

The Enhancement Equation:

Wider Experience
 + Deeper Understanding
 = Better Practice



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SFEU has a core role in supporting enhancement approaches.

The prominent newspaperman and political commentator HL Mencken once said that 'You can't do anything about the length of your life, but you can do something about its width and depth.' Not only a profound statement, I believe that this quotation reflects the Quality Enhancement agenda in Scotland's Colleges.

Quality Enhancement is a new term. It is becoming a more frequently mentioned term. It is used interchangeably with improvement and that is understandable – after all the end point is the same – a better learner experience. But there is a difference and let's explore what this difference might be and introduce a development which you will be hearing much more about in the months ahead.

Colleges are very good at reacting to external reviews and their own self-evaluation. They take professional pride in their strengths (and why not?), and are then rapidly forced to delve into their weaknesses. The priority moves to fixing the bits that need to be fixed, working in programme teams to address them, and arriving at solutions expressed in the form of an action point.

This is the essence of Quality Improvement. Quality Enhancement is a step further.

The likelihood of achieving excellence can be confined by involving a group perhaps limited by its size and, more likely, its own ownership of the problem. A quality framework is the foundation of improvement. It can also limit thinking of how to tackle a problem. Sometimes, we find ourselves back at 'the way we've always done it' only applying a little more effort. Without doubt the problems often get fixed, to a point. But, a bit like that leaky tap in the bathroom, it may have needed attention for a long time, and we might not have the right tools to fix it anyway. Here is where the need to go beyond one's own knowledge and environment emerges, issues remain associated with one's own experience and remedies are sought there. Enhancement means making use of wider experience, gaining deeper understanding and delivering better practice. Wider, deeper, better.

Part of our strategy for better quality is to look beyond our own department or college, to look further afield to find solutions to our problems, and come back fresher to the challenge. By taking a wider view through building on good practice and examining strategies elsewhere, and by taking a deeper view through literature reviews and research, we are taking an enhancement approach to being better.

Interaction, collaboration and participation will be essential to the success of subject networks.

Many colleges and staff are already enhancement practitioners. They look wider and dig deeper: and they perform better too.

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Reviews and self-evaluations are essential. Sometimes you need a little more. Enhancement can be that little bit more.

Our funding council is all for it, with positive language within some of its recent circulars including:

- 'Exceeding the threshold'
- 'Raising capacity'
- 'Wider connotation.'

They would like the findings trumpeted too:

- 'Identifying a range of good practice'
- 'Supporting activities aimed at disseminating'
- 'Conduct a literature review.'

Good practice is generally available – in Broadcast, in HMIe Reviews and disseminated at conferences. Widening experience should be straightforward though we need to get better. And we still have to deal with that perennial of how to move it from context and mould it for another.

SFEU has a core role in supporting enhancement approaches. College People Week, whose theme was student motivation, helped to stimulate thought regarding the different factors that motivate our diverse student population. Linked with learner engagement, this is a crucial issue for practitioners in Scotland's Colleges. And during College People Week, participants widened their experience and deepened their understanding.

A new SFEU service will be introduced next session in an enhanced version of our subject networks. We have widened our experience, deepened our understanding and will provide a better service.

SFEU's aim will be to secure an effective professional support infrastructure of subject networks that promotes enhancement approaches to quality development within subject-based practitioner communities in Scotland's Colleges. This infrastructure will complement and support college-based approaches by providing opportunities for subject focused debate, discussion and resources on

- Scottish Executive imperatives, priorities and their implications
- Learning and teaching related issues and developments
- Developments specific to subject areas to ensure continued relevance of the learner experience.

The infrastructure will complement other mechanisms of quality development and will be a national resource used to inform, engage and enable subject practitioners to enhance their practice. As the support infrastructure develops, it will enable subject-based practitioners to engage in work related to enhancement themes and contribute to thinking on the selection of future themes.

A credible subject-based practitioner will lead each network. The form of such leadership would be through mentoring. SFEU will add value to the process by building on our extensive experience in

providing professional support for a variety of sector groups, providing professional advice on a range of matters related to learning and teaching, developing a common ICT infrastructure to facilitate subject network activity and ensuring that practitioners are aware of work related to national enhancement themes and their implications for practice in Scotland's Colleges.

Such networks will embody the wider, deeper, better aspirations of quality enhancement. They will encourage participants to disseminate innovative and clever solutions to common problems, as well as helping people to use the disseminated information.

Although well researched and discussed, practitioners will wish to know if published examples actually work: here was the problem, this is what we did that was innovative, this is how it was solved, and here is the proof.

As partnerships and sharing evolve, our goals will be to celebrate working together to solve problems, to use others' ideas and develop them further, and to get better as a result.

Wouldn't every lecturer, new or experienced, benefit from a good practice repository, whether it's associated with a particular specialist area, or some generic, ground-breaking approaches to engaging learners or addressing retention and achievement? With changing demands such as new technologies and diverse student populations, we all deserve a little help.

The new service will help you widen your experience and deepen your understanding to help you get better.

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