

Thematic Update 2018:

Use of Institutional Data

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 the use of institutional data. This report provides an overview of sector activity in this area as at 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.

Key points

All the areas identified in the 2017 Thematic Report remain current, and several additional areas have emerged during the first year of the Theme. Upskilling staff and students in the use of data is a core focus of the current Enhancement Theme and has emerged as a clear priority for many institutions. Similarly, learning analytics is a priority for institutions - as well as the specific examples provided, it plays a role in some of the other areas identified (for example, in the Open University's work on retention). The current Enhancement Theme includes a collaborative cluster in this area, led by the University of Strathclyde.

It is clear that the current Enhancement Theme maintains strong links to previous Themes and, in particular, the two most recent Themes - Student Transitions (2014-17) and Developing and Supporting the Curriculum (2011-14).

Areas covered in the 2017 Thematic Report

Developments in institutional data management

The University of Dundee is in the process of procuring an attendance data capture system.

Development work has taken place on GCU DASH - the interactive suite of data dashboards used at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU). It is believed that this will improve GCU's reporting capabilities and allow staff to access and interrogate data to support the continual improvement of the student experience. GCU DASH also contains demographic information to support in-depth analysis of the data.

Analytical capacity is being developed at Robert Gordon University (RGU) through the phased roll-out of a new business intelligence reporting tool - RGU:Insight. The aim is to focus staff time on identifying quantitative and qualitative insights and facilitating informed

discussion to prioritise appropriate interventions. Additional operational and strategic-level analytic functionality will be afforded by the implementation of a new library management system (LMS), with a view to informing the design, delivery and appraisal of the services which the Library offer. RGU has also introduced a new online platform within the School of Nursing and Midwifery, for the evaluation of students' practice learning environments.

Queen Margaret University has made significant progress to enhance the systems it uses for capturing, collating and analysing both qualitative and quantitative data to inform decision-making. This includes: data captured via online systems such as the Electronic Registration of Attendance and the Hub/ePortfolio; and data generated internally and externally to inform the Portfolio Sustainability Review, Teaching Excellence Framework and Longitudinal Educational Outcomes data. In addition, the University makes use of student demographic data, as well as retention, progression and attainment data to support staff reflection on teaching practice, programme development and enhancements to areas such as student recruitment, support and curriculum development. Another important source of data is external and internal student survey data which the University actively uses to inform enhancement activity. The University is aware of the cultural challenges involved in moving to a different approach to the way data is used to inform changes in policy and practice, and has ensured that the necessary planning and resources are in place to continue implementing its systematic approach to data-informed decision-making.

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) has adopted a broad interpretation of data. The appointment of a Statistical Analyst has been positive and has led to improved use of data informing programme committee discussions.

Use of data in planning, decision-making and benchmarking

The Jisc student digital tracker and follow-on focus groups have been used to collect information to inform future development of Abertay University's estate.

The University of Glasgow is monitoring the use of teaching space to help proactively manage the campus and mitigate any risks to the student experience.

Robert Gordon University is exploring library service data sources and identifying those which have the most potential to provide relevant insights into user experience. It is hoped that this will help ensure students can readily access the materials required to best support their learning.

The only institution that made explicit reference to benchmarking its performance against the sector is Glasgow Caledonian University, though it is likely that other institutions are using data in this way.

Use of data in initiatives concerned with retention, progression and completion

At the University of Dundee, School Partnership Action Plans are being developed in each School to suit the needs of their learners. Advising has been identified as an area for enhancement and is seen as instrumental in aiding retention and progression.

The University of Glasgow monitors performance and the success of students from its International Pathway College. Data enables the institutions to work together to ensure an optimal learning experience prior to entry to Glasgow. This helps direct support for students through the critical transition from College to University.

At the University of Stirling, a project is underway investigating student non-continuation and solutions to minimise the number of students who leave the University before the completion

of their studies. Initial data analysis will aim to determine any correlation between non-continuation rates and student satisfaction.

The Open University in Scotland uses existing learning analytics research and intervention schemes to support retention for Scottish students.

An Electronic Registration of Attendance system introduced at Queen Margaret University in 2015-16 aims to enhance support for students deemed to be 'at risk' of leaving. ERA data is used to explore reasons for student non-attendance, signposting 'at risk' students to University support services or referring students to the 'Stay on Course' Retention Project. Student demographic data as well as retention, progression and attainment data, is used in Annual Monitoring Reporting to support staff reflection on teaching practice and support enhancements in relation to recruitment, student support and curriculum development.

Use of data in initiatives concerned with widening participation and articulation

Widening access retention and progression data at the University of Dundee have been reviewed, and the resulting action plan absorbed into the University's strategy action plan. Initial evaluation work has been carried out in relation to the STEP UP programme (a module aimed at supporting associate college student entry to Year 2 undergraduate study).

Use of data in initiatives concerned with equality and diversity

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) has undertaken a project to measure the impact of the introduction of its 'Big White Wall' online support initiative. This is expected to connect with other work RCS is engaged in around the topics of mental health, suicide prevention, safe space and gender-based violence. Gender-based violence is also the basis of a project at Glasgow Caledonian University.

At the University of St Andrews, a plan has been developed to explore the diversification of the student demographic.

The Open University in Scotland has initiated an institution-wide project that seeks to address the attainment gap for students from deprived communities. This project will run throughout the lifetime of the current Enhancement Theme and will use data and evidence from a variety of sources within the University, including the different data systems.

Queen Margaret University's Equality and Diversity Committee (EDC) monitors student admissions, progression, completion and attainment by protected characteristic. There is evidence of appropriate staff engagement with this work and of EDC making effective use of the enhanced monitoring information and evidence available to inform decision-making. Monitoring and collection of students' protected characteristic data has improved since the 2013 ELIR through incorporating data collection annually as part of enrolment.

At the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the Disability Adviser collects data on equality and diversity, which informs an annual Counselling and Disability Service Report for the Academic Board. The Systems Analyst collates and reviews additional diversity data, which is considered in the committee structure. This data confirms the effectiveness of the support provided by RCS by comparing retention and progression across student characteristics such as Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) status, disability and ethnicity.

Use of data in initiatives concerned with monitoring, review and evaluation

At Abertay University, a review of the annual monitoring process and links to institution-led subject review has resulted in a new division-level of reporting in addition to programme and

school level reports. The flow of information and data for each level of report has been clarified and new templates for programme and divisional reporting have been developed.

The University of Aberdeen has launched a project aimed at improving staff and student confidence in the student course evaluation mechanism, and work is underway at the University of Edinburgh to identify and share good practice in relation to closing the feedback loop with students.

Edinburgh Napier University has initiated the mapping of its annual review processes to identify key points where evidence is used, and how to enhance support to staff wishing to engage with evidence and make appropriate enhancements to practice.

Core quality processes at Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) are being strengthened through the improved use of evidence. Revised procedures for annual monitoring and institution-led review are in place across all campuses and levels of delivery. Annual monitoring is being emphasised as a continuous process, with evidence collected throughout the year which is then discussed and actioned on an ongoing basis.

At Queen Margaret University, a new two-stage Annual Monitoring Reporting process uses both qualitative and quantitative data to inform and evidence the changes required, with the facility to make timely changes which can enhance the student experience for the start of the new academic session.

At the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, data is generated from a range of sources to inform decision-making. The Academic Board considers whether programmes are meeting agreed aims and objectives using a variety of data drawn from Annual Dialogue, performance indicators, external examiner reports and reports from validations and reviews. The Statistical Analyst has been working with programme teams to improve the generation and interpretation of data in support of work relating to the National Student Survey (NSS) outcomes through the use of statistical significance tools. This approach has been further developed by the Academic Board introducing a new standard template in response to the NSS to ensure a strategic focus on significant trends and comparisons with appropriate benchmarks to assess the impact of interventions and to identify good practice to be shared across the institution. RCS is also developing an online resource that will allow students to respond to the question of what makes a good learner or teacher.

Student partnership and student-led initiatives

The current Enhancement Theme has helped support evaluation of new student voice initiatives at Abertay University. Six projects have been funded, which all include an element of student engagement.

The University of Dundee is working in partnership with its Students' Association to ensure that students are aware of all support available at institutional level. This has involved the development of resources including an International Student Booklet, Student Handbook, Adviser of Studies Handbook and a video produced with Student Services as a one-stop-shop resource. Dundee and DUSA are also examining NSS evidence to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement in relation to closing feedback loops to students.

Edinburgh University Students' Association has led a project to transform the student representative structure, with a move from class (course) to programme representatives. A visual representation of the new representative structure illustrates how it supports the process of gathering student feedback and closing the feedback loop.

Glasgow Caledonian University held a student summit with a focus on enhancing student mental health and wellbeing.

Student-led research into student nominations for the Student-Led Teaching Awards on Heriot-Watt University's Dubai and Scottish campuses will aim to assess how differences have been made to the learning and teaching environment.

Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) is working jointly with its Students' Association (SRUCSA) on projects within its Student Partnership Agreement. Priorities include increased engagement with student surveys and enhancing the class representative system, both of which help to ensure authentic student voices are heard. SRUCSA ran a 'speak week' for students, gathering soundbites from students on their experience at SRUC.

At the University of St Andrews, seven projects have been undertaken by Student Faculty Officers. These projects are designed to enhance the student experience within academic divisions or faculties, and Student Faculty Officers have been encouraged to gather evidence of the impact of the projects.

Use of data in small specialist institutions

At Glasgow School of Art (GSA), a form of student experience evaluation predicated on a participatory arts method is being piloted to enable students to consider the assets of the GSA community.

Engagement with the current Enhancement Theme has resulted in the identification of two priorities at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland: meaningful data for creative institutions; and programme engagement with data. The Theme has also prompted RCS to work in partnership with Glasgow School of Art and Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design (University of Dundee) to explore the transformations that occur as a result of learning in a performing arts institution, gathering and using a range of data to inform new programme designs, and exploring ways of engaging staff and students in finding meaningful ways of interpreting data. RCS is also establishing a project fund and process for students to bid for project funds to carry out work that will help them gain a deeper understanding of the evidence that will genuinely make a difference to the progression of their careers as professional artists.

Consistency in use of data within institutions

A project underway at the University of Aberdeen aims to enhance the postgraduate taught experience and to measure the impact of any changes in practice which have been made. The approach taken by the project group was to look at measures/metrics that are routinely used at undergraduate level and to ask how appropriate these are for postgraduate taught students.

Building institutional expertise

Abertay University has instigated a project to establish what different disciplines regard as evidence, and what use is made of that evidence at institutional and discipline level.

An online 'Good Practice Hub' is being created at the University of Aberdeen to provide a central and accessible repository for evidence-based practice case studies which have been identified and can then be shared across the institution.

The University of St Andrews has hosted workshops and other discussion activities to help improve understanding of what data is currently collected, and the aspects of student experience enhancement that this might inform.

The Open University in Scotland has concluded work to scope and map activity relating to how data is being used to monitor and enhance the student experience.

At Queen Margaret University, professional services play a key role in identifying and sharing good practice with academic schools, as well as within and across the range of services. Examples include the introduction of mechanisms for data capture and analysis within student support services.

Student surveys

Glasgow Caledonian University has piloted two internal surveys - the GCU Experience Survey (an annual student experience survey) and Module Evaluation Surveys, to support staff to monitor the student experience. The surveys are based on similar themes to the National Student Survey (NSS), which allows for benchmarking activity and will help the university understand student responses by considering results, questions and so on, with students to inform future tools as well as student experience activities.

The first stage of a new student experience survey was implemented at Glasgow School of Art. The survey aims to build a more comprehensive understanding of the student experience as cohorts progress through their degrees. A new student voice structure has been used to disseminate the results and ensure discussion at a local level between staff and students is facilitated.

Work is underway at Heriot-Watt University to identify appropriate approaches to evaluating the success of action plans created in response to student surveys. Work has progressed on a project involving a systematic review of the current survey processes at the institution, assessing the effectiveness of the actions taken by the University in response to student survey results over the last two academic years.

Robert Gordon University is aiming to extend the reach and impact of its internal student evaluation questionnaires. An appreciative enquiry was commissioned, enabling Schools to self-reflect and to collate perceptions on what is working well and what might be developed at various institutional levels. The institution has also undertaken a substantive review of university-wide student evaluation mechanisms; aiming to increase the reach and strengthen the collective student voice.

An Institutional Student Surveys Working Group has been formed at the University of St Andrews to oversee survey and other student engagement activity. This has carried out five activities to enhance the effectiveness of survey work.

Previous work at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, aimed at addressing low NSS scores on assessment and feedback, led to a comprehensive review which resulted in higher scores in 2016-17.

Emerging areas of interest

Upskilling staff and students

The University of Dundee has produced detailed, user-friendly data dashboards and has undertaken School-level development work to equip staff to use data to enhance teaching, learning and the student experience.

A staff workshop has been held at the University of Edinburgh to inform the establishment of meaningful and useful data sets for impact metrics for lecture recording and minimum standards for virtual learning environments.

Edinburgh Napier University has aimed to enhance awareness of existing data tools, and to encourage staff to engage with these tools. Workshops have taken place exploring the support and development needs of programme leaders.

Queen Margaret University has employed a range of mechanisms to assess staff familiarity with, and usage of, the various forms of data collected at the institution.

Scotland's Rural College has delivered quality roadshows demonstrating various data-related tools and systems, including the Scottish Funding Council's PI tools, HESA Community Dashboard, and Heidi Plus.

At the University of Strathclyde, a project is underway to explore staff knowledge and understanding of the institutional data available, and staff data literacy at interrogating that data, and using it for enhancement.

The Open University in Scotland has begun work on a staff development programme and a staff development forum, as well as producing a Data Handbook and a Data Competency Framework.

An ongoing aim of Queen Margaret University's Enhancement Theme work is to improve how staff and students use the range of evidence available. A specific focus for the University is access, inclusion and retention, with objectives linked directly to the Student Experience Strategy. A new staff portal has been developed to enable programme teams to access, analyse and reflect on student data, and staff are encouraged to use this proactively to identify, as early as possible, issues related to student retention and attainment and students at risk.

Improvements in the provision of data at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland have resulted in increased confidence amongst Heads of Department, who indicated to the ELIR team that they were now able to interrogate this data in much more informed and critical ways, and felt better able to reflect on performance indicators and the NSS results.

Learning analytics

The University of Edinburgh has initiated scoping work around institutional engagement with learning analytics. This was launched as an 'Institutional Conversation on Learning Analytics', with a workshop involving colleagues from across the University.

A review is underway at the University of Stirling to determine the capability of current systems to offer learning analytics. Staff and student consultations are underway, and activities to pilot learning analytics tools have been brought forward.

Development of policies, guidelines, models, frameworks and toolkits

A project at Queen Margaret University aims to update and develop student and staff guidelines developed during the 'Developing and Supporting the Curriculum' Enhancement Theme. These guidelines focused on successful institutional practice, and will now aim to incorporate, in addition, findings from institutional data on successful student practice, as well as the work of the Learning Analytics collaborative cluster.

At the University of St Andrews, work has started on developing a framework within which staff will be able to network and collaborate to share ideas and resources. Work has also started on the creation of a toolkit for university-wide projects in educational research.

The Open University in Scotland has initiated development of a model that articulates an evidence-based theory of change for the Theme.

The University of Strathclyde is developing its Learner Experience Framework, with student engagement activities providing a student voice to the measures outlined.

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