



## End of Year 1 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 has grown in size to ensure wider engagement and now includes Luke Millard (Chair); Andrea Cameron; Elley Petrie (Students' Association);, James Nicholson; Jim Huntingford; Julie Blackwell Young; Julie Gawrylowicz; Noelle McAra; Ruth Falconer; Scott Cameron, Daniela Bandeva/Robyn Thiel (Students' Association), William Graham, Claire MacEachen and Zbynek Gazdik (2<sup>nd</sup> year student).

### **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).

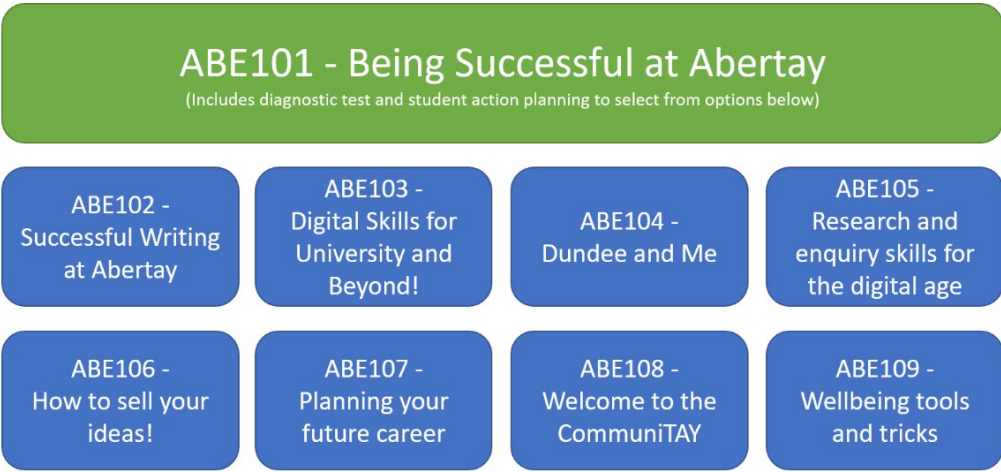
Please report each activity/intervention against the following questions in the Evaluation part of the template.

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 <b>has been</b> made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
<p>The University has developed a suite of microcredentials that all first year students will engage with in September 2021. These 5 credit modules will contribute 20 credits to the student's progress and are formulated to help students set the foundations for a successful student career. Within the first of the modules - ABE 101 – students will undertake a diagnostic test that will guide them to additional microcredentials that would best support their development.</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 10px 0;">  </div> <p>The microcredential modules are led by academics (ABE 101, 106 &amp; 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"> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• 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?</li> </ul> <p>The new modules and innovative delivery model received approval through Teaching and Learning Committee in June 2021.</p>
2. Why <b>have we made</b> 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.

It is anticipated that future developments across years 2, 3 and 4 will continue a focus on retention, especially for direct entrant students, but will also switch to supporting students skills development for employability with a focus on generating a sense of purpose.

3. What difference **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 **will we** know? (How is the change measured)

Retention data will be prime indicator and we will have evidence of first year impact by September 2022.

Module evaluation of the microcredentials will also provide evidence and we could look at tailoring questions?

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

University Teaching and Learning Committee will receive reports on outcomes

Programme teams will witness local level impact.

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

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

Always the need to communicate and even when you think it is done, there is probably some more that needs doing.

Student engagement is key for what and why we develop the new offer. Student voice on the steering group is important and the fact that one MC is delivered by the Students' Association is probably unique in the sector. We are not aware of any other SA delivering a credit bearing academic module.

However, we must not stop there and we believe that the student voice will be key to helping us develop future offers and refining of the existing offer as we better understand what works for those students.

7. Any things you **have stopped** doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)

The microcredentials replace year one electives which have now ceased.

Title of project/activity
Curriculum redesign through block delivery of learning
8. What change <b>is being</b> made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
A University working group has completed a series of meetings to develop a proposal for University Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC). This stakeholder group sought to identify issues/opportunities and considerations through the lenses of student experience, staff experience and curriculum. A proposal paper will go TLC in September 2021 seeking institutional approval to develop the Aberaty model for implementation in 2022/23.
9. Why <b>are we making</b> it? (Rationale for the change)
Institutionally there is interest in the opportunities block delivery provides, particularly in relation to retention of new students (direct entrants as well as first years).  The Victoria University model has provided our template and we will explore how it could be redefined for Abertay with a real focus on student community, belonging, collaborative working and retention.  There is potential for alignment with the microcredentials initiative as we seek to make most effective use of student time through a blended approach.
10. What difference <b>will hopefully occur</b> as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)
Initially, it is hoped that Teaching and Learning Committee will approve and steer the direction of travel proposed through the paper.  It will approve pilots to be designed and a development process will be put in place for the creation and design of those pilot activities supported by the AbLE Academy.
11. How <b>will we</b> know? (How is the change measured)
Initially – a measure may be how many programmes wish to engage in the pilot.  Student outcomes are far away at present, but attendance data and module evaluation might offer an early indicator of success.
12. Who <b>is</b> involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)
Stakeholder Development Group drawn from across the university created the initial paper to Teaching and Learning Committee. TLC will judge if they believe the case that has been made and feel it is worth supporting.
13. Any lessons learned to apply already? (Applied ongoing learning)
With such a future gazing project there is a need to think years in advance so the discussion about the future academic calendar has had implications.
14. Any things you <b>have stopped/need to stop</b> doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)
None at present

Title of project/activity
New approaches to orientation and the 'relentless welcome'
15. What change <b>is being</b> made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
<p>A stakeholder group had held three meetings to start to explore the concept and create linkages between Schools, professional services and Students' Association. At present it 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. It also relates to the microcredential activity mentioned earlier.</p> <p>This project is at its early stages and will grow over the coming years. Initial discussions have focused on the 'relentless element' and the concept of making sure every year of students is welcomed back to their university.</p>
16. Why <b>are we making</b> it? (Rationale for the change)
<p>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.</p> <p>One example is that in 2020/21, as a response to the pandemic, the university created programme level sites on our VLE that were moderated by senior students. The plan was to help students to engage with the peers outside of the hierarchy of the university. In some programmes this operated very well and was maintained throughout the year, in others it was less successful</p>
17. What difference <b>will hopefully occur</b> as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)
<p>Collaboration across the university to enhance that welcome experience.</p> <p>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.</p>
18. How <b>will we</b> 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.
19. Who <b>is</b> involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)
Teaching and Learning Committee
Programme and service leaders
20. Any lessons learned to apply already? (Applied ongoing learning)
Further work required with Colleges and the direct entrants that come to Abertay. Dean of Teaching and Learning is taking that forward.

21. Any things you <b>have stopped/need to stop</b> 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
Student Life Coaching was initial title, but we are now redirecting this work to Student Success Officers.
22. What change <b>is being</b> made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
The University has received funding from a charity to explore the employment of recent graduates as Student Success Officers who will work with Student Academic Advisers (an academic post in each School). 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.
23. Why <b>have we made/are we making</b> it? (Rationale for the change)
The institution receives all sorts of data around student participation and engagement, but does not really make best use of that data to intervene with and support student progression. This new role (one in each school) will offer that focus and provide the friendly, peer led support and guidance that students require.
24. What difference <b>has occurred/will hopefully occur</b> 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.
25. How <b>will we</b> 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 student – quantitative and qualitative. AbLE Academy will co-ordinate activities so best practice is shared among the SSOs and they understand the institutional picture and are not refocused by local needs.
26. Who <b>is</b> involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)
The posts have just been advertised and AbLE Academy will co-ordinate activities. 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.
27. Any lessons learned to apply already? (Applied ongoing learning)

Dean of Teaching and Learning ran similar roles at a previous university and has some insight to how it might work. However, no model transplants completely and therefore the Abertay version will be slightly different and hopefully more effective.

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

None

Title of project/activity

Enhancement Theme Learning and Teaching Projects.

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

In June 2021 the 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.

Theme resources will be used to pay for student employment that helps to deliver the projects.

30. 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.

31. 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.

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

Success of activities through student participant feedback and student outcomes

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

Steering Group

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

No

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

No

### 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.

See PARC mentioned in next section

### Collaboration outwith your institution

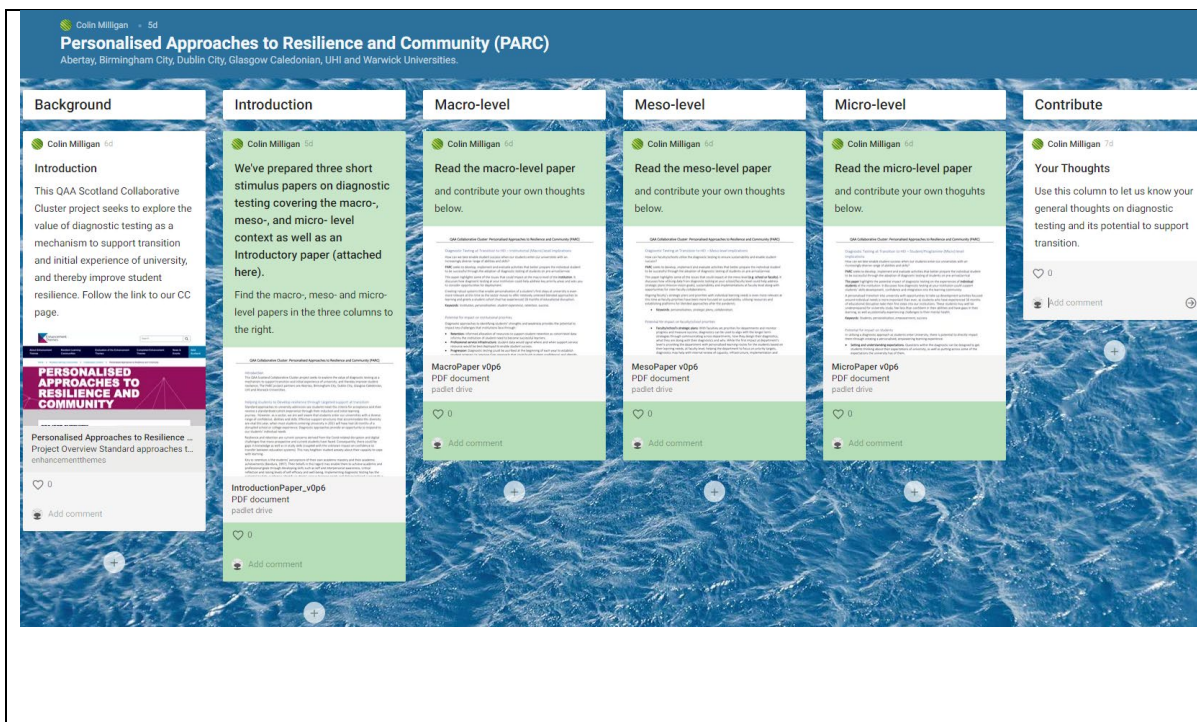
How have you collaborated with other institutions? This could be informally by growing networks or contacts, or more formally for example, through collaborative clusters or sector work. If you have been collaborating with others, briefly explain what this has involved and what have been the benefits and challenges.

The diagnostic approach has resonated with the sector and QAA has supported a collaborative cluster project around Personalised Approaches to Resilience and Community (PARC).

<https://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/resilient-learning-communities/collaborative-clusters/personalised-approaches-to-resilience-and-community>

Abertay leads this work with its partners (GCU, Warwick, BCU, Dublin City and UHI). The partners have produced some discussion papers around macro, meso and micro level impacts of diagnostic approaches. These were discussed at an event held on 15<sup>th</sup> June to which 139 people from around the world signed up. Representatives from across the UK, Belgium, Turkey, Sweden, USA, South Africa and Ireland were represented.





## Supporting staff and student engagement

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

The work outlined previously is all about stakeholders contributing to a designed and integrated approach. In addition, we have a QAA Enhancement Themes steering group in which Staff and Students from across the university steer and monitor developments.

## 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 will be considered by the Enhancement Themes Steering Group and Teaching and Learning Committee

**Report Author:**

**Luke Millard**

**Date:**

**16<sup>th</sup> June 2021**