

## CASE STUDY TO SUPPORT HEAR IMPLEMENTATION

### Bath Spa University

Bath Spa University became one of the 'Phase 2' trial institutions in 2009.

The institution intends to provide paper copies of HEARs' for all graduating students this year. In addition, it is intended to initiate the HEAR with incoming students in 2011/12 as well as issuing to graduates in 2012 - potentially in electronic form.

#### A. Institutional Background.

Bath Spa University is a medium-sized university of around 7,000 students. It provides a broad portfolio of courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level with its major areas of provision in the visual and performance arts, digital media, humanities, teacher training, social sciences, science and business studies.

Bath Spa University achieves consistently high scores on indicators of teaching quality in the annual national students' survey (88% in 2009 compared to a national figure of 83% for all UK universities). Bath Spa was ranked joint 7th university in the country for the quality of its teaching and learning in the league table published by The Times Higher in January 2010. Bath Spa has a strong record in research and is notable for linking its research to teaching.

The University has research activity across all of its academic schools with particular strengths, as measured in the independent Research Assessment Exercise in Art and Design, English and Creative Writing, History, Music, and Psychology. Bath Spa forms an important part of the region's economic infrastructure and makes a significant contribution to the cultural life of the region.

Partnerships involving Foundation Degree programmes with five FE Colleges and two private educational institutions across the region all serve to help provide access to higher education for the widest range of students. Nearly one in twelve of BSU students are taught at a partner institution, making Bath Spa the third largest provider of franchised provision pro-rata to size, out of 13 in the South West.

#### B. Purposes in participating within the trial.

A key driver for becoming involved with the Phase 2 trial, following a national Dissemination Conference, was the very strong concern to support student employability; 'anything that could enhance our student's chances of employment on graduate was something we were going to be interested in'. From the specific perspective of Registry, involvement also held out the prospect of providing a means for the delivery of the Diploma Supplement. The University had been providing the DS on a bespoke basis on request, particularly for Erasmus students, but never for all. The alignment of the HEAR and DS specifications provided the opportunity to provide a document closely aligned to the DS for all.

While Senior Managers were not instrumental in initiating engagement with the HEAR, the Head of Employability, who reported to the Deputy Vice Chancellor, found him highly supportive of involvement and willing to support this as one aspect of the student employability agenda.

### **C. Your 'structural' starting points Transcript, DS, extra-curricular awards/provision; SRS, data held centrally (e.g. in respect of module marks).**

The University already produced a Transcript in respect of academic performance, and had produced the DS on demand. Importantly, relevant data was held centrally within SITS, including marks at component levels within modules, thereby allowing the capability to drill down into detailed levels of achievement. This provided a crucial advantage, the holding of data centrally on a uniform basis meaning that the key initial task has been the review of the HEAR specification in terms of the data held within SITS.

The University did not offer an extra-curricular award.

### **D. Your 'people' starting points – who was involved from the outset (e.g. Registry, IT, Careers and Employability, Learning and Teaching) how, and why?**

The key element in respect of personnel has been the strong relationship between the Information Systems team and Registry which facilitated the initial mapping process and identified approaches to HEAR production. Also important has been the relationship with staff that support student employability and – very importantly – the Students Union.

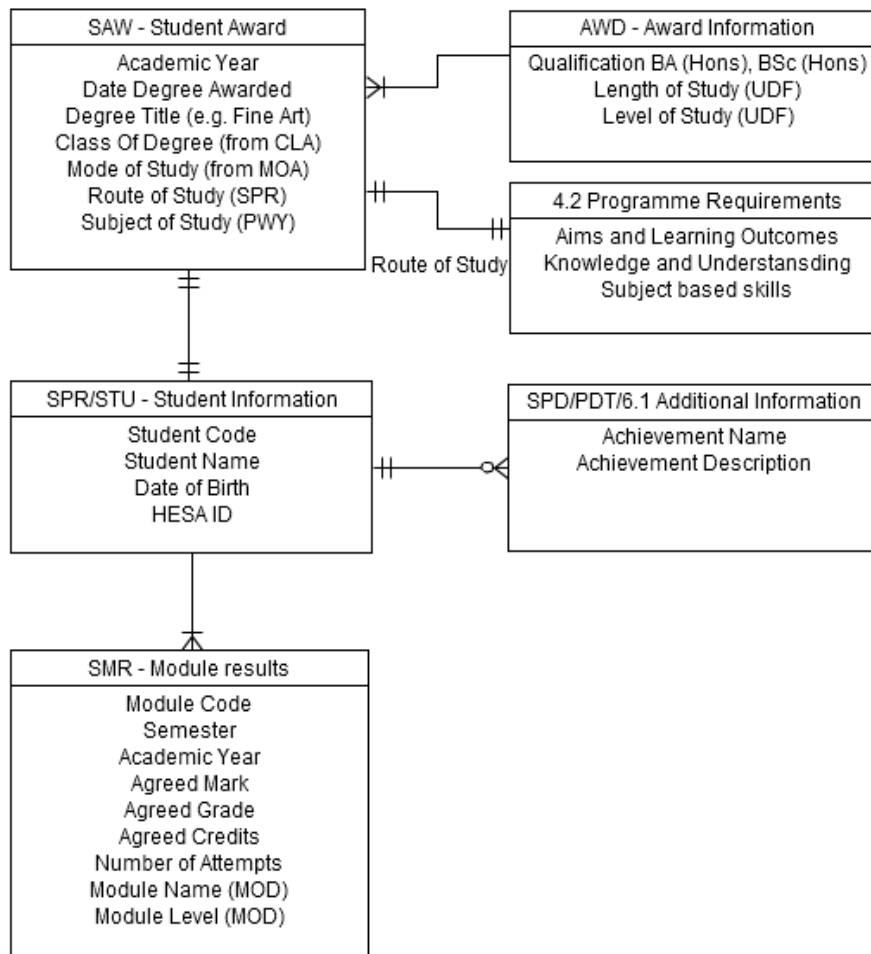
In organisational terms, work has been based upon a task group which reported initially to the Modular Scheme Committee and subsequently to Academic Board. Reporting to the Academic Board, in turn, has allowed information on progress to be shared with academic colleagues.

### **E. What key actions did you take toward implementation, and in what sequence?**

#### **Key tasks have been:**

- To map across from the requirements of the HEAR specification to data already held within SITS. This identified areas for further attention, and emphasised that while some of this might be drawn in fairly easily, other material may take more time and energy to collect.
- Consultation with the Students Union in respect of the non-academic element of the record (section 6). Initial concerns that there would be nothing to report within this section have been overtaken by a realisation that not only is a great deal going on (e.g. in volunteering, Student Ambassadors, support for work in schools via AimHigher, Student Representative roles) but that this is currently recorded by the Students Union outside of the SITS system. So, 'the data exists for section 6.1 but in different places and different forms'. An important task is to incorporate some of this into SITS and additional administrative support is likely to be necessary here.
- To initiate the collation and further development of Programme Specification information for inclusion in section 4.2, as this is not currently held within SITS. In addition, while material currently available in respect of Programme Specifications is mostly appropriate for a wider audience, having been written with students in mind, there is a degree of diversity in the ways this is presented, and especially the length of the information, which may raise issues of equality and comparability in terms of HEARs from different subject areas.

## Production of HEAR from SITS information and Additional Tables



### F. What have been the reaction(s) of a) students; b) employers; c) academic staff; d) administrative staff to your work?

As already indicated, the Students Union have been important contributors to the HEAR process, specifically in respect of the information they hold about the engagement – and achievements – of students in the non-academic field. In addition, the Students Union officers themselves have been ‘extremely supportive’, this extending across different Presidents over two years.

As a Phase 2 HEAR trial institution, there has not yet been sufficient time to consult with employers, the University taking the view that students emerging with, and making use of, their HEARs will provide a context through which employer reaction can be gauged.

The centralised storage of data has meant that high demands have not been made on academic staff, though they are tasked with the updating of Programme Specification material. They are however, aware of and interested in the developments and supportive of developments, such as the HEAR, which they perceive as offering a competitive edge for their students.

Finally, there have been no substantive demands on administrative staff beyond the small core team in Registry and IS, though some limited administrative support will be needed to input the Programme Specification information into SITS.

### **G. What lessons have been learned through the process which may be useful to institutions getting started?**

The centralised storage of data provided a real benefit from the outset, and a stable environment from which to map to the requirements of the HEAR – ‘It was very easy to look across and map’.

Conversely, information – on Programme Specifications – held locally rather than centrally – has proved more problematic. There is no central datastore for this information in the University. With hindsight, the need for a more standardised approach here might have been something that should have been considered earlier.

Work with the Students Union was crucial in appreciating just how much was taking place in terms of extra-curricular activity, ‘the important thing for the HEAR has been pulling it all together centrally, and this has been really useful for the institution’. However there is now a comparable need for greater standardisation here too, with different sources containing information recorded in different ways and different degrees of detail.

### **H. Your Future Plans for HEAR development.**

#### **In terms of future developments:**

- Work to standardise Programme Specification information for inclusion within section 4.2 will continue, perhaps via a common format which restricts the number of characters which may be employed.
- Ongoing decisions will be taken as to how to enhance and extend the entries considered for inclusion in section 6.1, using the criteria developed by the University of Keele<sup>1</sup> as a starting/reference point. It is also felt that interest in this section will grow once different Schools within the University develop an appreciation of what may be included, in terms of information about exhibitions for Art students, for example, though again a degree of standardisation in the interests of equity and common format will be necessary.

---

<sup>1</sup> At the University of Keele the approach has been to develop a number of high level principles, (protocols) to establish the framework that student activity must meet in order to be eligible for inclusion in the HEAR. The protocols developed at Keele are detailed below.

1 The activity is verifiable and is endorsed by the University.

2 The activity to undertake the opportunity is open to all students in principle.

3 Information included is presented factually, not opinionated.

4 The activity/outcome is directly part of the academic programme.

5 The role/activity/outcome is defined by University Regulation (e.g. prizes).

6 The role/activity/position supports a university process, and that is normally determined by election (student) or University nomination (e.g. student representatives).

7 The activity/role supports wider University policy and strategy (e.g. volunteering, outreach, recruitment events).

\*\* (It should be noted that no one protocol is exclusive, although protocols 1-3 should all be met.)

- In the short-to-medium term the University intends to move toward an electronic HEAR rather than a paper-based one.
- Over time there is the potential for the HEAR to be used formatively, most probably in the context of meeting between students and their Personal Tutors.

At the University of Keele the approach has been to develop a number of high level principles, (protocols) to establish the framework that student activity must meet in order to be eligible for inclusion in the HEAR. The protocols developed at Keele are detailed below.

1. The activity is verifiable and is endorsed by the University.
2. The activity to undertake the opportunity is open to all students in principle.
3. Information included is presented factually, not opinionated.
4. The activity/outcome is directly part of the academic programme.
5. The role/activity/outcome is defined by University Regulation (e.g. prizes).
6. The role/activity/position supports a university process, and that is normally determined by election (student) or University nomination (e.g. student representatives).
7. The activity/role supports wider University policy and strategy (e.g. volunteering, outreach, recruitment events).

\*\* (It should be noted that no one protocol is exclusive, although protocols 1-3 should all be met.)