Strategies for generating 'transformative quality' at sub-institutional level

October 2007

David Rush
Mike Hart

The Business School
University of Winchester

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge with gratitude the considerable help given by the anonymous interviewees who gave up time in their pressured schedules to answer the relevant questions. It is also necessary to thank the members of the Steering Committee for their very helpful input to the establishment of the project. Finally, the initial ideas for this project were prompted by the work of the authors in the Quality in Business Education (QuBE) consortium through fruitful discussions with several consortium members.

Table of Contents

Executive summary

Background

Introduction

Given a shift in emphasis from traditional quality assurance to quality enhancement, this project seeks to explore some of the dynamics of change in the university sector, focusing particularly, but not exclusively, on UK business schools.

What is 'transformative quality'

The concept of transformative quality is traced back to its origins in the work of Harvey and Green (1993) and Harvey and Knight (1996). Harvey and Green (1993) explore five different ways in which the word 'quality' might be conceptualised. The final one of these categories is 'quality as transformation', referring to the enhancement and empowerment of students or the development of new knowledge and ways of attaining it. The authors suggest some of the ways in which the abstract concept of quality as transformation could be operationalised.

Aims

- *To investigate the extent to which individual school and department heads have the autonomy to develop quality management.*
- *To make recommendations that will help school and departmental heads to develop and implement their own strategies for transformative quality management.*
- *To characterise the variation with size of school or department, institutional size and structure, extent of departmental autonomy and faculty complexity of issues that impinge upon quality management.*

Methods

The research paradigm of the investigation

The philosophical underpinnings of the investigation were rooted in an 'interpretivist' paradigm rather than in conducting a survey in the more positivist sense.

The methods deployed:

- *Steering committee* – a steering committee was established, which gave useful advice.
- *Locus of the interviews* – five universities were chosen to reflect the diversity of business and management provision within the sector. Interviews were held at two levels within each institution, representing views both at senior management level and at sub-institutional level.
- *The interviews* – sixteen in-depth interviews, typically lasting for two hours, were conducted and digitally recorded. Some interviews were with groups of staff so the views of some 26 staff were collected. An outline interview guide

was utilised, tailored somewhat to the needs of each institution – respondents were not discouraged to go beyond the parameters of the interview guide.

- *Confidentiality* – a variety of steps have been taken to enhance confidentiality. No university is identified and departmental responsibilities have been indicated according to a standardised format.

- *Other sources of data* – documentary data in the public domain (principally websites) were consulted. In addition, institutions freely gave examples of their internal documents (such as quality handbooks).

- *Analysis of the data* – a verbatim transcript was made of each interview. Computer files were generated that were then searched systematically for phrases from which a thematic narrative could be constructed.

- *Triangulation* – the presence of more than one interviewer, as well as group interviews on occasions, helped to reassure the investigators that accurate representations of the respondents' views were utilised.

- *Role definitions* – to further enhance confidentially and anonymity and to aid in the comparability of institutions, each quotation is ascribed to a standardised role definition.

Results

The results are presented using several themes that were identified during the analysis of the interviews. These themes are as follows:

Enhancement

- 'Enhancement' is discussed at the semantic level, drawing a distinction between pedagogic and curricula enhancement.

- Enhancement is often seen as implicit in all learning and teaching activities within universities.

- Typically, enhancement is reported upon in action plans that form a part of routine annual monitoring reports.

- The need for explicit strategies for enhancement was articulated in some universities, but the extent to which enhancement was pursued as a strategic objective was variable.

- In some universities, an enhancement strategy was clearly embedded as programme teams and faculties were requested to address this issue specifically.

- The operation of enhancement activities and innovation was most discernible at the level of the individual programme.

- Faculties could play a generally supportive role by the encouragement of the transfer of good practice and curricula change.

Influence of size and maturity

- The influence of several factors on enhancement was explored, concentrating on institutional size and the length of time university status had been held.

- In larger universities, central management had difficulty in ensuring the effectiveness of mechanisms for enhancement. In smaller universities, the more limited availability of staff made it difficult to operate comprehensive enhancement schemes.

- There was evidence that, whatever the size of the whole institution, the delivery of courses should be undertaken by smaller teams.

- It is possible that in smaller universities there is a more overt sense of control limiting the inclination to innovate.

- Smaller faculties are effective in facilitating informal interaction but face difficulties when growth forces changes to formal structures.

- An optimum size for a faculty cannot be specified, being dependent on local circumstances.

- Smaller institutions may form faculties composed of disparate departments, thus creating inherent differences.

- The responses indicate that post-92 universities are more likely to have more complex, centrally controlled structures.

Autonomy of departments and faculties

- Although there was a widespread perception that faculties have independence and devolved authority, faculty staff were more ready than central management to add.reservations

- Often policy statements from the centre are advisory only; faculties follow their own timescales, or define their own objectives. Where policies are presumed to be over-prescriptive, staff may react negatively.

- Although faculties may formally have autonomy, in practice there are informal mechanisms by which conformity to centrally determined policies is achieved.

- Departments have a certain amount of autonomy within their faculties, often being the focus of initiatives and innovation. They are subject to constraints, particularly in areas where their activities might overlap.

- The drivers for change to a programme can come from very different levels in the hierarchy: a programme is affected by drivers at faculty, university and national level.

- The exercise of central authority through imposed constraints may limit faculties' inclination to innovate.

- Centrally defined policies were not seen as a significant constraint upon enhancement because they were not rigidly enforced, or were specified in a way that allowed for flexibility in their implementation.

- A centralised structure or framework may constrain the autonomy of a faculty to innovate.

Cultures of excellence

- The concept of a 'culture of excellence' proved to be difficult to operationalise when respondents were questioned. However, the responses tended to fall into one of the following five categories:

    1. *Organisational comments*: where a 'culture of excellence' was defined principally in organisational terms.

    2. *Teaching*: where cultures of excellence could be observed in outstanding pedagogy.

    3. *Traditional academic values*: where students were encouraged to emulate their teachers, for example, in writing publishable material.

    4. *Cultural view*: where groups of staff (perhaps led by an inspirational head) shared values and an identity of a culture of excellence.

    5. *Nihilistic view*: where there was a denial that the concept was a particularly useful one for staff.

- When 'cultures of excellence' were mentioned in a positive light, stress was laid upon collaboration, consultation and an ambience of continuous improvement.

- *Neutral* views were sometimes expressed in which 'cultures of excellence' were considered desirable but inhibited by resource and other constraints.

- *Several negative* views of departmental cultures were expressed, including that departments might just 'coast along' or feel that they existed within an over-directed culture and that transitional problems might arise when groups of staff had been amalgamated.

Conclusions

- The prime movement for *enhancement* activities is principally at the level of the programme. Faculties and departments have a crucial role to play by incorporating enhancement strategies into their own planning.

- *Larger faculties*, with correspondingly greater degrees of autonomy, may well be better placed to pursue an enhancement agenda than smaller faculties that

historically may have been subject to stronger centralised procedures of quality management.

- Larger faculties/departments may well exhibit a degree of *autonomy* within the overall parameters laid down by central university bodies. Such autonomy means that the relationships between the centre and the faculty always needs to be one of trust on both sides, with an overriding recognition that quality enhancement occurs at the programme level.

- A characteristic of a *culture of excellence* is that there is a recognition of the importance of developing a collaborative and supportive culture within a programme area. Increased participation by a high proportion of staff in professional, subject and pedagogic communities often helps to develop and sustain a culture of excellence.

Recommendations

While the majority of these recommendations are aimed at faculty and departmental management, some are for the whole institution and the way it relates to its constituent faculties and departments:

1. Faculty/departmental leaders should develop strategies for transformative learning.

2. Learning and teaching committees and quality management committees can benefit from clear audit trails for demonstrating an enhancement agenda.

3. An effective institutional enhancement strategy should recognise that strategies are more likely to be successful when faculties are able to exercise a degree of autonomy.

4. The meaning of *enhancement* and the way in which it is audited needs to be delineated at the faculty level.

5. Transformative learning requires a climate for change, the appropriate resources and the designation of staff with responsibilities for pursuing this agenda.

6. Staff development opportunities to develop an enhancement agenda should be made available for faculty/departmental heads.

7. Staff development plans should reward those staff who can clearly demonstrate positive enhancement activities.

8. Faculty managers should be encouraged to establish and implement an agenda for enhancement.

9. Departments should be encouraged and rewarded for the creation of demonstrable opportunities for change.

10. Universities should consider the optimum size of departments or groups that best promote an enhancement agenda.

11. Faculties/departments should develop and articulate their own strategies for developing cultures of excellence.

12. Faculties/departments should actively encourage a high proportion of their staff to develop and extend their academic, professional and pedagogic links with the wider academic and professional communities.

1 Background

1.1 Introduction

This investigation sought to explore various aspects of the enhancement of student learning. A significant driver for the work was the notion of *transformative quality,* which was expected to illuminate current processes of change within UK universities. Lomas (2007) shows that enhancement comes within the definition of 'quality as transformation'. Change processes were seen as taking place both at central university level and in faculties and departments. This led to an exploration of some of the factors that might influence the development of enhancement such as the existence of a culture of excellence, the size and maturity of an institution, and the extent to which faculties and departments have autonomy.

It is now generally acknowledged that there has been a shift of emphasis from traditional quality assurance to that of quality enhancement, but the nature and dynamics of that shift are only now being systematically investigated. One aspect of the shift was the establishment of the Learning and Teaching Support Network with the aim of "enhancing the quality of learning, teaching, assessment and curriculum in higher education" (Trowler *et al*. 2003). Concern as to how to achieve quality enhancement has been the driving force for investigation and discussion in several papers and presentations (Hodgkinson and Brown 2003; Williams 2002; Hodson and Thomas 2003; Clewlow 2007). Indeed the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) itself now places great emphasis on enhancement (QAA 2006).

1.2 What is 'transformative quality'

The term 'transformative quality' derives from two seminal works by Harvey and Green (1993) and Harvey and Knight (1996). Rather than try to define one notion of quality, Harvey and Green (1993) argued that they could be "grouped into five discrete but interrelated ways of thinking about quality".

Harvey (2004) provides the following brief overview of the five categories:

Type of quality	**Explanation**
Quality as *exceptional*	Linked to notions of excellence, high quality and unattainable by most.
Quality as *perfection*	A consistent or flawless outcome.
Quality as *fitness for purpose*	Quality is seen as fulfilling customer requirements, needs or desires. Does a programme of study fulfil its mission or stated aims?
Quality as *value for money*	Achieving outcomes at lower cost or a better outcome at the same cost. The desire for accountability reflects this approach.
Quality as *transformation*	This refers to the enhancement and empowerment of students, or the development of new knowledge and ways of attaining it.

Table derived from: Harvey (2004), Harvey and Knight (1996).

For Harvey and Knight (1996), transformation involved transforming institutions to enable learner transformation. For many governments and intergovernmental organisations, higher education has a key role in providing the change agents for the future. Higher education should provide a transformative experience for students, so

that they can, themselves, take a leading role in transforming society. Thus, Harvey and Knight argue that higher education must itself be transformed if it is to be successful as a transformative process. In brief, such transformation requires the following:

- shifting from teaching to learning
- developing explicit skills, attitudes and abilities as well as knowledge
- developing appropriate assessment procedures
- rewarding transformative teaching
- encouraging discussion of pedagogy
- providing transformative learning for academics
- fostering new collegiality
- linking quality improvement to learning
- auditing improvement.

The term 'transformation', like the term 'quality' itself, needs further elaboration. Once a move away is made from a more philosophical towards a more operational explanation of transformation, the question needs to be asked as to exactly what is being transformed? It may be useful to examine transformation under a series of headings, but it must be noted that these distinctions are conceptual and the underlying reality evidently more complex

1.3 Transformation of quality structures

The term 'structures' connotes, in this case, those instruments and reporting mechanisms typically used in universities to report upon and monitor quality. Although there is considerable diversity, all institutions have requirements that programmes of study (or groups of cognate programmes) submit reports of their own monitoring procedures to a higher level of scrutiny. The immediate higher level of scrutiny is liable to be the faculty, which, in turn, may be scrutinised by central quality monitoring bodies. Transformation may occur in the ways in which these bodies (typically committees) both report and are monitored within the university's own hierarchy. It is common for universities to be constantly revisiting and refining their own mechanisms, and if these changes are more than minor adjustments, it is possible to talk of *transformative* structures. One significant illustration of such a structural change may be the decision of some universities deliberately to bring together their quality procedures their and learning and teaching procedures into one portfolio (University of Southampton 2007).

1.4 Transformation of quality processes

The transformation of the quality processes themselves is closely allied to the structural processes identified above, but may be conceptually separated from them. Institutions could decide, for example, that new procedures be adopted within the existing reporting structures. For example, institutions may well decide that considerably more weight be given to an examination of *quality enhancement* rather than traditional *quality assurance* even within the remit of existing reporting mechanisms. It is more normal, though, for structural and procedural issues to be closely associated with each other and to be implemented at the same time.

1.5 Transformation of teaching philosophies

This heading relates to the manner in which a subject group (or individual tutors) decide to transform radically the way in which a particular subject is taught or delivered. There may have been a historical trigger for change that arose from normal quality monitoring (high failure rates for example). However, one must not discount the fact that staff through their own professional linkages may always be alert to new ways of teaching their subject. A good case study is provided on the QuBE website illustrating the ways in which the University of Ulster reformulated its approach to the teaching of first-year Accounting (Greenan and Reid 2007). The impetus for the transformation of teaching philosophies may indeed come from inspired academic leadership at group or departmental level (Lomas 2004; Gordon 2002; Knight and Trowler 2001). The ways in which universities can and indeed do foster a climate of educational innovation and transformation is an interesting area explored further in this investigation.

1.6 Transformation through technological challenge

It is all too easy to overstate the impact of technological change through instruments such as a VLE. Nonetheless, it has to be recognised that living in an age of cheap and accessible computing power, the modes of delivery of the conventional course could well be rethought. It is now more possible than ever to dispense with lectures entirely (replacing them with a CD-ROM or iPod downloads) thus creating the time and space for more interactive tutorial time. Some VLEs (Moodle, for example) can be used to generate much higher rates of interactivity with student learners through quizzes, forums, wikis, short assignments and the like. Whereas one has to be cautious about overemphasising the role of technology, it is possible to argue that many more learning possibilities are now afforded by intelligent and discriminating use of evolving technologies. Examples of how the changes necessitated by the introduction of technology for teaching and learning are given by Trowler *et al.* (2003).

1.7 Transformation through cultural shifts at departmental level

It has been long been recognised that a quality agenda needs to inculcate a culture of excellence within both institutions and departments. Over 20 years ago, there was an argument that considerations of quality needed to move beyond notions of 'fitness for purpose' and espouse high standards of professionalism (Elton 1986). The argument is also made that the funding bodies, as stakeholders with only an overall interest in the functioning of the sector, only look for the basic maintenance of standards – the achievement of excellence from there on becomes part of the aspirations of the university community itself (Srikanthan and Dalrymple 2003). The same idea is developed further in the notion of a 'quality roadmap' developed by the QuBE project (QuBE 2007).

The Dearing report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997) advocated the idea of teaching excellence awards. In a significant HEFCE initiative, 74 CETLS (Centres of Excellence in Learning and Teaching) are being funded from 2005-06 to 2009-10 at a cost of £315 million (HEFCE 2007).

An objective of this investigation was to explore how notions such as the 'pursuit of excellence' had become recognised and embedded at a departmental level. Although it may be operationally difficult to achieve a metric of a 'culture of excellence', there is an argument that most academic staff would recognise the phenomenon upon encountering it. One line of investigation is to ascertain the

extent to which the number, nature and extensiveness of linkages with professional and subject groups helps to define and sustain a culture of excellence. In some circumstances, cultures of excellence may become self-sustaining as colleagues constantly seek to expand their own pedagogic and research frontiers and to share this with students and with other staff. Innovative and stimulating new approaches may well come from exposure to other HEIs through external examining, attendance at professional conferences or involvement in Subject Centres. At the same time, new initiatives in *research-informed teaching* are a stimulus for academic staff to engage students in current and cutting-edge research issues, as evidenced by the HEFCE initiative involving a spend of £25m over three years (Beaty 2005).

1.8 Subject Review and subsequent developments

The effort required for departments to meet the demands of subject review is now fading from memory, leaving only the reports of review visits on the Quality Assurance website (QAA 2007) as testimonial to what was achieved by reviewers and subject staff. The emphasis of these visits was on quality assurance. The QAA Handbook for Academic Review (2000) certainly required investigation of "the enhancement of academic standards", but what this meant was neither clearly defined nor did it occupy a primary place in the review method.

Concern for the need for enhancement predated the QAA's concentration on quality assurance, but was downplayed as departments strove to achieve good subject review scores. The work of Harvey on transformational quality has already been noted (2004), but other authors addressed related issues. Yorke (1994), for example, suggested that while external quality audit and quality assessment had led to some improvement, future demands would require concentration on the enhancement of quality, and proposed a funding agency oriented towards enhancement.

After subject review it became clear that institutions wanted to place more emphasis on what was variously called 'quality enhancement', 'enhancement of the student learning experience' and 'learning and teaching enhancement'. This can be seen from the quality documentation of many institutions available on the web (for example, University of Essex 2007; University of East London 2007; Anglia Ruskin University 2007). This chimed in with the view of central government, who increasingly funded initiatives, such as the Further Developments in Teaching and Learning programme, and established the Higher Education Academy in 2004, which assimilated in the process some national bodies with a focus on learning and teaching enhancement, such as the Learning and Teaching Subject Network (LTSN) (Harvey 2004). The Academy's mission (Higher Education Academy 2007) is '"to help… to provide the best possible learning experience for students". The QAA itself now features enhancement on its website front page, although that is defined as "enhancement of the management of quality and standards". Certainly at national level the emphasis has demonstrably shifted to quality improvement and the enhancement of teaching and learning.

The QAA handbook for institutional audit (QAA 2006) defines quality enhancement as "the process of taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities". As the handbook says, this definition places the emphasis on the seizing of developmental opportunities by the institution. Audit teams are advised to consider how institutional-level approaches to quality enhancement make use of internal and external information to support quality enhancement at programme level. The implicit model here is a top-down one in which the institution drives the enhancement agenda. Admittedly the handbook recognises that enhancement of learning takes

place through staff and that this can be through independently generated initiatives, the bottom-up route. However, the judgement on an institution is to be based upon how well it maintains an ethos that encourages the enhancement of learning. By contrast, as the handbook points out, the Higher Education Academy's approach is to support a wide variety of projects at different levels in institutions. Thus the focus of the QAA and Academy approaches to enhancement are rather different, the former looking for explicit institutional strategies and procedures, the latter concentrating on schemes and projects that generate enhancement nearer to the point of delivery.

2 Aims

Given that the larger aim of this project was to examine transformative quality, the objectives were to investigate by a series of interviews and other data sources the ways in which institutions are developing their own paths to transformative quality (even if not specifically labeled as such). Within the constraints of the time span of the project (12 calendar months), it was intended to utilise the experience gained from participation in the QuBE project (QuBE, 2006) to explore a variety of universities that broadly reflect the diversity, size and geographical spread of the sector. The subject mix took Business as a starting point (as quality models may well have been more explicitly adopted therein), but was extended to other subjects for comparative purposes. As initially formulated, it was intended that the following areas would, inter alia, constitute suitable areas for investigation:

- *the cultural level (what makes for a culture of excellence?)*
- *the policy level (how do faculties encourage, facilitate and reward innovative, transferable and reflective approaches through their own departmental auditing, reporting and committee structures?)*
- *the operational level (are there particular exemplars of realising transformative quality that can be illustrated via workshops and communities of practice to the rest of the sector?).*

Given the above rationale the aims of the project were:

- *to investigate the extent to which individual school and department heads have the autonomy to develop quality management*
- *to make recommendations that will help school and departmental heads to develop and implement their own strategies for transformative quality management*
- *to characterise the variation with size of school or department, institutional size and structure, extent of departmental autonomy and faculty complexity of issues that impinge upon quality management.*

3 Methods

3.1 The research paradigm of the investigation

The research paradigm in which the investigation is rooted is that of *interpretivism*, which is a philosophical position that refers to the way in which human beings (in this case in an organisational context) interpret and 'make sense' of the world around them (Schwandt 1994; Patton 2002) The authors set themselves the task not of conducting a survey in the traditional sense in which data might be gathered that is subject to statistical description and analysis. Rather, it was wished systematically to gather the perspectives, working assumptions and visions of the respondents so as to build a picture of the ways in which, in their professional lives, they went about the practical concerns of generating a quality learning environment for their students. A central concern was to understand the meanings that the respondents attach to their vision of the teaching and learning process, conscious of the fact that this always takes place in an organisational context that is complex, multi-layered and apparently always in a state of flux. In the philosophical stance of interpretivism, all views are regarded as equally valid, and the role of the analyst therefore becomes to trace out continuities and patterns in the responses rather than attempt to make any value judgements concerning them. The investigators were also conscious that their wider role was not just to investigate but to make recommendations that could ultimately lead to enhancement of the student experience. It was a source of particular interest to note any particular approach or perspective that seemed to lend itself to the transfer and adoption of examples of good practice that emerged within the context of the investigations.

By way of clarification it should be noted that there is not a widely accepted simple meaning of interpretivism as applied to qualitative social enquiry. The framework adopted for this investigation is not seeking to follow scientific method in establishing laws of social organisation; it is not positivist. Rather, as has been stated above, the researchers sought to understand the interpretations that those who were interviewed put upon their actions as they sought to improve the teaching and learning of their students. Also, it should be stated that although considerable amount of data were collected the investigation was not undertaken using the methodology of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) because it was judged that attempts to create a theory, the essence of the grounded theory approach, would have been premature at this stage. As is discussed below (see Section 3.2 Analysis of data) explicit model building was not the intention at this stage, but is a logical future development, which it is intended to pursue.

It is worthy of note at this point that the organisational structure and/or quality systems in *each one* of the institutions within this investigation were in a state of refinement or even more fundamental change. Hence, it is quite common for the respondents to explain how a particular policy or procedure worked in their institution only quickly to add a rider that next year there was an intention that this was to be refined in some way.

3.2 The methods employed

3.2.1 Steering committee

Although not technically necessary, the investigators took the decision at the start of the investigation to appoint a steering committee with a distinguished membership

(See Appendix A). Although only meeting face-to-face on one occasion the committee proved to be a valuable source of advice and assistance.

3.2.2 Locus of the interviews

Five institutions were approached with a request that interviews be conducted at two levels within the institution – firstly those with responsibility for quality management and enhancement at a university-wide level and secondly those with parallel responsibilities at the faculty/departmental level. One of the research questions in the investigation was to explore some of the dynamics of quality improvement both at the central, university-wide level and also at the sub-institutional (faculty/departmental) level. It was felt that an investigation at any one level without reference to the policies, procedures and practices at the other level could run the risk of being seriously misleading. The initial meeting of the steering committee endorsed this approach to the investigation. At the same time, the researchers were strongly encouraged to examine the role of teaching and learning as well as formal quality mechanisms in the enhancement of the student learning experience.

This area proved to be a complex one to research and one that has not been visited much in the literature, with the exception of the paper by Baldridge *et al.* (1973). An additional complexity was that in practice, the organisational structure and associated terminology varied by university that led us to adopt a common set of role definitions to aid comparability (see below, p.15). It also has to be borne in mind that a large business school can often approach the size of a small university with a history that can be traced back over the decades. Under these circumstances, the relationship between the university's central institutions (such as the committees for quality and for learning and teaching) and the sub-institutional level is simultaneously complex, dynamic and evolving.

The universities were chosen to reflect the diversity of Business and Management provision within the sector and included:

- one large pre-1992 university
- three large post-1992 universities of which one was metropolitan (London-based) and the other two were located in the Midlands
- one smaller post-1992 university.

Interviews were conducted in each university at two levels (central and faculty/ departmental) so as to capture some of the essential dynamics envisaged in the research design.

3.2.3 The interviews

Some 16 interviews were conducted including both levels within each institution, and the two investigators typically conducted each interview. A detailed breakdown of the interviews and the quotations utilised in this report is given in Section 4.2. The average length of each interview was two hours and, with the permission of the respondents, the interviews were digitally recorded. Of the interviews conducted at sub-institutional level, the majority were conducted with staff from the business and management field, but the opportunity was taken to conduct other interviews with staff from humanities and science faculties/departments. These comparative interviews were intended as a cross-check to help us establish whether procedures, policies and practices were completely *sui generis* within the sampled institutions – in practice, no sharp differences were revealed. Many of the interviews were with more than one respondent – therefore, although 16 interviews were conducted, the views

of some 26 individuals were gathered in total. Each interview was then transcribed verbatim to generate a definitive record. An interview guide (see Appendix B) and background material was supplied so that respondents had a reasonable expectation of the issues that were to be investigated. The interview schedule was not used in a mechanical fashion – when respondents wished to explore a particular theme, this was encouraged. In practice, the interview guide was tailored slightly to meet the particular configuration of each university. It was not intended to document and to cross-tabulate each response against each question as this would not have reflected the underlying interpretive research paradigm deployed.

The interviews often touched on aspects of the interviewee's activities and experience in institutions other than the one in which they were currently employed. This might, for example, have been a previous place of employment, or where they had been external examiner or had undertaken some kind of external audit. Such comments often proved to be illuminating. They were therefore not ignored but rather used de facto to extend the range of universities covered by the investigation.

3.2.4 Confidentiality

It was stressed to the various respondents that all of the interview material was confidential and that neither an institution nor an individual would be identified. The opportunity was taken for respondents to make remarks 'off the record', but this opportunity was rarely, if ever, requested. All respondents were found to be frank, forthcoming and fully engaged in their subject matter and the fact that each of the investigators had experience of the operation of quality systems within higher education helped to establish a common basis of assumptions and of language.

In the analysis of interviews, the context of the quoted material was also provided by utilising a common set of role definitions that allows the reader to locate the organisational role of the respondent. Because organisational structure and the associated terminology varied by institution, then a term such as *Departmental Quality Co-ordinator* might be a technically accurate description of the role, but this term did not actually form part of the job description to it. The intention was that this procedure allowed for comparability across institutions while also enhancing confidentiality of the contributions of individual informants.

While completely accurate verbatim records of each interview were transcribed, there was a need for the illustrative quotes in this report to be presented in a coherent way. Accordingly, the opportunity was taken to undertake some semantic and grammatical correction of individual contributions while being absolutely faithful to the sense of the original. It was felt that this practice has also helped to enhance levels of confidentiality.

3.2.5 Other sources of data

The data about each institution that were in the public domain (insofar as they were published on the university's own website) was also utilised. In addition, each institution was generous in its offer of documents and other supportive materials that would allow us to gain an accurate knowledge of the organisational structure, procedures and terminology that was germane to each. This background material helped the researchers to employ the terminology or acronym as used within each institution, and this helped to avert any misunderstandings. It should also be reiterated that respondents often had experience of a variety of institutions in which

they may have worked or have been closely associated, e.g. as an external examiner. These wider perspectives were regarded as valuable as they gave both wider and deeper perspectives to this investigation. They effectively extended the range of institutions investigated and should assist in increasing the relevance to the whole of the higher education sector.

3.2.6 Analysis of the data

Having a completely accurate verbatim record (both in Microsoft Word files and also in Adobe Acrobat files generated from them) helped us to search quickly and comparatively for key phrases and concepts that were to be utilised in a thematic analysis. The investigators had available to them specialist qualitative analysis software (Atlas TI v. 5.2) that was not used extensively at the analysis stage. However, it was also considered that the interview material was a rich source of data that could be employed for some more complex model building to be reported in additional papers flowing from this research.

3.2.7 Triangulation

The presence of more than one interviewee (as well as two investigators) helped to ensure that accurate impressions were, in practice, conveyed. It was not uncommon for respondents to check with their fellow respondents that they had given a fair representation of the subject under discussion. The authors feel confident that the quality of the recorded data is robust – but they evidently accept full responsibility for the subsequent thematic analysis.

3.2.8 Role definitions

To preserve anonymity in reporting and to aid comparability generic role titles have been used. These describe the respondent's function rather than their particular job title. The meaning ascribed to these generic titles is as follows:

> *Senior Manager* – a person who is part of the university senior central management team, typically a deputy vice-chancellor.
>
> *Senior Academic Manager* – a central management person with responsibility for academic processes, typically an academic registrar or learning and teaching director.
>
> *Head of Faculty* – a person having overall responsibility for a large academic unit that may concentrate on a single subject or may offer several cognate subjects. The actual title might be Head of School or Dean.
>
> *Faculty Quality Manager* (Co-ordinator) – responsibility for quality within a faculty. May be a Deputy Head of Faculty. As a manager may chair a faculty committee for quality assurance and enhancement that reports to a university committee with a similar title. As a co-ordinator, will report to a faculty quality manager or deputy head of faculty.
>
> *Faculty Learning and Teaching Manager (Co-ordinator)* – replace 'quality' with 'learning and teaching' in previous definition.
>
> *Head of Department* – a department is a section within a faculty concentrating on a single subject discipline. The head is responsible for the delivery of teaching and research in that subject.

Departmental Quality Co-ordinator – a role concerned with promoting quality issues within the department. Typically a part-time role.

Departmental Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator – replace ‘quality’ with ’learning and teaching’ in previous definition.

Programme/Module Leader – self-explanatory.

4 Results

4.1 Universities sampled

Interviews were conducted in five universities. The following outlines are deliberately brief to help preserve confidentiality, but may help the reader to gain an impression of the range of institutions where interviews were conducted.

University A

This large Midlands-based post-92 university has a total student population of about 20,000. It has a large business school, providing nearly one student in four of the university's total intake. The university's hinterland is culturally diverse.

University B

This smaller southern post-92 university has a total student population of 5,500 with approximately 16% of its students studying business-related subjects.

University C

This large metropolitan post-92 university has a total student population of about 23,000 and a business-related faculty supplied about 25% of that total. The make-up of the student body reflects the ethnically diverse nature of London's population.

University D

This large Midlands-based post-92 university has a total student population of about 19,000. Approximately one-sixth of its students are in the business-related area.

University E

This large southern pre-92 university has a total student population of about 20,000.

4.2 Breakdown of the interviews

The table below gives an analysis of the interviews by institution, the number of interviews of senior staff (staff in the first two categories), the number of interviews of staff at levels other than senior, the number of quotes included in the report from both categories of staff and the total number of quotes included from each institution. From the table it may be seen that the evidence presented in the report is not disproportionately weighted towards any one university.

Figure 1: Analysis of interviews

Institution	No. of interviews of senior staff	No. of interviews at faculty and below	Total no. of interviews	No. of senior staff interviewed	No. of staff at faculty level and below interviewed	No. of quotes from senior staff	No. of quotes from staff at faculty level and below	Total no. of quotes
A	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	**4**
B	2	5	7*	2	7	8	19	**27**
C	1	1	2	1	2	10	10	**20**
D	1	1	2	3	3	20	20	**40**
E	1	2	3	1	4	6	8	**14**
Totals	**6**	**10**	**16**	**8**	**18**	**46**	**59**	**105**

* Includes interviews in non-business areas

4.3 Presentation of results

The results are presented using several themes that were identified during the analysis of the interviews. Since some responses might be classified under more than one theme, they are not mutually exclusive. They serve to identify major areas of concern that form the basis of the conclusions and recommendations.

4.4 Theme: Enhancement

It was felt it would be illuminating to explore the different contexts in which the word (or the concepts) associated with 'enhancement' occurred throughout the interviews. A rough content analysis indicates the extremely wide range of areas in which 'enhancement' was spontaneously mentioned (i.e. not as a direct response to a posed question) and also some indication of the frequency of such concerns:

Occurrence of concept of 'enhancement'	**Number**
As part of a formal role/job description	6
Necessity for strategy for …	5
Closely associated with learning and teaching	5
Reporting mechanisms	5
Shift from quality assurance to quality enhancement	5
Semantics/conceptualisation	4
Teaching culture	4
Action plans	4
Specific plans	3
Teaching structures (e.g. semesterisation)	2
Staff development	2
Not helped by bureaucracy	2
Reflective practice	2
Political imperatives	2
Funding	2
Think tank	1
Role of QAA	1
Innovation	1
Audit	1
Workshops	1
Enhancement Board	1
Student experience	1
Regulations	1
Research-informed teaching	1
Financial constraints	1

It is possible to explore the ways in which the concept of enhancement is employed in the universities that were studied. The table shows occurrence data for the word 'enhancement', from which five notions have been drawn out that exemplify the ways enhancement finds practical expression in the work of the universities in the sample.

4.4.1 Semantics/conceptual distinction

Here the respondent was exploring the ways in which the enhancement agenda was carried forward in his own university, incidentally locating some of the impetus at programme or curriculum level:

> Coming back to structure, on the whole quality enhancement agenda, the way we operate is to split that into two parts, at least. One part is to do with pedagogic enhancement and the other is to do with curriculum enhancement.
>
> Head of Faculty

4.4.2 Implicit in learning and teaching

Here the view is expressed that members of staff engage in enhancement activities as part of the way they define their learning and teaching functions:

> Quality has a bad name and is thought of as hoops to jump through. People are doing quality without naming it as quality. They are doing enhancement, thinking about how their learning and teaching can produce better quality and be judged better for it.
>
> Faculty Quality Manager (Co-ordinator)

4.4.3 Enhancement reported in action plans

In practically all of the institutions investigated, quality enhancement was reported upon as part of the normal cycle of annual monitoring alongside conventional quality assurance data. However, the ambiguity of the exact route for enhancement initiatives is still evident:

> The action points from (the annual monitoring report) and points of good practice and enhancement – they would be directed either to [the Faculty Quality Committee] or to teaching and learning to take on board, for discussions – or indeed to heads of department or programme directors for any executive action.
>
> Head of Faculty

4.4.4 The need for an explicit strategy for enhancement

The QAA handbook on institutional audit suggests strongly that all institutions should now give enhancement the same attention that was previously accorded to quality assurance:

> In this definition of quality enhancement, the emphasis is on how an institution seizes developmental opportunities in a manner no less systematic and no less based on clear strategic planning than quality assurance - 'taking deliberate steps'. Quality enhancement is therefore seen as an aspect of institutional quality management that is designed to secure, in the context of the constraints within which individual institutions operate, steady, reliable and demonstrable improvements in the quality of learning opportunities. (QAA 2006, para. 47).

This message on enhancement is certainly being received in some universities. Indeed, the need for an explicit delineation of enhancement was outlined to us by one respondent, speaking of a colleague:

> Basically the QAA perspective, and one he's striving to work with at X because he very much believes in it, is that just having good practice going on in an area of an institution is not enhancing. It's only enhancing if the institution has a methodology to join that good practice up, to learn from it and to implement that good practice across the institution.
>
> Senior Manager

This point was particularly interesting as enhancement was often depicted as only the sharing and reporting of good practice, whereas this quotation indicates adherence to a more systematic view of enhancement. However, the extent to which a clear strategy on enhancement was embedded within institutions was variable as the section below indicates.

4.4.5 Enhancement embedded as a university strategy

Following the lead of the QAA, some institutions had recognised the importance of enhancement as a current strategic objective. In one particular university, learning and teaching, and academic monitoring had been brought together into a single reporting structure (and incidentally, 'enhancement' was operationalised in a particular way reflecting wider value orientations within the university):

> This is the most recent (monitoring and enhancement instrument). At the back they've put the [document that outlines the learning and teaching enhancement strategy]. These are the five bullet points that they are trying to bear in mind:
> - student-centred, research-led teaching
> - employability
> - inclusivity
> - staff development and reward
> - building the infrastructure for education.
>
> Faculty Quality Manager

However, in one institution, there was a *cri de coeur* that enhancement needed to be thought about in a more strategic way:

> The previous regime in the university was skewed towards quality obsessiveness in a very narrow way. That's a problem because it's nothing to do with strategy. The nuance of the differences between strategic and operational management hasn't been grasped at all. The chair [of the Faculty Quality Committee] has to do operational things and has no time to think strategically. Enhancement is not operational, but has to be strategic in the sense of having objectives and plans and method by which you achieve those. That could be the operational stuff. We have talked about how quality committee could take on enhancement, but it's suffocated by the pressure of the operational.
>
> Programme/Module Leader

Some universities had formalised their reporting mechanisms, encouraging a new form of reporting as follows:

> … it's very much to do with the whole spectrum, identifying problems, but trying to find out what the solutions are as well and keeping in touch with learning and teaching issues because we have an improvement team … It's definitely to do with what are people doing well, what problems are people solving, how transferable are those solutions to these other people over here who are struggling.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

Finally, it is noteworthy that one university reported on a practice (not within one of the universities in the sample) in which a Board had been created to meet after each round of Examination Boards specifically to address enhancement issues.

4.4.6 The locus for enhancement activities

It was interesting to explore whether strategies for enhancement were:

- top-driven, i.e. driven by the central quality monitoring institutions within a university
- primarily the responsibility of the faculty/department, which encouraged developments and innovation in programmes that reported to them while at the same time reporting and representing such innovations upwards
- primarily bottom-driven by innovations at curricula and programme level.

In all of the universities that were investigated, there was a clear recognition of the importance of the enhancement agenda at each of the three levels represented above. This multi-layered approach was explicitly recognised by one respondent:

> It's so multi-layered when talking about innovation. There's small innovation that can be done in individual learning activities, then there's module level, then programme level, then school and university level. There are clearly policies and strategies that are trickling down and affecting each one. So where does one drill in?
>
> Programme/Module Leader
>
> Yes it's the multiple layers. A couple of days ago we had a programme meeting for our big Business and Management programme. On the agenda were a lot of drivers for change at the programme level, which were coming from very different areas, so they had drivers for change for internationalisation that was coming from an [accreditation source]. It was coming down to the programme and would then trickle down to the module level. But also at the national level we were looking at the changes that would be needed to be made to the programmes because of the changes to the benchmarking statements that they would want to align with. Then at the university level because of the academic restructuring there would be fundamental changes that would have to be made at programme and module level. I think that is a very common thing to happen. At any level, even at senior management team level, you're getting the bottom up from what is happening on the ground and also from what is happening to the university. At the programme level you can really see the influences coming from the top and the bottom.
>
> Departmental Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator

It was also certainly the case that the prime movers for enhancement activities were firmly located at the programme level, with faculties themselves taking on generally a supportive role and having a concern for wider structural issues such as semesterisation.

4.4.6.1 Bottom-up innovation

The way in which enhancement and innovation could be shown to 'bubble up' in a very non-directive way was vividly illustrated in one university:

> At department level, we have group development meetings. So for subject one, subject two and subject three we have different groups of people who meet up during the year to discuss ways of moving the modules and the programme forward and discussing what should be introduced. For example, we recently considered how to implement [subject X] within our module system and how to keep up to date with those sort of things.
>
> Programme/Module Leader

[Q] Would the programme leader take prime responsibility for this?

[R] No. It's whoever teaches on that area. So say [in subject X] all staff who teach in that area are invited to join in. There is a completely flat structure

[Q] Who does the inviting?

[R] Somebody is appointed to do that.

[Q] The Head of Department?

[R] No, not at all. A member of staff who is willing to undertake that role.

[Q] But who appoints them?

[R] In my department it was just 'is anyone willing to write to everyone?'. There wasn't one particular person in control at all. So we come together about a couple of times a year and meet in groups of about six or seven. We discuss interesting things that were going on, what we should introduce, how we should go about introducing it. The best example recently is [specialism in Subject X] and how it should be introduced across all modules. Next we will be looking at double modules, whether they could be introduced. [An industrial and professional contact] has offered to do some teaching, so we are discussing how best to take advantage of that offer. Someone would volunteer to summarise the information so that it could be disseminated.

***R*=** Programme/Module Leader

4.4.6.2 The Faculty's role in enhancement

The point was made forcibly by one of the respondents that what might be called 'traditional' quality assurance and enhancement could be seen as two sides of the same coin:

> People talk about enhancement as if it were something totally separate – well, it isn't, I mean driving poor quality out is enhancement in itself, So, you know, it's just a further step along the way. What you're talking about is when you get to the stage when you've got the obvious bad bits out and then moving on from there.
>
> Head of Faculty

Faculties evidently had oversight of routine quality monitoring and enhancement activities in their constituent departments. The interesting question becomes, though, how they perceived their role in advancing an enhancement agenda, particularly as all faculties also had a learning and teaching committee. There was recognition that 'enhancement' needed some 'unbundling' at the operational level and arising issues dealt with differently:

> Coming back to structure, on the whole quality enhancement agenda, the way we operate is to split that into two parts, at least. One part is to do with pedagogic

> enhancement and the other is to do with curriculum enhancement. Of course they interact, but, for example, the learning and teaching committee is not a curriculum committee except in so far as generic issues such as academic literacy, or skills or 'graduateness' and things like that. Because the expertise in the curriculum is within the departments.
>
> Head of Faculty

In the main, this was by providing forums in which there was an exchange of practice, sometimes leading to structural change within programmes

> A lot of the initiatives that we have do develop from unit level. There's a Programme Director's forum, which is chaired by X, and within that forum they do discuss aspects of delivery and provision…. One example was of two Programme Directors who decided to extend a sort of common, first semester approach across the two programme areas and to take it into long thin units – in other words, to support the students from Semester One through to Semester Two by front-loading the module with experienced staff. Now, that was tested out in a localised environment and when it came up for review, they decided that they could extend that across two programme areas. So, I think that's an example where innovation, particularly at the unit leader/course director level has fed through, and then within a formal review led to a new structure going into place for Semester One.
>
> Faculty Learning and Teaching Manager

Occasionally, there was some scepticism at programme leader level that the policy of providing enhancement plans was working as intended:

> All the modules that are controlled by that [Subject] Board, we have to write an annual report identifying problems… and identifying ways forward, you know enhancement plans…I'm not sure that it works very well, but theoretically it's there.
>
> Faculty Quality Manager (Co-ordinator)

Although there was evidence that faculties undertake considerable activity to enhance the student learning experience, there was little indication that this was done in the context of a faculty exercising its autonomy to have a strategic plan that it implemented under its own management control. Faculty strategic plans for learning and teaching were established and implemented with varying degrees of rigour, even for faculties within the same university.

There were some examples of faculty learning and teaching strategies where the faculty strategy was at variance to that of the university:

> Five years ago the university had put together an e-learning strategy. This said that in two years every module would have an e-learning presence. In our faculty we developed our own strategy, which was that we would only give time and energy to e-learning when it enhanced a programme or a module. This has spread throughout the faculty and now we have modules that don't necessarily have an e-learning presence. We passively resisted by not doing what the university wanted.
>
> Faculty Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator

The following two quotations from staff in a faculty recently established after restructuring show a faculty in the process of using its autonomy to work out its approach to learning and teaching:

> X is a new faculty; it's only one year old. We are still having discussions as to whether we are going to have a learning and teaching strategy for the faculty or if it's possible to have one.
>
> Faculty Academic Manager

> There isn't a strategic plan for enhancement. ..... In the absence of a strategy those with the time and feeling innovative will come up with a project or curriculum development because academics as a whole are thinking in that way, but they are ad hoc, not joined up, not always pulling in the same direction and certainly not consciously strategic in the sense that they are delivering outcomes or objectives.
>
> Programme Leader

One can sympathise with this faculty in not having a strategic plan for, as another interviewee from that faculty pointed out, in a faculty that embraces a breadth of study it is difficult to formulate a generic strategy that embraces all the different interests. On the other hand the programme leader points out the weaknesses of not having a strategy. The alternative would seem to be to have a climate in which staff are encouraged to innovate and left to work out for themselves how to innovate. The risk then is that the innovations are limited and restricted because resources are not devoted to them. By contrast there are potentially many benefits to an effectively executed strategy, such as the faculty knowing 'where it is going' and 'how far it has got' and being able to embed the results of initiatives.

In one university an interview in one faculty gave the impression that each faculty had a learning and teaching strategy and that this was a mandatory part of the university's annual quality process. An interview in another faculty gave a rather different view. The first quote gives a description of the process, one which accords with the official university documents, while the second quote from another faculty is much more ambiguous about whether there is a need for a faculty strategic plan and in fact whether the faculty has produced one:

> The idea is that the [monitoring documentation] is completed with the learning and teaching strategy in mind, that it's completed and reviewed by January and that by February it's ready to inform the strategic plan.
>
> Faculty Quality Manager

> Some ... would say we do not have a strategy in terms of educational enhancement. What we have is a series of issues that need attention. I have always found it difficult, not looking at our faculty in particular, but as a general concept, to be thinking about a learning and teaching strategy. I'm confused as to what that looks like. An example is – 'what is your assessment strategy?' I find it rather silly to be talking about an assessment strategy divorced from everything else ... In other words when you have a strategy you have to say that it is a strategy for doing something. So you are implying a particular objective. A statement that simply says 'what is your learning and teaching strategy?' is more like saying what do you do.
>
> Faculty Quality Manager

4.4.6.3 Staff development

One aspect of improving the student learning experience is to develop staff to do so. Most institutions have a strategy for staff development, but the extent to which this is

determined centrally varies. A paper by Hicks (1999) describes the role of central academic staff development units in Australian universities. Hicks develops a framework for analysing alternative ways of delivering staff development, either through these central units that then tend to concentrate on generic knowledge and skills or through faculties where discipline-specific training can be given. Although the dominant form of academic development in Australian universities at the time of writing was centrally delivered programmes, Hicks advocates an integrated model in which central and faculty-based development are interrelated and feed into each other through collaboration.

The strategy can include staff development, although this is usually by means of open-house events, aimed at the perceived needs of the faculty. There is no relation of the topics to the needs of individual staff and attendance at the events is usually voluntary. Academic managers are well aware of the limitations of this approach as the following quotes show, but presumably are not willing to implement a more directive policy, with all that that would entail:

> We do have staff development days, two a year. Things do crop up; for example, new e-learning initiatives such as use of wikis.
>
> Faculty Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator

> The disadvantage with the voluntary approach is that to implement a strategy you have to rely on peoples' willingness.
>
> Faculty Academic Manager

4.4.6.4 Central initiatives

In spite of their view that faculties have devolved responsibility, senior managers see a significant role for the centre in initiating change and development. Senior management often instanced centrally funded initiatives as a mechanism for achieving enhancement. There were several examples in the interviews, such as learning and teaching fellowships available to all university staff through a bidding process and funding for a variety of projects in areas such as research-informed teaching and personal development planning. At least one university explicitly refers to "developmental initiatives" in its learning strategy document. The following quote shows an example of a central initiative going back several years, in this case concerning an issue raised by students:

> Take an example of a few years ago, which was a top-down example from university to faculty. It was the teaching of group work skills in Year One. The team had to respond to that initiative.
>
> Faculty Academic Manager

Certainly faculties seemed to have considerable autonomy in responding to initiatives, few of which were mandatory and some, such as teaching fellowships, were aimed at individual staff thus effectively bypassing the faculty. This autonomy in reacting to central initiatives was tempered in some cases by the faculty feeling the need to be active within the university:

> Yes I think we have the autonomy to say an initiative is not high up our priority list. But on the other hand we try to participate in university initiatives.
>
> Faculty Academic Manager

Often in those cases where central initiatives were promoted by the university and readily taken up by the faculty, it did not seem that this utilisation was part of a faculty strategic plan for enhancement. Nor was the activity for those undertaking it part of a considered individual development plan. Rather the faculty would be taking advantage of an opportunity that presented itself or perhaps perceiving itself to be under pressure to accede to a university requirement. In their turn, the programmes of central initiatives often contained significant elements included as a result of national initiatives. The result was that sometimes the central initiative was too generic to meet the specific needs of an individual discipline:

> We were aware of various central initiatives in terms of improving essay writing and so on, but we felt that they had had relatively little impact, because of the fact that they were very generic.
>
> Head of Department

This issue of over-general provision can be addressed by tailoring the initiative to the discipline, as in the following example, but this seems to be relatively rarely done, presumably because of the effort required, especially when the tailoring is done jointly between initiative provider and recipient:

> There is a generic framework, but it is utterly flavoured by the discipline. What would be nice would be to do tailored provision to the individual discipline with the faculty staff so that there's much more ownership.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

In practice there are difficulties that arise from the implementation of initiatives. The initiative may not be welcomed by those members of the group not involved in it. Central management may find there is not an enthusiastic uptake from staff with other priorities such as the need to perform in the research arena:

> There is tension especially when learning and teaching initiatives affect other staff.
>
> Senior Academic Manager
>
> We are concerned that people are not wanting to declare their expertise in learning and teaching in the present climate where RAE looms large. So we have tried to counter that with a sense of prestige and status for learning and teaching.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

There was not a great deal of evidence that the progress or outcomes of these initiatives was monitored. The initial assessment of bids for funding was thorough, but whether or not projects achieved an institutional impact through dissemination was less certain:

> **[Q]** Two years from now – how will you able to say that that spend has had an impact?
>
> **[R]** It's a question that we get asked in Subject Centres and the answer is that I'm not sure that we are ever going to know. We measure the number of workshops and the number of publications. These are easy to measure. But what impact that has on students is very long term and difficult to measure.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

> ... and there is a requirement of writing a final report that is made available to all colleagues. That's the area we often fall down on – the dissemination.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

4.4.6.5 Impact of accrediting bodies

For some universities, the process of accreditation was seen as a significant driver for innovation and enhancement:

> When you are trying to get into the club it's an agent for change, a driver for change. When you are in the club it's a constraint because you've got to comply with the club's requirements. So it's not so much a contrast between the accrediting bodies but where they are in relation to them. So because [X accrediting body] is forward looking and they need to do various things and the main areas that [the accrediting body] is driving them in are two areas that are perceived as weaknesses, which are real internationalisation (i.e. more than just having lots of international students around) and engagement with the business community.
>
> Head of Faculty

4.5 Theme: Influence of size and maturity

A particular point of interest was to identify factors that influenced enhancement in faculties and departments. In particular it seemed plausible that the size of the university and the size of the faculty might have an effect on the ability to enhance. One possibility was that in the larger universities there would be more innovation, because sheer size would preclude detailed control from the centre. Another factor that might affect enhancement is university maturity, by which is meant how long it has been a self-governing entity. A lengthier period of independence might lead to greater self-confidence to innovate. In this respect one might expect to see a difference between pre- and post-92 universities. Faculties composed of departments with disciplines not closely related to each other could also find it more difficult to innovate. The methodology employed did not allow an exploration of these issues in any systematic way. There is no metric for enhancement that could be readily applied and the sample was quite small. Nevertheless, it seems worthwhile to record here the impressions gained on these issues from the interviews and from examination of internal documentation.

4.5.1 Effect of size

There are some obvious effects of university size, both for small and large institutions. One is that central management in larger universities wants to maintain oversight, but may find it difficult to do so:

> I must say the loop-closing mechanisms in an institution this size are a nightmare.
>
> Senior Manager

On the other hand in smaller institutions there may be problems in handling all the required quality mechanisms:

> Rightly or wrongly people feel they haven't got the time to get into enhancement. They feel that they are overburdened. In a small institution it's almost impossible to

avoid. There's a sense in which this structure could work for an institution that is double the size.

Programme Leader

There also seems to be a widely shared belief that, whatever the size of the whole institution, the delivery of courses should be by smaller teams:

[Q] Do you think the size of a department has an impact on the student learning experience and innovation?

[R] In a sense it doesn't … as long as the team is relatively small, then that's OK. It doesn't matter whether that team's part of a huge faculty or a small faculty.

Head of Faculty

Ideally, in a smaller group it's easier to achieve student satisfaction. I mean my experience in over 20 years of looking at student evaluations tells me that the bigger the numbers you are operating with, the lower the ratings are.

Faculty Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator

The investigation was limited in systematically exploring the effects produced by variation in size since the sample consisted of four similarly sized universities and a fifth much smaller one. However, in that smaller institution there were seven interviews with a total of nine interviewees and some common issues emerged that may be related to size. Some of those interviews revealed a concern among faculty staff about central control and regulation that did not appear in the interviews in the other universities; a typical remark was:

People in the institution have a feeling of being checked over and over.

Faculty Quality Manager

It is therefore possible that in smaller universities, with management structures bringing senior managers closer to faculties, there is more an overt sense of control, limiting the inclination to innovate. Of course this observation, derived from a single university, may not be significant, but it does have plausibility.

4.5.2 Pressures to change structure

As universities have increased in size over recent years the corresponding increases in faculty size have forced re-examinations of structure. Within one faculty the respondent discussed the difficulties as the faculty had grown larger, and informal relationships were no longer adequate to manage increasing diversity. The response was to restructure and clarify the role of the departments within the faculty:

Ten years ago we managed the faculty quite well on relationships. The faculty was small enough and coherent enough for us to be able to do that. We didn't have all these multiple roles and collaborations with very different focuses. Now part of the driver for restructuring is that it is not quite working at the size we now are. We are trying to find a structure whereby the departments become the powerhouses, whereby if there is a need for staff development within a department, the department would take the lead on that, and they would be able to take the lead because they

would have a department head and his team, which would include someone with an academic/pedagogic/learning focus.

Faculty Academic Manager

This sense of a smaller faculty allowing easy informal interaction is also seen here:

... you could do that with a small unit. And it worked because we all knew what we were doing and we shared it. It was a good cultural thing to try to develop. The key thing was that we were small enough to have a meeting like this [i.e. this interview] and go away and do it.

Senior Academic Manager

4.5.3 Optimum size

This is not a clear issue. The balance of advantage between large and small may be influenced by local factors as the following quote shows. The optimum faculty and department size for enhancement will thus not be straightforward to determine and is likely to change over time:

[Q] Is there a relationship between quality and size?

[R] Two things are in play. One is the logistical problems of handling large numbers of students – the other is having a critical mass of academics and therefore the ability of that group to spark. There must be crossover where the size is large enough to get a 'buzzy' department with lots of staff talking to each other and not so large that they are overwhelmed by 800 students. If your techniques and abilities are right you can move that point, so if you're good at it could move the point to where you are about to collapse close to the 800 student intake – other teams might collapse if they have more than 12 students.

Senior Academic Manager

4.5.4 Perceptions of structure

One possible marker of the variation in structure within an institution is the view held by the members of that institution, as indicated by their unprompted use of language. The word ‘devolved’ when used to describe the structure and working of a university seemed to be such an indicator. In fact it was used to a significant extent by only two interviewees, both senior academic managers in large universities of comparable size, one a pre- and the other a post-92 institution. Interestingly their usage was quite different. In the pre-92 university it was used to describe a devolved structure with no qualification; for example:

In a university [like this] that is so devolved.

Senior Academic Manager, pre-92 university

Whereas in the post-92 university, devolution was only one element in a more complex structure:

Our faculties are an interesting mix of the very devolved in a comprehensive centralised system. We retain the undergraduate modular system; so programmes

> operate through common standards and systems, but faculties have a very high level of devolved authority. So we are devolved in a central context.
>
> Senior Academic Manager, post-92 university

The other post-92 universities in the sample also had quite complex systems of oversight.

A related issue was the variety of disciplines within a faculty. In a larger university a faculty is likely to be composed of departments with disciplines that are closely related. Because of this all staff share, to some extent, underlying assumptions and therefore understand each others problems. In a smaller university faculties may be created, for administrative reasons, from departments whose discipline ethos is quite different. This can create difficulties for departments who see their path to enhancement in very different terms from those of their faculty colleagues in other disciplines, as can be seen here:

> We perhaps have to work harder in the sense of having to explain our situation to people who are perhaps more likely to be unfamiliar with it. We see ourselves as the only department of its kind, whereas in another institution one would be explaining oneself to people from a subject with a similar sort of tradition.
>
> Head of Department

4.5.5 Conclusions on influencing factors

Of the influencing factors discussed size does seem to be linked with enhancement, but the responses do not reveal any simple relationship. Although some have thought that smaller faculties might give more opportunities for enhancement, this does not seem to be the case. Smaller faculties can allow better informal relationships and working practices, but as they grow they require extensive reorganisation. Faculties in smaller universities may be more closely controlled by central management. Smaller institutions may form faculties composed of disparate departments, thus creating inherent differences. The indications of these responses are that the post-92 universities are more likely to have complex, centrally controlled structures.

4.6 Theme: Autonomy of departments and faculties

4.6.1 Introduction

Given the first of the project's aims, autonomy was a central focus of the investigation. Although in higher education there has been much discussion about institutional autonomy – the ability of a university to act independently of a regulatory framework – for this project the investigation of autonomy concentrated on whether some constituent part of the university has the capability to act independently of the rest of the institution, and what the implications of this are for the student experience. The most obvious example would be for a faculty to set up its own quality procedures. However, questions of autonomy may arise within a faculty. A constituent department may wish to have its own approach to particular issues, different from that of the faculty. Then again within a department, small teams and individuals may state a need for autonomy in their own teaching and research. This last example of autonomy is what is often termed 'academic autonomy' and relates to an individual academic staff member. It is not considered here because, although obviously of great importance to the student learning experience, it is not within the scope of this report.

4.6.2 Perceptions of autonomy

In the interviews there was little indication that central management thought it had complete and direct authority over the delivery of the student experience. As one faculty learning and teaching manager reported:

> At a university committee the DVC said 'I have no real power to require faculties to do things, only persuasion'. I think it's the same position for the central educational development unit.
>
> Faculty Learning and Teaching Manager

One senior manager in a large university, early on in the interview, emphasised the power, independence and devolved authority of faculties:

> Faculties are almost self-managing as to how they want to do things. They're too big and powerful. We're talking about small HEIs in their own right. The deans have the authority to go off and do pretty much what they want. My role is to ensure they have an outcomes-based approach which achieves the end results, probably.
>
> Senior Manager

This initial impression was somewhat weakened as later in the same interview the senior manager described the various constraints under which the faculties operate in that university. Indeed, most senior central staff recognised that although there is some degree of autonomy in devolved university structures, the relationship of the faculty to the centre is a complex one, with the faculty subject to a range of constraints. These issues are explored in more detail below. Here it is noted that the positive views of central managers are not always shared by faculty staff:

> Most people think that the strategies and mechanisms in place are top-down, that they are forcing a national or institutional agenda on colleagues, when personally I would see it as creating opportunities to give people funds to go away and do their own thing within their own subject areas as a way of enhancing those areas.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

Staff within faculties were less forthright about having autonomy in their relationship with the university centre, acknowledging that they had it, but immediately adding that it was subject to limitations:

> There is a certain amount of autonomy - we couldn't go completely our own way.
>
> Head of Faculty

Autonomy within the faculty was also a concern. Some faculty managers felt that departments and their constituent parts had a considerable autonomy. In fact in larger faculties the relationship between the centre and faculty was, in many ways, mirrored in the relationship between the faculty and its departments.

4.6.3 Autonomy in practice

There now follows a more detailed examination of how faculty autonomy is manifested, as evidenced by the interview responses. There are various ways in which such autonomy is to be seen, some relatively straightforward such as control

of resources, others more complex where changes required by the centre are implemented only partially, to a delayed timescale or not at all. A related question is whether faculty autonomy is influenced by factors such as size or type of university. Below the level of the faculty, the extent of autonomy accorded to its constituent departments, is also of considerable importance.

4.6.4 Resources

It was interesting to know whether faculties and departments had the autonomy to deploy resources to support student learning in a fashion of their own choosing. This might, for example, mean supporting locally determined initiatives to install additional equipment or to concentrate staff on one programme to the potential detriment of another.

All the universities had financial systems that devolved significant resources to their faculties and allowed them to retain a considerable proportion of direct revenues. This was illustrated by the response from a senior manager to a question as to whether a faculty could have its own model for costing new programmes:

> ... certainly they would have to work with the finance department and come up with a solution. But I welcome the principle that it is their money and if they want to spend it in a particular way they spend it in that way. That's the executive nature of the deans. They have full power to spend their resource. We would then check that the student experience wasn't suffering. That's what the quality systems are there for.
>
> Senior Manager

However, in this university there are clearly limitations placed on faculty autonomy to spend if the institution judges that the expenditure will not achieve requisite standards, since the same senior manager also said:

> So it's the end result that is important for me. … But at the same time my responsibility as being guardian of academic standards is that they can't do it if they can't do it properly.
>
> Senior Manager

Instances were found of faculties spending considerable sums on their enhancement initiatives. One faculty spent their own resources on a system for module evaluation since it was unhappy with that provided by the university. It seems that faculties do indeed have the autonomy to use available resources for enhancement, but this expenditure may be subject to scrutiny by established monitoring mechanisms.

4.6.5 Nature of intervention

When the extent of faculty autonomy is explored, it becomes clear that the relationship of a faculty to its central university bodies is a complex one. Some of the formal constraints placed by universities on their faculties are detailed below in a separate section, but, initially, examination of the informal interactions proved interesting. It seems that often directives from the centre are in practice advisory, as faculties follow their own timescales, or define their own objectives:

> This is about, not so much blocking something, but postponing and having a different timetable than the university wanted. The university put forward [the initiative] round about this time last year, probably about a month after the faculty had just redone its

> own learning, teaching and assessment strategy. Suddenly the university wanted us to align with [the initiative] at a time of change and flux including academic restructuring. What we've done, with no repercussions, is to smile nicely and say we'll do that, but not quite yet. We weren't expecting changes to happen so quickly, but we will implement [the initiative].
>
> Faculty Learning and Teaching Manager

It can be the case that a university will adopt a policy on some pedagogical method that is mandatory for all its staff. This runs the risk of being counter-productive as staff react to the loss of their individual academic autonomy. The following quotation shows someone responding negatively to a very directional policy and then, on moving to another university, being positive about their new-found freedom:

> I haven't found this university to be prescriptive. I was previously at a university that was. They had WebCT and everyone had to implement their course on WebCT and had to do this by a certain date. There was no discussion about this. That hasn't been the case here, you had the choice. And that has been true about virtually everything. They look for volunteers and people who are interested. It's not prescriptive.
>
> Departmental Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator

The following question and response shows that although faculties may formally have autonomy, in practice there are informal mechanisms by which conformity to centrally determined policies is achieved:

> **[Q]** … if faculty X says that for all sorts of reasons 'we won't do it', the institution wouldn't say 'you've got to'? Or is the relationship more subtle than that?
>
> **[R]** It's more subtle than that. My perception is that there is guidance and good practice and that it is a devolved university. Sometimes people forget that means devolved responsibility. I wouldn't like to think that if a faculty said 'we are not going to do it' there would be no consequences. I think that what happens is that you get this peering over the fence and competition.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

These informal mechanisms for control work in parallel with, and are perhaps enhanced by the formal constraints described below.

4.6.6 Autonomy within the faculty

Another point worthy of consideration was the degree of autonomy within the faculty itself and the extent of the autonomy afforded by the faculty to its constituent units, such as departments. Faculties are usually organised with an internal structure of separate sections commonly known as departments, which are discipline focused. This was the case with the universities in the sample. The management roles within departments are typically carried out by individuals selected at faculty level, but these roles are often only part of their duties. This then raises the question as to whether the department has the autonomy to decide how to organise itself. In some cases this was clearly so, but in others there was some doubt. The faculty quality manager quoted next had responsibility for reorganisation of the faculty and, as the quotation shows, was not sure about the extent to which the faculty should specify the working of its departments:

[Q] You have the [departmental] roles, but you're not saying how they should be dealt with?

[R] It may be that we do provide guidance.

Faculty Quality Manager

Evidence for the existence of departmental autonomy can be found in the consternation shown by the Senior Manager in the next extract, who found out that not only faculties but also the actual departments had autonomy, and they were both exercising it to undertake actions unknown to those to whom they were responsible:

> Some of the processes I am implementing are so that the university knows about things that previously only the faculties had known about; or sometimes only departments had known about. ... It was all done by the Head of Department. Sometimes the Dean didn't know it was happening.

Senior Manager

Senior managers feel that even with strong faculties, departments have a significant role as is witnessed in the following exchange:

[Q] How are you going to address that [problem] through your staff?

[R] Through the Head of Department, who reports to the Assistant Dean, who reports to the Dean, who reports to me.

Senior Manager

And similarly faculty management depends heavily upon departmental management:

> So the Head of Department is responsible for appraising staff, responsible for the quality of module provision and responsible for the success of a course or a programme area.

Faculty Quality Manager

The nature of the relationship between faculty and department as seen by a faculty quality manager is shown in the following extract. In some aspects it mirrors the view that a senior academic manager might talk about a faculty. The faculty quality manager sees the departments as the focus of initiatives and innovation and to that extent is happy to give them their head. This then requires that the departments need to be constrained, particularly in areas where their activities might overlap:

> We ask all departments for departmental plans. There's a certain healthy internal competition in terms of developments, and where that pays off – you can often see initiatives that would span two or more departments so we can get them together.
>
> What we have to be wary of at the faculty level is that they compete with one another – which is a good thing – because we get courses developing and get innovation and so on. The only danger is that clearly when they innovate, there is also a danger that what they do is corral the resources for that new product, for that new course development, around their own department … So, I think we probably see ourselves as stimulating innovation, getting departments to be proactive and taking responsibility for developing courses, recruiting students, hitting targets but then trying to make sure that they do that within a faculty brief ... So they're the ones that drive the change – even if someone has sort of suggested it might be worth looking at

> that area or focusing in that direction. So they take control of the agenda – but it's the faculty that perhaps suggests there's something that can be done.
>
> Faculty Quality Manager

It seems that departments, like the faculties of which they are a part, do have some autonomy. The constraints on departmental autonomy are considered below with constraints on faculty autonomy.

4.6.7 Exercise of autonomy

Another aspect of autonomy is the extent to which it is exercised. One possibility is that there is complete independence, with the sub-unit having different goals from the organisation of which it is a part. In these interviews this was not the case. The goals of the institution were mostly accepted without much demure, with the faculties trying to make progress on enhancement issues, such as widening participation and e-learning. A few doubts were raised by a small number of individuals, but the overwhelming impression was of the need to achieve institutional goals. Thus the autonomy sought was of an operational nature. Of course, those interviewed in the faculties all had some managerial or co-ordinating role within their faculty and so might have identified more strongly with the university and faculty objectives. It might be that if individuals without such responsibilities had been interviewed, a different picture would have emerged – see, for example, Fanghanel (2007) for a detailed investigation of the response of academic staff to an institutional strategy for teaching and learning.

In practice, senior managers recognise that faculties have autonomy and even celebrate that fact:

> One of the joys of a devolved system is that we don't have a model for the faculty and its interaction with the centre.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

However the same senior academic manager tempered that enthusiasm by saying, almost in the same breath:

> There are framework rules for the university, which means you have to conform to an overall picture for the organisation of student learning. There are limits to the extent you can innovate.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

So the exercise of autonomy is tempered by constraints that may be self-imposed within the faculty or may arise from university-wide structures and frameworks. These constraints are examined in more detail below.

4.6.8 Drivers for change

A university experiences many external drivers for change in its learning and teaching in the form of funding body policies and initiatives, statements by national and international bodies, and the need to respond to market forces. It may well respond to these by invoking processes to introduce changes to teaching and learning within its faculties. This raises the question as to what impact these transmitted external drivers have on the autonomy of faculties and indeed whether

there are additional drivers on its learning and teaching to those directed from the centre.

Obviously the centre [the central institutional processes] and its requirements are an ever-present driver, although in these interviews this presence was mostly mentioned in passing. It seemed to be accepted as a fact of life, as here:

> There are certain things from the centre acting as our driver, so we put them constantly on our agenda.
>
> Faculty Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator

The impression was gained that while such centrally defined drivers were accepted and acted upon, they were usually not at the forefront of peoples' minds when change was discussed. Several other views as to what drives departmental change were raised. For example, in the following response it is possible to see the interviewee places much less emphasis on the influence of the centre:

> I think the pressure for change is probably at course director level, with the lecturers that teach on the programme. I think it's probably a two way process - from my experience of being a course director, you know where the success is in your programme and where things can be improved. To some extent it's driven by the course director saying: 'We could improve this for the students.' The tutors … normally would have some form of understanding of how the modules fitted together and would talk to one another, because it's based around subject areas. So the change would be – the course director talking with the module leaders. Sometimes, the module leader suggests this could be delivered in a better way and the programme director, will help them put it through the bureaucracy, if you want to call it that.
>
> Faculty Learning and Teaching Manager

Here the process of development is seen as bottom-up, with proposals for change arising at the level of the programme leader and the individual module leader. The prime mover seems to be the programme leader, someone who has an overview of the programme and is familiar with how well individual modules are currently being delivered. The model requires that individual module leaders have an understanding that extends beyond their own module, taking in the relationship of that module to the whole structure, and that they communicate readily with each other. The role of the programme leader is crucial, since he/she is familiar with the processes by which proposals for change can be implemented. So here the driver for change is one generated internally in the faculty and located in the exercise of the leadership role of the programme leader. The faculty is not acting completely autonomously, since it must get proposed changes through the bureaucracy, but nevertheless change is initiated from within.

The following contribution illustrates how drivers for change to a programme can come from very different levels in the hierarchy. It shows how changes to a programme are effected by drivers at faculty, university and national level:

> On the agenda were a lot of drivers for change at the programme level, coming from very different areas. One driver for change was internationalisation arising from the faculty's search for accredited status. It was coming down to the programme and would then trickle down to the module level. But from the national level were the changes that would be needed because of the changes to the benchmarking statements. Then from the university level because of the academic restructuring

there would be fundamental changes that would have to be made at programme and module level ... At any level, even at senior management team level, you're getting the bottom up from what is happening on the ground and also from what is happening to the university. At the programme level you can really see the influences coming from the top and the bottom.

Faculty Academic Manager

The requirements of external agencies, such as professional accrediting bodies, are seen as highly significant by faculties in general as instanced by the following interchange:

[Q] How much do external referents interact with innovation and development?

[R] They are a key driver ... [X accrediting body], however, for us is a big driver for change.

Faculty Academic Manager

An external driver can simply be visiting another university, but especially useful is taking on the role of external examiner as these quotes show. This function of the external examiner system in acting as a driver for change in the *external examiner's own university* is rarely acknowledged:

A big driver in my subject area has been someone visiting somewhere else and reporting back on what is done there.

Senior Academic Manager

One of the most useful things about [being an external examiner] was that it was such a big department – there were three external examiners – so three of us would be there for two days and we were talking for most of the time, of course, about how things were done here and how – obviously you're comparing it with where you are and other places that they had been and other places I had been and so on.

Head of Department

Overall, a multiplicity of drivers for change can be observed that impact on the learning and teaching of the departments in these faculties. Certainly the centre drives some of this change, but it seems that the response is more enthusiastic when the driver is identified by the faculty itself. Thus autonomy leads to commitment and ownership of initiatives.

4.6.9 Constraints on autonomy

Although there were few direct references to central authority and control, some highly relevant points were made. In passing it might be noted that one particular central university committee still had the words 'quality control' in its title, perhaps reflecting the approach of some in the institution, or perhaps that agendas move on but committee titles do not. Of more significance was the remark by a newly appointed senior academic manager who wished to make significant changes to processes, but had to wait:

I did this relatively late in the year, but I couldn't do it before I had authority to do it and had got authority from [the appropriate university committee] .

Senior Academic Manager

At one university, central staff played down the element of control in the quality processes:

> Quality enhancement is nothing new. It's what we've been doing all along. Just emphasising the enhancing agenda. At [X university] we use quality assurance, control and management interchangeably.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

However, a view from a faculty in the same university did not quite accord with this. The following response gives a sense of a faculty increasingly constrained, albeit to a slow timetable, by an imposed centralised structure on some of its courses:

> So it's again this issue of some constraints and some latitude. Postgraduate [course structure] is interesting in that it was much less centrally controlled and is becoming more so. Only a few years ago a standard module size was introduced for postgrads. Before then we had all sorts of different things across the university. There is now an embryonic, university-wide Masters structure. It's moving slowly in the direction of the undergraduate programmes. But it's come from a very decentralised position – postgraduate structure was the responsibility of the schools.
>
> Faculty Academic Manager

In some cases a university may assert its authority by insisting that a faculty adopts a certain set of procedures or structure. The following answer shows a faculty that felt that by setting up its own internal structures it would have been able to be innovative – "to be dangerous" – but that was overruled by the university, which insisted that a standard structure be used within the faculty for reporting on one of its enhancement-related activities. The faculty recognised the benefits of the university-imposed system, but is left wondering what it lost by not having its own system:

> We wanted to control our own agenda. We felt by not being part of a university structure, it would enable us to do that. The enhancement within the faculty – one of the instruments, the vehicles for doing that would be through our own structure at a faculty level ... However, having said all that, we were then instructed by the university to use its structure. The interesting thing was that the actual terms of reference hardly changed at all – but what it does mean in practical terms of course, is that now I'm a member of a university committee, and we've got to align ourselves with their agenda. So, it's a question of '**do we have the licence to … to be dangerous?**' [emphasis added]
>
> Faculty Academic Manager

Less significantly, sometimes control from the centre can be seen as an irritant:

> Having to comment about information that we have no control over and can do nothing about in the future is a waste of time.
>
> Faculty Academic Manager

Within universities, even those with quite devolved structures, the exercise of central authority is clearly an important part of their functioning. In the specific context of this report, the enhancement of teaching and learning, these interviews indicate that exercising that authority may limit faculties' inclination to innovate. It is for institutions to consider the balance of advantage between achieving uniformity of approach and limiting innovation.

4.6.10 Policies

As universities respond to external pressures they create extensive policies for enhancement of their learning and teaching, and as the following quotation shows, these are pervasive in their effects:

> It's so multi-layered when talking about innovation. There's small innovation that can be done in individual learning activities, then there's module level, then programme level, then school and university level. There are clearly policies and strategies that are trickling down and affecting each one.
>
> Module Leader
>
> They're even talking about policies on assessment that will affect module level.
>
> Faculty Academic Manager

One pressure is the need to ensure fairness by having uniform processes when making decisions about students. An example of this is the system used for degree classification. One respondent recounted with amazement that, in another university than his own, he had found several different schemes for degree classification being used in different faculties. He seemed not have considered whether there might be any benefit in such diversity. The next quotation is representative of the approach taken on this issue in the universities in the sample; the emphasis is on the uniformity of the decision process:

> We have a university system for degree classifications. This doesn't allow department X to do its own thing. So its autonomy is infringed because it can't award a degree on some irrational basis, only on the basis of a commonly agreed system.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

Generally, these centrally defined policies were not seen as a significant constraint because they were not rigidly enforced, or were specified in a way that allowed for flexibility in their implementation. This allows faculties to implement enhancement based on policies that they have defined themselves, which it is possible to speculate will lead to their more enthusiastic reception. Although there was little evidence that the universities in the sample adopted a rigid approach to faculties following central policies on enhancement, there are examples of the mandatory imposition of a policy from the centre provoking a negative response as has already been seen in this report (p.28) This may well be a trap into which a university may fall:

> **[Q]** Are you constrained or directed by any university policy towards enhancement. For example, is the university saying you should be using more e-learning?
>
> **[R]** Well we are, but not in a rigid way. There is a committee to enhance e-learning in the university, but it's very much along the lines of 'where-relevant', is it fit for purpose, do you want to use it.
>
> Faculty Quality Manager
>
> If anything we are constrained by the policies we write ourselves: our faculty policies.
>
> Faculty Quality Manager

Another way in which the acceptance of a policy may be achieved is by having wide consultation as the policy is formulated. It is then a constraint upon a faculty, but a constraint that the faculty has had a hand in creating. The following quote shows this in operation to such an extent that the final committee approval is a formality:

> ... there is a culture of consultation. If that has worked you get regulations and policies that are all-encompassing so that anyone is able to follow that policy ... So it was about cleaning that up and there was real opportunity for everybody to say 'Oh that's fine' or 'That wouldn't work in my faculty because of X'. That has to go to committee tomorrow ... There is no need for discussion because it's had wide consultation beforehand. And then it's the guidelines. Then it's the policy.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

4.6.11 Frameworks and structures

A centralised structure or framework may constrain the autonomy of a faculty to innovate. A typical example of this is the imposition of a combined honours scheme with the student having the freedom of choice of modules across two or more subjects. Packaging the curriculum into modules with a common structure may lead to difficulties if a subject sees a need, for example, for a radically different assessment regime in its own modules. The constraint of conformity to a common pattern has a limiting effect on innovation as can be seen in the following quote. In the view of this respondent not only will students want a structure that is uniform, but staff will meet difficulties from their colleagues in attempting to go outside the common framework:

> There are framework rules for the university, which means you have to conform to an overall picture for the organisation of student learning. There are limits to the extent to which you could innovate. Beyond the obvious problems you have student expectation of what is going to happen to them and peer pressure as to how you carve out the space for what you want to do. .... Timetablers might be annoyed if you started to spill out of your room too much.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

However, just as with central policies, individual faculties have the ability to try to convince their colleagues of the need for structural change. A compromise is reached to the satisfaction of the majority:

> A unit that understood the level of its autonomy could exercise quite a lot of autonomy in terms of its programme structure. It's restricted because we have a large number of subject combinations; the limitations are to protect from people doing something stupid and affecting another programme. It might be timetabling, but we have also been debating the dissertation deadline. Setting a decision at an optimum for everyone, you have 80% happy, 20% unhappy. The university sets the compromise.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

It does seem that the adoption of common regulations in such areas as submission, mitigating circumstances, progression and award, whether produced by central diktat or discussion, is a necessary corollary of having university-wide standard structures. In the interviews there was no evidence that faculties and departments wished to opt out of these structures, yet it may be that doing so would make the introduction of innovations easier.

In practice, the enterprising faculty may well find a way around regulations and frameworks to achieve its own ends:

> So they have interpreted the university framework in such a way as to undermine what it is trying to achieve. But it meets their needs and no one is trying to change it.
>
> Faculty Academic Manager

4.6.12 Monitoring and review

Although there may be devolved authority for development, this is balanced, to an extent, by institutional processes for monitoring and review. Senior managers depend on these to identify problem areas and examples of good practice. External examiner reports are one means of doing this. They are often read in their entirety by senior managers or at least by a senior academic manager – someone with significant central authority. One approach is to use some kind of exception reporting where the modules failing to meet some criteria are identified:

> I see a huge amount and ask the student management information unit for, say: all the units that have less than 75% completion; all the units where the standard deviation of marking is less than 10%: units without first-class marks; units without third-class marks. I will then send them out to the Faculty Quality Managers.
>
> Senior Manager

Here a problem that has been identified at the centre can be seen to be passed down to the faculty for investigation and resolution. In this model it is for the faculty to address that problem, to resolve it and to report back to senior management.

The prime concern of this report is not, however, handling problems. It is about getting departments to enhance and transform the learning experience of their students. So a department that, on the face of it, is not a problem because it raises no exceptions on the reporting system is nevertheless a problem if it is delivering a student experience that is adequate, but fails on enhancement. This may be termed the problem of the 'coasting department', set in its ways and using its autonomy to continue as it always has. Senior management does not see this directly. Rather it expects to be informed by lower levels. When asked how he would know about the quality of the delivery of the student experience, one senior manager said:

> Because they will report what they are doing through their programme monitoring report, which is dealt with at department level, which is reported up to faculty level, which is eventually reported to me.
>
> Senior Manager

This view was held by senior managers and senior academic managers in several universities. It was for the faculties to identify departmental inertia and to take action. It was a key role for the dean. Accepting this, it might be expected that as part of their staff development, faculty managers would be trained in how to establish and implement an agenda for enhancement.

Another review process is that of institutional audit. Certainly responses to the line of questioning showed that this has an effect, prompting the resolution of issues. It also may put on hold necessary changes. Both reactions are seen in the following quote:

> There's a phrase going around now that this is the year of audit. It's geared us up to sort out some things. Also it's a question of 'we can't do that till after the audit'.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

4.6.13 Conclusions

An overall impression of the operation of autonomy in this sample of universities is of top-down and bottom-up processes not being completely in alignment. Senior managers see themselves as lacking direct authority over faculties and departments; rather they have several ways of influencing academic delivery and development. One is by using the results of monitoring processes to identify areas where intervention is required or examples of good practice. Another is through centrally driven initiatives that either offer resources for particular kinds of development or impose mandatory requirements that such developments take place according to a timetable. Finally, institutional schemes of staff development are established, one of the aims of which is to promote particular types of development. In practice, as the ultimate resource holder, central management has considerable reserve powers, even if these are rarely exercised directly.

Faculties and departments have a certain amount of autonomy to make developments in learning and teaching. This is most readily exercised at the lowest level in the hierarchy, that of module delivery. The impact of innovations at this level is, however, likely to be limited. In some cases, faculties have been able to produce coherent plans for innovation, ignoring some directives from the centre where it was considered appropriate.

4.7 Theme: Culture of excellence

4.7.1 Introduction

Harvey (1996) has suggested that higher education could be transformed in a number of ways including rewards for transformative teaching and the fostering of a 'new collegiality', in which much greater emphasis is placed upon values such as networking, teamworking, responsiveness and innovation. Harvey is actually advocating a cultural shift away from what he terms 'cloisterism' towards an environment in which academics, students and other stakeholders facilitate student learning and explicitly encourage the development of new skills and abilities.

It is argued that although individuals can and do follow such a philosophy as individual teachers, one of the indicators of transformative quality would be the extent to which such changes were embedded culturally within a department or faculty. Such cultural shifts could be the result of inspiring leadership, both in the past and currently, before becoming embedded in the taken-for-granted assumptions within an organisational unit.

The concept of the 'culture of excellence' has been utilised in the quality management field, not least in the EFQM Model of Business Excellence, in which by personally communicating the organisation's mission, vision, values, policy and strategy, plans, objectives and targets to people:

> … leaders reinforce a culture of Excellence with the organisation's people (British Quality Foundation 2007).

While not denying the impact of energetic and inspiring leadership, this definition might prove to be somewhat narrow as it fails sufficiently to take into account the shared corpus of knowledge, belief and practice that would exemplify a culture of excellence distributed throughout a whole department (and not just exemplified in its leadership). The authors have previously attempted (Hart and Rush 2006) to develop a possible metric for the delineation of a culture of excellence, and this approach seeks to measure the extent and quality of the linkages in which members of a department are engaged. This theoretical model has still be tested in a more rigorous way – therefore, the problem remains that the phrase 'a culture of excellence' might seem to be intuitive to many, but actually hard to define in practice.

The opportunity was taken to explore with these respondents how they could recognise a 'culture of excellence'. The reasoning here was that transformative quality was not just the product of an individual's own conception of the ways in which the student experience could be enhanced, but would be embedded at a cultural level within the department – "the way we do things around here".

Members of the sample were asked if they could define or recognise the elements of a 'culture of excellence'. In practice, this was not deemed to be an easy question to answer, and some of the respondents had to reflect for some time before volunteering an answer. The responses have been grouped into five categories displayed below.

4.7.2 Question on the elements of a 'culture of excellence'

4.7.2.1 Organisational comments

> What we try to operate at X is trying to make the absolute best of what's available to you. That includes a definite understanding that there are standards. Standards are not negotiable and must be adhered to. Quality can be enhanced, standards can't.
>
> Head of Faculty

> You have parity across everybody's hours in terms of the allocation and their roles and responsibilities, you have … just in terms of the ways that things are divvied up, in terms of either teaching and research, or people getting … funding and so on.
>
> Faculty Learning and Teaching Manager

> I think one of the things we've looked at following on from the National Student Survey results, first time through was to look at where the scores were good – and so, I suppose, one of the things that would indicate excellence for me is the accumulation of getting a lot of little things right rather than an accumulation of getting them wrong. We interviewed staff in the Department of X and it was just common-sense stuff – there wasn't anything groundbreaking, but they just got all of those little things right in terms of how they organised themselves and how they communicated to students – and that accumulated to excellence. They've also got the advantage of having quite a homogenous group of students to deal with, and those departments that have more diverse groups have more of a challenge. But at the other end of the spectrum are those departments that are just totally badly organised and didn't have that excellence to offer the students.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

Three rather different aspects of the organisational approach to a culture of excellence are evident here. The first quotation acknowledges the fact that resources

are inevitably constrained, but excellence is attained by striving to adhere to absolute standards in situations of ”what is available to you”.

The second approach stresses the values of academic fairness and contains a heavy implication that transparency of allocation of workloads, responsibilities and access to funding opportunities is at least a necessary if not a sufficient condition to sustain a culture of excellence.

The third approach was interesting as the respondent identified a particular department within the university that exhibited a ‘culture of excellence’. Here the approach was evidently a universalist one (“getting a lot of little things right”), but also contains the observation that the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the student body might be an important contributory factor.

4.7.2.2 Teaching

> From my experience of going into classrooms for X, I get a sense when you walk into some classrooms that this is going to work – but how you would define this, I don’t know. There can be an atmosphere there. When external examiners make comments some people respond positively – others don’t.
>
> Senior Academic Manager
>
> One of the things that try to do with the modules within my department is to become increasingly innovative perhaps less traditional than they were previously. There’s a danger in overdoing innovation, I suppose, if you have innovation for its own sake.
>
> Departmental Quality Co-ordinator

One common strand across these two approaches is the concept of innovation in teaching – but with the recognition that this can be experienced yet not easily defined. There is also the recognition that one can have innovation for its own sake.

4.7.2.3 Traditional academic values

> Well, I guess I would probably really be looking at the dissertations. I think that would be my starting point and the kind of things that the students were doing. And I suppose the originality really and obviously the quality of what they’re going to do … So, publishable standard in terms of the quality of the thought and the writing.
>
> Head of Department
>
> As an external examiner I want to meet staff and students to talk about their commitment to success and quality. It’s very difficult to quantify but you do pick it up. Another issue is whether they are alert to what's going on outside. How do we ensure colleagues know about what's being talked about by the Academy? What the QAA is introducing? How to open up a conversation to take advantage of opportunities?
>
> Senior Academic Manager
>
> We're talking about academic excellence here, aren't we? As measured through league tables, A-level scores, numbers of firsts and RAE results.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

> It's worth having a look at the degree-awarding powers criteria. There is a section in there about qualities of academic staff. Some that was standard (have they got doctorates); more interesting ones were about how connected they are to their communities; what is their engagement. Electronic CV at X was about collecting that information. Some of that was straightforward – Do you sit on other people's validation panels? Have you been an external examiner? But also softer stuff – about do you go to learning and teaching conferences? Are people attached to the fringes of the projects that are going on or are they moving into the centre of those projects? What are those signifiers with the engagement of the development of the discipline?
>
> Senior Academic Manager

This response was an interesting one in that two of the perspectives were seen through the perspective of the experience of the respondent being an external examiner. One of the respondents in the same interview introduced the aspiration that the quality of the thought and writing in the work should be of publishable standard. This reflects a view (not, perhaps, universally held) that students should aspire to some of the values and practices that characterise the wider academic community.

Another interesting theme is the notion of connectedness with the rest of the higher education community, with the evident implication that engagement and connectedness is a signifier of higher quality. This theme has been also been addressed by the authors in a recent paper (Hart and Rush 2006) and provides a potential way forward into the development of a new metric of quality.

4.7.2.4 Cultural view

> One great sign, I think, is cohesion across different conversations with people in different subjects. If there is a good sense of cohesion about what they're saying, that's very inspiring, I think. It indicates a culture that is shared rather than a place where there happens to be some good teachers and good curricula.
>
> Faculty Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator

This viewpoint identified the centrality of the concept of culture as essentially shared values and identities. In many ways it was the definition that came closest to an 'ideal typical' culture of excellence.

4.7.2.5 Nihilistic view

> I'm not sure about a culture of excellence – you can recognise excellence individually, but I'm not sure about notion of common shared excellence … It's a bit of motherhood and apple pie thing. Who is going to volunteer to be in the alternative?
>
> Programme Director

This viewpoint expressed doubts about the concept of the 'culture of excellence' as a whole while not denying that excellence could be recognised at the individual level. It is possible that the notion of a culture of excellence could be redolent of elitist attitudes (Harvey (1996) identifies this as the 'cloistered' view) perhaps provoking a counter-reaction.

As a subsidiary factor, some respondents indicated that the level of resourcing helped to distinguish and sustain a culture of quality – but this type of response did not feature prominently in the responses as a whole.

4.7.3 Explicit mention of departmental culture

It was also felt that it would be instructive to examine those instances in the data in which the *culture* of a group or department was mentioned specifically by the respondents. This examination revealed:

Positive responses	3
Neutral responses	8
Negative responses	8

Positive view

> There is a culture of improvement at X as witness subject review results. 'Chugging along' colleagues wouldn't be countenanced by colleagues.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

> My former faculty had about 1,000 to 1,500 students, and thriving culture of supporting each other, teaching in teams of different disciplines and went on to do things because you were doing things together; you could do that with a small unit.
>
> Senior Manager

> What has happened in the last couple of years is that there is a culture of consultation. If that has worked well … then your regulations and policies that are all-encompassing so that anyone is able to follow that policy.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

These positive references to *culture* highlight several features including continuous quality improvement and good consultation policies. There is also a suggestion that a thriving culture might be at an optimum in departments that do not extend beyond a certain size, but this point would need more systematic investigation in order to arrive at more definitive conclusions.

Neutral views

> ... we do have on our website, we got an intranet that splits staff and students – so there is a student intranet of which this sort of information is published up there, along with lots of other student-related notices and so on. So from that point of view, I think we've sort of, had a culture of creating information systems particularly through a web-interface type system.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

> OK there's a practical element there because students need money, they have to work – but from a culture of an excellent learning experience, you might want to offer the facilities for student to feel ... perhaps space on campus, really.
>
> Faculty Learning and Teacher Manager

These references deploy the concept of culture in a relatively descriptive way, but illustrate some of the features that might be considered *desiderata* to enhance student experience.

Negative views

(Coasting culture)

> ...the hardened rump of the university that has been there for 15 to 25 years. It ain't gonna change and doesn't want to and is just seeing out its time.
>
> Senior Manager

> Sometimes it's the culture in the department that may have developed over time, which while not resistant to those ideas may not be as embracing as it could.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

(Over-directed culture)

> There is a lack of self-confidence. The culture about is people thinking someone is on their shoulder. We need to shift to culture in which people say, 'we're doing this because we want to do this'.
>
> Programme Leader

> If you get beyond culture of proof and quantitative evidence then proof that the programme has been enhanced is that I say so. At the end of year, say what has been done to enhance and what difference it has made. If someone says he knows what he's doing, that should be enough
>
> Programme Leader

> ... when I talk to professional people who, like me, have come into higher education and done little bits of teaching here and there, they find themselves confronted with the 'tick-box' culture.
>
> Faculty Learning and Teacher Manager

(Cultural dissonances)

> When I was Head of Faculty I wanted the centre to lay off. But now I'm in the centre I find I couldn't make things happen very easily because of the culture in faculties.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

> Then the faculty was moved into another one that obviously had a quite different culture. The former faculty was all about 'touchy-feely', but the [new] faculty is all about bottom lines. The [new] faculty had a different system of workload planning, with lots of fine detail and prescribed expectations. A number of people survived and did well in that situation, but for a time it was a painful change.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

> Yes, Economists did well in FDTL – they are different from Business with a different culture.
>
> Senior Academic Manager

The negative factors fall quite neatly into one of three categories:

Coasting culture is one in which a department may not figure on any senior management's radar in the sense that departmental data do not display any sources of concern – but neither are they typically a source of evident innovation.

An ***over-directed*** culture is one in which quality assurance elements tend to predominate, and staff themselves opine that they are not granted sufficient discretion in the ways in which their work is monitored and evaluated.

Cultural dissonance occurs when staff themselves change perspectives (typically following a career progression move). Departmental reorganisations and amalgamations will also generate their fair share of discomfort until new cultural practices are formed and institutionalised.

The data presented above were to some extent stimulated by direct lines of questioning in which respondents were invited to delineate what might be connoted by the phrase a 'culture of excellence'. However, the unprompted references to cultural elements were equally revealing, if only following Herzberg (1966) to highlight the hygiene factors associated with departmental functioning.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Theme: Enhancement (see 4.4)

The prime movers for enhancement activities are typically at the level of the programme (4.4.6). Central university bodies can play their role by providing guidance in the way in which enhancement activities can be reported and audited. Faculties can and do provide supportive environments in which groups of staff and programmes can communicate and share good practice with other colleagues and programmes (4.4.5).

There is much variability in the ways in which faculties and departments pursue a strategy of enhancement. For some, enhancement is implicit in the ways in which learning and teaching is reflected upon in annual monitoring returns (4.4.3, 4.4.6.2). There is also the recognition that there is an emergent need to pursue the enhancement agenda at a more strategic level (4.4.4). The strategies of enhancement witnessed in the sample often tended to be diffuse and implicit and not to receive the level of scrutiny that traditionally had been accorded to conventional quality monitoring. In part, this could be due to the historic split between the oversight of quality assurance and of learning and teaching where enhancement activities were typically examined by, for example, a learning and teaching committee. These two activities had been formally merged in the committee structure of one of the universities from which evidence was taken (4.4.5).

5.2 Theme: Influence of size and maturity (see 4.5)

Size of institution, faculty and department is a factor that can influence enhancement. Larger institutions, and therefore larger faculties, seem to have the balance of advantage (4.5.1, 4.5.2). Although smaller faculties may allow better informal relationships, they are likely to be more closely controlled from the centre, subject to reorganisation and composed of non-cognate disciplines (4.5.2, 4.5.3, 4.5.4).

The other influencing factor that emerged from the interviews was how long the institution had been a university, and it seemed that the post-92 universities are more likely to have complex, centrally controlled structures (4.5.4).

5.3 Theme: Autonomy of departments and faculties (see 4.6)

Both central university management and the faculties themselves recognise that the faculties have a certain amount of autonomy, although both also recognise that there are limits to this autonomy, just as there are limits to the authority of central management (4.6.2, 4.6.3). There were often indications of a mismatch between the actions of central management in initiating developments and the response of the faculties to them (4.6.5). Correspondingly, the exercise of faculty autonomy could lead to enhancement, but this then was likely to be of limited extent, taking place at the lowest level in the hierarchy (4.6.7, 4.6.9). In some cases effective faculty plans for innovation have been produced, which might require that central directives be ignored (4.6.10).

5.4 Theme: Culture of excellence (see 4.7)

It was found that the term ‘culture of excellence’ was recognised by all, but, in practice, defined in many different ways ranging from organisational views to the quality of the teaching and learning experience itself as well as traditional academic

values (4.7.2). The quality agenda tended to be dominated by quality assurance concerns (and the amelioration of poor quality) rather than a more active concern with quality enhancement at a strategic level. There was a recognition that departments had to ensure that 'all of the little things had to be got right' (4.7.2.1), but this was easier in some departments and with some cohorts of students than others. Those departments that encouraged participation of significant numbers of staff in activities external to their own department (and to their own university) through external examinerships, participation in professional groupings and in the wider pedagogic academy were more likely to be able to display a 'culture of excellence' (4.7.2.3). This was particularly marked in departments that shared a strong collaborative culture and encouraged their students to display originality and creativity in their work so that it could approach publishable standard – a traditional indicator of excellence in the academic world.

6 Recommendations

The recommendations are drawn from a detailed examination of the interview data that have been collected, frequent discussions with a range of collaborative colleagues on quality issues and the experiences of the authors in working on other quality projects (principally the QuBE (Quality in Business Education) project).

The authors would recommend:

1. Faculty/departmental leaders should have a strategy for transformative learning that unites individuals' development plans within overall faculty/departmental strategy (4.4.4, 4.4.5, 4.4.6.4).

2. Careful consideration should be given to the ways in which both quality management committees and learning and teaching committees (at both university-wide and departmental level) share agendas and procedures in order that clear lines of accountability and audit exist for an enhancement agenda. Universities may wish to consider whether there are advantages to be gained by following the lead shown by some universities where such committees have been effectively merged or redefined so as to give a clearer focus to an enhancement agenda (4.4.5, 4.4.6.2).

3. Recognising that faculties already exercise a fair degree of autonomy in their pursuit of quality agendas, university procedures should actively assist in the propagation throughout the university of quality initiatives and good practice achieved at the faculty level (4.4.5).

4. Planning for enhancement should include both curriculum enhancement and pedagogical enhancement and serious attention is paid to ways in which enhancement may be both operationally defined and recorded (4.4.1, 4.4.6.2).

5. Several conditions are necessary for transformative learning:
   - a climate and attitude for change (4.4.6.2)
   - resources and objectives defining an overall direction (4.4.6.2)
   - (perhaps) designated people with responsibility to encourage enhancement through change (4.4.6, 4.6.12).

6. Roles near to the chalk face but with leadership responsibilities, such as programme leader and head of department, may be considered to be crucial and therefore specific staff development opportunities should be made available to them (4.6.8).

7. Faculties/departments should articulate staff development plans more clearly that reward (either symbolically or materially) those staff who can clearly demonstrate the contributions they have made in innovation, transfer of good practice and other activities that impact positively upon the student experience (4.4.6.3).

8. As part of their staff development, faculty managers should be trained in how to establish and implement an agenda for enhancement (4.6.12).

9. As drivers for change are acted upon more enthusiastically when they are generated internally within a department, departments should be encouraged and rewarded for the creation of demonstrable opportunities for change (4.6.8).

10. Universities should consider the optimum size of functional sub-units (e.g. departments below the level of a faculty) that facilitate, encourage and reward cultures in which transformative learning can occur. Smaller-sized universities may be less able to promote enhancement unless they allow a degree of autonomy to faculties/departments to both define and pursue their own enhancement strategies. This implies that the student experience, in the long term, will be improved by following strategies of institutional growth up to an optimum size (4.5).

11. Faculties/departments should be encouraged to debate and articulate their own visions of excellence and put in a place a strategy for communicating and delivering such excellence to the student community (4.7.2).

12. Faculties/departments should actively encourage participation of faculty members in professional groupings and wider pedagogic communities that may be either internal or external to their own university. The nature and extent of such linkages can be a powerful force in the promotion of innovative pedagogies and in the transference and dissemination of good practice (4.6.8, 4.7.2.3).

References

Anglia Ruskin University (2007) *Quality Enhancement Audit*. Available from: http://web.anglia.ac.uk/anet/academic/public/qea_rev_methodology_sen25.4.07.doc. [Accessed 24 May 2008]

Baldridge, J. V., Curtis, D. V., Ecker, G. P. and Riley, G. L. (1973) The impact of Institutional Size and Complexity on Faculty Autonomy. *The Journal of Higher Education.* **44** (7), 532-47.

Beaty, L. (2005) *Links between Teaching and Research*, HEFCE Annual Conference. Available from: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/events/2005/annconf/trlinks.ppt [Accessed 24 May 2008].

British Quality Foundation (2007) *Leadership.* Available from: http://www.quality-foundation.co.uk/ex_leadership.htm [Accessed 24 May 2008].

Clewlow, E. (2007) *Paul Ramsden, Why enhancement is the future of quality assurance (QAA subscribers meeting, 5.vi.2007)*. Available from: http://eduspaces.net/elliec/weblog/177334.html [Accessed 24 May 2008l

Dee, J. R., Henkin, A. B. and Hsin-Hwa Chen, J. (2000) Faculty Autonomy: Perspectives from Taiwan. *Higher Education.* **40** 203-16.

Elton, L. (1986) Quality in Higher Education: Nature and purpose. *Studies in Higher Education*. **11** (1), 83-4.

Fanghanel, J. (2007) Local responses to institutional policy: a discursive approach to positioning. *Studies in Higher Education*. **32** (2), 187-205.

Greenan, K. and Reid, C. (2007) *Case Study (University of Ulster)*. Available from: http://qube.ac.uk/QuBE/toolbox/cases/studsuppcases/ulster/qube-case-study-uu-1.doc/view [Accessed 18 May 2008].

Hart, M. and Rush, D. (2006) Can we measure excellence in Business Studies Education (utilising Innovative Methodologies?) In: Remenyi, D. (ed.) *Proceedings of the 5th European Conference on Research Methods in Business and Management* (ECRM2006). Academic Conferences Ltd: Reading.

Harvey, L. (2004) Analytic Quality Glossary. Quality Research International. Available from http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/ [Accessed 18 May 2008].

Harvey, L. and Green, D. (1993) Defining quality. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education.* **18** (1), 9-34.

Harvey, L. and Knight, P. (1996) *Transforming Higher Education.* Buckingham: Open University Press and Society for Research into Higher Education.

HEFCE (2007) *Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*. Available from: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/tinits/cetl/ [Accessed 18 May 2008].

Herzberg, F. (1966) *Work and the Nature of Man*. Staples Press: New York.

Hicks, O. (1999) Integration of central and departmental development - reflections from Australian universities. *International Journal for Academic Development*. **4** (1), 43-51.

Higher Education Academy (2007) *About us.* Available from: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/184.htm [Accessed 18 May 2008].

Hodgkinson, M. and Brown, G. (2003) Enhancing the Quality of Education: A Case Study and Some Emerging Principles. *Higher Education*. **45** (3), 337-52.

Hodson, P. and Thomas, H. (2003) Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Fit for the new millennium or simply year 2000 compliant? *Higher Education*, **45** (3), 375-87.

Knight, P. T. and Trowler, P. R. (2001) *Departmental Leadership in Higher Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press and Society for Research into Higher Education.

Lomas, L. (2004) Embedding Quality: the challenges for Higher Education. *Quality Assurance in Education*. **12** (4), 157-65.

Lomas, L. (2007) Zen, motorcycle maintenance and quality in higher education. *Quality Assurance in Education*. **15** (4), 402-12.

National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (1997) *Higher Education in the Learning Society* (Dearing Report). London: Department for Education.

Patton.M. W. (2002) *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.) London: Sage.

QAA (2000) *Handbook for academic review*. Available from: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/academicReview/handbook2000/acrevhbook.pdf [Accessed 18 May 2008].

QAA (2006) *Handbook for institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland*. Available from: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/handbook2006/Handbook2006.pdf [Accessed 25 April 2007].http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reports/institutional/LiverpoolJMUCPA06/RG265UniLiverpoolJohnMoores.pdfhttp://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reports/institutional/LiverpoolJMUCPA06/RG265UniLiverpoolJohnMoores.pdf

QAA (2007) *QAA website*. Available from: http://qaa.ac.uk [Accessed 25 April 2007].http://qaa.ac.uk/http://qaa.ac.uk/ http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/handbook2006/Handbook2006.pdf
QAA (2007) *Reports*. Available from: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ [Accessed 25 April 2007].

QuBE (2007) *Quality Roadmap*. Available from: http://www.qube.ac.uk/QuBE/roadmap [Accessed 24 May 2008].

Schwandt, T.A. (1994) Constructivist, Interpretive Approaches to Human Enquiry. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Srikanthan, G. and Dalrymple,J. (2003) Developing alternative perspectives for quality in higher education. *The International Journal of Educational Management.* **17** (3), 126-36.

Trowler, P., Saunders, M., and Knight, P. (2003) *Change Thinking, Change Practices*. Available from: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/id262_Change_Thinking_Change_Practices [Accessed 24 May 2008].

University of Essex (2007) *Quality Enhancement at the University of Essex*. Available from: http://www.essex.ac.uk/quality [Accessed 24 May 2008].

University of East London (2007) *Quality Assurance and Enhancement*. Available from: http://www.uel.ac.uk/qa/ [Accessed 24 May 2008].

University of Southampton (2007) *Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit*. Available from: http://www.soton.ac.uk/lateu/index.shtml [Accessed 24 May 2008].

Williams, P. (2002) Anyone for Enhancement? *Higher Quality.* **11**, 1-2. Available from: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/news/higherquality/hq11/default.asp [Accessed 24 May 2008].

Yorke, M. (1994) Enhancement-led higher education? *Quality Assurance in Education*. **2** (3), 6-12.

Appendix A: Steering Committee membership

Professor José Chambers, Director of the Comino Centre, The University of Winchester

Julie Davies, Policy Development Manager, Association of Business Schools

Professor Clive Holtham, Director of Cass Learning Laboratory, Cass Business School

Professor Bruce MacFarlane, Head of Educational Development, Thames Valley University

Professor Jean Woodall, Director of the Business, Management, Accountancy and Finance Subject Centre

Dr David Rush, Project Manager, The University of Winchester

Professor Mike Hart, The University of Winchester

Appendix B: Interview guidelines

Please note: The first five pages of the guidelines were given to the interviewees in advance; the last two (more detailed) pages were for the use of the interviewers.

Trans-QM: 'Strategies for generating transformative quality at sub-institutional level'

Interview Guide

THESE GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF THE INTERVIEWERS

1. Introduction

The 'Trans-QM' project is the shorthand title for a Higher Education Academy funded project, the full title of which is 'Strategies for generating transformative quality' at sub-institutional level' The investigation of one calendar year's duration (September 2006 until August 2007) is being conducted by:

Professor Mike Hart
Dr. David Rush

of the Business Management department of the University of Winchester. The project as a whole grows out of and has been stimulated by the authors' participation in the Quality in Business Education (QuBE) project, a consortium of six business schools lead by Cass Business School and including Leeds Metropolitan, Nottingham Trent, Oxford Brooks, University of Ulster and University of Winchester.

Presently, quality management in higher education is changing. The well-established QAA processes such as institutional audit are seen to be based on a fitness for purpose model. Such an approach, while guaranteeing the achievement of good standards, does not provide a framework for radical improvement. In particular, it does not adequately address the transformative conception of quality. There have been several attempts to go beyond the QAA model by applying institutional-wide models in a top-down fashion with change initiated through institutional leadership. Also some institutions are integrating their quality management and learning and teaching strategies with the objective of enhancing the student learning experience.

An alternative approach to institutional-wide quality initiatives is for departments and schools to undertake their own initiatives. The success of such a bottom-up approach will depend on the success with which departments can identify and encourage initiatives that will deliver enhancements to the student learning experience. One of the aims of this project is therefore to investigate the extent to which individual school and department heads have the autonomy to develop such initiatives.

The research project will gather data from those with responsibility for enhancing the quality of the student learning experience (probably at Dean/Assistant Dean level) in Business and cognate schools. Information will also be sought from the institution's own central bodies charged with the same task. A particular focus of the investigation will be upon the following, relatively under-researched areas:

- the degree of autonomy for departments/faculties/schools (i.e. the sub-institutional level) to develop and advance their own enhancement strategies
- the impact of size (or programme, student cohort) upon the operation of such strategies.

2. Clarification of terms used

These are the meanings given to these terms for the purposes of this project, although it is recognised that they may be contentious.

For this exercise quality management responsibilities are seen as encompassing the following:

Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance refers to the policies, processes and actions through which quality is maintained and developed. In the context of higher education this included processes that ensure the product is 'fit for purpose' (e.g. course approval and validation processes) and those concerned with the continuing coherence of the systems in place to ensure conformance to specification (e.g. monitoring and review and audit processes).

Quality Enhancement

Quality Enhancement refers to the improvement of quality, for example, through dissemination of good practice or the use of a 'continuous improvement cycle'. It is given practical expression through staff appraisal and development and the fostering of a culture of 'continuous improvement and innovation'. For some, it is synonymous with the pursuit of excellence.

Sub-institutional level

To be considered here are the units of a university that offer courses in a single discipline or a set of related disciplines. Terms that are often used are faculty, school or department. Where interviews are best conducted for this project may depend on the size of the university. It is also important to take into account any evidence of existing or potential usage of autonomy to enhance the student learning experience.

University-wide responsibility for the enhancement of the student learning experience

Those who have responsibility for or detailed knowledge of the university's quality strategies and learning and teaching strategies. These roles may be separated out or may have been brought together

Faculty/Departmental respondents

These would be people at sub-institutional level responsible for or with a detailed knowledge of the ways in which enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience is delivered. This might be the dean of a faculty or an associate or sub-dean with responsibility for quality and/or learning and teaching developments or equivalent people within a school. Interviews with those responsible for large scale learning and teaching activities within the unit such as the leaders of courses would also be very useful.
Transformative quality

One of several views of quality. Transformative quality is seen, in higher education, as a process that changes students through their learning experience. There are two notions of transformative quality in education, enhancing the consumer and empowering the consumer. See Harvey, L. and Green, D. (1993) Defining Quality. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. **18** (1), 9-34.

1. Institutional context

1.1 In terms of size of your institution:
a) How many students are there?
b) How many staff in total?

1.2 What is the size of the Business and Management provision?
a) How many students in the undergraduate provision?
b) How many students in the postgraduate provision?
c) How many academic staff?
d) How many support staff?

1.3 What, if any, collaborative provision do you have in your own subject field, for example, franchising, in-house courses?

1.4 What external scrutiny are you subject to in terms of your subject provision (e.g. AMBA, professional bodies, QAA)?

1.5 Do you regard your system of quality management as centralised or decentralised?

2. Respondents profile

2.1 In terms of your profile as a respondent:
a) What is your job title?
b) What is your role and responsibilities?
c) What are your specific quality management responsibilities?
d) Do you have experience of QAA scrutiny (i.e. academic/subject review, institutional audit) and/or experience of Business and Management accreditation processes (i.e. AACSB, AMBA, EQUIS, professional bodies)?

The following questions will form the basis of a detailed interview

3. Quality and enhancement in your university

Could you please tell us about the processes in your university for enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. Have they evolved and to what extent have they been influenced by quality models? Are reporting mechanisms standardised, and is there scope for faculty/school/department autonomy?

4. Quality and enhancement initiatives at faculty/school/department level

How do you see the learning experience being enhanced at this level?

5. Cultures of excellence

Would you aspire to have or have you attained a culture of excellence?

6. Learning and Teaching Strategies: the Quality interface

Are there any institutional (i.e. formal) linkages between T&L strategies on the one hand and quality management and enhancement (QME) strategies on the other?

7. Quality and enhancement initiatives

What ways do you have of developing initiatives to enhance the student learning experience?

Mike Hart/David Rush

THE FOLLOWING SECTION GIVES DETAILED NOTES FOR EACH OF THE QUESTIONS

3. Quality and enhancement strategies in your university

- Could you please tell us about the strategies and processes in your university for enhancing the quality of the student learning experience?
- We would be grateful if you could allow us access to any documentation related to your answer.
- To what extent has your institution and/or department explicitly deployed a specific quality model (such as TQM, EFQM, Balanced Score-Card etc)?
- Has the institutional/departmental strategy evolved and/or has it been influenced by any of the developments mentioned above?
- Are reporting mechanisms to the central monitoring bodies completely standardised? Is enhancement monitored? What happens if enhancement is not included in the monitoring?
- What scope is there for individual autonomy in quality/learning and teaching initiatives at the departmental level? If there is such scope what use has been made of it?

4. Quality and enhancement initiatives at faculty/school/department level

- How would you characterise a *quality learning experience?*
  (In view of the fact that definitions of quality are themselves contested – and the question might seem to be impossibly wide – you may care to think of:
  - *phrases or concepts that epitomise a quality learning experience*
  - *elements that form the building blocks of a quality learning experience*
  - *scenarios that undoubtedly exhibit quality).*
- How is the learning experience enhanced?
  (How do we know this? Is it recorded? Recognised? Rewarded?)

- What do you see as the obstacles to enhancing the learning experience?
- (Can you give an account of a case study that would illustrate this, triggered by either internal/external events?)
- Would you characterise enhancement initiatives as primarily:
  - transmitted (i.e. from higher levels)
  - emergent (i.e. from lower levels)
  - adopted/transferred (in parallel, from good practice elsewhere)?
- *Can you give examples of enhancement initiatives at the local level (either successful or 'gallant failures')?*
- What is the impact of accreditation (QAA, ABS, AMBA, EQUIS etc) upon quality procedures and initiatives?
- To what extent has department/cohort size created enhancement issues?
- Would you say that there was an optimum size of faculty/department for enhancement (leaving aside purely economic considerations)?
- How do individuals learn to enhance the learning experience?
- Have you used any kind of tool for this, bought in or developed by yourselves?
- Have any attempts to enhance the student learning experience been influenced by people in the same discipline in other institutions, for example, by attendance at workshops or conferences, or through the Higher Education Academy Subject Centres?

5. Cultures of excellence

- How would you characterise a department that exhibits a 'culture of excellence'?
- What is the balance struck between quality monitoring/management and quality enhancement? Does quality management lead inevitably to quality enhancement?
- Can you cite any examples (from your own department or other areas of which you have direct experience and knowledge) that exemplify a 'culture of excellence'?
- Are there any institutional procedures to embed perceived excellence?
- How do individual staff become incorporated into a departmental culture in which excellence is prominent?
- Do you encourage/participate in quality networks/communities of practice?
- What do you perceive as the drivers of quality?

6. Learning and Teaching strategies: the Quality interface

- Are there any institutional (i.e. formal) linkages between T&Lstrategies on the one hand and quality management and enhancement (QME) strategies on the other?
- Are there other ways in which these two strategies might mutually impact upon each other?

7. Quality and enhancement initiatives

- Can you identify any materials that would assist your school/department to develop its own quality strategies?
- How are students and/or new staff introduced to enhancement initiatives?
- Are there any perceived threats to quality cultures and/or quality initiatives?
- Are there any particular insights into quality initiatives and quality cultures that you would like to share with the wider academic community?
- What staff development initiatives do you undertake to support enhancement of the student learning experience?

Mike Hart/David Rush