



2003-2023

# EVALUATION OF 20 YEARS OF ENHANCEMENT THEMES

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## SUMMARY MESSAGES FOR POLICYMAKERS

QAA Scotland commissioned this evaluation to understand and show what difference the Enhancement Themes approach has made in Scotland and beyond. The main aim of the evaluation was to identify the impact of the 20 years of Enhancement Themes' activity on the student experience.



## EVIDENCE GATHERED BY THE EVALUATORS

- Retrospectively co-created a Theory of Change (ToC) process and outcomes with the sector
- Used Contribution Analysis methodology to map a range of evidence sources and outcomes which contributed to ToC development
- Undertook documentary analysis of 31 Themes-related reports and evaluative outputs and conducted gap mapping of all Themes across 20 years
- Provided ratings and feedback upon evaluation design and impact assessments carried out between 2020-23 for all submitted HEI summative evaluation reports (n. 54) and across all submitted cluster reports in same period
- Analysed and triangulated 73 Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) reports for cross-referenced impact
- Held quarterly international Expert Reference Group meetings from 2020-23 to assist the overarching evaluation process and triangulation of evidence
- Identified and pursued 43 key contacts to examine relevant lines of enquiry alongside a further 17 contacts engaged in joint Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC)/Theme Leaders' Group (TLG) committees
- Pursued requests for additional evidence from SHEEC via 19 HE institutional leads
- Evidenced observations from attendance at TLG and Theme Leadership Team (TLT) meetings between 2021-23 and at 20 years celebratory events

Infographic designed by Kay Sohini

## KEY OUTPUTS

01

*Produced an array of methodological workshops from 2020-23 to develop ET practitioners' capacity-building*

02

*Developed several reusable learning objects for the sector, including the Guide to Basic Evaluation, Evaluating the Overall Impact of Interventions: A 10 Point Framework, several evaluation methodology recorded presentations*

03

*Designed and implemented the open-access Universal Evaluation Framework (UEF) to support all evaluators, regardless of levels of evaluation experience, role and starting points*

04

*Produced a full technical report Evaluation of 20 years of Enhancement Themes: (2003-23) in addition to this summary output*



- 1 All enhancement activities should be aligned to national strategic ambitions**  
 To maximise effectiveness, all enhancement projects and activities should align to an overarching framework that allows clear assessment of their contribution to national strategic ambitions, in line with a set of shared and transparent outcomes.
- 2 Consider the importance of ‘critical mass’**  
 Aligning specific ‘themes-type’ work with existing institutional or sector level strategic change helps build a ‘critical mass’ and drive effective resourcing and better engagement, understanding and impact.
- 3 Enhancement work has more impact when grounded within a change methodology, for example Theory of Change approach**  
 The evidence shows that enhancement work was more effective when it had been planned, implemented and monitored using theory of change processes. They involve a range of stakeholders in decision-making, and more focused on making impact than the number of activities.
- 4 Focus on impact not number of outputs**  
 The assessment of the effectiveness of enhancement work should consider its long-term impacts, primarily in relation to student outcomes.
- 5 Set clear, measurable criteria at the outset; prioritise improving student outcomes and demonstrating long-term impact.**  
 Planning enhancement activity should, from the outset, include projections of their impacts upon outcomes for students. Success should be assessed in relation to the long-term student outcomes which eventually follow (according to improvements in standard metrics on continuation, completion, attainment and progression), to inform the development of institutional strategy and sectoral policy.







## 20 YEARS OF ENHANCEMENT THEMES TIMELINE AND INNOVATIONS

There are some noteworthy achievements of the Themes over the past 20 years.

Some of the approaches in evidencing achievement are highly innovative, especially as there was no overt sector-wide evaluation landscape for many of these themes.



2003 - 2023

<p><b>STUDENT NEEDS</b></p> <p>Dedicated Project Board for developing and sharing good practice.</p> 	<p><b>EMPLOYABILITY</b></p> <p>Created active Community of Practice for Employability in HE.</p> 	<p><b>THE FIRST YEAR</b></p> <p>Outputs began to reach beyond Scotland to the international stage.</p> 
<p><b>DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING THE CURRICULUM</b></p> <p>First projects led by students as full team members.</p> 	<p><b>STUDENT TRANSITIONS</b></p> <p>New annual evaluation reports and impact statements increased stakeholder awareness of projects and achievements.</p> 	
<p><b>EVIDENCE FOR ENHANCEMENT</b></p> <p>Theme Leadership Group included equal representation: 1 student &amp; 1 staff member from each provider. Collaborative clusters formalised to strengthen project working between providers.</p> 	<p><b>RESILIENT LEARNING COMMUNITIES</b></p> <p>Highly relevant during Covid-19 pandemic with many collaborations directly supporting student and staff wellbeing and effectiveness and accelerating positive change.</p> 