Resilient Learning Communities

Institutional Plan for: University of Stirling

Context

The Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on Higher Education sets this plan, indeed the whole sector, in an unprecedented context. There continue to be significant challenges for all the communities of the University. Whilst recognising these challenges, this plan aims to identify ongoing and potential opportunities for the enhancement of Learning & Teaching at Stirling, specifically in ways that strengthen the resilience of our learning communities. Our aim is to continue to support our students and staff through this period, whilst also developing insights, evaluations and innovations which will inform the future direction of Learning & Teaching.

The projects described in this plan are strategically aligned to the University Learning and Teaching Quality Enhancement Strategy and are approved through our governance structures as appropriate. These projects form just a part of the enhancement work being undertaken at the University but do provide an indication of the breadth and depth of the work involved.

Institutional team

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Institutional lead	Prof Alison Green Dean for Teaching Quality Enhancement		
TLG staff representative	Dr Tom Cunningham Academic Development Partner		
TLG student representative	Lexi Ehresmann VP Education, Students' Union		
	Dr Catriona Cunningham Academic Development Partner		
	Rosamund Vickers		

	Democracy & Representation Coordinator Students' Union		

Planned activity: Year 1

Overall outcomes/activity

Our key priorities for this Theme are:

1. **Support for Students**

   To support students through and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring academic success and meaningful, valuable, student experiences. We want our students to achieve their potential, develop resilience and thrive; to be prepared for life beyond university and into employment. Supporting student mental health and wellbeing is central to this. We will deliver enhanced academic skills support and a new student life programme as part of this proactive approach to encourage successful students with good mental health.

   This work will provide legacy materials and resources for future years. At sector level we are happy to share our approach and share best practice with colleagues.

2. **Technology Enabled Education (TEE)**

   To evaluate our move to TEE in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The University, like the sector, had to move quickly to respond to the initial impact of lockdown. This was followed by a rapid development of online teaching pedagogy, learning technologist and practical support. This enabled the University to deliver a much-enhanced online experience for students in Autumn 2020.

   We will evaluate our learning from the experience of moving to TEE: what worked, what didn't, and the impact this had on our learning communities. We will go on to consider how we wish to use this knowledge to embed good practice, meaningful change, and sustained improvements in Learning & Teaching at Stirling. This will include consideration of how our Learning Spaces (both online and on-campus) can be best used and developed for the future.

   This work will help shape the future direction of the University; the kinds of teaching we will offer, the learning experience for students, and how best we use our unique campus to shape our ongoing identity. It will feed into ongoing sector discussions about the scope, value and nature of Higher Education in Scotland.

3. **Students as Partners in Learning (SPL)**

   To develop and enhance our close relationship with our students as partners and collaborators at Stirling. Our SPL initiative, launched in Summer 2020, recruited a group of students to "roadtest" modules in the new VLE template for academic staff, sharing their student perspective. This approach and group have been successful, with excellent feedback from the staff and students involved.

   Though we already have a strong relationship, particularly through our Student Union, we are mindful that student representation should be approached through a variety of initiatives to ensure we are reaching a representative cross-section of students. As we emerge into a new teaching landscape post-Covid, we are aiming to work even more closely with our student community.

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Year 1 outcomes/activity

Our key priorities for Year 1 are:

Support for students

1. We want to ensure our students fully understand good academic practice and are supported to act in an appropriate ethical manner towards their studies. International students, for example, can sometimes struggle to understand the UK approach in this area. The University approved a new academic integrity policy in September 2020 and we wish to support the implementation of that policy through the development and delivery of a module/materials on academic integrity and avoiding plagiarism which can be deployed across the University. By doing so we hope to reduce stress on students and improve outcomes.
2. We wish to support students who are experiencing particular difficulties this year. Particularly due to the impact of Covid19, students are potentially disadvantaged due to the learning gap experienced by many students and applicants from March 2020. In addition, due to the stress of Covid19 on personal lives and student life, many students may find studies more challenging this academic year. Therefore, we have implemented enhanced academic student support. This includes academic skills transition workshops, enhanced study skills materials and enhancements directed specifically to our post graduate taught students through our online transition module "Stirling Essentials" workshops and resources.
3. Following the success of our BeConnected programme, which was rapidly deployed in April to support our students and staff through lockdown, we have decided to extend the programme, as a student life programme, which offers both online and on campus activities for our students. The programme is based on the 5 ways to wellbeing themes and our aim in doing to so is to build community and support good mental health.
4. In collaboration with our Students' Union, we will develop our peer-to-peer support system for students (STEER) with a 'Pandemic Pals' scheme. This scheme will operate with the Union matching students into small groups, based on year of study, degree and other shared interests. This will enhance further our student support network and the development of STEER.

Technology Enabled Education (TEE)

1. We will carry out an evaluation of Autumn Semester 2020, exploring how staff and students have responded to TEE. We will draw on learning analytics and other data, as well as focus groups with staff and students. This will help identify areas of challenge and opportunity, but also look forward to what changes might happen in the future as we return to more face-to-face teaching.
2. A reflection on our current learning spaces at Stirling will also include a horizon-scanning project, working closely with Students as Partners and key institutional stake holders on learning design to develop some of the key recommendations on how blended learning can best be delivered in a Stirling context, using the learning spaces we have most effectively.

Students as Partners in Learning (SPL)

1. We will recruit a Student Engagement Officer - a new role for a current Stirling student. They will work closely with Academic Development and others to develop genuine dialogue, communication and collaboration between staff and students across the University.

Dissemination of work

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

Work under this theme will be promoted via our website and student and staff bulletins. We are also happy to disseminate our work through professional networks and sector events. BeConnected (as a response to Covid 19) and Stirling Essentials have already been shared in this way.

Collaborative cluster work

We are delighted to be the lead institution for the Collaborative Cluster: Decolonising the Curriculum.

Aims and objectives
The project aims to work with staff and students to expand and deepen sector-wide understanding of what decolonising the curriculum means, in practice. We will co-create, develop and evaluate a framework and resources for HE staff to use in their own institutions for purposes of staff development and cultural change work. The precise form of the deliverables needs to take account of the views of the diverse institutional networks.

Deliverables
- Creation of institutional networks for Decolonising the Curriculum with diverse representation from staff and student bodies for all partners in the cluster
- A series of cross- and intra-disciplinary online workshops involving all staff and students, to facilitate discussion of what decolonisation of the curriculum means in different disciplines and contexts.
- An open-access, digitally accessible installation, collating discussions and themes from the workshops. This would allow for multi-vocal perspectives on decolonising the curriculum from students and staff in Scottish HE. This installation would be co-created by students from the creative industries in project institutions and disseminated across the sector through audio-visuals. In order to have the sector-wide impact and reach, this installation would be hosted on the QAA website and disseminated through a series of podcasts and short films with a view to embedding these practices
- A sector-wide Framework with accompanying resources to enable programmes and institutions to approach the process of decolonising the curriculum

In addition, we are a partner in the Collaborative Cluster led by GCU on Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Curriculum, following on from our involvement in the previous cluster in this area. We will also be actively involved in the work of the other clusters.

Supporting staff and student engagement

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

Funding has been made available institutionally for all the projects to provide resource to complete the work required.

Evaluation

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

Engagement with activities, workshops and materials will be monitored and feedback will be gathered and analysed. The institutional team will oversee evaluation and reporting.

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