From Quality Indicators to Enhancement Descriptors: Towards a New Framework

Professor Murray Saunders and Dr Steven Dempster
Centre for Higher Education Research and Evaluation
Lancaster University
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Contents

About this document

This document is the product of a series of five meetings of a subgroup of the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), see Annex 1, which was asked to reconsider the idea of enhancement indicators (based on the evaluation of the original indicators devised in 2008). It took as its starting point that the phrase enhancement descriptor would be used as a more accurate description of a new and distinctive approach to identifying, discussing and presenting institutional approaches to enhancement to stakeholders and the wider public.

It is divided into two parts. Part one outlines the new descriptors based on the work of the SHEEC subgroup, the decisions of the Committee, and the orientation offered by the evaluation of the original indicators. Figure 1 outlines the status of the new indicators, now described as descriptors.

Part two provides the background discussion and considerations which supported the new approach.

Part one: introduction to the descriptors

1   Operating principles for the descriptors

The new descriptors have one overarching use which is to provide a framework which captures the core practices in the Scottish approach to enhancement.
They are intended to be used to coordinate the way enhancement might be described at national and institutional levels and act as a tool to integrate the various frameworks in use in the various review processes.

It is important to note that many indicators are presently in use (in reflective analyses, for example) but the gap being filled by these new descriptors is one of orientation. They are intended as a succinct expression of the Scottish approach and a mechanism to be used to preserve and develop core and other important processes, particularly for internal stakeholders (staff and students) and to communicate to external stakeholders (the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), employers, the international community and other community members).

Figure 1: What are the descriptors for?

1.1   At the first meeting of the Development Group, some principles were established on how the Group might focus its work. It was agreed that the Group would contextualise the work within a broad overview of how the enhancement model works in Scotland. It would particularly emphasise the values of trust, openness, transparency and collegiality.

1.2   This position took account of the way in which members of the academic community experienced the attributes of enhancement differently (and potentially more negatively). A critical issue was identified concerning how more ownership of enhancement might be fostered without overloading colleagues who engage in day-to-day teaching and learning activity.

1.3   A resilient theme established at an early stage in the Group's deliberations was that enhancement descriptors should have a clear and unequivocal use. The importance of retaining/revising the descriptors was in the extent to which they could describe (though not measure) enhancement within individual higher education institutions. In this sense, the descriptors should support the development of a reflective culture, as well as encourage the capacity of institutions to account accurately what they do. The aim was to provide a way of depicting student experiences in both qualitative and quantitative ways.

1.4   In summary, the broad principles of procedure established by the Development Group were as follows.

- How new enhancement descriptors might support and act as a resource for the gap evaluative practices in which institutions have to engage. This might be, in particular, helping higher education institutions to do 'better Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIRs)'.
- Enhancement descriptors will be perceived and will be used differently depending on the part (or level) of the institution (departmental or school staff, heads of department faculty or institution) and they should recognise different disciplinary cultures which will shape the way in which descriptors are likely to be used.
- Enhancement descriptors should be used as part of ELIR follow-up processes.
- Enhancement descriptors should link to but not reproduce the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code).

- They should include 'practice' profiles (examples of practices) associated with enhancement/improvement/enabling.
- Enhancement descriptors should be adaptable enough to encourage institutions to respond to situated circumstances and to enable members of staff who have an interest in developing and engaging with creative teaching and learning opportunities.

Complementary and non-duplication

1.5   The enhancement descriptors should be complementary to other measures, or a resource to be used internally, as well as outward-facing. If the design is working, then it could be seen as a support for ELIR, linking quality enhancement to quality assurance, rather than something additional. The Group noted how the reflective analysis found difficulty in trying to trace the cause and effect of enhancement. It may be possible to use the descriptors as a template to show enhancement in reflective ELIRS. They are intended to help tell the story, describing how enhancement unfolds in Scottish higher education institutions, describing the activities and behaviours of an engaged student undergoing enhanced teaching.

Broad purposes and comparable frameworks

1.6   Building on this analysis, what might the gap in the market be that the new enhancement descriptors could fill; one view was that it was difficult to identify a gap given, for example, the emerging UK-wide *Chapter B5: Student Engagement* of the Quality Code[1] and the Curriculum for Excellence.[2] In the former, there are seven Indicators that are clearly identified which are close to the range of indicators in the original enhancement indicator list (see Annex 2). The latter also clearly indicates the range of attributes associated with an engaged approach to learning to which higher education institutions might be expected to respond (see Annex 3). The danger was that the clear role for enhancement descriptors might not be apparent, that is they might be seen as another set of hoops through which universities might feel they have to jump. This was at the crux of the purpose of revisiting and the need for analytical scepticism.

Mind the gap

1.7   With respect to the market-gap discussion, there was a comment that the enhancement indicators (as originally devised) appear to have been subsumed into the Quality Code. The indicators in Annex 3 from the Quality Code might form the basis for a new set which were adapted for use within the Scottish sector. However, as the Group continued to meet, there was the growing consensus that while there should be clear connections with the Quality Code, it remained an essentially assurance-driven tool. In summary, the added value of the new approach is captured in the following; the critical shift in thinking embodied in the new approach is a focus on how things might be enhanced; how higher education institutions might benefit from certain practices and continue to develop and enhance learning, teaching and assessment. They are not specifications on student engagement or learning but descriptions of the practices associated with improvement and enabling.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=174.
[2] The Curriculum for Excellence, available at: www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/thepurposeofthecurriculum/index.asp.

Potential uses

1.8   By a focus on practices, this approach will enable the description of enhancement in institutions and act to coordinate the descriptive profile and the use of evidence. It will also act as a way of focusing data and evidence requirements. Its uses are:

- to coordinate the description of enhancement practices within institutions
- to orientate and organise reflective analyses and other ELIR documentation
- to provide the framework for internal analysis and review of core enhancement practice and cross checking with the Quality Code
- to check on the internal coherence in policy
- for external communication to key stakeholders (for example, SFC and employers)
- to scale-up and focus sector-wide analyses of success in the student experience.

1.9   Descriptors or indicators of enhancement are, by their very nature, a reference to processes. They will not in themselves demonstrate student achievement outcomes (destinations, degree classes, National Student Survey (NSS) scores, and so on). There is still a need to connect causally enhancement with existing positive outcome indicators beyond those associated with enhancement. This can be done by aligning positive outcomes (like the above) with the enhancement processes they are emphasising.

2   The enhancement descriptors

2.1   A strong guiding principle for the development of new descriptors was to identify clusters of practices which evoked the distinctive character of the Scottish approach to enhancement which set it apart from other, more assurance-driven designs.

2.2   Descriptors 1 to 5 outline the focus for descriptions of how institutions and, scaled-up, the whole sector, might depict the specific dimensions of the Scottish approach to enhancement. They are:

1   Enhancement descriptor: collaborative practice
2   Enhancement descriptor: the use of national quality Enhancement Themes
3   Enhancement descriptor: learning from international experience
4   Enhancement descriptor: alignment and coherence
5   Enhancement descriptor: evaluative practice.

2.3   Descriptor 6 outlines the focus for more general considerations of the practices that depict the institutional and sector approach to the enhancement of the student experience, as detailed further on:

6   Students as partners (Enhancement descriptor: student engagement in learning and Enhancement descriptor: student engagement in decisions).

1. Enhancement descriptor: collaborative practice
Context

The enhancement process is characterised in Scotland by a collaborative emphasis in the development of frameworks and resources which work across and within institutions. While not exaggerating this emphasis, through SHEEC and the way in which Themes are developed, the sectoral consensus on the focus for developments, the centrality of the student experience, and the well supported sparqs involvement were all examples of this collaborative approach. Phrases which captured this characteristic included the 'we have a tendency to work together', the 'we understate an emphasis on 'competition''. The suggestion was that this process characteristic was one which might be endorsed and highlighted through a separate category of consideration in the enhancement descriptors. The practices would focus on the institution's capacity and involvement in this dimension of Scottish development.

Example practice clusters

- Practices associated with cross institutional and internal collaborative working and learning with the purpose of intra and inter-institutional development of teaching and learning.
- Practice associated with how the higher education institution works with other partners to support and sustain teaching and learning developments.
- Practices associated with the use of external partners to enhance the student experience. for example, employers work placements, internships and so on).

2. Enhancement descriptor: the use of national quality enhancement themes
Context

A critical feature of the distinctive approach to enhancement is the thematic approach in which focus, resources, approaches and institutional developments were structured through a series of themes that characterised the whole sector. Through longitudinal evaluation, the importance of this strategy has been established. This suggests an enhancement descriptor which focuses on the way in which institutions adapt and use these resources. This might include practices associated with the way in which the themes work as a catalyst for developmental projects within institutions and the way in which institutions developed cross institutional approaches to the use of themes.

Example practice clusters

- Practices which address the way in which institutions adapt, modify and situate the resources and collective effort made available by the thematic approach (this might involve the range of practices within institutions associated with innovative, effective and inspiring teaching and learning).
- Practice associated with how the higher education institution enables the use of resources for teaching and learning.
- Practices associated with how priorities for the focus in teaching and learning are decided at institutional level.

3. Enhancement descriptor: learning from international experience

Context

This feature of the Scottish environment is associated with learning from international experience. In effect, this consideration refers to the work within Themes, but also in terms of more generic practices in which the reference points were global, as well as within the Scottish sector. This refers to the extent to which higher education institutions have the capacity and confidence to learn from and adapt interesting and appropriate practices from the international environment.

Example practice clusters

- Practices which embody and demonstrate the way in which higher education institutions in Scotland refer to and learn from international exemplars, practice and lessons in the development of their own approaches.
- Practices associated with international networks and collaborations on teaching and learning.
- Practices associated with identifying comparable, international practice with which institutional practice might be contextualised and equated.

4. Enhancement descriptor: alignment and coherence

Context

This descriptor refers to enhancement culture both at institutional and sector wide level. Specifically, the way in which different policies and practices are unified by a common set of values, protocols and ways of behaving. This characteristic of systemic practice is dependent on the range and power of the processes and practices put in place within a higher education institution to communicate common purpose and clarity within policy and procedural development.

In the case of enhancement, the focus is on practices which are associated with promoting a learner-centred and cohesive approach, aligned with policy and practice and is informed by a systematic understanding of learner expectations, needs and aspirations. This descriptor is focused on making sure the policies and practices within an institution are mutually supportive and communicated effectively.

Example practice clusters

- Practices which focus on joining up the dimensions and articulation of institutional policy (policy documents and statements) directly to what students might actually expect and hope for. It denotes a reduction in rhetoric and, in its place, a close alignment with what actually happens.
- Practices associated with participation and consultation during policy development.
- Practices associated with an open and discursive culture. It also includes transparent decision making practice.

5. Enhancement descriptor: evaluative practice

Context

This category refers to enhancement strategies which promote the development of evidential resources for decision making, development and communication. It includes practices associated with a reflective quality culture.

These are practices designed to enable the support of a reflective quality culture developed through a framework of staff and student support structures (time, encouragement, systems, reward), and by the promotion of approaches to learning and teaching which are aligned with a shared vision of student-centred learning.

Example practice clusters

- Practices associated with reflection and the use of evidence.
- Practices associated with maintaining and developing opportunities for reflection on experience by drawing on appropriate ranges of evidence, including national and international data sets.
- Practices which embed an evaluative culture into day-to-day teaching practices by informal and formal review meetings, a discursive culture and an open approach to peer assessments of teaching.

6. Enhancement descriptor: students as partners

General context

The emphasis on the student as a partner in learning and in institutional and sector life denotes a relationship within Scottish higher education institutions in which the student is part of the providing process, both through engagements with their own learning and in decisions about the learning environment. In this case, an indicator might suggest practices which embody the partnership metaphor and which encompass a range of ways in which students are partners (representational practices, involvements in planning, reviews, discussions and in the use of sector wide training resources and so on) at various levels within institutions and across the sector. This refers to, in particular, practice relating to the student learning experience which can be informed by a continuous engagement and dialogue - both formal and informal - with students. In developing partnership with students it is important to recognise the issues relating to perceptions around position, power and influence.

6a Enhancement descriptor: student engagement in decisions

Context

This category refers to the involvement of students in decisions at all levels of the institution. It involves practices which improve and develop student capacity to be a partner in decision making and review forums. Practices associated with decisions which affect students take place in a variety of ways and students can engage in them through formal representation mechanisms, as well as through less formal mechanisms such as surveys and focus groups.

Example practice clusters

- Practices which create a culture of engagement that is led from the top, but owned by everybody.
- Practices which reflect the diverse nature and needs of the student body.
- Practices that focus on enhancement and change, rather than on student engagement for its own sake.
- Practices associated with recognising and rewarding the value of the student contribution.
- Practices involving the provision of appropriate resources and support, including training of student representatives.

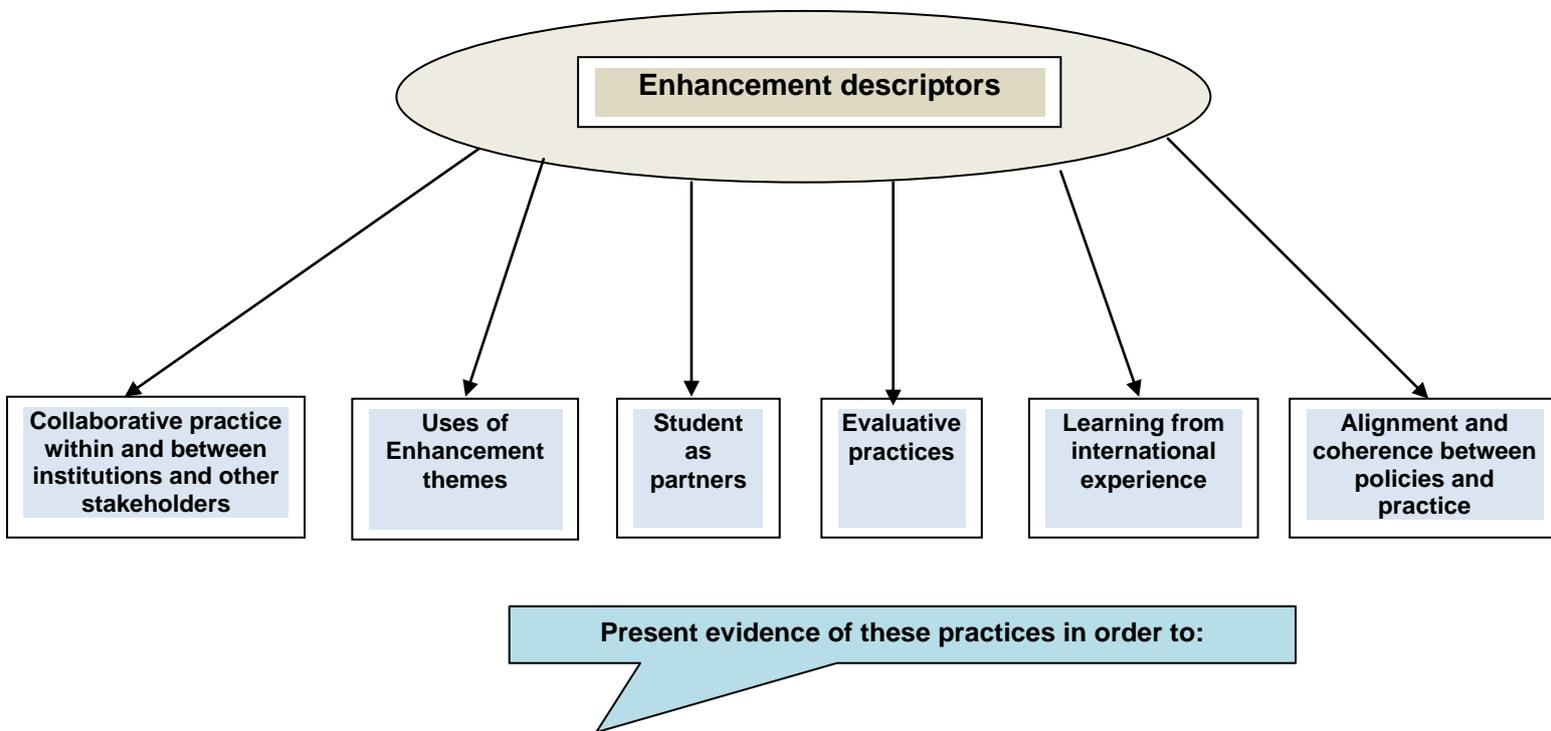**6b Enhancement descriptor: student engagement in learning**

Context

This category refers to practices associated with supporting students to become purposeful partners in their learning. These practices involve enabling students to become fully engaged in the learning processes by the provision of opportunities for learning decisions, independent learning and the development of enquiry skills. This means practices involving the provision of appropriate opportunities for effective engagement and enthusing students, practices which are not risk averse, are innovative and experimental.

Example practice clusters

- Practices associated with using a varied assortment of effective teaching strategies and technologies.
- Keeping up to date with new material.
- Providing feedback in a timely manner.

Integrated Enhancement Descriptors Approach

Enhancement descriptors

| Collaborative practice within and between institutions and other stakeholders | Uses of Enhancement themes | Student as partners | Evaluative practices | Learning from international experience | Alignment and coherence between policies and practice |

Present evidence of these practices in order to:

- **coordinate the description of enhancement practices within institutions**
- **orientate and organise reflective analyses and other ELIR documentation**
- **provide the framework for internal analysis and review of core enhancement practice and cross checking with the Quality Code**
- **check on the internal coherence in policy**
- **communicate to key stakeholders (for example, SFC and employers)**
- **scale up and focus sector-wide analyses of success in the student experience.**

To enable:

the provision of a narrative analysis (qualitative and quantitative) of alignment between enhancement practice and student outcome agreement indicators (NSS scores, destinations, degree quality, external examiners reports, retention and so on) to internal and external audiences.

2.4 This graphic integrates this descriptor approach by showing the flow between the six descriptors of enhancement and the evidence of their existence with the 'job' they might be expected to do in communicating with internal and external stakeholders about student outcomes. If enhancement is to guide practice, it is important to show its efficacy with student outcomes.

Part two: background discussion

3 Lessons from the evaluation of the original indicators and their critique

3.1 The evaluation of the use of the original set of enhancement indicators[3] was completed and submitted to SHEEC in October 2013.[4] On the basis of this work, we are able to provide some useful learning points which have formed the initial assumptions of the new approach to enhancement descriptors.

3.2 It was noted that performance indicators of any kind have built-in inhibitions (something about the very nature of performance indicators and the way they constrain) and enhancement indicators are no exception. Even at a personal level targets like weight loss, fitness, gym membership, being more controlled, being better humoured, and so on, have a restraining dimension and evoke resistance. This means there is something about performance indicators which will always be received as constraining, even those designed by oneself and used by oneself. Conventionally then, the downside of indicators used in different contexts is summarised below:

- if they are self-generated they may be self-referential, cautious and lacking ambition, sometimes having a lack of clarity on audience
- performance indicators often result in confusion between management information, monitoring, diagnosis and development
- at institutional level, performance indicators potentially produce strategic conduct, associated with control and managerialism
- at national level, they are associated with external control, externality in both use and audience.

3.3 In light of this analysis, we argued that there was a need for clear systemic incentives for use, which were lacking in respect of the original set of indicators. An initial step was to suggest the redesignation of the indicators as descriptors which would re-invigorate and re-state the fundamental tenets of the Scottish approach and would help to orientate the way enhancement practice takes place within higher education institutions and the way in which these practices are expressed to both internal and external stakeholders.

3.4 It was clear from the evaluation that the enhancement indicators, as they stood, were perceived to have little value in informing, initiating, or helping higher education institutions describe enhancement practice. Although there were some examples of higher education colleagues using the enhancement indicators in specific and targeted ways, the majority appear to have used them as a background resource: either ad hoc - as an extra to institutional policies/approaches - or post hoc to assess whether enhancement activity already initiated was appropriate, relevant or effective.

3.5 It appeared that informed discussions about the enhancement of the student experience were happening, but usually without the guidance of the enhancement indicators. This was because the indicators:

- were written in vague and/or managerialist language
- overlapped

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[3] See www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/sheec/indicator-development-project/indicators-of-enhancement for the original document.
[4] This report was discussed at the SHEEC meeting on 28 October held in Edinburgh.

- lacked apparent connection with institutional agendas
- lacked connection with and status in comparison to other systemic measures of enhancement
- failed to showcase or model examples of enhanced higher education practice.

3.6   While there was sufficient evidence of very partial use and aspects of usability of the enhancement indicators which were problematic, there was no evidence of a crisis of legitimacy for the use of the indicators as such. This led to a position where their redesign had some forward momentum. The evaluation suggested that the next generation of descriptors needed to be:

- aligned with and relevant to other forms of evaluative practice (outcome agreements and ELIR)
- consolidated and expressed in terms of practices
- indicative of the kinds of evidence of practice that might be required
- developed with a clearer view of the distinctiveness of the enhancement approach and culture within the Scottish system.

3.7   It was agreed that the form descriptors should take was Mode 1 type, that is descriptors as a **focus**: indicators are interpreted as areas, activities, domains or phenomena on which evidence will be collected. In this case it would refer to descriptors of enhancement practices, that is those practices that are designed to improve or enable the quality of teaching and learning within an institution.

Example: The clusters of practice associated with enabling student engagement in decision making is identified in advance as an area on which data will be gathered (practices might include training students, creating forums for students to discuss institutional matters, encouraging involvement, and so on).

Advantages	**Disadvantages**
• **Catches unintended effects** • **Potentially participative** • **Collaborative** • **Avoids spurious or arbitrary targets**	• **Does not control or specify desired outcomes** • **Can include collection of irrelevant data** • **Expensive**

4 Enhancement as practice

4.1 We have adopted the perspective that depicting and understanding what goes on in social domains like higher education requires an operational definition of social practice. This perspective is based on behaviour, with what people do, what they value and what meanings they ascribe either singly, in groups, in institutions through their systems, or nationally through national managing structures. So, enhancement practice refers to the behaviours associated with enhancement.

4.2 At its core, what people do is a social phenomenon, multi-hued of course, but we consider it to have discernible characteristics. What people do then can be termed practice, and all social life can be interpreted as consisting of a series or clusters of practices in different fields of activity, within families, friendships groups, at work and so on. So, how do we depict or understand what people do in the context of enhancement practice?

4.3 The application of this social practice approach to the idea of a descriptor of enhancement means that it refers to the routine everyday behaviour that embodies what people do when they have adopted an enhancement approach to quality.

4.4 From its inception in 2003, the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) attempted an integrated approach in which enhancement rather than assurance was emphasised in the context of the quality of university teaching and learning. This approach was welcomed by the sector as an improvement on the previous, assurance-based engagement between the Scottish universities and the national bodies (SFC and QAA).

4.5 The dimensions of the policy or the policy mechanisms which are distinctive involve the rebalancing of practices and systems associated with quality to put far more emphasis on enhancing and improving practice and experience rather than checking and reviewing for external accountability.

4.6 The QEF aspired to a clear break with the emphasis of previous quality approaches (assurance based) within the Scottish system and still prevalent in other parts of the UK and associated, in the eyes of the higher education sector at least, with the role of QAA.[5] It would be a mistake, however, to imply an oppositional relationship between the aspirations of the new framework and QAA in Scotland; QAA were fully incorporated into the new framework as members of all key steering groups. Created jointly by the sector and the sponsoring agencies, the QEF is distinctive in that it is owned by the higher education community, or at least by senior education managers.

4.7 We can consider enhancement in three ways captured in the following matrix:

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[5] QAA asserts on its website that it is 'our job is to safeguard quality and standards in UK universities and colleges, so that students have the best possible learning experience' www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx.

Figure 2: enhancement as practice

Enhancement mode	Practice
Incrementalism	Doing the same only a little better, in other words improvements on existing practice clusters. Improving the quality of teaching materials might be an example.
Innovative incrementalism	Addition of innovations to existing practices, for example adding an international dimension to a syllabus where none existed before, or a new teaching practice to a repertoire.
Transformation	Radical understanding of enhancement involves a re-think of existing approaches, even fundamental purposes, and completely new practices

4.8 The Scottish approach has traces of all three dimensions across and within the institutions and overall; however, the combination of a more developmental approach to institutional review, greater student involvement, a focus on teaching and learning themes and responsiveness to feedback and experience has resulted in a step-change in the way quality processes are understood and practised within the sector.

4.9 In terms of the critical differences, an enhancement as opposed to an assurance-led approach to quality processes; we have in the Scottish case an opportunity to recast the way in which this approach can be captured by Descriptors as practice clusters. In this way we might integrate legitimate sectoral concerns with standards and cross institutional comparisons (via the periodic external reviews ELIR)[6] and the initiation of processes designed to provide frameworks for action and resources for improvement and development. It is the integrative approach, with an emphasis on development, which sets the case apart.

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[6] The indicators for which have been derived consensually by Scottish universities (through SHEEC) via a partnership with QAA Scotland.

5   Principles of procedure and the distinctive mode of thinking

5.1   We have then, in the QEF, a complex policy instrument designed to shift practices to embrace enhancement rather than assurance. The focus on practices which challenge more assurance-based systems is captured in the following.

> Practices which:
>
> - balance enabling mechanisms with compliance to quality standards
> - shift the emphasis between, rather than the mutual exclusivity of assurance and enhancement
> - enhance the student experience in higher education (means supporting practices associated with improvement, being innovative, being enabled through resources and a positive climate)
> - focus on partnerships between agencies and stakeholders
> - embody a theory of educational change that places more weight on consensual approaches than more coercive stances
> - move away from top-down compliance-inducing processes to participative and critical supported self-evaluation
> - focus on routine behaviours which support and enable positive changes (enhancement practice)
> - acknowledge that the focus on enhancement is more demanding than assuring particular characteristics
> - have cross-sector relevance but are adaptive and responsive to individual higher education institution contexts
> - are embedded in preparations for ELIR and internal review processes.

Linking with previous indicators

5.2   The building process from the original set of indicators (see Annex 2) suggested the reconstruction of the indicators under a broad, agreed contemporary vision of an enhancement culture. This means adjusting for repetition and:

- redefining the potential uses of the indicators taking into account the clear requirement that they should be used as a means to communicate with internal and external audiences about the teaching and learning processes and practices within institutions
- giving an indication of the kinds of evidence that might be used to demonstrate the nature of the enhancement practices and their effects
- having a clear statement about the nature of the impact or the effects associated with the approach. This will not be based on spurious lines of determination (we will provide a rationale for such an approach in line with current international thinking on the effects of policies but consistent with the culture of the QEF and the need for robust indications of impact)
- having a clear statement about the range of purposes, uses and audiences indicators might have

- specifying the kinds of systemic imperatives/levers that might be needed to make sure institutions use and develop their own indicators (systemic incentive)
- specifying the existing practices that integrate the use of indicators into communicative mechanisms and review.

Links with the Quality Code

5.3   It is possible to map the enhancement indicators with key dimensions of the Quality Code (particularly *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching* and *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*); however, key informant comments and the view of the Development Group was that the Quality Code was more concerned with assurance and did not give particular purchase on the practices associate with enhancement (see Annex 4 for further examples). The notion of enhancement has at its heart a dynamic, it denotes movement and of enabling improvement. The Quality Code is a list of characteristics which can be used as a checklist. The aspiration of the enhancement descriptors, on the other hand, is to identify and encourage the practices associated with positive change and improvement. However, the Group did undertake an exercise in which the indicators of sound practice from *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* of the Quality Code was cross checked with an enhancement descriptor approach based on practices. It indicated the shift from general exhortation to an approach which was of more immediate use to higher education institutions, and there was the suggestion that each of the Quality Code indicators might be rendered in terms of the practices it implied. Included below is an example of how a Quality Code indicator might be reconsidered as an enhancement practice cluster (see Annex 3 for further examples of this kind of reconstruction).

Indicator 1

Higher education providers articulate and implement a strategic approach to learning and teaching and promote a shared understanding of this approach among their staff, students and other stakeholders.

Practice clusters associated with how strategic plans are developed and how they are communicated and discussed. Enhancement practices maximise the involvement of students and teaching staff in development.

Evidence of impact: consensus on and shared understanding of approach by all stakeholders (through interviews and statements, knowledge of policy, and so on).

6 Future development and concluding remarks

6.1   Once the new descriptors have been stabilised (provisionally confirmed by SHEEC), the Development Group suggestion is that they should be trialled by a small group of institutions as they prepare reflective reviews. At the SHEEC meeting of 2 June, there were at least two institutions who were interested in using the new approach within their enhancement practice.

6.2   In the trial, the following principles might be considered.

- The descriptors are formally endorsed as part of the framework which explicitly addresses enhancement within the Scottish higher education institution environment. This means that they will be used by ELIR teams and by institutions as they prepare for visits. It means redefining the potential uses of the indicators taking into account the clear requirement that they should be used as a means to communicate with internal and external audiences about the teaching and learning processes and practices within institutions.
- These descriptors have been developed on the basis of the expertise and experience of a Development Group within SHEEC under a broad, agreed contemporary vision of an enhancement culture.
- The kinds of evidence that might be used to demonstrate the benefits of the enhancement practices and their effects will be drawn where possible from existing sources but narrative evidence will become more prominent.
- Identifying and describing enhancement practices will provide a clear statement about the nature of the impact or the effects associated with the approach. This will not be based on spurious lines of determination but be consistent with the culture of the QEF and the need for robust indications of impact.
- This approach has a clear statement about the range of purposes, uses and audiences indicators might have.
- Work with SHEEC on refining the approach (that is, present an outline of options which would still require some refinement thus binding in and encouraging authentication and ownership of the new approach by the sector). It is understood that this work is separate from, but has synergies with, the re-evaluation of the enhancement themes which will be conducted in parallel by the same authors.

Annex 1: Members of the SHEEC Development Group

Dr Steven Dempster	Lancaster University
Professor Murray Saunders	Lancaster University
Professor Roni Bamber	Queen Margaret University
Ms Thelma Barron	QAA Scotland
Professor Val Belton	University of Strathclyde
Professor Alan Davidson	Robert Gordon University
Mr Robert Foster	NUS Scotland
Ms Eve Lewis	sparqs
Professor Lorna Milne	St Andrews University
Ms Nicola Milton	St Andrews University
Professor Ian Pirie	University of Edinburgh
Ms Rowena Pelik	Edinburgh Napier University
Dr Alastair Robertson	University of Abertay Dundee
Mr Mike Williamson	sparqs

Annex 2: Original indicators

1   **Alignment of activities:** Promoting **a learner-centred and cohesive approach** which is aligned with policy and practice and is informed by a systematic understanding of learner expectations, needs and aspirations.

2   **Student engagement in learning:** Being active in supporting students to become **purposeful partners in their learning** and providing them with appropriate opportunities for effective engagement.

3   **Student engagement in processes:** Ensuring that all policy, strategy and practice relating to the student learning experience is informed by **a continuous engagement and dialogue - both formal and informal - with students**.

4   **Quality cultures:** Enabling a reflective quality culture to be supported and developed through a framework of staff and student support structures, and by the promotion of approaches to learning and teaching which are aligned with a shared vision of **student-centred learning**.

5   **Reference points:** Maintaining and developing **structures which create the opportunity for reflection on experience** by drawing on appropriate ranges of evidence including national and international benchmarks.

6   **Structures for managing quality:** Establishing and developing systems and structures for the management of quality which **promote and sustain shared values, beliefs and aims** and support an effective internal quality culture.

7   **Quality processes:** Operating processes related to quality which are both designed to enhance the academic standards of students' awards and to **contribute significantly to the enhancement of the student experience**.

8   **Enhancement themes: Establishing a creative, reflective and productive relationship with the QEF Enhancement Themes** based on an engagement which is the most appropriate for an institution and for each level within an institution.

9   **Staff development and reward:** Providing **continuing development opportunities** for all staff that contribute to the student learning experience which is informed by and **aligned with a culture of enhancement** and with the identified needs and aspirations of students; and providing institutional recognition for staff achievements in this context.

10   **Graduate attributes and lifelong learning:** Ensuring that the learning experience enables **learners to develop appropriate graduate attributes**, skills and the capacity for active lifelong learning.

Annex 3: Indicators of sound practice from *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching* of the Quality Code

Indicator 1

Higher education providers articulate and implement a strategic approach to learning and teaching and promote a shared understanding of this approach among their staff, students and other stakeholders.

Indicator 2

Learning and teaching activities and associated resources provide every student with an equal and effective opportunity to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Indicator 3

Learning and teaching practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship.

Indicator 4

Higher education providers assure themselves that everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning is appropriately qualified, supported and developed.

Indicator 5

Higher education providers collect and analyse appropriate information to ensure the continued effectiveness of their strategic approach to, and the enhancement of, learning opportunities and teaching practices.

Indicator 6

Higher education providers maintain physical, virtual and social learning environments that are safe, accessible and reliable for every student, promoting dignity, courtesy and respect in their use.

Indicator 7

Every student is provided with clear and current information that specifies the learning opportunities and support available to them.

Indicator 8

Higher education providers take deliberate steps to assist every student to understand their responsibility to engage with the learning opportunities provided and shape their learning experience.

Indicator 9

Every student is enabled to monitor their progress and further their academic development through the provision of regular opportunities to reflect on feedback and engage in dialogue with staff.

Annex 4: Relevant Quality Code Indicators redefined as practices

To indicate the shift from general exhortation to an approach which was of more immediate use to higher education institutions, there was the suggestion that each of the Quality Code indicators might be rendered in terms of the practices it implied. An initial attempt at this is outlined below. The important point, and this was also emphasised by one of the Group, was that we need to move from descriptions of activities or practices to their impact.

Indicator 1

Higher education providers articulate and implement a strategic approach to learning and teaching and promote a shared understanding of this approach among their staff, students and other stakeholders.

> Practice clusters associated with how strategic plans are developed and how they are communicated and discussed.

> Evidence of impact: consensus on and shared understanding of approach by all stakeholders (through interviews and statements, knowledge of policy, and so on).

Indicator 2

Learning and teaching activities and associated resources provide every student with an equal and effective opportunity to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

> Practice clusters associated with how higher education institutions embed considerations of the needs of the diversity of students in the process toward achieving learning outcomes.

> Evidence of impact: participation of students with diverse needs enabled throughout the institution (statements of experience, flexibility of approach, specific changes associated with an emerging need).

Indicator 3

Learning and teaching practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship.

> Practice clusters associated with how higher education institutions enable staff to reflect on, research and evaluate their professional practice.

> Evidence of impact: evaluation policies in place, evaluations routinely undertaken, uses of evaluations discernible, changes made on the basis of evaluative activity.

Indicator 4

Higher education providers assure themselves that everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning is appropriately qualified, supported and developed.

> Practice clusters associated with how higher education institutions enable staff to gain appropriate qualifications in teaching and learning.

> Evidence of impact: numbers of staff with teaching qualifications, narratives of experience, narratives of the experience acting as a useful resource.

Indicator 5

Higher education providers collect and analyse appropriate information to ensure the continued effectiveness of their strategic approach to, and the enhancement of, learning opportunities and teaching practices.

> Practice clusters associated with how higher education institutions collect and use data and evidence relevant to the capture of the effectiveness of their teaching and learning policies.

> Evidence of impact: coherent and usable data sets in existence, use of data in decision making, sharing data across the institution.

Indicator 6

Higher education providers maintain physical, virtual and social learning environments that are safe, accessible and reliable for every student, promoting dignity, courtesy and respect in their use.

> Practice clusters associated with how higher education institutions design and implement the use of learning environments in a dignified, respectful and courteous way.

> Evidence of impact: feedback from students on the tone and tenor of learning experiences.

Indicator 7

Every student is provided with clear and current information that specifies the learning opportunities and support available to them.

> Practice clusters associated with how higher education institutions make sure students are aware of what is available, and so on.

> Evidence of impact: evidence from students on their awareness of what is available.

Indicator 8

Higher education providers take deliberate steps to assist every student to understand their responsibility to engage with the learning opportunities provided and shape their learning experience.

> Practice clusters associated with how higher education institutions create agreement between all parties on the customs and expectations associated with their partnership with the institution in undertaking teaching and learning.

> Evidence of impact: feedback from students on what is expected of them and why.

Indicator 9

Every student is enabled to monitor their progress and further their academic development through the provision of regular opportunities to reflect on feedback and engage in dialogue with staff.

> Practice clusters associated with how higher education institutions create a framework for personal reflection, monitoring and discussion of academic and personal development within the institution.

> Evidence of impact: students' statements of experience of the framework including how it was used.

QAA952 - Dec 14