

The Scottish Funding Council

The Scottish Further Education Funding Council and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council were formally amalgamated into The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) in October 2005. The SFC's declared intention is to focus on *working in partnership with colleges, universities and other parties with an interest in learning and research to deliver high quality programmes, invest in modern facilities for learning and research, and promote responsiveness and flexibility for lifelong learning for all* (<http://www.sfc.ac.uk>). One of the SFC's major remits is to distribute funding to 43 colleges and 20 higher education institutions (HEIs) in Scotland. In 2005-6 this funding amounted to about £1.3 billion, and in 2006-7 to about £1.5 billion. For 2006-7 £962 million is allocated for teaching and research in HEIs (£634 million for teaching, £244 for research and £37 million for improving infrastructure), an increase of about 10% on the previous year. Of particular relevance to our research and consultancy activities is the shift toward full economic costing of research, and support of £16 million for knowledge transfer projects (an increase of about 20% on the previous year). Concerns about increases (1.6% in the current year) in the cross-border (*i.e.* England to Scotland) flow of students, dubbed *top up fee refugees* by the media, have prompted an examination of the policy on tuition fee rates by the SCF, and the Scottish Executive itself proposes to reconsider this issue in the near future.

The Enhancement Themes

The Enhancement Themes initiative (<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, which focuses on two Themes each year, has, as anticipated, become the focus of enhancement of LTA in Scotland. Ongoing themes in the 4-5-year rolling programme, discussed in my last report, are *Assessment, Responding to student needs, Flexible delivery* and *Employability*. The *Employability* theme is closely linked to *On-Track*, an SFC survey of 2004 graduates that demonstrated that acquiring skills and knowledge of benefit to career development is a major consideration to students, and also to *Employability: Implementing Plan for Learning to work*, a paper on how SFC intends to give to support Scottish colleges and universities in implementing the *Learning to work* initiative published in 2004.

Current Themes are *The First Year* and *Integrative Assessment*. As is usual with development of Themes, respective steering groups have been working to identify key issues for development. In *The First Year* Theme, building on the *Responding to student needs* Theme, three issues have been selected for consideration: *the first year curriculum*, *empowerment* and *engagement*. The *first year curriculum* sub-Theme proposes to examine how content and structure of the first year curriculum influences the student experience, for example, is there a need to use the curriculum to shift students away from adopting the strategy of simply working to pass assessments into becoming learners fitted with skills for life and life long learning? The *empowerment* sub-theme proposes to examine how we might enhance learning-centred approaches so that students take more control over their learning, and will focus on the personalisation of students' learning (implicit in which is the effective implementation of personal development planning[PDP]) and a strengthening of the induction process. The *engagement* sub-Theme proposes to examine how we might enhance students' engagement with their studies in their first year, and will focus on induction, PDP and peer support. The *Integrative Assessment* Theme, building on the *Assessment* Theme, proposes to examine whether or not the undoubted current emphasis on summative assessment should continue and whether giving greater emphasis on formative assessment might enhance learning.

Themes planned for the future are *The effective learner*, *The Inclusive Curriculum Progression and Success* and *Research-teaching linkages*.

Contribution of the HEA in implementation of the Enhancement Themes.

The success of the Enhancement Themes initiative obviously relies on outcomes of the Themes being embraced and put into practice at all levels in HEIs, and the mechanisms by which this can best be achieved has been the subject of much debate in Scotland. Although change is imminent, up to the present the strategic management of the Enhancement Themes initiative, including holding a programme of relevant conferences and events, has been undertaken by Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC - www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/defaultpage121bc1green.aspx?pageID=1700), comprising members from various HEIs and student representatives. The major issue confronted by SHEEC has been to determine to what degree the Enhancement Themes have changed practices, by what mechanisms such change has been brought about and how such change can be measured. To this end Annual Enhancement Themes Working Conferences have been held. Although achievements has been made, it is recognised that the impact of the Enhancement Themes at the levels of Schools in HEIs had not been as great as anticipated, and roles have been

proposed for the HEA, particularly the subject centres, in promoting implementation of outcomes of the Themes at the School level.

Following on from this, an HEA conference was recently held on *Supporting Quality Enhancement in Scotland at the Subject level*, during which discussions were held on how the HEA might practically support implementation of the Enhancement Themes. The conference was opened by Alastair Robertson, whose appointment as the first HEA Senior Advisor for Scotland was a welcome demonstration to HEA member here in Scotland of the importance that the HEA places on the Scottish agenda in higher education. At the conference there was agreement that while the Subject Centres make a valuable contribution to development of support materials (and I think for the Centre for Biosciences in educational research through BBE-j) they could contribute more fully in implementation of outcomes of Themes. Possible mechanisms could be by: contributing to discipline-specific CPD and educational development (it was recognised that the Centre for Biosciences was already active with this with an area dedicated to educational developers); contributing to curriculum design; improving communication between subject centres and schools within HEIs. The HEA is currently funding a review of the ways in which Subject Centres might effectively support the QEF initiatives, and I will examine the outcome of the review and other related initiatives in a future report.

The SFC is currently conducting its own review of the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Framework, which will examine how the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) process (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR/default.asp>) addresses the engagement of institutions with Enhancement Themes and whether more could be done to integrate Themes into the wider QE agenda. While this review does not seek to examine the activities of SHEEC, we in HE do not take that as an indication of disinterest within the SFC as to how effective implementation of Themes is!

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

I think it is not coincidental that many of the considerations that have been/are being given to LTA practices at tertiary level are also on the agenda at primary and secondary levels. Development of skills in enterprise, emphasis on formative assessment, use of peer learning (*i.e.* teaching) and implementation of Personal Learning Plans (*i.e.* PDP) are just some examples. However, as I outlined in my last report, severe failings in the existing primary and secondary curricula have been identified, and in consequence a complete overhaul of the primary and secondary curriculum for Scotland is currently underway. The recently announced proposed curriculum (<http://www.acurriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk/>), the

Curriculum for excellence, seeks to move away from the existing syllabus- and assessment-driven curricula to more student-centred curricula with focus on creative thinking, learning skills, literacy and numeracy. What has proven to be rather disjointed 3-5, 5-14, Standard Grade and Higher level curricula are being transformed into what is expected to be an overarching 3-18 curriculum in 6 broad, cohesive stages. A greater emphasis on the sciences, including biological sciences, is envisaged. I do know that the criticisms outlined by the STEM project (School to University Transition in **S**cience, **T**echnology, **E**ngineering and **M**aths), which examined what universities see as lacking in school education for students progressing to study STEM subjects at university level (www.gla.ac.uk/stem/advisorygroup/index.html), were closely examined in the course of design of the curriculum, and the failings of the existing system identified by the STEM project do appear to have been addressed in the proposed curriculum. (The findings of the STEM project were consistent with a parallel review of the primary-secondary curricula by the Curriculum Review Group for the Scottish Executive (www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/cerv-00.asp), and had been highlighted in HMI reviews). I will revisit the *Curriculum for excellence* in future reports when more details become available.