



End of Year 2 Report for University of Aberdeen

Institutional team

Identify any changes in Theme leadership, TLG and institutional team membership since details were reported in the institutional plan developed at the start of the academic year.

We have a stable and committed Institutional Team with consistent staff and student representation on the Theme Leaders Group. Our Student Representative, Ondrej Kucerak, was replaced in Year 2 of the Theme with David Mercieca, a 3rd year, BSc (Hons) Neuroscience with Psychology student and the Students' Association Undergraduate Education Committee Vice-Chair. Ondrej is now the Student Theme Leader in the Enhancement Theme Leadership Team. We are in the process of identifying further postgraduate student representation for our Year 3 Enhancement Themes Institutional Steering Group.

Evaluation of activities/outcomes

Please report each activity/intervention against the following questions in the Evaluation part of the template. N.B. You may have already realised some of your objectives and/or these might be ongoing, so please delineate each question according to whether activities or interventions have been completed already in this reporting year or are in process. (Easiest way is to delete **either/or** options highlighted in **red** in questions below):

The initiatives described below are a diverse range of projects that form part of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme (LTEP), which funds projects related to the Resilient Learning Communities (RLC) Enhancement Theme. At present [13 funded projects](#) are underway at various stages of progress, which address our Year 2 plans to expand our theme-related projects. Three examples are detailed below.

Title of project/activity

Investigating Solutions to Make Mathematical Teaching Content Accessible

1. What change **is being** made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)

In Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) disciplines, course material often requires the use of LaTeX. LaTeX is a system which enables high-quality maths notation to be included in a document which can then enable it to be made available digitally (in PDF format) through eg. a Virtual Learning Environment. The project's aim is to improve the accessibility of the teaching materials which use LaTeX and to produce guidance for staff on how to achieve this.

2. Why **are we making** it? (Rationale for the change)

To comply with the University's legal obligations in respect of accessibility and inclusion, including the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018, requires universities to make all new learning material published on Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) accessible. PDFs, generated by LaTeX, are not fully accessible as they are not compatible by text-to-speech software.

3. What difference **will hopefully occur** as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)

This is a known, sector-wide issue with no established solution or timeframe for resolution. The University of Aberdeen aims to train staff to convert all existing course material to and write new course material in, an accessible HTML format as soon as there is a process in place. It is hoped

<p>this will be within the next two years. In the meantime, there is in-house support for staff where an accessible format is requested by a student.</p>
<p>4. How will we know? (How is the change measured)</p>
<p>Measurement of the conversion of LaTeX materials to accessible HTML format across selected courses. In addition, new funding from the Council of Heads and Professional in Computing for the next phase 'Evaluating LaTeX Accessibly Solutions' project, will support the rollout of training and guidance provided to staff who will be trying to convert materials themselves. The training and guidance will be evaluated through staff survey.</p>
<p>5. Who is involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTEP Project Team undertaking this research, which includes the Academic Skills Adviser (Maths) and staff from the School of Natural and Computing Sciences. • Three student interns, employed for the second phase project, will be involved in the evaluation of the guidance provided to staff. • The external UK-wide SIGMA Mathematics and Statistics Support Network who advised that HTML was a suitable alternative file format for STEM documents containing maths.
<p>6. Any lessons learned to apply already? (Applied ongoing learning)</p>
<p>Having investigated four existing conversion software technologies (Pandoc, LaTeXML, Coursebuilder and Tex4ht), LaTeXML and Coursebuilder have been identified as the most suitable software approaches for HTML conversion.</p>
<p>7. Any things you have stopped doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)</p>
<p>The project stopped working with Pandoc and Tex4ht because of the poorer HTML output they produced.</p>

<p>Title of project/activity</p>
<p><i>Understanding, Developing and Demonstrating Resilience in the Context of Employability</i></p>
<p>1. What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)</p>
<p>A toolkit resource has been created for all levels of students on the topic of resilience in the context of employability. A research informed video introducing the key concepts around the topic, including what resilience is, what it means in the context of the workplace, why it is important and how students can develop and evidence it. This will be complemented by a mini online interactive careers course for the student to extend their understanding of resilience.</p>
<p>2. Why are we making it? (Rationale for the change)</p>
<p>Resilience is one of the top skills required by graduate employers for their future workforce. Whilst students are relatively confident that they are developing resilience, which will benefit their career, they are less confident about demonstrating this in applications and at interviews. Students are also less confident about the resilience when facing career setbacks. This toolkit resource is designed to bring the topic of resilience in the context of employability to life for students, giving practical resources to help students recognise, develop and evidence their own resilience.</p>
<p>3. What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)</p>
<p>The intention is that students will build their understanding of resilience in employability and be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise examples of their resilience. • Plan further development of their resilience. • Showcase their resilience to employers via CVs, applications LinkedIn profiles and at interview. <p>This should contribute to increased success throughout the recruitment and selection process, and in better onboarding to a work placement or graduate job opportunity.</p>
<p>4. How will we know? (How is the change measured)</p>
<p>Engagement with the course will be measured using access data. In addition, the mini career course will include a confidence checker designed against the intended course learning outcomes to show distance travelled. Feedback will also be gathered from students to evaluate the usefulness of the video for student learning, and to make any amendments as needed.</p>
<p>5. Who is involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)</p>
<p>The LTEP Project Team undertaking the project and the wider LTEP network have been involved in all stages of the project.</p>

6. Any lessons learned to apply already? (Applied ongoing learning)
Our student intern has been critical to the success of this project, offering their perspectives and providing dedicated resource through their time and enthusiasm for the project. A lesson learned is around providing student interns with the opportunity to lead and take responsibility for a project whilst ensuring they are given enough support throughout a project of this scale.
7. Any things you have stopped doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)
No.

Title of project/activity
<i>Building Student Resilience through Course Development – Moving from Surviving to Thriving</i>
1. What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
<p>The aim of this project is to create an online, micro-credential short course (zero-credits), which is designed to promote, support, and enhance student resilience. The course will encompass the following content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 1: Introduction to resilience. This will cover models of resilience, resilience self-assessment, and signpost students to sources of University support. • Week 2: Adversity impacts everyone. Shared student experiences of dealing with adversity, models of mental health, recognising symptoms of mental distress. • Week 3: Building resilience. This will include metacognition strategies, and tips for maintaining mental and physical health. • Week 4: Social connections. Interactive activities with peers, shared tasks, resilience walks – all designed to help build a learning community. • Week 5: Reflection. Looking back on the resilience journey, assessing which activities were most useful, comparative self-assessment of resilience.
2. Why are we making it? (Rationale for the change)
The aim of the course is to introduce resilience as part of the curriculum and provide students with the resources, and strategies, to build and maintain their resilience over their years of study. Resilience is considered a dynamic factor, meaning resilience levels can be increased through appropriate interventions and activities. As such, it is vital that core resilience strategies are highlighted to students early on, to equip them with the tools they need to deal with the ups and downs of academic life.
3. What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)
This elective course will be launched in September 2022 to undergraduate students and will help to enhance their resilience levels. The course aims to enable students to manage adversity, both academic and personal, using a variety of key strategies. Helping students to understand resilience and why it is important will facilitate students with their wellbeing, progression through university, and support their academic achievements.
4. How will we know? (How is the change measured)
The course includes several methods of self-assessment (scales designed to measure resilience, mental health, stress, mood, areas of concern). Students will be asked to complete these at the start and end of the course, both to help them plot their journey through the course (which includes a range of options for activities depending on what a student wants to know more about / needs the most support with). Statistical analysis of the scale scores will enable us to determine if there have been any changes in ratings over the duration of the course. Students will also be asked to provide feedback, as part of their self-reflection in week 5, on which activities were the most useful / interesting and the extent to which they feel these activities will help them build / maintain resilience. Student feedback forms will also be gathered for the course.
5. Who is involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LTEP Project Team undertaking the research, the team comprises three Psychology academics, an Educational Developer and 2 student interns. • Students from across the University at all levels within 5 separate, consultative focus groups. • Individuals from the Careers & Employability Service, the BeWell team, and those within the University's Enhancement Themes Steering Group and Community of Practice

- Resilience Course Management Team / University's Quality Assurance Committee

6. Any lessons learned to apply already? (Applied ongoing learning)

The key lesson was the importance of co-creating the course with students, to ensure the content is accessible, meaningful, and engaging. Student-developed content will feature throughout all five weeks of the course, in a variety of formats, and peer-to-peer engagement will also be encouraged. In addition, there were lessons learnt in terms of understanding the resilience course literature, including the balance between content and activities.

7. Any things you **have stopped** doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)

Given the scope of this project, we have decided to target the pilot micro-credential course with undergraduate students only, so we have stopped trying to accommodate taught postgraduate students at this initial stage.

Dissemination of work

Which mechanisms have been most effective in disseminating outcomes and resources internally, and to the sector? Please provide examples. If there are materials and resources you can share with the sector, please provide details below.

Internal Dissemination

- *Annual Academic Development Symposium*: This year, entitled '[Global Communities: Building Communities and Improving Collaboration](#)', the Symposium was the most measurably effective way of disseminating Theme-related outcomes, as it was attended by around 130 delegates, both in person and online, who were then asked for feedback, which confirmed the success of the event. The Symposium was an opportunity to showcase the LTEP project work, and cross-sector Theme work. For example, the keynote presentation addressing 'Decolonising the Curriculum across disciplines – what can we do?', was delivered by Professor Catriona Cunningham, co-lead of the Collaborative Cluster on Decolonising the Curriculum in the Time of Pandemic, and Jasmine Millington, Student Intern project.
- *Symposium poster competition*: This provided staff (or groups of staff) with the opportunity to share their practice *and* receive feedback on their research from symposium delegates. The 21 posters submitted can be found on the [Symposium poster webpages](#), along with the [Best Judged](#) and [Highly Commended](#) posters.
- *LTEP Project Group*: Year 2 project teams have joined Year 1 project teams to meet regularly and share ideas, evaluation plans and any concerns, proving a further effective mechanism for dissemination.
- *Community of Practice*: With representation from across the University, this Group continues to be a useful forum for engaging others with the work of the RLC Theme, including a channel to promote events, such as the internal LTEP webinar. This online Community has grown in Year 2, and also includes the Year 2 LTEP project teams.
- *Staff eZine*: LTEP projects are being individually showcased in our weekly, University-wide staff ezine, providing information about the projects and raising awareness about the current Theme.
- *Celebrating Diversity events*: Under the umbrella of the University's Inclusivity and Accessibility in Education Framework, a number of [discussion panels](#) involving staff and students have been hosted, which strongly relate to the Theme.
- *Toolbox of Resources*: Our Year 2 plans to curate resources for staff including case studies and other examples of effective practice, which relate to the RLC Theme now will be launched in 2022/23.

External sector dissemination

- *Theme leaders' group event*: In April 2022, the '[Building Student Resilience Through Course Development – Moving from Surviving to Thriving](#)' LTEP project presented at one of the informal Theme leaders' group events, sharing practice across the sector.
- *Enhancement Conference 2022*: At this year's Enhancement Themes Conference in June several of the LTEP projects presented their project journey and disseminated their key findings and resources generated.
- *Promoting the Equity of the Student Learning Experience*: Several case studies were submitted as part of this student-led project (more below).

Collaboration outwith your institution

How have you collaborated with other institutions? This could be informally by growing networks or contacts, or more formally for example, through collaborative clusters or sector work. If you have been collaborating with others, briefly explain what this has involved and what have been the benefits and challenges.

Collaborative Clusters: During the first year of the RLC Enhancement Theme, the University was part of the collaborative cluster project, *Exploring the Potential of Micro-credentials and Digital Badges*. This project aimed to explore stakeholder (academic, student, employer, and alumni) awareness and use of micro-credentials. The findings and outcomes from the Year 1 cluster project are now informing the work of the new, QAA-led sector-wide micro-credential project and the newly established, Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-credentials. The University continues to be a member of this QAA sector-wide project and the complementary project, *Valuing and Recognising Prior Learning and Experience*. Benefits from collaborating with others on these projects include, enabling the University to build expertise in this area for our own on-demand short courses, and helping to agree a common micro-credential terminology across stakeholders for these small units of learning.

Student-led Collaborative Project: This year's Enhancement Theme cross-sector student-led project has been focusing on the theme of *Promoting the Equity of the Student Learning Experience*. The project is exploring how students and staff can support equity for diverse student communities, to enable student parity in their learning opportunities. University of Aberdeen staff responded enthusiastically to the call for short case studies under the three project sub-themes: Pedagogy, Accessibility and Digital Technologies. At least 8 case studies from the University have been submitted for curating and wider dissemination by the RGU student-led project team. Case study titles include: 'Improving Equity through Virtual Project Learning' and the 'Equity of Infographics in Accessible Learning'. Benefits from contributing to this project, include the ability for a wider range of staff from across the University to contribute to, and engage with the RLC Theme. Having discussed this topic with individuals across the University, this project has also helped academics to think more about equity-minded teaching and how to cultivate a sense of belonging in their own student cohorts.

Student Mental Wellbeing: Initial conversations have occurred between our QAA Quality & Enhancement Specialist, UHI and the University of Aberdeen regarding the notion of staff and student transitions back to campus. We aim to re-group and re-think how to approach this area in Year 3 of the RLC Theme. This will enable us to further build upon our Year 2 RLC priorities, and to engage in additional sector-wide activities through becoming involved in other Collaborative Clusters.

Anti-Racist Curriculum (ARC): The Vice-Principal (Education) continues to be Deputy Chair of the national Anti-Racist Curriculum project, which is now in its second phase. The outputs from phase 1 of the ARC feature in our Year 2 RCL plans, and as intended are being used as part of the University's own strategic workstream on Decolonising the Curriculum.

Supporting staff and student engagement

How have staff and students been supported to engage in Theme activities? Please provide examples.

The [Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme](#) projects have been very successful in engaging staff and students in Theme-related activities, with 13 projects currently active and more planned for Year 3. This number of projects has been made possible by the University providing matched project funding. Every project has at least one student intern involved, and the work is focused on elements of practice related to Resilient Learning Communities. Through regular University-wide updates and establishing an LTEP project group that meets every 6 weeks, these initiatives have succeeded in engaging the University's Community of Practice, which includes representation and participation from all 12 academic Schools.

The [Annual Academic Development Symposium](#), aligned with the Resilient Learning Communities Theme, ran in May 2022 and was attended by around 130 delegates including staff and students from across and beyond the University. It focussed on showcasing topics, LTEP projects and activities relating to the Enhancement Theme offering the opportunity to discuss key issues and

challenges in developing staff and student communities of learning. It also offered opportunities for networking and establishing collaboration and advertised the call for new LTEP project applications.

More generally, since the beginning of the Theme, staff and students have been kept updated with relevant work through a variety of channels that have also served as a means of encouraging and supporting engagement. These include staff and student ezines, interactive webinars, committee updates and communications with Directors of Education within each School. In addition, the Resilient Learning Community of Practice has served as a forum for discussing ongoing initiatives and establishing collaborative partnerships between staff and students from across the University.

Processes

What are you learning from the processes, approaches and structures you are using to support this Theme? How will this report be used/distributed within your institution?

Students as partners in teaching and learning has been a key feature in all of our enhancement approaches and initiatives during the current RLC Theme. Students have contributed to a wide range of activities, events, and research projects, including but not limited to: RLC committee membership, LTEP project internships, symposium sessions, and internal dissemination activities. During the Theme, so far, we have adopted different forms of student engagement from gathering student ideas, experiences, and concerns (e.g., through focus groups), to more collaborative working and co-ownership during the LTEP project internships. The benefits are clear for both stakeholders, as students build their confidence, develop their skills, and enhance their employability. For staff these student engagement initiatives have helped to develop their ideas about teaching and supporting learning, to enhance educational practice and the student learning experience. During Year 2 of this Theme, we have further raised the profile and importance to a range of stakeholders of a student partnership approach for effecting enhancement and change. We are extremely grateful to receive QAA funding to provide these paid student internships, which have driven developmental change at the University. We would be keen to follow up initial discussions with QAA Scotland about forming a sector-wide network for student interns in Year 3 to further encourage student engagement with the RLC Theme.

This report will be distributed via the following key channels:

The University's committee structure which includes the University-level Education Committee and its three sub-committees (Quality Assurance, Employability and Entrepreneurship, and Student Support) for information and discussion, and to inform plans for the remaining final year of the Theme.

The Community of Practice for the Theme, which has representation from all 12 academic Schools and Professional Service Directorates at the University of Aberdeen (current membership ~35) will review and discuss this report, before wider dissemination to individual School Education Committees. In addition, the report will be considered at the Institutional RLC Steering Group and will be used to reflect on the progress, achievements, and challenges of the RLC Theme in order to help plan and to identify our next steps for Year 3.

Looking ahead

In session 2022-23 we will be starting to consider what the next Enhancement Theme might focus on. We are interested to know about the discussions, hot topics and issues that are emerging in your practice and gaining increasing attention. Please share your thoughts and views below.

Following consultation with our wider Enhancement Themes community, the following emergent areas are proposed for possible future themes:

- Assessment & Feedback in a Digital Age
- Interdisciplinary approaches to learning and assessment
- Education for sustainable development

- Student partnerships into, through and beyond university
- Authentic experiences
- Enhancing employability and skills development

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