



End of Year 2 Report for: Abertay University

The key purposes of this report are to:-

- provide a framework for HEIs to report on their Theme activity that has taken place over the year
- help share information across the sector on the benefits and challenges around Theme engagement.

Please report under the headings below. The report should be about 6 to 8 sides of A4 in length.

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.

The Steering Group is:

Luke Millard (Chair); Andrea Cameron; Elley Petrie (Students' Association), James Nicholson; Jim Huntingford; Julie Blackwell Young; Julie Gawrylowicz; Noelle McAra; Ruth Falconer; Scott Cameron, Robyn Thiel - President (Students' Association), William Graham, Claire MacEachen and Zbynek Gazdik (2rd year student).

There are no changes.

Evaluation of activities/outcomes

To make evaluation processes more accessible and user friendly, we have attempted to simplify (not minimise) the evaluation reporting process into 7 key questions (see below). Prior to completing these, it would be useful to refer to the QAAS website resource: [A Guide to Basic Evaluation in HE](#) (specifically, Section 8, Summary overview on page 23, and the Evaluation Checklist – Appendix A, on pages 28-29).

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):

Evaluation

Please complete the following 7 questions for each activity or intervention (N.B. Just cut and paste the table below as many times as necessary)

Title of project/activity
Diagnostic testing of students through engaging microcredentials to develop successful student attributes.
1. What change has been/is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
<p>The University has developed a suite of microcredentials that all first-year students studied from September 2021. These 5 credit modules contribute 20 credits to a student's progress and are formulated to help students set the foundations for a successful academic and social student career. Within the first of the modules - ABE 101 – students undertake a diagnostic test that will guide them to additional microcredentials that would best support their development.</p> <div style="text-align: center;"><div style="background-color: #76b82a; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 15px; margin-bottom: 10px;"><h3 style="margin: 0;">ABE101 - Being Successful at Abertay</h3><p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">(Includes diagnostic test and student action planning to select from options below)</p></div><div style="display: grid; grid-template-columns: repeat(4, 1fr); gap: 10px;"><div style="background-color: #4a86e8; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 15px; text-align: center;">ABE102 - Successful Writing at Abertay</div><div style="background-color: #4a86e8; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 15px; text-align: center;">ABE103 - Digital Skills for University and Beyond!</div><div style="background-color: #4a86e8; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 15px; text-align: center;">ABE104 - Dundee and Me</div><div style="background-color: #4a86e8; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 15px; text-align: center;">ABE105 - Research and enquiry skills for the digital age</div><div style="background-color: #4a86e8; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 15px; text-align: center;">ABE106 - How to sell your ideas!</div><div style="background-color: #4a86e8; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 15px; text-align: center;">ABE107 - Planning your future career</div><div style="background-color: #4a86e8; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 15px; text-align: center;">ABE108 - Welcome to the CommuniTAY</div><div style="background-color: #4a86e8; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 15px; text-align: center;">ABE109 - Wellbeing tools and tricks</div></div></div> <p>The microcredential modules are led by academics (ABE 101, 106 & 104), professional services staff (ABE 102, 103, 105, 107 and 109) and the Students' Association (ABE 108).</p> <p>Two key elements are at the heart of this work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To encourage students to shape their own learning paths and take charge of that journey by choosing their modular path (which will continue in years 2/3/4)• To 'normalise' student engagement with professional support services so that they are not seen as remedial, but developmental. If we can get students to engage with those services in year one, can we make that engagement just part of being a successful student? <p>The first year has been implemented and we are now seeking to learn from that implementation as exam board results are produced. We are encouraged by short-term outputs and intrigued for the potential of longer-term benefits.</p>

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

Retention of new students has been an issue for the institution, and we believe that this diagnostic and foundation setting approach will provide students with the opportunity to develop academically, promote good habits and enable them to integrate socially within the learning community

We are now looking at creating a year two version for direct entrant students who we know are another area of retention discomfort for the University. This new microcredential (ABE201) will be different in form, 10 credits, and delivered in a long, thin manner across 2 terms. The module will be launched in September 2022 and will be mandatory for all direct entrant students into year 2.

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

Improvement in retention data

Happier students integrated into a community of learners

Staff to understand how they might design and tailor new microcredentials at higher levels of student study to enable students to achieve graduate-level outcomes

4. How **do we/will we** know? (How is the change measured)

We need to wait for the exam board data to confirm our suspicions of a positive impact.

There is also the opportunity to utilise modular feedback from students and comments from discussion forums that are woven into modules.

Professional services will consider impact on their services – has demand increased or fallen off – has nature of enquiry changed?

5. Who **has been/is** involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)

Court, Senate and University Teaching and Learning Committee will receive reports on outcomes.

Programme teams will witness local level impact.

Students are involved in shaping the continuing evolution of the microcredentials and the construction of the way in which the diagnostic is designed and reported to students. Longer term we hope students will advise us of new topics or microcredentials that better support the building of those foundations.

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

Plenty and these have already been fed back into redesigning some of the modules for release in September 2022 with the next cohort. This included assessment types, timing of release of modules, feedback and other issues. Nothing was disastrous, but the teams all realised that from the strong foundation, small improvements could be made that might considerably help students achieve.

7. Any things you **have stopped/need to stop** doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)

The microcredentials replace year one electives which have now ceased.
In September, a new suite of year 2 microcredentials will replace all year 2 electives.

Title of project/activity

Student Success Officers (SSO) for a personalised approach to student interventions

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

The University received funding from the Northwood charity to explore the employment of recent graduates as Student Success Officers who can work with Student Academic Advisers (SAA), an academic post in each School, to analyse student engagement data and make personal interventions to re-engage students with their learning.

This model has worked successfully elsewhere and will enable the SSO to interrogate student data (attendance and progression), work with students, individually and in groups, and offer input to the SSAs. They also provide a conduit between students and staff for a wide range of issues.

9. Why **have we made/are we making** it? (Rationale for the change)

The institution receives all sorts of data around student participation and engagement but did not really make best use of that data to intervene with and support student progression. This new role (one in each school) offers that focus and provides the friendly, peer led support and guidance that students require.

10. What difference **has occurred/will hopefully occur** as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)

Improvements in retention data.

Enhanced sense of learning community.

Greater awareness of students around support structures/services and improved awareness of academics around student difficulties.

Early work is taking place that will see the SSO's liaise with Representative Council and members of the Students' Association team on relevant campaigns. This may also include better integration of approaches to welcome and induction across the SA and the University.

11. How **will we** know? (How is the change measured)

The Funder requires an annual report on success and reports will also be deployed at Teaching and Learning committee

There will be an analysis of how each SSO has engaged with students – quantitative and qualitative. AbLE Academy will coordinate activities so best practice is shared among the SSOs and they understand the institutional picture and are not refocused by local needs.

12. Who **is** involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)

Feedback from the SSOs and SAAs will help improve the operation of the programme and we need to build measurements that show input v outcome so that we can define what an effective intervention looks like and how it should be deployed.

Staff and students have also provided feedback on the impact of the role and we are undertaking an internal review of the role in June so that it can be even more successful in 2022/23.

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

Resourcing and methods of communication was an early lesson, as we could not get mobile phones for the SSOs. Students seemed to engage more with texts than emails and we continue to learn about communication around the how, when, and why.

The review this summer will shape templates that might be more engaging or support redirection to support services. We will explore those options.

14. Any things you **have stopped/need to stop** doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)

None

Title of project/activity

**Enhancement Theme Learning and Teaching Projects.
Now called – EnAbLE project funding.**

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

In 2021 the Abertay Themes Steering Group met to define what projects would be supported by theme funding.

It was proposed that the Enhancement Theme at Abertay seek to support projects that deliver activities that focus on:

- Direct entrants and enabling success through setting and delivering on expectations;
- Mentoring through activities such as ‘supplemental instruction’;
- Blended learning, community, and campus;
- Microcredentials that enable successful student employment.

These themes have been identified through institutional research and/or are part of the inevitable focus of this and many other universities as we strive to learn from the pandemic and the impact upon student and institutional futures. They also aim to bring together institutional areas of concern or development and refocus them to target activities that will enhance the student experience.

The project funding call was released in May 2022 and theme resources will be used to pay for student employment that helps to deliver the projects. The focus is on co-creation to support this work.

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

To ensure staff and student participation in school-based activities that will raise the prominence of retention and the enhancement theme.

Student and staff partnerships also set the foundations for the development of a successful learning community.

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

Projects will fund student engagement/participation through employment. This will ensure we have the capacity for projects, develop student skills and ensure relevance of the outcomes to the existing student generation.

18. How **will we** know? (How is the change measured)

Success of activities through student participant feedback and student outcomes

19. Who **has been/is** involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)

Steering Group, TLC and the new Students as Partners Board, constructed to drive forward student engagement in the university community

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

No

21. Any things you **have stopped/need to stop** doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)

No

Title of project/activity

New approaches to orientation and the 'relentless welcome'

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

This work has not progressed as much as we hoped following stakeholder group meetings in year one that started to explore the concept and create linkages between Schools, professional services and Students' Association.

The focus on microcredentials and how that is being employed to set student expectations is perhaps deflecting away from this work as we do not really have the capacity at present to do both.

So the focus is more around awareness raising of what everyone is planning to do so that each area can offer support or steer students to engagement activities.

The perspective of the 'relentless welcome' has been shared widely across the university and we are now starting to see that addressed through things like the new ABE201 microcredential for direct entrants.

An additional project looking at how we might work with direct entrants into year 3 and 4 has also been proposed. Funding has been secured from the University to work with a company called GRIT to explore how we might build the confidence and set expectations for direct entrants that is not built into the curriculum.

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

Once again, this is about retention and ensuring our students are welcomed to the university, understand what is required and what is possible during their academic career. We need to ensure clarity around setting student expectations and share the vast array of support and engagement opportunities that are available.

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

Collaboration across the university to enhance that welcome experience.

In addition, a third of Abertay students are direct entrants to year 2 or 3, so exposing the concept of the 'relentless welcome' to each year of student entry is key. Programmes and services are now starting to see that welcome/scene setting piece as being key to future student success, but we have a long way to go in embedding this approach.

25. How **will we** know? (How is the change measured)

This could be a component of retention outcomes, but it might just be satisfaction surveys on the welcome experience.

26. Who **is** involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)

Teaching and Learning Committee

Programme and service leaders

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

Further work required with Colleges and the direct entrants that come to Abertay. The University is reviewing articulation arrangements with partner colleges so we set students up to succeed not fail.

28. Any things you **have stopped/need to stop** doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)

This will come as the university starts integrating activities and recognising where it needs to position its limited resources.

Title of project/activity

Abertay's Vision for Embedding EDI within the Curriculum and Institution: Building on decolonising and anti-racist approaches.

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

This is a new project that has just received approval through Senior Management Team, Teaching and Learning Committee and Senate. It will build on the themes of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), Decolonising the Curriculum (DTC) and creating an Anti-racist Curriculum (ARC). The new strategy paper signals the approach that the University will take in addressing these issues in a coherent and phased manner.

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

The initial proposals aim to create a cohesive plan to build on the work done in including more diverse perspectives and addressing the narrative exposed in our recent Race Equality Charter application. Abertay was the first Scottish university to gain REC bronze and wants to remain the Scottish sector lead in this space.

Abertay aims to be a proactive and engaging partner with Dundee and beyond to create teaching, learning and engagement practices that are equitable to all its stakeholders. This work will start its focus internally but extend to include its various external partners who both contribute to and benefit from an engagement with Abertay.

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

The internal work will be focused on three ambitions:

1. Creating a learning community that is diverse and inclusive in its teaching and that supports staff and students.
2. Enabling the development of competent and engaged professionals who are active citizens and address bigotry in its various forms. These students will be prepared not just to be good employees but to engage more effectively with the diverse societies they will join after graduation.
3. Embedding equity in teaching and learning activities to create a space that is accessible, safe and belonging for a diverse student and staff base. These students will be enabled to challenge inequalities within the classroom and wider society.

32. How **will we** know? (How is the change measured)

Stakeholders will be involved in formulating the evaluation framework. We would like to adopt the UEL approach outlines at the Themes conference.

33. Who **is** involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)

The University, staff (academic and professional) and students

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

Not yet as only about to begin.

35. Any things you **have stopped/need to stop** doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)

AbLE Academy had to reorganise its secondment funding to free up resources so that a 0.2FTE secondment could lead the work.

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.

QAA Enhancement Theme Conference June 2022

The conference saw Abertay lead and deliver sessions on the Student Success Officer and the Diagnostic approaches activities. This dissemination has seen enquiries ranging from Plymouth to Dundee and these will be followed up over the coming weeks.

European First Year Experience Conference – April 2022

The Diagnostic approach was shared in an extended pre-conference workshop and a standard workshop at the conference, held in Austria. International follow up has seen colleagues in Belgium share insights as Gent University has also undertaken substantial work in this space.

In June 2023, Abertay University will host the European First Year Experience Conference providing opportunities for Abertay and all theme leads to share their ideas with an international audience.

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.

An interesting development has seen the theme leads at Abertay and Dundee University come together to consider how the universities might work together to support all students coming to Dundee. This has also involved the key partners of the Students' Associations at each University. The four partners have had 2 meetings and will continue to develop over the summer and coming year as we better understand what is possible.

Abertay also leads the PARC collaborative cluster project and new universities join that each year. The recent themes conference saw three other universities suggest an interest in joining which we hope will be followed up shortly.

Supporting staff and student engagement

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

Alongside the Enhancement Themes work and in direct alignment is a new initiative at Abertay that has seen the Students' Association and University work together to create a Students as Partners Board. The Enable project funding will be driven through this board as they will all be co-creation projects. The board has also commissioned work around the student voice and integrating it with ongoing programme level evaluation.

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?

This report was shared with the Enhancement Themes Steering Group which was invited to comment. It will also be shared with Teaching and Learning Committee.

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.

Learning communities and redesigning the new university campus so that it engages students and staff struggling to return from the pandemic. This could be physical spaces or redesigning the timetable.

For example, if through blended approaches we have 20% less teaching on campus, presumably that means we need 20% fewer rooms. But it also means that we have at least 20% fewer students on campus which means our buildings are quieter. To avoid the feeling of tumbleweed, what should we do? A three day teaching week has been proposed, would that work? It would create a busy campus with a healthy vibrant feel, but are staff and students being short changed?

At the end of 2018-19 we have one year of the current Theme remaining. Looking beyond this Theme, please share any observations and views to help shape the final year of the current Theme and to identify a topic for the next Theme.

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Date:	17th June 2022

