



Thematic Update 2018:

Employability and Graduate Attributes

Introduction

As part of the ELIR method, QAA Scotland produces regular Thematic Reports to support learning from the outcomes of individual ELIR reports. The purpose of the Thematic Reports is to inform future development work in the sector, and to inform future QAA activity including work carried out in collaboration with the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC).

In 2017, we produced a Thematic Report on employability and graduate attributes. This report provides an overview of sector activity in this area as of the beginning of the 2018-19 academic session. The intelligence on which this update is based is the reports produced by institutions at the end of the first year of the current Enhancement Theme, along with the Technical Reports published for the first two reviews of the ELIR 4 cycle (Queen Margaret University and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland). It is likely that there is additional activity in the sector that is not captured here.

Policy and strategy

At the University of Dundee, School Partnership Action Plans are being developed in each School to suit the needs of their learners, with employability identified as an area for enhancement.

Robert Gordon University has initiated a project to explore the underpinning qualitative and quantitative metrics that might best support the work of its new Employability Hub, and ultimately the successful transition of students into graduate-level employment - a key performance indicator of the University. Insights from the analysis have also supported a number of targeted interventions. A new internal survey mechanism has been designed: the Leavers Survey, which will provide a direct comparison with both the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) and National Student Survey (NSS); and quantitative and qualitative insights, which will enable proactive support to be targeted in the period following graduation and in advance of the Graduate Outcomes Survey.

With the support of Education Scotland, Scotland's Rural College ran focus groups on the topics of student voice and career guidance. These were facilitated by an external student from Education Scotland.

A new employability strategy was introduced at Queen Margaret University in June 2017 to build on the success of the previous strategy, which saw the University achieve a 98.2 per cent positive destinations rating in the DLHE survey in 2017. Key aims of the new strategy include: provision of work-based learning opportunities for all programmes by 2025; increased uptake of overseas exchange; increased student engagement in volunteering; the Graduate Attributes review; and consideration being given to adopting the Higher Education Achievement Report. An implementation group, reporting to the Student Experience Committee, is overseeing progress on the delivery plan and KPIs associated with this strategy.

Within the curriculum

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) offers a range of activities and opportunities aimed at developing graduate attributes, employability and enterprise. These include: curricular work - such as the cross-programme modules 'Introduction to Collaborative Practice' (undergraduate) and 'Approaches to Critical Artistry' (postgraduate) - which present students with opportunities for cross-disciplinary work; and the extracurricular, Make it Happen Month (which was first offered in 2017) and Bridge Week (which has been running since 2012). Bridge Week is a significant investment on the Conservatoire's part. Students are invited to propose projects and successful ones are then funded, with around 10 per cent of students participating in projects and almost all proposals being accepted. Students consider Bridge Week to be of significant value in promoting collaboration across disciplines and, for many students, the ethos of collaboration itself is part of the motivation for coming to RCS rather than another conservatoire.

Work-based learning opportunities

The University of Dundee's Academic Skills Centre ran an event to share best practice in delivering work-based learning.

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland describes itself as a proto-professional environment, finding a balance between its remit as an academic institution and the professional training it offers as it prepares students for entry into that profession. It has strong links with the professional world and aims to inculcate an understanding of professional expectations in its students within the context of formal academic study. In common with most other conservatoires in the UK, the Conservatoire runs an agency which secures professional engagements for its students. The Conservatoire is also supportive of students taking up professional work during term time - for example, short-term contracts and one-off performance opportunities. The Conservatoire has working partnerships with many performing arts companies in Scotland which allow students to work alongside professionals, such as the side-by-side scheme run for orchestral musicians with Scottish Opera and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

Developments for postgraduate research students

In session 2016-17, Queen Margaret University introduced a Researcher Enhancement and Development Programme. This 60-credit, SCQF level 12 doctoral certificate in researcher enhancement and development, is a separate qualification from the PhD and recognises students' engagement with activities in support of their doctorate (for example, presenting at conferences or running workshops). Students are automatically enrolled on the programme in the first year of their PhD or professional doctorate but can choose to opt out with the agreement of their supervising team and the Head of the Graduate School.

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