Resilient Learning Communities

Institutional Plan for: University of Aberdeen

This document is intended to be a cumulative plan for your institution, which you will add to year on year as the Theme progresses. At the end of the Theme, this document will show how plans may have developed and changed over time. The plan for each year should be around three to four sides of A4.

Italicised text in this document can be removed as it is advisory.

Context

Provide any statements that might be helpful in explaining your institution's context and approach and how this plan supports the achievement of institutional priorities. In subsequent years, any context statement could draw on salient points from the previous year's learning/outcomes and reflect any changes in the strategic direction of your institution.

Institutional team

Please specify for each member whether staff or student and for staff, their role title. Where the Theme Leaders' Group (TLG) staff or student nominee is unable to attend meetings, an alternate can attend on their behalf. This need not be named individuals, which may help support Theme involvement across a range of staff and students.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Institutional lead	Dr Steve Tucker	Dr Steve Tucker	Dr Steve Tucker
TLG staff representative	Dr Steve Tucker	Dr Steve Tucker	Dr Steve Tucker
TLG student representative	Ondrej Kucerak	Ondrej Kucerak	Ondrej Kucerak
Dean for Entrepreneurship and Employability	Dr John Barrow	Dr John Barrow	Dr John Barrow
Dean for Student Support	Prof Abbe Brown	Prof Abbe Brown	Prof Abbe Brown

Head of Careers and Employability	Tracey Inness	Tracey Inness	Tracey Inness
Dean for Educational Innovation	Dr Kirsty Kiezebrink	Dr Kirsty Kiezebrink	Dr Kirsty Kiezebrink
Manager, Graduate School	Dr Lucy Leiper	Dr Lucy Leiper	Dr Lucy Leiper
Access and Articulation Manager, Student Recruitment	Dr Sally Middleton	Dr Sally Middleton	Dr Sally Middleton
Dean of Postgraduate Research	Prof Graeme Nixon	Prof Graeme Nixon	Prof Graeme Nixon
Educational and Employability Advisor, CAD	Dr Joy Perkins	Dr Joy Perkins	Dr Joy Perkins
Manager, Student Engagement	Karen Scaife	Karen Scaife	Karen Scaife
Dean of Quality Enhancement and Assurance	Prof Kath Shennan	Prof Kath Shennan	Prof Kath Shennan
Centre Manager, Centre for Academic Development	Patricia Spence	Patricia Spence	Patricia Spence
UG student representative	Janet Gauthier	Janet Gauthier	Janet Gauthier
PGT student representative	Tbc	Tbc	Tbc
PGR student representative	Tbc	Tbc	Tbc

Planned activity: Year 1

Overall outcomes/activity
What are your key priorities?
What outcomes do you want to achieve?
What activities will you deliver?
What do you anticipate will be the benefits at sector and institutional levels?
Key priorities and activities over the course of the three-year Enhancement Theme

This is a list of institutional priorities, activities and collaborative intentions which will develop throughout the Enhancement Theme. Note these are all centred around building and utilising different learning communities to enhance institutional practice and importantly involve staff and students working in partnership.

1. *Create a dynamic institutional Enhancement Theme Community of Practice*

    a. Develop an Institution-wide group involving staff and student stakeholders from academic units (including staff representatives from every School) and professional services who present, discuss and develop practice in areas relating to the Enhancement Theme. This collaborative approach will engage staff and students across all Schools enabling their involvement with developing Enhancement Theme outputs.
    b. Utilise the Community of Practice to identify collaborative opportunities, direct support, target development and disseminate activities that build resilient learning communities which contribute to an enhanced student learning experience.
    c. Disseminate outputs (e.g. good practice toolkits and guidance) across the University for wider implementation and to encourage other colleagues to participate in Enhancement Theme related work.
    d. Consult, engage and collaborate with the wider sector to share our activities and to seek input from external sources.

2. *Incorporate a collaborative learning approach that will enhance the student learning experience and contribute to building a more resilient learning community.*

    a. Evaluate the impact of the implementation of this framework in order to facilitate continuous quality improvement across all modes of delivery (on campus/online and blended). This will be carried out through annual survey of students using the validated community of enquiry survey tool.
    b. Explore how this framework address the learning needs of specific subgroups of student including but not limited to BAME, widening access, mature returning students, student with disabilities, international students as well as any discipline specific differences.

3. *Continue to explore aspects of learning to learn / learning to teach during a pandemic considering how these changes will transform learning communities post-Covid-19*

    a. Continue to build on the blended learning, teaching and assessment developments that are in place as part of our response to the pandemic. Utilise the outcomes of our blended learning evaluation to identify and share good practices. The aim will be to make sustained and embedded change for the longer-term, post Covid-19.
    b. Consider and develop ways of supporting enhancement and development of resilient learning communities e.g. focus on the development of peer support, in partnership with AUSA to further develop existing approaches (e.g. Students 4 Students, other buddy systems).
    c. Evaluate the initiatives that have been implemented and how they represent positive changes in our approaches and determine how these will form part of our approach to developing resilient learning communities moving forward.

4. *Create a toolbox of resources supporting the development of resilient learning communities (the toolbox will be a collection of case studies, good practice and resources related resilient learning communities presented on the University website)*

a. Identify and disseminate relevant work being undertaken by colleagues across the University through various channels (e.g. the Enhancement Theme Community of Practice (see section 1 above), CAD, AUSA, The Annual Academic Development Symposium, scrutiny of LTEP funding applications).

b. Support development of existing and new projects using Learning and Teaching Enhancement Project (LTEP) money and showcase these through various internal and external communication channels (see below).

c. Include resources and approaches developed through the University's Decolonising the Curriculum Steering Group, as part of the toolbox of resources.

d. Collect and present bitesize summaries on the University of Aberdeen website for colleagues to access and adapt to their needs as a *toolbox of resources*.

5. *Engage with the following sector-wide collaborative clusters*

   a. Micro-credentials
   b. Student mental wellbeing (focus on BAME and LGBTQ+ student communities)
   c. Personalised approaches to learning and community
   d. Decolonising the curriculum

6. *Awareness raising activity*

   a. Run Enhancement Theme-related events e.g. Annual Academic Development Symposium, Webinar/Q and A sessions.

   b. Promote the Theme broadly across the Institution and encourage involvement (see section 1) and offer financial support (LTEP funding) by putting in place activities and events that will enable students and staff to share practice, increase networks, and identify actions for their own practice e.g. The Annual Academic Development Symposium, Webinar / Q and A presentations, Social media campaigns (see below).

   c. Promote the creation of the Toolbox as an output from the Theme internally and externally.

Anticipated benefits at institutional and sector-wide levels

By the end of the Enhancement Theme:

Local level:
- A collaborative and inclusive learning will be fully incorporated within all teaching and learning activities creating resilience across our communities and enhancing the student experience.
- Staff and students will be more aware of examples of practices that help create resilience amongst the communities involved in learning and teaching e.g. peer support, collaboration, student partnerships.
- An education-focused Community of Practice will have been established that will have developed and disseminated approaches and activities that will enable staff and students to engage in resilient learning communities.
- A toolbox of resources for creating resilient learning communities will be available.

Sector-wide:
- External engagement will extend the impact of the good practice developed at the University of Aberdeen to the broader sector.

• The University of Aberdeen will be embedded within cross-sector work associated with Collaborative Clusters.

Year 1 outcomes/activity

What are your key priorities?

What outcomes do you want to achieve?

What activities will you deliver?

What do you anticipate will be the benefits at sector and institutional levels?

The work already established within the areas identified in the overall plan above is indicated below, again with emphasis on these learning communities being developed and used to benefit the broader institution and sector.

1. *Create a dynamic institutional Enhancement Theme Community of Practice*

   a. This group is being developed from the Retention Task Force (a previous Institutional committee concerned with sharing practice and developing initiatives relating to student engagement and retention). The existing group has representation from all academic Schools and student representation from AUSA.
   b. The membership of this Task Force is being invited to form this group initially, which will provide a means of identifying and sharing practice, as well as identifying potential cross-sectional collaboration.
   c. The members of this group will also contribute to the Enhancement Theme Steering Group on occasion, which has further student input from UG, PGT and PGR representatives.

2. *Incorporate a collaborative learning approach that will enhance the student learning experience and contribute to building a more resilient learning community*

   a. The community of inquiry (CoI) model has been implemented as our underpinning pedagogical framework for our move to blended learning with the premise that learning occurs through the interactions of social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence.
   b. To support this, the university produced a set of principles and guidance for blended learning which were developed based on the CoI framework (https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/blended-learning.php).
   c. These continue to be developed, disseminated and implemented.

3. *Continue to explore aspects of learning to learn / learning to teach during a pandemic considering how these changes will transform learning communities post-Covid-19*

   a. Several aspects of good practice have been identified that have supported students and staff to adapt to the pandemic e.g. initiatives by CAD and AUSA
   b. There has been a huge body of work undertaken to implement blended learning at an Institutional level which has focussed on principles and guidance for blended learning, coherent approaches to collaboration, toolkits for application of blended learning, training requirements etc. all of which focus on learning communities and developing resilience and flexibility within them (see section 2 above).
   c. The above aspects are being evaluated currently, with a view to look beyond the pandemic to enhance the student experience into the future.

d. Details of these activities is being gathered to showcase the effectiveness of the work and are likely to feed directly into section 4 below

4. *Create a toolbox of practice and resources supporting the development of resilient learning communities*

    a. Some of the work identified in sections 2 and 3 above is likely to begin formulating the collection of resources and initiatives.
    b. The LTEP funding call is scheduled for early 2021 to support and encourage development of projects relevant to the Enhancement Theme.
    c. Scrutiny of applications for LTEP funding, and the work presented at the Annual Academic Development Symposium, will be used to identify other relevant work (both ongoing and completed)

5. *Engage with the following sector-wide collaborative clusters*

    a. The University has already joined the Micro-credentials Collaborative Cluster (led by Anne Tierney from Heriot-Watt University)
    b. The Enhancement Theme Steering Group will consider involvement with the other emerging Collaborative Clusters

6. *Awareness raising activity*

    a. The Annual Academic Development Symposium (29th April 2021) entitled "Best of Blends: Building Resilient Learning Communities During Our University's Covid-19 Response" is in the advanced stages of planning
    b. The event will host plenary speakers (internal and external) as well as panel sessions based around key aspects of the Enhancement Theme
    c. This will promote awareness of the Enhancement Theme and the use of LTEP funding for developing Enhancement Theme work within the Institution.

Dissemination of work

How will you promote and communicate your work internally and externally?

In order to promote and disseminate Enhancement Theme work fully, the communication plan intends to utilise internal and external routes.

Communication channels for internal dissemination are:

- Use of existing networks e.g. existing networks (Centre for Academic Development, Pedagogical Inquiry Network, Learning & Teaching Network)
- Establishing the Enhancement Theme Community of Practice group
- Use of existing committees (e.g. Quality Assurance Committee, University Committee for Teaching and Learning (UCTL)
- Use weekly ezine sent to all staff by the Communications Team
- Use of social media channels e.g. University Facebook and Twitter
- Social media campaigns specifically targeting students early in each semester to update and engage them with the Enhancement Theme
- Regular updating and curation of internal Enhancement Theme webpages
- Live webinar "update" sessions e.g.30-60 min Q and A sessions
- The Annual Academic Development Symposium, which will focus on work related to the Enhancement Theme (see below)

- Dissemination to the student body via our student representatives on the Enhancement Theme Steering Group and via targeted social media campaigns (see Dissemination section)
- Exploring development of "buddy" systems / peer-assisted learning initiatives in the next AY

Communication channels for external dissemination are:

- Advertising and supporting staff to attend / present at Enhancement Theme events
- Encouragement and support to attend / present at other events e.g. Advance HE, other learned societies
- Inviting other institutions / professional bodies (e.g. QAA) to attend our Annual Academic Development Symposium

Collaborative cluster work

What is your intended involvement in formal collaborative cluster work? Do you intend leading a cluster? Who might be involved in cluster activity?

(Formal bids for collaborative cluster work will be managed separately.)

We are already involved in the collaborative cluster activity centred on Micro-Credentials (led by Heriot-Watt University)
We are also interested in getting involved in other areas of collaborative cluster work e.g.

- Student mental wellbeing (focus on BAME and LGBTQ+ student communities)
- Personalised approaches to learning and community
- Decolonising the curriculum

Further discussion amongst the steering group is likely to further our involvement and contribution to these and other areas of collaborative cluster work

Supporting staff and student engagement

How will you support your community to deliver on planned activities?

Building on the success of the Student Partnership Agreement (SPA), students will be fully integrated into the community developing work around the Enhancement Theme. Focusing on "students as partners" in this way will create an inclusive, collaborative and immersive learning community for staff and students alike. The Vice President for Education at the Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) will co-lead the theme and UG, PGT and PGR representatives will form part of the steering group membership alongside student involvement in the Enhancement Theme Community of Practice.

The staff and students that make up the University community will be supported by:

- Provision of Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme (LTEP) funding for projects that align with the enhancement theme
- Creating the Enhancement Theme Community of Practice group
- Providing updates in the form of webinars/Q and A sessions

Evaluation

How will you monitor progress and impact of the enhancement activities?

- Progress will be monitored according to the requirements and timelines of the QAA
- The Enhancement Theme Steering Group will meet regularly to review and monitor the progress of enhancement theme activities
- The Community of Practice group will feed into the Enhancement Theme Steering Group as a vehicle for sharing updates and progress on ongoing (or new) enhancement theme areas of activity
- The Annual Academic Development Symposium presents an excellent means of measuring progress and outputs from Enhancement Theme activity
- Updates will be provided through institutional committee structures, primarily the Quality Assurance Committee and the University Committee on Teaching and Learning

Plan author:	Dr Steve Tucker
Date:	08/12/2020

Return to: mailto:ARCadmin@qaa.ac.uk

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Financial Annex Year 1

Please provide information on how the funding given through the Enhancement Theme institutional contract will be used to support work within the HEI in relation to the Theme. This should be high level, not detailed.

At the time of the end-of-year report, you will be asked to comment on expenditure against financial plan information.

Please note that this information remains confidential and will not be made available on the web.

Activity	Estimated cost
University's Annual Academic Development Symposium (April 2021) – fees for virtual conference platform	£1500
Learning & Teaching Enhancement Programme funds	£4000
Contingency in case travel is possible	£500
Total	**£6000**

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