



Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience

End of Year 1 Report for Heriot-Watt University

Italicised text can be removed as it is advisory.

The key purposes of this report are to:-

- *provide a framework for HEIs to report on their Theme activity that has taken place over the year*
- *help share information across the sector on the benefits and challenges around Theme engagement.*

Please report under the headings below. The report should be about 6 to 8 sides of A4 in length.

Institutional team

Identify any changes in Theme leadership, TLG and institutional team membership since details were reported in the institutional plan developed at the start of the academic year.

Two members have been added to the Institutional Team to ensure that all international campuses are represented. These are:

- Dr Alyce Mason (Academic Development Coordinator- Dubai Campus)
- Stella Marie C. Galimpin (Effective Learning Manager- Malaysia Campus)

Outcomes/activity

Outline what was achieved in relation to your year 1 planned outcomes and activities, at the time of submitting this report.

Have there been any unintended outcomes/unexpected findings?

Please report on any aspect of work that you are particularly proud of and want to promote.

If there is work, which is not yet completed but will be by the 31 July, please comment below.

Overall, the Enhancement Theme work at Heriot-Watt is progressing well. Like many institutions, the industrial action in early spring has had an impact and some elements are behind where we might have expected them to be.

An institutional wide team, with representatives from our two international campuses has been set-up. This team has met twice to date. An institutional Enhancement Theme web site has been created to provide information for HWU staff on Enhancement Theme activities and to provide information on calls for projects etc. This can be viewed at <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/is/learning-teaching/gaa-enhancement-theme.htm> and links within.

Funded Projects

As with previous Enhancement Themes, much of the HWU funding will be used to fund individual projects across the University. In contrast with previous Themes, the call for these are focussed on specific aspects of our Enhancement Theme work and staff and students across the University are invited to submit project proposals to meet the call.

To date we have funded two projects.

Project 1: *Revitalising the Student Survey Process at HWU: Closing the feedback loop & How do we know we have made a difference?*

This project will involve a systematic review of the current survey processes at HWU and assess the effectiveness of the actions taken by the University in response to student survey results over the last two academic years. The project will provide a series of scalable recommendations to the University on how the student survey framework could be enhanced to close the feedback loop. This work will include desk research around existing survey data and actions plans etc., but will also include interviews and/or focus groups with student representatives and key staff to help fully understand present approaches and how they might be enhanced. This project will be based in the Registry and is expected to report in Oct/Nov 2018.

Project 2: *Exploring Student Views of Good Practice: An evaluation of Student Lead Teaching Awards (SLTAs)*

This project will undertake research of student nominations for the Student-Led Teaching Awards (e.g. Oscars) at the HWU Dubai and Scottish campuses. This research will be student-led and have a clear aim in order to assess how we have made a difference to the learning & teaching environment across Heriot-Watt University. The project will employ a student intern to undertake content analysis of the student nominations for SLTAs and identify the main themes. They will conduct a literature review of how SLTAs have been analysed or used in other institutions. They will also carry out semi-structured interviews with students and award winners. The output of this work will be a report to the University on the findings and recommendations. This will be shared with various stakeholders across the University. It is expected that relevant outcomes and learning from this project will be shared with the wider sector through conference presentations and other means.

Present Project Call

A call for further project proposals is presently open and we expect to fund another 3 to 5 projects this academic year. (see <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/is/learning-teaching/innovation/enhancement-theme-funded-projects.htm> for details). Further project funding will be made available in future years of the Theme.

Other work in relation to our Year one Plan

Work is underway to identify appropriate approaches to evaluating the success of action plans created in response to student surveys. This work is being informed by the approaches taken to evaluating the successful implementation of the

recommendations of the PGR Life-Cycle working group, (part of our Student Transitions work) which reported in November 2016. The approaches taken in this work will be shared with the sector at the 15th Enhancement Conference on June 7th. The present Heriot-Watt approaches to Athena Swan and the HR Excellence in Research Award evaluation are also influencing this work. It is expected that this work will not be finalised until after the results of the “Revitalising the Student Survey Process...” project are reported. (see above)

Dissemination of work

Which mechanisms have been most effective in disseminating outcomes and resources internally, and to the sector – please provide examples?

If there are materials and resources you can share with the sector, please provide details below.

As most of the HWU activity is in an early stage, there are few, if any, tangible outputs at this point.

Regular updates on activity and approaches have been provided at TLG meetings, reports to the University Committee for Learning & Teaching (UCLT) and in other fora. We also have created a dedicated website for HWU Enhancement Theme activities to raise staff and student awareness and to both advertise calls for funded projects and to present the outcomes from these projects. (see <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/is/learning-teaching/qaa-enhancement-theme.htm>)

HWU will be presenting in both a workshop and a paper session at the forthcoming ET Conference. The paper presentation will be sharing the approaches and lessons learnt from a recent review of our PGR life-cycle. The workshop will be an update on a collaborative project with the University of Glasgow which is trying to better understand the data available on the experiences of International PGR students in the UK. The workshop will both share present knowledge as well as engaging participants in identifying potential ways forward for this project. A similar workshop will be run at the UKCGE Annual Conference in Bristol in July.

We expect that once our internally funded ET projects are complete, the reports and other outputs will be shared through the HWU ET web site and through other means.

Inter-institutional collaboration

What was achieved with respect to collaborative working with other Higher Education institutions and what do you perceive as the benefits and challenges – please provide examples. Note that this relates to work funded through institutional contract finance rather than the collaborative cluster activity.

None of the monies that HWU receive from the QAA have been invested in collaborative working. However, that has not prevented inter-institutional collaborative activity that falls under the wider remit of the Theme.

HWU staff are involved in a collaborative project with staff and research students at the University of Glasgow, to try and identify gaps in the existing data pertaining to the experiences of International PGR students in the UK. This work is ongoing and workshops will be presented at the QAA Enhancement Themes conference and the UKCGE Annual Conference to raise awareness and to get input to the project from the wider sector. It is expected that the learning and outcomes from this project will be shared in future ET reporting and at future ET events.

The other main inter-institutional collaboration we are involved in is with Edinburgh Napier University. The focus of this project is on “supporting staff in interpreting and synthesising evidence and in evaluating the impact of changes introduced”. It is expected that much of the work of this project will be achieved in the next academic year.

Sector-wide work

Identify the ways in which your institution has contributed to collaborative sector-wide work project strands (work funded beyond institutional contract finance).

TLG: HWU has been actively represented at all but one of the TLG meetings to date.

Collaborative Clusters: HWU was represented at the second meeting of the Learning Analytics Cluster, and expects to continue to contribute to this work going forward.

Student Led Project: Three HWU staff and one student representative attended the April Think-Tank event. A number of staff also completed the online survey related to this event.

ET Conference: HWU staff will be involved in two of the workshops and presentations at the conference. A number of HWU staff are registered to attend.

E4E Scottish Planners Group: Our Planning Manager is a member of this group and attended the meeting in March, with further offline contribution as part of this work stream. HWU will continue to contribute to the future activities of this group.

Supporting staff and student engagement

How have staff and students been supported to engage in Theme activities? Please provide examples.

Please report on any work (current or planned) around upskilling staff and students in the use of evidence to improve the student experience. Would you be willing to share any of your materials with the sector?

Staff Engagement

Enhancement Theme activities at HWU are aligned with institutional strategic priorities and are heavily influenced by guidance from the University Committee for Learning and Teaching (UCLT).

Our main mechanisms for raising awareness of the Enhancement Theme activities amongst staff across the university is through UCLT, and the Schools Directors of Learning and Teaching, and through the HWU Enhancement Theme webpages (see <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/is/learning-teaching/gaa-enhancement-theme.htm> and links within).

Our main mechanism for engaging staff directly in Enhancement Theme activities is through our Enhancement Theme funded projects (see above).

Student Engagement

As part of our awareness raising activities the TLG Staff Representative and the TLG Student Representative held a meeting with the Student Union School officers in March. This was an opportunity to explain to the School Officers how the Theme activity was being approached within HWU and to answer any questions they might have on this.

One of the funded projects to date is being led by HWU Student Union and will involve input from the Student representatives at our Dubai and Edinburgh campuses. This project will involve the recruitment of a student intern to carry out a content analysis of past nominations for Student Led Teaching Awards (SLTAs), carry out a literature survey of how SLTAs in other institutions have been used and carry out semi-structured interviews with students and award winners. The learning from this project will enhance HWUSUs expertise in the use of evidence to support improvements in the student experience, and feed into future student led work in this area. This learning will also be shared with staff across HWU.

Evaluation

*Reflecting on the monitoring and evaluation of your Theme work, what is changing with respect to **strategy, policy and practice**?*

The progress of our Theme work is assessed and considered at a number of regular points during the academic year. These include:

- Annual reporting to QAA through the end of year report and the annual plan of work,
- The meetings of our Institutional Team,
- The reporting to the HWU University Committee for Teaching and Learning,

At each of these points, our progress against our plan is evaluated and appropriate changes to planned work and input of time etc. considered. At each of these points an account of our progress is shared with the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and with the School Directors of Teaching and Learning.

This ensures that our Theme work is closely linked to other enhancement work across the University and that all major stakeholders are aware of progress and next steps.

Stakeholders are also provided with an opportunity to input into the evaluation of progress and may influence the next steps at each juncture.

This regular communication between the Institutional lead for teaching enhancement, the School leads and the Theme Institutional Team ensures that our Theme activity is aligned with other institutional enhancement strategy, is in line with present policy and can feed into new policy changes and developments. This process also provides early opportunities for the learning from our Theme activities to influence practice within our Schools.

The present Theme activity has been designed to directly address elements within our present Teaching and Learning Strategy (2013-2018), while our learning from this activity feeds into the development of the new 2018-2023 Teaching and Learning Strategy which is presently being developed.

An example of how this works in practice is that the recent call for projects was designed to focus on two areas that the University Committee for Teaching and Learning identified as key to institutional progress in these areas. These were “closing the feedback loop” in regard to student surveys and identifying “How do we know we have made a difference” regarding actions taken in response to student feedback provided in surveys.

It is too early to identify specific significant policy or practice changes, but we expect that the learning from the project elements of our work will lead to significant changes in policy and practice at both School and Institutional level. The learning from some of these projects, along with the work of the Institutional team will influence our teaching and Learning strategy for the next five years as well as impacting on other strategy elements.

Processes

What are you learning from the processes, approaches and structures you are using to support this Theme?

How will this report be used/distributed within your institution?

Learning from the process

To date the Theme activities and discussions have included staff from across our campuses, from all of our academic schools and many of our professional service directorates. This has resulted in many discussions and collaborations between staff whose work would not normally overlap. This closer working is helping us to identify gaps in our knowledge and identify elements of our process where enhancement is desired. Once our funded projects start to report, we expect the learning from these to help us to enhance our understanding of student survey usage across the university and to identify new ways of enhancing our student engagement and our student learning experiences. We also expect that some of the learning from these projects will provide questions for future projects to tackle.

Report Distribution

This report will be shared with the members of the Institutional team, HWUSU, UCLT and with the University Student Survey Management Group. It will also be made available to staff and students across the University through the HWU Enhancement Themes website.

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