

End of Year 1 Report for: University of Stirling

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.

No changes

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

Title of project/activity
Students as Partners in Learning
1. What change has been made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
The Students as Partners in Learning (SPL) initiative launched in Summer 2020. Student volunteers 'roadtested' modules created by staff for online and blended learning. The initiative grew to include student perspectives on university policies, co-creation of learning materials for staff, and the creation of two Student Engagement Officer positions.
2. Why have we made it? (Rationale for the change)
In our move to online and blending learning caused by the Covid-19 pandemic we identified seven principles to inform our approach. One of these was recognising the value of Students as Partners in Learning and the opportunity the move online presented.
3. What difference has occurred as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)
<p>Working in collaboration with the Student Union, 20 students were recruited from across Stirling's five faculties, including undergraduate and postgraduate students. Following training from Academic Development, students offered a 'road-testing' opportunity for staff, which meant testing the new online modules from a student perspective, sense-checking, ensuring that links and content were visible. We deliberately paired students with modules outside their subject area – the intention was not to check academic content, but rather the coherence and accessibility of modules. An MS Teams space was created for students to discuss their experiences and ask colleagues for assistance. Within a month of launch, 23 new modules had been 'road-tested' – each of these modules was given a digital badge to recognise the student partnership.</p> <p>The partnership grew to include student perspectives and views on new policies, such as the Extenuating Circumstances policy (can be seen, with badge, here). Student volunteers participated in webinars and helped co-create resources for staff members on topics such as student engagement and collaborative learning.</p>
4. How do we know? (How is the change measured)
<p>Feedback was gathered from both staff and students – including both quantitative and qualitative data. Comments from staff on the 'roadtesting' included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Based on these comments I went back to make adjustments/clarifications and so forth.</i> • <i>The feedback received was useful and constructive for further testing and tweaking.</i> • <i>Getting a student perspective on the module - and from a student who is not on the module, so they could be honest. Feedback was very constructive and useful.</i> <p>In their feedback on the initiative, students expressed that they liked their roles, felt supported throughout the process and enjoyed taking part in a wide range of tasks. Students emphasised that taking part in the initiative has been an excellent experience and would like to continue working with staff. The most rewarding aspect that students have valued was the opportunity to offer their perspective in diverse staff projects.</p>
5. Who has been involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)
Staff and students at the University. Our new Student Engagement officers a conducting a research project, approved by the University Ethics Panel, exploring staff and student experiences of learning and teaching through the pandemic, and expectations for the future.
6. Any lessons learned to apply already? (Applied ongoing learning)

We have shared the work of the Students as Partners in Learning initiative with the sector and are preparing a co-written article for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Our experience demonstrates the value of genuine partnership in meeting shared challenges and has opened up possibilities for future work involving students in Academic Development, and our learning community in general. This value of the partnership has been evidenced further by engagement with the group from other areas of the University. For example, with Student Learning Services to receive feedback on new projects and workshop ideas to support the student experience at Stirling.

7. Any things you need to stop doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)

The challenge is now to recruit more student volunteers over Summer 2021 and embed the initiative further into our work at Stirling.

Title of project/activity

Technology Enabled Education

1. What change has been made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)

Supporting the move to online and blended learning caused by the Pandemic and looking forward to the future of Learning & Teaching at Stirling.

2. Why have we made it? (Rationale for the change)

To meet the immediate challenge in Spring 2020 and a rapid move online, then to prepare a systematic and informed approach for AY20/21, bringing together pedagogy and technology. This will then inform longer term, sustainable, change to our approaches.

3. What difference has occurred as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)

The impact of the Supporting Online Learning & Teaching (SOLT) materials, sessions and discussions has been significant. The new Canvas template, designed by the Learning Technologist team, offers both consistency for staff and students, as well as an effective learning environment. Staff development has focussed on pedagogy and technology, enabling staff to design and repurpose material for effective online and blended learning.

4. How do we know? (How is the change measured)

This has been measured through both quantitative and qualitative means. A staff confidence survey was circulated in May 2020, then again in October 2020. It showed significant increases in staff confidence related to online learning, including a two-fold increase in designing learning for online delivery, and for building an online community. Qualitative feedback praised the support for staff: *[The Team] provided a huge range of accessible resources in a very short space of time. Seriously cannot be credited enough. Again, accessible, knowledgeable and there for us.*

Student feedback was also positive. Students valued the compassion and empathy shown by staff toward their need to create and manage new study environments and practices. The understanding associated with adjusting to adapted ways of learning was much appreciated. Students were complimentary about the quality and high standard of the resources produced and delivered. Much of the positive feedback throughout the Autumn 2021 semester was related to how understanding, flexible, and supportive staff had been of students.

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

We commissioned an external report on the work done at Stirling in response to the pandemic, which reported in December 2020. It concluded that: *'much has been achieved by academic and*

academic-related staff in the few short months leading up to and on the commencement of this academic year. Digital competence and self-assurance has grown exponentially, as demonstrated by comparative staff confidence data and the rich reflections on diverse practice shared by staff and students.'

In addition, Academic Development conducted a research project following ten academic staff through the Autumn 20 semester and will published the findings in a peer-reviewed journal. A current research project, led by our Student Engagement Officers, is exploring staff and student reflections on the last year and the future of Learning & Teaching at Stirling.

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

The external report provided recommendations which are being implemented in terms of community building, investment in technology and people, as well as embracing a Stirling perspective on the challenges facing the sector as a whole. We continue to reflect on the effective use of learning technologies, the challenges of student engagement, and how best to foster a genuine community at Stirling. This is all still in progress, and we continue to learn from the experiences of staff and students.

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

The challenge now is to ensure Technology Enabled Education fit for Autumn 21 and beyond.

Title of project/activity

STEER and Pandemic Pals, University of Stirling Students' Union

1. What change has been made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)

Continuing the STEER programme to provide peer-to-peer mentorship for new students, as well as creating the Pandemic Pals programme to connect students across the University during the pandemic.

2. Why have we made it? (Rationale for the change)

The programmes were made to create connection and community between students. The STEER programme was made to support for students who are new to Stirling by pairing them with a trained student mentor, whilst the Pandemic Pals programme was made to tackle social isolation amongst students during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. What difference has occurred as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)

The impact of both STEER and Pandemic Pals has been very positive. For STEER, it has provided a support mechanism for new students, whether based overseas, here for a semester abroad, undergraduate or postgraduate, with a fellow student who can help their transition into life at the University of Stirling. This programme has helped new students to settle in and realise the opportunities available to them.

Pandemic Pals, created as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, provides a channel for students to meet and make friends with fellow students during this challenging time. Many students were facing social isolation due to the pandemic and struggling to make connections with fellow students during online learning. Pandemic Pals has provided a channel for students to be paired with a fellow student/s so they can create "pals" and create a sense of community during a time when the sense of community amongst students has struggled.

4. How do we know? (How is the change measured)

STEER, which has been in place for several years now, has had numerous students sign up to be both Captains (the student mentor) as well as the Crew (the new student), and this number continuing to grow year on year, with many Captains returning to volunteer several times. Pandemic Pals has successfully paired 218 students so far during the pandemic, with many

students involved praising the idea. The programme has been largely considered a success and plans are in place to continue this programme as we hopefully move out of the pandemic.

5. Who has been involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)

Union staff who run the programmes, the Students' Union Chief Executive, students on the programmes both past and present, relevant Sabbatical Officers, and staff within the University of Stirling.

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

Discussions are currently underway between the Students' Union and University of how to maintain and potentially expand the programmes and how we can manage any expansion given the currently limited staff capacity.

We hope to continue the Pandemic Pals programme as the pandemic hopefully ends and adapting it into a non-pandemic related student pairing programme, with the aim still being to help students create social connections at university.

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

The challenge moving forward is securing continued funding for the programmes and ensuring visibility of the programmes amongst students and staff who could help promote these. We recently shared the work of STEER / Pandemic Pals at the University Learning & Teaching Festival, to help with this visibility.

Title of project/activity

Be Connected Student & Staff Life Programme

1. What change has been made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)

Inspired by the 5 ways to wellbeing, **Be Connected** comprises a blend of online and face to face activities, events and resources designed to build a sense of belonging and community. The programme seeks to ensure our students and staff stay connected with each other, and remain healthy, active and supported.

2. Why have we made it? (Rationale for the change)

The development of a blended, dynamic, innovative Campus Life programme had previously been identified as a key priority in the Student Experience Framework, primarily supporting the "Prepared" and "Connected" strategic objectives. The pandemic provided an opportunity to fast-track plans to build the programme, and it was designed and launched within two weeks of the first lockdown.

3. What difference has occurred as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)

The programme has been an undoubted success, engaging staff and students over 30,000 times since it commenced. To date, we have delivered 2247 individual events. Of particular success has been the blended sports programme, which is promoted under the #BeConnected and #BeActive hashtags, and the skills development programme, comprising activities and workshops from Student Learning Services, Information Services, Careers and Employability and Student Support Services.

In total, 3983 individuals have participated in the social and community building aspects of the Be Connected programme. The online sports and physical activity strand of the programme reached student and staff almost 10,000 times during 2019-20 and c.24,000 times in 2020/21. Skills development workshops, such as those delivered by Student Learning Services, have been especially engaging and popular, with just over 1200 interactions recorded in the spring 2021 semester.

4. How do we know? (How is the change measured)

Services have gathered feedback on the impact of the activities delivered under the Be Connected banner. The responses have been excellent. For example, over 1000 students provided feedback on the programme of Student Learning Services workshops, with an average positivity rating of 4.7 out of 5. Students also provided direct quotes about the quality and impact of the events, activities and workshops they attended, such as:

“It gave me a lot of confidence to just get started! I was dreading even going online to do a webinar but I now know there is nothing to worry about! It was extremely informative. It has really made me feel a lot less stressed about going back to university.”

5. Who has been involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)

Be Connected is driven by an institution wide coordinating group. Some 50+ individuals, including academic staff, Professional Services colleagues, and student representatives participate in the coordinating group, representing students at all levels of study, as well as staff from across the whole institution. The coordinating group links with the Student Equalities Officers and International Society to ensure that content is relevant and beneficial to students with varied needs and from a range of cultural backgrounds. The group is chaired by the Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion/Director of Student Experience. It reports to the Student Experience Committee and the Principal’s Executive Group (USPG): USPG recently made the decision to invest in a new post and an enhanced project budget to enable growth in the programme.

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

As well as driving a strong sense of community and enhancing the student and staff experience, the programme can now be used as an effective marketing and recruitment tool for all cohorts of prospective staff and students.

In recognition of the success of the programme in 2019/20 and into 2020/21, the University in May 2021 approved investment in a new Student Life & Engagement Coordinator Post, which will coordinate and evaluate the Be Connected Programme. The University also tripled the revenue budget to significantly grow the range of face to face and online activities that will be offered in the next year. The Events, Engagement and Stirling Life team will engage with a coordinating and user reference group including representatives from the Students’ Union staff team, Sabbatical and Liberation Officers, Faculty Officers, Faculty staff, central Student Services (e.g. Student Support, Student Learning Services, CES), Information Services, Sport, and Accommodation Services to create a network of colleagues and students responsible for generating content and planning, delivering and promoting events.

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

Some sessions are known to have lower take up because students prefer 1-1 support; for example, sessions on anxiety management. We will continue to explore ways to deliver mental health support and skills building to our students via a range of media, including digital, group work and 1-1 delivery as appropriate. We will continue to evaluate take up and feedback from students and staff to identify what delivery formats are most effective.

Title of project/activity

Pre-arrival workshops - Student Learning Services

1. What change has been made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)

Student Learning Services launched a series of pre-arrival virtual workshops for new students. For three weeks before the start of semester, we delivered a daily ‘transition to university’ workshop. Associated with each workshop were a summary recording and additional resources to be used throughout semester.

We covered a broad range of topics (16 workshop in total including, 'The difference between school/college and university', 'managing your time', 'how to be a successful student', 'university for mature students', 'learning on-line' etc). These workshops then continued into our induction programme. All workshops were kept relatively short with plenty of opportunity to ask questions. Each workshop also has an associated recording and additional resources. We also delivered a weekly, 'Chat with a Tutor' session where students could drop-into a virtual session and ask any questions they might have around studying at university.

2. Why have we made it? (Rationale for the change)

Increasingly students arrive at University without the academic skills required to be successful and many lack confidence in their early years of study. This can negatively impact on the learning experience, progression and retention. The reasons for developing this suite of workshops included -

1. We recognised that many students were having a disrupted educational experience due to the pandemic and that this had resulted in increased anxiety about studying at university.
2. Some students had been out of education for a while and would be concerned about what to expect at university.
3. Advance entry students can often find the transition into university particularly different
4. Students might be feeling isolated and disconnected from the university community as a result of the lock-down and the uncertainty about teaching and learning in 2020-2021.

The workshops were intended to address some common concerns and issues around studying at university, build confidence and motivation and create feeling of community between the institution and the students. We also wanted students to recognise the level of support which was available at the university.

The workshops were primarily aimed at new students, but any University of Stirling student was welcome to attend.

3. What difference has occurred as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)

The workshops were highly successful based on -

- Numbers attending (450 students in total). Attendance at the workshops ranged from 10 - 50 students
- The numbers of international students joining from their home countries
- Attendance from all faculties
- The number of repeat attendances
- Positive feedback from students indicating that they felt supported and better prepared for university.

4. How do we know? (How is the change measured)

The number of students attending was recorded. Feedback was gathered after each workshops using a standardised evaluation form. Students also voluntarily posted comments on the workshop chat area. End-of-year feedback was collected through focus groups.

Comments included -

- *The level of support and encouragement truly helps build up confidence and determination to do things right and keep on trying, so, yet again, thank you!*
- *I have found all the workshops helpful so far. This workshop was no exception and I look forward to the next one! Thank you!*
- *Can't wait to attend more*
- *One of the most quality experiences in the Uni*
- *I think these sessions are important to help students get a feel of what is to come and what to expect.*

- *I think these are wonderful and easy to understand workshops. Each lecturer has been great and taking time to explain everything clearly and answering questions. Fabulous*
- *As I am going into 2nd year I am using these workshops as motivation and build-up to starting again after a long break. Really helpful.*

Students were all very positive in their feedback and felt more connected to the institution. They appreciated a familiar face at the workshops, and they felt better prepared and less anxious. They also enjoyed the flexibility that a virtual workshop offered but were also pleased to have these offered 'live'.

5. Who has been involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)

- Staff involved in delivery
- Students who attend the workshops
- End-of-year focus groups

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

Having reviewed the workshop provision, we will be implementing the following -

- Including other services from across the university into the pre-arrival/induction programme
- Changing the booking system to accommodate student requests for reminders and inclusion in their calendars
- Including more postgraduate workshops
- Making a limited number of workshops 'compulsory' as part of an induction package
- Introducing certification for student attendance
- Implementing one central SharePoint site with all workshop information and booking links available

7. Any things you need to stop doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)

- Stop using current booking system

Title of project/activity

Academic Integrity Module

1. What change has been made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)

The design of a new 'Academic Integrity and writing' module/resource
Delivery will be from the start of 2021-2022

2. Why have we made it? (Rationale for the change)

Academic misconduct is an ongoing concern for both staff and students. Staff across the institution spend a considerable amount of time discussing referencing and avoiding plagiarism, giving feedback on poor practice and processing plagiarism cases. On the other hand, students get overwhelmed with the available information on referencing, are still uncertain about what is expected of them and are usually very stressed when faced with a case of (often unintended) plagiarism. The anxieties associated with academic writing have been exacerbated during the pandemic (for a range of reasons), and the additional fear of plagiarism make the writing process very stressful. SLS have developed a 'module' for on-line delivery which all students can participate in. After consultation with students and staff, the module focuses on writing at university, avoiding academic misconduct and referencing. There is also a section on referencing feedback for use by both staff and students. It is anticipated that all new students will engage with the module when they start in 2021-2021. This development also supports the new academic integrity policy.

3. What difference has occurred as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)

This project is still to be fully implemented. 20 students have piloted the module - and the feedback has been positive. Suggested changes have been made in the module. The module is now to be reviewed by key staff.

When the project is rolled out, we would hope that the following impacts are observed -

- High numbers of students participating in the module.
- More students requesting support with referencing and writing before assignment submission.
- More use of the 'similarity checking space' in Canvas
- Reduced numbers of academic misconduct cases.
- Staff and students using the referencing feedback resource.

4. How do we know? (How is the change measured)

- Analytics from the module VLE
- Numbers requesting SLS guidance with referencing questions
- Numbers of plagiarism cases and record of severity

5. Who has been involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)

- 20 students involved pre-release reviewing (including Students as Partners)
- Student feedback opportunity is embedded within the module
- Student Learning Staff
- Academic/professional service staff

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

- Module alone will not resolve academic integrity issues. It is the start of a conversation and will need to be backed up with ongoing learning opportunities and careful curriculum design.

7. Any things you need to stop doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)

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.

Collaborative Cluster – Decolonising the Curriculum in the time of a Pandemic

Dr Catriona Cunningham and Dr Marita Grimwood (now at Edinburgh Napier) successfully bid for Stirling to lead this Collaborative Cluster with a project that aimed to bring colleagues together with and without lived experience to explore what decolonising the curriculum project looked like in practice in the disciplines. We felt that the shift to online learning was opening up new ways and spaces for learning and teaching and this was an important moment to explore.

The Cluster has held three professional development events across Scotland between February and June 2021 where the focus has been on provoking thinking and sharing practice amongst colleagues in the discipline. The events and work have been shaped by an inter-institutional steering group comprising colleagues from 7 other universities (Abertay, Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier, Glasgow Caledonian, Glasgow, Heriot Watt, St Andrews, Sheffield Hallam) and more recently by student interns from 4 different universities. The student interns have shaped the design of the final event and are also designing part of the evaluation report, due at the end of July 2021.

The benefit of this inter-institutional approach have so far been on the diversity and plurality of voices shaping this work and feeding into the creation of resources that will be shared with the sector(for example we have gathered together a set of mini case studies to use as a reflection pack with colleagues). It has also ensured a focus on conversation and dialogue as a way of learning through and from this work. This biggest challenge so far is how to bring colleagues into the conversation who do not yet grasp the urgency and importance of this work.

Learning & Teaching Festival

The keynote for this year's Learning & Teaching Festival will be delivered by Dr Fiona Smart, Head of the Department of Learning and Teaching Enhancement at Edinburgh Napier University, and Dr Alison Nimmo, Head of Academic Development at Glasgow Caledonian University, sharing their work on understanding resilient academic leadership as an intangible asset. This session explored some of the work being done on the collaborative cluster they are leading.

Supporting staff and student engagement

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

Information about the work of the Enhancement Theme is shared regularly through the weekly staff newsletter Roundup, including information on upcoming events, the work of the collaborative clusters and links to resources. We also share links to sector resources on our Learning & Teaching Sharepoint site.

Our Learning & Teaching Festival ran over three days – the second day was called 'Our Resilient Learning Community' and gave staff the opportunity to explore and discuss elements of the Theme. This including sharing the work of Students as Partners, Pandemic Pals, and work on Decolonising the Curriculum.

Be Connected is driven by an institution wide coordinating group. Some 50+ individuals, including academic staff, Professional Services colleagues, and student representatives participate in the coordinating group, representing students at all levels of study, as well as staff from across the whole institution. The coordinating group links with the Student Equalities Officers and International Society to ensure that content is relevant and beneficial to students with varied needs and from a range of cultural backgrounds. The new Student Life and Engagement Officer will play a key role in building connections and collaborations and evaluating the impact of the programme on our community.

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?

We have kept the processes around the Enhancement Theme itself to a minimum and focussed on delivery of the projects within existing institutional structures. This has been effective in delivering the projects. We used a dynamic leadership team reflecting the projects we engaged with and will continue to do so in future.

This report will be shared through our governance committees. In addition, news on each of the projects has been disseminated separately, in context, throughout the year.

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Date:	22/6/21