



Resilient Learning Communities

Institutional Plan for: Abertay University

This document will form your year 2 plan and should be around three to four sides of A4. You can find your year 1 plan through this [web page](#).

Context

Provide any statements that might be helpful in explaining your institution's context and approach and how this plan supports the achievement of institutional priorities. Any context statement could draw on salient points from the previous year's learning/outcomes from Theme work and reflect any changes in the strategic direction of your institution.

The Enhancement Theme has been embraced at Abertay and has helped support a raising in profile of the need to focus on retention. This has seen discussions at Teaching and Learning Committee and Senior Management Team that have focused on data and understanding the issue before arriving at potential solutions. These are ongoing and are likely to see the university target specific issues that are pertinent to students joining Abertay.

The first-year development on microcredentials has been delivered and will now be implemented and evaluated for impact on the first-year student experience. Discussions with Stella and Liz will guide that evaluation. The QAA PARC initiative has also helped colleagues realise that there is international interest in diagnostic approaches and how that can be embedded into curriculum through microcredentials.

Charitable funding has been found to augment this work through the Northwood Trust. This will see the appointment of three student success officers to monitor student engagement in the microcredentials and their programme specific modules as we seek to ensure we create that sense of learning community at Abertay.

Other activities such as block delivery of learning and the relentless welcome are developing and will be implemented over the coming months as we seek to address student and staff need.

Institutional team

Please specify for each member whether staff or student and for staff, their role title. Where the Theme Leaders' Group (TLG) staff or student nominee is unable to attend meetings, an alternate can attend on their behalf.

Institutional lead	Luke Millard
TLG staff representative	Julie Blackwell Young
TLG student representative	Robyn Thiel, President of Students' Association
Add additional rows for additional members	

Overall outcomes/activity

Are there any changes to your key priorities, outcomes and delivery activities that you identified at the start of the Theme?

The year one plan identified that the key activities would focus upon:

- Diagnostic testing of students;
- Curriculum redesign through selective block delivery of learning;
- New approaches to orientation and the 'relentless welcome';
- Student Life Coaching;
- Engaging microcredits to develop successful student attributes and skills;
- Mentoring as an integrated retention approach.

The majority of these work streams are on track or about to be actioned if they were not promised in year one. The only activity that has significantly changed is the Student Life Coaching which has been adapted to focus upon retention developments through the employment of recent graduates as Student Success Officers. There will be more information on that role later in this submission.

Year 2 outcomes/activity

In answering the following, identify what is continuing from year 1 and what is new:

What are your key priorities?

What outcomes do you want to achieve?

What activities will you deliver to achieve your key priorities?

Diagnostic Testing of Students

Abertay remains the lead partner on the QAA Collaborative Cluster project Personalised Approaches to Resilience and Community (PARC) which had a very successful first year and has now been funded by QAA to continue and expand its activities in a second year.

At Abertay, the formative diagnostic test has been embedded in ABE 101, a first year microcredential that students take as they transition into the university, post enrolment. This effective deployment of the diagnostic and the wider microcredentials is crucial to the university and will be fully evaluated through quantitative and qualitative sources. The target is to improve our first-year retention rate through this approach.

Curriculum redesign through block delivery of learning

The block delivery of learning development group has been meeting since the new year and has developed a paper that will be discussed at Academic Leadership Group and Teaching & Learning Committee. This seeks to set out the parameters for an Abertay instance that could be piloted across a range of programmes, as soon as 2022/23. The paper has sought to draw on the literature on the subject and then scrutinise the potential development through a series of lenses:

- Lens 1: Design principles for curriculum and assessment
- Lens 2: Design principles for student engagement and success
- Lens 3: Design principles for staff engagement and success

It is hoped that Teaching and Learning Committee will endorse the proposals at its meeting in October with a view to development of pilot activities in 2022.

New approaches to orientation and the ‘relentless welcome’¹

The University is starting to take more of an integrated approach to orientation, but we recognise that we still have some way to go on this work. The creation of the microcredentials that are deployed on enrolment will support this work, but we need to see how this grows and develops from first years to direct entrants at year 2 or 3. The ethos or ‘relentless welcome’ is starting to be recognised but it is yet to be embraced across all programmes.

Student Success Officers (SSO)

Abertay University believes in the students it welcomes onto its courses and recognises its responsibility to help those students to succeed. The SSOs will harness existing data analytics processes to implement targeted interventions and provide a personalised approach to support and development. This personalisation of the student journey could see the SSO provide a focal point and a constant for students as they seek to navigate through the world of academia. The SSOs will encourage the student to engage with specific activities and diagnostic tools to enable the student’s participation, continuation and development. Through building of student confidence we will enable the student to visualise success and complete their degree.

The University has attracted funding for these 3 posts from the Northwood Charitable Trust Foundation. Funding is for 3 years and the Dean of Teaching and Learning will need to report regularly to the Trust on progress and impact. Three graduates from 2021 have been identified to lead this work, one in each School, and we remain excited by what they might achieve.

¹ <https://www.teaching-matters-blog.ed.ac.uk/creating-a-relentless-welcome/>

Engaging microcredits to develop successful student attributes

Senate recommended that microcredentials replace the electives that had been in place since 2015. At that time it was determined that all programmes would contain electives where professional body regulations allowed. As the ELIR submission (2016) stated '*Underlying much of what we do is a belief in an initial broadening of education, offering flexibility, choice, and interdisciplinarity to students. To this end we have introduced our compulsory interdisciplinary electives*'.

The Microcredentials will continue to support the '*broadening of education, offering flexibility*' and choice, but the focus of the offer is tightened to enable students to develop the skills and practices that support their personal and professional development. It remains a requirement that programmes provide students with a minimum of 20 credits choice in year one and two. In 2021, the first year of the microcredential offer will focus on the first-year student experience at level 7.

The University will adopt a phased approach to the Microcredential initiative. This will see a suite of microcredentials be introduced in September 2021 for year one students, and for some direct entrants into year two, that focus on preparing those students to be successful academically and socially within the Abertay community.

The titles in the diagram highlight the areas developed and now being deployed with students. ABE 101 was sent to students on enrolment so they could actually achieve 5 credits before they arrived on campus.

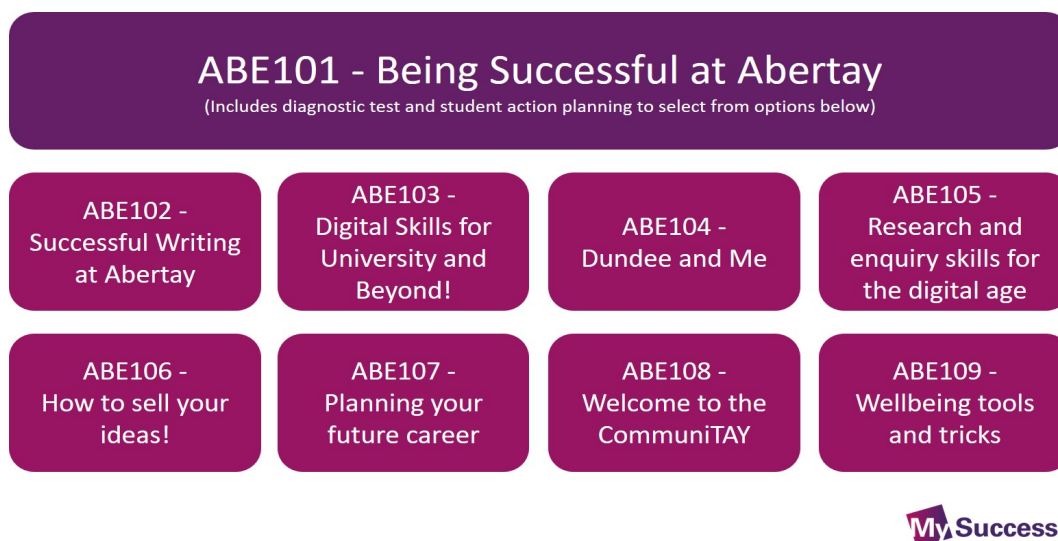


Diagram 1: Year one Microcredential structure (now called MySuccess)

The students' journey through the Microcredentials would see them all undertake the mandatory Abertay 101 component that would include a diagnostic test that would inform students of their strengths and weakness across a range of areas. The four pillars of the diagnostic test would be academic skills, numeracy, digital skills and wellbeing. Outcomes of the diagnostic would enable the student to undertake some reflection of their skills base and will help them select the three remaining microcredits from the pool of options. The Microcredentials are a genuinely university wide effort with modules being delivered by the Students' Association, Professional Services, Education Development and Academic Schools.

There is one simple target and that is to improve retention of our first year students through helping them to academically and socially integrate into their new university.

Mentoring as an integrated retention approach.

This is the most embryonic idea that will be pursued through the enhancement theme. It is the evolution of an embedded mentoring ecosystem that runs throughout all retention components. The drive is to utilise mentoring as the integrated backbone of the retention activities highlighted in this report. This may see:

- Mentoring as a key focus in the first year experience (block delivery) and alignment with the enablement agenda (mental health, disability, commuters)
- Mentoring training (blended approach) for all students and staff that address academic and pastoral support for students;
- Recognition and credit (curricula and extra-curricular) for participation (microcredits);
- The creation of a mentoring matrix to enable students to receive support whenever and wherever they need it within and outwith the University

This aspirational work has not yet begun, but we remain committed and expect pilots in this enhancement year.

Evaluation

How do you intend to evaluate your year 2 projects and activities?

Prior to completing this section, 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 complete briefly the following 5 questions for each activity or intervention (N.B. Just cut and paste the table below as many times as necessary). This will help you complete your end of year 2 report.

Title of project/activity

Discussion with QAA evaluators to be held in September

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

We are continuing to collate institutional data around student success and have a meeting scheduled with Stella and Liz to focus on specific evaluative techniques around some aspects. In particular, the Student Success Officer intervention interviews with students who are considering leaving and how we record those outcomes.

We propose to follow the same models we identified in year one and then enhance them with the guidance that we receive from the QAA Evaluation leads (Stella and Liz). These projects will not lack for evaluation, but we want to align with QAA evaluative guidance.

We would be happy to provide more guidance per project after speaking to the QAA evaluation team.

Dissemination of work

How will you promote and communicate your work internally and externally?

We have internal seminars already arranged for some of the topics, Microcredntials, amd SSOs, and also sectoral dissemination for diagnostic testing through QSN, UKAT and QAA Annual Conference 2021.

Supporting staff and student engagement

How will you support your community to engage with planned activities?

We will be employing students to help us promote some of these activities and monitor the impact. Students are also on the Enhancement Theme steering group and we had a significant discussion at the last meeting as to how we can grow this student engagement.

Staff will engage through pilot activities, seminars we hold and through learning and teaching project funding we will share.

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