



Supplement to the HEFCE Financial Sustainability Strategy Group (FSSG) report: 'The sustainability of learning and teaching in English higher education'

February 2009

Executive summary

This paper contributes to the debate on the financial sustainability of learning and teaching in higher education institutions. It sets out the development and current status of student services functions in UK HE and notes their value and impact to HEI learning, the student experience and to a wide range of government agendas.

It considers the developing role of student services as discrete and professional activities that deliver welfare and personal support in a model that is believed to be more effective and efficient than either the academic as pastoral tutor or statutory services. It acknowledges that there is a dearth of robust evidence to test or prove the value for money of such services but details some emergent projects that are working, at a local level, to this end.

It recommends:

Detailed research be commissioned to provide a robust evidence base that can be applied across the sector and be used to generate metrics that may influence the Treasury and universities in their evaluation of student services contribution to the sector and inform government action to resolve the long term financial sustainability of teaching, learning and the student experience.

A landmark report be produced to profile the development, growth and innovation in the delivery of student services in UK HE, making use of such data as currently exists, to provide a timely demonstration of the seriousness that the sector attaches to the student experience.

These recommendations will assist in framing the public and political debates on the future funding of HE, as well as enhancing the value of UK HE to international markets.

1. Background

- 1.1. This paper contributes to the debate on the financial sustainability of learning and teaching in English higher education institutions. The FSSG Report it supplements identifies five primary cost pressures on teaching and learning: the relationship of staff to students; changes in the curriculum and assessment; changes in the student population and experience; infrastructure for teaching and learning; and student support services.
- 1.2. Of these, the first four are judged to be relatively measurable and well documented. However, the final category - student support - is acknowledged to be in need of further evidence and metrics in respect of value for money. Data offered by case study institutions was not easily transferable and lacked the robustness of data on the other categories.
- 1.3. **AMOSSHE - *The Student Services Organisation*** has produced this paper as an initial contribution to the discussion and recommends that a systematic and detailed research project be undertaken to assess the work and impact of student service provision in UK HE. The research should provide a robust evidence base on the role, impact and value of student services to inform discussion and debate on the sustainability of higher education learning and teaching to maintain and enhance the UK HE student experience.
- 1.4. This paper therefore summarises the current status of student services; its development and growth over the past 10-15 years; and the benefits and impact of student services on both key sector issues and a range of government agendas. It considers emerging developments and includes examples of supporting data and evidence that has been gathered in the short time available to produce this paper.

2. Context

2.1. Secretary of State's Grant Letter 2009:

- 2.1.1. The significance of this work must be considered in the context of the January 2009 Grant letter which sets the scene for a challenging financial settlement. This will place further pressure on an already overstretched unit of resource, requiring hard decisions to be made at both a national level and within each HEI. These decisions will have a direct and lasting impact and it is therefore essential that the role, impact, benefits and cost base of student services in underpinning student learning is understood, and evidenced.

2.2. Student services in UK HEIs

- 2.2.1. The term 'student services' is used here to refer to welfare and development provision for students. It is provided by professional staff and generally organised into central units. In addition, some HEI's have also appointed student support staff within academic departments as an additional complement to central support services. These services

underpin student learning, development and wellbeing, and are increasingly important to the quality of the student experience and to distinctiveness in graduate outcomes.

- 2.2.2. Whilst comprising different elements, and configured differently in each HEI, there is a broad and growing range of student advice, support and development activity within the remit of “Student Services”. The 2006-07 AMOSSHE members’ survey indicates 29 different areas of activity. The most common services include: counselling; disability; dyslexia support; financial advice; mental health; careers; general welfare and legal advice; chaplaincy; international advice; general health. Institutional level arrangements determine the range of student services, their boundaries and levels of integration with academic, other central services, and students’ union provision. Whilst traditionally established as discrete departments in post 92 HEIs, there has been a trend in recent years of greater development of a more coherent student services provision across the sector.
- 2.2.3. Data provided to AMOSSHE by Tribal Education Limited (Tribal) indicates that the average spend per student (1.0FTE on student support services) rose from £225 in 2006/07 to £329 for the 2007/08 year, reflecting the increasing demands on and priority attached to student services.

3. The growth and development of integrated student services

- 3.1. The past 10 to 15 years have been a time of enormous change in the HE sector. We have seen significant expansion, an increasingly marketised environment and a shift to public and political dialogue that is now framed by consideration of the student experience in its broadest terms. Heads of Student Services are often either the strategic lead (or the key partner to the strategic lead) in many HEIs with respect to the student experience and associated strategies and initiatives. Examples of the breadth of activities beyond core support service provision now include: community cohesion and relations; drugs and alcohol awareness; safe and green environments; managing complaints and student behaviour; diversity and equality; the National Student Survey, OFFA Access Agreements; critical incident handling; employability strategies; “studentification” plans; lead liaison with Student Unions, NHS and local communities.
- 3.2. The FSSG Report provides a helpful overview of the AMOSSHE perspective on the development of student services:

*The phases of development of student services could be described as a move from an **administrative deficit model** (i.e. as a last port of call for student problems) through an **integrated customer care model** (the one stop shop movement) towards a **professional support services model**. In the latter the academic/administrative divide should become much less important and student services are recognised as more interventionist and crucial to the broader student experience. (Para. 4.95)*

- 3.3. The development of the ***integrated customer care model*** placed the student at the centre of service delivery and development and was explored in *Student Services: Effective approaches to retaining students in higher education* published by Universities UK in 2002. This recognised Student Services as providing cost effective central expertise across a wide range of areas.
- 3.4. The more recent emergence of a ***professional support services model*** concerns the integration of non-academic student facing functions to create a physical and virtual frontline helpdesk, many utilising a Customer Relations Management (CRM) system. Developments such as these have taken place at Manchester, Reading, Hertfordshire and Southampton Universities.
- 3.5. Integrated approaches are also bridging the academic/administrative divide. Here, partnership approaches are informing educational interventions within the curriculum. They are also developing a holistic view of a “whole campus” learning environment, with wellbeing learning opportunities being made available to students in places as diverse as residence halls and student union bars.
- 3.6. Close monitoring of service use, together with student progression data, enable proactive evidence-led interventions designed to directly support student learning and progression, e.g. the identification by a counselling service of cluster issues such as eating disorders or self harm in particular courses, the identification by a study skills service of poor progression rates indicating the need for study skills intervention or peer mentoring, or a support programme for students returning from a period of intermission of studies, where guidance to aid retention is delivered centrally both with peers and in partnership with academic departments.

4. The benefits and impact of student services on key sector issues

4.1 Widening participation

- 4.1.1 The HEFCE document *Supply and Demand in Higher Education*¹ recognises that growth in HE participation will come from young people from lower income backgrounds and also that growth will be spurred by economic need, for example in times of economic downturn. Evidence from one counselling service found that in excess of 20% of their clients were from low participation postcode areas, significantly more than the institutional average.
- 4.1.2 Student services will continue to play a critical role in the delivery of Government’s widening participation agenda, delivering services to significant numbers of students from low participation backgrounds and managing the delivery of key Office of Fair Access Agreement elements. These include bursary schemes and targeted transition support for specific groups such as care leavers, disabled students and students with dependents. One institution has also introduced an induction and support programme via student services for

¹ HEFCE 01/62, pp.30-31

'commuter' students which represent one of its key WP constituencies. Support is provided in partnership with the Students' Union to ensure firm connection with the student experience.

- 4.1.3 Apart from the importance of the WP agenda, all students require and are deserving of the necessary support and developmental services to ensure a smooth passage through their studies and a successful transition to employment or further study. Increasingly the nature of the student experience is the differentiating factor in the institutional offer and the role that student services play is increasingly central to this aspect.

4.2 Compliance with equality legislation

- 4.2.1 Student Services continue to lead on compliance with the range of equality legislation that underpins many aspects of widening participation. This is particularly the case with respect to the DDA and the obligations of the Disability Equality Duty which require moves to mainstream provision for disabled students.
- 4.2.2 Work in mainstreaming adjustments for disabled students is also leading to wider improvements in the learning experience for all students . For example, where HEIs commit to ensuring all materials are available for download before the lecture takes place. Additionally, the work of disability sections within student service departments have an important role in minimising the risks of very costly legal action and potentially significant reputational damage to HEIs, given the currently open nature of the DDA and the ease with which discrimination claims can be brought.
- 4.2.3 The importance and impact to the economy and national prosperity of supporting disabled people to achieve in HE was highlighted by the 2007 Social Market Foundation study *Disability, Skills and Work: Raising our ambitions*. Adopting the same methodology as the Leitch Review to analyse the costs and benefits of improving the skills of disabled people the report found that improving the skills of disabled people to world leading levels by 2020 would boost the UK economy by some £35 billion and to do so would require an increase in degree equivalent qualifications from less than one fifth today to one third².

4.3 Retention

- 4.3.1 Retention has always been of concern, but the importance of this aspect will increase in the context of deepening recession. Recruiting and keeping students in education, and workforce up-skilling will be key government agendas in responding to increasing levels of unemployment; rising welfare benefit costs; and consequential social division and decreasing community cohesion. Increasingly institutions are recognising the importance of

² Stephen Evans, *Disability, Skills and Work: Raising our ambitions*, SMF, June 2007

enhanced student support at key 'transition' points throughout the whole student journey. This is extending work traditionally concerned with undergraduate student orientation into innovative support services focussed on periods such as transition into the second level of study or 'out-duction' for masters students who have completed their taught programme and are facing the transition into the dissertation phase. AMOSSHE members across the sector are currently working on a number of projects to assess the impact of retention support via a research programme funded by HEFCE and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

- 4.3.2 **Money advice and financial hardship services** make a particularly important contribution to the retention of students. Based on 2006/07 data, within England, £96M of bursary support is provided to an estimated 70,000 students in financial hardship every year. The cost to the sector if these students were to withdraw would be in excess of some £490M. In addition, a further £56M in government discretionary funds were distributed across England in 2007-08. In addition, money advice services advise students with regard to the financial implications of their studies, the impact of part time work and on debt issues – increasingly a factor for students.
- 4.3.3 **Financial literacy:** Student services are leading the national Financial Services Authority's (FSA) "Money Doctors" programme designed to improve the financial literacy of HE students. This work has a direct and long-term impact in relation to managing debt, budgeting, using credit and planning for the future and is of relevance to a number of contemporary issues: graduate debt, collapse of the housing market, the global financial crises and the ageing population and associated pension crisis.
- 4.3.4 **Counselling services:** The longest established student service, counselling has always provided an invaluable support to students across the sector in dealing with a range of life experiences that could impact negatively on their studies, as well as their personal wellbeing. Feedback across the sector demonstrates the value to individual students of this service.
- 4.3.5 **International Student Advice:** International students are of great importance to UK HE. International students expect to receive a range of advice and support to help them study in the UK, and student services often provide information about banking, healthcare, faith issues, accommodation and social networks. In addition, services providing immigration and visa advice support international students and staff to remain in the UK for study and work.
- 4.3.6 The government's Points Based System (PBS) for immigration is a strong example of where institutions are bearing significant costs due to an externally imposed government agenda. It is also an agenda which has a significantly impact on the role of HEIs, changing it from one focussed solely on support of international students to an additional, and many have argued unwelcome, role of policing compliance by international students with government regulation.

4.3.7 HEI's have already borne the costs of staff time and IT infrastructure developments necessary to prepare for PBS. As it rolls out data input by Admission departments and institution wide monitoring and reporting systems are required, and current enrolment and advisory functions are all predicted to lengthen significantly. One 1994 group institution has confirmed they are seeking £95K in additional resource to manage PBS, a crude extrapolation using this figure would indicate a cost to the sector of some £12M. This is an agenda for which no additional resource has been provided. The effective implementation of corresponding government functions is far from assured raising concerns across the sector that PBS will negatively impact on international recruitment.

4.3.8 **Welcome, induction and first year experience:** the majority of student services departments lead in the delivery and development of induction activities to support new students transition into the institution and the first year. This is an area of work recognised to be essential for retention as the first 6 weeks are when withdrawal is most likely to occur³ and when perceptions are very amenable to influence. At one university, the student services department led a project to enhance orientation services for undergraduate students. As a result of this work the institution witnessed a 20% increase in student satisfaction with their first year induction experience. This activity highlights the way in which student service departments evolve service delivery to meet the changing needs of students. Innovative examples of student support in pre-entry information were recently recognised in the Government response to the National Student Forum report:

- video casts to promote lifestyle issues and services available;
- “transitions” DVDs to be sent to incoming students;
- using mentoring to support transition into student life;
- providing information on financial literacy issues (Including the Financial Services Authority (FSA) Money Doctors initiative);
- pre-arrival days for those with a widening participation background and mature students; and
- the use of web based portals.

4.3.9 **Study support** activities have a very direct impact on student learning and retention and are an area of increasing activity for student services departments. Many of these include peer mentoring schemes that also enable personal development for mentors. A number of HEIs use the PASS (Peer Assisted Study Support) scheme which enables higher year students to facilitate lower year students, in groups, to help develop study and learning strategies and has been highlighted by the QAA as “an excellent innovation” in a recent

³ Tinto, V. (1988). Stages of student departure: Reflections on the longitudinal character of student leaving. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 59(4), 438-455.

IchemE accreditation⁴ Other schemes are developed as targeted interventions in response to the analysis of progression data and module feedback.

4.4 Employability

- 4.4.1 Careers services within student services departments provide significant support to institutional missions in respect of employability, and in consequence directly support the UK economy, not least through mitigating the risks to the UK economy, of both failing to realise the potential of the graduate contribution, as well as the fiscal implications of delays in the repayment of student loans.
- 4.4.2 Institutions act as a powerful catalyst for employer engagement – their work with employers from SME to FTSE100 acts as a stimulus for broader contact associated with research, curriculum involvement (and design) whilst enabling employers to access the strongest talent pools in the country. Companies interested in recruiting graduates to their workforce may, through careers services, establish scholarships or support research projects which might not otherwise have been considered. Services also therefore act as important bridges with regional funding agencies and support the delivery of regional development agendas as a result.
- 4.4.3 Increasingly careers services bridge a divide between curriculum development and the business of careers education. This can focus on both ends of the spectrum from ‘immediate employability’ (important in the current economic climate) to more long term career skill training that enables students to be successful over the long term. Both are needed to underpin the UK economy. A number of careers services also work with institution staff providing vital assistance in supporting early career researchers and the flow of highly skilled talent into university research projects.

4.5 Citizenship

- 4.5.1 **Chaplaincy, interfaith and community cohesion:** Heads of student services will often lead the institutional oversight, contact and relationships with faith groups and leaders. Many students prefer to discuss personal difficulties with a faith representative, or have a strong personal faith and are reassured by a Chaplaincy on campus. A good chaplaincy provision can be a recruitment tool for some student constituencies. In many cases interfaith provision is being developed. This work is crucial to Government’s Prevent and Community Cohesion Strategies.

⁴ The University of Manchester see: <http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/studentsaspartners/peersupport/pass/>

- 4.5.2 **Active citizenship, civilising communities and social capital:** an emerging agenda. Expressed as life-wide learning, developments include the reconfiguration of counselling and mental health services to a Well-being model with remit covering all students (and in some cases staff as well) and proactive initiatives such as including healthy eating, physical exercise, responsible drinking, tolerance, personal maturity and self management. The benefits of these longer-term, capacity building initiatives are legion. One connection with a Government agenda concerns recent expressions from DCLG who feel that citizenship skills should be learned when students are tenants in the local community, as they are likely to continue to rent until they are 34 years old. The wellbeing agenda in HEIs also sits well with government agendas on health education.
- 4.5.3 **Volunteering:** in many cases supported by student services departments. One institution estimates that every £1 invested in volunteering programmes generates £3 worth of time invested in the community. This can contribute to widening access agendas, as well as counteract the negative impacts of studentification. Research into the impact of informal learning opportunities in HE and the impact on graduate outcomes found that involvement in extra curricular activity increased students' happiness, satisfaction and sense of belonging and detected a correlation with overall marks⁵. Careers services will attest to the value of volunteering experience in terms of attractiveness to employers.

4.6 Risk management

- 4.6.1 The individual, institutional and reputational risks managed by student service departments on a daily basis are often poorly understood. They include the risk of student withdrawal or periods of disengagement with learning due to financial, personal and emotional issues, or regulatory compliance crisis (e.g. visa and immigration requirements for international students, disability issues and childcare management where provision exists). Many heads of student service also lead the institutional response to cases of student death, communicable disease (meningitis), missing persons, mental health crises and 'town and gown' difficulties.
- 4.6.2 It is however in the area of mental health where the day to day management of risk has increased most significantly. The incidence of mental ill health within the HE population has increased, as has the participation of students with mental health related disabilities. There are many positive aspects to the inclusion of such students but there are also risks that arise when mental illness is not managed by the individual concerned, or properly supported by the HEI. The risks are both to the individual and also in relation to the negative and detrimental impact on the learning experience of other students on the same course or with whom they live. The management of such risks are often complex and

⁵ Stuart, Lido, Morgan and May (2008)

extremely time consuming⁶. The overall resource costs of such support can therefore be significant.

4.7 Efficiency and cost effectiveness

- 4.7.1 Student services departments deliver professional expertise, economies of scale and more effective working patterns (such as ease of referral). The staff who work within them ease the responsibility to support individual students experiencing significant difficulties from academic members of staff, freeing institutional resource to be focused effectively. Increasingly this is specialised work, requiring suitably qualified professional staff. As a sector, student services professionals are well organised into networks sharing and developing good practice.
- 4.7.2 Many student services departments have chosen to assure the quality of their provision via external benchmarks such as Matrix, given that there is no overarching quality assurance process within the sector for student services.
- 4.7.3 For government, the cost of the services provided would inevitably be higher if delivered by external agencies and the impact if such services did not exist would place significant additional burdens within society.

5 Resource and impact methodologies

- 5.1 **Resource formula:** developing a formula for resourcing student services is complex as is creating effective ways to evaluate the impact of the provision on learning, teaching and the student experience. External measures, for example benchmarking, are problematic because the configuration and structure of student services across the UK (and therefore costs) varies very significantly across the sector and services are constantly evolving and developing.
- 5.2 **Volume indicators,** whilst an important element of measurement, give only a partial insight into the complexity and time involved in many cases and the value and impact of the service activity. Student services are a people focussed business. As such they are frequently dealing with the inherent complexities of an individual and every facet of their life. It is however very important that student services operate in a transparent way and are provided with an agreed mechanism through which their value and impact on teaching, learning and the students' experience can be evidenced.

⁶ A single case can typically involve a Mental Health Coordinator or Adviser, the Head of Student Services, academic colleagues such as a personal tutor and Head of Department or School as well external agencies such as a GP practice, NHS Mental Health Services and the Police.

- 5.3 **Seeking richer data:** There exists a great deal of quantitative and qualitative data with regard to student services activities and use within individual HEIs. There is an understanding that we need to develop richer data and in particular the need for greater research into the value and impact of interventions. One Russell Group institution is around 6 months into a local 'holistic evaluation' pilot, inspired by recent US research⁷. The recommendation is that student services professionals should move from a concern with process and satisfaction monitoring, to the impact of provision; asking a richer set of questions: what difference do we make to students' lives? How do services help students to develop, to grow, to achieve, to learn, to succeed?
- 5.4 **Value for money studies:** Another project on value for money in student services is also currently being initiated. Methodologically, a pragmatic approach is being taken, using a number of 'proxy' measures to reflect VfM which will then be put alongside more qualitative information to gain a deeper understanding of both value and value for money. The measures are likely to include: analysis of service monitoring input/output statistics; service usage figures; service reputation measures; fit with corporate objectives; achievement of service level obligations; innovations and project success; evidence of effective budget control; income generation activity, where possible; partnerships/shared services; customer feedback; and benchmarking.
- 5.5 **Full Economic Costing:** Another institution is resourcing a project to understand the full economic cost of student service elements, using the HEFCE TRAC methodology, and at the current time focusing on disability support.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 6.1 This paper has outlined the significant changes that have taken place throughout student services in UK higher education over recent years and captured some of the innovative and progressive developments currently taking place. It has described the benefits and impact of these services not only to individual student beneficiaries but in relation to key sector issues and government agendas. Student services are pivotal to the student experience in the UK. The future public and political debates on higher education, particularly those relating to fees and funding will be framed and contextualised by consideration and reference to the student experience. It is therefore in the interests of the sector to ensure that parliamentarians and government officials, particularly in the Treasury, understand the role, impact and benefit of student services.

⁷ International Center for Student Success and Institutional Accountability (ICSSIA), in collaboration with NASPA: Assessment Reconsidered: Institutional Effectiveness for Student Success (Richard Keeling, Andrew Wall, Ric Underhile & Gwen Dungy, NASPA 2008): <http://assessmentreconsidered.org/>.

6.2 To achieve this AMOSSHE recommends the following:

- 1. Commission a systematic and detailed research project to assess the work and impact of student service provision in UK HE. The research should provide a robust evidence base that can be applied across the sector and be used to generate metrics that may influence the Treasury and universities in their evaluation of student services contribution to the sector and inform government action to resolve the long term financial sustainability of teaching, learning and the student experience.**
 - 2. Commission and publish a landmark report as a follow up to the 2002 UUK report *Student Services: Effective approaches to retaining students in higher education*. It should profile the development, growth and innovation in the delivery of student services across the UK, making use of such data and case studies as currently exists. This would provide a timely demonstration of the seriousness that the sector attaches to the student experience and in doing so assist in framing the public and political debates on the future funding of HE, as well as enhancing the value of UK HE to international markets.**
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APPENDICES

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1 Regional context

1.1 Wales

- 1.1.1 ***The Learning Nation: A Comprehensive Education and Lifelong Learning Programme to 2010 in Wales***⁸ set out the Welsh Assembly Government's broad post-devolution agenda for education in Wales. This included a commitment to keep Welsh HEIs competitive with comparator institutions and a commitment to the widening participation agenda including the rationale applied to that in England. Though policy reviews have since taken place, in particular with regard to student hardship and finance, these broad policies remain in place. This commitment has been reinforced in the One Wales coalition agreement between Labour and Plaid Cymru in 2007 "We will work to widen participation for all ages in ... higher education, promoting adult and community learning both in relation to employability and the wider benefits which education brings"⁹
- 1.1.2 The Welsh sector is small and resourcing and roles of student services vary significantly across institutions. The UUK report ***Devolution and higher education: impact and future trends***¹⁰ confirmed the longstanding concern of the sector that it is less well funded compared to England. The report notes: "HEFCE estimates that the higher education sector in Wales is under-funded by between £25-£41 million per year compared to levels of funding in England, but that the real figure maybe as much as £60 million"¹¹.
- 1.1.3 AMOSSHE is concerned that the funding gap may adversely affect student services, particularly in smaller HEIs, as those institutions seek to balance their budgets. It should also be noted that a significant number of posts in the relatively small Welsh sector are funded from HEFCW premium funds, income generation or other funding outside the institution's control. This may represent a risk to the critical functions such posts perform and consequently to the ability of student services to deliver on the mission critical functions they perform.

⁸ (Welsh Assembly Government/Crown Copyright: 2001)

⁹ (p.24, One Wales: A Progressive Agenda for the Government of Wales, Welsh Assembly Government/Crown Copyright: 2007).

¹⁰ Universities UK December 2008: *Devolution and higher education: impact and future trends*:

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/DevolutionAndHE.pdf>

¹¹ HEFCE 2006 *The Funding Gap: 2004/05*: http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/The_Funding_Gap_2004_05.pdf

1.2 Scotland

1.2.1 The UUK report *Devolution and higher education: impact and future trends* notes that: “Scotland has favoured widening participation with improved student funding, co-locating institutions of further and higher education, as well as lifelong learning policies that do not focus only on skills. Scotland had rejected variable fees in favour of graduate endowment, but in 2008 the SNP abolished that.”

1.2.2 The Scottish HE sector enjoys a high level of engagement with the Scottish Parliament, facilitating effective dialogue that has seen a number of initiatives relevant to the growth, development and impact of student services in the Scottish HE sector. These include:

- **Joint Future Thinking Task Force:** set up in 2008 combining Universities, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Scottish Government in which the sector and Scottish government set three challenges for the other, the outcome of this process is that Universities will be funded by a General Fund (GF) distributed by the SFC and a Horizon Fund (HF) to be administered by a Tripartite Advisory Group (Universities, SFC and Scottish government) to advise the Scottish Government on how the fund should be distributed.
- **Student Support:** QAA Scotland has taken a lead role in identifying best practice within Scotland and the rest of the world. The work of the SHEEC (Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee) International Benchmarking project seeks to inform teaching and learning practice in Scotland by looking at practice in other countries. Student support was identified as being the area that should be investigated as a pilot for a cycle of disciplinary areas during 2008 - 2012. The aim of the work is to:
 - help support the Scottish higher education sector in comparing with and learning from practice internationally,
 - establish a range of useful resources for HEIs, Student Associations and practitioners;
 - establish links with and share with centres of practice internationally.

1.2.3 Universities have embraced an enhancement led approach to the development of student support in the areas of:

- **The First Year:** commencing in 2005 this has considered how the first year experience can promote student engagement and empowerment, to make the first year a transformational experience.
- **Student engagement:** seen as a challenging area, its scope including strategies to raise the level of student engagement with the first year, personal development and HE life more generally.

- **Student empowerment:** concerned with equipping students to take control of their learning and to become autonomous learners, the two key ideas to have emerged are the personalisation of taught provision and the development of an extended transition process.
- **Responding to Student Needs:** in 2003 two areas were identified for investigation and development: Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of receiving and responding to student feedback; and providing holistic support for students with particular emphasis on the phases of the student lifecycle (pre-entry; entry/induction; first year of study; and preparation for exit).

1.2.4 **Employability Enhancement:** commenced in 2004 with the following aims:

- raise the profile of employability, including its benefits to students, employers and academic staff
- create a clearer understanding of what is meant by Employability
- encourage and provide assistance for the Scottish higher education sector in developing institutional Employability strategies
- aid the embedding of Employability within the curriculum
- implement its strategy in parallel with work on Personal Development Planning (PDP) as part of the Effective Learning Framework (ELF) project.

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