

# Quality Compass

## Educational Gain

March 2023

Welcome to the sixth edition of Quality Compass – QAA’s publication exploring current topics to help you navigate future challenges and potential opportunities.

This issue considers educational – or learning – gain: what this is, where some of the challenges are and how those challenges might be addressed. Reflections from a range of colleagues across the UK higher education sector illustrate the opportunities presented by different approaches and how grappling with the concept of education gain can provide an opportunity to celebrate excellence and enrich the experience of staff and students.

We view a Quality Compass as a conversation-starter, linked to our wider membership offer.

We are keen to engage with you and provide the opportunity to share your thoughts and practices. If you would like to contribute to future editions or respond to anything we have covered in this issue, please do get in touch at [membership@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:membership@qaa.ac.uk)

This edition of Quality Compass includes contributions from:

Professor Christina Hughes, women I space; Jack Medlin, Keele University Students’ Union; Dr Kyle Erickson and Professor Mirjam Plantinga, University of Wales Trinity Saint David; Professor Fabio Aricò, University of East Anglia; Brian Green, Louise Lowe and Louise Logan, University of Strathclyde; Professor Gwen van der Velden, University of Warwick; Dr Camille Kandiko Howson, Imperial College London.

Educational – or learning – gain is something that English higher education providers who meet condition B6 of the Regulatory Framework will have been thinking about quite a bit recently as they have all made submissions for the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) assessment.

But educational gain – what it is, how we evidence it – is not a TEF challenge or an English challenge; it is a question for the whole UK higher education sector. This is partly as we reflect on issues of ‘value’ that external stakeholders raise but also (and probably mostly) because we recognise the transformative power that higher education can have and we want to ensure that all students have the best opportunity to experience that. One of the difficulties, though, is that students are individuals, each with their own ambitions and aims, and, in addition, may all be starting from different points.

In 2015, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) initiated a project into learning gain which the Office for Students (OfS) then supported through to completion in 2019. Professor Christina Hughes, speaking at a QAA Members event in autumn 2022 on the LEGACY (Learning and Employability Gain Assessment Community) project that she led as part of that overarching initiative, outlined six key lessons that emerged:

1. Measure what you and your students value
2. Choose the most appropriate method
3. Remember learning is non-linear
4. Subject-level is more significant than institutional-level
5. Student engagement is incredibly challenging
6. Learning gain can be better than the NSS [National Student Survey].



Through contributions from a number of colleagues across the sector, this Quality Compass explores these six lessons a little further. First, Christina provides a bit more context around the LEGACY project:

## Case Study

There is a wonderful diagram developed by [Leinster and Coffey](#) depicting the learning journey that always makes me smile. It's a mess of squiggles that looks like toddlers' art. It is also accurate: learning is non-linear. We each progress at different rates. Some things stick. Others don't. And a knock to our confidence or a challenge can take us back.

The non-linearity of learning sets up a challenge for educational gain. With its principal measure of distance travelled, when and how to assess student progress is critical. This is not just a challenge in terms of validity, but also because of the resource commitments needed to undertake cross-institutional research. Our experience through LEGACY (Hughes and Behle, 2021) – an OfS-funded [Learning Gain programme](#) – is a case in point.

Working on the principle of measuring what you value, the University of Warwick-led workstream in the LEGACY project sought to develop understandings of how to better support students in making career choices where the odds of flourishing were stacked in their favour. Would instruments such as [Strengths Profile](#) that promote a working-with-the-capabilities-that-energise-you philosophy be of use? To what extent does taking the test alone support a student in making good choices? And how effective is career counselling with a qualified practitioner in enabling greater distance travelled and helping students understand their work-related strengths?

To answer these questions, the design of this research strand included a group of students who would undertake the standardised test and have a career counselling session. A control group was instituted of students who would take the test but not have career counselling.

Recruitment to the programme was challenging. It was particularly difficult to recruit students to the control group as they could not understand its value. That we were successful is down to the work of colleagues who, despite all the other demands on their time, never gave up encouraging students to engage.

To understand the impact of strengths profiling on students, we used a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures. Students were indicating a dip in confidence between survey points. Why? Students' expectations of where their strengths lay were often at variance with the outcomes of the test. For many this dissonance led to discouragement. Relying on quantitative data only would suggest that such incidences represented 'learning loss', suggestive – wrongly – of the failure of strengths profiling. The qualitative data enabled the team to more fully understand the impact, and necessity, of follow-up career counselling.

We did not analyse the data in the Strengths Profiling workstream in terms of subject differences but other workstreams did include this element. The workstream on career adaptabilities led by the University of Nottingham found distinct differences across disciplines. Sociology students, for example, were more difficult to engage than those taking economics. The findings from the Cambridge-led workstream that developed a test to measure the development of academic skills (Vermunt et al 2018) also found that subject-level variation is significant.

While debate continues about the value and politics of educational gain as another tool for regulating universities, from a student perspective a relevant, supportive and valid assessment of their progress in areas other than subject knowledge confirms what all educators know – it is welcome! As one student reported: 'this is far better than NSS!'.

That final comment from a participating student is key to many of the six lessons – a student who had taken part in one of the activities was able to understand the relevance of what they had done and recognise the benefit to them personally as a return on their engagement. The exercise had provided an opportunity for self-reflection that is not afforded to the same degree in a satisfaction survey, and it led to identifiable personal development as a consequence.

The text that follows offers further reflections on the six lessons from the LEGACY project including some of the challenges and possible approaches to evaluating educational gain.

## Lesson 1: Measure what you and your students value

So what do students value? Jack Medlin, from Keele University Students' Union, reflects on the six LEGACY lessons from the point of view of the student. He makes the critical point that educational gain is very personal, not just to the higher education provider or the subject area but to each student. This means that defaulting to traditional measures will not work:

### Case Study

Perhaps most importantly, university is a development opportunity for students - they arrive on day one, and throughout their educational experience they grow personally, professionally, and academically - but how exactly do we capture this? In comes the concept of 'Educational Gains'.

There is no national measure of educational gains, and very limited local measure; owing to this, it is important that we consider what we should be measuring. It's easy to jump to the conclusion that educational gains are equivalent to graduate outcomes, but it isn't that simple.

In my experience as a student, and as a sabbatical officer, students have no coherent view of what 'success' means to them at university - to one student it is the first-class mark they achieved on an assessment, to the other it is simply winning their BUCS [British Universities and Colleges Sport] game.

Learning from the LEGACY project, it is important that, when grasping the concept of educational gains, you understand what you value but also what your students value. The educational gains for students at an independent theatre provider are going to differ wildly to those at a large research-intensive provider - and that's okay.

By ensuring measures of - or providers' articulations of - educational gains remain grounded in the rich context of their cohort, ensures we are not simply measuring gains for a tokenistic reason. No one group of students is the same, and the idea that a single national metric of students' 'educational gains' exists is unrealistic.

It is also important that we do not default to existing measures, such as the NSS, to define or measure what educational gains students make during their time at university. Instead, each provider should work with its students and graduates to capture a meaningful and authentic understanding of the lessons learnt and growth made during their educational experience.

In saying that, student engagement in discussions around learning and educational gains is difficult - especially when grounded in the particularly turbulent context for today's students. Providers and the sector should see students as co-producers in the process of developing a better understanding of educational gains and should empower them to see the importance of this work - being given the tools and resources necessary to facilitate this.

But ultimately, it is important to realise that if students themselves do not understand the gains they have made, capturing them in a metric is meaningless. As part of the process of exploring and capturing educational gains we should work with students to understand the lasting impact their academic, and extracurricular, activities have on them.



## Lesson 2: Choose the most appropriate method

Once you have decided what it is that is most valued and most distinctive about your higher education community, there remains the challenge of how you assess or measure this. There is no silver bullet for this but there are some really interesting approaches developing across the sector.

The University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) has been doing a lot of work around data sets and dashboards. These have provided greater transparency with information that is more easily understood by users and they enable the same data sets to be used flexibly to meet local needs. Dr Kyle Erickson and Professor Mirjam Plantinga outline the work for UWTSD. While they explain that an appropriate method for their university community starts with the quantitative and qualitative data that inform an assessment of learning gain, these then lead to the discussion and collaboration that can inform a whole-university approach:

### Case Study

At University of Wales Trinity Saint David, we have approached the issue of learning gain as being informed by the combination of quantitative and qualitative data following the student journey.

The first phase of the project established coherent and understandable data sets that allowed access to data from the level of the whole university to that of individual programmes. In doing this, we developed data sets building from individual student data upwards (course, subject, university-wide data) and made that available at course level to all programme teams, as well as discipline, institute and senior managers. We initially focused on developing this approach at subject-level as we found that this is where the most impact for students can take place.

We then focused on enhancing the transparency and accessibility of the data through the development of data dashboards. The goal of the dashboards was three-fold:

- (1) To allow a holistic picture of subject-level data (including both quantitative metrics and qualitative (for example, student feedback, data)
- (2) To allow the analysis of intersectional data (for example, gender and disability)
- (3) To allow programme teams to combine their programme knowledge with the quantitative and qualitative data provided by the university and external surveys.

Through the use of data visualisation and advance filtering of identified issues at subject level, the dashboards have enabled programme teams (as well as managers) to concentrate their efforts and reflection on the issues and good practice that are most significant to their discipline and programme. This has allowed intervention to be specific, measured and appropriate, rather than enforcing 'blanket' solutions across cohorts or discipline(s).

We have now embarked on the next stage of the project through a restructuring of the Annual Programme Review process. As part of this phase, we are continuing to refine the dashboards to provide a clearer understanding of the intersectional data and to allow programme teams to better utilise the information. This development will aim to allow both a deep dive into individual aspects of the data while also facilitating a subject-level overview of strengths and development opportunities. The aim is to support programme teams to work collaboratively with central University services to use the framework built-up by the dashboards, augmented by their own knowledge and understanding of the programme particulars, to identify specific actions to support further enhancement of their programmes.

This stage brings together subject teams and central units to engage in discussion and collaboration for the solution of issues and the sharing of good practice across disciplinary and institute boundaries.

There is not a single metric that can capture learning gain, but enabling a discussion about learning gain requires a whole university approach.

## Lesson 3: Remember learning is non-linear

The ‘whole university’ approach is valuable in ensuring coherence of vision across a provider, identifying trends and sharing good practice. As explored in other case studies here, a shared over-arching philosophy can then be applied within a subject, taking account of the specific needs and nature of that area. This next, more-detailed example of practice takes us to a subject-specific translation of the challenges and illustrates how, at the micro-level of a module, educational gain can be measured in a way that makes most sense for the cohort.

Professor Fabio Aricò is based within the School of Economics and the Centre for Higher Education Research Practice Policy and Scholarship at the University of East Anglia (UEA). A number of the LEGACY lessons are illustrated in his example of academic self-efficacy as a measure of student learning. In particular, he considers the challenges for students in accurately self-assessing their own performance. In some respects, this speaks to the point about learning being non-linear and the impact this can have on students’ confidence and engagement. Through the innovative approach described here, students are supported in making a more accurate assessment of their own development and recognising that that is an ability in its own right:

### Case Study

The creation of meaningful metrics to assess the quality of students’ learning and teaching experience should be rooted in addressing practical issues. Teaching a first-year large class foundation module in Introductory Macroeconomics at UEA, I quickly became acquainted with the challenges I had to face and overcome. Students enrol in our Economics degree with no expected previous exposure to Economics and no pre-requisites in Mathematics at A-level or equivalent. Compounding this with the thrill, but also with the uncertainty that characterises the transition from secondary school to university, my students would struggle to self-assess their own performance. Consequently, they would not be able to identify effective studying strategies and self-regulate to improve them. This, in turn, would translate to students displaying either stress and anxiety, or over-confidence, about their academic abilities, knocking at the door of my office in panic or, worse, disengaging from the module altogether. For this reason, I decided that student academic self-efficacy was an important learning outcome, to be achieved jointly with the acquisition and practice of the skills and the knowledge developed in my module.

Embracing active learning, low-stake quizzing all along the teaching period was the way to keep the students engaged. Moreover, quizzing would not just involve assessing knowledge, but also explicitly and repeatedly asking students to self-assess their own performance and rate their confidence at mastering the skills they were developing. Making intense use of student response systems, students would be continuously exposed to this practice, question by question. This innovation allowed me to facilitate continuous cycles of feedback taking place in real time, developing metacognitive skills, promoting self-regulation patterns, and simultaneously generating the data necessary to evaluate my approach.

Extensive statistical analysis of the data collected highlighted that breaking self-assessment tasks into very small components empowers all students to accurately appraise their preparation. This was ground-breaking in its own right, as the educational psychology literature generally predicts that poor performance is associated with poor self-assessment skills (Dunning-Kruger Effect). Considering the data from a dynamic perspective, I was also able to uncover that an increase in knowledge and skills is strongly and positively correlated with an increase in students’ confidence levels. This suggested that developing self-assessment, and monitoring students’ self-efficacy beliefs, can represent a strong and fully-rounded method to measure educational gain.

The pedagogy and the methodology underpinning this approach are simple to adopt. They fully engage the students in the process, and they provide useful insights to both students and lecturers that can be utilised to further improve the student experience. The challenge lies in the scalability of the approach across the disciplines. Whenever dealing with the design of quizzes and questions that do not have a right or wrong answer, further tweaks need to be brought to the pedagogy, as well as to the measurement of self-assessment skills and self-efficacy beliefs. The intense use of learning technology, and the lack of off-the-shelf platforms facilitating the process, might also be perceived as barriers hindering teachers' buy-in. Nevertheless, with students' anxiety and mental health at the centre of attention in the HE sector, further research and experimentation are certainly in order to further explore this approach, which brings these dimensions right to the heart of the learning process in the classroom.

## Lesson 4: Subject level is more significant than institutional level

An overriding message around assessing educational gain is that subject-level information is more significant than institutional-level. The University of Strathclyde has developed and established an approach to evidencing, reporting on and enhancing activities through a Learner Experience Framework (LEF). Brian Green, Louise Lowe and Louise Logan explain more about how the LEF works to evidence educational gains:

### Case Study

Established in 2016, the Learner Experience Framework (LEF) provides the University of Strathclyde with a mechanism to evidence, report on and enhance activities in support of our distinctive approach to delivering an Outstanding Student Experience, capturing and reflecting on our external partnerships with industry, business and the voluntary and public sectors, locally, nationally and internationally. The Framework, alongside our strategic education projects, enables us to reflect annually on how we influence and respond to our institutional KPIs, as well as to develop a deeper and broader awareness of our strengths, commitment to enhancement and development areas in our strategic priorities for education and the Strathclyde student experience.

The LEF was developed and is overseen by the Education Strategy Committee, and has evolved over the years through consultation with academic, professional services and student stakeholders. It operates within the University's annual monitoring process by way of an appendix for programme-level reporting in the Faculty Annual Reports. Reporting follows a standard set of questions but enables flexibility for the information to be viewed in the context of each discipline. These reports are used within areas of the University to reflect on whether there are gaps, whether those gaps matter and, if so, how they might be addressed. As the information progresses through the University governance structures, it is augmented by other management information for consideration by the institutional Educational Strategy Committee.

The LEF was also a key part of the University's engagement with QAA Scotland's sector-wide Evidence for Enhancement Theme from 2017-20 which enabled us to fund student intern-led projects. These projects were invaluable in gathering student views and perspectives on the LEF and in co-creating online resources to aid students' personal development through their extra-curricular experiences.

Independent reflections on the LEF have also been positive, with the LEF noted by Strathclyde's 2019 ELIR team where the LEF was highlighted in the commendations relating to the strategic approach to enhancement and the availability and use of data to inform decision-making.

Now in its fifth year, the LEF has continued to evolve in line with the University’s strategic objectives and in response to sector-wide developments in relation to student experience. At Strathclyde, the LEF has continued to evolve to incorporate additional indicators in order to better understand the scope and scale of engagement in key areas - for example, entrepreneurship, innovation and digital literacy. The LEF also now investigates how Strathclyde’s programmes engage with Education for Sustainable Development, which has emerged as a sector-leading practice in the last five years. Table 1 below provides an overview of current LEF categories and related indicators.

**Table 1: LEF Categories and Indicators**

LEF Category	LEF Indicators
Internships	Formal placements for academic study or work experience, research internships and work-based learning opportunities, <b>entrepreneurial activities and placements</b>
International	International placements for academic study or work experience <b>Engaging with the UN Sustainable Development Goals for real-world impact</b>
Industry	External / Employer / <b>Professional Body</b> engagement in courses <b>including Entrepreneurs, Innovators and Leaders</b>
Innovation	<b>Creating, designing and innovating as part of studies, working in partnership with the University to enhance programmes, undertaking interdisciplinary learning</b>
Knowledgeable, Skilled & Successful Graduates	<b>Demonstrating graduate attributes that equip students for an ever-changing world</b> The use of Careers Services / Careers advice, extra-curricular opportunities, volunteering
Flexible, Blended & Digital Learning	Digital and distance learning, <b>digital literacy skills</b>

The LEF has allowed us to gain a broad overview of what is on offer at Strathclyde beyond the approved and accredited curriculum and identify areas of future development. By reporting through the Careers and Employability Working Group, the Education Strategy Committee and ultimately University Senate, the findings of the LEF are able to guide high-level decision making and agenda setting.

The LEF is continually evolving alongside the student experience and is regularly updated to include new areas of focus for the University and the sector as a whole. Now that the framework is firmly established in the Faculties and embedded in our Faculty Annual Reporting processes, our aim is to focus more on how LEF findings are disseminated. Currently the LEF data is predominantly staff-facing, but by producing infographics using LEF data we hope to be able to improve students’ understanding of and ability to articulate the distinctiveness and additionality of a Strathclyde degree and the excellent student experience we offer.



## Lesson 5: Student engagement is incredibly challenging

Student engagement is challenging, particularly in the current context as Jack observes under Lesson 1. Despite that, there is a clear consensus that students should be considered as, and supported to be, co-producers in educational gain. Here, Professor Gwen van der Velden of the University of Warwick describes how the Warwick Award sets out to do just that:

### Case Study

At the University of Warwick, educational gain is co-designed to stretch students' intellectual, personal, and cultural learning through learning beyond the boundaries of their discipline, the taught context, and cultural or national contexts, to enhance their agency for life during and after their studies.

Warwick's educational gain concept is directly related to our students' own interests, our Education Strategy and the ongoing development of the Warwick Award. Led by student choice, teaching innovation and a focus on inclusion over very many years, three areas of curricular and co-curricular learning have been particularly significant at Warwick. Interdisciplinarity challenges students to learn beyond the boundaries of their own subject. Internationalisation opportunities allow students to learn beyond the boundaries of their home nation, culture and languages. Student research opportunities of which there is a rich offer, invite students to learn beyond the boundaries of taught provision. Together, internationalisation, interdisciplinarity and student research are summarised as 'Learning beyond Boundaries'.

In recent years, the focus on these three aspects of a Warwick Education have been embedded in the institutional Education Strategy, investment in student opportunity provision and more recently, the development of 'Grand Challenges' across our Faculties, where especially interdisciplinarity is key to curriculum portfolio expansion.

For each of the three Learning beyond Boundaries aspects, a raft of opportunities exist both within and outside the curriculum, and there is evidence that students who engage substantially in such opportunities increase their employability or ability to engage in other post-study activity of their choice. Benchmarked against the sector, Warwick students are highly sought after and according to the Graduate Outcomes survey, 93% of our students have found meaningful work or study within 15 months and 89% of students find these activities fit with their future plans. We regard 'meaningful' and 'fit with future plans' as some of the indicators of having developed agency to achieve in relation to personal interests. Further aspects from this survey and other data sources will be evaluated to measure their relevance as agency indicators.

Warwick students value the opportunity to define what learning success and agency mean to them. Given the variety of goals inevitably generated, a highly personalised approach to educational gain cannot be straightforwardly measured. However, the recent introduction of the [Warwick Award](#) allows us to position self-defined student achievement as central to evaluating educational gain - noting that agency will be different for each student.

The Warwick Award captures students' combined gain from different learning opportunities as well as their own experiences. It allows for evaluating the extent to which a participating student has achieved their personal agency goals and can be started at any point during the student's time on a course. Achievement of the Award is then included on the graduate's Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) for first degrees or by way of a digital certificate for postgraduates who complete it successfully. Notably, the Warwick Award records a representation of these educational gains by students, subsequently allowing them greater agency when negotiating their chosen futures. In the coming years we will refine cross-institutional evaluation of how effectively our provision has supported students' own goalsetting and agency development as the key indicator of educational gain at Warwick.



## Lesson 6: Learning gain can be better than the NSS

As Christina notes, at the conclusion of her piece, students generally welcome constructive feedback and they value having agency over their learning and development. In the most successful projects, students themselves were able to recognise that they had benefitted from their engagement in the LEGACY programme - with the example we have already considered of the student who commented that they considered this to have been a more valuable exercise than completing a national satisfaction survey. While the NSS provides the sector with valuable information, it is less clear to students how it benefits them - as it is time-consuming to complete and measures something quite specific so only gives one piece of the overall picture - as other contributions in this Quality Compass have observed.

Dr Camille Kandiko Howson is well-known for her work in the area of learning gain and she writes here about the development of learning analytics at Imperial College London to help staff evidence student education gain, engagement and progress, and, importantly, enable students to engage with the dashboards as well so that they can be active agents in their own learning:

### Case Study

One of the biggest challenges to measuring educational gain, as identified in the Higher Education Funding Council for England/Office for Students' learning gain programme, was the challenge of student engagement. Students did not see the value, have the time or interest, or were sufficiently made aware of opportunities to complete additional tests and surveys. To be able to explore educational gain of students, without additional burden upon them, at Imperial College London we have explored over the past four years how to get the most out of the data we already have about students - primarily through their data trails across the institution and engagement with virtual learning platforms.

To enable measuring students' educational gain and progress in their learning across the institution, Imperial is investing in its institutional data infrastructure and analytical capability. As part of wider College data strategy, a sector-leading Unified Data Platform is being developed to link data across the institution and support the development of learning analytics to offer data-derived insights to enhance learning, teaching, assessment, and the experience of staff and students through a more holistic approach to information.

Learning analytics refers to the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about the progress of learners and the contexts in which learning takes place (JISC). Learning analytics aim to offer data-derived insights to enhance learning, teaching, assessment and the experience of staff and students. Higher education institutions can leverage analytics to transform many activities, including enrolment, student support, alumni engagement, financial aid administration and other learning and operational functions. An institution-wide approach is necessary to ensure that data subject rights are respected, data is used appropriately, ethically and transparently, shared with permission at appropriate levels and to deliver parity of experience for all students.

Many higher education learning analytics dashboard systems are predicated on predicting drop-out and creating early warning systems; to streamline services and minimise costs; or to support regulatory reporting. By contrast, Imperial has aimed to use learning analytics to offer an enhanced student experience, and to better know and support our students, through the breadth of the sources on which it draws and how various elements inform each other.

Imperial has a unique opportunity to develop and deliver on its strategic priorities for education: to empower students; to facilitate high-quality staff-student interactions in order to maximise student success; and to offer a distinctive, evidence-based educational experience. Similarly, our students have opportunities to reflect and gain insights into their own educational experience, as well as engage in opportunities to design research projects using learning analytics data for use in course projects.

This initiative around learning analytics will allow us to evidence student educational gain, engagement and progress, and show the data in dashboards to both staff and students, allowing them to be active agents in their own learning. This initiative echoes our educational approach and integrates educational expertise, disciplinary research and methodological skills from our academic faculty in areas such as machine learning and AI, in partnership with students.

## Conclusions?

Each of these case studies sits nominally under one of the lessons learnt from the LEGACY project but they all speak to more than one of those lessons and some common themes emerge.

First, UK higher education is diverse and this is one of its strengths as it is a quality that equips the sector to meet the needs of learners whose ambitions, circumstances and priorities are also enormously varied. This means that there may never be a magic formula for the measurement of educational gain but that fact should also reassure providers and encourage them to be confident in articulating what this means for them, and to be flexible in their evidencing.

The importance of subject-level information also comes through. This is partly because there is a flattening effect at institutional level; inevitably, for many providers, particularly those with diverse disciplines, some subjects will lend themselves to particular skillsets, expertise and characteristics, so taking an institutional-level view means that various strengths and areas for development are balanced out overall. Identifying the gaps is important because this enables pockets of excellence to be identified and other areas to reflect on what similar levels of achievement might look like in their discipline. It also means there is an opportunity to target specifically the typical areas in any subject for which students are likely to benefit most from support.

Another clear message is that, however a provider chooses to evidence educational gain, an assessment is going to require self-evaluation. In particular, there has to be honest reflection at subject-level on areas for development. Equally important is recognising where there are strengths and then having a mechanism for sharing good practice across and between subject areas.

The case studies and reflections here show how higher education providers are looking beyond the traditional curriculum to enrich the experience of their students and give them a competitive edge as graduates. And again, the most appropriate way to do this will vary; examples here include the provision of opportunities for learners to gain recognition of their development and achievements through extracurricular awards through to innovative design and pedagogy that develop and evidence the 'soft' skills that graduates will need to succeed in employment.

Ultimately, these case studies illustrate that determining and evaluating educational gain requires collective engagement and conversation.

And just as higher education providers will need to continue having conversations internally on what educational gain means for them and how they will demonstrate it, so - as a sector - we should continue to explore approaches and exchange ideas and practice on this topic so that we can maintain and enhance a high-quality experience for our students.

One of the ways in which we are supporting this at QAA is through a Collaborative Enhancement Project - [Accounting for Student Success: Measuring Educational Gain](#) - which is running throughout 2023 and completing in the summer of 2024.

Led by Imperial College and working with 12 partners, this project aims to explore approaches that higher education providers are taking to identify educational gain, building on the work of the last decade in exploring measures of learning gain and student engagement. Across three phases, the partners aim to develop frameworks for classifying measures of educational gain, supported by practical case studies, with the aim of assisting the wider QAA Membership in identifying their own individual approaches to evidencing educational gain for their students.

Through this project and our other work with QAA Members, we look forward to further conversations on educational gain.



## Additional resources

QAA Membership Resources website: Evidencing Value Framework

[www.membershipresources.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-and-standards/data-evidence-and-evaluation/evidencing-value-beyond-the-metrics](http://www.membershipresources.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-and-standards/data-evidence-and-evaluation/evidencing-value-beyond-the-metrics)

QAA Membership Resources website: Educational Gain

[www.membershipresources.qaa.ac.uk/quality-and-standards/data-evidence-and-evaluation](http://www.membershipresources.qaa.ac.uk/quality-and-standards/data-evidence-and-evaluation)

QAA website: Collaborative Enhancement Projects - Accounting for Student Success: Measuring Education Gain

[www.qaa.ac.uk/en/membership/collaborative-enhancement-projects/educational-gain/accounting-for-student-success-measuring-educational-gain](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/membership/collaborative-enhancement-projects/educational-gain/accounting-for-student-success-measuring-educational-gain)

QAA Scotland Enhancement Themes website: Evidence for Enhancement Theme (2017-20)

[www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/explore-the-enhancement-themes/evidence-for-enhancement](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/explore-the-enhancement-themes/evidence-for-enhancement)

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