

QQI ENHANCEMENT-LED APPROACHES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

July 2015



SUMMARY

This is a brief paper outlining the responses to a QQI survey on quality enhancement in higher education conducted during the inaugural enhancement seminar in May 2015. The purpose of this paper is to record the responses of institutions in relation to how QQI engages with them on enhancement. These will inform the QQI approach to enhancement and the enhancement themes for the forthcoming period. Given the relatively low response rate to this survey, it is likely that the QQI Executive will be required to conduct further information gathering and analysis before finalising its strategy for enhancement engagement and enhancement themes for the coming period.

INTRODUCTION

QQI's work with the higher education sector began its shift in focus from quality assurance to enhancement with the inaugural enhancement seminar held in May 2015, the first in a series of enhancement-led events for higher education. Around 60 organisations were represented at the seminar and attendees were provided with a copy of a survey to gather input from institutions on QQI's approach to enhancement and the selection of themes for future enhancement events. The specific aims of the enhancement survey were to identify the optimum methods of identifying and engaging with enhancement themes; to measure the relevance of the ten key areas of enhancement identified in an earlier report (based on the findings of reviews) and to gather additional suggestions of enhancement themes for higher education. A copy of the survey is provided in Appendix A. There were 28 responses to the survey and therefore these results only represent the views of a limited proportion of higher education institutions (HEIs) and stakeholders.

1. AN ENHANCEMENT-LED APPROACH

1.1 How should themes be used by QQI in engaging with institutions?

Types of engagement	Responses	Percentage of respondents
Dialogue and discussion	17	61%
Annual seminar	15	54%
Other (or a combination of those listed)	6	21%
Reviews	4	14%
Monitoring	2	7%

According to 61 percent of respondents, dialogue and discussion should be used by QQI in engaging with institutions in relation to enhancement themes. Fifty four percent of respondents agreed that an annual seminar should take place. There was some interest in the use of monitoring and review and a proposal to employ a combination of the approaches or a multi-faceted/multi-staged approach. It was also suggested that approaching a theme from a variety of perspectives could enable it to be integrated at a variety of levels and contexts.

While it was said by one respondent that monitoring and reviews focus on compliance, an enhancement-led approach could be supported by dialogue, discussion and seminars. Concern was also expressed that the burden should be kept to a minimum.

To summarise: QQI should use themes to engage in dialogue, discussions and an annual seminar on enhancement.

1.2 Selection and prioritisation of enhancement themes

Methods for selection of themes	Responses	Percentage of respondents
Existing evidence basis (annual reports, monitoring, reviews)	13	46%
Discussion through existing fora (QQI consultative forum, IHEQN)	13	46%
Discussion through a new forum/steering group for enhancement	10	36%
Surveys	7	25%
Other (or a combination of the above)	7	25%

Forty six percent of respondents believe that enhancement themes should be selected and prioritised on the basis of existing evidence; and the same percentage were of the opinion that this could be chosen through discussions through existing fora. Thirty six percent agree with the development of a new forum or steering group to discuss enhancement themes. Some respondents thought a new forum was not necessary and that enhancement themes could be selected by QQI, based on existing fora and Annual Dialogue Meeting processes from which higher education institutions can elect to focus on specific themes (or other) at specific times.

Other advice included looking outward to practice in other jurisdictions and to global examples rather than limiting theme development to only Irish or internal issues.

To summarise: QQI should identify themes based on existing evidence, dialogue and fora. QQI should supplement this with additional research to look internationally for themes.

1.3 Participation in enhancement activities

Willingness to participate in types of enhancement activities	Responses	Percentage of respondents
A seminar to share and highlight enhancement practices	24	86%
Meetings/fora/discussion groups	18	64%
Projects	11	39%
A website/blog	3	11%
Other (or a combination of the above)	2	7%

Eighty six percent of respondents were in favour of participating in a seminar to share and highlight enhancement practices. Sixty four percent would like to participate in meetings, fora and discussion groups and 39 percent would agree with the use of projects for enhancement.

There was a view that this should be a national effort, crossing sectors and including stakeholders. Also expressed was a preference for open structured face-to-face discussion.

To summarise: QQI should host an annual cross-sectoral enhancement seminar which involves stakeholders as well.

2. ENHANCEMENT THEMES

The theme for the 2015 enhancement seminar was *Sharing Smart Approaches to Optimising Quality*. In an effort to identify possible themes for future enhancement events, a number of areas for development were proposed and respondents were also asked to make suggestions for future themes.

2.1 Ranking of areas for development in higher education

The Higher Education Themes from Review Findings Report¹ identifies ten key areas for development in higher education arising from previous reviews:

1. Governance and management in higher education
2. Collaborations and multi-campus arrangements
3. Transnational collaboration
4. Communicating with the outside world
5. Benchmarking, metrics and indicators
6. Research strategies and research-informed teaching
7. Staff development and appraisal
8. Transfer and progression of students
9. Assessment
10. Internal communications

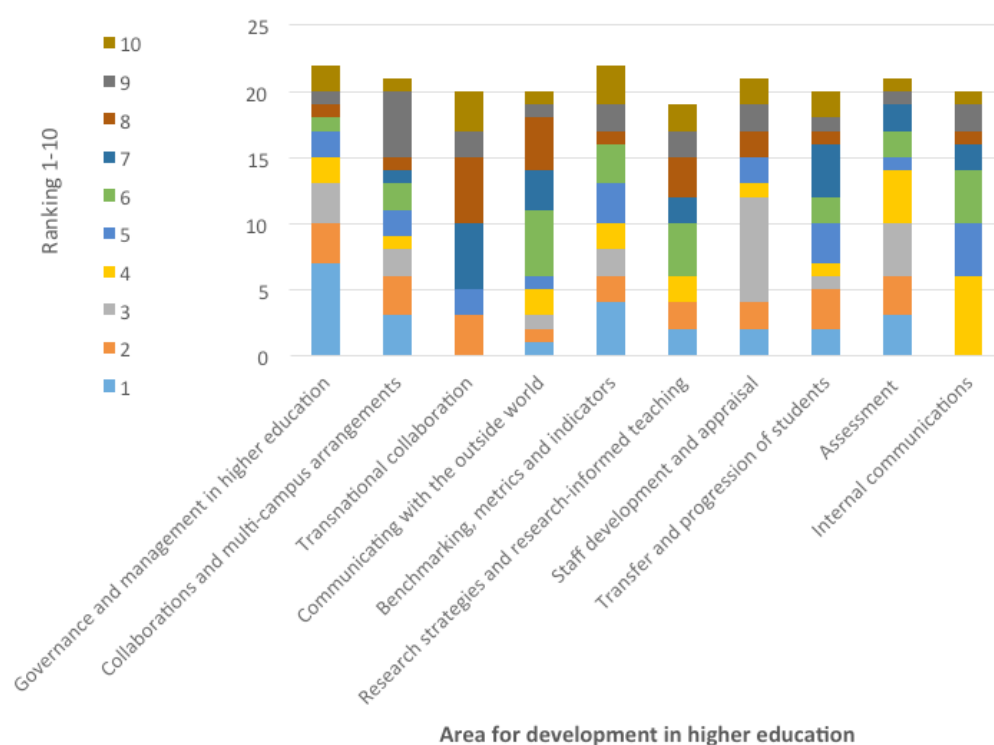
Respondents were asked to rank the ten key areas from 1-10 in order of their importance as themes for enhancement. A number of respondents did not rank the ten areas, with one respondent expressing the view that all areas are important.

¹QQI Review of Reviews: Higher Education Themes from Review Findings, November 2014, available at www.QQI.ie

The chart below details the numbers of respondents ranking each area from 1-10. The area of internal communications did not rank within the top three for any of the respondents. The top three ranked areas are:

- Governance and management in higher education
- Staff development and appraisal
- Assessment

Ranking of ten key areas for development in higher education



2.2 Other themes

Respondents were asked to suggest any other themes and a number of themes were suggested for consideration:

- required engagement/HEI engagement with local and regional communities/engagement and participation in higher education decision-making
- diversification of student body/assuring and enhancing with increasing student numbers
- student experience/first-year student experience
- curriculum development/teaching and learning/learning approaches, including blended learning

- parity of esteem/equality
- integrating the sector/emphasis on private sector
- parity of processes/standardisation
- feedback on assessment and its role and importance
- enabling creativity in programme provision and assessment
- staff development without appraisal
- internationalisation
- use of Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) towards enhancement
- subheadings under some themes: e.g. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) with transfer and progression of students
- forum to encourage promotion and sharing good practice between HEIs
- outcome from themes – what has been learnt?

To summarise: QQI should focus on the following three themes for enhancement initially: governance and management in higher education; staff development and appraisal; and assessment. Other themes suggested by respondents were diverse and did not cohere around any particular theme. This suggests that QQI will need to do additional research to identify future themes.

3. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

General responses to the survey revealed that the inaugural enhancement seminar was well received and similar activities would be welcomed in the future. Individual views were positive in relation to the sharing of good practice and stimulating discussion on the day and the level of participation and involvement of a wide variety of speakers.

Specific comments:

Congratulations, great location, great speakers, stimulating discussion, good networking opportunity, good sharing of practice. Should truly be an annual event.

Good to see some students involved today. Perhaps this can be extended for future seminars (and for non-traditional students).

Thank you. Thanks, enjoyed it.

There used to be a lot more learning opportunities before the merger. There was NQAI, HETAC etc. events, now there seems to be less. I would like to see more events to learn more.

4. CONCLUSION

The survey revealed a generally positive disposition in institutions towards enhancement-led approaches in higher education.

There was a strong preference for using existing evidence bases to select specific enhancement themes and engagement and discussion around these through existing fora. There was limited support for the setting-up of a new forum for enhancement.

A number of key areas for development in higher education, based on the findings of legacy institutional reviews, were put forward for consideration. The results of this survey revealed the most popular enhancement themes as: governance and management in higher education; staff development and appraisal; and assessment. A variety of additional enhancement themes were also proposed. These were diverse and did not cohere around any particular theme.

The inaugural enhancement seminar was received positively and an annual enhancement seminar was revealed as the most popular choice for sharing enhancement practices in higher education. Meetings, fora and discussion groups were also suggested as ways that could be used to share and highlight enhancement activities.

Whilst the enhancement-led approach is strongly supported by the evidence, the response rate to this survey was relatively low and therefore feedback, particularly in relation to the identification of enhancement themes, is probably not sufficient for the clear identification of themes. It is therefore necessary to conduct some further information gathering and analysis prior to finalising the enhancement themes for the coming period.

5. OUTCOMES FOR QQI

The outcomes of this survey for QQI and actions accruing are that:

QQI will host an annual cross-sectoral enhancement seminar which involves stakeholders as well.

QQI will also use enhancement themes as a basis for engagement in dialogue and discussion with institutions.

QQI will focus on the following three themes for enhancement initially: governance and management in higher education; staff development and appraisal; and assessment. However, QQI will undertake additional research to ensure that these themes are useful as foci for enhancement activity and have broad acceptance across higher education.

Future themes will be based on existing evidence available to QQI (annual reports, institutional review reports, dialogue meetings), further dialogue and additional research to identify themes nationally and internationally.

APPENDIX A. COPY OF SURVEY COMPLETED IN MAY 2015

A Survey about Enhancement-led Approaches

QQI would like to take an enhancement-led approach in all its engagements with higher education institutions. We would like you to provide us with some inputs on how QQI and institutions should approach and collaborate on enhancement in the coming years.

1 An enhancement-led approach

1.1 How should themes be used by QQI in engaging with institutions?

- Dialogue and discussion
- Monitoring
- Reviews
- Annual seminar
- Other or a combination of the above (please describe below)

1.2 How should specific enhancement themes be selected and prioritised?

- Existing evidence basis (annual reports, monitoring, reviews)
- Surveys (like this)
- Discussion through existing fora (QQI consultative forum, IHEQN)
- Discussion through a new forum/steering group for enhancement
- Other or a combination of the above (please describe below)

1.3 What kind of enhancement activities would you like to participate in?

- A seminar to share and highlight enhancement practices (like this)
- Meetings/fora/discussion groups
- Projects
- A website/blog
- Other or a combination of the above (please describe below)

2 Enhancement themes

The theme for the seminar this year is Sharing Smart Approaches to Optimising Quality.

2.1 The Higher Education Themes from Review Findings Report² identifies 10 key areas for development in higher education arising from previous reviews. Please rank the areas from 1-10 in order of importance as themes for enhancement:

- Governance and management in higher education
- Collaborations and multi-campus arrangements
- Transnational collaboration
- Communicating with the outside world
- Benchmarking, metrics and indicators
- Research strategies and research-informed teaching
- Staff development and appraisal
- Transfer and progression of students
- Assessment
- Internal communications

2.2 Are there other themes that should be considered?

3 Any additional comments?

²QQI Review of Reviews: Higher Education Themes from Review Findings, November 2014, available at www.QQI.ie



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