

Background Information on the Evaluation of the Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) Quality Enhancement Framework for higher education

Neil Lent, Lancaster University

Background

The Quality Enhancement framework is an initiative led by the Scottish Funding council. It is intending that the framework will improve the quality of learning and teaching in the Scottish college and university sectors.

Principles

The framework is built around three main principles:

Development of a quality enhancement culture. In order to develop enhanced educational practices there need to be a shift in culture. This means a move away from external audit style inspection towards a working culture where staff view the development of better teaching and learning methods as part of their day to day work.

High quality learning. 'Ownership' of formal teaching and learning practices should be with colleges and universities and their expert staff. It is assumed that, they are in the best position to develop high quality learning and teaching practices.

Engagement of students. As the intention of the framework is to improve the experience of FE and HE for students they must be actively engaged. Therefore 'ownership' of the framework encompasses students as well as staff.

What we do

Lancaster University and the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) are evaluating the effectiveness of the QEF in Scottish higher education over the next three years on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council. We are using a variety of methods to do this including large-scale surveys, visits to universities and interviews and focus groups with staff and students.

In particular we are carrying out a number of surveys with students and their representatives over the next three years and also carrying out focus groups with students and interviews with representatives.

To do this effectively we need help from student representative bodies to maximise participation in surveys and also to help us ask the right questions in the right way. It is essential that the 'student voice' is heard in the evaluation. We also want to create meaningful feedback systems for students and their representatives. This is so we can receive feedback on our own effectiveness and so we can provide you with useful information that you can use.

What we've found so far

Overall, the findings of the evaluation so far suggest a growing concern with enhancement over assurance and also changes in practices that reflect this concern. Included in this is a strong focus on enhancing the student experience together with increased student engagement.

Interesting differences were observed between post-1992 university respondents and others. Most notably this was in terms of responses in relation preparation for work. Post-1992 university respondents tended to report greater tutor linkage between subject matter and employment and more likely to report placement opportunities. There were also interesting variations in responses given between different subject areas. Again this was largely focused on explicit preparation for work in degree programmes. Likewise there were some disciplinary differences observed in the preparation for work section. Reported placement opportunities were low in Science and Engineering and also in Management.

Respondents tended to present being a rep in terms of raising issues / complaints. This may suggest a reactive rather than integrated way of working. There is clear separation between staff and student. Following on from this there is some evidence that departmental and institutional cultures and practices may exclude students from fully active membership..

Contact details

For further information or comment please contact me (especially if you'd like to be involved in helping us enhance our evaluation):

University sector

Neil Lent, Lancaster University

n.lent@lancaster.ac.uk

01524 594765