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Enhancing Student Engagement through First Year Curriculum Design

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Enhancing student engagement through first year curriculum design

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Overview

- Scottish Quality Enhancement Themes context
- Focus of the first year curriculum design project
- Methods of data collection
- Findings and recommendations
- Questions arising from the work
- Further research and development
Quality Enhancement Framework has 5 strands

- Subject reviews
- Enhancement-led institutional reviews (ELIR)
- Improving information about quality
- Greater student representation in quality systems
- National programme of enhancement themes
Previous themes
Assessment
Responding to student needs
Employability
Flexible delivery
Integrative assessment

Current themes
The first year
Research-teaching linkages

New theme
Graduates for the 21st Century: Integrating the Enhancement Themes
First year experience projects

- Sector wide discussion: the nature & purposes of first year
- Student expectations, experiences and reflections
- Curriculum design
- Transition to and during the first year
- Peer support
- Personal development planning
- Personalisation
- Transforming assessment and feedback
- Introducing scholarship skills
Focus of the project

Curriculum design
Student engagement & empowerment

- first year of undergraduate programmes
- many overlaps with other projects
Data collection methods

1) Literature review
2) Staff workshops x 2 (n=60) ‘ideal first year curriculum’
3) Student focus groups x 3 (n=21)
4) Case studies (n=25 → 8 + 5 mini)
   - FY practitioners (QAA database)
   - HEA subject centres
   - enhancement themes website
   - contacted FY & curriculum writers
   - encouraging staff towards SoTL
Key themes: Content

1) *early and regular feedback*  
(all data sources)

2) **active learning and problem-based learning**  
approaches (literature, staff and case studies)

3) *‘learning communities’* to enhance transferable skills and a sense of belonging (literature and case studies)
Key themes: Process

1) **students should be participants** (staff, students, case studies + more general literature)

2) ‘**ideal**’ process for curriculum design (literature):
   - identify start and end points (abilities on entry; programme aim) through consultation with students, graduates and employers
   - facilitate progression of learning through strategic use of L&T and assessment strategies across the programme and first year in particular
   - evaluate student engagement and empowerment before and after curriculum redesign
Cautionary note

Most literature reviewed provided:

a) suggested strategies or
b) examples of innovation with no evaluation

As a result there is a danger of building
a “…massive but trivial literature”
McInnes (2001:112)

Recommendations made in this context
staff need support in the form of:
• dedicated time and rewards for innovation
• institutional support for improving the FY experience
• resources for further evaluation, research and scholarship

there is also a need for:
• a ‘birds-eye view’ approach
• pragmatism: start small (module-level strategies)
• involvement of first year students in design
• further evaluation, research and scholarship focusing on curriculum design
Key questions to consider

How could you use the findings to influence first year curriculum design in your institution?

– What could you do to change practice based on the project findings?

Should students be involved in curriculum design?

– Why / why not?
– If yes, how could you influence this to happen?

How can we encourage more evidence-based comprehensive approaches to curriculum design?

– Are you evaluating your practice in a scholarly way?
Developments...

• Should students be involved in curriculum design? – Liverpool Hope PRHE Conference & PRIME Paper
• Finding out more about where student participation is happening – Case study research including Elon University, North Carolina
• Further research plans in this area
• Scottish Enhancement themes developments
• University of Glasgow plans
• beSoTLed – supporting academics’ engagement with SoTL: an online user’s guide
  http://www.gla.ac.uk/sotl
School of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) - Introduction

A very warm welcome to BeSoTled, an on-line resource to support the School of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), hosted by the University of Glasgow (GU).

In brief, the aim of BeSoTled is to:
- promote the development of teaching and enhancement of the learning environment by providing practical, collegial, academic and pastoral support for staff to engage with the School of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).

Please complete the following short questionnaire.

How will this SoTL resource help?

BeSoTled is made up of two parts: this public-facing website and a Virtual Learning Environment (at present only accessible by University of Glasgow staff). To receive the enrolment key you need to contact Jane Mackenzie. The resource has been designed to encourage interested staff to engage in SoTL by providing:

- Practical resources for helping staff in their SoTL activity (e.g., links to and information about useful papers, relevant journals, and funding opportunities);
- Explorations of different conceptions of SoTL and different examples of engagement with SoTL;
- Opportunities for discussion of issues related to SoTL and to obtain advice from peers regarding our own SoTL projects either in e-mail forums and online workshops (on Moodle), or two to face by encouraging the organisation of...

• QAA(Scotland) Quality Enhancement Themes Website [http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/default.asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/default.asp)
