

SHEEC Student Engagement Working Group- final report and recommendations

Background

1. The short life Working Group on Student Engagement (WGSE) was set up by SHEEC and approved by UQWG in order to examine areas for development in terms of student engagement within the Quality Enhancement Framework. The Working Group was chaired by Alastair Robertson (Deputy Chair of SHEEC, Abertay University) and Rob Henthorn (NUS Scotland).
2. The scope of the review was to consider:
 - (i) The efficacy of the current Enhancement Theme delivery framework in enabling student engagement in the strategic planning and management of enhancement activities and how this may be better supported and facilitated – at institutional level and at sector level in relation to committees, networks and groups;
 - (ii) The engagement of the wider student body in quality enhancement processes, both within institutions and at sector level;
 - (iii) Consistency in student engagement in quality enhancement including how best to support continuity and handovers for students, given that many representatives are only on teams or committees for one year;
 - (iv) Student engagement in institution-led review at subject level;
 - (v) Student engagement in ELIR 4.
3. The Working Group met four times between October 2016 and January 2017 in order to consider the above topics and make recommendations to the Sector (specific groups identified below).

Findings and Recommendations

4. The Working Group's findings and recommendations have been summarised below under the relevant elements of the Quality Enhancement Framework.

Institution-led Reviews

5. Students already take part in institution-led reviews throughout the sector, often through the participation of a sabbatical officer. The Working Group considered that there were benefits to utilising the increasingly prevalent role of school/faculty officer or equivalent as internal student reviewers thereby increasing the opportunities for a wider group of students and minimising demand on sabbatical officers.
6. In ELIR, it is good practice for students to be key members of the group developing the reflective analysis and the Working Group felt that wider student engagement in subject level self-evaluation of institution-led review, although not without potential challenges, would improve the process and provide more opportunities for students to play important role in quality processes which are more directly relevant to them.

7. There is also an opportunity to review sector guidance on institution-led review as part of the current Focus On: institution-led review project and when the SFC guidance to HEIs on quality is revised.
8. **Recommendation 1: The Working Group recommends that:**
 - (i) **Institutions should consider how appropriately trained School/Faculty officers, or equivalent, can be drawn upon to support and enhance their ILR process and related activities in the institution.**
 - (ii) **Institutions should consider formally recognising students' contributions to ILR through the students' HEAR, or equivalent.**
 - (iii) **SFC should consider how future guidance on ILR might be revised to include the involvement of appropriate student representatives.**
9. **Recommendation 2: Future SFC guidance and supporting guides from QAA Scotland and sparqs should encourage the development of the role of students in ILR, particularly in self-evaluative processes, and sparqs, in collaboration with QAA Scotland and SFC, should continue to develop support for institutions, students' associations and students in developing this role.**

Enhancement-led Institutional Review

10. The proposed method for ELIR 4, currently in development, is set to provide a more tailored, contextualised review. It is important to ensure student involvement in all stages of the ELIR process including the preparatory stages, pre-Part 1, between Part 1 and Part 2 and post review follow-up activities. Student engagement in the Annual Discussions and Preparation of the Reflective Analysis could be strengthened to ensure partnership with students in all stages of the ELIR process. Engaging Students' Association staff in the Annual Discussion is considered to be good practice as it helps to improve continuity which is an important consideration, especially as the ELIR cycle is being extended to 5 years.
11. **The Working Group has made a number of recommendations for QAA Scotland, EIRAG and UQWG to consider.** The recommendations are around further student engagement within the Annual Discussion, measuring student involvement in the Reflective Analysis, and how ELIR 4 could include further examples of student participation. Specific recommendations are set out below.
 - (i) Develop Annual Discussions guidance further to include participation from Students' Associations as good practice;
 - (ii) Further improve student input into Annual Discussions agenda setting to reflect the main student body's current priorities in learning and teaching;
 - (iii) Investigate the extent to which an institution has engaged with students in the preparation of the Reflective Analysis during an ELIR review;
 - (iv) Include in the Operational Guidance examples of positive practice of student engagement in the preparation of the Reflective Analysis and the Institution's Year-On report; advice to institutions regarding student involvement in the preparatory stages for ELIR, pre-Part 1 and Part 1 and Part 2; Further advice to Institutions and Students' Associations regarding planning activities and organising calendars in advance in order to support wider student engagement with the process.

- (v) That QAA and SHEEC consider promoting student engagement in future Focus On activity, possibly through institutions holding their own Focus On events, the outcome of which might be shared nationally.

Student Engagement

12. The Working Group recognises that the student engagement in teaching quality is a spectrum and varies for individual students. For the majority of students, engagement will constitute participation in module evaluation (completion of surveys) and only a very small number will be engaged in quality processes such as ILR and ELIR. It is important to continue to recognise the value of all aspects of student engagement and the need for a range of effective mechanisms which taken as a whole are inclusive, stimulate discussion, feedback and reflection between students and institutions.
13. Student Partnership Agreements (SPAs), or equivalent, have been recognised in ELIR as a way to strengthen the partnership working between staff and students¹. So far, SPAs have been adopted in nine institutions and a further three are in the process of developing them for publication in 2017. The Working Group supports the use of SPAs, or equivalent, as they provide institutions with a useful strategic framework to improve student engagement in quality enhancement priorities agreed jointly by the SA and institution. Further, the Working Group considered that local SPA action plans at a School/Faculty level could be developed in order to improve wider student awareness and engagement in quality enhancement matters.
14. Another area which the Working Group identified for enhancing wider student engagement in enhancement was at the subject level. Specifically, there is the potential to encourage students' sharing of practice across institutions at a subject level through networks etc. One key outcome of the QEF consultation is that the sector has, to date, missed the opportunity to learn collectively from the findings of individual institutional-led reviews. This, alongside the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and its future focus on subject-level metrics, points at the benefits of encouraging subject-specific dissemination and embedding of good practice to enhancing consistency across the sector. (Although, at the time of writing, it is by no means certain that Scottish HEIs will engage with the TEF at subject level)
15. The Working Group considered that there are groups of students who are particularly under-represented in quality matters, e.g. articulating, commuting, part-time, international and postgraduate students. Institutions and Students' Associations should continue to work together to ensure that these students are represented and enabled to be part of the quality enhancement culture in their institutions and the sector.
16. The Working Group recognised the important role Students' Association staff members play in supporting continuation between sabbatical officers and student representatives, through training, briefings and handover. The engagement of Students' Association staff in both institutional and sector level groups was considered to be good practice and essential for supporting student engagement.

¹ Thematic Report on Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) Reports 2013-16: Student Engagement, QAA Scotland, 2016

17. **Recommendation 3: Institutions to consider how to extend Student Partnership Agreements, or equivalent, to support multi-level engagement with the support of sparqs.**
18. **Recommendation 4: UQWG should consider how student-led subject-level enhancement arising from, for example ILR, can be most effectively shared across the sector. Possibilities might include the creation of student disciplinary networks and other information sharing mechanisms.**
19. **Recommendation 5: Institutions to consider what steps they could take to improve representation across the increasingly diverse student body, with particular reference to articulating, postgraduate taught, postgraduate research and off-campus students (commuting, distance, remote campus etc)². Furthermore, the Student Transitions Theme Leaders Group should be invited to consider the feasibility of a Theme-funded project on the representation of articulating students.**
20. **Recommendation 6: To support wider student engagement, sparqs should consider how they could support institutions to develop the Institutional Associate Trainer role further³.**
21. **Recommendation 7: Students' Association staff bring valued advice, expertise/knowledge, support and continuity to Sabbatical Officers work and, to enhance this contribution, the sector should highlight this further through sector bodies and committees (QAA Scotland, TLG, SHEEC, UQWG and SFC) and their associated events and meetings by including SA staff in conversations where possible.**

Enhancement Themes

22. The Working Group considered that the review of the organisation and management of the Enhancement Themes should be considered in the context of the increased emphasis on partnership working between institutions and their student bodies through, for example SPAs. Further, it was recognised that there was a particular need to review the Themes' Student Network as it had not been as effective as it might in its current form, lacking clarity of purpose, remit and operation. Another important issue raised by the Working Group was that, although students are engaged with the Enhancement Themes overall, there has been a noticeable lack of student involvement with the decision-making process of the Themes.
23. The Working Group considered that the ethos of partnership working demonstrated through SPAs at institutional level could be replicated within the Themes through equal representation of students and staff on TLG. This would facilitate partnership working, collective debate and decision making and negate the need for a separate TLG and student network. It would also mean that each institution would have two TLG representatives— a staff member and a student. TLG meetings could also facilitate a parallel or a pre-meeting session for staff and students to meet separately occasionally in order to have an opportunity to discuss matters with their peers.

² For information: Off-campus student representation formed a part of the QAA Scotland Focus On: Collaborative Activity project and the current Focus On: Postgraduate Research Student Experience will look at postgraduate student representation.

³ <http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/students.php?page=55>

24. The Working Group recognised that in principle student members bring significant value to Theme-related projects, however, in practice student-led projects have encountered a number of challenges in the past– such as lack of appropriate support to the students involved. The Group highlighted the importance of learning from past experiences in order to improve the support and opportunities for student-led projects within TLG and work on the Enhancement Themes.
25. The Working Group also discussed student engagement with SHEEC and how the student voice could be strengthened within the Committee. The Working Group identified that one of the barriers is the perceived lack of communication between SHEEC, TLG and the Student Network, which, if resolved, would result in a stronger student voice and, in particular, more student engagement in the leadership of the Enhancement Themes. Another issue highlighted was the fact that student representatives are often chosen after the first SHEEC meeting in the Academic Year, which poses difficulties in continuation from academic year to academic year.
26. The Working Group further reflected on the role of the student members within SHEEC and considered the value of a diverse student voice within the Committee. The Group reached a consensus that the most effective way to ensure sufficient diversity and strength of the student voice at SHEEC would be to invite two additional student members onto the Committee. This would allow the Committee’s deliberations, including decisions around future Enhancement Themes, to be enriched by a stronger and more diverse student voice. In order to aid communication links between SHEEC and TLG, the Working Group further recommends that the two additional student members are selected from the TLG Student Network pool. SHEEC, TLG, sector agencies and institutions should remain mindful of the increased workload to TLG Student members of these proposals and consider how the support they offer can best encourage and support participation. Furthermore, SHEEC is recommended to work with the TLG Student Network Pool to improve the selection and induction process in order to ensure that student members are in place at the beginning of each Academic Year.
27. **Recommendation 8: TLG’s membership to be revised to include one staff member and one student member per institution, in effect merging the SN with TLG and changing the membership of both groups.** This recommendation has already been addressed by TLG and implemented with effect from February 2017.
28. **Recommendation 9: The Working Group recommends that there are one or two TLG meetings a year which include the opportunity for staff and students to have a separate discussion throughout the day. TLG should also consider more effective ways of involving students in funded projects through mechanisms such as joint student-staff led projects or funding allocated for student-led projects.**
29. **Recommendation 10: QAA Scotland and sparqs to provide written guidance regarding the student membership at TLG to support both staff and student TLG members.**
30. **Recommendation 11: The Working Group recommends that SHEEC increases the number of student members from two to four by adding two additional members from TLG’s**

Student Network pool, and that SHEEC and the TLG Student Network work together to improve the student member selection and induction process.

Appendix 1: Working Group on Student Engagement Members and Composition

Staff Co-Chair	Dr Alastair Robertson	Director of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Deputy Chair of SHEEC	University of Abertay
Student Co-Chair	Rob Henthorn	Vice-President (Education)	NUS Scotland
Three student Officers	John Black	President Education	Students' Association of University of West of Scotland
	Patrick Garrat	Vice-President Academic Affairs	Edinburgh University Students' Association
	Maria Roberts	Vice-President HE	Highlands and Islands Students' Association
Two members of Students Association staff	Stef Black Finikin	Policy and research Coordinator	University of Stirling Students' Union
	Stewart Squire	Democratic Support and Policy Coordinator,	Dundee University Students' Association
Three institutional staff members comprising two members of sector committees and one expert in the area of student engagement	Ms Nicola Milton	Vice-Convenor, Teaching Quality Forum; Executive Officer to the Proctor	University of St Andrews
	Hilary Douglas	Member of TQF, Academic Registrar, Academic Registrar and Secretary to the Board	Robert Gordon University
	Professor Nicola Andrew	Head of Academic Quality and Leader of GCU 'Engage' project	Glasgow Caledonian University
Two members of sparqs staff	Eve Lewis	Director	sparqs
	Hannah Clarke	Development Consultant	sparqs
One member of QAA Scotland staff	Emilia Todorova ⁴	Quality and Enhancement Specialist	QAA Scotland

⁴ QAA Scotland officers Thelma Barron and Ailsa Crum have also attended a number of the meetings to support the work of the Working Group.