

Personalised Approaches to Resilience and Community

End of Year 3 Report

February 2024



Abbreviations

Abertay	Abertay University
BCU	Birmingham City University
Dublin City	Dublin City University
GCU	Glasgow Caledonian University
Middlesex	Middlesex University
OU	The Open University
PARC	Personalised Approaches to Resilience and Community
RGU	Robert Gordon University
RLC	Resilient Learning Communities
UHI	University of the Highlands and Islands
Warwick	University of Warwick
Worcester	University of Worcester
sparqs	Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland
SRUC	Scotland's Rural College
St Davids	University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Table 1: Evidencing effectiveness and reporting impact

Cumulative descriptor of institutional/ cluster/ student-led project activity over Resilient Learning Communities (RLC) Theme period	<u>Which overarching RLC Theme questions (1-5) were prioritised?</u>	Evidence of effectiveness in addressing chosen RLC theme priorities	Suggested outcomes and impact measures used to assess effectiveness	Challenges	Made most difference?	Hindsight
Generation of a Community of Practice	Community and belonging of the group members	The cluster partners initially engaged with a one-year project that lasted for three. The level of commitment and enthusiasm has been maintained as institutional partners emerged. There have been five core partners throughout (Abertay, GCU, BCU, Warwick and UHI). Others have got what they needed and moved on (RGU, Middlesex, Dublin City), or have more recently joined (Worcester, the OU, SRUC, St Davids). Evidence of effectiveness would be	The group has worked well together within a welcoming and positive environment. Many participants are not senior leaders and cannot directly make things happen in their institutions, and this is not a problem as people have been encouraged to progress at a speed that is relevant to their context. As dissemination activities have increased, more people have become aware and this has led to more discussions and new members (four	The core group was key in providing consistency, but the coming and going of some partners was, on occasion, difficult as we had to start to explain basic aims, ways of working, and so on. Covid and geography also provided a challenge as the partners did not meet in person until 18 months of the project had passed. The UK engagement probably made Microsoft Teams the only solution to continuing development	Having the QAA badge for the work has given it a credibility and provided levers to help secure institutional staff time. The enthusiasm and flexibility of the participants has been key to the duration and success of the PARC work. For example, some colleagues have been able to plough ahead and introduce diagnostics while others have been awaiting the opportunity and contributed to the project in other ways. It	We were very lucky to have identified such willing and enthusiastic participants in the project.

		<p>that we have more members now than we started with.</p> <p>Recent presentation at Enhancement conference (June 2023) would also have seemed to attract new partners from the workshop delivered. PARC will also be discussed at European First Year Experience Conference at Abertay in June 2023.</p>	<p>in the last year of the project).</p>	<p>and meant that the one in-person meeting each year was highly valued.</p>	<p>has really been a team effort!</p> <p>As the cluster has persisted over an extended period of time, the Community has had the opportunity to consider the broader issues underpinning diagnostic testing. This has helped sustain and broaden the appeal of the group.</p>	
<p>Design and Implementation of Diagnostic tools</p>	<p>Supporting student success</p>	<p>The partners have worked together to explore the potential of a core diagnostic tool that originated at BCU. The tool was refined and has been most widely deployed at Abertay. UHI and Warwick have also utilised variants in their own institutions. These initial deployments contain questions around student academic skills, digital competence, wellbeing and employability. Newer partners have sought to expand to include English language skills. The</p>	<p>Each university has deployed the tool as it deems appropriate. Abertay has embedded a formative diagnostic within a credit bearing microcredential that is mandatory for all first-year students. This is now in its second year of deployment and valuable learning and adaption is taking place.</p> <p>Warwick has been using its tool for PGCE students as they enter teacher training from a variety of backgrounds.</p>	<p>Institutional commitment and development timelines are key barriers.</p> <p>Abertay was able to make such swift progress due to that leader having the seniority to be able to implement change. Others were not so fortunate and have had to work within the systems. The cluster design allows productive engagement of all partners, whether or not they are deploying the instruments - the broader conversations</p>	<p>The Abertay work has shown that this is possible and has provided a base level of success that has given others the time to develop in their own way.</p>	

		partners are using the diagnostic at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.	UHI and BCU have deployed the tool at programme-level activities as a means of building an evidence base to support wider roll out.	around the use of diagnostics in developing an understanding of current and future student needs, and how they can be best supported are useful to institutions who are still developing their approach.		
Dissemination of learning	Supporting student success and flexible/ accessible learning	<p>The partners have established the QAA website for PARC that contains a large number of resources.</p> <p>The partners have presented at a variety of international conferences including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA Enhancement Themes Conference x2 • European First-Year Experience Conference x 2 • UK Advising and Tutoring (UKAT) • Jisc Digifest • 42nd Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience (USA) • Advance HE Retention 	<p>Numbers of people who attended those sessions would be an indicator as would downloads from the website.</p> <p>The European First-Year Experience Conference had 50 people in a two-hour workshop. Detailed follow-ups with Lithuanian and Belgian colleagues followed.</p> <p>The fact that new partners (SRUC, St Davids) continue to show interest and join the group, as this now aligns with institutional interests, is positive.</p> <p>The PARC team has recently been approached by a</p>	<p>The examples have been drawn from some, but not all of the participating institutions. This can lead to some domination within a dissemination event, but we have tried to manage that sensitively. The other partners have been able to valuably challenge and offer sense checks as work developed.</p> <p>The lack of significant funding to support the work means that we cannot write as much as we would like or provide the level of detailed statistical analysis of diagnostic impact. That will come, but within institutional</p>	<p>The willingness of all partners to just turn up and talk about their experiences. We always say that this is 'work in progress' and the openness of the team to share what is and what is not working has been refreshing for all who attend the dissemination events.</p>	<p>The project started off by drafting macro/meso and micro challenge papers. These are available on the website. We hope they are helpful, but in hindsight they accidentally provided a really nice reflective and structural way for us to consider our developments over the course of the project.</p>

		Symposium Book chapter on Abertay experience is due for publication in June 2023.	student analytics company to invest in the future development of a flexible diagnostic tool. Conversations are ongoing.	timeframes when resource can be identified.		
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What is the ONE most positive aspect to report over the three-year period? ('Evidence of effectiveness' column and 'Suggested outcomes and impact' column)

The PARC community of practice will continue to be the most positive element as we have already agreed to continue working beyond this summer. The Community of Practice provides a space for broader questions to be considered without the complicating factors of institutional pressures.

What is the most challenging issue? ('Challenges' column)

The greatest challenge is that of balancing institutional priorities with project/cluster participation. The project has clearly shown that where the project aligns with institutional goals, it can be readily implemented. Where that alignment is one of enthusiasm, not policy, it becomes a great deal more difficult.

What has made the most difference and why? ('Made most difference' column)

The openness of the partners and the willingness to share and challenge in such a positive manner.

What would you NOT do again, in hindsight and why? ('Hindsight' column)

There has been a lack of direct involvement of students in design of the project. This oversight was understandable in the early phases as institutional leads sought to understand the project and how such a concept might be utilised. However, some form of representation, perhaps through sparqs, could have been brought on board.

Table 2: Ways of working/engaging in the Resilient Learning Communities Themes work

Theme process	Activities' description	Positive aspects/difference made	Challenges	Changes made during process	Hindsight - could be improved by:
Supporting staff and students to engage with Theme activity	We have disseminated primarily through workshops which were open to Scottish, UK and ultimately worldwide audiences.	PARC project has spoken to many universities who sometimes joined the cluster or through dissemination events. The conversation around diagnostics has been very interesting for all.	While workshops brought our ideas to wide audiences, we kept the core community quite small so the views from the wider community has not been captured as well.	We were always welcoming to new partners, but it was always their choice to make the commitment to engage.	Perhaps we could have established a mailing list.
Effectiveness of organisational and management structures	Cluster is led by Dean of Teaching and Learning at Abertay who used a combination of existing and new relationships to drive forward the collaborative cluster - adopting an outward looking approach from the outset (inclusion of non-Scottish HEIs as partners).	Clear open leadership has encouraged new members to join the cluster at regular intervals through the life of the cluster.	Key challenge for PARC has been how to implement change without power or opportunity. Where most effective, Abertay, both were present.	None.	Should have integrated student voice in core business meetings.
Evaluating activity and projects	The nature of the cluster means we have not undertaken any overarching evaluation. Individual implementations have been evaluated informally/formally.	Internal evaluation of Abertay deployment of diagnostic tools has resulted in minor changes in Year 2.	Resource to undertake more extensive evaluation.	Ongoing reflection and consideration.	PARC has acted upon institutional grace and favour and really requires investment to scrutinise data. This may be coming.

Disseminating outcomes and findings internally and externally	We have disseminated primarily through workshops and conference presentations, and outputs on QAA website.	We have developed a 'story' which has provided a rich base on which to develop workshops and engage new audiences.	Recording everything we have done as more formal outputs.	PARC has sought opportunities whenever they arrived and been responsive to those.	Focusing more on output creation earlier.
Collaborating with other institutions/ organisations	PARC project was a collaborative one and therefore this was key.	New contacts made, building our collective understanding of the complexity of the issue by drawing on experience from the diverse institutional perspectives.	Balancing a desire to welcome new members with a need to constantly be renegotiating the focus of the cluster.	No explicit change made, just adapting.	The cluster dynamic might have been different if we had met in person earlier or had more in-person meetings.

Which ONE process from each of those listed within the Theme processes column in Table 2 worked best? ('Activities' description' and 'Positive aspects' columns)?

The positive nature of the collaboration was the best aspect of our work and its success is evident by our commitment to continue the work beyond QAA funding.

Why was it the best ('Positive aspects/difference' made column)?

Implementing change within institutions where there is peripheral engagement. Some partners were enthusiastic about the ideas and possibilities but lacked the institutional opportunity and power to initialise the development. Abertay was lucky and was able to harness both for institutional engagement, but others have had to work at the fringes to seek engagement and this has required great persistence.

Which was most difficult and why ('Challenges' column)? Why did you make any changes (could be reported as 'Positive' or via 'Challenges' column)?

Any changes were tough gradual evolution rather than wholesale change. Often this arose through new partner engagement and questioning.

What would you NOT do again, in hindsight and why? ('Hindsight' column)

Nothing. The project was not perfect, but the collegiality to engage and persist has been heartening.

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