Good Practice in Higher Education Review
A Collection of Case Studies
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Read more good practice case studies from commended institutions on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/research/analysis/case-studies
Introduction

One of the benefits of QAA review is that it provides an opportunity to consider and share good practice from across the UK higher education community.

We define good practice as a process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to academic standards and quality and is worthy of being emulated and disseminated more widely.

In this booklet we share case studies of good practice sourced from UK institutions who received commended judgements during Higher Education Review.

At the end we also include two case studies from other institutions that had examples of effective action affirmed by the QAA review team. These are intended to complement the good practice case studies, providing a different perspective on quality enhancement.

The institutions and practices featured represent a wide cross-section of UK higher education in both universities and colleges. The good practice is grouped by theme:

- **Programme offer and module choice**
- **Recruitment and widening participation**
- **Promoting enhancement**
- **Staff development**
- **Student engagement**

By clearly setting out what each institution did, and how, it is hoped that we provide food for thought and inspire other providers to introduce similar enhancements in their own practice.
Enhancing students’ employability
Royal School of Needlework

Review finding (June 2014)
The Royal School of Needlework (RSN) received a commendation for the quality of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice: ‘the extensive involvement of employers and students in programme design and development’ (Quality Code, Chapter B1).

About the good practice
Students develop their creative practice through a unit-based curriculum, engaging with leading-edge practitioners and working to real-time projects and schedules. This is both a motivator and an enabler. Students on the BA (Hons) Hand Embroidery for Fashion, Interiors and Textile Art develop a visual language, and problem-solving and making skills, underpinned by competency in analysis and research. The course offers flexible approaches to learning, taught by project, enabling students to develop an evolving skill set in hand embroidery together with complementary critical and self-reflective skills.

The RSN is a niche provider that has established an international reputation for excellence in hand embroidery. Study is in small groups at its unique ‘campus’ at Hampton Court Palace. Degree students learn in an environment that holds teaching and study at its heart, supported by resources that include a textile archive and handling collection. The RSN Studio is a commercial space creating private commissioned works for external clients at an international level.

Level five (second year) BA (Hons) degree students have the opportunity to study on a live project with external collaborators who change from year to year. The study unit enables learning across a range of platforms, and outcomes with more than one client.

Evaluation and development
Evaluation is undertaken both formally and informally throughout the academic year. Regular meetings for discussion and evaluation are held each term between student representatives and course leaders. Actions can then be progressed by the Course Board, which meets once a term and reports to the degree-awarding body, the University for the Creative Arts.

Students evaluate their own progress through tutorials and reflective practice, including annotated journals, research files, design sheets and peer discussion. Staff evaluate student learning against client briefs. Live projects are reviewed through the annual review cycle. Clients are involved in the evaluation and feedback process, and a number of them have offered RSN students and graduates internships or employment.

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A strategic approach to refreshing curricula
University of Hull

Review finding (February 2016)

The University of Hull received a commendation for the enhancement of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice: ‘the strategic transformational approach to cross-institutional enhancement, which involves effective partnership working between professional support and academic teams through a series of integrated projects’ (Quality Code, Chapter B1 and Enhancement).

About the good practice

Continuous enhancement of learning opportunities takes place through the Transformation Programme, an institution-wide enhancement initiative consisting of four interrelated strategic change programmes:

- **Curriculum 2016+ (C2016+) -** reshaping the portfolio of programmes offered across the University including innovation in the use of learning technologies
- **IT Transformation -** improving information systems and services, and introducing innovative solutions
- **Academic Investment -** shaping the University’s academic staff profile, with an emphasis on supporting staff to develop their research and teaching
- **Student Experience -** improving the quality and scope of student support at every stage along the student journey, from applicant to graduate.

C2016+ is central to the Transformation Programme. Informed by two phases of market research conducted in 2015 and 2016, the University’s entire portfolio of taught programmes is being reviewed and enhanced. This involves collaboration between academics, professional support staff and students. In particular, curriculum development teams are expected to involve students in curriculum and pedagogic design, working alongside academic and professional support staff.

The Transformation Programme has meant changes to culture and practice across all spheres of teaching and learning. Existing good practice has been identified, enabling it to be adapted and adopted in other contexts where useful and appropriate.

Evaluation and development

Funding from the Higher Education Academy’s Vice-Chancellors’ Strategic Excellence Initiative has been awarded to develop methodologies and metrics for evaluating the effectiveness of C2016+. The continuing involvement of the Students’ Union and the wider student body is central to the success of C2016+.

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Inclusive and welcoming recruitment processes
Hugh Baird College

Review finding (May 2015)
Hugh Baird College received a commendation for the quality and the enhancement of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice: ‘the comprehensive interview procedure and effective use of “keep warm” postcards to widen participation by providing targeted information, advice and guidance to all prospective students at key points of the application process’ (Quality Code, Chapter B2 and Part C).

About the good practice
Recruitment processes are designed to meet the College’s strategic priorities and widen participation in higher education. All applicants are interviewed so that course content and work-based learning opportunities can be clearly communicated. A significant amount of work has been undertaken over the last year to develop good practice in this area and to share information with all those involved in recruitment, selection and admissions. A higher education interview pack for use by all staff was introduced to enhance the quality of information, advice and guidance provided to candidates.

Selection procedures are outlined in the Higher Education Admissions Policy. Letters inviting candidates to interview identify special requirements such as portfolios or auditions. At interview, staff take prospective students through each stage of the recruitment, selection and admissions process – as outlined in the interview record sheet – and guide them through the information in the interview packs. A series of ‘Keep Warm’ postcards has been developed for use between application and enrolment, with the following headings: Interview Checklist, Thank You, We Liked You, On Your Marks, Finances in Order? How you Doing? Getting Excited, Don’t Forget, Freshen Up, Still Here.

Evaluation and development
The College has found student feedback to be extremely positive, with particular reference made to the fact that the College was in constant contact prior to enrolment. During clearing, the challenge of sending out large numbers of relevant postcards in a short time frame was tackled by emailing the cards rather than sending them by post.

Building on this good practice, the postcards scheme has been extended into a ‘Stay Warm’ campaign to support retention and engagement once students are enrolled. These postcards cover the following areas: Settled In, Assessment Deadlines, Stressed? Top Tips. Graduation Checklist.

The scheme has shown the benefit of engaging actively and creatively with students to make them feel valued, from the point of initial enquiry and onwards throughout the student lifecycle.

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Review finding (November 2015)
Liverpool Hope University received a commendation for the quality of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice: ‘the Communities of Practice, which provide an effective platform for identifying, developing and sharing good practice to enhance learning and teaching’ (Quality Code, Chapter B3 and Enhancement).

About the good practice
The University has developed a mechanism for detecting, sharing and creating enhancement activity. The Communities of Practice network aims to establish practitioner-led collaboration and innovative problem solving as the main drivers of enhancement in the University. The network encourages focused thematic conversations leading to ‘enhancement fast tracks’ and institutional change.

Enhancements taking place within teaching and learning environments or within particular faculties and departments are diverse and arise at different times. The Communities of Practice network provides a platform through which such developments can be shared, supported, developed and disseminated at University level.

The network arose from a whole-University conversation that resulted in 10 principles of learning and teaching being placed at the core of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. There was an appetite for a new approach to staff development and enhancement, enabling practitioners to meet and discuss aspects of academic practice related to their interests. Over 30 themes were suggested for particular focus and discussion. These have been organised in a nested structure under six main Communities of Practice that report directly to the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee (SLTC). Meetings generally take place at lunchtime and are open to all staff. Useful ideas that emerge are reported directly back to the SLTC for consideration.

The network has resulted in conversations between unlikely groups of people, addressing University-wide issues from different perspectives. It has been particularly effective in bringing about improvements in the areas of educational technology and the student experience, through staff–student collaboration.

Evaluation and development
Data or materials created in the enhancement process are captured within the Google Apps system, enabling them to be shared and evaluated.

Large-scale buy-in from the academic staff can be hard to achieve, but the network provides an array of diverse and interest-directed participation routes. This flexibility has proved to be a highly effective means of engaging staff and promoting enhancement.

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Inclusive initiative for ongoing enhancement
Plymouth College of Art

Review finding (July 2015)
Plymouth College of Art received a commendation for the enhancement of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice: ‘the comprehensive programme review and monitoring process that effectively captures and responds to emerging issues’ (Quality Code, Chapter B8) and ‘the rigorous implementation of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy which engages staff, students and employers in creating a vibrant learning experience’ (Quality Code, Chapter B5 and Enhancement).

About the good practice
The College enables the quality of programmes to be enhanced as the learning journey develops, through ongoing monitoring, engagement with staff and students, and follow-up action. This brings benefits to students, in the form of timely improvements, and to staff because the system is based on the ‘little-and-often principle’ and is light on administration.

The Quality Enhancement Strategy requires termly Programme Performance Review (PPR) monitoring and subsequent timely and effective corrective action. PPR follows a well-planned agenda that is seasonal and offers accessible real-time involvement of programme staff and students, as well as of the College’s quality management staff, via Google Drive. This enables staff to take timely corrective action in response to issues emerging from well-established tracking processes. Such actions are based on live data from the students’ learning journey or respond to views expressed at face-to-face meetings and in the National Student Survey (NSS), as well as to complaints and commendations, which in many cases are evaluated against predetermined key performance indicators.

Staff and students’ ownership of the process has been developed through staff development sessions, training of student representatives and oversight by the Registry quality function, supported by strong management information systems developed through consultation with academic staff.

Evaluation and development
Students can see improvements in response to their views within the same academic year. The data, feedback and actions resulting from PPR underpin the preparation of the Annual Programme Evaluation (APE) and action plan required by the degree-awarding body. Spreading monitoring and improvement work throughout the year has led to APE completion targets being successfully met. This is a significant improvement on the previous system where staff struggled to review multiple information sources under pressure at the end of the academic year.

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Use of data in academic quality management

De Montfort University

Review finding (July 2015)

De Montfort University (DMU) received a commendation for the enhancement of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice: ‘the effective use of data and management information to identify, monitor and evaluate enhancement activities’ (Quality Code, Chapter B3, Chapter B8, Part C and Enhancement).

About the good practice

Drawing on a staff consultation, DMU has made significant improvements to its information management systems and reporting software – changes that have led to more effective academic monitoring and strategic planning.

The Department of Academic Quality (DAQ) has worked from a relatively low baseline to replace out-of-date and ineffective reporting software with a new data visualisation tool. This redevelopment project has been delivered by the Strategic Planning Service, consulting colleagues from across the institution. An iterative process of reflecting evaluations and reviews back into the work undertaken has ensured that the end product meets users’ needs.

The project has culminated in the launch of a new suite of self-service reports. At the implementation stage, the Department of Academic Quality provided a comprehensive schedule of hands-on briefing and training sessions attended by over 400 colleagues. With suitable support and guidance, staff have been enabled to use the new systems and software to evaluate the curriculum, student performance and strategic initiatives. To date, more than 630 staff (around 480 of whom are academics) are actively using this reporting system within quality management.

Evaluation and development

Overcoming negative perceptions and achieving buy-in from staff disaffected with the previous system was one of the main challenges faced, but the approach outlined above has received universally positive feedback. Rather than remaining mere consumers of data, staff have been empowered to take ownership of the underlying issues with a genuine appetite for more information.

Key success factors and strengths of this practice are that the end user has been engaged at every stage and that, just as staff views were sought in developing the new systems and software, mechanisms are in place to elicit feedback and inform future enhancements. There are ongoing opportunities for staff to feed back on their experiences.

The system has since been extended to the university’s external examiners and collaborative partner institutions.

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Promoting enhancement
Review finding (May 2015)
Derby College received commendations for the quality and the enhancement of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice: ‘the higher education academic governance structure which empowers academic and support staff from all levels to develop, maintain, deliver and enhance provision’ (Quality Code, Part A, Chapter B3 and B4) and ‘the investment in, and comprehensive support for, higher-education-specific staff professional development, which enhances the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices’ (Quality Code, Chapter B3 and Enhancement).

About the good practice
To support and sustain the rapid growth in its higher education provision in line with its Higher Education Strategy (2014), the College has established deliberative structures with clear terms of reference to ensure that provision is enhanced at every level. This was the key recommendation of a root-and-branch exercise mapping the College’s higher education and associated infrastructure against the Indicators and Expectations of the Quality Code.

Members of the newly established Higher Education Academic Board include senior leaders of teaching and support services, students and a link governor. Members of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee include middle managers, student engagement staff, and staff involved in teaching and support. Additionally, a learning and enhancement committee for teaching staff has been set up. Each of these committees focuses on developing important themes, policies, processes and continuing professional development for higher education, as well as providing a record of actions against the performance indicators in the Strategy. Policies and procedures have been put in place for: admissions, observing teaching and learning, capturing and acting upon the ‘learner voice’, collaborating with other College partners, approving and maintaining regulations, and processes relating to Pearson.

Evaluation and development
The practice has been evaluated from an evidence base. Those involved in higher education provision have been asked to provide evidence against a matrix developed using the Quality Code, the UK Professional Standards Framework and other relevant reference points.

Each year the College will conduct a programme ‘health check’ to determine how well the new structures are working at programme level. Future plans relate to employer engagement, benchmarking learning gain, and extending the teaching and learning observation process.

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Supporting professional development in teaching
London School of Business and Management Ltd

Review finding (October 2015)
The London School of Business and Management Ltd received a commendation for the enhancement of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice:
‘the strong strategic approach to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, which is embedded in organisational structures and processes’ (Quality Code, Chapter B3 and Enhancement).

About the good practice
The School provides extensive support for the continuing professional development (CPD) of its staff. All academic staff are supported to become Fellows or Senior Fellows of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The confidential Peer Observation of Teaching Scheme and the Managed Observation of Teaching Scheme, both aligned with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), are key components of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. Good practice thus identified is shared through the Teaching and Learning Forum (TLF), and at the annual Teaching and Learning Conference.

HEA recognition and the use of the UKPSF to enhance teaching are central tenets of the School’s academic strategy and key drivers of staff development. To convert strategy to practice the School has a number of measures in place:

- generous remission for research/scholarship, especially in areas of teaching and learning
- funding per academic staff member for CPD, alongside divisional (departmental) CPD budgets
- reward of good teaching and learning through a prize for the best virtual learning environment, and, from 2016, a ‘best teacher’ award from students.

All full–time staff now have HEA membership, and the UKPSF is applied to most areas of CPD. At the ‘chalk face’, the benefits for students are demonstrated by the positive feedback gained through module evaluation questionnaires and meetings of the staff–student forum. At institutional level, the active commitment to CPD is reflected in an extensive range of staff opportunities that include Research Seminars, an e–Learning Reading Group, the Teaching and Learning Conference, and over 30 in–house CPD events annually.

Evaluation and development
Good practice and areas for development identified in the observations are collated and discussed in the TLF. Good practice is also identified through course–specific annual monitoring and evaluation, summarised in an overview report to inform planning and budget setting. The School has invested in EvaSys software to conduct a range of sophisticated surveys on the quality of teaching and learning and inform further improvements.

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An ethos to improve teaching and learning
University of Bedfordshire

Review finding (June 2015)
The University of Bedfordshire received a commendation for the enhancement of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice: ‘the institutional culture and support available to staff to develop and reflect on their learning and teaching practice’ (Quality Code, Chapter B3, Chapter B4 and Enhancement).

About the good practice
The University has developed an ethos in which institutional conversations at all levels focus on improving teaching and learning. This helps it deliver on its commitment to support and enable every student within its diverse population to achieve their full potential.

Principles of effective teaching and learning are enshrined in the recently updated Curriculum Framework. Rather than specifying approaches in detail, the Framework allows staff to interpret the principles according to discipline, adjusting their approach according to learner needs and their own professional development.

The Professional Teaching Scheme (PTS) identifies teaching excellence as a route to promotion and ultimately professorial status. The complementary Bedfordshire Teaching Fellow Scheme (BTFS) supports the commitment of individuals to their own nominated interests from early on in their teaching career.

Staff-and-student action groups drive the agenda of the Quality Enhancement Committee, which in turn generates institutional priorities and projects. Ideas are shared and taken forward in whatever way is found to be appropriate through debate and consensus.

The University has worked hard to nurture rather than prescribe enhancement, maintaining a space within the parameters of its institutional mission in which individual and subject contributions can thrive. Enhancement is an ethos, not just a project.

Evaluation and development
The University monitors how this ethos contributes to institutional enhancement and the success of staff and students, and maintains a flexible approach. The PTS has been developed to include an activity for the periodic maintenance of good standing; the curriculum framework has been revised; and BTFS is being reviewed to provide better support for external engagement. A commitment to reflection and collaboration remains central, ensuring decisions are informed and changes effective.

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Review finding (February 2015)
The University of Southampton received a commendation for the enhancement of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice:
‘the use of students to lead enhancement projects, which has a demonstrable impact on both staff practice and the student experience’ (Quality Code, Chapter B5 and Enhancement).

About the good practice
Southampton Opportunity is an initiative that focuses on enabling students to grow, develop and make connections across all that they do (within, alongside and outside the curriculum), and on providing an engaging academic environment that supports them to fulfil their potential.

A key aspect of the initiative, which had been running for two years at the time of the review, has been to develop teams of Student Champions dedicated to specific areas of enhancement activity: innovation and digital literacy in the curriculum (iChamps); feedback and assessment (Feedback Champs); student development opportunities (OPUS Champs); and enterprise (eChamps).

Every faculty is working with Champions from each of these four teams, coordinated by a senior academic staff member with relevant expertise. The initiative is overseen by a steering group chaired by the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and has been recognised by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) as part of its strategic enhancement programme for Engaged Student Learning.

Student Champions are encouraged to share and take ownership of their ideas. They work in partnership with academic staff to: guide and support innovation and enhancement; make their peers more aware of learning and development opportunities; apply their particular Student Champion remit within their discipline; and make it easier to share good practice and engage with students.

Evaluation and development
Student Champions are asked to regularly reflect on what they are gaining from the role and the impact they feel they are making. As one Student Champion put it:
‘Being an iChamp has allowed me to get involved in innovative and engaging projects. It has boosted my confidence, communication and technological skills, and I’ve been given a unique insight into the UK university education system which has allowed me to make a change at my own university.’

Ongoing evaluation will draw on module feedback (to test the effectiveness of measures introduced through the scheme), staff feedback, and employment data on former Champions (to discover whether the role is likely to have contributed to their employability).

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Review finding (November 2014)
Hereford College of Arts received a commendation for the quality of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice that: ‘the College takes an imaginative approach to supporting and engaging its higher education students in an environment which strengthens their academic and personal development and career prospects’ (Quality Code, Chapter B5).

About the good practice
The College has developed an iterative process of student engagement using a variety of approaches that are in harmony with its creative arts ethos and its status as a small specialist college located in a higher education ‘cold spot’. A culture of communication through multiple channels, including reflective and evaluative space, enables ideas to be fed up through the management chain. Projects are developed and shaped through mutual identification of needs and discussion between students and staff.

Dedicated student liaison staff facilitate students’ involvement in decision making. They support the officers of the centrally located Students’ Union, as well as student representatives and governors.

Bi-annual forums led by a member of the Senior Management Team and the Student Liaison Officer enable student representatives to comment on all aspects of the learning experience. An ‘open-door’ policy between senior leadership and students facilitates informal feedback. Students are invited to observe and evaluate the performance of candidates for teaching posts, and Student Ambassadors are on hand at open days and other events to provide a student perspective.

The Creatives in Residence Scheme specifically supports students in developing work-related skills by offering them the chance to engage with professional practitioners in a College-based setting. Informal online learning spaces are also being developed as the output of an ongoing research project.

Evaluation and development
Evaluation is integral to the engagement processes, through monitoring and review, internal surveys and an end-of-year forum. Students are informed of outcomes through ‘You said, we did’ posters, and posts on StudentNet. Student representatives from course level upwards have the chance to share ideas, evaluate progress and shape strategy for the future.

One area that the College has identified for further development and improvement is the involvement of part-time students. Options include the appointment of an Ambassador for part-time students and further development of online forums for ideas sharing.

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Appointment of formal school representatives
University of Gloucestershire

Review finding (April 2015)
The University of Gloucestershire received a commendation for the enhancement of its student learning opportunities. QAA identified as a feature of good practice: ‘the School Representative System which strengthens student engagement in quality assurance and decision-making at senior levels’ (Quality Code, Chapter B5 and Enhancement).

About the good practice
The University has established a fixed-term paid School Representative role for each school. The primary purpose of the role is to work with staff and students to enhance the student experience, both academic and non-academic.

The School Representative role was implemented by the Students’ Union (SU) for the beginning of the academic year 2014-15. Generally one current student per school was appointed, with preference being given to applicants with one year’s experience as a course representative. The SU organised an induction day in September, to which a range of staff contributed, including the Vice-Chancellor who led the opening session.

School Representatives receive ongoing support through fortnightly meetings with the SU, fortnightly meetings with the Head of School, and termly meetings with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (two-way discussions around key institutional change projects).

SU colleagues worked with each School Representative to draft individual key performance indicators (KPIs) that reflected the main ways in which the role would enhance student engagement in their particular school. Draft KPIs were discussed and agreed with the Head of School. School Representatives were required to maintain a work log to record the activity they had undertaken in relation to their KPIs, and any other activity relating to student representation. They were paid for the hours worked, and it was understood that this would vary according to their academic commitments. The regular meetings with the Head of School and the SU were used to shape plans for future activity, identify any additional support required, and discuss any barriers to progress.

Evaluation and development
An evaluation has been conducted involving those directly involved. The overwhelming view was that the School Representatives appointed have been exceptional, showing commitment and responding well to the training and support provided. Their achievements included negotiating gallery space for student work, creating an App that enabled students to find and book rooms for group work, and organising a Winter Ball. They have each managed the workload well, balancing the role with the demands of being a student, often at Level 6. In 2015-16 the scheme has been extended to provide a School Representative for each subject community. Representatives still meet regularly with Heads of School but also work closely with their academic subject leaders.

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Flexible student representation in health sciences
University of East Anglia

Review finding (January 2016)
The University of East Anglia received affirmation of the following action being taken at the University to make academic standards secure:
‘the steps being taken to implement the Code of Practice on Student Representation to enable students to contribute to the management and enhancement of their programmes’ (Quality Code, Chapter B5).

About the action taken
A new student engagement strategy draws together the strategies and best practice of two schools that have recently been combined, addressing some of the specific challenges faced by a large new, multi-professional school. The strategy has been successfully implemented by the Partnership Officer.

The schools of Nursing Sciences and Rehabilitation Sciences came together to create a new Health Sciences School (HSC) in August 2014. Health Sciences is a large and complex school, encompassing a wide range of professional programmes and split over two geographically distinct sites. Historically, the two former schools had their own staff-student liaison committees, which operated very differently from one another. Significant cultural shifts have therefore been necessary in order to engender a collective approach to student engagement that is valued by a diverse range and distribution of student groups.

An effective system of representation must take account of the fact that Health Sciences students strongly identify with their professions. Student groups follow different practice education patterns, which means attendance at whole-school meetings can be problematic. The Partnership Officer has introduced a system of liaison meetings that enable both school-level representation and professional programme advocacy. She has set up, and now facilitates, a quarterly, whole-school pre-registration staff-student liaison committee. Two subcommittees feed into the larger meeting by filtering course-specific issues and identifying items for the main group agenda.

Evaluation and development
The Partnership Officer has used Facebook groups, Blackboard discussion forums and email correspondence to raise significant student awareness of the representative systems in place, and to encourage greater buy-in. Students are increasingly proactive in putting themselves forward for course representation positions. The inclusive, co-operative approach of the Partnership Officer has been welcomed by students, leading to strong attendance at meetings and engagement in follow-up action.

The post has also provided an effective conduit of information to and from the School Teaching Director, ensuring that operational issues raised by the students are fed into strategic teaching developments to improve the student experience. These improvements are, in turn, communicated back to the student body.

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Review finding (November 2014)
The University of Northampton received affirmation of the following action being taken at the University to make academic standards secure: ‘the steps being taken to provide training for all postgraduate research students engaged in teaching activities’ at the University of Northampton’ (Quality Code, Chapters B3 and B11).

About the action taken
A new University-wide scheme entitles all postgraduate research students to free initial training as teachers in higher education, enabling them to enter teaching contracts at the University. They will join lecturers and other university staff on existing workshop programmes. The scheme also offers observations and opportunities to collaborate on course provision. Postgraduates who successfully complete it will be entitled to apply for paid temporary and/or part-time teaching posts. Once they have experience, they will be encouraged and supported to apply to the Higher Education Academy (HEA) for Associate Fellowship status.

This scheme addresses a recommendation from the Students’ Union in its written submission for Higher Education Review (2015): ‘That the University adopts innovative solutions to increase teaching opportunities available to PGR students, training in the role and opportunities to share research, to ensure their future employability.’

This recommendation reflects that, despite excellent overall satisfaction scores in HEA’s 2015 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), the University had been routinely found wanting by postgraduates in the area of teaching opportunities. Postgraduates were in a ‘Catch-22’ situation: unable to teach owing to lack of training, but unable to access training because they were not on teaching contracts. The scheme breaks that vicious circle.

A survey is being used to gather evidence in order to develop the training. A stakeholders’ group comprising students, academics and representatives of professional services has been created to overlook all phases of the design and implementation. The group will also monitor and evaluate the provision.

Evaluation and development
Being so new, this scheme has not yet been evaluated. To maximise buy-in from supervisors, programme leaders and senior management, it has been formally approved by Senate, with the first cohort expected to begin training in the academic year 2016-17. Training facilitators will seek feedback from postgraduates, with fuller evaluation beginning from 2017-18 when the first cohort start teaching.

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