Resilient Learning Communities

Institutional Plan for: University of Glasgow

Context

The University of Glasgow has had a sustained focus on student transitions in recent years, and a long-standing focus on supporting different student groups with particular support needs such as MD20/40 students, students articulating via pathway providers, and mature students. In the previous enhancement theme we focused our efforts on strengthening our data analytics and reporting in order to identify where there are differential attainment outcomes for student populations and we extended the analysis to include students with protected characteristics. We have also piloted a range of interventions to support students. These include peer mentoring, wellbeing officers, creation of pre-arrival support materials and we believe we are the only UK university that requires all new students to undertake a writing diagnostic (Academic Writing Skills Programme) that identifies at an early stage, opportunities to strengthen students' writing skills through self-directed learning, online group sessions and one-to-one sessions depending on any issues identified.

Building on this work, our institutional plan seeks to review our various peer-led activities (many of which are in early stages or pilot form) and to identify what range of provision would best support students studying online and on-campus, and where we can support the creation of student communities and thus improve a sense of belonging and wellbeing for students.

In addition, and in recognition of the need to augment support for numeracy and analytical skills, we would like to explore the potential to mirror our writing skills provision with support for numeracy skills development. The need for such provision both reflects feedback from students who express the need for support, and our internal data analysis undertaken in the last 2-3 years, that shows mathematical attainment in school to be a positive determinant of success in students irrespective of the academic discipline of their programme of study. (This latter point will also be reviewed in other contexts within the University in order to inform our strategic approach to enhancing the student experience.) We are currently piloting an approach to numeracy support, and have an existing service, but we would like to explore the merits of further expansion and the benefit for all students of some kind of diagnostic assessment on arrival as with AWSP. All these developments work together to support student success, to strengthen students' skills and to connect students with their peers and with the services that can best support them thereby improving their overall resilience.

Institutional team

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Institutional lead	Professor Moira Fischbacher-Smith (Vice Principal, Learning & Teaching)		
TLG staff representative	Ms Helen Butcher (Senate Office)		
TLG student representative	Liam Brady (President, Student Representatives Council)		
Year 1 Project Team	Dr Andrew Struan (Writing and Study Skills Co-ordinator, Learning Enhancement & Academic Development Service) – *to lead Year 1 PT Working Group*		

Planned activity: Year 1

Overall outcomes/activity
Our key priorities are: (1) to build resilience through increased commitment to **peer support** in a range of forms; to build a stronger sense of community among student cohorts (including PGR) students; and to enhance skills development; and (2) to develop a coherent approach to **support for numeracy and data analytics** that supports students' development at various skills levels and draws on relevant areas of academic expertise. Outcomes: • insight into the potential impact of more extensive peer support as a means of connecting and building community amongst students, with a clarity on the benefit for commuting students, SIMD20/40 students, and PGR students in particular although not exclusively. Calibration of relative merits of on-campus and online provision will be part of this work. • proposal for, and then pilot of, Peer Assisted Learning and/or Study Support (digital and/or on-campus depending on evaluation).

- identification of skills gaps and skills enhancement opportunities in relation to numeracy and data analytics across the student population and at a range of levels.
- proposals for and initial investment in a new approach to supporting student skills acquisition and development in the area of numeracy and data analytics, with credit-bearing provision in preparation where evaluation supports this.

Activities:

- We have two evaluations within this 3-year work, and we intend to undertake those by (a) creating dedicated teams with professional services and academic expertise in the relevant area of focus; and (b) using the QAA Enhancement Theme money to employ students as partners in the projects to shape, help undertake and interpret the evaluation outcomes.
- We also have two pilot pieces of work in mind: one in relation to developing more peer support and the other in developing support and courses for students in relation to numeracy and analysis. There is likely to be a peer element to this too.

Year 1 outcomes/activity

The priority for year 1 is to undertake an evaluation of the potential for more peer-enabled activity that strengthens student community and builds skills. We have a number of initiatives already from some peer assisted study support to peer mentoring and peer support for student wellbeing. We would like to review our existing initiatives, ascertain which could work well online, and develop a proposal for testing/piloting in year 2 that would extend our peer-enabled activities more extensively.

Evaluation Plan: Phases
A cross-institution working group, supported by student interns, will conduct an evaluation of peer-enabled activity across the University of Glasgow. This evaluation will consist of four distinct phases:
- **Phase 1: Scoping Exercise Within the University**
  - o The working group will scope the variety and nature of peer-enabled activity across the University of Glasgow. An array of peer-enabled activities, ranging from formalised Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) through Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) to Peer Wellbeing Support, currently exists in pockets and specific subject areas/Schools.
  - o The scoping exercise will allow the working group to establish the breadth, depth and scope of peer-enabled activities currently in practice across the University.
- **Phase 2: Examination of Literature and Best Practice Across the Sector**
  - o The working group will conduct a literature review and analysis of best practice from across the Higher Education sector, with regards to peer-enabled activity. Drawing on previous work undertaken for the University's Learning and Teaching Committee (Peer Assisted Study Session (PASS) Report, LTC/2018/17), the sector review will make contact with leading practitioners in the wider sector of the various forms of peer-enabled activity.
- **Phase 3: Student and Staff Interviews and Focus Groups**
  - o The working group will conduct a series of student and staff interviews and focus groups. These interviews and focus groups will draw on two main cohorts: those currently actively involved in a peer-enabled activity and those not currently involved in any peer-enabled activity, but interested in

the possibility. The interviews and focus groups will be used to determine pedagogical and practical implications currently being faced by peer-enabled activity within the University, as well as looking at potential barriers to engagement, both from staff and students point of view.
- o Drawing from the current experience and after careful consideration of the potential barriers to engagement, the working group will here create a coherent snapshot of views towards peer-enabled activity across the staff and student bodies at the University. This would take into account potentially divergent views between student and staff bodies; participants would be informed that the outcomes of the evaluation are in no way binding.
- **Phase 4: Report Writing**
  - o The working group will compile a report based on phases 1-3 above. Joining together evaluation of current practice within the University of Glasgow, best practice across the sector, and feedback from students/staff, the report will present a full evaluation of peer-enabled activity and how it might be best deployed.
  - o The report will provide details of established best practice across the sector, founded on a solid, sector-wide evidentiary based, as well as more specific recommendations.

Evaluation Plan: Timeframe
The working group will establish a realistic timeframe, using clearly defined milestones and project success/danger markers. A rough timetable is detailed below:

- **Phase 1:** January-February 2021
  - o **Key activity 1:** Hiring of student interns
  - o **Key activity 2:** Submission of ethics application to relevant College Ethics Board
  - o **Key activity 3:** Scoping exercise across institution
- **Phase 2:** January-April 2021
  - o **Key activity 1:** Extensive literature review
  - o **Key activity 2:** Contact with leading providers of best practice in peer-enabled activity
  - o **Key activity 3:** Creation of pedagogical and practical implementations of peer-enabled activity
- **Phase 3:** March-May 2021
  - o **Key activity 1:** Recruitment of interview/focus group members (both students and staff)
  - o **Key activity 2:** Conducting interviews and focus groups at times most suitable to the student and staff body (i.e. towards end of semester; outwith examination period; before examination boards, etc.)
- **Phase 4:** May-June 2021
  - o **Key activity 1:** Completion of report including literature review, review of pedagogical and practical implementation challenges/potentials, and localised recommendations.
  - o **Key activity 2:** Submission of report to relevant bodies and committees.

Evaluation Plan: Outcomes
The evaluation will provide several concrete outcomes:
- A user-friendly report on the practicalities of student-enabled activity across the Higher Education sector
- A range of information on best/good practice in deploying successful student-enabled activity

- A user 'kit' of recommendations for easy adoption within the Schools and Colleges of student-enabled activity
- A comprehensive evaluation of local and sector-wide practice of student-enabled activity
- A plan of action for deployment of student-enabled activity within the institution based on a solid evidentiary base of institution-specific and sector-wide considerations
- A set of recommendations for implementation of student-enabled activity.

Drawing on the principles of the previous theme – using evidence to enhance the student experience, we anticipate that others can learn from our review both in terms of the approach to the review and in terms of the insights it provides. We may also identify areas of future collaboration or sharing of resources and approaches.

Dissemination of work

We intend to promote the work through our main working groups and committees as well as through the SRC's communication channels.

Collaborative cluster work

We would like to contribute to the following collaborative cluster activities:
- Micro-credentials (led by Heriot-Watt University – contact Anne Tierney (A.Tierney@hw.ac.uk)
- Decolonising the curriculum (led by the University of Stirling – contact Catriona Cunningham (Catriona.cunningham@stir.ac.uk)
- Postgraduate taught students (led by the University of Edinburgh – contact Donna Murray (donna.murray@ed.ac.uk)

Although these themes are not highlighted in our response above, we are already committed to developing our micro-credentials and have similarly made a commitment to decolonising the curriculum so will be pursuing this work in addition to the enhancement theme work outlined here. We are also keen to collaborate on improving the experience for taught postgraduate students.

Supporting staff and student engagement

We have an institutional team of students and staff who are committed to the work we outline here. To take the individual elements of the work forward, we will empower project teams who will conduct the work on behalf of the institutional team. Those project teams can access members of the institutional team whenever they need and will report into the institutional team and Learning & Teaching Committee in tandem so that the enhancement themes work has visibility and legitimacy.

Evaluation
We will create a regular reporting cycle for the projects, and this will be agreed with and managed by Helen Butcher in the Senate Office. Reports into the University's Learning and Teaching Committee and into the Institutional Team will enable us to review progress and help maximise the impact of the activities.

Plan author:	Professor Moira Fischbacher-Smith, and Helen Butcher
Date:	14 December 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.

Item	Cost
Project interns: 500 hours @ £11.55 per hour (including on-costs)	£5,775
Total	**£5,775**

Author:	Helen Butcher
Date:	14 December 2020

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