

CASE STUDY TO SUPPORT HEAR IMPLEMENTATION

The University of Manchester

The University of Manchester became one of the initial trial institutions in 2008 and has continued as a committed member of both phases of the trial, seeking to produce ‘a full academic record and positive extra-curricular record’.

The institution provided HEARs to 2010 graduates via Digitary (<http://www.digitary.net/>) and plans to do so again for those graduating in 2011. It also has a research project exploring the use of HEAR material formatively¹.

A. Institutional Background.

The University of Manchester is a large research-intensive University in an urban setting. It has four faculties housing 22 academic schools and a multitude of disciplines. The University has a diverse portfolio of subjects including a large amount of professionally accredited subjects, particularly in STEM disciplines. It caters for more than 28,000 undergraduate students from more than 200 countries studying more than 400 different degree programmes. In addition the University has over 7,500 taught postgraduate students and over 3,500 postgraduate research students. The University has a strong commitment to widening participation and has excellent links with local schools and colleges.

B. Purposes in participating within the trial.

The launch of the HEAR trial fitted well with the Universities own review of undergraduate provision and the student experience, which concluded in 2007 and which recommended a stronger conceptualisation of the overall Manchester experience, with a strong emphasis upon the incorporation of graduate attributes into curriculum design and delivery (the ‘Manchester Matrix’, though this also emphasised extra-curricular experiences) and a more extensive summation of student achievements. While this review was a broad one, which may have slowed progress toward implementation, it remains the backbone of the current institutional curriculum reform project. It was strongly supported by the (then) Vice-Chancellor, and highly congruent with HEAR developments, and this level of support has continued with the new Vice-Chancellor. Indeed one recommendation was the development of an enhanced Transcript. It also ensured individual staff were well versed in the issues of the review and strongly placed to lead work on the HEAR. Finally, within the emerging agenda co-and extra-curricular achievement was seen as of increasing importance to student development and graduate employability, and this trend has been very marked during the period of HEAR trial and implementation.

¹ ‘HEARing Student Voices project is funded by the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) to look at how feedback from assessment, advising and formative HEARs (Higher Education Achievement Reports) impact on student choices in the taught and wider curricula. The project will focus on the formative, development aspects of the HEAR initiative and will run alongside the development of graduate HEARs. The project aims to research how: (i) Students make educational choices within differently structured curricula (ii) Employment aspirations influence choice (iii) Student centred strategies can develop the HEAR process (iv) Formative student assessment can influence career management.’ See <http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/hearingstudentvoices/>

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

A version of the Transcript was in place and the University had the facility to make the Diploma Supplement available on request, though such requests were in practice extremely rare. Importantly, prior to the HEAR trial the University had already entered into an arrangement with Digitary to present electronic Transcript and Diploma Supplements online (for 09 graduates), a development which in turn required information to be held centrally and made the HEAR development more straightforward in terms of document production. Information about marks below module level was sometimes held centrally but more often held locally, but this aspect of the HEAR has not been developed within the trial.

In addition a very wide range of data dealing with extra-curricular provision was captured but in databases and spreadsheets held locally.

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 leader of the Institutional Review Working Group which recommended the enhanced exit Transcript was then asked by the Vice-President (Teaching and Learning) to be the Academic Lead on the HEAR project, an initiative supported by the Universities Teaching and Learning Support Office rather than led from Registry. A small Development Group was established. This comprised representatives from Admissions, Careers, Registry Services, IT colleagues and the Student Union, and was led from within the Teaching and Learning Support Office. It met on two or three occasions to develop a broad plan with supporting protocols and outlines for HEAR entries which was submitted to and approved by Senate. This approval led, in turn to:

- Fuller consultation with Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees, and the Students Union;
- Work in the Student Systems office to develop and implement a business plan to support HEAR production;
- The identification of HEAR contacts in schools;
- Moves to upload new data to incorporate information on prizes and awards.

There is currently a Teaching and Learning Group, chaired by the Vice-President (Teaching and Learning) which includes senior academic colleagues as well as the Students Union, and which approves - or not – the inclusion of extra-curricular entries within the HEAR. The operational responsibility for the production process has however been handed on to the Student Services Centre².

A single point of contact for students to carry out most of the administrative tasks they need to when they interact with the University's central administration, such as registration, payment of tuition fees, obtaining all sorts of official documents, collecting loans, grants and other awards, everything to do with examinations, and graduation ceremonies and degree certificates.

E. What key actions did you take toward implementation, and in what sequence? Given the starting points key actions were:

- The development of provision within the Student Record System (Campus Solutions) to include entries (of 3000 characters or less, so short and accessible) as Statements on individual programmes.

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This is not drawn from the Programme Specification, which is seen as written for a different purpose and audience, but will reference such information on the website.

- Similar work to draw in information on Prizes and Awards and extra-curricular achievements.³
- Developing protocols for the inclusion of extra-curricular activities on the HEAR (approved by the University's Senate and available here: <http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/hear/>).
- Moves to publish the HEAR by developing a single data feed from the Student Record Systems (Campus Solutions), which required some 17 days of IT development time, with associated costs related to the verification of entries as appropriate. This model, of purchasing additional time to support such change processes, is one generally employed by the University.

A separate recommendation concerned with the recognition of an additional graduation award for particularly high achieving students had led to the identification of the range of prizes and awards on offer across the University, and these are now available on the HEAR.

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

The **Students Union** have been heavily involved and SU officers highly supportive from the outset. They have been involved both within the initial planning group and via Senate and, given that a wide range of extra-curricular activities are managed by the Students Union, will have a continuingly important role in terms of data provision into the SRS and with associated processes of verification.

An initial focus group held with 'blue chip' **employers** reinforced a sense of satisfaction with academic standards at the University and served to emphasise the importance of a wider set of capabilities, for example in respect of the development of ethical values and corporate social responsibility, as reflected within the Manchester Matrix. The University has encouraged the inclusion of such information within Programme Statements.

Employers were generally positive about the HEAR development, though the meeting also reinforced the importance of working issues through rather than accepting employer reactions at face value. For example the initial position that employers would wish for a full and detailed academic record – including assessment information at sub-module level - was modified in discussion to a position where it was acknowledged that sufficient confidence existed in the University's judgement to render such detailed information unnecessary.

The reaction of **academic staff** to the development has also been broadly positive, with a substantial process of dissemination and consultation at Faculty level Committees (and at School level within some larger Faculties). In addition, an online forum with frequently asked questions and a commentary was provided for feedback from academic staff. The support of Senate for the development has been a crucial positive development, while the recognition that decisions about the detail of the HEAR rested, ultimately, with the Institution in the context of institutional regulation(s) was also important. Finally, having a (respected) academic lead is also seen as having been highly significant in working issues through with academic colleagues.

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

Key lessons in supporting the process of implementation have been:

- The development and approval of clear and straightforward policy frameworks, particularly within a large institution with a culture of teams working relatively independently;
- The high level of congruence with existing institutional thinking, and consequent support of Senior Managers;
Leadership initially from within the academic community, which has been helpful in seeing the initiative in an appropriate light;
- The development of relationships between colleagues from Registry, IT and Teaching and Learning, particularly where teams from these different contexts work relatively independently. The limited nature of these at the outset slowed the process of producing the summative record down. Indeed, if there is institutional clarity about the policy frameworks and principles underlying the HEAR, and the focus is on – or moves to - the production of Records, then the importance of leadership from Registry from the outset may be more compelling;
- The importance of working issues in respect of the HEAR though with employers, rather than taking their initial reactions at face value; there is an educational element to work with employers;
- The recognition that the formative HEAR is much more driven by pedagogic considerations, the 'portlets' developed from the HEARing Student Voices Project offering key aspects of the HEAR dealing with academic achievement and extra-curricular involvement as live feeds. There is emerging evidence from trial work that students value and are engaged with such material, as an aide-memoire and a basis for discussion about 'next steps' with a range of appropriate academics, while it also provides a 'richer picture' staff may draw upon should references be sought, and means students can approach different staff for such references as appropriate.

H. Your Future Plans for HEAR development.

The implementation aspect in respect of the summative/exit HEAR is now seen as mostly complete. Responsibility for ongoing support is being handed over to the Student Services Centre, though with responsibility for the remaining developmental work continuing with the Teaching and Learning Support Office.

Looking to the future, key actions will be to:

- Complete work to develop the summative HEAR, specifically in respect of the capacity to include information on Study Abroad and Dissertation titles (though discussion on where the latter should be included is ongoing). Some further work will also be necessary in respect of extra-curricular provision and awards;
- Make access to the formative HEAR for all students to support the student experience, specifically by embedding access within the new student online environment via 'my achievements' (it is hoped to achieve this from September 2011, dependent on other developments).