

## Institutional Approaches to Good Practice in Learning and Teaching

This paper summarises approaches taken by Heriot-Watt University in identifying and sharing good practice in learning and teaching. Approaches adopted by the University's committees, the Schools, relevant Professional Services and the Student Union are included. The paper is presented as a draft for consideration by the Learning and Teaching Board in the first instance, and it is intended that the information will be expanded upon, as all the key stakeholders contribute an overview of their local process for identifying and sharing good practice.

### A. Background

In ELIR2 in 2011, the University itself identified in its Reflective Analysis the need to put in place a more integrated, systematic approach to identifying, disseminating and embedding good practice in learning and teaching (ELI2, HWU RA, para 4.5.31), with the Learning and Teaching Board having a role in managing this institutional approach. It was agreed that the development of an institutional approach to good practice in learning and teaching should be incorporated into the new University Learning and Teaching Strategy, the consultation process for which began in March 2012.

The approaches presented in this paper are primarily related to formal processes and routes through committees, but the value of more informal and individual mechanisms for sharing good practice is also recognised.

### B. University Level

#### 1. Learning and Teaching Strategy 2013-2018

The University's new Learning and Teaching Strategy 2013-2018 contains a range of priorities related to the Strategic Objective of *Developing Staff*. One of the key areas for development includes the need to *co-ordinate and further develop the range of opportunities and processes for identifying, sharing and embedding good practice in learning and teaching*.

The Learning and Teaching Board has discussed in depth the issue of institutional approaches to sharing good practice in learning and teaching at two meetings (13 November 2013; 11 December 2013), with this topic being selected as the Board's *Enhancement/Discussion* item at the November 2013 meeting.

The development of the Learning and Teaching Strategy as a whole has been informed by good practice identified from other UK and overseas HEI's, as well as by local HWU practices.

#### 2. Committees

The Learning and Teaching Board has responsibility at the institutional level for promoting good practice in learning and teaching. The Board uses international and national practice to inform its strategic activity; however, internal good practice also provides a valuable resource for shaping institutional developments. In particular, the Board uses its *Enhancement/Discussion* slot at each meeting and its annual Strategy Away Day as a means of highlighting local activities which can influence collective developments or which should become institutional projects.

The Learning and Teaching Board provides reports to both the University Executive and to the Senate, which facilitates sharing of a range of both academic and management practices related to learning and teaching.

A wide range of other University committees, groups and fora are also involved in sharing good practice through their roles in academic framework which underpins learning and teaching. All learning and teaching policies, procedures, guidelines and processes are developed by Clerks researching good practice at other HEIs (both UK and overseas) and by members who bring forward examples of good practice based on their own personal knowledge and experience.

As regards good practice in learning and teaching, the key groups are those which report to the Learning and Teaching Board:

- Student Learning Experience Committee, to which the following reports;
  - Student Survey Management Group
  - Learning and Teaching Administrators Forum
- Learning Environment Committee
  - Learning Spaces Management Group
  - VLE Management Group

Reviews of activities within the remit of these groups, such as VISION (the University's VLE), student surveys or mentoring, are purposely designed to enable the University to harness local practice and to enhance provision across the institution. Where appropriate local good practice can be incorporated into formal, approved institutional policies or procedures, such as the Moderation of Assessment. In such cases, the Senate and its Committees also provide a pivotal role in facilitating effective links between local and institutional practices, since all academic policies are progressed through this committee route.

Reports and briefings at the Senate bring good practice, particularly at a strategic level, to a wider audience.

### 3. Quality Assurance Processes

Enhancement is an integral part of HWU's quality assurance processes (approval, monitoring and review), and incorporates all of the University's undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision across all modes and locations of study. Annual monitoring and periodic review processes in particular provide an opportunity for identifying and sharing good practice.

3.1 Approval: as part of the University's programme approval processes, Schools must document the programme's alignment with the University's Strategy, which includes enhancing student learning. Examples of specific enhancement areas for inclusion at the approval stage are: development of research-informed learning skills and employability skills; induction and transition.

An enhancement plan must be provided as part of the contract approval and re-approval for all Approved Learning Partners.

Membership of the Undergraduate/Postgraduate Studies Committees includes School representatives who make use of the programme approvals proposals submitted by other Schools to shape their own practices.

3.2 Annual Monitoring and Review: in the Enhancement section of the School Review and Enhancement Report, the following summary is provided:

- Enhancement activities/plans (incl. multi- location/mode programmes)
- Progress towards University's Learning and Teaching Strategy
- Examples of Good/Innovative Practice
- Current Key Topics and Issues

In the enhancement section of Partner AMR template, partners are encouraged to identify developments to enhance the delivery of the programme and the students' learning experience.

An annual summary of all Schools' AMR reports and the associated AMR/KPI discussions is presented to the Learning and Teaching Board (enhancement) and the Quality and Standards Committee (assurance).

In addition, a summary of enhancement activities/examples of good practice from Schools' AMR reports is presented annually to the Learning and Teaching Board.

In the annual AMR briefing sessions, Schools are encouraged to use the AMR process as a means of identifying good practice and highlighting enhancement activities.

3.3 Academic Review: the Reflective Analysis, as produced by Schools as part of the Academic review process, contains a section on quality enhancement, which encourages Schools to document their engagement with and reflection upon activities relating to the implementation of

the objectives of the University's Learning & Teaching Strategy: enhancing student learning; reshaping the learning environment; developing staff; growing and diversifying the student population.

In the Review Report, the Review Team is encouraged to identify examples of good practice, and to comment on the School's approach to quality enhancement.

An annual summary of all Academic Review Reports is presented to the Learning and Teaching Board (enhancement) and the Quality and Standards Committee (assurance).

In addition, a summary of enhancement activities/examples of good practice from Academic Review reports is presented annually to the Learning and Teaching Board.

In the review briefing sessions, Schools are given advice on how to make the most out of the enhancement section of the review and how to reflect upon their enhancement activities and plans.

3.4 External Examiners are encouraged to identify examples of good practice in their annual reports; this information is then summarised in the annual Summary of External Examiner Reports, which is presented to the Quality and Standards Committee.

#### **4. Recognising and Rewarding Good Practice in Learning and Teaching**

Recognition and reward are key drivers in identifying and publicising good practice (as well as in raising the institutional value for learning and teaching). The University has in place a range of reward mechanisms for academic staff such as promotion through the Lecturer route or Teaching Fellow route to Professor or Professorial Fellow (part of the University's wider academic promotions procedures).

Good practice in learning and teaching is also routinely recognised through the Spirit of Heriot-Watt Awards, which celebrate commitment to, and achievement of, the University's Five Values: Pursuing Excellence; Shaping the Future; Outward Looking; Pride and Belonging; Valuing and Respecting Everyone.

The Student Union's Learning and Teaching Oscars and Graduates' Teaching Award are a particularly influential means of recognising and rewarding good practice across all Schools. See *Section on Student Union*.

#### **5. Other Activities**

There is a diverse array of other mechanisms by which the University communicates good practice in learning and teaching:

- Institution-wide learning and teaching events (*see section on the Centre for Academic Leadership and Development*);
- Partner Conferences, which provide a forum for exchange of information, ideas and practices;
- Principal's Open Meetings, which update staff on progress towards the University's Strategic Plan;
- University publications for staff, students and alumni, such as E-News, Network Magazine and Connect Magazine;
- The University website and its sub-sites;
- The lunchtime meetings between the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the Head of Academic Quality and the School Directors of Learning and Teaching. Similar meetings are also held with the School Directors of Administration in relation to learning and teaching matters.

### **C. Schools**

#### **1. School Learning and Teaching Strategies and Enhancement Plans**

The development of School Learning and Teaching Strategies and Enhancement Plans is led by the Director of Learning and Teaching. Good practice influences their development in the following ways:

- Engagement of colleagues across the School via the School Learning and Teaching Committee
- Drafts of all School strategies and plans are shared amongst the eight Directors of Learning and Teaching
- Drafts of all School strategies and plans are discussed collectively at the Learning and Teaching Board

Good practice in the context of School strategies and plans is a two-way process: good practice identified at the institutional level will be communicated via the Director of Learning and Teaching to groups or individual staff members; however, local good practice can also come up from individuals or small teams to shape the emerging School strategy/plan.

## 2. School Committees

Under the University-wide Academic Management Structure, which was introduced across all Schools from September 2014 (with the exception of Edinburgh Business School, which has incorporated the key functions of the Academic Management Structure within its own set-up), each School has a series of common committees. Good practice is part of the remit of each:

- School Studies Committee: *to provide a forum for the discussion and dissemination of good practice in quality assurance and partnership activities across the School.*
- School Learning and Teaching Committee: *to provide a forum for the discussion and dissemination of good practice in learning, teaching and assessment.*
- School Board of Studies: *to provide a forum for the discussion and dissemination of good practice in enhancing the relevant multi-campus programme.*

In addition, good practice forms part of the remit of specific posts, which are common across the Schools:

- Director of Learning and Teaching: *to promote discussion and dissemination of good practice in enhancing learning, teaching and assessment across the School.*
- Director of Academic Quality: *to promote discussion and dissemination of good practice in quality assurance and partnership activities across the School.*
- Programme Director of Studies/Senior Director of Studies: *to promote discussion and dissemination of good practice in enhancing the programme(s).*

The results of student surveys, which are considered by School committees, are valuable not only for highlighting areas for development, but also for identifying practices to be shared more widely.

## 3. Individuals/Groups in Schools

Individual staff members or small groups such as course teams have a role in identifying, disseminating and implementing good practice in learning and teaching. At this level, sharing good practice is facilitated by a wide variety of mechanisms, such as local workshops/events or peer-to-peer support, and may be identified from various sources, such as student feedback, PSRBs or industry experts. Practice is shared between colleagues in the same programme area who are located on different campuses or between Schools and their partner organisations.

Schools have their own learning and teaching development funds to offer financial support in projects, attending conferences or workshops, or paying for student helpers in data collection activities.

Individuals or small groups may also share good practice with their colleagues following their participation in institutional events, such as the Learning and Teaching Symposium or the Learning and Teaching Colloquium, or sessions such as VISION power hours. Review of external publications or participation in external events, such as Higher Education Academy discipline-specific activities or Enhancement Themes, provides an opportunity to bring back examples of sector-wide practice.

*At its meeting on 5 March 2014, the Learning and Teaching Board agreed that there was no need to expand this section to include School-specific practices, as the generic statements above applied to all Schools.*

## D. Professional Services

The Learning and Teaching Board provides the key institutional forum for sharing good practice in learning and teaching across the Schools and all relevant Professional Services. Where appropriate, issues will be referred directly to the relevant Professional Service or to the appropriate committee or group.

Several of the Professional Services have a more direct role in sharing good practice in relation to learning and teaching. The Centre for Academic Leadership and Development is responsible for collating and disseminating good practice related to educational development, while the Academic Registry identifies good practice emerging from the University's quality assurance processes.

### 1. Centre for Academic Leadership and Development

The Centre for Academic Leadership and Development has a significant role in the identification and dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching across the institution. The Centre acts as a conduit for good practice both from within and outwith Heriot-Watt.

#### Academic Development

The Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PG CAP), which is aimed primarily at new academic staff, provides a sustained, formal means of sharing, and learning from, good practice in learning and teaching. A key feature of the approach in PG CAP is inter-disciplinary collaboration which enables participants to share, and learn from, techniques in a diversity of subject areas. The ongoing development of the programme is informed by internal initiatives such as the Learning and Teaching Strategy and by a wide range of external pedagogical research as well as by the UK Professional Standards Framework.

The Learning Enhancement and Development Skills Programme (LEADS), which is aimed primarily at postgraduate students with a teaching role, likewise facilitates good practice through inter-disciplinary collaboration and discussion. LEADS is aligned with the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. The "Introduction to Global Learning and Teaching" programme, which is aimed at new teaching staff on overseas campuses (but can also be provided for ALP Approved Tutors), introduces participants to HWU's practices in learning and teaching, and provides a starting point for peer-led and peer-supported approaches to learning and teaching.

#### National Enhancement Themes

The Centre co-ordinates HWU's participation in the national Enhancement Themes through a series of projects which are proposed and progressed by academic staff, professional services staff and students. Projects are formally evaluated and reported both to QAA and to HWU's Learning and Teaching Board. For 2013/14, the eight Schools matched QAA funding in order to support further and embed the results of the various projects. The collaborative process allows good practice to be shared as the projects develop as well as at the conclusion when outcomes are disseminated through Project Knowledge-Sharing Sessions. Such sessions are intended to support the process of embedding new developments into academic practice and/or curricula.

#### Learning and Teaching Symposium

The annual Learning and Teaching Symposium is held each October at the Edinburgh Campus, with colleagues from other campuses participating by video link. The Symposium has recently focused on the Learning and Teaching Strategy, ensuring that the strategic initiatives are informed by existing and emerging good practice. The Symposium provides a forum for participants to showcase Enhancement Theme-related projects and to share and discuss outcomes.

#### Learning and Teaching Colloquium

The Learning and Teaching Colloquium is a four-year programme to support the implementation of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, with a specific focus on School strategies and plans. The themes of the Colloquium are influenced by the priorities of Schools as specified in their learning and teaching strategies. Participants are invited to identify actions to take forward as part of their School operation plan. The University Learning and Teaching Strategy Operational Plan is revised, where appropriate, as a result of discussions at the Colloquium.

#### Other activities

The Centre offers a staff development programme of learning and teaching events which provide opportunities for sharing good practice and informing participants of both external and internal

initiatives. Specific sessions, which are tailored to the needs of individual Schools or teaching groups, are also provided.

The Centre's website is designed to support communication of learning and teaching initiatives more widely across the institution. The Centre utilises YouTube and social networking sites to showcase leading-edge practices at HWU and to encourage engagement of staff outwith the Edinburgh Campus.

## 2. Academic Registry

The Academic Registry has responsibility for managing the University's quality assurance processes of approval, monitoring and review, and for quality enhancement through the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The Academic Registry has a fundamental role in effecting links between assurance and enhancement, and uses institutional assurance processes to identify, summarise and disseminate examples of good practice and enhancement (*see above*). The briefing sessions associated with these processes provide an institution-wide forum for participants to discuss and share their own approaches. Briefing sessions are offered in areas such as Annual Monitoring and Review, and External Examiners.

Members of the Academic Registry clerk many of the University's most senior committees (and all the key academic committees related to learning and teaching), and as such, staff are in a pivotal position as regards sharing good practice in learning and teaching.

The Academic Registry will collaborate with other Professional Services in progressing activities related good practice in learning and teaching, particularly the Centre for Academic Leadership and Development.

## E. Student Union

The Student Union's [Learning and Teaching Oscars](#) are amongst the most prominent means of publically recognising good practice in learning and teaching. The Oscars have been recognised as sector-leading, and have provided a model for other student unions to follow.

The Learning and Teaching Oscars are awarded annually at a ceremony each May, and are entirely student-nominated, recognising the staff who have "inspired, guided or aided the most" in each academic year. The six award categories are:

- Feedback Award
- Guiding Hand Award – Academic Mentor/Most Supportive Lecturer
- Switched On Award – Most Engaging Lecturer
- The Refreshing Award – Most Innovative Lecturer
- The Thinkers Award – Most Challenging Lecturer
- Support Staff – Admin or Technical Support

In addition to the award ceremony and the awards, a noticeboard displaying the names of current and previous winners of the Learning and Teaching Oscars is prominently located in the main reception area at the Edinburgh Campus.

In addition, the Student Union also provides a Graduates' Teaching Award, which enables final year students to honour staff in each School who have "made their degrees possible". The award is presented at graduation ceremonies.

The Student Union is currently considering the means by which the achievements/good practice of the award recipients can be communicated more widely. In 2014, the Student Union will produce a 5-year report on the Learning and Teaching Oscars for the Learning and Teaching Board, which will be distributed to all recipients and nominees as well as being located on the Union's website.

Endorsed by the Learning and Teaching Board, 5 March 2014