



## Resilient Learning Communities

### Institutional Plan for: Queen Margaret 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.

This Plan aligns with our [Institutional Strategy for the period 2020-25](#) (published July 2020): Within that Strategy we set out our commitment to maintaining and developing our distinct people-centred environment to ensure that students feel safe and supported in their studies by staff who are confident, motivated and inspired. The Strategy seeks to respond to the circumstances arising from the coronavirus pandemic. It expresses our commitment to promoting a culture of respect and resilience. We anticipate that the activities progressed under the auspices of the Enhancement Themes Team will make a direct contribution to that objective.

Our [Student Experience Strategy](#) is under review at present. Helpfully, there is crossover in the membership of the Strategy Review Steering Group and our RLC Team, and this supports a consistent and complementary approach to our review and project activity. Early discussion around priorities within the SES has included consideration of staff and student mental health and wellbeing and related actions to promote resilience.

Our [Student Partnership Agreement](#) was most recently updated in 2020 and includes, as one of four priority projects for the period 2020-21, an action for the University and Students' Union to work together to promote students' resilience and ability to thrive in their student life.

Reports from our Institutional Team are considered by the Student Experience Committee, which has oversight of the academic and co-curricular experience for all of our students. Regular updates on the work of the SEC are shared with the wider University community to promote engagement with strategic and policy initiatives. SEC members also have an important representative role to play in disseminating outcomes from the Committee.

<b>Institutional team</b>	
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	Professor Richard Butt, Deputy Principal
TLG staff representative	Professor Richard Butt, Deputy Principal
TLG student representative	Linnea Wallen, PhD Candidate
Add additional rows for additional members – Institutional Team members listed in alphabetical order	
Dr Gemma Blackledge-Foughali, Associate Head, Business, Division of Enterprise and Management	
Dr Theresa Cronin, Transnational Partnership Manager and International Lead, School of Arts, Social Sciences and Management	
Heather Hartley, Student Experience Data Officer	
Karl Johnson, Lecturer, Division of Psychology Sociology and Education	
Dr Jessica Lindohf, Head of Student Services	
Dr Joan Ma, Lecturer, Division of Speech and Hearing Sciences	
Dawn Martin, Assistant Secretary, Governance and Quality Enhancement (Secretary to the Institutional Team)	
Ailsa McMillan, Senior Lecturer, Division of Nursing	
Kristina Mountain, Senior Lecturer, Division of Nursing	
Aasiyah Patankar, Student President	
Mhairi Robertson, Assistant Lecturer, Division of Psychology, Sociology and Enterprise	
Dr Olivia Sagan, Head of Division of Psychology, Sociology and Education	
Ann Turner, Senior Lecturer, Division of Media, Communication and Performing Arts	
Dr Stefanie van de Peer, Lecturer, Division of Media, Communication and Performing Arts	
Linnea Wallen, PhD Candidate/Peer Assisted Learning (PALS) Support Co-ordinator	

### Overall outcomes/activity

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

Our key priorities, outcomes and delivery activities remain as stated at the start of the Theme.

### 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?

The key **outcomes** remain as stated in the previous year, namely:

- A better institutional understanding of loneliness and isolation, of the distinctions between the two conditions, and of their impact on health and wellbeing.
- A better understanding of the current impact of loneliness and isolation on the health and wellbeing of Queen Margaret University students.
- Improved understanding of the impact of loneliness and isolation on different groups of students, and how to meet the needs of these different groups.
- A better understanding and improved awareness of the resources already available at QMU and externally to support students experiencing loneliness and isolation, where this is detrimental to their wellbeing.
- A more nuanced understanding of how existing QMU resources support students in their loneliness or isolation.
- Provision of additional resources for staff and students, as appropriate and informed by the activities we deliver.

We plan to deliver the following **activities**:

- Analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data from our student questionnaire, which ran from April to June 2021, and of additional qualitative data gathered through student focus groups held in summer 2021 (follow-up activity to launch of the questionnaire in year one of the Theme).
- Analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data from our staff questionnaire, which is due to close in September 2021, and further activity to gather and evaluate qualitative data (follow-up activity to launch of the questionnaire in year one of the Theme).
- Preparation of research papers informed by the above activities for dissemination within and beyond the University (new activity for year two).
- Development of new and existing strategies and resources for the University community as a whole, and particular demographics, as informed by the outputs from the questionnaires (new activity for year two).
- Support for Programme Leaders, Personal Academic Tutors and the wider staff community to raise awareness of the outputs from the Theme and help them signpost accordingly (new activity).
- Partnership working with Class Reps, Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS) Leaders and Student Ambassadors to raise their awareness of the outputs from the Theme and support them to signpost their student peers accordingly (new activity).

## 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

Lonely Learning and learning to be lonely: a study of student resilience and challenge during COVID-19 lockdown

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

The overall purpose of our project is to explore student experiences of loneliness and isolation and identify strategies that may have been used to manage these experiences. Our key objectives are to raise awareness of the student experience, to enhance staff and student understanding, to promote existing resources and approaches, and to develop new resources to mitigate loneliness and isolation, where these are detrimental to the individual.

Activities and anticipated interventions are as reported in our end of year one evaluation and earlier in this year two plan.

### Why are we making it? (Rationale for the change)

As an early output from our Themes work (February 2021), we developed an expert staff briefing on loneliness and isolation (attached to our end of year one submission). The briefing explains to our staff community why we are investigating this topic at QMU:

*Included in the growing literature reporting on loneliness amongst particular groups is growing evidence of reported loneliness in the student body<sup>i</sup>. Studies investigating associations with culture<sup>ii</sup>; gender<sup>iii</sup> social media<sup>iv</sup>, internet<sup>v</sup>, smartphone use<sup>vi</sup>, attachment<sup>vii</sup>, mental distress<sup>viii</sup>, academic performance<sup>ix</sup> and social identity<sup>x</sup> are but a few of the areas under the microscope of social science. What we do know is that there is a growing number of students who report feeling lonely with the Unite annual survey of 2019<sup>xi</sup> suggesting that as many as one in four students feels lonely 'often' or 'all of the time'.*

The restrictions on in person learning and social activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic during academic session 2020-2021 are highly likely to have exacerbated the situation, and this is confirmed by a recent survey of students studying at Scottish HEIS<sup>1</sup>.It

<sup>1</sup> In a Youth Sight poll commissioned by Universities Scotland, 77% of students said that significant restrictions on in-person learning last year had a slight or strong negative impact on them feeling lonely. YouthSight spoke to a sample of 552 students, a combination of Scottish-domiciled applicants to start at Scottish universities next academic year and students already enrolled at Scottish universities across three weeks in May 2021.

is during this period that we decided to undertake this project exploring loneliness at QMU and find out which systems, structures and support mechanisms exist for students who may be experiencing this very human, but nevertheless distressing emotional and psychological state.

What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change envisaged)

The most important difference that we hope will occur is a reduced detrimental impact of loneliness and isolation on the student experience.

We expect that the following outcomes will underpin this overall objective:

- 1) Increased student awareness of and engagement with resources and approaches and strategies to address feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- 2) Increased staff awareness and signposting of resources and approaches and strategies to address students' feelings of loneliness.

How will we know? (How the change is measured)

We are considering reissuing the student questionnaire in 2022, with some modifications to allow us to compare the student experience of loneliness and isolation in 2022 with the 2021 experience. Should we proceed with this, we will also be able to gain an insight into whether students' awareness and use of QMU services had changed.

Similarly, we will compare NSS and QSS results to determine whether levels of loneliness and isolation have decreased.

### **Dissemination of work**

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

- Internally, we will continue to report to the Student Experience Committee and to other senior committees, including the School Academic Boards and the Senate.
- We will make use of our dedicated staff Intranet Enhancement Themes pages to communicate updates and publish key papers.
- Committee members, acting in their representative role have a responsibility to feedback locally within their academic Divisions and professional services, and it is at this local level that more nuanced discussion can take place.
- In year one of the Theme we discussed an on campus event linked to the Theme and we will revisit this in year two.
- Externally, we will participate in the Enhancement Themes Conference and related events. We hope to be able to share the research reports widely within the sector, and ideally to have the opportunity to present the findings through the Conference and/or related events.

### Supporting staff and student engagement

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

Please see the comments above on committee remits. RLC Team members additionally play an important role in dissemination and engagement in their capacity of Theme Champions.

All QMU staff and students have been invited to engage with this particular Theme through the questionnaires on loneliness and isolation. Within the recruitment materials, and Participant Information Sheets, we raise awareness of the Themes. We will also disseminate the outputs widely.

Staff are guided to the Themes, in some cases, as an outcome from the Performance Enhancement Review (PER) process. Staff are also encouraged to engage with the Themes through our Annual Monitoring and review processes.

We will be considering, at an early meeting of the RLC Team in year two of the Theme, how best to promote student engagement. We were interested to learn at the June meeting of the TLG about practices at other HEIs, in particular instances of students leading Themes projects. This is an area we will be exploring further with a view to allocating some of the Themes budget to support such activity.

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<b>Date:</b>	September 2021

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