



Resilient Learning Communities

Institutional Plan for: University of Aberdeen

Context
<p>Throughout the first 2 years of the Resilient Learning Communities (RLC) Enhancement Theme, the University of Aberdeen has created a collaborative approach, which has cut across the Institution and included staff and students working in partnership to drive initiatives for change and improvement. This work aligns closely with the long-range University of Aberdeen strategy (Aberdeen 2040), and was evident in the institutional Annual Academic Development Symposium, which celebrated Theme-related work divided into sessions representing the 4 pillars of the 2040 vision: inclusive, international, interdisciplinary and sustainable. Furthermore, our highly successful Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme (LTEP) has funded 13 projects that relate to the Theme over the 2 years that intersect with Institutional priorities, including assessment and feedback, staff and student mental well-being and accessibility for all. We have also extended our collaborative approach beyond our Institution in terms of our contributions to the Micro-credentials Network, the recognition of prior learning initiative, the student-led equity project and the anti-racist curriculum agenda.</p> <p>Overall, it is evident that the central strategic ethos of the University of Aberdeen is truly reflected in the breadth and depth of our Enhancement Theme work.</p>

Institutional team	
Institutional lead	Prof Steve Tucker (alternate and Deputy Theme Lead, Dr Joy Perkins)
TLG staff representative	Prof Steve Tucker (alternate and Deputy Theme Lead, Dr Joy Perkins)
TLG student representative	Akua Serwaa Agyeman (alternate, David Mercieca)
Dean for Entrepreneurship and Employability	Prof 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	Dr Joy Perkins (also Institutional Lead Alternate)
Manager, Student Engagement	Karen Scaife
Centre Manager, Centre for Academic Development	Patricia Spence
UG student representatives	David Mercieca Janet Gauthier
PGT & PGR student representatives	TBC

Overall outcomes/activity

Throughout the first 2 years of the RLC Enhancement Theme, we have focussed on collaboration and partnership between staff and students from across and outside the University. Through these alliances, we have supported the development of resources and initiatives to help establish and enrich learning communities that are resilient, productive and reactive to the challenges of the changing higher education environment. Moving into the final year of the Theme, this remains our focus, where we continue to prioritise delivery of support and guidance to initiatives that harmonise with the Theme and the broader Institutional strategy and vision.

We continue to achieve this through:

- Expanding our LTEP to fund Theme-related projects. Currently there are 13 projects in progress with more set to be funded through Year 3.
- Promotion of active communication, discussion and collaboration around the Enhancement Theme across the Institution through the Community of Practice and the Annual Academic Development Symposium.
- Engaging in sector-wide activities through involvement in Collaborative Clusters, through the Theme Leaders group and by contributing to Enhancement Theme conferences.
- The continuation of the work of the Decolonising the Curriculum Steering Group, linking into the sector-wide Anti-Racist Curriculum project. It is anticipated that the Steering Group will, by February 2023, deliver a set of resources to support Schools in taking forward their work in this area.
- The continuing development of a Toolkit of case studies and resources to disseminate theme-related projects.

Year 3 outcomes/activity

Our key priorities in the first 2 years involved staff and students working collaboratively to co-create resources and drive initiatives aimed at developing and enhancing learning communities. In Year 3, we aim to:

- Continue to fund theme-related projects through a further round of LTEP funding. The call will support further work centred around the RLC Theme, with staff and student collaboration encouraged as a key aspect of proposed projects. The University has once again kindly agreed to match the funding we have available, which provides added opportunities for staff and student involvement with the Theme.
- Contribute to various Collaborative Cluster initiatives:
 - Advanced stage contribution to the 'Understanding Micro-credentials and Small Qualifications' and 'Valuing and Recognising Prior Learning & Experience' projects.
 - Involvement in re-establishing the Student Mental Health and Well Being cluster (with QAA Scotland and UHI).
 - Proposing a new 'Developing a new Digital Accessibility for Mathematics in STEM disciplines' cluster (with University of Glasgow and Glasgow Caledonian University).
- Establish a collaborative working group involving those leading work developing and recognising student resilience aiming to integrate the outputs of the work into a suite of resources for broad dissemination across the sector.
- Make substantial contributions to the Enhancement Theme and Higher Education Teaching and Learning (HETL) international conferences in 2023 showcasing the leading role the University of Aberdeen has taken in work relating to Resilient Learning Communities.
- Continue to populate and develop the online toolkit of resources, providing staff with support for developing and enhancing practice.
- Promote involvement with the Enhancement Theme through regular communication of projects, initiatives and successes as well as through the Annual Academic Development Symposium (May 2023), which will be focussed on an aspect of the Theme. It is hoped this will continue to encourage broad staff and student involvement as we complete the current Theme and move towards the next one.
- 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 deliver a set of resources (web-based and Toolkit with the Antiracist Curriculum Project resources embedded) which will support Schools to take forward the relevant conversations and their overall work in Decolonising the Curriculum. It is also anticipated that a set of principles and a timeline for implementation of various phases of activity will be agreed in the next few months.

Using Theme resources from sector projects
<p>Since the inception of the RLC Enhancement Theme, a Community of Practice group has been established with representation from all 12 academic Schools and professional service units at the University of Aberdeen. During the Theme, this forum has been an excellent channel to share resources from the various RLC sector-wide projects. The QAA Micro-credentials Characteristic Statement, which was informed by the work of the QAA Resilient Learning Communities, Year 1 Collaborative Cluster on Micro-credentials & Digital Badges (now Understanding Micro-credentials and Small Qualifications) has been particularly well received by our Head of Online Education for the further development of our flexible short course provision. In tandem, with the Micro-credentials Glossary, which has recently been published on the Enhancement Themes website, both resources will help with developing our broader ongoing work on flexible and accessible learning.</p> <p>The University is committed to eliminating racism from its curricula, by way of actively promoting anti-racism and decolonising the curriculum. A number of useful external resources have been instrumental to the initial stages of this venture, most specifically the 'Anti-Racist Curriculum Project' from the current Enhancement Theme. The initial phases of our work have focused on offering practical solutions for staff to promote this topic to their colleagues and students, using the 'Tackling Racism on Campus' findings as a platform. The University appreciates that all its Schools will have different priorities and ways in which anti-racism can be promoted, but some fundamentals such as an awareness of language and conscious inclusion have proven to be an instrumental first step. The QAA's anti-racism resources have been helpful and will continue to be used in supporting our review processes.</p>

Evaluation
Title of project/activity
Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme (holistic evaluation of the process and projects funded over the course of the 3-year Theme)
What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
Funding will be provided to support collaborative projects that align with the RLC Theme. These projects will involve staff and students working in partnership to drive initiatives, develop resources and co-create content that enhances, showcases and shares Institutional practice.
Why are we making it? (Rationale for the change)
The funding will provide the necessary resource to staff and students to enable Theme-related projects to be completed, creating a portfolio of relevant work and a thriving collaborative community associated with it.
What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change envisaged)
Enhancement of practice across the Institution in terms of outputs and initiatives emerging from the funded projects. In addition, promoting and encouraging engagement with the Theme across the breadth of the Institution and stimulating formation of collaborative partnerships.
How will we know? (How the change is measured)
Year 1 saw funding of 5 projects, Year 2 saw 8 projects and we hope to see this upward trajectory continue into Year 3 (call for projects closes mid-September). By considering levels of engagement and numbers of applications submitted for this initiative, we can measure its broad impact on the academic community. Furthermore, change can also be measured granularly through the breadth of outputs produced and their reach, which will be evaluated in each individual project.

Dissemination of work
<i>Internal communication channels:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing staff networks (eg. School Directors of Education, Pedagogical Inquiry Network, Learning & Teaching Network) and events (eg. regular topic-based Discussion Fora). Existing student channels, working closely with the Student Experience Team. The RLC Community of Practice which was created in Year 1.

- The active LTEP Group which meets regularly.
- Our committee structure (eg. University Education Committee).
- The Annual Academic Development Symposium, which shares work related to the Enhancement Theme. It is likely that this year's theme resilience in the context of assessment and feedback. [Poster competition](#) runs alongside, with posters are promoted widely.
- Use of the University Staff News email to promote Theme-related activities and events to all staff.
- Working closely with Aberdeen University Students' Association to promote initiatives and involve students in all aspects of RLC activities.
- The launch of the LTEP-funded 5-week micro-credential, '[Student Resilience: Moving from Surviving to Thriving](#)', which consists of interactive activities, student content and podcast style lectures, and is designed to support students in enhancing their resilience through a variety of mechanisms.

External dissemination:

- Promoting Enhancement Theme events (including the International Enhancement Themes Conference) and supporting staff/students to attend and present at these.
- Providing encouragement and support to attend / present at other events eg. The University-hosted international [HE Teaching & Learning Conference](#), Theme Leaders' Group, Advance HE, other learned societies and submit case studies for RLC projects (eg. Promoting the Equity of the Student Learning Experience).
- Inviting other institutions / professional bodies (eg. QAA) to attend our Annual Academic Development Symposium.

Supporting staff and student engagement

The staff and students that make up the University community will be supported by:

- A third opportunity to bid for LTEP project funding.
- LTEP student interns (including those from past projects) will be invited to join an internal network which may, in future, link with students involved in RLC work across the sector.
- Ongoing close working with the RLC Community of Practice.
- Encouragement to attend/present at internal events (eg. Annual Academic Development Symposium).
- Funding and support to attend external events (eg. Annual Enhancement Themes Conference).
- Support to present at the international Higher Education Teaching & Learning Conference which this year is being hosted by the University of Aberdeen.
- Continuing 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) and School Teaching Executives alike. Key to the success of this partnership will be the continuing close working with the TLG Student Representative.

Plan author:	Professor Steve Tucker
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Return to: ARCAAdmin@gaa.ac.uk