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Summary

The QAA reports from the assessment of TRS in Scottish Universities are of limited use in identifying issues that PRS-LTSN may address, not least because five and a half years have elapsed since the assessments were made and the QAA brief extended rather more widely than learning and teaching. A reading of the reports is suggestive of broad issues for PRS-LTSN consideration, some of which are already part of its brief. Whilst a number of the issues emerge in all the reports (5 reports in the case of TRS: from Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, St. Andrews, Stirling), it is inappropriate to generalise from such a small sample and to see these issues as representative of TRS concerns in the UK as a whole. And is it QAA concerns or TRS concerns that are apparent in the reports? Or is it now inappropriate to make such a distinction? Reports from the current round of inspections of TRS departments are not yet available; when they are we may gain a fuller picture of national concerns.

The following list of issues emerges from a consideration of what is affirmed and what is the subject of criticism in the reports:

- Open access/admission policies; the development of an access module by subject department to facilitate such policies and enhance recruitment.
- Development of distance learning packages; possibility of collaboration with other departments within a University e.g. Continuing Education, or outside institutions eg. a ministerial training programme.
- The training and monitoring of Graduate Assistants. There is clearly good practice to be drawn on here, but reflection on TRS reports [and those for Philosophy] suggests to me that a code of practice re. the employment of Graduate Assistants would be useful both to departments and assistants [or does such exist already?].
- Matters relating to Course Design. A number of matters cluster around this, including the questions of what constitutes a coherent course for students and given a flexible modular structure, how students recognise/find coherence. Related to this is the making use of/identification of cross-curricular / interdisciplinary links.
- Modular Design. Again a cluster of issues emerge: expressing objectives clearly, ensuring that they match content and that assessment is related to them - a Module as an integrated whole - its intentions and requirements clearly communicated to students. [Also, clarity with respect to a Module’s relation to Departmental Aims and Objectives]. Points 6, 7 & 8 below also bear on course/modular design.
• The identification of **generic/transferable skills**. This was one of the clearest issues to emerge from TRS reports, [less in evidence in those of Philosophy]. Students must know what such skills are and be able to say where/how they are developing them. Consequently they need to be spelt out in modules, in teaching, in provision for student participation. In turn this relates to **end results' and employability**, perhaps also to consulting potential employers in course planning [for one institution this led to collaborative development of a new module in Business Ethics!].

• The development of **assessment**; clarity about the relation of this to identified skills; what is it intended to test and is it doing so? **Planned and coherent assessment** employing diagnostic, formative and summative methods - planned *through* a programme and clear to students.

• The identification/effective use of a range of (innovative) **learning experiences**.

• The development of **self-managed learning** - using ICT, but not just this.

• The development of **CD-Rom/online language packages** [cf. Development/use of Hebrew package in Scotland]; **use of Internet**.

• The relation of **research and teaching**; teaching that was ‘up to date’ and informed by research was highly rated. What of **research as an impetus to the design of innovative courses**?

• Providing for the **very able student**.

By way of postscript on teaching and learning in HE, you may enjoy this quotation about a TRS department:

’Course aims and objectives did not correspond closely to the needs of society and the economy’