



Focus On: Collaborative Activity

Managing Quality and Risk/Building learning communities at a distance

Where: The activity takes place, at the University's UK Campuses and within institutions with whom the University has an academic partnership arrangement eg, Approved Learning Partner (ALP).

Date: Annual activity.

Impact

The practice was **introduced:** during 2012/13 following a review of the University's overall Annual Monitoring and Review (AMR) process. In relation to the monitoring of activity within ALPs, the changes were made to: make the process more interactive and dynamic; integrate assurance and enhancement; enable Schools to manage partner delivery effectively; enable academic partners to engage effectively with Schools.

The practice has been **adopted by:**

The practice of collaboratively producing reports with ALPs has been implemented across the University, moving away from the previous process whereby the partner, independently produced the report, and the University responded within a letter. Additionally, the requirement for each partner to produce an enhancement plan was introduced. Consequently, the process has also been adopted by the University's ALPs.

Schools have implemented the process of collaboratively producing reports in different ways. The project presented as a good practice example, is that which is undertaken within the School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society, working with twelve ALPs.

Number of students affected:

804

Contact:

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Others involved:

Prof Fiona Grant, Director of Academic Quality, EGIS, HWU (*main lead*)
Prof Malcolm Chrisp, Director of Learning and Teaching, EGIS, HWU
Programme Heads, EGIS, HWU
School Administrators, EGIS, HWU
Academic Leads/Contacts within ALPs

Further information:

Annual Monitoring and Review website:

<https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/annual-monitoring.htm>

Abstract:

The AMR process involves reviewing activity within ALPs. The report incorporates an agreed action plan and an enhancement plan. The reports must be produced collaboratively between the relevant School and the ALP. The School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society has adopted a successful and effective approach to achieve the aims of the process. Significant preparation is

undertaken, in advance of face-to-face (Skype) meetings during which detailed reflective discussions and agreement of actions take place. The approach adopted has improved communications, built working relationships, brought about a depth and richness of information and helped ALP staff take ownership of the process.

Description:

What was the rationale behind this work?

The overall AMR process was heavily paper-based and resource intensive. A review of the process took place which incorporated consideration of the process by which annual monitoring of partnerships took place. A key priority was to increase the engagement of ALP colleagues, create collaborative working relationships and thereby improve the richness of process outcomes.

How was the work developed and implemented?

The overall AMR process was changed at the University level following a review in 2012. The process incorporated a revised process for monitoring external partnerships (including ALPs). Schools were responsible for incorporating the changes at the operational level. The approach taken by the School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society was as follows:

- The Director of Academic Quality produced a schedule and plan of activities, which expanded across twelve separate ALPs within the UK and overseas.
- Expectations of the process outcomes from the University's perspective were considered in order to determine how the process would be conducted and what information would be required.
- ALPs were then informed of the changes and future requirements/arrangements. A strong emphasis was placed upon collaboration, highlighting that it was not a one-way process.
- The biggest change to the process was the introduction of face-to-face meetings between HWU and ALPs using Skype (rather than solely a paper-based process).
- In advance of the Skype meetings, PAMR templates were completed by the partner, which were then reviewed by the Director of Academic Quality (for accuracy only). Clarification of points misunderstood were done in advance of the scheduled Skype meetings.
- Skype meetings took place for approximately 30 minutes per partner; detailed 'reflective' discussions took place and actions were agreed.
- The partner completed the PAMR template, recording agreed actions, which can then be easily recalled and reported on the following year.

What resources were needed?

- Staff – Director of Academic Quality as the lead; administrative support for planning activities and arranging meetings.
- Technology (Skype) and office space.

What enablers helped the work to succeed?

- Ownership of the process (by staff in the partner institution).
- Collaborative working.
- Building up relationships (face to face as much as possible, ie, using Skype).

What advice would you provide to others trying something similar?

- Clear communication of objectives from the outset.
- Getting everybody on board and buying in to the objectives (helping them see the benefits).
- Taking time beforehand to clarify any anomalies, misunderstandings, so that discussions can then be productive.
- Be flexible – understand that not everything works in the same way for everyone.
- Encourage ownership through a non-confrontational approach. If something is wrong, rather than say it is wrong, ask why first of all (help them get there on their own).

Outline any potential improvements/enhancements that you would like to make or are planning to make since first developing the work/project?

- Technological improvements – reliability of Skype (the University is now formally using Skype for Business which should provide improvements).
- Sharing best practice:
 - Across the institution – Schools operate the process differently.
 - Amongst ALPs - how do we get all ALPs to communicate between themselves so that they can share best practice?
- Achieving consistency of information provided within reports to allow easy comparisons across partnerships and across years.

Perceived benefits:

For students

- Enhanced teaching and learning due to clear recognition/ownership of intended actions and the sharing of good practice.
- Reassurance of quality and standards.

For staff

- Completion of actions at both locations.
- Improved relationship and communication.
- Sense of belonging and inclusion of the home campus.

For the institution

- Reassurance of high risk activity.
- A process which facilitates the embedding of the Learning and Teaching Strategy within partnership activities.

Issues/challenges:

For students

- Providing feedback – particularly as they have a strong loyalty to their ALP.
- Feeling like a university student when not part of a physical university community.

For staff

- Getting engagement from ALP staff.
- Getting feedback from ALP staff.
- Managing expectations, in terms of responsibilities at HWU and the ALP.
 - [Point 3]

For the institution

- Making sure it is not just a tick-box exercise but one which is meaningful and productive.
- Non-participation of the ALP (possibly during a teach-out period).
- Depth of content and value of the information provided, as well as consistency, for the purpose of comparing across years and across partners.