CASE STUDY TO SUPPORT HEAR IMPLEMENTATION
The University of Gloucestershire

The University of Gloucestershire became one of the initial trial institutions in 2008 and has continued as a committed member of both phases of the trial.

The institution intends to provide access to 'threshold-level HEARs' – in the form of e-transcripts – for all graduating students this year.

A. Institutional Background.

The University of Gloucestershire was awarded its university title in 2001, but it has a foundation which started with the Cheltenham Training College in 1847. The University has approximately 7,500 FTE students and from the 2011-12 academic year the students will be based at three campuses: two in Cheltenham and one in Gloucester. For many years the institution has had a centralised student record system (currently SITS).

B. Purposes in participating within the trial.

A key element within the agreement to participate was the strong support of the (then) Vice Chancellor. However this needs to be seen alongside a growing realisation of the potential of the HEAR to work for the University, given that the initiative both chimed with the strategic agenda of the institution and provided a context within which other initiatives could be located and progressed. These included the Employable Gloucestershire Graduate scheme (EGGS, at: http://resources.glos.ac.uk/tli/eggs/index.cfm), and a continuing desire to work closely on developments with the student body via the Students' Union. In overall terms, the HEAR initiative provided an opportunity to link a range of initiatives together not least by bringing colleagues from different parts of the institution together. This was reinforced by the iterative development process through which the trial was conducted.

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 provided a paper transcript for graduates, and held data relating to student achievement centrally within SITS, which ensured that, from the outset, there were no worries about the need to collate data and that it was easy to deal with technical aspects as these arose.

Building upon this, the mapping to the requirements of the Diploma Supplement had already been done and the HEAR work highlighted how close the institution was to meeting the requirements both for the DS and the HEAR itself. The institution plans to continue issuing paper transcripts to students whilst the development of the HEAR e-transcript continues. Students will therefore receive a paper transcript, but will also have access to an e-transcript. When the HEAR e-transcript has been finalised it is anticipated that the institution will stop issuing paper-based transcripts.

In addition, some initial thinking had been undertaken in respect of the EGG scheme and preliminary conversations held with Gradintel about their profiling tool and issues related to verification. Using a 'shell' framework developed by the University, some experiential learning modules had already been 10 set up to enable students to gain additional credits, and had been tried out with, and positively received by, Students' Union officers. This initiative has evolved into the EGG scheme.

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 HEAR initiative required, and facilitated, productive conversations with a range of colleagues including IT services and Registry (where there had previously been links but no reason to get together and collaborate). The participation of Students' Union officers was key; it was good for them to see the whole picture as this developed.

Within the University the HEAR work was located within the remit of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee, which reported directly to Academic Board. A HEAR Sub-Group was established with representation from Registry, IT services, Teaching and Learning, Academic Frameworks, Careers and the Students' Union. This was essentially a working committee, which initially met frequently to initiate actions which were undertaken between meetings. Whilst it reported into the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee, there was some additional reporting directly to the Vice-Chancellor.

As the initiative has become more established, meetings to review progress and plan future actions tend to be between particular individuals rather than the complete Working Group.

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

A key starting point was the fact that all academic data, including individual component marks and details in respect of retakes, is held centrally.

An initial decision was taken not to produce a paper version of the HEAR, but to plan for a wholly electronic version from the outset, the rationale being that a move from a paper Transcript to the HEAR would not be a useful step in terms of taking practice forward. It was also recognised that a paper format may raise particular issues, for example in respect of the presentation of detailed information on assessment, in order to maintain the document within the required number of pages. This held out the prospect of important cost savings in the Registry, and also emphasised the significance of the transition to a new graduate document.

In addition, conversations with staff at Gradintel which highlighted the possibility of utilising e-transcript software provided a link to the HEAR work. The closeness of Gradintel to SITS work was seen as a further benefit here, given that SITS itself was not then seen as a viable vehicle for presenting HEAR information in a secure electronic document format.

Participation in particular development meetings with fellow HEAR triallists has also been influential in enabling the presentation and testing of emerging ideas, and receiving feedback on and consequently tweaking institutional work. Of particular value here was the opportunity to receive feedback in respect of issues of verification in respect of the EGG scheme, and in clarifying distinctions between achievement and activity within such contexts, the latter being most appropriately considered in other contexts, such as Personal Development Planning or CV construction. Such meetings have provided 11 a good 'testing ground' for ideas, and benefited from institutional representation from a broad mix of constituencies which has enabled different perspectives to be considered.

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

The **Students' Union** was an early participant in the HEAR work, not least through their participation in the experiential learning module (see C above). The original sabbatical officers were highly positive about this but

less so about the HEAR, for which they had difficulty in seeing any clear role – and point. In retrospect this may have also reflected the early stage of the development process, where much was still to be clarified. Subsequent SU officers have been highly positive about the work, though wider student reaction is awaited pending further work with Gradintel which will allow all students access to their HEAR via the Student Portal. Where HEAR has been introduced into workshops on the EGG scheme those students have been very positive about it, considering that the intention to provide a richer record of student achievement endorsed by the University has the potential to give them a competitive advantage within the employment market.

Two presentations to **employers** were made early in the life of the scheme and elicited the following feedback, which is summarised (in the form presented to the Association of Graduate Recruiters Annual Conference) below:
- Keep it simple;
- Fairly happy with traditional classification;
- Interested in real-world, co-curricular, non-formal learning as well as academic learning;
- Not greatly interested in drilling down into details of marks;
- In favour of evaluation and articulation of achievement rather than bare lists of activities;
- Want graduates who show that they can think and adapt, with transferable skills;
- Want graduates who can articulate how they did it and why their achievement matters.

The more recent focus has been upon emphasising the development of the EGG scheme.

With regard to **academic** (and many **administrative**) colleagues the emphasis has been on emphasising the HEAR as a vehicle for supporting student development which will have no impact upon workloads but will rather provide a resource for existing practice, in particular stressing formative use within tutorial group meetings. There have not been any difficulties with academic colleagues when the rationale for the HEAR has been presented; furthermore, participation within a national Project – as opposed to an institutional one – has served to support the idea that the HEAR initiative is a natural 'next step' for existing provision across the sector.

The only barriers to progress have been technical ones, in particular the impact of institutional firewalls in respect of the implementation of Gradintel software, which have on occasion taken time to clarify and resolve.

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

Key points in supporting the process of implementation have been:
- The emphasis from the outset on the development of an electronic HEAR, coupled with centrally-held data. This has ensured that the initiative has not been associated with additional work for many colleagues, but rather with replacement activity for some;
- Institutional Management 'buy-in' from the outset has meant that there has been no need to 'sell' the idea to senior colleagues;
- The value of the initiative in bringing a range of initiatives within the institution together;
- Related to this, the importance of a team approach to implementation which has further facilitated the development of a shared set of understandings through an iterative process of development;

- The opportunity for testing and refining ideas through this iterative process, in respect of focusing work on verification for the EGG scheme for example, and the ways in which this helped to clarify the boundaries for inclusion of material within an institutional document.

H. Your Future Plans for HEAR development.
Looking to the future, key actions will be to:
- Develop access for all students to their HEAR document via the student portal, which will also allow all students to share this with chosen employers or other third parties;
- Complete work on formatting the HEAR, and on the development of material in respect of programme specifications which can be incorporated. While such information is currently not held within SITS, it is envisaged that the current process of academic review will facilitate the revision and development of text for this explicit purpose;
- Develop the explicitly formative use of the HEAR document, specifically via tutor group discussion.