Resilient Learning Communities
Institutional Plan for: University of Aberdeen

Context
The work we have undertaken for the first year of the Enhancement Theme encompasses a range of activities some of which will continue as we move into the second year of the Theme. Much of this work harmonises with the University of Aberdeen vision and strategy taking us to 2040 (Aberdeen 2040). The Enhancement Theme work aligns with the 4 main pillars of the strategy, namely inclusive, international, interdisciplinary and sustainable. This is evident in the 5 Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme projects that were funded as part of our year 1 work, which each align to one or more of these pillars (see evaluation below). These projects evidence the clear link between the Theme work itself and the overarching goals and context of the University. In addition, our work on decolonising the curriculum is focused on inclusive education and is part of the wider University work in this area. Year 1 has been pivotal in establishing a cross-University collaborative approach to the Theme through the Community of Practice and by establishing clear communication and dissemination channels to engage with the University community and encourage participation from staff and students in Theme-focussed work. Taken together, the work that we have completed through the first year of the Enhancement Theme provides an excellent foundation for the plan for our second year of activity.

Institutional team	
Institutional lead	Prof Steve Tucker
TLG staff representative	Prof Steve Tucker
TLG student representative (Alternate TBC)	Ondrej Kucerak
Dean for Entrepreneurship and Employability	Dr John Barrow
Dean for Student Support	Prof Abbe Brown
Head of Careers and Employability	Tracey Innes
Dean for Educational Innovation	Dr Kirsty Kiezebrink
Manager, Postgraduate Research School	Dr Lucy Leiper
Access and Articulation Manager, Student Recruitment	Dr Sally Middleton
Dean of Postgraduate Research	Prof Graeme Nixon
Educational and Employability Advisor, Centre for Academic Development (Institutional Lead Alternate)	Dr Joy Perkins
Manager, Student Engagement	Karen Scaife
Centre Manager, Centre for Academic Development	Patricia Spence
UG student representative	Janet Gauthier
PGT & PGR student representatives	TBC

Overall outcomes/activity

Our key priorities in Year 1 centred around building and utilising different learning communities to enhance institutional practice and importantly, to involve staff and students working in partnership. In Year 2, we also aim to:

- Expand our theme-related projects through a second round of our Learning & Teaching Enhancement Programme (LTEP) where staff and student collaborative partnerships bid for funding to support work relevant to the Theme. The University has kindly agreed to match the funding we have available to provide more extensive opportunities for staff and student colleagues to take projects forward into Year 2.
- Engage in further sector-wide activities through becoming involved in other Collaborative Clusters. In particular, we will, in collaboration with our TLG Student Representative, ensure that we engage with sector-wide opportunities relating to student mental health and wellbeing within our BAME and LGBTQ+ learner communities. We will also continue our central involvement in exploring the potential of microcredentials and digital badging including disseminating our experience with the recent Micro-credential Short Course 'Enhancing Your Online Teaching for 2021-22'.
- The Decolonising the Curriculum Steering Group is continuing to take forward its work and linking into the sector-wide Anti-Racist Curriculum project. It is anticipated that the Steering Group will report its agreed recommendations in June 2022 from where there will be an implementation plan to enable the recommendations to be embedded across our educational practices.
- Explore options to engage with the Internationalisation pillar of Aberdeen 2040 including building on the collaborative project funded through LTEP in Year 1 focussing on addressing the stigma of mental health in Arab students studying in our Qatar and Aberdeen campuses.

Year 2 outcomes/activity

1. *Continuing to grow the dynamic institutional Enhancement Theme Community of Practice (CoP)* – building on success of the CoP formed in Year 2, we will continue to use this group to identify and share good practice.
2. *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* – this work continues with the focus this year on the development of a Toolbox of Resources available for staff which will include case studies, good practice and resources related to resilient learning communities drawn initially from our [Year 1 LTEP projects](#). The Toolbox will be launched in 2021/22.
3. *Further call for LTEP projects* - this will launch in October 2021.
4. *Engage with the following sector-wide collaborative clusters* – we will continue contributing to the Micro-credentials Collaborative Cluster including sharing our experience with the new University of Aberdeen 4-week 'Micro-credential Short Course: Enhancing Your Online Teaching for 2021-22' developed in response to our Blended Learning Evaluation (as reported previously). We will also engage with other Collaborative Clusters, in particular the 'Student Mental Health and Wellbeing within our BAME and LGBTQ+ Learner Communities' Cluster.
5. *Awareness raising activity* - planning for next year's Annual Academic Development Symposium (5 May 2022) is already underway. The keynote will be delivered by Dr Catriona Cunningham, focussing on the work of the 'Decolonising the Curriculum' Cluster. Panel sessions will align with the 4 pillars of the Aberdeen2040 Strategy (interdisciplinary, international, sustainable, inclusive) and will provide colleagues with the opportunity to share the work of the current LTEP projects and those funded by the new call in October 2021. The aim is to improve the dissemination of the outcomes from the projects and to encourage other teams to consider taking the learning into their own practice.

Evaluation: Five LTEP Projects were funded this year to support work associated with the Enhancement Theme. These are very briefly detailed below to provide a level of evaluation of theme work thus far and to capture the forward trajectory of the initiatives into Year 2.

Title of project/activity (1) The bridge between: Arab voices and stories of coping
What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
To understand and lessen stigma surrounding disclosure of mental health issues amongst Arab students at both our Aberdeen and Qatar campuses. The project will pair students from Qatar and Aberdeen and encourage discussion about mental health.
Why are we making it? (Rationale for the change)
To address rising numbers of mental health cases across our student body especially in Qatar where mental health issues are traditionally stigmatised
What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change envisaged)
Greater insight into mental health issues across the student population and development of a greater sense of openness about such issues amongst our Arab students.
How will we know? (How the change is measured)
Post project feedback and assessment across student participants. Measurement of engagement with mental health support services.

Title of project/activity (2) Exploring the experiences of articulation students' transition to university
What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
Development of transitional support for students entering the university through an articulation route. The project will examine the transition journey and work with students who have entered through an articulation route to enhance the support available.
Why are we making it? (Rationale for the change)
Articulating students often face specific challenges as they transition into university and this project aims to identify these
What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change envisaged)
Development of more informed and bespoke support for articulating students.
How will we know? (How the change is measured)
A comprehensive evaluation will be conducted according to the RUFDATA model

Title of project/activity (3) Understanding, developing and demonstrating resilience in the context of employability
What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
Creation of a resilience employability toolkit based on employer and student insights gathered in interviews and focus groups.
Why are we making it? (Rationale for the change)
To address the lack of resilience amongst graduates reported by employers
What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change envisaged)
Enhancement of resilience skills amongst students and graduates
How will we know? (How the change is measured)
Through use of an evaluation framework which will seek input from students, graduate, staff and employers

Title of project/activity (4) Building student resilience through course development – moving from surviving to thriving
What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
Creation of a zero-credit course to specifically develop student resilience
Why are we making it? (Rationale for the change)
To embed development of resilience within the curriculum
What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change envisaged)

Increased awareness and opportunities for students to develop resilience allied to enhanced student experience and student well-being
How will we know? (How the change is measured)
Evaluation of course metrics and feedback from students enrolled on the course

Title of project/activity (5) Investigating solutions to make mathematical teaching content more accessible
What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
Creation of guidance / best practice around rendering mathematical text accessible for screen readers
Why are we making it? (Rationale for the change)
To enhance the student experience and fulfil legal requirements relating to accessibility of teaching materials
What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change envisaged)
Enhanced accessibility to lectures notes and teaching materials for courses that contain mathematical text
How will we know? (How the change is measured)
Monitoring and analysis of course accessibility scores across the virtual learning environment

Dissemination of work
Communication channels for internal dissemination are: - Use of existing networks e.g., Centre for Academic Development, Pedagogical Inquiry Network, Learning & Teaching Network   - The RLC Community of Practice group which was created in Year 1   - Use of our Education Committee structure (e.g. Quality Assurance Committee, University Education Committee)   - Use of School Executive Committees (includes staff and students)   - The Annual Academic Development Symposium, which will focus on work related to the Enhancement Theme (see above)   - Use of the University ezine to promote Theme-related activities and events to all staff.   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

Supporting staff and student engagement
We will continue to build on the success of the Student Partnership Agreement (SPA), fully integrating students, including Postgraduate Research Students, into the community developing work around the Enhancement Theme. Focusing on "students as partners" in this way is creating an inclusive, collaborative and immersive learning community for staff and students (both taught and research focussed) School Teaching Executives alike. Key to the success of this partnership will be the continuing close working with the TLG Student Representative The staff and students that make up the University community will be supported by: - A second opportunity to bid for LTEP project funding   - Ongoing involvement with the Community of Practice

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