STRATEGY FOR THE IDENTIFICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF GOOD PRACTICE IN LEARNING AND TEACHING

1. Overview

1.1 It is recognised by the sector that dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching is challenging (King, 2003; Murphy, 2003; Stewart & Thompson, 2005). It is acknowledged that staff have different motivations for engaging with good practice and hence a range of resources (eg. reports, case studies, research papers) and channels of communication (eg. web sites, newsletters) need to be employed.

1.2 Whilst formal routes of dissemination are important, we should not lose sight of the significance of informal conversations, networking and other interactions between staff, as such dialogues provide valuable opportunities to learn from colleagues. These exchanges do not necessarily need to focus on innovation in teaching, but may highlight effective ‘every day’ good teaching practice.

1.3 Curriculum Reform Recommendation 36 states that ‘There should be a strategy to identify and communicate best practices in learning & teaching to all staff’. This document sets out a strategy to enhance current good practice in identifying and disseminating effective teaching at the University of Aberdeen.

2. Aim of the Identification and Dissemination of Good Practice in Learning and Teaching Strategy

2.1 To raise awareness, improve understanding and stimulate activity, with the overall purpose of enhancing teaching and learning at the University of Aberdeen, in turn supporting its mission to ‘be excellent in delivering teaching’.

3. Objectives of Strategy

3.1 To encourage more effective identification and dissemination of good practice through a structured and targeted approach as follows:

- Systematically identify existing good practice from around the University, including gathering input from the student body
- Maintain awareness of good practice from across the HE sector, both nationally and internationally
- Use existing, successful channels of communication to disseminate good practice
- Evaluate and establish new channels and methods of communication for dissemination
- Review, report and revise identification and dissemination activities on an annual basis

4. Channels of Communication used for the Identification and Dissemination of Good Practice

Channels of communication should be viewed as a two-way conduit; they provide an outlet for good practice originating within the University, or a route via which ideas about effective teaching can enter. There is a need to identify good practice from both within and outwith the University, and to disseminate this using a range of channels identified below.

4.1 Institutional

At the moment the University of Aberdeen has a range of methods for identifying and disseminating good practice:

- Informal discussions and networks between staff
  - We will encourage staff to share examples of good practice on an informal basis.
• University Committee on Teaching & Learning
  ➢ The Centre for Academic Development will provide an annual report, which will include a review of the previous year’s identification and dissemination of good practice.
• University’s StaffNet Site eg. ‘News’ and ‘Events’ sections
  ➢ We will continue to promote good practice events and highlight examples when appropriate.
• Distribution lists eg Communication’s weekly StaffNet email
  ➢ We will continue to promote good practice events and highlight examples when appropriate.
• Internal Teaching Reviews self-identification of good practice
  ➢ The Centre for Academic Development will collate examples highlighted through the ITR process and disseminate these examples through appropriate channels.
• Reviews by Professional & Statutory bodies
  ➢ The Centre for Academic Development will collate examples highlighted in reviews undertaken by PSBs and disseminate these examples through appropriate channels.
• Course and Programme Review forms
  ➢ Examples of good practice, highlighted through the course and programme review process, will be identified by the Centre for Academic Development and disseminated through appropriate channels.
• External examiners’ reports
  ➢ Examples of good practice, highlighted in external examiners’ reports, will be identified by the Centre for Academic Development and disseminated through appropriate channels.

4.2 Centre for Academic Development

The Centre for Academic Development acts as a brokerage for ideas about good practice in learning and teaching. In addition to the provision of professional development opportunities, the Centre works with individuals, Schools and Colleges. Its unique central position enables it to gather and distribute examples both from within and across disciplines, and from external organisations. The channels outlined below are used already to identify and disseminate good practice.

• Annual Academic Symposium (previous themes have included First Year Experience, Flexible Delivery, Developing and Supporting the Curriculum for Excellence and Student Transitions)
  ➢ The Centre will organise an Academic Development Symposium on an annual basis, with a theme identified and agreed through discussion with the Vice Principal for Learning & Teaching. The Symposium will showcase examples of good practice, internal and external, national and international, which fall within the agreed theme.
  ➢ The Symposium now incorporates the Annual ‘Best Practice’ Poster Fair. The examples featured on posters will be disseminated in a number of ways including via the Centre for Academic Development’s StaffNet pages.
• Annual Teaching Fellows’ event (external and internal presentations of good practice with networking opportunities)
  ➢ The Centre will organise an event for Teaching Fellows on an annual basis, which will normally include an external guest speaker and a showcase of examples of internal good practice.
• PG Certificate Programmes in in Higher Education Academic Practice
  ➢ The Centre will continue to deliver the PG Certificate Programmes in HE Academic Practice which provides opportunities for staff to exchange ideas and learn about practice in different disciplines.
• Professional development events
  ➢ The Centre will continue to offer a programme of events across the summer and both half sessions for all staff with teaching responsibilities. Events will include discussions addressing internal and external examples of good practice.
  ➢ The Centre will continue to offer a comprehensive programme of events across both half sessions for postgraduates and postdoctoral staff with teaching responsibilities.
The Centre will continue to liaise with Colleges, Schools and disciplines, providing tailored events in support of specific requirements.

Learning & Teaching Enhancement Programme
- The Centre will continue to make funding available on a competitive basis to support and reward innovation in learning and teaching.
- The LTEP will be themed, normally aligning with QAA Enhancement Themes and endorsed by UCTL.
- The LTEP funding will be offered at least once per year where resource allows.

UCTL
- The Centre will provide UCTL with an overview of key events planned for the forthcoming academic year for their endorsement and promotion.

Centre for Academic Development’s StaffNet Web Pages
- The Centre will continue to enhance and expand its web presence to include the following:
  - Further spotlight features (interviews with academic staff about an example of effective teaching practice)
  - Posters from the Annual Academic Development Symposium
  - Examples of internal and external (including national and international) good practice
  - ‘How to’ guides for effective teaching
  - Further use of online discussion and conferencing opportunities
  - Recordings (video or audio) of events which have been captured in this way.

School Directors of Teaching network
- The Centre will continue to develop this network through hosted lunches.
- The use of the network will be extended to disseminate examples of good practice.

Informal networks
- The Centre will continue to encourage informal discussions both face to face and online.

External networks
- The Centre will continue to represent the University at meetings of the Universities Scotland Educational Development Sub Committee, the Higher Education Academy, the Association for Learning Technology, the Scottish Effective Learning Advisers and other external bodies.

The Centre will develop the following channels:

- Annual report including the identification and dissemination of good practice
  - The Centre will report to UCTL on an annual basis, reviewing the identification and dissemination of good practice activities across the Institution and incorporating these examples in its annual report.
- Centre for Academic Development eZine
  - The Centre will include examples of good practice in its monthly ezines to staff and PGRs.
- Evidence-based good practice in teaching and learning
  - The Centre will identify evidence-based good practice and disseminate through its web site.
  - The Centre will disseminate the outcomes of its pedagogic research and evaluation projects through appropriate channels.

4.3 College Activities

Colleges offer specific activities (listed below), instigated by College Directors of Teaching & Learning, for staff to engage in the exchange of ideas around learning and teaching.

- Annual Teaching Prizes
  - Colleges will continue to award annual teaching prizes in each College, nominated and voted for by students.
- College Teaching & Learning Committees
- Colleges will continue to identify good practice through College Teaching & Learning Committees. 
- Colleges will continue to disseminate good practice through College Teaching & Learning Committees and the Annual Academic Development Symposium.

- College newsletters
  - Colleges will continue to include examples of good and innovative teaching practice in College newsletters or similar channels

- Opportunities for informal discussions and networks between staff
  - Colleges will continue to encourage staff to share good practice.

### 4.4 School Activities

Schools also offer specific activities for staff to engage in the exchange of ideas around learning and teaching. These opportunities tend to focus on discipline-specific issues. The channels outlined below are used already to identify and disseminate good practice.

- School Teaching & Learning Committees
  - Schools will continue to identify and disseminate good practice through School Teaching & Learning Committees.
  - Schools will continue to disseminate good practice through College Teaching & Learning Committees and the Annual Academic Development Symposium

- School Teaching days and tailored workshops
  - Schools will continue to address discipline or topic-based issues through the organisation of continuing professional development opportunities at School level.

- School ‘Away Days’
  - In their ‘Away Day’ programmes, Schools will continue to include examples of discipline based good practice and opportunities to discuss them.

- Informal discussions and networks for staff
  - Schools will continue to encourage staff to share good practice.

- School induction for new staff
  - At induction, new staff should be informed of how to find examples of good practice.

### 4.5 External Identification and Dissemination Channels

Whilst there are many examples of good teaching practice in evidence across the Institution, an awareness of activities across the HE sector, both at a national and international level, can provide practical and novel ideas for enhancement. External examples can also offer the Institution a point of reference for our own practice. Interaction with external agencies should be a two-way process, providing the Institution with the opportunity to share its own good practice with colleagues in other institutions. The external channels outlined below are used already to identify and disseminate good practice.

- Engagement with QAA Quality Enhancement Themes
  - The Institution will continue to engage actively with the QAA’s Quality Enhancement Themes.

- Higher Education Academy
  - The Institution will hold regular meetings with representatives of the HEA and attend relevant events.

- sparqs
  - The Institution will continue to engage with sparqs (Student Participation in Quality Scotland) initiatives.

- Conference attendance
  - The Institution will encourage and promote staff attendance at relevant conferences such as the annual Quality Enhancement Themes Conference

- Formal networks
  - The Institution will continue to contribute to formal networks with a remit for enhancing teaching practice, such as Universities Scotland, the Staff and Educational Development Association, the Association for Learning Technology, the Scottish Blackboard Users Group etc.
5. Measuring the Impact of the Strategy for the Identification and Dissemination of Good Practice

It is challenging to evaluate the impact of the Institution’s Strategy. Specifically, it is problematic to relate directly an improvement in the dissemination of good practice to its impact on student learning.

- Mechanisms where enhancement in teaching practice might be measured indirectly include:
  - Student satisfaction (eg. SCEF, National Student Survey, Staff-Student Liaison Committees)
  - Student recruitment and retention statistics
  - Enhancement-led Institutional Review
  - Internal Teaching Reviews
  - External Examiners’ reports
  - Student Focus Groups
  - Anecdotal feedback
  - Assessments in PG Certificate Programmes

- In order to evaluate the success of the Strategy:
  - The Centre for Academic Development will report annually to UCTL on activities relating to the identification and dissemination of good teaching practice.
  - On the basis of this report and discussion with UCTL, the Centre for Academic Development will review and update the Strategy in the light of those aspects deemed to be most successful.

6. References

