Graduates for the 21st Century: Integrating the Enhancement Themes
Outcomes and achievements
From 2008 to 2011 the Scottish higher education sector - 19 higher education institutions - considered the topic Graduates for the 21st Century (G21C) as part of the programme of Scottish Enhancement Themes. These aim to improve the student learning experience in Scottish higher education by identifying specific areas (Themes) for development. They encourage all staff and students to share good practice and collectively generate ideas and models for innovation in learning, teaching and assessment. They are a key element of the Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland.

Aims of the Graduates for the 21st Century Enhancement Theme

G21C encouraged sector-wide debate and discussion informed by international advisers. Consideration of graduate attributes encompassed established qualities such as critical thinking, but also sought to examine the values that inform the work of higher education institutions: their contribution to culture, citizenship and intellectual growth in Scotland, and their capacity to educate students to have the flexible competencies needed for a knowledge economy. At the same time, there was a focus on how Theme outcomes could be practically and effectively achieved, by sharing information about new initiatives and building on the work of previous Themes. G21C’s work was carried out in three interconnecting strands:

**Institutional:** Every higher education institution formed a team to take forward and coordinate work of the Theme within their institution according to institutional priorities and plans.

**Areas of shared interest:** G21C provided opportunities for institutions to revisit completed Themes to help support their consideration and development of graduate attributes. Cross-institutional activities around completed Themes were supported by a range of events, activities and commissioned reports.

**Sectoral:** The Theme supported institutional activities through a number of sector-level discussions, including the Enhancement Theme conference and the National Enhancement Theme symposium series.

G21C worked across all Scotland’s higher education institutions to consolidate the earlier Themes and to consider two overarching questions:

- What should be the attributes of a graduate from Scottish higher education in the twenty-first century?
- How can the achievement of these attributes best be supported?

G21C Enhancement Theme: outcomes and achievements

G21C outcomes and achievements are of three broad kinds:

- a shared understanding of graduate attributes and qualities
- strategies for enhancement
- an array of resources, tools and activities.
Graduate attributes and qualities

The most prominent outcome of the work of G21C is a robust and well-articulated collaborative grasp of the attributes and qualities needed by twenty-first century graduates. Although each institution’s articulation of graduate attributes is distinctively its own, reflecting its own particular mission, ethos and strategic priorities, a broad set of common threads can be identified, each of which is found in several (but not necessarily every) institution’s formal statements of graduate attributes, summarised below:

Strategies for enhancement

A second major outcome of G21C is a robust toolbox of strategies that Scotland’s institutions have developed, individually and collaboratively, to advance and embed within institutional practice their enhancement of the student experience. They have done this by actively exchanging information about their activities and initiatives, initially in workshops and conference presentations and subsequently distilled through an array of case studies (www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/resources/case-studies/graduates-for-the-21st-century) in which each institution systematically documented examples of its G21C activities from which others might learn. Reviewing these case studies, seven main types of strategy adopted to take forward G21C can be identified, as summarised below:
Resources, tools and activities

A repository of resources and tools has been generated and a wide range of activities taken place through G21C. Outputs focused on the core topic of graduate attributes and qualities, but also refreshed and refocused earlier Enhancement Themes: Research-Teaching Linkages, Employability, the First Year, Assessment, and Responding to Student Needs.

A range of media is now available, including downloadable publications such as briefings, reports and newsletters; and videos and slide presentations from Enhancement Theme workshops, symposia and the Enhancement Theme annual conferences. All are available on the Enhancement Themes website: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk.

Key recommendations

A number of key recommendations emerged from the G21C Theme and will be considered in the work of the new Theme, Developing and Supporting the Curriculum. These include the need to:

- develop ways of integrating, embedding and assessing relevant graduate attributes into a wide range of degree programmes
- develop targeted resources, tools and activities for subject and discipline communities and their subject-specific purposes and practices
- engage students in the process of developing and embedding graduate attributes to make them their own and enhance their ability to articulate them.

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Further information

Full information on G21C is available at: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/completed-enhancement-themes/graduates-for-the-21st-century.


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