Assessing the impact of learning and teaching strategies in Wales

A guide for institutions

Haydn Blackey
Sue Clayton
Colleen Connor
Helena Lim
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This guide has been closely adapted with kind permission from an earlier Higher Education Academy document, *Embedding strategies to enhance learning and teaching in Scottish HEIs: An approach to self-assessment* (2007).

The HEA is grateful to Haydn Blackey (University of Glamorgan), Sue Clayton (Bangor University) and Colleen Connor (UWIC) for their contribution in adapting this guide for the Welsh higher education context.
About this guide

Introduction

Learning and teaching strategies are a key mechanism by which higher education institutions (HEIs) strategically co-ordinate learning and teaching within their institutions. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW, 2010a) recognises that:

... the [learning and teaching] strategy should be a document of value principally to institutions, and should provide structured guidance for the strategic development and management of learning and teaching within the institution’s overall management processes. Its secondary function remains that of informing and assuring third parties, not the least ourselves, that your institution is addressing the needs and requirements of its students appropriately.

This guide is designed to support those responsible for the development, management and reporting of progress on institutional learning and teaching strategies. It will enable the impact of such strategies on the student learning experience to be assessed.

This guide is intended to be supportive rather than prescriptive and provides a framework to assess impact. It will facilitate the gathering of robust evidence to enable you know how and in what way the student learning experience in your HEI has been enhanced.

In assessing the impact it is recommended that there is reflection on and evaluation of existing strategies in order to start to look forward. Looking at what we have done previously will set the context for assessing the impact of our learning and teaching strategies and help inform future plans in this area.

The importance of this evidence for learning and teaching enhancement is outlined in the new QAA institutional review methodology for Wales:

[Enhancement is] defined as the process of taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities ... the emphasis is on how an institution uses developmental opportunities in a systematic and clear strategic planning approach that would be similarly expected of its management of quality assurance ... Quality enhancement has therefore, much to do with the way in which institutions collect, analyse and use information from internal and external sources.

(QAA, 2009, pp. 10–11)
Such information may come from external examiners or advisers, from external bodies such as professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and the Higher Education Academy, from students, graduates and employers, from the outcomes of internal review procedures, and from internal policies, such as may be part of the institution’s learning and teaching strategy. The institution’s evaluation of its own internal processes and the impact of its activities that are intended to enhance learning opportunities are also an important consideration. (QAA, 2009, p. 34)

The context in Wales


In response to For Our Future, HEFCW outlined its strategic framework for higher education in Wales from 2010–2013 (HEFCW, 2010b). This framework aims to help higher education in Wales contribute to the WAG priorities of strengthening social justice and supporting a buoyant economy by strategically using resources from WAG and others to:

— secure higher education learning and research of the highest quality;
— make the most of the contribution of higher education to the culture, society and economy of Wales;
— ensure high quality, accredited teacher training across Wales.

An overview of HEFCW’s strategic framework for 2010–11 to 2012–13 can be found in Annex 1. These developments will be strong influencers on how HEIs in Wales deliver their learning and teaching, for instance through the way learning and teaching activity is funded by HEFCW going forward (e.g. widening access, regionalisation, foundation degrees, etc; see HEFCW, 2010c, 2010d, 2010e). The (re)iteration of learning and teaching strategies and activities will need to address and respond to such contextual factors.
Learning and teaching strategies development in Wales

Welsh institutional learning and teaching strategies were last submitted to HEFCW in 2007–08. These were reviewed by the Higher Education Academy (HEA, 2008) at the request of HEFCW. The review provided very positive comments on the strategies, noting:

*A major conclusion is that learning and teaching is in good health in the Welsh HE sector.*

*The strategies show that Welsh institutions pay great attention, and provide considerable resource, to improving learning and teaching for their students.*

*The majority of institutions are providing strong central direction and regulation within their learning and teaching strategies.*

However, the review also identified that:

*In general, institutions have not given more detailed attention as to how the strategies will be evaluated (for example, through staff and student feedback) and this is an area where more follow-up work is desirable.* [emphasis added]

In the light of this feedback, this guide has been developed to encourage and support institutional self-evaluation of the impact of learning and teaching strategies. The guide will assist HEIs to:

— identify and collect the evidence needed to assess the effectiveness and impact of their learning and teaching strategy;
— reflect on the impact of their current learning and teaching strategy to inform future enhancement plans;
— maximise how the evidence and experience from outside the institution can support the development of the learning and teaching strategy;
— develop future enhancement initiatives that will make an effective and sustainable impact on the institution’s learning and teaching.
Using the guide

The process of implementing enhancement activities throughout a HEI is a complex one and progress is likely to be variable. The guide contains a series of open questions that HEIs can use as self-evaluation prompts. These are organised into six themes (see the contents page for a list). The use of open questions allows HEIs to collect both qualitative and quantitative data and report on progress in a fuller, more holistic way (as opposed to answering simple quantitative questions, which could produce responses that are narrow and potentially misleading).

In recognition of the diversity of institutional priorities and activities, the guide is not prescriptive about the kind of evidence and data that institutions need to collect in order to make judgements about the impact and effectiveness of their enhancement activities.

HEIs should collect the evidence and data they require in order to respond to the prompts. There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers, and different HEIs will address different questions in varying degrees of depth and detail depending on the importance of a particular topic to them.

However, evidence (both quantitative and qualitative) to measure successful completion, impact and (where appropriate) broader institutional adoption can generally be differentiated between:

— the achievement of the key elements of institutional enhancement and/or learning and teaching strategies;
— the impact of the key elements of relevant activities in enhancing the overall student learning experience.

Although institutions should make their own judgements about the types of evidence they need, they may wish to identify, where relevant, key performance indicators (KPIs) in the crucial areas of their enhancement strategies.

The guide does not focus on detailed implementation at discipline/subject level (for instance, an academic department’s awareness of, or engagement with its relevant HEA disciplinary group), although it does ask whether an institution has processes in place to know whether such activities are happening.

The guide also does not make assumptions of a ‘top down’ model of implementing enhancement, but rather seeks to ensure that practice and ‘bottom up’ activities are integrated within a coherent institutional approach appropriate to its culture.
This guide does not set out to be comprehensive. Nor does it aim to cover all issues that are likely to be relevant to institutional enhancement of learning and teaching. For these reasons, HEIs should feel free to include further questions appropriate to their own requirements to meet the purposes of the guide as identified in the previous section. Similarly, not all questions may be appropriate to all institutions, and individual HEIs should feel free to omit those that are not applicable to them.

The guide and the self-evaluation prompts it contains have been designed to be brief, simple, and most importantly, sufficiently flexible to allow HEIs to collect evidence and data to reflect on and evaluate the impact of their enhancement activities, to identify and celebrate areas of innovation, and to help inform planning for the future.
Section A

The impact of our strategies for enhancing learning and teaching

All Welsh HEIs have an institutional learning and teaching strategy. Institutions frequently have operational plans that convert their strategic vision into the practical implementation of changing practices in learning and teaching. Institutions typically also have a range of other strategies that interlink to the learning and teaching strategy such as Welsh institutional widening access strategies 2006–07 to 2009–10 and the Reaching Wider Partnership funding proposals 2008–2010. Additionally some HEIs have also developed separate technology enhanced learning strategies in response to HEFCW’s *Enhancing Learning and Teaching through Technology: a Strategy for Higher Education in Wales* (2008).

This section encourages HEIs to reflect on the effectiveness of their current strategies in enhancing learning and teaching, to identify how they have been implemented and the extent to which the key elements have been achieved. This review of existing strategies will provide an insight into the future challenges they will need to address in their learning and teaching and widening access strategy(ies) for 2011–12 to 2013–14.

A1 To what extent has our institution achieved the objectives of our current learning and teaching strategy? Can we identify which elements had the most impact on the student learning experience?

A2 Are the measures we use to assess enhancement appropriate? Do the measures focus on the experience of the students in their learning or on internal operational processes? How do the measures of success outlined in the learning and teaching strategy link to other institutional measures (e.g. NSS, HESA data)?

A3 Is our learning and teaching strategy integrated and aligned with other relevant institutional strategies (e.g. institutional corporate strategy, research strategy, widening participation strategy, HR strategy, staff development strategy, information systems strategy, estates strategy)? Are there ways we can ensure more effective alignment in the new learning and teaching strategy?
A4 What are the main barriers to effective implementation of our learning and teaching strategies throughout the institution? What are the problems and barriers that are faced in their implementation? How successful are we at addressing the problems and barriers? What new approaches can we develop to ensure effective implementation of the new strategy? Can we be explicit about these approaches in the strategy?

A5 How effective has the learning and teaching strategy been at enabling cultural change at institutional level? Can we identify a changing focus on learning and teaching within our institutional context?

A6 What changes to human resource management are occurring to achieve our learning and teaching strategy? Is learning and teaching a key determinant in promotion criteria, recognition and reward, new career pathways, staff development, probation, encouraging equality and diversity, support for part-time and short-term contract staff? What else do we still need to do in this area so that our staff recognise that learning and teaching is valued?

A7 Do we assess the impact of our learning and teaching strategies on actual learning and teaching, and is this satisfactory? How does staff and student feedback inform our strategy and its implementation?

A8 What ways do we have to evidence that the student experience is improving because of our strategies to enhance learning and teaching? Is this improvement consistent across our institution? If not, why not?

A9 Are we open to encourage innovation in learning and teaching outside our planned strategy? How do we integrate emerging innovations into institutional strategies and plans?

A10 As we revise our learning and teaching strategy, what are the main changes necessary to ensure that it is fit for purpose in the future?

What other questions do we need to ask and what other data do we need to collect in order to review the effectiveness of our institution’s current learning and teaching strategy?
Section B

Engaging with the Welsh enhancement themes

Through sector consultation and dialogue with the HEA Welsh Institutional Group and the Higher Education Wales PVC Learning and Teaching Advisory Group, the enhancement themes that have been identified and developed over the last three years in Wales are:

- supporting and championing teaching;
- enhancing learning through technology;
- assessment and feedback;
- employability and employee learning;
- Welsh medium learning and teaching;
- education for sustainable development and global citizenship;
- first-year student experience;
- research-informed teaching;
- inclusion;
- curriculum design.

A new enhancement theme – graduates for our future – has just been identified as part of a HE sector-wide response to For our Future. Three work strands will contribute to the overarching theme:

- students as partners;
- learning for employment;
- learning in employment.

An overview of the ‘graduates for our future’ enhancement theme and work strands can be found in Annex 2.

This section enables HEIs to reflect on how successfully they have engaged with the enhancement themes developed in Wales. Engagement with these themes needs to be understood within the context of an institution’s vision and mission.
B1 How are staff in our institution using the Welsh enhancement themes? Are all staff engaging with the themes in their development of learning and teaching?

B2 Where engagement with the enhancement themes has been variable within the institution, how might we ensure new themes form a focus on future institutional learning and teaching development?

B3 How are the Welsh enhancement themes communicated to colleagues across our institution? Do we ensure links between colleagues across the sector in Wales to ensure collaboration in developments in response to the themes?

B4 What approaches to dissemination and support are we using to encourage engagement with the enhancement themes? What new approaches might we use to ensure engagement with new themes and work strands that emerge in response to For our Future?

B5 How do we evaluate the impact of our activities in response to the enhancement themes? Do we focus staff and student feedback around the themes?

B6 Are we improving the student experience through a focus on the enhancement themes? Is this improvement consistent across the institution? If not, why not?

B7 Are we gathering robust evidence about the engagement with the enhancement themes within faculties, schools and departments (or their equivalent)? If not, are there ways in which we can improve the collection of such evidence?

B8 What are our plans for ensuring that our engagement with the enhancement themes impacts on institutional learning and teaching?

What other questions do we need to ask and what other data do we need to collect in order to review the effectiveness of our institution’s engagement with the enhancement themes?
Section C

Using resources and expertise to enhance the impact of our learning and teaching strategies

There are multiple sources of expertise and resources for higher education both within and outside the sector. For instance, there is a wide range of published work from enhancement projects undertaken across the UK to inspire HEIs to consider evidence-based practices that could be further developed in their own context.

This section enables HEIs to reflect on the range of resources available to inform their activities.

C1 Does our enhancement strategy encourage staff to engage with and use resources and learning materials available within and outside our institution?

C2 Does the strategy engage with the ‘networked knowledge’ of internal development ‘agencies’ (e.g. teaching fellows, academic development units, learning technology teams)?

C3 Does our HEI have an effective means of identifying and sifting relevant external resources to enhance learning and teaching?

C4 Within Wales, are we using available resources from the full range of collaborative projects being undertaken (e.g. Gwella projects)?

C5 How well do we ensure that our staff are engaging with the HEA’s disciplinary and thematic work and contributing to EvidenceNet? What action do we need to take to encourage more effective engagement?

C6 The HEA also produces a range of material and advice on disciplinary and generic cross-cutting themes (e.g. education for sustainable development, inclusion, employability). How effective are we in ensuring best use of these resources, and what more might we do to increase awareness of them within our institution?

[1] www.heacademy.ac.uk/evidencenet
A number of resources have been produced by CETLs and FDTL projects in other parts of the UK. How do we ensure we are aware and take advantage of these?

JISC is also an important provider of services that can enhance learning and teaching\(^2\). How well do we ensure that both our institution as a whole and also our subject departments (or equivalent) take advantage of its work? Is there any action we need to take?

Open Educational Resources (OERs) are becoming a significant part of higher education. The HEA and JISC have both funded programmes to develop OERs for national reuse. OER repositories (e.g. Jorum and OpenLearn\(^3\)) provide resources to be shared, reused and repurposed. How are we integrating OERs into our learning and teaching? Is our institution a contributor to OER repositories? Do we have an institutional OER repository? If so, how well is this or external repositories being used to reduce costs and deliver efficiencies in learning and teaching?

There are also relevant international sources on enhancing learning and teaching (e.g. the Carrick Institute in Australia and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in the US\(^4\)). To what extent does our institution know of them and use them?

What other questions do we need to ask, or what other data do we need to collect, in order to review our engagement with relevant work and resources elsewhere that might support the enhancement of learning and teaching?

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\(^2\) [www.jisc.ac.uk](http://www.jisc.ac.uk)

\(^3\) [www.jorum.ac.uk](http://www.jorum.ac.uk) and [http://openlearn.open.ac.uk](http://openlearn.open.ac.uk)

\(^4\) [www.alt.edu.au](http://www.alt.edu.au) and [www.carnegiefoundation.org](http://www.carnegiefoundation.org)
Section D

Enhancing learning and teaching in our partnership and collaborative provision

HEIs in Wales have a lengthy experience of various forms of external partnerships and collaborative provision. Throughout Welsh higher education there is evidence of collaboration and partnership across educational institutions and sectors, with business and public services, and with a national and international reach.

This section enables HEIs to reflect on the educational rationale for collaboration and the means by which the enhancement of learning and teaching is supported in their collaborative and partnership activity.

D1 What educational and academic benefits do we expect to obtain from our partnership and collaborative activities, and are they being realised? If not, why not?

D2 To what extent do our current strategies for enhancing learning and teaching take full account of partnership activities? If not, what remains to be done?

D3 How do our strategies for enhancing learning and teaching help to encourage greater prominence for enhancement activity within partnership provision?

D4 Are there any problems with the implementation of our strategies for enhancing learning and teaching in partnership provision? What are they and how could they be overcome?

D5 What aspects of our strategies for enhancing learning and teaching in partnership provision are particularly successful? Could they be shared more widely?

D6 Do students get a broadly comparable learning experience wherever they study our programmes?

D7 What mechanisms are used to assess the impact of enhancement strategies on actual learning and teaching in partner institutions teaching our programmes, and are these satisfactory?
D8 What is our approach to engaging students in the determination of our enhancement strategy with partner institutions? Is it effective and are changes required?

D9 How effective are our arrangements for understanding and supporting students’ transition (e.g. between institutions)?

D10 Is the experience of our students in partner institutions being enhanced because of our learning and teaching strategies and if so, in what ways? If not, why not?

D11 Are our off-campus students getting access to the same standard of support and services as our on-campus students (e.g. access to library and electronic resources)? If not, why not?

What other questions do we need to ask, or what other data do we need to collect, in order to review our engagement with our partnership and collaborative provision that might support the enhancement of learning and teaching?
Section E

Engagement of students in the enhancement of learning and teaching

Welsh HEIs have an enviable reputation for engaging students in the enhancement of learning and teaching and National Student Survey (NSS) results attest to overall high levels of satisfaction.

The Welsh Initiative for Student Engagement (WISE), which aims to help students and students’ unions get involved with shaping the learning experience at their own university, has helped institutions to increase the level and quality of that engagement.

This section considers how institutions engage students in the enhancement of learning and teaching.

E1 Is our approach to engaging students in the development and implementation of our enhancement strategy effective, and what changes might we make?

E2 Overall, how effective is student involvement in our decision-making processes concerning learning and teaching, and what, if anything, might we do to strengthen it?

E3 How effectively do we engage our students in determining our priorities for enhancement?

E4 Can we be sure that our current approaches to student engagement in the enhancement of learning and teaching take proper account of the diversity of our student population (e.g. adult, part-time, international, work-based)?

E5 Within Wales, WISE partners produce resources and organise events aimed at supporting student engagement within institutions. To what extent do we take advantage of the WISE resources and activities?

5 www.heacademy.ac.uk/wales/ourwork/students
If our institution has a significant number of international students, how effectively do we engage them in reviewing their educational experience and planning its enhancement?

How effectively do we engage our students in planning the enhancement of transition to HE study?

What do we do to support and encourage students who act as representatives and is there any further encouragement we could provide?

How do we engage students with national surveys on their experience?

What other questions do we need to ask, or what other data do we need to collect, in order to review our engagement with our students that might support the enhancement of learning and teaching?
Section F

Informing our future enhancement through evaluation

Evaluation is an integral aspect of the cycle of designing and implementing a learning-led enhancement strategy. Consideration of the intended impacts and how these might be recognised as desirable and effective is advised at an early stage of the strategy-planning process.

There are a range of methodological and theoretical perspectives in evaluating impact and it might be argued that in dynamic and rapidly changing higher education settings, established methods or metrics for evaluation may be insufficient. Key performance indicators (KPIs) and frameworks for evaluation need to be able to engage with diversity and complexity, which quantitative approaches alone might not facilitate. Two illustrative examples of evaluation methodology can be found in Annex 4.

This section is not intended to be a comprehensive account of a complex area but provides institutions with lines of enquiry to assist evaluation. The points below highlight key issues for those not already familiar with this form of assessment.

F1 What are the main lessons that we have learned in the implementation of our current learning and teaching strategies that might guide our implementation of newly prioritised activities?

F2 What evidence do we require to enable us to predict with some confidence key factors that will strongly influence our planning assumptions in relation to future learning and teaching provision?

F3 When we next revise our learning and teaching strategies, what are likely to be the main changes necessary to ensure that they are fit for purpose and take full account of changing future circumstances?

F4 Over the next five years, what are the main barriers to further enhancing learning and teaching that we might have to address? What action might be taken on each of the issues raised, and how can we get ‘ownership’ from those involved?
F5 What actions do we need to take to ensure that we enhance learning and teaching in a way that meets both our current and future institutional strategic plans. How will these in turn reflect current and future sector-wide enhancement themes and wider Welsh and UK-wide policy drivers?

F6 Over the next few years there will be numerous external developments that are likely to influence our practice in significant ways. How will we ensure that our own practice takes full account of these (e.g. regional strategies for higher education in Wales; education for sustainable development and global citizenship in Wales (see Annex 3); the Browne Review (BIS, 2010); European Higher Education Area based on the Bologna framework; the greater internationalisation of higher education; increased benchmarking of learning and teaching within the region, Wales-wide, UK-wide and internationally)?

F7 The HEA Wales and HEFCW are engaging Welsh HEIs in a range of sector-wide enhancement activities that could contribute to enhancing learning and teaching. This includes the ‘graduates for our future’ enhancement theme and three related work strands. How will we ensure that our own practice across the institution takes full account of these and future themes/work strands?

F8 How will we measure our future progress in enhancing learning and teaching? What do we expect to be our key criteria and associated performance indicators in, for example, five years’ time?

F9 What additional measures do we expect to take in our human resource management activities in order to ensure that our staff are prepared for the future issues listed above?

What other questions do we need to ask, or what other data do we need to collect, in order to plan future activities to enhance learning and teaching over the next few years?
Annex 1

HEFCW’s strategic framework 2010–11 to 2012–13

**VISION**

Sustainable, internationally excellent higher education (HE).

**TO DELIVER**

Social justice and a buoyant economy

**STRATEGIC THEMES**

| Widening access: ensure equity, opportunity and success in HE | Student experience: ensure that the student learning experience is of high quality | Skills: ensure that graduates are equipped for the world of work and for their role as citizens | Knowledge transfer: ensure more productive relationships between HEIs and public/private sectors, local communities and other agencies | Research: ensure improved research performance to underpin the knowledge economy, and cultural and social renewal |

**UNDERPINNED BY**

| Reconfiguration and collaboration: deliver a reconfigured HE system with strong providers, that through partnership, particularly regionally, offer more accessible HE opportunities | Governance: deliver continual improvement in the quality of governance and long-term sustainability of the HE system |

Future Directions for higher education in Wales: learning and teaching quality enhancement

A new enhancement theme – Graduates for our Future – has been identified for higher education institutions (HEIs) and sector organisations in Wales to focus their teaching and learning enhancement activities.

The HEA is currently leading work to coordinate this activity in Wales at the request of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). This joint approach will lead to greater benefits for students as a result of both universities and sector organisations working together to enhance students’ learning experiences. The work is being led by a Steering Group with representatives from all HEIs in Wales and key sector organisations including HEFCW, Higher Education Wales (HEW), the JISC Regional Support Centre Wales, the National Union of Students in Wales (NUS Wales), and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

The work is being supported through a series of events led by different partners. The first event was held on 15 October 2010 where representatives from all HEIs in Wales and key sector organisations discussed what enhancement theme would best address the Welsh Assembly Government’s 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales For Our Future objectives.

Following the autumn 2010 event, the Future Directions Steering Group selected the theme, ‘Graduates for our future’, which came out most strongly from discussions at the Autumn 2010 event. The Steering Group has identified three work strands under this theme:

1. Students as partners;
2. Learning in employment;
3. Learning for employment.

The theme and related work strands form the focus of learning and teaching activities which will culminate with a major Wales learning and teaching conference which will be held in spring 2012.

* Taken from *Future Directions for higher education in Wales: learning and teaching quality enhancement* (HEA, 2010).
Annex 3

Education for sustainable development and global citizenship in Wales

Wales is one of the few countries in the world to have governmental policy regarding education for sustainable development and global citizenship (ESDGC). In 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government published its strategy *Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship – a strategy for action*. The policy introduced an action plan for 2006–2009 and this has been renewed recently with a plan covering 2010–2014 (WAG, 2006; 2008).

To address the action plan and take forward the policy, the HEA supports a Welsh institutional ESDGC network, which has representatives from all higher education institutions in Wales and key sector organisations. Since its inception in 2006, the ESDGC network has held regular meetings to provide updates on progress towards the Assembly Government’s ESDGC goals, to exchange ideas and good practice, and to carry out a curriculum review and analysis. The last was one of the key priorities in the WAG action plan.

In 2009, the HEA published a review of the curriculum audit findings. An important area for development identified by the ESDGC network in the curriculum audit was in raising staff awareness of ESDGC and confidence in delivering ESDGC in the curriculum. Generally, there is a good understanding of the more ‘traditional’ area of environmental and economic sustainable development and how this relates to ESDGC. However, there is a greater lack of awareness of ESDGC links where the curriculum deals with social sustainability and global citizenship. It would appear that a significant proportion of staff and students do not recognise or appreciate the ESDGC links to, for example, social justice and cohesion. Better understanding and articulation of global citizenship in the learning experience is important because WAG’s *For Our Future* strategy (2009) refers to the near parallel concept of the HE institution as corporate citizens within a sustainable local community. The task would appear to be not so much about the introduction of ESDGC into the curriculum, but to ensure that the links to ESDGC are recognised and made more explicit to students.

Other work has included Swansea University and the University of Wales, Newport carrying forward a pilot baselining project to ascertain the extent of ESDGC activity within their institutions (e.g. in curriculum, estates management, procurement, strategic thinking). Progress can then be measured from this baseline.
The pilot project will report to the network in 2010–11 and the intention is that a baselining approach should then be rolled out across the HE sector in Wales. The network is also working on producing a document on a common understanding of ESDGC. This is a document intended to raise awareness of ESDGC to the broadest possible audience within an institution.

The HEA also has a UK-wide ESD team, which aims to help institutions and subject communities develop curricula and pedagogy that will give students the skills and knowledge to live and work sustainably through a programme of research and development (e.g. publications, learning and teaching framework, curriculum development grants), capacity building (e.g. events, workshops, consultancy) and dissemination (e.g. networks, newsletters). More information and resources can be found at the HEA’s website^6^.

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^6^ [www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/teachingandlearning/sustainability](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/teachingandlearning/sustainability)
Annex 4

Evaluating impact

Many HEIs in Wales are considering how best to assess the impact of their enhancement or learning and teaching strategies. This annex is intended to provide some initial guidance on the use of performance indicators. This is followed by two examples of evaluation methodologies that link process and outcomes in the endeavour to measure complex situations.

Performance indicators

The need for suitably determined key performance indicators (KPIs) is increasingly being recognised in all areas of higher education (CUC, 2007; JISC InfoNet, 2009). However, producing impact data on enhancement is not without its difficulties, which include:

— ensuring that KPIs and other impact measures are closely associated with institutional mission; for example, an increase in retention rates may be an impact indicator in those institutions where retention is a problem but may be largely irrelevant to those universities where it is not;
— ensuring that measures are based on diverse institutional requirements rather than just those of external bodies;
— trying to move away from input measures of performance (for example, based on student admission data) to output – or even longer-term outcome – data, whereby the impact of enhancement on the actual performance of students might in some way be measured;
— the challenge of data collection, in that the more complex the data, the greater the effort involved. Although such effort may be feasible for larger institutions with sizable planning offices, small institutions (and particularly small specialist colleges) may struggle to find the resources to collect KPIs.
In practice, if they are to be useful to decision-makers within HEIs, almost all impact measures of enhancement need to have a number of features:

— Usually some aspect of the data will need to be comparative, either over time, using trend analysis, or with other similar institutions, through processes such as benchmarking. For example, collecting their own data concerning student performance for just one year may tell institutions relatively little about the impact of enhancement, but when the data are considered comparatively or over time, progress can be identified.

— If they are to be meaningful impact indicators, the methodology and measures adopted need to be robust and consistent over time. For example, substantial changes in the student population over time may well have a strong influence on some possible impact indicators (e.g. employability skills) and need to be factored into any ongoing analysis.

— Not all potential indicators will necessarily apply across the whole of an HEI, indeed some may be subject-specific. Institutions will therefore need to identify which measures legitimately apply to all subject areas, and which might be specific to individual schools and departments (or equivalent).

— By definition, KPIs should be what they say – that is, key. A long list of potential indicators is usually too cumbersome and resource-intensive to measure, and conversely producing easily available data (e.g. as returned to HESA) may say little or nothing about the real enhancement of performance.

— The measures adopted are likely to be a combination of both quantitative and qualitative. Resistant as many university staff are to the use of quantitative measures in this area, the fact remains that decision-makers at all levels from heads of department upward increasingly want at least some data of this type.

It follows that the selection of key impact and performance indicators is a major institutional challenge and must be undertaken with great care. Indeed the internal debate about what measures would be most valuable to adopt may say a great deal about priorities and institutional distinctiveness.

Evaluation methodologies
These are not presented as off-the-peg models, but can serve as lenses that may assist HEIs to determine KPIs, and/or engage stakeholders, and/or adapt approaches to impact evaluation fit for purpose in their own contexts.
Example 1

Theories of change is one version of a stakeholder approach derived from the field of social policy. However, this methodology has been adapted to HE applications and has been found to have value in a rapidly changing academic environment that needs to engage stakeholders in a sustained and meaningful way (Buckley and Clayton, 2009).

A 'theories of change' evaluation can be described as a systematic and cumulative study of the links between activities, outcomes and contexts of the initiative, which build a theory of how and why an initiative works. It is a hybrid of process and outcomes analyses, which is used to explore behaviours and outcomes that are not easily measurable (Connell and Kubisch, 1998, pp. 15–44). It is recognised as having the potential for generating community engagement, capacity-building and ownership (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 22).

The method engages all relevant stakeholders, from providers to intended beneficiaries, in a range of facilitated discussions in order to systematically identify:

- current situation/problems/drivers for change;
- enabling factors/resources;
- desired outcomes;
- processes/activities required to achieve the desired outcomes;
- milestones;
- longer-term impacts.

The results can be transferred to a template using the above headings (or a nest of templates), which then can be used to develop associated action plans. These are monitored, both formatively and summatively, keeping stakeholders within the process throughout.
Example 2
The Rugby Team Impact Framework (RTIF) was initially developed out of the Roberts, now Vitae, Policy Forum to contribute to a strategic debate with national stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of skills development among postgraduate researchers and research staff.

Essentially, the RTIF model is a set of five impact levels that form a 'logic progression' (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 2006). Impact areas or themes are identified, and then the following levels applied to each from evidence analysed using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods:

- Impact Level 0: Foundations – inputs and throughputs;
- Impact Level 1: Reaction – response/satisfaction measures;
- Impact Level 2: Learning – extent of change/improvement;
- Impact Level 3: Behaviour – extent of changed behaviour/practice;
- Impact Level 4: Outcomes – extent of final outcomes/results.

Key impacts, conclusions and recommendations are then drawn out from the whole analysis for the purposes of providing stakeholder reports. This model can potentially give full value to a scale of interventions.

Both the above frameworks have their flaws, but offer potential benefits and possibilities for genuinely grounded, 'evidence-informed' policy and practice.
References


