



Personalised Approaches to Resilience and Community (PARC): Collaborative Cluster Final Report

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Project team

- Dr Luke Millard, Dean of Teaching and Learning, AbLE Academy, Abertay University
- Dr Colin Milligan, Senior Research Fellow, Educational Research & Evaluation, Department of Academic Development & Student Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University
- Maggie Gibson, Head of Learner Development, Centre for Academic Success, Birmingham City University
- Dr Holly Heshmati, Senior Teaching Fellow, Centre for Teacher Education, Warwick University
- Dr Heather Fotheringham, Evidence Based Enhancement Lead, University of the Highlands and Islands
- Joan Connolly, Leadership and Life-Skills Centre Manager, Dublin City University

Overview of project aspirations (from original bid)

'Standard approaches to university admission see students meet the criteria for acceptance and then receive a standardised cohort experience through their induction and initial learning journey. However, as a sector we are well aware that students enter our universities with a diverse range of abilities and skills. For most of the Universities in this cluster the focus on access for widening participation students means that this is a very real and urgent challenge.

The partners wish to develop, implement and evaluate activities that better prepare the individual student to be successful. It will take a direct approach to targeting and supporting student need and utilise diagnostic testing of students on pre-arrival/arrival. This will see a diagnostic test(s), previously piloted at Birmingham City University, to review student academic skills, numeracy, wellbeing and digital competence. This approach arose out of BCU's participation in the HEFCE/OFS Learning Gain initiative. The focus on the individual is even more relevant at this time as the sector moves to offer new and untested blended approaches to learning which will potentially have an increasingly isolating impact on students. To acclimatise those students and ensure they are retained there is a real need to connect with the individual student and offer them a tailored approach to developing successful habits and skills (Vanthournout et al 2016).

The partners will collaborate to identify the mechanisms by which they will best utilise the data generated by the diagnostic, building on the learning analytics work developed in the last enhancement theme and focusing on community development. Outcomes are likely to be generated at the micro, meso and macro levels.

The partners will work together to share approaches and lessons learned as staff and students engage in the scenarios outlined. In particular, we believe that there may be some cultural elements that need to be surfaced especially with regard to international students and colleagues at Warwick are keen to explore that area of intrigue. The role of the Students' Union/Association in integrating with these new approaches will also be explored as student engagement in community will be key to ensuring student success.

The cluster will seek to develop a compartmentalised tool kit that enables other universities and colleges to replicate and build on this work. This would see the partners create and offer:

- Consultation workshop (and/or) Intangibles workshop exploring cultural issues;
- Diagnostic tool and guidance on how to deploy it in different settings;

- Discussion papers on micro, meso, and macro level impact as described above;
- Dissemination webinars/QAA conference.

The ongoing work of the cluster will be to: determine the value of the diagnostic testing; evaluate the interventions at the individual institutions, and to understand the impact on students and staff of such an approach.

Pilot activities may take place in spring 2021, but the first full scale diagnostic testing would take place in summer/autumn 2021. Students would be tracked through their first year to determine if they were more successful than previous cohorts. In addition, research through surveys and/or focus groups will be put in place with students and staff to better understand the impact of the intervention.’

Description of the activities taken forward as part of the cluster

The partners met at least monthly as they explored the development of the initiative. There were full, frank and enthusiastic exchanges as ideas were out forward and enhanced. It was a collaborative effort that drew upon the expertise of each and every partner.

The partners have delivered on all aspects of the proposed outcomes as can be evidenced on the PARC webpage.¹

In particular this has seen:

- An online event (15 June 2021) with over 130 registrations (a recording of the event can be found on the PARC webpage)
- Sharing of diagnostic tools across the partners and development in the context of that university
- Creation of macro, meso and micro level papers that formed a key discussion point at the online event (papers can be found on the PARC webpage)
- An abstract has been submitted to a special issue of the Journal of University Learning and Teaching Practice²
- The cluster presented on its work at the Theme Leaders Group and would welcome opportunity to disseminate through QAA events.

Evaluation and reflection

The cluster partners developed a really effective working relationship and all contributed. It was a very happy team and that helped as we all encountered periods of stress back at our own universities and others were able to step in.

As we explained in the bid, the proposal was a bit of a ‘chicken and egg’ situation as we were talking about diagnostics and holding events before we had actually run the test with our students. On reflection, the discussions and debates have been very useful for us all as our internal plans came to fruition.

Four of the partners (Abertay, BCU, Warwick and UHI) will be enacting diagnostic processes at their institutions in the next academic year and they have undoubtedly been influenced by the work of the cluster.

¹ www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/resilient-learning-communities/collaborative-clusters/personalised-approaches-to-resilience-and-community

² <https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/latestnews.html#SI4>

The challenge moving forward is to evaluate the impact of the interventions in the next academic year. The plan is to identify funding to employ student researchers to undertake the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the impact.

The high point of the project was the online event where over 130 colleagues registered from across the world. This included delegates from all the home nations plus Belgium, Sweden, USA, Canada, Ireland and South Africa. The debate was engaging and we have now contacted all delegates to see how they would wish to take this work forward. Early indications are that there are some new partners keen to join the work of the cluster.

Key points of learning and/or recommendations for future activity

We were lucky as the partner representatives all engaged with and further developed the vision and were happy to play their part. Teamwork made the cluster work enjoyable for all and as a result we were highly productive.

The impact of the pandemic means that we have yet to all meet in person and we hope to remedy that as we disseminate our work and present at various conferences.

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18 Bothwell Street, Glasgow G2 6NU
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Tel: 0141 572 3420
Web: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk