



Resilient Learning Communities

Institutional Plan for: Robert Gordon University

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.

In last year's plan, we highlighted how strongly the Theme of Resilient Learning Communities resonates with RGU's institutional context, the following aspects in particular:

- The university's strategic commitment to ensuring a high-quality student experience;
- The educational ethos outlined in RGU's recently published Learning and Teaching Framework and ongoing work to embed this at the institution;
- RGU's highly diverse student population, thanks to the university's strengths in on- and off-campus education, commitment to widening access, vibrant international community and strategic aim to further diversify the range of its provision;
- Enhanced knowledge and capabilities derived from our engagement in previous Themes in relation to supporting student transitions and evidence-based enhancement;
- The ongoing response to, and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic at RGU and across the wider sector.

All of the above continue to provide important contexts for RGU's engagement with the Theme in Year 2. At the same time, recent developments and learning from Year 1 also shape the activities that will be taken forward this session.

In terms of recent developments, while work in Year 1 focussed primarily on evolving RGU's approach to digital learning, the more widespread return of staff and students to campus anticipated this session provides the context for the new project strand on Teaching and Learning Futures that will be progressed in Year 2.

The work around inclusivity that is being continued from Year 1 will also be given additional impetus by the outcomes of the university's recent Enhancement-Led Institutional Review, which included the recommendation to continue to develop and embed equality, diversity and inclusion strategy, actions and practices throughout all aspects of university activity.

With regards to learning from Year 1, all continuing work strands will benefit from project-specific learning derived in the first phase, including the outcomes of data analysis and consultation.

Our approach to engaging staff and students in enhancement activities this session will also be shaped by two key observations from Year 1: firstly, that the significance and timeliness of the drivers outlined above has resulted in a broad spectrum of interlinked enhancement activity being

initiated at the university; and secondly, that staff and students continue to face ongoing pressures due to the pandemic, which may limit their capacity to engage with multiple projects.

In response, the university launched the Emerging Stronger Campaign in March 2021 to unify related enhancement activities taking place under the auspices of the Theme and other initiatives under a single banner. As well as helping to support coherence and impact, this approach has been fruitful in engaging colleagues with the Theme, with a number of practitioner-led projects being taken forward in Year 2 enabled by the campaign.

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	Prof Lynn Kilbride, Vice Principal Academic Development and Student Experience
TLG staff representative	Dr Rachel McGregor, Academic Support Lead
TLG student representative	Damilola Adesanya, President (Education and Welfare)
Additional members	Filippo Antoniazzi, Director of Student Life
	Laura Binnie, Head of School of Health Sciences
	Dr Duncan Cockburn, Director of Planning and Policy Development
	Prof David McLean, Head of Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and Built Environment
	Julie Strachan, Acting Head of DELTA
	Fiona Roberts, Lead Teaching Excellence Fellow

Overall outcomes/activity

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

RGU's key priorities remain the same, namely:

- Further realising the university's strategic ambition to ensure a high-quality student experience;
- Supporting the implementation of the RGU Learning and Teaching Framework (RGU LTF);
- Further enacting RGU's strategic commitment to our staff;
- Supporting the university, our staff, students and the wider sector in our ongoing response to, and recovery from the pandemic.

The desired outcomes identified at the beginning of the Theme also remain unchanged:

- Achieving further progress against the university's strategic objectives to:

- Adopt a student-centred, co-created approach to curriculum design and delivery;
- Provide appropriate support to enable students to be resilient, succeed in their studies and grow as individuals;
- Fostering a culture of staff engagement, empowerment, community and wellbeing.
- Further embedding the RGU LTF across the university's provision;
- Emerging stronger from the pandemic institutionally and as a sector.

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 priorities identified for Year 2 build on work undertaken via the university's engagement with the Theme to date, drawing on the outcomes of completed partnership, engagement and consultation activity to define and deliver enhancements to the student and staff experience at RGU. The following table outlines the new activity planned for Year 2, along with strands continuing from the first year.

New activity
RGU Teaching and Learning Futures
Continuing activity
Evolving RGU's approach to digital learning
Supporting whole-person education throughout the learner journey
Promoting retention and success through inclusive practice
Supporting RGU's Course Leader Community
Emerging Stronger Enhancement Award Projects

Further detail on the planned activities and outcomes for each of these strands is provided in the following section.

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

RGU Teaching and Learning Futures

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

In Year 2, this new strand will support the university in defining RGU's future model of teaching and learning, including how off- and on-campus learning will feature within this to provide an optimal and equitable learning experience for our diverse students. This will involve:

- Supporting the activity of the cross-institutional RGU Teaching and Learning Futures working group through the provision of data insights and project support;
- Determining and implementing standardised terminology for modes of student engagement to provide a common language and shared understanding across RGU's learning community.

The university will also start to consider the impact of the RGU LTF and explore how this might evolve in light of the significant and lasting impact of COVID on education and the world of work.

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

As Scotland moves beyond level zero and a return to more campus-based teaching becomes possible, RGU must turn its attention to the vital question of what the university's future model of teaching and learning will be. Over the last 18 months, members of RGU's learning community have experienced a variety of different modes, including fully online, blended and hybrid, and course provision has been adapted in radically new ways. The university has actively gathered feedback to understand the impact on students and staff, and this has highlighted both positive aspects that the university may wish to retain, as well as areas of potential challenge. Accordingly, this work is necessary to futureproof the university's educational model, ensure it keeps pace with the evolving needs and expectations of students, and is sustainable into the future.

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

The changes envisaged associated with this strand are wide ranging. The immediate changes expected are:

- Development of a clear vision for RGU's future model of teaching and learning
- Co-creation of a shared vocabulary to describe features of this model.

Anticipated longer-term changes include:

- Adaptations to course design and delivery;
- Widened access to RGU's courses and more inclusive modes of engagement;
- Enhancement of RGU's physical and digital learning environments;
- Changes to the provision of student-facing support.

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

The Year 2 activities for this strand will be evaluated via:

- Feedback from relevant working groups;
- Successful delivery of identified outputs.

Title of project/activity

Evolving RGU's approach to digital learning

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

In Year 1, four projects were defined under this strand that will be further progressed in Year 2:

- Digital learning practice – RGU's Online Learning Baseline will be developed to reflect the expansion in new kinds of students studying at the university and adoption of new technologies over the course of the pandemic. The new Baseline will be informed by staff and student feedback gathered in Year 1 and implemented via a supported rollout in Year 2.
- Digital learning environment – in Year 1, external consultancy was engaged to conduct an extensive enquiry into different groups of users' experiences of RGU's virtual learning environment. Building on the findings of this exercise, in Year 2 we will define a roadmap for the development of our digital estate and accompanying implementation plan.
- Digital assessment – recognising that invigilated exams will be an ongoing requirement in some subject areas, work was undertaken in Year 1 to prepare for an online proctoring pilot. With the provider, target modules, and technical groundwork now in place, the pilot is planned to proceed during the Semester 1 assessment period and will be evaluated to make recommendations for the adoption of online proctoring where there is a continuing need for timed, invigilated exams.
- Learning analytics – activity on this strand will be initiated in Year 2, drawing on the findings from the digital learning environment consultancy. The aim of this project is to harness the user generated data within RGU's VLE to build our understanding of students' digital learning experiences and the interventions that can be made to further enhance quality.

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

Last year, we recognised that the pandemic had driven widespread digital transformation at the university, leading to many positive enhancements and accelerating progress in respect of RGU's aspirations with regards to borderless education. To capitalise on this, we embarked on an ambitious programme of work to evolve digital learning at RGU post-COVID and four projects were defined informed by feedback from students and staff and aligned with the university's strategic priorities.

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

- Digital Learning Practice – a supported rollout of the updated RGU Online Learning Baseline will support our academic staff meet or exceed the new minimum expectation. Minimum standards will also be developed for new modes of engagement including Graduate Apprenticeships and online short courses, leading to more consistent and high-quality experiences for these students.
- Digital Learning Environment – a roadmap and set of requirements, developed through stakeholder feedback and objective analysis, will inform the further development of our VLE. Proposals for internal funding to support development over the next period have also been submitted.
- Digital Assessment – more sustainable mechanisms of supporting alternative assessments will be established, including appropriate procedures for maintaining the integrity of online

examinations.

- Learning Analytics – it is envisaged that we will have a better understanding of our students' digital learning experience and the interventions that can be made to further enhance quality.

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

- Digital Learning Practice – initial implementation of the updated RGU Online Learning Baseline will be assessed via staff feedback and SEQ data, with wider scale evaluation of impact following in Year 3 once the new Baseline is further established.
- Digital Learning Environment – future impact will be assessed by measuring implementation against the development roadmap established in Year 2.
- Digital Assessment – in the online proctoring pilot, evaluation will be conducted through interviews with students post-exam, as well as with the academic staff involved, to inform and refine future procedures.
- Learning Analytics – the initial phase of exploratory work will be evaluated through discussion and approval of implementation plans by our Digital Learning Steering Group.

Title of project/activity

Supporting whole-person education throughout the learner journey

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

In Year 1, this project focused on bringing together and adding impetus to a range of related enhancement activities being undertaken across the university focusing on themes such as:

- Understanding and supporting students' physical, mental and social health;
- Reviewing and enhancing the university's support platform, Ask RGU;
- Supporting the development of independent learning skills;
- Promoting student resilience;
- Building on the university's approach to Welcome to provide timely, integrated transition support at other stages of the learner journey.

In Year 2, project teams will work together to define and implement a suite of complementary deliverables informed by:

- Insights generated by the series of student voice opportunities enabled by the Theme in Year 1;
- Analysis of academic schools' Enhancement and Action Plans following the 2020/21 annual appraisal process.

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

The key drivers for this project are:

- The introduction of the RGU LTF and the commitment it articulates to developing students' metaskills alongside subject knowledge;

- The additional focus that the pandemic has driven on the need for holistic student support that acknowledges the academic, personal and social aspects of learning;
- Student feedback highlighting scope to further support learners' academic preparedness, confidence, wellbeing and sense of learning community.

Given the currency of these drivers, there has been a high level of institutional interest in these issues hence the requirement to work collaboratively across numerous projects to ensure alignment and maximize future impact.

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

The immediate impacts of this work include:

- New interventions supporting student success and wellbeing;
- Enhanced cross-institutional collaboration and efficiencies;
- Enhanced partnership-working across staff and students.

It is envisaged that the longer-term impacts will include:

- Enhanced student-facing support information and communication platforms;
- Strengthened support for student transitions into and through university;
- Increased preparedness, confidence, wellbeing and resilience among students;
- Greater embedding of the RGU LTF.

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

The impact of deliverables defined and delivered in Year 2 will be measured via a variety of mechanisms relevant to the project in question, including:

- Student and staff engagement with deliverables;
- Student and staff feedback on deliverables;
- Student satisfaction, retention and success.

Title of project/activity

Promoting retention and success through inclusive practice

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

In Year 1, two projects were initiated seeking to further promote inclusive curriculum design and delivery with a view to further supporting student retention and success. Building on outcomes from the first year, work on these strands will continue in Year 2 as follows:

- Accessibility of online learning – Year 1 focused on technical enhancements to our technology suite, in particular for captioning and templates, and raising awareness of digital accessibility among academic Schools. In Year 2, we will provide further support to schools to increase the accessibility of online learning and work with support services to enhance staff awareness and skills.
- Male students: Closing the gap – this focus was identified in Year 1 through the analysis of institutional equalities data. Led by a cross-institutional working group with membership from relevant schools and support departments, the project will move from the 'discover' to 'define' and 'deliver' stage in Year 2, seeking to recommend evidence-informed enhancements to address disparities in male student outcomes.

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

The rationales for the projects within this strand are as follows:

- Accessibility of online learning – accessibility is a vital component of online education and recent changes in legislation also make explicit the expectation for digital accessibility within higher education.
- Male students: Closing the gap – institutional equalities data highlight that male students perform less well than their female counterparts against a range of measures, including satisfaction, retention and achievement. Addressing these differences has been identified as a priority Equality Outcome for the university.

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

The resulting changes envisaged from these projects are as follows:

- Accessibility of online learning
 - More accessible and inclusive learning experiences for students;
 - Enhanced student satisfaction, retention and success;
 - Improved outcomes for students with disclosed disabilities;
 - Increased staff awareness and skills in digital accessibility;
 - Augmented institutional support for digital accessibility.
- Male students: closing the gap
 - Greater understanding and awareness of the male student experience among staff;
 - Identification of evidence-informed strategies for addressing disparities in male student outcomes.

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

The change effected by these projects will be measured via:

- Student and staff feedback;
- Institutional equalities data.

Title of project/activity

Supporting RGU's course leader community

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

Continuing from Year 1, this project seeks to scope and facilitate opportunities for RGU Course Leaders to come together as a community to enrich colleagues' work in this pivotal role, support professional development and enhance the overall student experience. In Year 2, key activities will include:

- Analysing data generated by focus group activity in Year 1 to understand Course Leaders' lived experiences of the role, preferences and needs;
- Sharing findings with key stakeholders across the institution;
- Defining and implementing new support mechanisms and CPD opportunities for our Course Leader community.

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

RGU recognises the crucial contribution our Course Leaders make to the student learning experience, as borne out by feedback mechanisms such as the NSS. Building on the re-specification of the role at RGU in 2018 and the university's engagement with the Collaborative Clusters on Programme Leadership, this project seeks to enhance the support and development available to Course/Programme Leaders to assist them in discharging their pivotal role and further promote their confidence and resilience. Consultation activity in Year 1 has confirmed the need for further support, development and professional networking opportunities for Course/Programme Leaders, as well as generating valuable data concerning lived experiences of the role to inform these.

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

As a result of planned activity in Year 2, the following changes are anticipated:

- New support and development opportunities for Course/Programme Leaders will be designed and implemented;
- Course/Programme Leaders' professional confidence and effectiveness will be increased;
- Course/Programme Leaders' wellbeing, resilience and job satisfaction will be promoted;
- Further practice sharing and professional dialogue among Course/Programme Leaders' will be facilitated;
- Students' course experiences will be enhanced leading to increased retention, satisfaction and success.

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

The change resulting from this project will be measured via the following means:

Short-term impact:

- Feedback from Course/Programme Leaders;
- Engagement with new support/development opportunities.

Longer-term impact:

- Evidence from Course/Programme Leader application and review processes;
- Student outcomes.

Title of project/activity

Emerging Stronger Enhancement Award Projects

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

In Year 1, staff and students were invited to bid for £500 funding through the Emerging Stronger Enhancement Award Scheme to take forward a project of their choosing. Six award winners were selected and as a result, the following projects are being progressed in Year 2:

- Collaborative online international learning (School of Creative and Cultural Business)
- Digital community (Law School)
- Education for sustainability (Employability and Professional Enrichment/Gray's School of Art)
- Student digital competence (School of Creative and Cultural Business)
- Supporting mature undergraduate students (Law School)
- Virtual labs (School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences)

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

In our Year 1 plan, we stated our intention to identify short-term project initiatives within discipline and service areas that could be enabled by Theme funding in addition to planned institutional activities. This was achieved through the Award Scheme, which also provided a mechanism to engage staff and students in enhancing the future learning experience at RGU by leading local developments of wider institutional interest and relevance. As part of the proposal process, applicants were required to justify potential projects on the following grounds:

- Benefits to the RGU learning experience
- Links to RGU's Learning and Teaching Framework
- Relevance in supporting staff, students and the university in emerging stronger from the pandemic

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

Planned outputs from funded projects include:

- New mechanisms to facilitate COIL partnerships and staff training resources;
- A good practice guide on supporting digital community for students;
- Resources to support embedding of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals within course provision;
- A diagnostic tool and student peer network to aid the development of digital competencies;
- An enhanced support system for mature undergraduate students in the Law School;
- Introduction of new technology enabling the recording of biophysiological measurements within virtual labs.

It is also anticipated that engagement with the Award Scheme will result in the following impacts for award holders:

- Increased awareness of the Theme and Emerging Stronger Campaign;
- Developed skills in project management, enhancement and evaluation;
- Professional recognition, fulfilment and satisfaction.

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

In Year 2, award winners will be supported to define evaluation methodologies for individual projects drawing on the sector-level approach being used to evaluate the Theme.

End of project evaluations will also be used to generate insights into the impact of the Scheme on award winners.

Dissemination of work

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

Internally, Theme activities will continue to be communicated as part of the university's Emerging Stronger campaign, which provides a unifying banner for a range of enhancement activity aiming to support RGU in charting its future direction post pandemic.

In addition, the following mechanisms have proved valuable throughout Year 1 and will continue to be utilised in Year 2:

- RGU:ETLG members will continue to play a key role as champions for the Theme;
- The RGU Committee structure will be employed to further raise awareness of the Theme's work and report on activities;

- Staff development and networking opportunities will be used to showcase and advance the work of the Theme, including established events, such as RGU's annual Learning and Teaching Conference, as well as bespoke sessions;
- Communication with RGU's student body will continue to be facilitated in collaboration with RGU:Union;
- External communication will be facilitated by participation in sector-wide activities, collaborative clusters, and Enhancement Theme conferences.

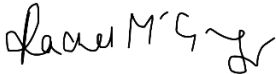
Supporting staff and student engagement

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

Work undertaken in Year 1 has laid a solid foundation for continuing to engage RGU's community with planned activities in Year 2. This will be achieved via:

- Cross-institutional representation on the RGU:ETLG;
- Staff and student involvement in project teams and working groups;
- Further staff and student consultation and engagement activities;
- Sharing of project outputs from Theme activities.

Consideration will also be given to enabling further project internships and awards as Year 2 activities progress.

Plan author:	
Date:	20.09.2021

Return to: ARCAAdmin@qaa.ac.uk