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Case Study Extracted From:

When Quality Assurance Meets Innovation in Higher Education

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NEW MODEL INSTITUTE FOR
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LONDON
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When Quality Assurance Meets Innovation in Higher Education

Case Study of Practice

Embedding a New Curriculum Enhancement Framework

Katrina Swanton¹¹

1. Context

Edinburgh Napier University's central QA team is located within the university's Department for Learning & Teaching Enhancement (responsible for Academic Development, Student Academic Skills Development; and Academic Quality) and works in liaison with the university's five academic schools which comprise a varied numbers of subject groups (departments). The management of the operational elements of QA is devolved to the schools (supported by school-based quality-focussed administrative staff). The central QA team is responsible for setting and monitoring relevant policy and practice for the university.

2. The innovation

During the development of Edinburgh Napier University's new Learning & Teaching Strategy in 2021, it was agreed that a new Curriculum Enhancement Framework be developed. This sought to ensure that all Edinburgh Napier University's academic programmes are designed to be student-focussed; support the development of digital and information literacy skills; and support the strengthening of citizenship and community. The Framework also identified five themes against which programmes are encouraged to work into the curriculum: employability; research and practice integration; sustainability; inclusion; and global outlook. The themes were determined following consultation from staff and students and sought to acknowledge the university's existing strengths and where we wanted to improve. The Edinburgh Napier Curriculum Enhancement Framework (termed ENhance for short) was intended to:

- Provide a shared reference point and vocabulary;
- Give a clearer structure to curriculum design and enhancement work, and the support on offer for this;
- Facilitate more systematic sharing of existing effective practice;

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- Make internal expertise in curriculum development, from academic and professional services colleagues, more accessible; and
- Support and encourage external sharing of effective practice.

Initially programme teams were invited to individual meetings to talk about their curriculum as part of the process to demonstrate engagement with ENhance, but it was quickly realised that this would not be sustainable at scale. Instead it was agreed that consideration of engagement with ENhance should instead be integrated into the university's quality processes: approval; annual monitoring and review; and periodic review (which also includes activity one year after the review). In addition a new dialogic approach was incorporated into the midpoint of the periodic review cycle to offer programmes further opportunities for consideration against the ENhance threshold.

The QA Officers take an active role in contributing to judgements around ENhance thresholds (with support from Learning & Teaching specialists). All hold at least Associate Fellowship with Advance HE as part of an intentional action to upskill our QA specialists on teaching and supporting learning practices.

3. Outcomes

Module and programme leaders are being actively encouraged to engage with the Curriculum Enhancement Framework at key Quality touchpoints.

We have incorporated opportunities for colleagues to better express their strengths and areas for development amongst the ENhance themes as part of the provision record (programme specification); and incorporated greater opportunity to reflect on the impact of that engagement in annual monitoring and periodic review.

Successful engagement in enhancement (meeting threshold of demonstrable engagement in all core themes and at least three of the additional themes) is a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for the university's Learning & Teaching Strategy, and nearly 30% of the university's programmes have already achieved this threshold.

Staff are beginning to understand that there is flexibility in how they can utilise the Curriculum Enhancement Framework, for example concepts around environmental sustainability may look very different in an English literature programme than it might in an Architecture Technology programme and requiring programme teams to reflect on this through annual and periodic monitoring and review, the university has been able to surface some case studies for sharing positive practice within the university.

While we are still at a relatively early stage in the implementation of this embedded approach, we were delighted that our approach to embed the ENhance Framework within our existing quality procedures was recognised as a feature of good practice in our most recent QAA Review (QESR, 2024).

4. Takeaways

- Partnership working between staff responsible for leading learning and teaching innovation and the staff responsible for QA and enhancement is essential.
- Avoid requiring staff across the Institution to do more, when it is possible to integrate into and improve the value of existing tasks and processes.
- Support Quality specialist staff to improve their understanding and confidence in innovative learning and teaching practice, for example through engagement with Advance HE Fellowship.