CASE STUDY TO SUPPORT HEAR IMPLEMENTATION
The University of St Andrews

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

All undergraduate honours degree graduates were issued with five copies of their HEARs in paper format derived from the Student Record System (SITS) in June 2010, and a similar process will be adopted this year. In November 2010 all Taught Postgraduate students were also issued with HEARs.

A. Institutional Background.
St Andrews is the third oldest university in the UK with four Faculties (Arts, Science, Medicine and Divinity), 18 Schools, 7,700 students, of which 6,000 are at undergraduate level, offering four and five year degree programmes at undergraduate level. These programmes offer a wide range of choice to students with regard to available modules especially in the Arts Faculty.

B. Purposes in participating within the trial.
The opportunity to engage in the HEAR pilot fitted well with strategic thinking within the institution, specifically in respect of the commitment of the (then) Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) to engage students more fully with the learning process on a formative basis, and to improve information provided in respect of academic achievement. The University already had online record cards accessible to students and academic staff that used these for academic advising and to support student engagement from the beginning of their programme - 'as part of a formative process'. In turn, this also fitted with an awareness of employer interest in understanding more clearly not only the nature of student academic achievement but also the wider range of activities in which they had engaged. Finally, the 600th anniversary of the institution has provided a particular context which can be highlighted directly in issuing the documents to students.

Given these interests, the HEAR trial offered an opportunity through which to focus the institutional agenda. It provided a framework with attention to quality issues and processes at national level which offered good visibility to institutional participants – e.g. communicating with employers at national level - whilst not negating institutional identity. The HEAR provided 'visibility, communication, and the opportunity to be recognised as being at the forefront of change'.

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 paper transcripts with information in terms of module listings, credits and module marks on individual module level as well as academic prizes and an overall degree classification. Therefore it already had established centralised mechanisms for collecting and storing data related to information published on the transcripts. The University was also collecting programme specifications independently of the HEAR pilot.

The University stored information in respect of ECTS at module level and offered a GPA score (though not in the US sense) which it did not routinely publish. It therefore had a framework in respect of academic achievement which had the potential to be extended fairly easily to non-academic achievements. In addition, the Diploma Supplement which had previously been made available to students on request could be offered to all by implementing the HEAR.

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

As a small institution, St Andrews was already centralised in ways of working with results and reporting, and this has helped the process of implementation. Specifically, the size of the institution and already established procedures allowed work on the HEAR to be led through informal discussion between the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Registry, and for this to feed into existing Committee structures and internal decision-making processes. This was specifically achieved via a working group which prepared documents and business for the institutional Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee that – in turn - considers and approves policy changes. Not much change requiring this level of approval was necessary to implement the HEAR.

IT played a critical role in the delivery of the outputs themselves. This effort and required expertise of the IT resource should not be underestimated. As the production of the documents has to work in a relatively short time scale between results reporting and graduation, the designs and solutions have had to be able to sustain and deliver under this pressure. IT resource was required for creating the report for printing the HEARs and as part of that determining the data structures and flows to enable printing. In overall terms, however, actual FTE of this resource was small and required only periodically.

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

Given the starting points key actions were:

- The reformatting of academic information relevant to the Programme Specifications, specifically the transformation of textual information into smaller chunks of data held in such a way that this could be pulled into the relevant sections of the HEAR. This is a complex and demanding piece of work which has been undertaken by Registry;
- The back-population of information related to programmes especially honours level programme requirements;
- Data quality checks – significant effort which had to be scalable after results reporting;
- Output quality checks – ensuring that the output stayed as designed after the merge of data and template. As programme data varies in length between degrees there were times when the output did not paginate correctly or the printed transcript did not look acceptable;
- Iterative development – The refinement of the output is a natural by-product of iterative curriculum review as more precise language has replaced bland phraseology and less-well defined structures have been disambiguated within the database (e.g., definitions of intended award and sub-honours vs. honours pathway requirements, core vs. optional modules, etc.). There is also the need to maintain the quality of the output design as further fields such as student placement details have come on stream;
- The production of PDF documents which were stored and are audited with regard to changes. This provides a log of what was issued and when regardless of whether there are future and further data changes in the Student Records System. This is important as the data sources pulled together on the HEARs do not have the same life-cycles.

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

Students have been openly supportive of the project including on relevant University committees and at meetings where decisions were being taken.

With regard to employers, we are still testing the general market demand for electronic, digitally signed versions of transcripts; however, we saw a decrease in requests for clarification of printed transcripts, our mark schemes and programme details. We have not had a single DS request since the HEARs replaced our traditional transcripts.

Academic staff have been positive or at worst indifferent. They took a bit of time to be reassured in respect of the Additional Achievements section, but we brought in new policy to regulate the framework and ensure that there is no undue work created around ambiguity or lack of clarity.

Administrative staff have also been supportive. The additional bonus of issuing five free HEARs at graduation reduced the amount of work straight after graduation which has often been consumed in the issuing of transcripts. There is the added savings bonus of a reduction in our postage costs.

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 process of bringing together programme and student information may not be straightforward for older universities due to less prescribed programme structures;
- Working with the academic community to keep all elements of programme information up-to-date is very time consuming;
- Do not underestimate the data quality issues especially in relation to changes in programme structure and honours requirements over the duration of a student's life cycle;
- Ensuring that there is policy agreement over the nature of what may be included in section 6.0 Additional Achievements;
- Test the output production from the scalability point of view before the documents are produced in earnest for a graduating cohort;
- Ensure that there are many more hands on deck to carry out checks and amendments to data the first time you run HEARs;
- We now outsource the printing of the HEARs to save effort and cost; however, we have retained the ability to issue individual HEARs if there are problems or changes.

H. Your Future Plans for HEAR development.

Looking to the future, key actions will be to:

- Include information on student placements including study abroad and industrial placements;
- Enrich section 6.0 Additional Achievements to focus more fully on Taught Postgraduate students;
- Create an electronic Enhanced Student Record Card which would transform the summative printed HEAR distributed at graduation into a dynamic "of the moment" formative HEAR available to staff and students;
- Develop the ability to have an electronic HEAR, digitally signed and certified.

NB The new Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) will be extending her role to take on the Student Experience alongside her current responsibility for Learning and Teaching. This may further aid HEAR development.