

Country Consultant's Report for Scotland –October 2006

Funding Issues

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is currently reviewing its mechanisms for funding teaching in colleges and higher education institutions (HEIs) in Scotland (see <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/library>). Such funding currently stands at £634 million. Comparable funding methodologies in Australia, New Zealand, Eire and Canada have been examined, and a consultation exercise amongst interested parties in Scotland has been concluded and its results under consideration. Implementation of new proposals is earmarked for 2009/10. Although Scottish HEIs took part in the Department for Education and Skills' consultation on reform of the Research Assessment Exercise, the SFC is not currently considering implementing alternative research funding models proposed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Funding earmarked for research in Scottish HEIs currently stands at £244 million.

How to react to concerns about increases in the cross-border (*i.e.* England to Scotland) flow of students still splits political parties in the Scottish Executive, with calls for free education for all, top up fees to be levied for on English students for selected subjects such as medicine, and abolition of the graduate endowment scheme (a fee of over £2000 currently levied after graduation on non-exempt Scottish students). This is against a background in which fees from students South of The Border currently fund the equivalent of 2 out of the 12 universities in Scotland.

The Enhancement Themes

The Enhancement Themes initiative (see <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk>) is one pillar in the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) endorsed by QAA and SFC, and is seen as an important means of enhancing student learning across Scottish HEIs by identifying and addressing shared problems, identifying priorities for action, and identifying outcomes. This initiative is coordinated by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), comprising members from various HEIs and student representatives.

Current Themes are *The First Year*, *Flexible Delivery*, *Integrative Assessment* and *Research-Teaching Linkages*. The *Flexible Delivery* Theme is almost completed, and publications arising from the Theme have been prepared on the following aspects: an overview, flexible programmes, resources to support flexible learning, the flexible curriculum.

The First Year Theme seeks answers to fundamental questions about what we want students to get out of first year, which for full time students in Scotland is the first of four years to Honours, and focuses on the first year curriculum, and student empowerment and engagement. Sector-wide discussions will be held on the nature and purposes of the first year curriculum, and students' experience of their first year. These will be informed by practice-focussed groups examining the first year curriculum, formative and diagnostic assessment and feedback, peer support in first year, PDP, personalisation of the first year, introducing scholarship skills, and transition. An event has been held at which these issues were examined.

The *Integrative Assessment* Theme arose from conclusions from the previous *Assessment* Theme that there was imbalance in Higher Education between formative

and summative assessment. The *Integrative Assessment* Theme seeks to consider whether greater emphasis should be given to use of formative assessment to enhance learning. The strategy adopted for this is to undertake a review of practices to optimise formative and summative assessment, survey good practices across a wide range of subjects and institutions, and examine selected practices in detail. The outcome is likely to be publication of guides on monitoring students' experiences of assessment, balancing assessment *of* and assessment *for* learning, blending assignments and assessments, and managing assessment practices and procedures.

The *Research-Teaching Linkages* Theme has just formed its steering group comprising lecturers and student representatives, and the group is currently planning a schedule of topics for this Theme. We are promised that a broad view on 'research' will be taken.

Contribution of the HEA in LTA affairs in Scotland

As outlined in my interim report, the HEA is examining ways in which it can contribute fully to the enhancement of LTA practices in Scotland. Leading on from the establishment of the post of Senior Advisor for Scotland, the HEA has further strengthened its position in Scotland with establishment of the post of Scottish Senior Associate and an office in Scotland. The strategic priorities within the Scottish HE sector for 2006-7 are to support events and projects at national, institutional and subject levels and to promote student involvement in quality enhancement (see <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/4137.htm>).

Following on from recent meetings (see <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/4568.htm> and <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/4570.htm>) at which approaches to strengthening the roles of the HEA Subject Centres were discussed, a meeting will be held in November at which Subject Centre staff will discuss with Scottish colleagues how Subject Centres can best coordinate efforts to support enhancement of LTA in the Scottish HE sector. The HEA-funded Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Research (SHEER) project has been examining the roles played by the Subject Centres in conjunction with Educational Development Units in supporting the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework, and its report should be available shortly.

Re-design of the primary and secondary curricula for Scotland.

In previous reports I outlined that recognition of the failings of the existing primary and secondary curricula were leading to a complete overhaul of the primary and secondary curriculum for Scotland (see <http://www.acurriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk/>). The *Curriculum for excellence* embodies a cohesive ages 3-18 curriculum with greater emphasis on the sciences, including biological sciences, and a move away from the existing syllabus- and assessment-driven curricula to more student-centred approach. There will be emphasis on (many mature teachers would say a return to emphasis on) creative and independent thinking, literacy and numeracy, and development of learning- and life skills. This latter aspect is demonstrated by the four main purposes (*capacities*) of the new curriculum being given as *to enable all young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors*. The new *curriculum* addresses skills development in many areas that we are ourselves in

biosciences are concerned with, for example use of technology, development of ethical views, and development of enterprising attitudes. Emphasis on enterprise is given in two publications, *Excellence through enterprise* and *Focussing on enterprise in education* and is prompting a debate similar to that currently running through the HE sector (for example, see <http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/events/nott06.htm>) on not just what we mean by ‘enterprise’ but how best to develop enterprising attitude in our pupils/students. Our expectation in science in the HE sector is that as the new curriculum becomes embedded we will see students entering our courses fully equipped with those vital skills we currently see as being poorly developed (see www.gla.ac.uk/stem/advisorygroup/index.html).

Sino-Scottish Universities Programme

The Sino-Scottish Universities Programme (SSUP) (see <http://www.interactiveuniversity.net/news/NewsItem.aspx?ItemNo=100nb>) arose from contacts between the Scottish Executive and the Chinese Government. The programme is mediated by the Interactive University (IU), and enables Scottish Universities and Colleges to deliver courses, through the IU, to Chinese Colleges and Universities. Although several Scottish Universities have already independently developed programmes in partnership with individual Chinese Universities, the SSUP moves beyond this type of arrangement to a multi-partner to multi-partner model, which is expected to bring a greater return to the Scottish FE and HE sectors. The Chinese Ministry of Education recognises that in China students tend to learn by rote and tend not to question or challenge, and it has declared that it seeks a shift in this cultural approach to education in both staff and students to a more open and questioning style, and is looking to the SSUP to promote such change. Interesting times, indeed!

Through a ‘Foundation College’ system the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Scottish Colleges Consortium are offering programmes in China at (Scottish) Higher, Advanced Higher, HC and HD levels. With these qualifications students can gain access into degree programmes in China with Scottish Universities in eight designated disciplines, including Life Sciences and Health Sciences. Biotechnology is seen by the Chinese as being of special interest within Life Sciences. Support material being developed within the Collaborative e-Learning in Life Sciences (CeLLS) project (see <http://www.cellproject.org/index.html>) will certainly be put to good use in these Life Sciences HNC, HND and Degree programmes.

Taking bioscience into schools and the community.

In one of my previous reports I outlined several initiatives aimed at attracting pupils/young people into our HE institutions to participate in various activities. A similar initiative, also designed to support teachers and promote biotechnology in the community, is the Scottish Initiative for Biotechnology Education (see <http://www.biology.ed.ac.uk/public/sibe/about.htm>). The initiative seeks to support teachers in preparing students for studies in biotechnology, assist in preparing materials and practicals aimed at supporting this, and promote engagement with bioscience and technology by pupils and the wider public.