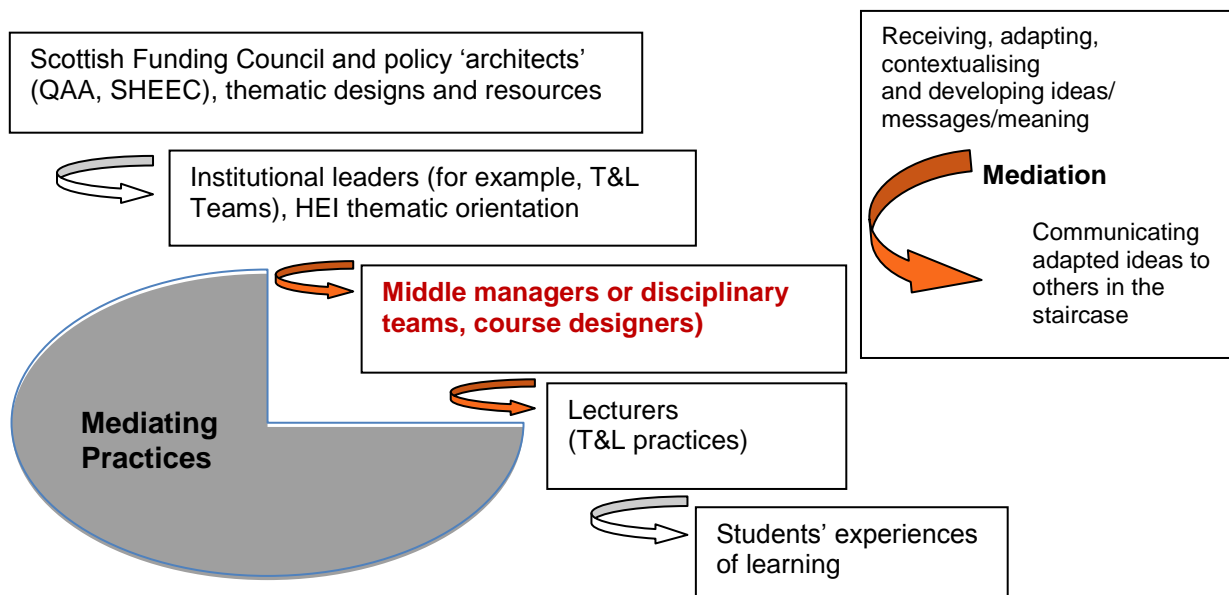
3.3.3 With regard to the latter, Reynolds and Saunders' (1987) 'implementation staircase' (Figure 1) serves as a useful theoretical model as it alerts us to how changes may occur to a particular policy or strategy as it is received, translated, modified and recreated in practice:

Policy is...expressed by different participants who exist in a matrix of differential, although not simply, hierarchic power...participants are both receivers and agents of policy and, as such, their 'production' of policy reflect priorities, pressures and interests characterising their location on an implementation staircase.  
(Reynolds and Saunders, 1987, p 44)

3.3.4 As a policy moves from one group of stakeholders to another, its original messages are modified and adapted, and so the emergent practices differ from the intentions or expectations of the policy's original architects (Trowler, 2002). While we will discuss this in more detail in Section 6, it is important to recognise that the extent to which stakeholders enact change in response to a particular policy/strategy, or the value they attribute to that policy/strategy, is likely to be mediated through their 'position' on the 'layers' or steps they occupy on the implementation staircase. Alongside disciplinary cultures, these 'layers' or steps provide individuals with a sense of professional identity and attendant norms, values and feelings.

3.3.5 In terms of this evaluation, Reynolds and Saunders' model is useful in highlighting the need to be aware of the differences between stakeholders' responses to the Themes, and the nature of the data our evaluation activity has generated. The analysis will consider whether and how different stakeholder groups emphasise different aspects of the Enhancement Theme strategy; and how they adapt, modify and 'render' the strategy in the light of their own priorities and day-to-day realities.

Figure 1. The implementation staircase as applied to Enhancement Themes



## 4 The evaluation strategy

### 4.1 Overview

4.1.1 As mentioned in paragraph 1.1.2, this report draws on two strands of data:

- questionnaires received from 57 colleagues in 10 institutions
- interview and focus groups with a wide range of stakeholders, undertaken during seven institutional visits in the spring of 2014.

4.1.2 While this report refers to data from both strands, the focus is broadly qualitative. Partially, this is because the final questionnaire sample is somewhat limited in number. Thus, other than providing data from colleagues in a broader range of HEIs, it is not possible either to state that the questionnaire responses are representative of the sector as a whole, or to subject these data to tests of statistical significance. The qualitative approach was used because we were interested in gaining detailed explanations of individuals' perceptions of how the Enhancement Themes impact (or otherwise) on their work.

### 4.2 Institutional visits

#### Sample

4.2.1 Between February and May 2014, seven Scottish HEIs were visited by members of the Lancaster team for either one or two days depending on the size of the institution. The sample was chosen to represent the diversity of institutions within the Scottish HE sector and to ensure that we covered a broad geographical spread of the country. The sample of HEIs is outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1. Sample chosen for site visits**

	Number in sector	Number visited
<b>Ancient</b>	4	1
<b>New (Post-1992)<sup>1</sup></b>	7	4
<b>Plate-glass (Post-1963)<sup>1</sup></b>	4	1
<b>Specialist</b>	4	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	19	7

#### Visit format

4.2.2 At each site, the Lancaster team engaged with a number of 'key informants': staff members and students who had been identified by institutional contacts prior to the team's visit (see paragraphs 4.2.8 and 4.2.9). Participants engaged either in focus group discussions - involving between three and 12 individuals - or in a semi-structured interview. The majority of the interviews were with individuals, although some were conducted with pairs of informants, either due to scheduling constraints or because each member of the pair had complementary job roles. In all interactions the evaluator made notes, and the majority were audio-recorded, with the key points and indicative extracts being transcribed prior to analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the date the institution was granted a Royal Charter conferring university status.



## Issues explored

4.2.3 The interviews and focus groups followed a semi-structured approach which affords participants the freedom to discuss what is meaningful to them. Despite this freedom, interviews and focus groups were also underpinned by a framework of issues the evaluation team considered worthwhile to explore. These were:

- considerations of the **concept of enhancement** as defined in Enhancement Themes policy
- **alignment** of the concept of enhancement with institutional/disciplinary/personal concerns, imperatives or priorities
- **use and usability** of the Enhancement Themes in teaching, learning, and support for learning
- perceptions of **effectiveness** of Theme-related work within the institution and in supporting/informing an individual's or a group's pedagogic practices
- **enablers and barriers** to developing and embedding enhancement
- perceived **strengths and weaknesses** of the Themes
- suggestions for **future developments** of the Enhancement Theme strategy.

4.2.4 With regard to our discussions with students, we presumed that students would have little direct knowledge of the Themes initiative, so we asked more general questions about their experiences of teaching and learning in their subject areas, from which we might infer evidence of enhanced practice. Areas explored with students included:

- pedagogies and tutor styles
- opportunities for work-based learning
- support and resources for learning, such as library, information technology provision and virtual learning environments
- careers advice and guidance
- student representation
- opportunities to feed back on their experiences.

## The semi-structured approach

4.2.5 Although the direction of both the interviews and the focus groups was shaped by a schedule of questions (see Appendix 3 for schedules), the loose, semi-structured nature of these aimed to encourage participants to provide their own interpretations of 'enhancement' and give insights into whether and how an enhancement approach was embodied in their teaching and learning practices.

4.2.6 The advantages of a semi-structured approach in the context of this evaluation were that they:

- allowed participants to use their own words to describe what is meaningful to them, hence circumventing the constraints of predetermined response categories, which is an issue with questionnaire-based studies
- permitted the evaluator to ensure questions were interpreted in the way they were intended and to probe for further details
- provided participants with opportunities to take discussions in their own directions, thus capturing a range of understandings of, engagement with, and meanings attached to the enhancement agenda and the Enhancement Themes.

4.2.7 In addition, the 'implementation staircase' model highlights how policy responses are shaped, created, sustained and changed by dialogues which are specific to groups within an organisation. These responses are informed by the location individuals and groups

occupy within an organisation; the sense of power (or powerlessness) they feel this location affords them; and perceptions of the 'goodness of fit' between the policy's recommendations, their conceptualisations of professionalism and the meanings attached to belonging to an 'academic tribe' or disciplinary community (Becher and Trowler, 2001; Trowler, Saunders, and Bamber, 2012). Thus, the focus groups aimed to provide a means through which the evaluator might access these dialogues as participants constructed, co-constructed, and negotiated their positions in response to the enhancement agenda and the Enhancement Themes. Open questions such as what participants feel is involved in the 'enhancement' of teaching and learning, and whether students' expectations of HE have changed in the last few years, resulted in thoughtful, interesting and often candid dialogues with managers, teaching staff and student representatives in our sample.

### **Informants: interviewees**

4.2.8 Face-to-face interviews were undertaken with personnel in key positions: those at senior management level with institutional quality enhancement responsibilities, such as Vice Principals for Learning and Teaching. We also interviewed directors of quality, student support services and educational development units; Students' Association/Union officers with a remit for education, welfare or quality; and other key personnel identified by institutional contacts as useful sources of information.

### **Informants: focus group participants**

4.2.9 Faculty/school management teams<sup>2</sup>, teaching staff and students were invited to share their perspectives on enhancement through focus group discussions. We held separate focus groups with middle-managers and then with teaching practitioners within each subject area. Institutions were asked to nominate teaching staff with no formal quality or enhancement remit beyond their own pedagogical duties, however, it was evident in some HEIs that some lecturers had been chosen because they had a specific enhancement brief or were 'enhancement champions' within their institution.

4.2.10 As staff and students either volunteered or were nominated by their institution to participate, and moreover because their participation was voluntary, the Lancaster team could influence, though not determine, the final size of each group. The focus groups ranged in size from between three and ten individuals. Dependent on the time constraints on the HEIs, and/or the size of the institution, the composition of the groups varied, as follows.

- Focus groups in the three larger institutions involved staff, middle-managers or students from two faculties or schools grouped by disciplinary similarities. For example, social scientists and humanities participants were grouped together, as were those in areas with a focus on professional practice in their teaching and learning, such as nursing, social work, and education.
- In two smaller institutions staff members engaged in single-discipline focus groups, while student groups were drawn from across all faculties/schools.
- Focus group participants in the small specialist institution (academic staff, middle managers and students) were drawn from across the specialisms of that institution.
- In one multi-campus HEI, a total of five focus groups occurred with managers, middle managers, and staff and students from diverse academic disciplines, with some participants joining the group via video conferencing.

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<sup>2</sup> The terms 'middle management' and 'middle managers' refer to individuals in roles such as Associate Dean, and heads of academic departments, schools or sections. 'Senior managers' refers to those in institutional management roles, such as Vice Principals, or the head of a professional service, such as careers or student support.

## 4.3 Questionnaire study

### Rationale

4.3.1 In addition to the site visits, between March and April 2014 the Lancaster team ran an anonymous online questionnaire, designed using SNAP software<sup>3</sup>. The aim of this questionnaire was to generate data on the Themes from colleagues in a broader range of Scotland's HEIs. Hence, members of SHEEC who worked within HEIs were asked to disseminate the questionnaire link to staff with responsibilities for:

- Quality Assurance/Enhancement
- Educational Development
- Student Support
- departmental/school/section management
- learning and teaching within departments/schools/sections.

4.3.2 The questionnaire sought data from colleagues on:

- their conceptualisations of 'enhancement'
- whether/how Enhancement Themes have informed institutional approaches towards enhancing student learning
- enablers and barriers to the embedding of enhancement and the Enhancement Themes in institutional policies and practices.

4.3.3 A facsimile of the online questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix 2.

### Sample details

4.3.4 A total of 57 questionnaires were returned by colleagues in 10 institutions, representing three Ancient, four New and two Specialist institutions. No questionnaires were returned from any of the four Plate-glass institutions in Scotland. In addition, while a key aim was to generate data from institutions not involved in the site visits, we received questionnaires from colleagues in three of the seven institutions we visited. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the questionnaire sample by institutional type.

**Table 2. Questionnaire respondents by institution type**

	(N)	Per cent
<b>Ancient</b>	21	37 <sup>4</sup>
<b>New</b>	29	51
<b>Plate-glass</b>	0	0
<b>Specialist</b>	7	12
<b>Total</b>	57	100

<sup>3</sup> More information about Snap Surveys is available at: [www.snapsurveys.com](http://www.snapsurveys.com)

<sup>4</sup> All questionnaire percentages have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

4.3.5 The majority of the sample (56 per cent, N = 32) have been in post for five or more years; 50 per cent of these hold an academic post involving teaching and research. Fifty-eight per cent (N = 33) of questionnaire respondents have 'academic' roles, 70 per cent of whom (N = 23) engage in both teaching and research functions as part of their contract. Of the remainder 19 per cent (N = 11), worked in administration or management; 11 per cent (N = 6) in educational development; and five per cent (N = 3) in a student advisory role. Four respondents (seven per cent) stated they worked in 'other' areas.

## 4.4 Analytic strategies

### Questionnaire

4.4.1 Questionnaire data were analysed using SPSS and data summaries (frequencies and percentages) were produced. Initially, we intended to undertake a deeper analysis of these data, cross-tabulating responses by institution type or job role and subjecting the data to tests of statistical significance such as chi-squared analyses of association. After some deliberation and because the relatively low response rate resulted in unreliable test statistics, it was decided to abandon this approach and present the questionnaire findings as a 'snapshot' of individuals' opinions across the sector. This 'snapshot' comes with a caveat that we cannot claim that the data are representative of the opinions of academics and managers in HEIs across Scotland as a whole, but they are offered as they are indicative of some important preoccupations and a range of experience.

### Qualitative data

4.4.2 The interviews and focus groups from the institutional visits generated a considerable quantity of rich data which were categorised and analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Preliminary themes were noted for each response in all of the transcriptions. The themes emerging within each institution were cross-compared to identify consistencies and potential tensions in dialogues about enhancement. This involved, for example, assessing whether Vice Principals, management teams and lecturers within the same department shared the same 'language' of, or had qualitatively different 'takes' on, enhancement. Secondly, data emerging from our evaluation activities generated with stakeholders on a particular 'step' of the implementation staircase were compared against those from those occupying the same 'step' in other institutions. This permitted a broader analysis of how the Themes were received, (re)interpreted and used by colleagues occupying different 'steps' across the sector as a whole.

4.4.3 In the presentation of the data, verbatim quotes are used to illustrate the points raised. As informants were promised anonymity, any references that might identify particular people or institutions have been omitted.

## 5 Conceptualisations of enhancement

### 5.1 Overview

5.1.1 It is, perhaps, testament to the longevity and resilience of the idea of 'enhancement' and its accompanying discourse in Scotland that managers, middle-managers and lecturing staff across both samples broadly agreed on what enhancement involves, and recognised the positive contribution this agenda has made to teaching and learning in the Scottish HE sector.

5.1.2 Four key themes emerged from the qualitative data in respect of how participants viewed 'enhancement' at its most general level. Enhancement is viewed as being:

- **student-centred**
- **an on-going process**
- **aimed at inculcating a mindset**
- **different to an audit approach.**

5.1.3 The discussion of these themes integrates the data and is enlivened by the use of illustrative quotes throughout.

### 5.2 Student-centeredness

5.2.1 Enhancement focuses on actively improving teaching, learning, and outcomes for a diverse body of students. In our evaluation, an overwhelming majority (95 per cent) of questionnaire respondents agreed that enhancement was concerned with 'improving the way we teach students'. Furthermore, 77 per cent and 72 per cent respectively agreed that enhancement should result in improved achievement and in efficiencies in assessment and course delivery.

5.2.2 During the institutional visits, a commitment to improving students' experiences and involvement in decisions made about their learning was particularly evident. A member of an educational development team (Post-1992 HEI) commented that 'enhancement' comprised 'high quality education delivered by excellent staff in partnership with students', which lecturers in a different Post-1992 institution felt meant 'raising the bar' for students who had previously been overlooked by their HEI's focus on meeting the needs of widening participation students.

5.2.3 Despite some concerns about the timeliness and focus of student course evaluation mechanisms, student-centeredness was also evident across all HEIs in how lecturing staff took account of student feedback in changes to pedagogy, module options and course structures. In a number of HEIs, students were positioned as 'equal partners' on university and programme-level committees (Students' Union, Post-1992), and 'co-creators of the curriculum' (Students' Union, Specialist; Lecturer, Post-1992). Interestingly, in the Plate-glass institution and in one Post-1992 institution, lecturers reported their students were experiencing 'survey fatigue' as the HEI was constantly surveying them for feedback.

5.2.4 Elsewhere in the qualitative study, the understanding of student-centeredness was broadened to ensuring students graduate from Scottish HEIs with, as one lecturer (Ancient) suggested, 'skills that are fit for purpose', particularly for those going on to careers in business or non-academic sectors. According to this lecturer, an 'enhanced' higher education:

...[introduces] our students to the disciplines that they're studying and also the wider reaching...elements that being trained in these disciplines deliver...that they're not subconscious [sic] of.

5.2.5 This sentiment was echoed by the Vice Principal responsible for teaching and learning at one of the four Post-1992 institutions we visited:

...to come to this word 'enhance', I guess that at its simplest level, I would see that the experience that the students have is qualitatively better than it would have been had these initiatives not been undertaken and the technical and personal and interpersonal skills are attributes that a student has or acquires...therefore positioning themselves more advantageously for their subsequent studies or careers...[It involves] greater awareness of the context in which those [technical] skills are being practised and make students more likely to think about ethical issues around their particular profession than they may otherwise have done.

5.2.6 Comments from lecturers in the three other Post-1992 institutions highlight that student-centred learning need not always accord with the students' views of what is interesting, enjoyable or worthwhile. In respect of the 'skills' question raised, one lecturer recalled a graduate who had stated her students had loathed group assessments, yet this graduate conceding that the difficulties in 'forcing' other group members to achieve a 'successful outcome' had provided skills from which they had benefitted in the workplace.

5.2.7 This was echoed by middle-managers on a degree course for budding health professionals in a second Post-1992 institution. In order to prepare students with skills necessary for their proposed professions, the department replaced lectures with simulation exercises on diagnosis and prescription, and altered assessments to model the report-writing undertaken in the health professions. Once again, student feedback expressed vehement opposition to these changes, though on reflection, many conceded these were beneficial learning experiences.

5.2.8 In the third institution, a lecturer noted that although student feedback on their learning was valuable, this should be tempered with an understanding that they are not always qualified to make decisions:

...the students sometimes imagine that even in a professional context, that they know as much as we do or that they are able to influence decisions which to me are academic decisions...We should be the judge of whether this is a good module for them...whereas they would say, 'well I'm never going to use this'.... We only get one or two, but the attitude is that 'the reasons you are doing this is because this is an accredited course, it's meeting this standard, this is what they require you to have'...It seems to me that's the flipside of them having an input, don't get me wrong...it's getting that balance and sometimes we get it right, and I think sometimes we go too far the other way.

5.2.9 Finally, lecturers in two of the Post-1992 institutions noted that enhancing student-centeredness was also tied to enhancing lecturer skills and confidence to try new approaches or work with new educational technologies. As will be seen in Section 8, lecturers and their management teams across all institutions (and also in the questionnaire) felt that lack of time and job intensification were barriers to this, and one Post-1992 lecturer focus group felt that a future Enhancement Theme should focus specifically on staff development and staff agendas.

### 5.3 An ongoing process

We regularly think about the material we're delivering, the way we're delivering it, how appropriate our assessment is...how all of these processes can be improved.  
(Lecturer, Ancient)

I see it as continual, not as a discrete: 'now we're doing curriculum, and next week we're doing partnership'.  
(Vice Principal, Plate-glass)

It's healthy that there's a culture around [Enhancement Themes]...that they're not seen as doing the job once, that's it, let's move on...Assessment...for the majority of us it is still a major area where we have to do better.  
(Vice Principal, Plate-glass)

5.3.1 Another strand of the understanding of enhancement was focused on the evolution of practices. In this sense, enhancement is something that is never complete. Firstly, this is because the outcomes of certain approaches or initiatives will take time to materialise and will require further reflection as to their relative value.

Academic processes have long time scales. In academia you don't change the world overnight...and we have to be realistic...but if we can move things forward... Graduate attributes is a great example...those three Themes probably span something like four or five years.  
(Vice Principal, Ancient)

5.3.2 Secondly, innovations in academic disciplines, pedagogy and educational technology, coupled with emerging economic and political agendas, and the demands of an increasingly diverse student population, will bring with them new challenges to which institutions will be required to develop solutions.

There's been a marked shift in terms of student expectations and, at undergraduate level, family expectations...the experience overall and, therefore, the challenge for the university to meet those expectations; and also dealing with when things...didn't meet those expectations. The view is that there is a duty to develop and enhance. The HE sector is having to keep up with those expectations, because I think they are almost going ahead of us....  
(Educational Developer, Plate-glass)

[Enhancement is]...also something about preparing young people for university study and this is where I'm trying to get a better understanding of Curriculum for Excellence. The philosophy sounds so good. What we'll be seeing in the next few years, if this is all correct, is a different young person, with the sets of skills that we would like them to have now in relation to self-directed learning, potential for...graduateness, whatever that means, but absolutely about being self-directed and knowing where they want to go.  
(Lecturer, Post-1992)

5.3.3 Of importance is that the enhancement approach does not necessarily infer that a gap or dearth of existing good practice needs addressing (although a minority of lecturers in some institutions had interpreted it in this way). In the main, enhancement was viewed as additive; maintaining, augmenting and celebrating good practice with an eye to the future:

...what enhancement means is staff are really saying...'yes, we do all that, but this is a world that's moving forward, we should be moving forward too...looking for



opportunities to make the student learning experience a better one'.  
(Vice Principal, Ancient)

5.3.4 In a number of institutions, the idea of enhancement as ongoing was also tied into the way in which the discrete Enhancement Themes are now seen more as parts of an ongoing, cumulative whole, and not having a 'shelf life'. These factors were somewhat misinterpreted in the earliest days of the strategy:

I do feel it's more integrated now, to have an idea of a Theme that's running for three years with a range of strands rather than a...Ferris wheel of we're doing this, and that's stopped and we're already moving on to this next topic, I think in the early years it was difficult to keep up. Whereas this...it feels more integrated than trying to pick the links between the Themes and how you're seeing it as a general framework that you're working within.  
(Educational Developer, Plate-glass)

5.3.5 Recognition that enhancement is ongoing also provides institutions with confidence that work undertaken in relation to a specific Enhancement Theme continues to have value beyond the lifespan of that Theme:

It's healthy that there's a culture around them that they're not seen as doing the job once, that's it, let's move on...assessment...for the majority of us it is still a major area where we have to do better.  
(Vice Principal, Post-1992)

Enhancement Themes are there for slightly longer...and...they're very much driven by what's going on, so looking at assessment and feedback at the moment is something that's coming through the NSS...the ISB, the student barometer and it's across all institutions. It's something that to then say...'we've got this Enhancement Theme around assessment and feedback, you're preaching to the converted'; people realise there are things that can be improved and are very keen to...almost be given an excuse and a bit of structure to then focus on those...it's not every couple of months you've got a new initiative coming through, you've got time to build up a bit of a head of steam.  
(Lecturer, Ancient)

I don't believe the Themes have a shelf-life; I think it would be wrong to think of them as time limited. They're time-limited in the sense that they only remain as Themes on SHEEC's agenda for a certain time...but this to me is a bit like the student journey through our university; it's part of a continuum. So we will engage with a Theme through whatever funding strand happens to be going at a time, but the reality is that the work that we'll do internally will probably have started before and continue beyond it. And it may well be that we pick up some of the materials that came out of the Theme a few years later and actually apply them internally...  
(Vice Principal, Ancient)

5.3.6 Although there was broad support for enhancement, some lecturers and middle-managers expressed concern that the ongoing nature of enhancement could engender 'constant change to show that you are enhancing where this may not actually be necessary' (Lecturer, Post-1992), and that the changing focus of the Themes might not provide time for staff to bed previous enhancement work into practice. A minority of lecturers felt that having to enhance continually was an exercise in hoop-jumping, tied to the feeling that enhancement may be audit by another name, which will be discussed further in Section 5.5. Illustrative quotes which embody this view are as follows:



The problem people have, is that they perform. They go through one hoop and then you jump through another one, and then they build another...and a certain kind of process exhaustion it leads to, you know, you can't keep highering [sic] the goal posts.... And if it is still to have validity and people to take ownership and very often...you're already starting with people on your side, so it's very sad if somewhere along that process you lose goodwill, that people become dispirited and demotivated and despondent, because it's never ever quite good enough.  
(Lecturer, Plate-glass)

Every year we are jumping through a different hoop, in [subject area] we've got [the professional bodies] added onto that...there's the SQA [Scottish Qualifications Authority] and there's the ELIR, the REF.... It seems like there is never a year when we're just teaching the kids; there's always this thing where a big percentage of the time is focused on making sure that we're actually doing what we say we're doing. When you spend so much time proving that you are doing your job, it actually takes you away from doing your job, it just can't possibly make any sense.  
(Lecturer, Specialist)

## 5.4 Inculcating a mindset

5.4.1 A key aim of the enhancement strategy, particularly as it was interpreted by senior managers, is to raise the profile of and encourage reflection on teaching and learning. In some institutions, teaching and learning have tended to be afforded a lower priority than research, particularly with the activity around the recent Research Excellence Framework (REF). Thus, the enhancement agenda has been welcomed as a means of restoring the balance:

One thing I find really refreshing...is that it has forced us to put students and teaching more at the centre, whereas in the past...it was all about, 'you've got to be more efficient; teaching's got to be done as efficiently as possible.' Well, but... we've got to spend a lot of time bringing in grants and writing and REF, and the REF obsession took over.... And now it is actually, the thing I do like about all this, is it does...put teaching back at the sort of key part of what we do.  
(Lecturer, Plate-glass)

5.4.2 In addition, rather than just merely consider efficiencies in teaching (which in the context of this lecturer's discussion referred to personnel and resourcing issues), the enhancement agenda was viewed as a means of encouraging academic staff to think more creatively and reflectively on pedagogical processes:

Part of it's a mindset; it's about getting staff to see teaching as more than a mechanical process...it's to get them to reflect on practices, to get them to think about how through that reflection, they can identify areas for improvement.  
(Vice Principal, Ancient)

I have...been addressing some of the structural...pedagogic...assessment issues and I think what I've noticed is...that academics do need the stimulus of a programmatic or a thematic approach to things just for that discourse to develop... it gets people talking about things that they're not normally talking about.  
(Vice Principal, Plate glass)

5.4.3 In general, lecturers positioned enhancement as good practice; it was considered common sense or something a good lecturer would already be doing as part of their day-to-day activity. This discourse was evident across all institutions, especially in lecturers'

responses to questions about the 'goodness of fit' between the Enhancement Themes and their own concerns for professional development.

It makes solid sense, so why would we not, even if there had never been any Enhancement Themes, not been attempting to deliver on these things?  
(Lecturer, Ancient)

...you might find that a lot of your practices are following these [Enhancement] Themes and you've used them, but you're not aware of it.  
(Lecturer, Post-1992)

5.4.4 It was recognised by participants across the institutions, however, that not all colleagues were as engaged as others in enhancing teaching and learning (more of which later); or that some lacked the necessary skills or pedagogical knowledge to go about this. In this sense, professional development courses such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education were cited as valuable, while the QEF and Enhancement Themes were considered to push 'teaching and learning up the agenda' (Lecturer, Ancient).

One of the things that the Enhancement Theme approach and a lot of the other dimensions of the QAA process...ELIR and things like that, what they do is they actually create a common language which is usable whether it's in the science group or the philosophy group and it's a common language around learning and pedagogy and assessment, which is extremely helpful because that certainly was never there 20, 25 years ago.  
(Vice Principal, Plate-glass)

5.4.5 Across the qualitative sample, participants spoke of a 'growing confidence' (middle manager, Post-1992) of academics in engaging in discussion facilitated, as the extract in paragraph 5.4.4 suggests, by a 'common language' inherent in the enhancement strategy. In addition, the perceived openness and collaborative approaches fostered both within and across institutions, and events such as QAA workshops, were seen as positive enablers for enhancing teaching and learning. However, it was recognised particularly by senior managers that starting these conversations and developing pedagogically-focused cultures are:

...not something you do overnight; it's something you do over time.  
(Vice Principal, Ancient)

5.4.6 As will be noted in Section 8, although the Themes provide a good 'jumping off point' for discussion or innovation around pedagogical matters (Lecturer, Post-1992), there are some barriers to enhancement activity that may impede innovation and may prevent these cultures extending beyond a select few.

## 5.5 Different to an audit approach

5.5.1 A further, important component of an enhancement 'mindset' is to move academics and institutions away from viewing initiatives such as this in terms of audit and accountability, to a culture that encourages and rewards innovative practice.

Many colleagues who had experience of the system in England, compared the Scottish sector more favourably, suggesting that QAA England's approach was more about accountability and checking, and thus counter to the spirit and motivation to enhance.

5.5.2 For managers, 'enhancement' is a more 'helpful' term as it focuses activity on continual improvement. Thus, as intimated earlier, enhancement is qualitatively different from audit which is retrospective, judgemental and focused on collecting data to assess whether targets and outcomes have been achieved. Instead, enhancement was viewed as being more holistic, inclusive and positive. As the Vice Principal for Teaching and Learning in the Ancient institution commented, the enhancement agenda has led the sector to move away:

...from a culture of tight...control, academic control that audit maybe forces or encourages to a much more discursive...more open culture where we actually say...'Maybe we don't do that as well as we could, how can we do it better?'... There's much more of a discussion of how you can move things forward.

5.5.3 The more positive 'tone' of enhancement is exemplified in the following excerpt where a Post-1992 Vice Principal discusses the recent revision of his institution's academic course review process:

...the most critical part of it being departments' forward-look in terms of 'these are the directions which we want to go in'...Deliberately, the process was intended to be focused around broad changes that would enhance...with the end-point from the self-evaluation being a reflection on forward directions...[not] a definitive action... to give more room for manoeuvre....

5.5.4 A middle manager in another Post-1992 also noted that enhancement approaches may set in motion a virtuous circle of activity. However, he also recognised that, somewhere along the line, communicating the effectiveness or value of this activity would require an evidence base. Two potentially negative implications of this were noted by interviewees. Firstly, a middle-manager in one Post-1992 institution suggested that having to evidence enhancement may prevent staff members from engaging in innovative teaching and learning developments, as innovation carries with it the risk of failure. A Students' Union representative from the same institution echoed this by saying that while staff should be given the space to innovate, there needed to be assurances that students' learning was not compromised. Secondly, without careful consideration, the need to evidence enhancement could take institutions back to an appraisal or audit culture:

There is a lot of monitoring and evaluation of enhancement, sometimes you can be too caught up in the monitoring process and there is a danger that the monitoring becomes the focus of the enhancement.

5.5.5 In respect of this latter point, some middle managers and lecturers felt that this had already happened. For them, the way in which the enhancement agenda had been interpreted and formalised into institutional strategy had already strayed into audit territory.

However once it has been taken on it can become a tick-box exercise; it becomes about accountability or something we feel we have to do. Good practice is currently shared within the faculty but some of it does become tick-box. Quality assurance is not equalled to quality enhancement; the latter would ease the audit trail approach, but in some circumstances this has not occurred and the potential of enhancement has been obfuscated by audit.

(Middle-manager, Plate-glass)

5.5.6 As a middle manager in another Post-1992 institution suggested, an enhancement culture should not be geared towards measurement and staff accountability; it should be based on confidence, trust, and collegiality. It appears however that these laudable sentiments, which are echoed in the Enhancement Themes literature (see Mayes, 2013), are in tension with other performative markers of 'quality' such as Key Indicator Sets and the NSS. Such tensions were also commented upon by a Vice Principal, new to the role in a Post-1992 institution. This Vice Principal argued that a less audit-led approach would free up time for improving teaching and learning:

I think...an overemphasis on compliance and, to some extent, pointless exercises, and the reason I say sometimes they're pointless, because [of] the timing of them... Signing off annual reports that's...too long into the past, you can't possibly inform where you are; there's not an immediacy to it. But we have this huge effort around QA and demonstrating we've done things, and again I've said to colleagues, 'maybe we do need to look at this. We've got our ELIR next year, so this is timely, so there's a real opportunity, let's just reflect on what we're doing'...If we stopped doing all of that and simply ask ourselves a couple of questions, what have we done to enhance the student experience, what have we done to innovate, and can we ask it mid-year so we can influence things this year, not what we did last year...if we can just ask more direct...more pertinent questions in a more timely manner and act more quickly, maybe then everyone would benefit.

## 6 The Enhancement Themes: impact on practice

### 6.1 Usability and use

6.1.1 Drawing on the work of Saunders (2012), 'usability' and 'use' refer to the interaction between the organisational environment in which a policy or strategy is being developed or deployed, and the design and tone of the policy or strategy. Both these features interact to determine the extent to which a device like the Enhancement Themes can create effects by changing practices.

6.1.2 Usability refers to whether a policy or strategy is written and presented in such a way that it maximises its potential use (as described in Section 6.2). It refers to whether the design and tone of the policy/strategy message assures HEIs that its directives are broadly aligned to the aims, current practices, and/or organisational cultures of each institution.

6.1.3 The way the Themes will be used will depend on the capacity of potential users to see positive use scenarios in the messages the Themes might contain. Use is the degree to which the Themes provide knowledge resources for new practices to arise. HEIs who either recognise the benefits of using a particular Theme, or whose practices are flexible enough to respond to new knowledge (where some of it may be problematic), are better placed to respond to the Theme and use it to shape practice. Use refers to the capacity of an HEI (in an organisational or systemic sense) to respond to the resources associated with a Theme.

### 6.2 Usability of the Enhancement Themes

6.2.1 A running theme within this report is a general sense that the Enhancement Themes strategy connects with institutions' priorities for development and has value in resourcing learning and teaching initiatives. This can be either as a starting point, checking device or a legitimising tool. For example, in the questionnaire study, 81 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Themes 'address important issues' regarding Learning Teaching and Assessment, with 61 per cent agreeing there was a good sense of fit between the Themes and their institutions' priorities.

6.2.2 In the visits, managers and lecturers agreed that there is a good sense of fit between the Themes and their institutional approaches and priorities. Although Themes did not always necessarily reflect the most salient or current priorities of each institution, they did not run counter to institutions' overall aims. The general mood of positivity towards the Enhancement Themes, and thus inferences of their usability, is summarised by the following comment:

Emphatically, I find them a very important, valuable factor...they are more than a resource...Without exception, all of the individual Themes are...focusing on... big things that are relevant and topical to HE today...they serve a very important function in actually putting these big things on the institutional agendas keeping them there...The fact they're associated with QAA, while they're separate...does give them a legitimacy...they do create an expectation...an institution should be expected to know they exist and at least have a view on some of the big issues. (Vice Principal, Post-1992)

6.2.3 In addition to the overarching foci of the Themes aligning with what stakeholders in HEIs feel is important or valuable, the Themes' usability appeared to be heightened by the following:

- outputs and supporting documentation available on the website tend to be practice-focused and avoided jargon
- the 'tone' of enhancement is more positive and developmental than audit (see Section 5.5) and is thus more palatable and saleable to frontline staff
- the three year timescale facilitates time to develop, implement, and begin to consider the value of activity
- Themes were broad enough to support a range of enhancement activities that connect with the priorities of institutional, departmental, and programme teams (however Developing and Supporting the Curriculum was considered by some staff to be too broad and difficult to engage with).

## 6.3 Use of the Enhancement Themes

### Overview

6.3.1 Across both samples, there was clear evidence that the Enhancement Themes were being used to shape policy and enrich teaching and learning practices in Scottish institutions. In the questionnaire study, five per cent felt that the Themes had no impact on the practices of frontline academics; while between one-third and one-fifth report that the Themes have a 'limited' impact on all categories of staff.

6.3.2 In the main, sizeable proportions of the questionnaire sample felt that the Themes had some impact on the work of educational developers (42 per cent), student support (44 per cent), and learning resource staff such as librarians or web developers (37 per cent). However, few felt that the Themes influence 'highly' the practices of their colleagues: this ranged from four per cent in student support, to 28 per cent in educational development.

6.3.3 As far as 'frontline' academics were concerned, five per cent of questionnaire respondents claimed that the Themes had no impact; 15 per cent felt that Themes were 'highly' influential; while the majority (54 per cent) felt it had 'some' impact on academics' practices. Picking up on this point, interviewees and focus group participants (irrespective of role), reported that though teaching staff would be aware of the underlying philosophy of enhancement and may already be engaged in enhancement activity, they may not always necessarily be familiar with the documentation and language of the Themes:

...you might find that a lot of your practices are following these Themes, and you've used them but you're not aware of it.  
(Lecturer, Post-1992)

I'm not certain that the research-teaching linking Quality Enhancement Theme drove research-teaching linkages; I think...we were aware of this being an important part of the education that we provide for our students, long before that particular Enhancement Theme was publicised.  
(Middle manager, Plate-glass)

6.3.4 One explanation for this links back to the discussion highlighted in paragraph 5.4.3, that many academic staff viewed enhancement activity as common sense or something a good lecturer should already be doing. Another explanation, in line with Reynolds and Saunders' (1987) 'implementation staircase' model, is that 'everyday' academics' access to and use of the Themes tends to be largely mediated through institutional strategies and policies:

Many people...wouldn't necessarily understand that a lot internal...processes have been shaped by the Themes...and they will see it as the way...[institution] works but wouldn't necessarily know what has influenced them.  
(Vice Principal, Post-1992)

6.3.5 We return to this latter discussion in Section 6.7.

6.3.6 Data generated in the two studies identify three ways in which Enhancement Themes are used in shaping institutions' learning and teaching practices:

- a **starting point** for engaging colleagues in discussion - involving consensual development, establishing networks and raising the profile of teaching and learning
- a **checking device** - use in planning and design of curricular components, guiding the direction of travel
- a **legitimising tool** - justifying use of time and resources on teaching and learning developments.

### A starting point for engaging colleagues in discussion

6.3.7 The Enhancement Themes were positioned as a good foundation for encouraging inter-disciplinary work around a common agenda, and acting as a forum for sharing good practice. In the questionnaire, 79 per cent agreed that the Themes provide opportunities for sharing good practice, while in the qualitative study participants often espoused the belief that enhancement opened up dialogues across individual HEIs and the sector as a whole. This was seen to be beneficial as it permitted learning from colleagues and building networks that transcend institutional and disciplinary boundaries and cultures:

Enhancement Themes and that whole enhancement process is about not just creating the internal language but bringing...that language from outside, creating that sectoral base on which any institution can connect and then filter it around.  
(Vice Principal, Plate-glass)

It gives you a...good starting point for engaging other colleagues in discussion. You can start a conversation, 'okay the Enhancement Theme at the moment is x, y or z', and it can start off a conversation. It's also a way that we can reach out to other people at other...institutions, again under the auspices of that particular Theme. And when we have time...you can go along to the conferences, you can go to the workshops and, again, you can make lots of cross-disciplinary contacts that you wouldn't necessarily make.  
(Lecturer, Ancient)

6.3.8 The Ancient institution's commitment to learning from other HEIs was echoed by its Vice Principal, and by the Vice Principal of a Post-1992 institution. The latter was among a number of colleagues who stated that the Themes had helped - alongside Scotland's relatively small size HE sector - to build a sectoral culture that felt more collegiate and less competitive than that 'south of the border'. This Vice Principal's thoughts are in the second of the following two extracts:

What we get...from the Enhancement Themes is...some reinforcement of an institutional priority area but...more importantly, we get a good external perspective in terms of what we're doing and it helps us to evaluate...the approach we're taking.... What we tend to do is, we tend to ensure...the Themes are related to that, so that we can connect the staff to individuals in other institutions and to the events that run as part of the Enhancement Themes that will benefit them in the work that they're doing.  
(Vice Principal, Ancient)



I think the Themes do have a significant role in creating expectations and involving...a collective dimension. I certainly feel a responsibility to the Themes to get involved to learn from them, to contribute to them and I sense that in other colleagues. We can meet up from other universities and we will know broadly what we're doing, we can actually share what we're doing; you can drop an email and say 'what are you doing about this?' and it is routine to actually get a copy of the individual process or procedure...there is a willingness to share and celebrate and share both problems and solutions in quite a constructive manner.  
(Vice Principal, Ancient)

## A checking device

6.3.9 Intra-institutional and cross-institutional collaborations plus the documentation and case studies on the Enhancement Themes website were considered useful resources for those involved in designing, revising or evaluating the quality of courses. Theme-related resources helped institutional policy makers and curriculum designers to ensure they were 'on the same page' or 'moving in the right direction' as others in the sector:

When we revise [courses]...I certainly look at the QAA, what's the priorities and sometimes it's not actually changing the module; it's putting different things in the module guide and emphasising that...[course title] is great for helping build global citizens...it's just how you frame things.  
(Lecturer, Post-1992)

When we were developing our 2011 curriculum...then we utilised a lot of the Enhancement Theme evidence to support what we doing within the curriculum, and also took notice of what was coming up in development in relation to Curriculum for Excellence and how was that going to affect the curriculum with the up and coming school leavers...so from that point of view it's a great reference source.  
(Middle manager, Plate-glass)

I found it quite helpful when you were having to look at the process to make sure that you were on track...when you were doing your reviews, but day to day stuff, probably not so much.  
(Lecturer, Post-1992)

6.3.10 In the specialist institution, middle managers indicated that Theme activity and related cross-sector networks provided them with an awareness of ways of doing things that differ from, though could augment, their institution's specialised pedagogies, particularly with respect to work placements and the employability agenda. This was echoed by the senior management team of a relatively recently established university who felt the Themes had eased their transition from a predominantly further education (FE) based institution, to a secure and confident provider of higher education. The managers of this institution considered the Themes website as a 'go to' site as it was helpful to see how other HEIs were approaching a particular issue. However, they did suggest that the Enhancement Themes site might provide direct links to other institutions' web pages on these issues so they could gain additional details.

6.3.11 Similarly, middle-managers of a Nursing programme in a Post-1992 institution explained that the Themes initiative was particularly useful in their endeavours to recast nursing as an 'academic' subject. They described Nursing as 'a recent entry' as a higher education discipline - having moved from the FE sector to degree-bearing status. The Enhancement Themes aided these managers in ensuring that their programmes aligned with HE quality assurance requirements, and provided funds to aid further pedagogical developments. This was echoed by colleagues from the same discipline in another HEI, who



noted how Themes were both helpful in the revalidation of modules and were used as a means to convince external stakeholders and decision-makers in the institution that pedagogical innovations had grounding in evidence.

6.3.12 Finally, data gathered from Student Union representatives highlight that the Enhancement Themes have acted as a 'checking device'. This was not only to ease them into their roles by familiarising with the current issues in higher education, but also to ensure that their own innovations had currency with the enhancement agenda:

I see [the Themes]...as...a bite-size tool to say, 'this is what's on the agenda at the moment in higher education, this is what it was a few years ago'.... All the reading materials are there and you can...quite easily get a sense of what's happening... They were a useful tool of quickly getting my head around the bigger conversation. (Student representative, Specialist)

6.3.13 In one Post-1992 institution, a student representative recalled how elements of the Flexible Delivery Theme acted as a lever for his Union's campaign to ensure programme leaders involved students 'from as early as they can' in module design processes. Both he and his opposite number at the Ancient institution noted how the Themes were influential in shaping the training and support offered to student volunteers and class representatives.

6.3.14 Furthermore, in the latter institution, the Students' Union research into 'teaching excellence' was buoyed by funding from the Developing and Supporting the Curriculum Theme. This enabled the Union to employ some student researchers whose findings would ensure that their student teaching awards had value, and that future Union campaigns on teaching and learning were research-informed. Comments from this institution's Vice Principal confirm that the student teaching awards are indeed valued by both the top table and frontline academics in this institution.

### **A legitimising tool: a means of creating consensus on institutional priorities**

6.3.15 The previous discussion about the Ancient institution's teaching excellence awards introduces a final strand of Enhancement Themes use evident in our data. This was the way in which the Themes were called upon to justify or augment the value of ongoing work or strengthen the case for new innovations. Colleagues in various roles highlighted that cases for support for temporal or financial resources for a development project would be strengthened if they could demonstrate that their proposals aligned with the Themes:

Rather than advertising...Enhancement Theme monies as, 'come on down and get yourself some development money'...some of it's supply led, some of it's demand led. If there's something we think we ought to develop, we might be using some of that funding and activity to support something that we see as strategically important.... At the moment I'm talking to some staff in postgraduate... about Flexible Curriculum and about...what kind of background work have they done to understand part-time delivery and other approaches to delivery, so it's accessing resources when they fit with our needs. (Vice Principal, Specialist)

The...teaching grants that come out every year...are very much built around the Enhancement Themes so they will change with the Enhancement Themes in terms of the focus and for a relatively small pot of money...it generates a massive amount of academic staff engagement...it's vastly over-subscribed, not everything is funded. (Lecturer, Ancient)

6.3.16 In one Post-1992 HEI the Themes were considered a useful 'bargaining chip' to legitimise proposed innovations with institutional managers, who had previously vetoed their ideas. Although these staff members found the Themes useful in this respect, they also felt somewhat deprofessionalised by the fact that until QAA legitimised something as 'good practice', their HEI appeared not trust its staff to try something new.

## **6.4 Use or influence of specific Enhancement Themes: overview**

6.4.1 Of the various Enhancement Themes that have been in place since 2003, it was largely the earlier Themes rather than the later ones that gained the most mention from participants in our qualitative sample: Assessment (2003-04) and Employability (2004-06) tended to be cited more often than the later Themes. One reason for this may be that the outcomes, effects or impact of these Themes are only recently beginning to filter through and have a demonstrable impact on policy and practice.

6.4.2 Another reason may be that these are perennially salient concerns and foci for enhancement. For example, in all but one of the institutions we visited there was a major preoccupation with how students should be assessed and how they should be provided with feedback (both formally and informally). These were highlighted as areas in which lecturers, middle managers and educational developers had undertaken a great deal of development work.

6.4.3 It may also be that teaching staff members' use of the terms 'assessment' and 'employability' reflects the ways in which these terms have become embedded in institutional discourses and policy documentation - but which does not overlook how some of the later Themes have revisited and attempted to consolidate work undertaken in the earlier ones. For example, some lecturers and middle managers were cognisant that Graduates for the 21st Century (2008) included elements of the Employability Theme, while Developing and Supporting the Curriculum likewise revisited aspects of Assessment, Integrative Assessment and Flexible Delivery. Therefore, it may not be that these staff members' pedagogical thinking or foci for enhancement are outmoded, but that the language they use to verbalise this thinking is.

## **6.5 Assessment (2003-04), Integrative Assessment (2005-06) and Developing and Supporting the Curriculum (2011-14)**

6.5.1 As mentioned, in six of the seven institutions we visited the ways students should be assessed and how progress should be reported remained perennial issues. In line with previous discussions, it has been eight years since assessment was formally covered by the Enhancement Themes. This not only shows the applicability of earlier Theme-related work to such 'perennial' issues but also, based on the numerous references to the National Student Survey in the dataset, it suggests that low scores attained on these criteria had an equal, if not more significant, influence than 'enhancement' on HEIs' decisions to engage in work in this area<sup>5</sup>. This said, assessment may also be covered as a component of Developing and Supporting the Curriculum (DSC), as it was in one HEI, which used DSC funding to undertake development work into assessment blueprinting.

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<sup>5</sup> This reflects findings in the questionnaires where 61 per cent agreed that enhancement is concerned with improving satisfaction scores on the NSS, and 60 per cent felt the same applied to raising scores on internal evaluation measures.

6.5.2 Examples of assessment and feedback work occurring in HEIs are as follows.

- Work to make students aware of what constitutes feedback. This seeks to extend students' view of feedback as summative and written in response to a piece of coursework (promulgated by the NSS) - the paucities of which were expressed by managers and lecturers in a range of HEIs across the qualitative sample. These activities have attempted to enlighten students that:

...every time we're having contact is feedback, because you're largely talking about work that's generated by an individual and feedback is going to that individual, but it may also be going back to the group as well.

(Middle manager, Specialist)

- Ensuring that 'staff and students are having regular discussions that inform how students prepare for an assessment'. This includes making final year students aware of the need for their self-directed work to reflect elements of professional practice so they can attain accreditation by professional bodies (middle manager, Specialist)
- Designing assessments in a practice-based discipline in two Post-1992 HEIs, that are based on the skills required in the students' chosen professions. As mentioned (paragraph 5.2.6), these included formal report writing, diagnoses simulations and group-based assessments to strengthen goal-setting and team-working skills.
- Providing choice and flexibility in assessments which model accepted dissemination approaches for academics within disciplinary areas. For example, in one Post-1992 institution, social science students are given opportunities to give a presentation or make a poster rather than write an essay. Staff at this HEI did note that, initially, their courses' committees registered opposition against this approach, but that the departments prevailed by making a case for its value, using Developing and Supporting the Curriculum materials as a legitimising tool.

## 6.6 Employability (2004-06) and Graduates for the 21st Century (2008-11)

6.6.1 As the last three examples indicate, many staff members in Scotland's HEIs are conscious of the need to enhance the 'real-world' applicability of what they teach to students. Issues around employability and the kinds of attributes a graduate from a Scottish HEI should possess were suggested to be primary concerns. In part this is because many students come into higher education with a specific career in mind. Furthermore, as an educational developer in the Ancient institution informed us, this is because employers are targeting students at the start of the final year and so students need to have evidence of their employability in place from an earlier stage in their student career.

6.6.2 Thus, in addition to providing access to subject/disciplinary knowledge bases and 'academic' skills, a great deal of work has occurred to embed 'real-world' applicability and self-reflective, metacognitive and interpersonal skills into the curriculum. This supplements work on employability, self-development and careers undertaken by Students' Unions/Associations, Careers Services and Educational Development Units.

6.6.3 Examples of employability activities in Scottish HEIs are as follows.

- Student internships - such as using students as researchers on enhancement-based work, student representation and opportunities to engage in institutional governance.
- Work placements - compulsory in practice-based subjects such as teaching and nursing, but becoming more common in a range of other subject areas. For example, in Architecture, Construction and Engineering courses at a number of HEIs, students were often provided with attachments to 'real world' projects run in partnership with local employers).
- Entrepreneurial or 'theory into practice' competitions and activities - both within and outwith curriculum areas.
- Assessments, exercises and workshops designed to scaffold students into reflecting and reporting on their skills. As one Educational Developer in a Post-1992 institution argued, these reflective exercises were important as students gain numerous skills and attributes in both curricular and extracurricular activities, yet many are unable to articulate the value of the skills to future employers in applications and interviews. Such activities furthermore, permit students to become aware of the skills they lack, and engage in activities that will endow them with these skills.

## 6.7 Assessing impact

6.7.1 While we have highlighted some of the activity tied to the Enhancement Themes, it is not always possible to attribute practice change solely to the Themes. We offer three, related, explanations for this observation.

6.7.2 Firstly, the Themes run concurrently with other sectoral initiatives, drivers and measures such as the NSS and Outcome Agreements. Many managers, middle managers and lecturers in our qualitative study felt that these were more likely to be drivers or harbingers of change within their institutions, with the Enhancement Themes and associated funding acting as a resource to inform or facilitate that change.

Whilst the QAA sits in its very admirable form, I guess these days what, to some extent becomes more prominent in managers' minds are...the league tables, NSS. All of these things act as drivers and then probably in a sense are more explicit drivers. Because every year we're looking at NSS and how we're doing...and that in turn is kind of influencing more of what we do with our students. And that's, perhaps, become more...significant than any of this stuff.  
(Middle manager, Plate-glass)

6.7.3 Secondly, although the influence of these drivers was also recognised by those who sit atop of the implementation staircase, many senior managers and educational developers felt the Themes had value for practice and have undertaken work to embed them into institutional strategies, policies, and practices. Yet, in the process of developing or implementing Theme-related activity, the Themes policy/strategy is reinterpreted in light of institutional priorities and dialogues, and then mediated to those on the lower 'steps' of the implementation staircase.

I have been that layer within the institution that interprets the policy that comes from QAA. So we see the language and the form that arrives in to the institution and then say 'I don't think anybody's going to understand what that term means' and then we shuffle that to make it into a phrase or a concept or a practice that means more to us and our institution and then we talk to our colleagues within our schools.  
(Middle manager, Plate-glass)

6.7.4 Hence, for some frontline academics and those who have not had direct experience of institutional discussions, it can be difficult to trace the policy origin of some of the activity that has been undertaken and, furthermore, attribute practice change to that policy.

What we get...from the Enhancement Themes is...some reinforcement of institutional priority area but...more importantly, we get a good external perspective in terms of what we're doing and it helps us to evaluate...the approach we're taking.... That's not always...apparent to staff in the university, because the staff here will focus on the university or college or school priorities...  
(Vice Principal, Ancient)

There are some links but I would say...when we started these things, to be honest with you we were slightly surprised there were Themes...there are things filtering down it's just that we didn't realise they were filtering down from a Theme...but we were still always doing it.  
(Lecturer, Ancient)

6.7.5 Thirdly, frontline academics' responses to using the Themes in course design and on a daily basis may be influenced by other factors. These include:

- the 'nature' of their student intake in terms of demographic factors or modality of study
- the needs of local employers
- perceptions of the skills and attributes that are important to their specific academic discipline
- for certain subjects, accreditation specifications from external agencies and professional bodies.

6.7.6 In our discussions, lecturers and middle management teams positioned Enhancement Themes as part of a suite of resources on which they drew to shape learning and teaching policy and practices. Other resources include pedagogical research encountered on PG Certificate courses and in-house CPD, and, for practice-based subjects, accreditation stipulations and 'fitness to practice' criteria from professional bodies. For tutors of these subjects, these stipulations and criteria often had more influence on curricular decisions than the messages of the Enhancement Themes. In addition, the degree of regulation the professional bodies 'impose' on teaching and learning (middle manager, Post-1992), sometimes runs counter to an ethos of enhancement:

And sometimes those other bodies...of course they support quality, but sometimes they can impede certain aspects of enhancement.... For example, the current discussion surrounding condonement and compensation and all these areas which are being seen as good, student-led, enhancement initiatives are problematic for schools like ours because of the way in which our programmes...are run with the professional bodies involved. So sometimes it does create that sort of a tension.  
(Middle manager, Plate-glass)

6.7.7 In terms of how we assess the impact of the Themes on different layers or 'steps' on the implementation staircase within HEIs, there is the need to be discerning and nuanced. Policies on assessment, employability, graduateness, pedagogy and so forth, have their agenda shaped by Themes, which is subsequently translated and, to some extent, reconstructed by organisational and departmental priorities, and other agendas. These will then appear as specific 'front-line' practices which are mediated through the language and dialogues of the institution, the impact of other drivers and the logic of disciplinary cultures.

6.7.8 The closer we get to the teaching and learning practices of staff and students, the resources they may be using and the embedded experiences they have, the less likely they are to ascribe change or practice directly to the use of Themes. This may be a reason why a key discourse regarding the Enhancement Themes in our qualitative dataset emphasises Themes as the context or backdrop for enhancement work, rather than specific or direct causal drivers or stimuli for change.

## 7 Student representation and engagement in enhancement work

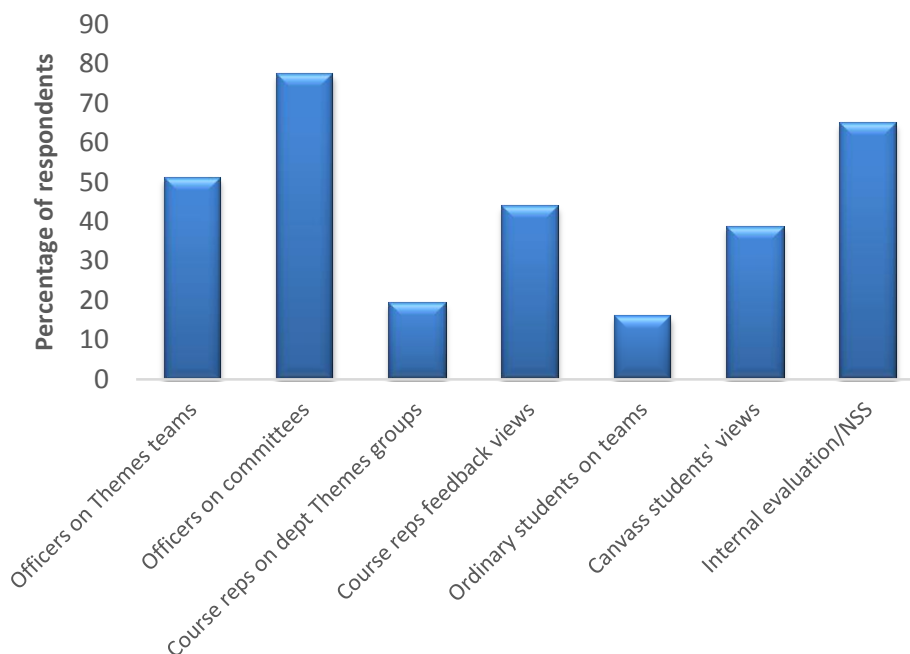
### 7.1 Overview

7.1.1 As highlighted in Section 5.2, a key tenet of the QEF and the Enhancement Themes strategy is the involvement of students as 'partners rather than customers' (Mayes, 2013, page 1). That is, rather than being mere recipients of the end-products of enhancement, a policy priority of the QEF in general is to position students as having both a voice and being actively involved in how institutions shape their responses to enhancement strategies.

### 7.2 Student representation

7.2.1 In our institutional visits, all HEIs stressed their commitment to student engagement in teaching and learning, and in many cases Students' Association/Union leaders concurred, feeling that they were valued partners on staff-student and major institutional committees. In the questionnaire, 81 per cent of respondents confirmed that students were involved in enhancement work in their departments and institutions; of the remainder, two per cent reported this was not the case and 16 per cent were unsure. Figure 2 provides an overview of questionnaire responses on how institutions involve students:

**Figure 2. Involvement of students in enhancement activity within institutions**



7.2.2 As expected, the main way in which questionnaire respondents felt students were involved or represented in Enhancement Theme decision-making was through institutional committees where learning and teaching issues are discussed, such as University Senates, Courts or Councils (77 per cent):

...probably like most universities...the students are part of all of our main committees...so the [Student's Union]...has oversight of everything we are doing in the learning and teaching space.... We put a lot of emphasis on making our students effective in these processes rather than just passengers....  
(Vice Principal, Ancient)

7.2.3 On reflection, as student leaders have always tended to have a seat on these committees, it is unlikely that the QEF or Enhancement Theme initiatives have motivated any change here. However, 51 per cent of questionnaire participants commented that student officers had membership on specially convened Enhancement Theme teams, and as the qualitative data makes clear, these policies have been instrumental in increasing the number of student representatives on both institutional and departmental committees. This was evident in one Post-1992 HEI which was: 'actually inviting more students to sit on their committees' (student officer).

7.2.4 From the questionnaire data, it is apparent that institutions are less inclined to canvass the feelings of 'rank and file' students on enhancement work (39 per cent of respondents said this was the case), or involve these students on institutional Theme Teams (16 per cent). This said, 44 per cent of questionnaire respondents felt that these students' views on Themes were fed back to departmental committees via course representatives. Moreover, discussions with student leaders in the seven HEIs we visited suggest that course reps also feed 'rank and file' opinions back to the Students Association/Union leaders who sit on the top-table committees in their respective institutions. The importance of student representation on these committees was expressed by the Students Union President of the specialist institution:

[These committees are] the first formal run up the ladder...for student feedback. If I'm not at those, there is the opportunity for things to...get missed or certain things students say they, not [that they] don't get followed up, but it's quite beneficial for the programme as well as the students to have myself or the position of president sitting there.... It provides a little bit of weight for programmes and students to get certain things done.

7.2.5 As the extract in paragraph 7.2.2 highlights, institutions are attempting to inculcate a discourse and a set of expectations that students are partners rather than 'passengers' or passive recipients. Evidence generated from interviews with student leaders, and from student focus group members, who have acted as course representatives, generally suggests that these espoused partnerships appear to be working well. Senior managers and educational developers often 'name-checked' the Students' Union/Association officer with responsibility for educational issues in their interviews, with a sense of positivity and value about what these officers bring to the table:

From the highest level there is a total commitment to work with the student body... and to respect the student association...the elected sabbaticals through to the individual class representatives. There is a total commitment and desire to work with them, to respect them and a very considerable institutional management effort to support that in ways that deliberately provides assistance, encouragement, practical resources, but without intrusion.  
(Vice Principal, Ancient)

7.2.6 For their part, student representatives commented that they felt valued, that the institutions listened and responded to their concerns, and gave credence to their ideas:

There's always a student-led item on most of the agendas...so the faculty [student] officers will be asked to submit a student-led item, the Students' Union will provide one as well, and any students that are coming to those meetings will have the opportunity to provide something to add onto that agenda.  
(Student officer, Post-1992)



Our class reps will raise things with their course convenors...[and] lecturers, and they'll get changed immediately or what not. And to me that's a real big enhancement kind of thing which is sometimes missed out.  
(Student officer, Ancient)

7.2.7 Despite this mutual regard, and the espoused commitment by HEIs to make student leaders partners in decision making on learning and teaching issues, student officers highlighted examples of where students may be seen as 'junior' partners in the relationship:

The student president should always remain the critical friend...because if you're not the friend, you just don't get invited and that's when there are problems and that's when things really...potentially build up.  
(Specialist)

We had a School representative who wasn't being invited along to the School Learning and Teaching Committee, and all of our School representatives are invited along. But this was an anomaly and so we got in touch with the convenor, and said 'this is a bit of University policy which says you must have a student on this committee', and immediately they listened to it and pulled him in. What the good thing about policy here is that it is listened to if you point to it, but sometimes people don't follow it unless you point to it.  
(Ancient)

Some staff see it as an opportunity...[others] see it as students moaning...or some staff will tailor the meeting so that the opportunity to moan is less...or there's less time for certain areas on the agenda, because they're concerned of student moans. But it shouldn't be perceived as that; it's an opportunity for students to relay their experiences and it's not just that there's no paper towels; it's 'how's the general teaching on the programme?'  
(Specialist)

7.2.8 Despite these examples, the overall message from the data as a whole is that Students' Association/Union have increased their engagement in matters relating to teaching, learning and enhancement. The relationships between HEIs and their student representatives have, as an Educational Developer suggested, 'shifted from protest to partnership'.

## 7.3 Examples of student engagement in decision making

### Student consultation

7.3.1 In one institution, there has been 'extensive consultation' with the Student Association on the Strategy for Learning within individual schools - students sit on the portfolio refresh working groups. A review of university strategy up to 2020 included events with student input such as having pop-up stands in the Students' Association building identifying key themes in the university strategy and mission and inviting students to comment on these:

Obviously engagement with the students is always a challenge, but there have been some examples where I think yeah, that's really worked, but it can't be episodic; it's now trying to...making it part of the culture and I'm sure there's more that we can do on this.

Each school is examining their degree offer and how they're delivered. So I think with various degrees of success, students have been involved...and...academic schools are very clear that student reps at the very least are going to be sitting on the programme development team. So, right from the start of the process, right through. In other academic schools it's been more a kind of top down, but students have been involved...feeding back once the proposals have been finalised... there's different levels of engagement on...partnership, but students have been involved right across the institution.

### Students' Association activities

7.3.2 A student representative at another Post-1992 institution stated that his role is:

...about feeding into any policies that are being discussed...[including] Strategy for Learning, Portfolio refresh, there's a careers and employability strategy getting worked on just now, so it's far more of a kind of working with the different Schools or areas and feeding into that process.

7.3.3 This HEI also uses the Students' Association as a means through which the HEI can access a sample of its student body:

The schools or different parts contact us, they need...students for focus groups or consultations, they'll normally come through us...sometimes it kind of works against us because there's almost like an impression that you're not speaking to the students association...but it's good they're being involved because I've spoken to officers in other institutions where if there is a consultation going on, the institution will go straight to the students and it feels as if there not as involved, so we're therefore involved pretty much anything involved with contacts.  
(Student officer, Post-1992)

7.3.4 Finally, the following, from a different Post-1992 institution, highlights how Students' Unions/Associations contribute directly to initiatives based around learning and teaching, and employability:

We currently have five graduate interns, so they're all former...students, we're looking to increase that from next year. Employability, we have the Student Leaders programme, so that's open to any student who volunteers so whether it's through the university...mentoring, peer support programmes, through ourselves in the Students' Association or class reps or anywhere in the sports clubs and societies, or if they volunteer in the community as well. If they volunteer, they're eligible for the

Student Leaders programme...it's basically two workshops and an online skills profile to add to their CV. Learning and teaching, one of my objectives...to set up school specific L&T events...in three weeks, it's branded as...an 'Education Week'. There'll be an event in each school... going through the student learning experience whether it's the curriculum, assessment and feedback, timetabling and enhancement as well...

## 7.4 Challenges to student engagement

7.4.1 In some HEIs there were suggestions that student representation was not as efficient as it could be and some 'everyday' students were sceptical that their feedback was acted upon or listened to.

The institution is good at responding formally, but a certain percentage of students aren't aware of the mechanisms or don't trust the mechanisms...  
(Union President, Specialist)

7.4.2 In a couple of HEIs this was explained by both senior managers and student leaders as a problem of communicating enhancement/innovations back to the student body, which had been addressed through poster campaigns, such as the 'You Said, We Did' initiative at one Post-1992 institution, with the aim:

...to kind of highlight where we have had wins. For the institution, as soon as the results come out, each of the three schools come up with their action plans... they're pretty quick to analyse the data that comes out...and then put that into practice for the following year.

7.4.3 In other HEIs, student leaders admitted that sometimes work was not being taken forward due to changes in personnel and lack of efficient handover. In one institution, the HEI made funding available for a permanent staff member, appointed by the Students' Union to ensure continuity between outgoing elected members and their successors.

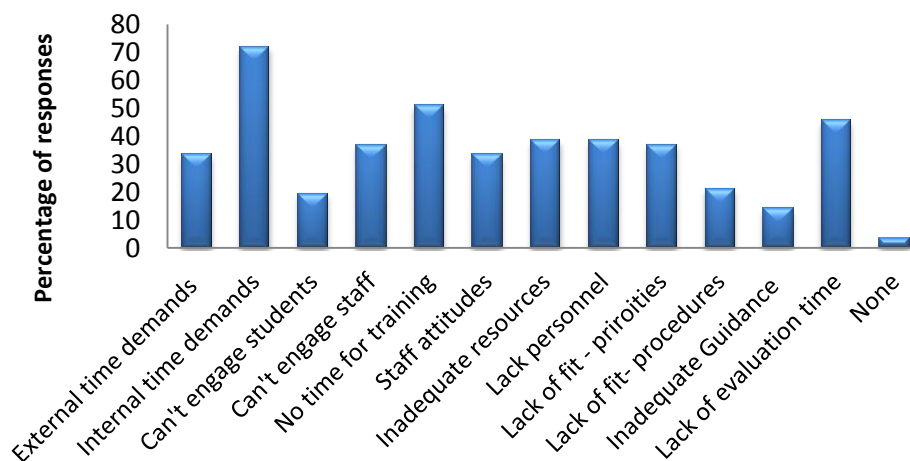
## 8 Challenges for the enhancement agenda

We have a spectrum...a group of very active enthusiasts who we couldn't stop... wanting to keep changing, improving doing better.... We have created roles for them in terms of our learning enhancement co-ordinators... We have challenges with those who don't want to change...or they feel unable to do so, whether it's actual workload, perceived workload or a feeling they cannot change...there is definitely a challenge there.  
(Vice Principal, Post-1992)

### 8.1 Overview

8.1.1 Data from both studies undertaken for this evaluation make it clear that some staff members (and lecturing staff in particular) are experiencing a number of barriers to engaging in Enhancement Theme activity. Figure 3 provides an overview of questionnaire responses on this issue.

**Figure 3. Factors hampering enhancement activity within institutions and/or departments**



8.1.2 Of particular interest in the questionnaire responses is around one-third of respondents suggested that staff attitudes and perceived lack of fit between the Themes and institutional/departamental priorities or systems acted as an impediment to engagement with the Themes. This accords with another questionnaire finding that 61 per cent felt the Themes tended to correspond well with institutional priorities. In addition, it tallies with an overall sense from the qualitative study that practitioners irrespective of institution or position on the 'implementation staircase' tended to be in favour of the enhancement approach as enshrined in the Enhancement Theme strategy.

8.1.3 Although the majority of questionnaire respondents see enhancement as a positive, it is clear that there are features that compromise their ability (and perhaps willingness) to engage with each of the Themes. The most cited barriers appear to be institutional and internal, and focus on issues of time. They include: internal demands being made on their time (72 per cent), lacking time for training (51 per cent), and lacking time to evaluate the impact of Enhancement Theme work (46 per cent).

8.1.4 This issue of time as a barrier was also evident in our qualitative study, and it was joined by three other, related barriers:

- **time:** competing demands and heavy workloads
- **priority:** research-teaching disconnections
- **privilege:** enhancement involves the few, not the many
- **ownership and agenda:** whose enhancement, for what purpose?

## 8.2 Time

8.2.1 As Figure 3 indicates, the main barriers preventing staff members from engaging in Enhancement Theme activity were time-related. Of all questionnaire respondents, 72 per cent cited internal demands on their time as being a barrier to engagement; 51 per cent felt they had no time for training, while 56 per cent suggested there was a lack of time to evaluate the impact of Enhancement Theme initiatives within the institution. These data accord with findings emerging from the qualitative study, which will be discussed momentarily.

8.2.2 The qualitative data support the questionnaire findings. Lecturers almost exclusively cited demands on their time as prohibiting Enhancement Theme activity, or squeezing this out to the margin of their work:

I'm not sure...there is a general sense that many of the academic staff...in the key roles that impact on student learning...they all feel under tremendous time pressure...and so in terms of shaping change...staff just feel...they'd love to do more...but pressure of the day job is limiting that.  
(Vice Principal, Post-1992)

People have more priorities or less time to get into that lovely creative discussion of enhancement which is almost like a luxury these days, isn't it?  
(Lecturer, Post-1992)

8.2.3 Other examples of workload compromising enhancement activity cited in the qualitative study are as follows.

- A lecturer in a Post-1992 institution who commented that QAA workshops and events were good 'eye-openers' on pedagogical practice, yet who noted that other commitments made it difficult to attend these: 'mid-semester there's no chance of going, really'.
- Colleagues in a more northerly HEI who felt that QAA Enhancement Theme events had value, yet as many of the events were in the Glasgow-Edinburgh corridor, it was difficult for them to find the time to travel to these.
- Members of a departmental management team in one Post-1992 institution who felt that their colleagues were 'genuinely enthused about enhancement'. However, heavy teaching loads and lack of allocation of time for enhancement in institutional workload models meant that there were few opportunities to translate this enthusiasm into activity.

8.2.4 Finally, we end this section with a cautionary tale which may provide an insight into why some staff may choose not to participate in enhancement work, for fear of self-intensifying:

Once you demonstrate you can do something, it's actually quite dangerous... because all of a sudden you are landed with so much crap to deal with, because... your name gets bandied around. There's a culture for me in this university, if you can do something... 'give her that, take it off him, but give her that...'. He just goes and sits in the background and does very little... Train him to do it instead of banging it on somebody else.  
(Lecturer, Post-1992)

### 8.3 Priority: research-teaching disconnections

8.3.1 Another barrier relating to the issue of time recalls the discussion in Section 5.4 regarding the perceived uneven relationship between teaching and learning in many HEIs. As the following comment highlights, maintaining an active research profile may influence some academics to overlook enhancing their teaching, or indeed 'close themselves off' from the whole enhancement discourse:

The more you immerse yourself in research the less you have exposure to these kinds of Enhancement Themes. It's not that you don't recognise or are not cognisant of them, you just actually have less exposure, so...you're less aware of it all; you're not as engaged with it.  
(Middle manager, Plate-glass)

8.3.2 This same manager also noted a tension (included here because it reflects the experience in other HEIs and in other research) that there are fewer extrinsic rewards for teaching 'excellence', than there are for excellent researchers and that evidencing excellent teaching is more problematic:

Even in terms of promotions, it's very clear in terms of research what you have to do... somebody who is a teaching fellow, who doesn't have research therefore in their contract, what is their track of academic performance, and what do they perform against? I'm not trying to say that teaching and learning is only the enhancement, that assurance is only about teaching and learning, but again... what makes up quality, and what it is, how that expresses itself in research terms it's somehow quite clear... in terms of... teaching and learning and academic performance more generally, it's not quite so... clear or even recognised.

8.3.3 This middle manager's view that the rewards for teaching were fewer than those for research were echoed by a more junior colleague in his institution, and a member of the educational development team in another HEI:

I mean we had some staff who have done all sorts of innovative stuff... it's a nice thing to do, but is there any reward attached to that? It's not really recognised in workload planning; it's just assumed that you'll do high quality excellent teaching... You get nothing for that apart from personal satisfaction.  
(Lecturer, Plate-glass)

And sometimes people... want to get engaged in... learning and teaching practice in more innovative ways but they don't necessarily feel like... some of the promotion structures and the research structures and the omnipotence of the research agenda... encourages that.  
(Educational Developer, Ancient)

8.3.4 It is also worthwhile sharing the comments of a Vice Principal (Plate-glass), who reflecting on the policy shifts some HEIs have made in respect of the 2008 RAE<sup>6</sup> and the 2014 REF, reiterated the importance of institutions encouraging a dialogue around the importance of teaching, if only to guarantee an institution's financial stability:

Research brings reputation. It brings a proportion of additional money, but nothing in comparison to the teaching revenue. But also teaching brings reputation and... revenues...so I didn't have any trouble raising that priorities with the academic staff and no trouble with the management either as it was basically seen as this sort of reduction in the focus on teaching had been counter-productive...

## 8.4 Raising the profile of teaching

8.4.1 It is worthwhile calling attention here to evidence that all of the HEIs we visited were undertaking work to raise the profile and rewards of teaching. Some of this has been done under the auspices of Enhancement Theme work, while other initiatives have emerged independently of that initiative. Examples include:

- using Enhancement Theme funding to pump-prime pedagogical research
- teaching excellence awards instigated both by institutions and Students' Associations
- an incoming Principal recasting his institution's mission as being a 'university focused on teaching supported by research', rather than the usual 'research-led' approach, and pledging that 100 per cent of staff will eventually attain a HEA Fellowship
- one HEI awarding Professorships for colleagues who have followed a 'teaching only' career track.

## 8.5 Privilege: enhancement by the few?

8.5.1 As intimated by the earlier discussion, many teaching staff did engage with the Enhancement Themes, but often felt they did this on a rather piecemeal, ad hoc basis - due to time constraints and the primacy of research. It was clear that in all HEIs we visited that no member of academic or academic-related staff was formally disbarred from engaging in enhancement work. However, some lecturers opined that the majority of enhancement opportunities would be taken on by a select few, and usually not those involved in the day-to-day activity of teaching students.

8.5.2 A lecturer in a Post-1992 institution informed us that enhancement conferences and events appear to be dominated by professional services staff as academics do not have the time to devote to such events. This sentiment was given credence by an Educational Developer we interviewed in another HEI:

...there's now a group that's looking into the Enhancement Themes, very much involving people from across the University, but again they tend to be, it's probably the Directors of Learning and Teaching, the key individuals, some of our staff and the Educational development function post.  
(Plate-glass)

8.5.3 Although lecturers were generally positive about Educational Development and similar professional service departments in their institutions, some felt that these services were not as readily available as they might be to consult on pedagogical issues:

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<sup>6</sup> Research Assessment Exercise, a forerunner of the REF which assessed the quality of research in UK universities and colleges.

Sometimes by the time they say they're available, you're actually at the validation point...

(Lecturer, Post-1992)

8.5.4 Other lecturers in this respondent's HEI argued that as Educational Development Units are often 'detached from the fundamentals of the [taught] programme', the project work that they do may not always be of value to a specific discipline, or is not disseminated effectively, so is lost. In another Post-1992 institution, it was suggested that some of the 'enhancement' work that is formalised and carried out by the 'centre' is bureaucratised and fails to connect with the ways departments and academics work:

This is 'symptomatic of how...[Enhancement Themes] are embedded... two separate processes which ought to be one in the same, that to me is just... indicates the Enhancement Themes are there but not fully embedded...and that's how systems work, with how management work, it's not how we work...it ought to be much more integrated.

When I was reading this [institutional] briefing document...about all of the things the university is doing to try and fit in with the Enhancement Theme that's currently being examined, I got the impression that the main focus was on developing strategies and having meetings and having officers in place and developing more strategies, but...I wasn't actually clear how much of that...has an actual impact on students.

(Lecturer, Plate-glass)

8.5.5 In at least one Post-1992 HEI, it appears that attempts have been made to redress the balance. An educational developer recalled that when the First Year Experience Theme was live between 2005 and 2008, the institution did not largely involve academics, resulting in initiatives with limited impact on practice. Since then, the institution has appointed departmental enhancement co-ordinators, who sit on school-level Quality Enhancement committees. These seek to represent and involve academics more in the processes of enhancement work, in ways that is contingent with their own needs or priorities. Yet, while this educational developer argued that these committees have increased the input of academics in enhancement work, a colleague (speaking in a different focus group) remained unconvinced:

[Departmental Enhancement Co-ordinators] tend to be detached from the fundamentals of the programme. So they do little projects here and there, and they produce things here and there, but nothing's embedded and the individual who gets the role it helps their CV and their knowledge and skills, and they have a lot of developmental opportunities...but the value of it to the wider school and what you're doing is questionable.

(Lecturer, Post-1992)



## 8.6 Questions of ownership and agenda

8.6.1 The extracts in paragraphs 8.5.4 and 8.5.5 also suggest a further potential barrier - that of the ownership of the Enhancement Themes. In the main, practitioners appear to be 'on message' with, and ascribe value to the Themes. As mentioned, 61 per cent of questionnaire participants agreed that the Themes correspond with institutional priorities and 81 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they 'address important issues' regarding Learning Teaching and Assessment.

8.6.2 However, also evident is: that 44 per cent of questionnaire respondents felt that the 'intent and purpose of the Themes are clear'; that 42 per cent of this sample felt that staff members ideas are taken on board in deciding the Themes<sup>7</sup>; and that 37 per cent agreed that the Themes reflect practitioners' agenda<sup>8</sup>. Thus, despite support for enhancement, questions of 'whose agenda' and 'how relevant to me' may prevent the adoption of the Themes among a minority of frontline teaching staff within institutions. An illustrative example of this sentiment is provided by a lecturer in the Plate-glass institution we visited:

It's not just the fact that it feels it's an imposition, it feels it's an imposition that hasn't taken the time to check what we were doing in the first place and it hasn't checked across a wide range of subject areas as well. There is the 'student experience'; there's a range of different student experiences that all of us are contributing in different ways and doubtless trying to enhance in many, many different ways... [yet]...no time that it's taking to...come into classrooms and see what's actually happening.

8.6.3 In one Post-1992 institution, a group of departmental managers complained that the Themes were too general and prescriptive; that the QAA suggests something is the focus for a Theme and then 'throws it out' to the sector. This focus group furthermore suggested that the Themes did not reflect academics' agendas; that they were part of a government-sponsored agenda that narrowed the focus of HE to promote a 'neoliberal' employability agenda. The potential anathema of some academics to the employability agenda was also recognised by a lecturer in the Ancient institution we visited. However, this lecturer also opined that shifting the discourse within the Enhancement Themes from 'employability' to 'graduate attributes', may have helped to get some more sceptical academics back on board:

It's almost a tool for us to maybe take some of the fear out of the students' view of what's going to happen to them and reclaim that space for higher education. We're not just producers...of graduates for employers.... And I think that's where Graduate Attributes has been very timely and useful...it's a much more palatable Theme for higher education institutions than...employability is. For a lot of us, we're very happy to talk about employability...and happy that part of our role is to prepare students for the outdoors, but...it's not necessarily the core part of our role.

8.6.4 Another management group in the Post-1992 HEI mentioned in paragraph 8.6.3, although more accommodating of the Themes' purpose, considered them to be 'a good way forward', but nevertheless questioned the lack of transparency by which SHEEC decide each Theme. They suggested that there could have been a specific Theme for each HEI, evidenced by internal reviews and or ELIRs, rather than institutions having to tailor their development work to fit an agenda set outside of the HEI.

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that on this question, only 11 per cent disagreed outright with this statement and 47 per cent expressed neutrality.

<sup>8</sup> In respect of this question, 26 per cent disagreed, while a further third (37 per cent) were neutral.

8.6.5 Comments from colleagues who teach programmes with professional practice in three HEIS also reflect this sentiment. They note that while the Themes had their uses, they were less influential on their work than the need to be up to date on practices in the field, changes in legislation and the dictates of their professional bodies. By comparison to these dictates, the Enhancement Themes '...seem to kind of float about somewhere out there really' (Lecturer, Post-1992), and lecturers across practice-based subjects appealed for more time to undertake practical work in the field to enhance their courses.

8.6.6 In two other HEIs, some lecturers intimated that an expectation to 'repackage' or 'shoe-horn' existing practice into a policy document that reflects the language of the Themes, smacked of bureaucratisation and accountability. Reflecting the comment in paragraph 5.5.5 about the danger that evidencing enhancement becomes the de facto enhancement activity, it was suggested that little time or motivation would be left to spend on actual enhancement work:

It's definitely a top-down word, heavily loaded with connotations...but I think a lot of the stuff is happening...but it now has to happen under a particular label or it's trying to collect that stuff. And there's also meetings about, 'well what are you doing about employability?' You say 'yeah, it's threaded throughout your work', but it's just not labelled: 'this is the employability strand'. And in some ways I recognise the bureaucratic nature of this process too which then sometimes stops people doing things because they don't get time in their workloads to do that, which before they were just doing it because they thought it was really important for students...  
(Lecturer, Plate-glass)

## 8.7 Commentary and comparisons with 2008

8.7.1 As in our 2008 evaluation, perceptions still remain among a minority of lecturing staff that the Themes are imposed on HEIs; done by 'the centre' and delivered to them; are unconnected to the 'way we do things in our discipline'; and another burden on their time. These dialogues run contra to the spirit of institutional and professional ownership that both the QEF and the Enhancement Themes attempt to bring to quality processes in Scotland, and can do much to compromise the potential of these strategies to engender change. If, as suggested earlier, the success of the Enhancement Theme initiative involves establishing a particular 'mindset' or culture, then there is a necessity to work to challenge the assumptions that may engender a counterculture of resistance towards and/or perceived disenfranchisement from the enhancement agenda.

8.7.2 To reiterate, it is clear that, there is general acknowledgement that the Themes link very well with sectoral, institutional and the majority of academics' priorities. Moreover, while the 'time' and 'priorities' barriers are experienced by many in the sector, the fact that a number of academics have overcome these and engaged in enhancement projects, would suggest that these barriers are less insurmountable than are the 'privilege' and 'ownership' ones.

8.7.3 Given that the Enhancement Themes strategy is in its eleventh year and there are still these pockets of resistance and scepticism, institutions and QAA/SHEEC might wish to focus their efforts on countering the perceived 'privilege' and 'ownership' barriers by:

- giving more consideration of how to make practitioners aware of the 'goodness of fit' between Themes and their own concerns for development
- communicating more transparently with frontline academics as to how the Theme focus is selected, and highlighting the potential benefits of academics in engagement
- involving SHEEC representatives in discussing future proposed Themes with a broader cohort of their institution's staff to ensure that a wider representation of concerns, priorities and ideas feed into the decision making process. This may disrupt the belief that enhancement is the privilege of the few.

8.7.4 In addition, further activity to counteract 'time' and 'priorities' barriers may involve:

- finding ways of providing more time (sabbaticals, secondments, off-timetable weeks) for academics to work specifically on enhancement of teaching and learning
- extending and publicising extrinsic and career rewards for academics who engage in enhancement activity, and/or who demonstrate continued good practice and innovation in their teaching practices.

### Attribution

8.7.5 The evaluation report of 2008 suggested that rather than being focused on a small number of key players within institutions (the 'usual suspects') as was the case when the Themes were first introduced as part of the QEF, engagement now seemed to be far more diffuse across institutions. By this we suggested that:

At the senior management level, vice principals teaching and learning are the most informed about the Themes and, in the majority of institutions, are the main 'champions' for the Themes. The associate deans teaching and learning (or their equivalents) 'sit' between senior and middle managers and have a pivotal role in promoting the Themes within their schools or faculties. Below this level of academic staff, engagement is less visible.

8.7.6 As indicated, there is still an issue of ownership as we move down the implementation staircase. The 2008 report suggested that middle managers - such as heads of schools, heads of department and programme leaders - varied considerably in their engagement with the Themes and lack of engagement of this group was often cited as a barrier to wider adoption of the Themes within institutions. Practitioners were also seen as not sufficiently engaged with the Themes.

8.7.7 As we have pointed out, this issue of attribution might be a distraction. Practitioner engagement may, in many cases, be 'unconscious' in that they are unaware of the Themes as drivers of various activities with which, nevertheless, they willingly engage. This mediated influence or impact is a feature which continues but in the view of this report, should not be seen as a problem. What might be more important is the degree of alignment which exists between good practice (embodied in Themes) and what is actually going on in teaching and learning practices.

### Alignment and ownership

8.7.8 The 2008 evaluation identified the issues of timing, ownership and incentives as important determinants of vibrant use of the Themes. In 2014, while these features are clearly endemic, the Themes are positioned differently.

8.7.9 The importance in their use is in setting institutional and sector wide priorities. To that extent they are now embedded in such a way that they provide one of the most influential 'frames of reference' for decisions about resources, orientation and practice.

To that extent, the question about impact is not one concerning 'are they having one'? But much more about how they are being used to 'guide' actions and make curricular decisions. The early indications of this process were present in the 2008 report, such as this quote from a student officer:

I like the fact that people are speaking about it and it gives a focus and that is really useful for us because it means we can home in on areas, because as the student rep, at whatever level, there's [sic] so many other things to do that you can't encompass everything. These are the kind of things that you'd be working on all the time. So from year to year if there is a focus it really does help and you can actually get work done and I really think that that comes through with a lot of them.

8.7.10 However, now, this is a predominant practice.

### **A note on focus and the theory of change**

8.7.11 One of the issues raised in the 2008 report concerned the focus of the Themes. To some extent, in the intervening period, the focus has continued to be on the generic:

It would be nice if from this evaluation came a period of thinking which led to a slightly different approach rather than just continuing down the same line with choosing national Themes. I think it's difficult to keep on choosing one Theme for the whole national HE sector to focus upon and expect some kind of equal engagement.

8.7.12 An interesting option is to connect a disciplinary dimension to the notion of thematic support. This may also require an overview of the theory of change (or enhancement) embodied in the Theme approach.

## 9 Overview

9.1.1 The detailed analysis of the data sets within the report suggests the influence of the thematic approach to enhancement is profound but mediated. It is important that the realities of these processes are understood, and 'crude' attempts to ascribe 'impact' are resisted and this more subtle analysis holds sway. However, in most thematic areas the resources and activities associated with each Theme have provided important resources for teaching and learning developments both within and across HEIs in Scotland. To that extent, the strategy has been successful and the evidence of this success is clear.

9.1.2 The evidence suggests that the closer we get to the T&L practices of staff and student interactions, the resources they may be using, and the embedded experiences they have, the less likely they are to ascribe change or practice directly to the use of Themes. However, this is to be expected as resources for policy on T&L practice within institutions are mediated by important key individuals within disciplines and at institutional levels. This can be seen as part of a successful strategy in which the cadre of individuals working within institutions are part of a strong national network that is tasked with interpreting, reconstructing and situating nationally relevant resources to the realities and needs of individual HEIs. These individuals and groups can be at head of department, modular or school, or equivalent levels, such as people with a specific institutional brief for T&L policy or curriculum design. Thus institutional policy is heavily influenced by the Themes, which is then mediated in practice by these key individuals and then appears in practices within specific 'units'. The key question is, within specific disciplines, 'where do teachers go for resources on T&L design and practice?'

9.1.3 Policies on assessment, employability and gradueness have their embodiments in 'front-line' practice, with the agenda shaped by Themes, mediated and translated by organisational priorities, and then appearing as specific practice taking into account the logic of disciplinary cultures. The following processes and practices are typical of the relationship between the Themes and T&L practice:

- legitimating ('doing the right thing', 'on the same page', 'moving in the right direction')
- checking ('in line with current thinking')
- procuring resources ('guidance for putting in bids for resources for T&L')
- consensual development ('working with colleagues collaboratively')
- steering ('guiding the direction of travel and development')
- space for reflection ('justifying use of time on T&L developments')
- raising the profile of T&L concerns ('providing a legitimate platform for the use of time and resources on T&L')
- planning and design ('use in validation documents')
- external and internal referencing ('being part of wider agreement on orientation and design').

9.1.4 Those engaged in direct teaching and the experience of students will sense and translate (or reconstruct) the thematic emphases into practice as they make decisions about what to do on a day to day basis or in terms of course reviews and new designs put forward for validation. Other drivers will be the external examining process which will be informed by thematic emphases and will be taken into account in the yearly examination process.

9.1.5 Institutions were clear that student involvement in teaching and learning had been enriched and enhanced by the Themes, although, once again, these processes were mediated by the institutional, school/department and then course or modular interpretations. Our interpretation of this is not that this suggests a deficit but that, this set of translations is inevitable and desirable. What is important is that the processes are transparent, known and effective.

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## Appendix 1. Site visit programmes

### Site visit programme (one day)

#### Enhancement Themes Evaluation 2014: site visit timetable

(One day visit: parallel sessions involving Murray Saunders & Steve Dempster)

<b><u>MURRAY</u></b>	
09.30 - 10.15	<b>Interview:</b> XXX, PVC for Learning & Teaching
10.30 - 11.15	<b>Interview:</b> Students' Association, VP Education
11.30 - 12.15	<b>Lecturer Focus Group:</b> School of Health and Life Sciences (one) one lecturer from seven of the school's 15 subject disciplines (up to seven people)
12.30 - 13.15	<b>Student Focus Group:</b> School of Health and Life Sciences (up to 10 people)
13.15 - 14.00	<b>Lunch</b>
14.00 - 14.45	<b>Management Focus Group:</b> School of Health and Life Sciences - including Learning Enhancement partner and HODs or deputies with L&T remit (up to 10 people)
15.00 - 15.45	<b>Lecturer Focus Group:</b> School of Engineering and Built Environment (two each from the three subject areas: up to six people)
16.00 - 16.45	<b>Student Focus Group:</b> School for Business and Society (up to 10 people)

<b><u>STEVE</u></b>	
09.30 - 10.15	<b>Interview:</b> Director of Centre for Learning Enhancement
10.30 - 11.15	<b>Interview:</b> Director of Student Support (or equivalent)
11.30 - 12.15	<b>Lecturer Focus Group:</b> School of Health and Life Sciences (one) one lecturer from each of the remaining eight subject disciplines (up to eight people)
12.30 - 13.15	<b>Lecturer Focus Group:</b> School for Business and Society (one lecturer from each subject discipline: up to 10 people)
13.15 - 14.00	<b>Lunch</b>
14.00 - 14.45	<b>Management Focus Group:</b> School for Business and Society (LEAD partner and HODs or deputies with L&T remit) (up to 10 people)
15.00 - 15.45	<b>Management Focus Group:</b> School of Engineering and Built Environment (LEAD partner and HODs or deputies with L&T remit) (up to 10 people)
16.00 - 16.45	<b>Student Focus Group:</b> School of Engineering and Built Environment (up to 10 people)



## Site visit programme (two days)

### Enhancement Themes Evaluation 2014: site visit timetable

<b><u>DAY ONE</u></b>	
09.30 - 10.15	<b>Interview:</b> Deputy Principal for Education and Students
10.30 - 11.15	<b>Interview:</b> Students' Association, VP Education and Engagement
11.30 - 12.15	<b>Lecturer Focus Group:</b> Schools of Applied Social Sciences and Arts & Humanities (five lecturers from each school: up to 10 people)
12.30 - 13.15	<b>Student Focus Group:</b> Schools of Applied Social Sciences, Arts & Humanities, Management and Graduate School (three from each: up to 12 people)
13.15 - 14.00	<b>Lunch</b>
14.00 - 14.45	<b>Lecturer Focus Group:</b> Schools of Education and Nursing, Midwifery and Health (five lecturers from each school: up to 10 people)
15.00 - 15.45	<b>Management Focus Group:</b> Management and Graduate Schools (HODs or deputies with L&T remit) (up to 10 people)
16.00 - 16.45	<b>Management Focus Group:</b> Schools of Education and Nursing, Midwifery and Health (including HODs or deputies with L&T remit) (up to 10 people)

<b><u>DAY TWO</u></b>	
09.30 - 10.15	<b>Interview:</b> Director of Student Learning Services
10.30 - 11.15	<b>Interview:</b> Director Student Development and Support Services
11.30 - 12.15	<b>Lecturer Focus Group:</b> Management and Graduate School (five lecturers from each school: up to 10 people)
12.30 - 13.15	<b>Lecturer Focus Group:</b> Schools of Natural Sciences and Sport (five lecturers from each school: up to 10 people)
13.15 - 14.00	<b>Lunch</b>
14.00 - 14.45	<b>Management Focus Group:</b> Schools of Social Sciences and Arts & Humanities (including HODs or deputies with L&T remit) (up to 10 people)
15.00 - 15.45	<b>Management Focus Group:</b> Schools of Natural Sciences and Sport (including HODs or deputies with L&T remit) (up to 10 people)

## Appendix 2. Questionnaire instrument

### Enhancement Themes Evaluation 2014

Thank you for completing this survey

This survey is part of an evaluation of the Scottish higher education Enhancement Themes, undertaken by **Lancaster University** and commissioned by **QAA Scotland** and **SHEEC**.

The main aim of the evaluation is to identify how the Enhancement Themes have informed institutional approaches towards enhancing student learning experiences, and to have supported or impeded the embedding of the Themes in institutional policies and practices. As your work is related to quality in teaching and learning, we would be grateful if you could spend around **10 to 15 minutes** completing this survey.

The survey is completely **anonymous** and is submitted to a secure server at Lancaster University. We will **remove all identifying data** (such as institution names) prior to feeding our findings back to QAA Scotland, SHEEC and participating institutions.

Should you have any queries, please contact the project manager, Doctor Steve Dempster at: [s.dempster@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:s.dempster@lancaster.ac.uk)

#### Instructions

For drop-down questions, please **click** and **highlight** your answer.

For other questions, **check the appropriate box** or boxes.

For longer answers, please type in the box.

To clear your answers on a page, press **'RESET'**

When you are happy with your answers on a page, **please press** the **'NEXT'** button to move on.

Should you not be able to complete the survey in one go, pressing **'SAVE'** will save your progress and allow you to pick up from this point when you next click the link.

Please press NEXT (below) to begin

## General information

**1. In which institution do you work?  
(N.B. We will not refer to specific institutions in reports/outputs)**

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

**2. What is your role or job title?**

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**3. Is your role mainly:**

- Academic - predominantly teaching
- Academic - predominantly research
- Academic - a mix of research and teaching
- Administrative / Managerial
- Educational development
- Staff Development
- Student Support/Advisory
- Other

If 'Other', please specify

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**4. How long have you been in this post?**

- <1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5 or more years

### The idea of enhancement

Please check each item on the scale to indicate how far you agree or disagree with each statement concerning enhancement.

Please do not leave any statement blank.

#### 5. To me, the phrase: 'enhancement of teaching and learning' refers to:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Improving the way we teach students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving the efficiency of the way we assess students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving the efficiency of how we deliver courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improved student achievement in terms of explicit learning outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Achieving more positive feedback from students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improved student satisfaction scores on internal measures (e.g. course evaluations)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improved student satisfaction scores on external measures (e.g. the NSS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other, please specify below

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## Development and purpose of the Enhancement Themes

6. Please check each item on the scale to indicate how far you agree or disagree with each statement.

Please do not leave any statement blank.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Enhancement Themes address important issues concerning improving teaching and learning in the Scottish HE sector.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Themes indicate what QAA, SHEEC and SFC priorities are.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Themes form the officially sanctioned agenda for Scottish Universities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhancement Themes correspond well with the priorities and concerns of my institution.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Themes suggest what we are meant to be doing rather than our own agenda.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
QAA/SHEEC take advice on board from individual HEIs prior to announcing each Enhancement Theme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The intent and purpose of the Themes are clear from the outset/from their announcement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sector-wide development of the Enhancement Themes provides opportunities for sharing good practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Themes accurately reflect the practitioner`s agenda.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The focus of the Themes accurately expresses the students' agenda.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Further comments (optional)

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## Stakeholder engagement with Enhancement Themes

### 7. To what extent have the Themes influenced the practices of staff in your institution?

	Highly influenced	Some influence on practice	Limited influence	No influence	Unsure
Frontline academic staff (lecturers, tutors)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Academic Support and/or Educational Development staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student support staff (e.g. advisors, counsellors)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning resources staff (e.g. librarians, learning technologists)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Further comments (optional)	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				

### 8. Are students involved in the enhancement of teaching and learning in your department/institution?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

### 9. If 'yes', which of the following describe how? (Please tick all that apply)

- Student officers are members of institutional-wide teams convened specifically to oversee the development of each Theme.
- Student officers represent the student body's views at formal committees.
- Course Representatives are members of Enhancement Theme working groups in each department/subject area.
- Course Representatives can feedback their classmates' views on the Enhancement Themes at departmental/school level committees.
- Students without formal representational roles sit on institutional-wide teams convened specifically to oversee the development of each Theme.
- The views of students without formal representational roles are canvassed (e.g. through questionnaires) during the development of Enhancement Theme work.
- We assess students' reception of enhanced teaching and learning through formal mechanisms such as the NSS and course evaluations.

On the next few pages we will ask you about how each of the Enhancement Themes has impacted upon aspects of work in your institution.

We recognise that their impact may be uneven, or in some cases not relevant. However, such an exercise helps to identify the different ways in which the Themes might have contributed as a useful resource.

### **Instructions**

Please rate each Theme against each aspect by typing a number between **1 (not useful)** to **5 (very useful)** in the appropriate column.

If you feel an aspect is not relevant, please type a **zero (0)** into the box.

If you were not in post when a particular Theme was 'live' press **NEXT** to move on

If you do not wish to do this in one go, press **SAVE** to save your progress and to pick up from this point when you next click the link.

## Impact of the Enhancement Themes (1)

Type a number between 1 (**not useful**) to 5 (**very useful**) in the appropriate column.

If an aspect is **not relevant** to that Theme, type 0.

If you were **not in post** when a Theme was 'live', **leave that Theme's grid blank** and press '**NEXT**' to move on.

**'SAVE'** will save your progress and let you pick up from this point when you next click the link.

### 10. Assessment; 11. Responding to Student Needs; 12. Employability

Identifying good practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving collaboration within departments in the institution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving collaborations across departments/institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing opportunities to share practice within and between institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing a tool for reflection for internal review and/or ELIR	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helping to evaluate/ improve teaching methods	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhancing students' capability to engage with the subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhancing students' employability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhancing support/guidance provided to students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improved learning resources (e.g. VLE)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 13. Flexible Delivery; 14. Integrative Assessment; 15. The First Year

Identifying good practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving collaboration within departments in the institution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving collaborations across departments/institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Providing opportunities to share practice within and between institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing a tool for reflection for internal review and/or ELIR	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helping to evaluate/ improve teaching methods	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhancing students' capability to engage with the subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhancing students' employability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhancing support/guidance provided to students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improved learning resources (e.g. VLE)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**16. Research-Teaching Linkages; 17. Graduates for the 21 Century; 18. Developing & Supporting the Curriculum**

Identifying good practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving collaboration within departments in the institution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving collaborations across departments/institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing opportunities to share practice within and between institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing a tool for reflection for internal review and/or ELIR	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helping to evaluate/ improve teaching methods	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhancing students' capability to engage with the subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhancing students' employability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhancing support/guidance provided to students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improved learning resources (e.g. VLE)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Barriers to progress**

**19. Have any of the following factors hampered or delayed the enhancement of teaching and learning (in respect of the Enhancement Themes) within your institution or department?**

**(Please tick all that apply)**

- Demands on time/resources from external sources
- Demands on time/resources from within the institution
- Lack of opportunities to engage with students
- Lack of time/opportunity to involve frontline staff
- Lack of time to train frontline staff
- Frontline staff attitudes
- Inadequate Funding or resources
- Lack of personnel
- Lack of fit between Enhancement Themes and institutional/departmental priorities
- Lack of fit between Enhancement Themes and institutional/departmental procedures or systems
- Inadequate guidance from QAA/SHEEC on development and implementation
- Lack of time to evaluate Enhancement Theme initiatives within the institution
- None of the above

Other barriers to progress (or comments)

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**20. If there are other comments you would like to make on your experience of the Enhancement Themes, please do so below.**

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Thank you for taking part in this research.

If you have any questions about the project please contact Steve Dempster at Lancaster University: [s.dempster@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:s.dempster@lancaster.ac.uk)

To send us your responses please click the [SUBMIT](#) button.

## Appendix 3. Interview and focus group schedules

### Enhancement Themes Evaluation 2014: interview schedule for institutional visits

Coverage:

Director of Educational Development (or equivalent)  
Director of Student Support (or equivalent)

#### Beginning of interview

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. To remind you, I'm Steve Dempster and I am based in the Higher Education Research & Evaluation Centre at Lancaster University.

I am not sure what you've been told, but we have been commissioned by SHEEC and QAA to evaluate the impacts that the Enhancement Themes have had on Scottish institutions, particularly on enhancing student learning experiences.

This is a confidential interview, but I hope it's okay for me to record our conversation, this just helps me focus on what you're saying and I'll make some notes from the recording later on. All information is confidential and I'll wipe the recordings once the project is complete. Obviously, you and your institution won't be mentioned by names in reports or discussions we have with QAA.

If there are any questions that you feel you cannot answer, please feel free to say so and we'll move on. If at any point you don't understand what has been asked, please stop me and ask me to explain it again.

#### A. Job/role (relationship builder)

1 So, if you're happy, could you please begin by saying something about your position or job role and what that involves?

Prompts/probes:

- How long have you been in this job/role?
- What areas of responsibility are covered by the job/role?

#### B. View of enhancement and development

2 As a broad question, could you please outline what you feel (or your institution feels) is involved in 'enhancement' of teaching and learning?

3 Have students' experiences or expectations of HE at (institution) changed in any way over the last few years?

Prompts/probes:

- In what ways?
- How have you responded to changes in expectations?

### **C. Themes usability/use**

4 In terms of enhancing the student experience here, what has your/your department's input been?

Prompts/probes:

- work within the department
- working with/supporting specific subject areas
- engagement across the sector
- engagement with external stakeholders (specialists, employers, parents, community members).

5 Given what we have just discussed, do the Enhancement Themes reflect your concerns or priorities for enhancement of teaching and learning and/or the 'student experience'?

Prompts/probes:

- Which Theme(s) in particular?
- Why/how?

6 In terms of contributing towards enhancement in respect of (Institution's) priorities, have any of the Themes been particularly influential or useful?

7 Have any been less influential or useful?

Prompts/probes:

- Can you think of specific examples?
- Have the Themes 'inspired change' or 'added value'?
- How/why? (e.g. refer to policy, practices, review, reporting enhancement)
- Have any of the Themes 'jarred' with institutional practices or priorities or been of little value in enhancing teaching and learning?
- Specific initiatives in specific departments?

## **D. Student engagement**

8 How does the institution make use of information resources concerning student achievement and feedback on 'satisfaction', (such as course evaluations, the NSS) to support future practice?

Prompts/probes:

- policy or systems development
- support for staff to enhance teaching, learning and student support
- reward and recognition for staff
- involvement/engagement of staff/students in changes or improvements to teaching, learning and support.

9 Other than evaluations and feedback, how are students engaged in decision-making on learning teaching and support policies, strategies and practices?

Prompts/probes:

- Is any value added?
- Can you comment on the alignment between expectations (as above), Enhancement Themes and capacity of the institution to respond?
- How would you like to see the engagement of students in teaching/learning quality and support provisions developing in future?

10 What barriers or challenges currently impact (or may impact in the future) on student involvement in enhancement work?

## **Enhancement Themes Evaluation 2014: interview schedule for institutional visits**

Coverage:

Student Association President or VP for Education

### **Beginning of interview**

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. To remind you, I'm Steve Dempster and I am based in the Higher Education Research & Evaluation Centre at Lancaster University.

I am not sure what you've been told, but we have been commissioned by SHEEC and QAA to evaluate the impacts that the Enhancement Themes have had on Scottish institutions, particularly on enhancing student learning experiences.

This is a confidential interview, but I hope it's okay for me to record our conversation, this just helps me focus on what you're saying and I'll make some notes from the recording later on. All information is confidential and I'll wipe the recordings once the project is complete. Obviously, you and your institution won't be mentioned by names in reports or discussions we have with QAA.

If there are any questions that you feel you cannot answer, please feel free to say so and we'll move on. If at any point you don't understand what has been asked, please stop me and ask me to explain it again.

### **A. Job/role (relationship builder)**

1 So, if you're happy, could you please begin by saying something about your position or role and what that involves?

Prompts/probes:

- How long have you been in this job/role?
- What areas of responsibility are covered by the job/role?
- How does its remit sit with other sabbatical or officer posts in the SA/SU?

### **B. The student experience**

2 Since you've been a student here, have you noticed any changes in students' experience or their expectations over the years? In what ways?

Prompts/probes:

- in terms of teaching, learning, support, guidance
- evaluation of effectiveness.
- What has the institution done to respond to changes in expectations?

### **C. Usability/use**

3 As a broad question, could you please outline what you feel is involved in 'enhancement' of teaching and learning?

4 Given what we have just discussed, are you aware of the QAA Enhancement Themes?

5 If yes, do the Themes reflect students' concerns or priorities for enhancement of teaching and learning and/or the 'student experience'?

Prompts/probes:

- Which Theme(s) in particular?
- Why/how?

6 In terms of contributing towards enhancement in respect of (Institution's) priorities, have any of the Themes been particularly influential or useful?

7 Have any been less influential or useful?

Prompts/probes:

- Can you think of specific examples?
- Have the Themes 'inspired change' or 'added value'?
- How/why? (e.g. refer to policy, practices, review, reporting enhancement)
- Have any of the Themes 'jarred' with institutional practices or priorities or been of little value in enhancing teaching and learning?
- Specific initiatives in specific departments?

8 If no (or as a follow on) could you say something about your/the SU/SA's involvement in the enhancement of learning and teaching here?

Prompts/probes:

- involvement on policy/strategy committees or working groups
- specific SU/SA campaigns.

## D. Student engagement

9 How does the institution make use of information resources concerning student achievement and feedback on 'satisfaction' (such as course evaluations, the NSS) to support future practice?

Prompts/probes:

- policy or systems development
- involvement/engagement of staff/students in changes or improvements to teaching, learning and support.

10 Do you feel that the institution listens to and acts on feedback from its students?

11 Other than evaluations and feedback, how are 'ordinary' students engaged in decision-making on learning teaching and support policies, strategies and practices?

Prompts/probes:

- Are there any differences between schools, faculties or departments?
- What does it contribute towards enhancing teaching and learning?
- Alignment between expectations (as above), Enhancement Themes and capacity of the institution's willingness or capacity to respond?

12 How would you like to see the engagement of students in teaching/learning quality and support provisions developing in future?

Prompts/probes:

- barriers or challenges.



## **Student focus group schedule for institutional visits**

### **Beginning of focus group**

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. To remind you, I'm Steve Dempster and I am based in the Higher Education Research & Evaluation Centre at Lancaster University.

I am not sure what you've been told, but we have been commissioned by SHEEC and QAA to evaluate the impacts that the Enhancement Themes have had on Scottish institutions, particularly on enhancing student learning experiences.

This is a confidential interview, but I hope it's okay for me to record our conversation, this just helps me focus on what you're saying and I'll make some notes from the recording later on. All information is confidential and I'll wipe the recordings once the project is complete. Obviously, you and your institution won't be mentioned by names in reports or discussions we have with QAA.

If there are any questions that you feel you cannot answer, please feel free to say so and we'll move on. If at any point you don't understand what has been asked, please stop me and ask me to explain it again.

### **Questions**

1 Can we just go round the room and will you each give your name, say where you are from, and say what your degree programme is?

2 What were your reasons to come into Higher Education or to do a degree?

Prompt/probe:

- Why did you choose your particular degree?
- Why did you choose XXX institution?
- For non-Scots, why Scotland?

3 Is your course what you expected? In what ways?

Prompt/probe:

- workload
- course content and mix
- tutor availability/approachability
- learning resources
- learning support
- assessment practices
- opportunities for work-based learning.

4 How supportive do you find your tutors in helping you learn?

Prompt/probe:

- pedagogies and tutor styles
- academic feedback from lecturers
- tutor availability/approachability.

5 Do you think you have good facilities for learning and career development here?

Prompt/probe:

- learning resources (e.g. library, ICT, VLE)
- learning support
- academic tutoring or support
- personal development planning
- careers advice.

6 Do your tutors, the Students' Association/Union or the University ever ask you to feedback or make suggestions about the course?

Prompt/probe:

- about what have they been asked
- methods (e.g. course evaluations, email requests, via representatives).

7 Do you think they listen to or have they acted on your feedback?

Prompt/probe:

- Can you identify any specific examples?
- Why/why not?

8 In order for you to get more out of your university experience, would any of you make any changes to how you are taught and/or the ways you are expected to learn?

Prompt/probe:

- pick up on what students may have said earlier
- pedagogies
- learning resources
- learning support
- assessment practices.

9 And finally, what sort of person do you think you'll be when you have graduated?

## **Managers' and practitioners' focus group schedule**

### **Beginning of focus group**

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. To remind you, I'm Steve Dempster and I am based in the Higher Education Research & Evaluation Centre at Lancaster University.

I am not sure what you've been told, but we have been commissioned by SHEEC and QAA to evaluate the impacts that the Enhancement Themes have had on Scottish institutions, particularly on enhancing student learning experiences.

This is a confidential interview, but I hope it's okay for me to record our conversation, this just helps me focus on what you're saying and I'll make some notes from the recording later on. All information is confidential and I'll wipe the recordings once the project is complete. Obviously, you and your institution won't be mentioned by names in reports or discussions we have with QAA.

If there are any questions that you feel you cannot answer, please feel free to say so and we'll move on. If at any point you don't understand what has been asked, please stop me and ask me to explain it again.

#### **A: Starter**

1 Can we just go round the room and will you each give your name, say which department/school/subject discipline you are from, something about your role?

#### **B. View of enhancement**

2 As a broad question what are your 'takes' on the discourse of 'enhancement' of teaching and learning that are prominent in the Scottish HE sector?

Prompt/probe:

- Is 'enhancement' a helpful or useful way of framing the issues concerned with and arising from teaching and learning?
- Does 'enhancement' sit well with how you or your colleagues think about teaching and learning?
- Does 'enhancement' connect with disciplinary cultures, e.g. what you/your colleagues feel are the necessary attributes or skills to become a scholar in your discipline or area?
- Why/why not?

3 Given what we have just discussed, what have been your (or your colleagues) more recent concerns or priorities with regard to teaching and learning?

Prompt/probe:

- specific examples, pressure points, imperatives
- locus of 'need', 'requirement' or 'priorities', bottom-up (from students/staff) or top-down (via sectoral, institutional or collegiate mandates)
- alignment of individual priorities with those from the sector, institution, department or otherwise, relative importance of these for the individual academic
- evaluation of impact
- barriers and challenges.

4 What support is or has been made available for addressing the kinds of concerns or priorities we've just been discussing? What resources might you use?

Prompt/probe:

- time out/sabbaticals for teaching related work
- time/support for developing research based teaching.
- Whose needs or agendas are being addressed/why? (sector, institutional, departmental or individual, those arising from students, and alignment issues between various needs and agendas)
- Where else might you go for support or resources?

5 In terms of specific resources for teaching, such as materials and ideas for student activities, what do you find you draw on the most?

Prompt/probe:

- courses/CPD for e.g. using ICT, updating skills, pedagogical research
- own experience
- informal with colleagues
- already outlined in the course handbook

### **C. Enhancement Themes**

6 Talking about resources or support for teaching and learning, as you know, we are interested in the extent to which the Enhancement Themes offer resources which are usable and helpful. So, with that in mind, can you say whether you have used or referred to the Enhancement Themes?

Prompt/probe:

- Which ones?
- Some more than others?
- What elements have been useful, in what way?
- Did they inform practice or did they just act as a checklist?
- If not, what is their opinion of them or why not?

7 Do the Enhancement Themes align with or reflect your own (or your department's) aims/priorities/needs (if not already explored in B2)?

Prompt/probe:

- How/why? (e.g. refer to policy, practices, review, reporting)
- Which Theme(s) in particular?
- Does any Theme 'jar' with departmental institutional practices or priorities or considered of little value?

8 Have the Enhancement Themes had any input into projects or initiatives aimed at improving or updating teaching and learning (personally or for staff members in departments/sections)?

Prompt/probe:

- frontline staff awareness of, or involvement in, Theme-based work
- student involvement.
- Which Themes?
- Specific initiatives?
- Whose agenda?

9 Finally, in a number of the policy documents surrounding the Enhancement Themes, they are presented in the language of joint ownership, trust, consensual development, and so forth. Have you found this to be the case?

## **Interview schedules for institutional visits**

Coverage:

Vice Principal Teaching and Learning (or equivalent)

### **Beginning of interview**

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. To remind you, I'm Steve Dempster and I am based in the Higher Education Research & Evaluation Centre at Lancaster University.

I am not sure what you've been told, but we have been commissioned by SHEEC and QAA to evaluate the impacts that the Enhancement Themes have had on Scottish institutions, particularly on enhancing student learning experiences.

This is a confidential interview, but I hope it's okay for me to record our conversation, this just helps me focus on what you're saying and I'll make some notes from the recording later on. All information is confidential and I'll wipe the recordings once the project is complete. Obviously, you and your institution won't be mentioned by names in reports or discussions we have with QAA.

If there are any questions that you feel you cannot answer, please feel free to say so and we'll move on. If at any point you don't understand what has been asked, please stop me and ask me to explain it again.

### **A. Job/role (relationship builder)**

1 So, if you're happy, could you please begin by saying something about your position or job role and what that involves?

Prompts/probes:

- How long have you been in this job/role?
- What areas of responsibility are covered by the job/role?

### **B. View of enhancement and development**

2 As a broad question, could you please outline what you feel (or your institution feels) is involved in 'enhancement' of teaching and learning?

3 Do you have a view on the processes that were involved in framing, shaping and refining the Themes at a national level?

Prompts/probes:

- Is there a sense that the enhancement agenda in Scotland is prescriptive and controlled by policy makers?
- Do institutions feel a sense of ownership or involvement in the development of the Themes?
- Do they feel coerced into following someone else's agenda?
- Have you been involved in helping to shape the Themes at a national level?

### **C. Usability**

4 Given what we have just discussed, do the Themes generally reflect your institution's concerns or priorities for enhancement of teaching and learning and/or the 'student experience'?

Prompts/probes:

- Which Theme(s) in particular?
- Why/how?

5 In terms of contributing towards enhancement in respect of (the institution's) priorities, have any of the Themes been particularly influential or useful?

6 Have any been less influential or useful?

Prompts/probes:

- Have the Themes 'inspired change' or 'added value'?
- How/why? (e.g. refer to policy, practices, review, reporting enhancement)
- Have any of the Themes 'jarred' with institutional practices or priorities or been of little value in enhancing teaching and learning?

### **D. Use and staff engagement/culture**

7 Is there a 'culture of enhancement' among staff members here?

Prompts/probes:

- What does this look like?
- In what ways do staff practices embody an 'enhancement approach'?
- To what extent does this institution support such a culture?
- What are the factors that encourage such a culture here/what are the barriers?

8 How is the contribution of teaching staff recognised and rewarded, and how might enhancing teaching and learning compare with other priorities that staff may have?

Prompts/probes:

- relative statuses of research and publication vs. teaching
- promotion criteria.

9 To what extent have the Themes been drivers of a culture of enhancement, particularly in the way that departments/sections or individual staff members approach enhancement of teaching and learning?

Prompts/probes:

- Specific initiatives in specific departments?
- Frontline staff awareness of or involvement in Theme-based work?
- Opportunities for CPD available?
- Relative influence of internal and external agendas?

## E. Student Engagement

10 One thing that appears to be emphasised in the Enhancement Themes' documentation is that students play a central role in, or work in partnership in enhancing teaching and learning. With that in mind, could you say something about how students are involved in decision-making on learning and teaching policies and strategies, particularly the initiatives inspired by the Enhancement Themes?

Prompts/probes:

- Which students? (reps and/or 'rank and file')
- Role: partners and/or informants? (e.g. in subject review, NSS, ELIR)
- Is any value added?
- Alignment between expectations (as above), Enhancement Themes and capacity of the institution to respond?
- Could you give a few examples?

11 Are there any issues surrounding, challenges or barriers involved with engaging students in enhancing teaching and learning?

12 How would you like to engage (more) students in enhancement work in the future?

Prompts/probes:

- Are there any challenges you anticipate in doing this?
- Do you think the Themes reflect students' opinions of what 'enhanced' learning and teaching should be or is like?







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