Resilient Learning Communities

Institutional Plan for: University of the Highlands and Islands

Context

During 2020-21 the University will be undergoing other significant changes including welcoming a new Principal and Vice Chancellor in February 2021, publishing a new Strategic Plan (for launch in 2021-22) and Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) in June-August 2021. We will also be evaluating the impact of the current Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy (LTES) and working on a new Strategy for launch and implementation in 2022-23. In addition, the first year of the Theme occurs at a time when the university, along with the rest of the sector, is seeking to reflect on and consolidate learning from the rapid changes to learning, teaching and student support brought about due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With this context in mind, the University has chosen to base its plan around three broad strands of work:

- Facilitating resilient students
- Facilitating resilient staff
- Creating a resilient institution

Activities proposed within the first year of the Theme focus primarily on gathering and sharing best practice in supporting students during COVID to assist with the overall aim of developing both a resilient student learning community and a resilient staff body. As outcomes from ELIR and the strategic direction of the institution develop, these will shape the details of work in years 2 and 3 of the Theme.

Institutional team

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Institutional lead	Dr Heather Fotheringham, Evidence-Based Enhancement Lead		
TLG (Theme Leaders Group) staff representative	Dr Heather Fotheringham, Evidence-Based Enhancement Lead		
TLG student representative	Jack Shehata, VPHE Highlands and Islands' Student Association (HISA)		
Add additional rows for additional members	Professor Keith Smyth, Professor of Pedagogy (TLG staff representative alternate) Dr Iain Morrison, Dean of Students Rhiannon Tinsley, Academic Registrar Andrew Bowie, Student Voice Assistant, HISA Kevin SInclair, Student Engagement Manager Dr Iain MacInnes, Subject Network Leader (Humanities and Gaelic) Iain Eisner, Careers Manager		

Planned activity: Year 1

Our approach to the new Enhancement Theme will be to develop, implement and evaluate initiatives in relation to three broad areas:

Strand 1: Facilitating resilient students

The overall aim of work within strand 1 is to develop a student body of resilient learners and resilient graduates, able to adapt to a changing world of education and employment.

This will involve projects, initiatives, resources, and events which:

- Champion good practice in teaching, learning and student support that can help to develop resilient learners
- Help staff to develop the knowledge and skills to encourage resilience in their students through teaching, learning and support activities
- Deliver initiatives directly to students to broaden their skillset, and increase their confidence

Strand 2: Facilitating resilient staff

The overall aim of work within strand 2 is to develop a staff body of resilient educators able to adapt to changing student needs and shifting policy contexts.

This will involve projects, initiatives, resources, and events which develop staff awareness, knowledge, and skills in the areas of:

- Using technology for learning and teaching
- Diversifying learning, teaching and assessment
- Reflective practice
- Wellbeing and self-care

Strand 3: Creating a resilient institution

The overall aim of work within strand 3 is to examine the policies, strategies, processes, and structures within the University to ensure that they are fit to serve the changing needs of the staff and student body.

This will involve projects, initiatives, resources, and events which focus on:

- Curriculum redesign
- Flexible curricular models, including micro-credentials

- Taught programmes and professional development for educators (e.g., TQFE, PG Certs, CPD provision)

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?

Our priority in year one will be to gather and share best practice in supporting students during COVID. The bulk of this work will sit within strand 1 of our approach, Facilitating Resilient Students. Specific activities planned are:

- Running a Student Support Initiative Award to identify and celebrate excellent practice
- Undertaking an analysis of student feedback to identify good practice during COVID and creating a staff-facing resource and accompanying event to share this good practice
- Running student-facing initiatives such as webinars and podcasts to help students develop career resilience
- Enhancing student community and connectivity by providing opportunities for students to come together online both socially and academically including chat groups, community study space and monthly social events. (This area of activity will be led by our students' association HISA)

Within strand 2, activities this year will focus on benchmarking current institutional practice and reviewing relevant literature and exemplars within the sector to inform activities to take place under these two strands in years 2 and 3 of the Theme. Specific activities planned are:

- Gathering data on staff awareness and use of values underpinning the University's LTES (Learning Teaching and Enhancement Strategy) in their teaching practices, with a particular focus on the value of: Reflective practice and Continuous Improvement (more information about the Strategy values can be found at: https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/learning-and-teaching-academy/innovation/ltes/values/)
- Evaluating the extent to which the VLE and other learning and technologies are being used and embedded specifically in relation to the Benchmarks for the Use of Technology in Learning and Teaching (more information about the Benchmarks can be found at: https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/learning-and-teaching-academy/innovation/ltes/benchmarks/)

Within strand 3, activities this year will focus on investigating and benchmarking the extent to which issues and challenges relating to student, staff and institutional resilience are being embedded, post COVID-19, in policies, strategies, processes and structures related to learning and teaching, programme design, and student and staff support and wellbeing. This will involve:

- Evaluating the evidence emerging from the current round of annual evaluation (including through our Quality Monitoring Dialogues with each of our Subject Networks) to identify emerging examples of good practice, and perspectives on issues and challenges related to resilience to be addressed going forward
- Aligning the work of the new Enhancement Theme with the recently implemented Curriculum Review Group, to mutually support and inform institutional-wide curriculum review activities in relation to the flexibility, robustness and future proofing of curriculum design and delivery post-pandemic
- Reviewing the extent to which our formal programmes for educators are engaging our lecturers in issues relating to resilience and resilient practices in learning and teaching.
- We will also review, forward plan, and begin to foreground issues of resilience in the delivery of continuing professional development opportunities through the activities of the Learning and Teaching Academy (including workshops, webinars and symposia, leadership development provision, and activities relating to the University Mentoring Scheme).

Intended benefits institutionally during Year 1 will be:

- Raising of awareness amongst staff and students of good practice in teaching and student support which has taken place under COVID-19
- Increased student awareness of skills required for career resilience, and how they may further develop these
- Increased institutional knowledge in relation to staff capabilities and future training needs in relation to embedding LTES values and the use of technology within learning and teaching.
- Increased institutional knowledge in relation to how formal programmes for educators are engaging our lecturers in issues relating to resilience

For the sector, we expect benefits during Year 1 would be through disseminating the outcomes of our benchmarking/research and sharing examples of good practice.

Dissemination of work

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

We have established an Enhancement Themes Consultation Group comprising representatives from academic staff and our students' association HISA, as well as from

learning and teaching enhancement and academic quality. We will report on progress via our Enhancement Themes steering group to our Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee which is a key channel for communicating to senior staff from across the University partnership.

In addition, we will run a programme of events to be offered through the university's Learning and Teaching Academy as this was a successful mechanism for engagement during the last Theme. For Year 1 of the Theme, these will consist of webinars sharing good practice emerging from the response to COVID, as well as the University's Learning and Teaching conference in June 2020, of which Resilient Learning Communities will be a key theme. We will seek to make as many of these events open to colleagues within the Scottish sector as is practical.

We will also be seeking to participate actively in the dissemination activities of the Enhancement Theme itself (including conferences) as well as undertaking digital dissemination of our work through blogs and other social media updates.

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 have identified four of the collaborative clusters which would be of interest and relevance to UHI for this first year of the Theme:

- Micro-credentials
- Student mental health
- Programme Leadership
- Decolonising the curriculum

Student mental health is one of the priorities for our students' association HISA this year, identified within their Student Partnership Agreement. It is envisioned that a HISA colleague will be involved in this Collaborative Cluster with potential for a member of Student Services to join them. We are currently seeking individual colleagues who would be involved in each of the remaining clusters.

Supporting staff and student engagement

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

Support to deliver activities will come through the Enhancement Themes Consultation Group comprising representatives from academic staff, our students' association HISA, plus learning and teaching enhancement and academic quality. Relevant members of the group will lead on activities within the Theme, with additional colleagues joining the

Consultation Group where they are undertaking work relevant to the Theme. The University's Learning and Teaching Academy will lead on the dissemination of work under the Theme using established channels of engagement such as the LTA Connect webinars and LTA blog. Key to engaging students will be the students' association who are fully invested in the work of the Theme.

Evaluation
How will you monitor progress and impact of the enhancement activities?
As with other enhancement activities, we will be using a theories of change approach to shape the evaluation of work under the Enhancement Theme. Our institutional plan centres around three strands with associated aims. For each year of the Theme, outputs and outcomes are specified in relation to each strand which will shape the evaluation data to be gathered. For Year 1, this will primarily consist of monitoring stakeholder engagement with Theme activities and events. As the Theme develops, we will seek to gather data on longer term impacts such as changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices.

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Resilient Learning Communities

Institutional Plan for: <Name of Institution>

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.

Our Enhancement Theme Consultation Group has agreed that Year 1 funding will be utilised as follows:

- 1K to cover travel and accommodation for TLG meetings and internal meetings and events (in the anticipation that these may resume over the course of 2020-21)
- 5K contribution to partially cover the costs for a 0.2 role to provide project management and administrative support. The remaining funding for this role, which formally extends an existing post from 0.6 to 0.8, will be met by the university's Learning and Teaching Academy (the LTA) as a contribution to supporting our work for the new Enhancement Theme (this continues the same arrangement we had in place to support our work for the last Enhancement Theme).
- The LTA will also cover any other associated costs in relation to our work for the new theme (e.g., external speaker fees and catering for events, materials production)

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