



## Student Transitions Enhancement Theme End of Year 3/End of Theme Synopsis

<b>1. Institution</b>
University of St Andrews
<b>2. Theme Leaders' Group institutional representative(s)</b>
Ros Campbell
<b>3. Institutional team membership</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Paul Brown, Director of Careers</li> <li>2. Ros Campbell, Institutional Lead and Academic Monitoring/Development Adviser, Centre for Academic Professional and Organisational Development (CAPOD)</li> <li>3. Jack Carr, Director of Representation, Students' Association</li> <li>4. Dawn Hollis, Postgraduate Research (PGR) student representative, School of History (year 2)</li> <li>5. Dr Lisa Jones, Director of Teaching, Department of Philosophy</li> <li>6. Sam Lister, Head of Academic Partnerships and International Experience, Registry</li> <li>7. Garry MacKenzie, PGR representative, School of English (year 3)</li> <li>8. Dr Heather McKiggan-Fee, Educational &amp; PG Researcher Developer, CAPOD</li> <li>9. Dr Aidan Naughton, Pro Dean Undergraduate (UG) (Science)</li> <li>10. Dr Clare Peddie, Pro Dean (Taught Postgraduate Studies)</li> <li>11. Dr Penny Turnbull, Assistant Director (Projects &amp; Residential), Student Services</li> <li>12. Joyce Walsh, Theme Administrator, CAPOD</li> <li>13. Cat Wilson, Deputy Director of CAPOD and Head of Student Development</li> </ol>
<b>4. Outline what was achieved in relation to your Year 3 plan of work, at the time of submitting this report. Identify what future outcomes are anticipated to be delivered by the end of the Theme. Have there been any unintended outcomes/unexpected findings?</b>
<p><b>Achievements</b> The team has: implemented new structures and initiatives to create a seamless transition from taught postgraduate (PGT) to postgraduate research (PGR) study; embedded initiatives that support and encourage students to make the transition from student to professional; developed initiatives and resources that strengthen student confidence, resilience and independence; and funded nine projects led by staff and students at School/Departmental level. Further information is available in section 11.</p> <p><b>Future outcomes</b> A student intern has been appointed from May-June to make recommendations on the use of pre-arrival surveys for incoming UG and Masters students and to create a template survey. The proposal will be considered by the Proctor's Office in the summer. Additional outcomes, which will emerge from recently-funded projects, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An understanding of why female physics UGs are less likely to progress onto the physics UG masters (MPhys) course than male UGs, and an investigation of possible interventions.</li> <li>• Online resources to equip international students with skills to study maths at St Andrews.</li> </ul>

**Unexpected outcomes** The combination of the St Andrews Award into the Professional Skills Curriculum led to the appointment of a student intern to act as a link between CAPOD and the Careers Centre. This role acted as the catalyst for other collaborative projects such as joint employability workshops and shared surveys. The closer working relationship of these Units also led to the drafting of a new University Employability Strategy. Another unexpected outcome has been increased thought around how we encourage students to engage with professional skills from the earliest opportunity. This has led to the creation of a professional skills section of the Orientation app, which we shared with colleagues from other Scottish Institutions at an induction networking meeting held in St Andrews in February 2017, as well as sparking an interest in pre-arrival surveys which will be further developed via a student internship between May and June 2017.

**5. In what ways have institutional team members (including students) engaged in Theme activities during this session?**

- a) Developing and implementing plans for Year 3
- b) Attending and contributing to the Student Network and TLG meetings
- c) Planning a Good Practice Exchange to showcase funded projects
- d) Planning and contributing to a closing event for the theme
- e) Attending and contributing to the International Enhancement Theme conference
- f) Promoting the funding scheme and reviewing applications for funding
- g) Applying for funding for transition-related projects within their own School/Department
- h) Reviewing proposals for the international Enhancement Theme conference
- i) Collaborating with other institutions on related projects.

**6. Identify good practice in supporting the TLG representative/alternate both in their TLG role and in their institution.**

- a) Presence of a committed and reliable institutional team, with members appointed on the basis of the institution's priorities for the theme and their related expertise
- b) Even distribution of responsibilities and actions within the institutional team, and availability of team members for discussion, input and advice between meetings
- c) Regular meetings with manager and SHEEC representative to discuss theme progress
- d) Dissemination of theme-related information by the Principal's Office
- e) Encouragement to engage with relevant professional development
- f) Availability, approachability and responsiveness of QAA Scotland staff.

**7. Which mechanisms has your institution employed to disseminate outcomes and resources internally, and to the sector? Which approaches have been most effective? Illustrative examples would be valuable.**

Theme-related outcomes and resources are disseminated and promoted internally via events, committees/networks, emails and mailing lists, and Enhancement Theme web pages. Our annual Good Practice Exchange is a particularly effective mechanism to showcase staff and student-led initiatives funded by the theme. Established in 2016, this informal marketplace-style event enables staff and students to browse posters and interactive displays, talk to funding recipients and colleagues, and share ideas over lunch. The event is open to Theme Leaders from the sector. Our wider work related to institutional priorities for the theme will be shared internally at a closing event, which is likely to feature PechaKucha-style presentations and a poster competition.

External dissemination of outcomes and resources has been facilitated by events such as the International Enhancement Theme conference, the University of Edinburgh's Gearing Up event, the Induction Professionals Network (hosted by St Andrews in February 2017), the Theme Leaders Group, and meetings with counterparts from other institutions.

**8. Outline your approach to collaborative working with other Higher Education institutions and what you perceive as the benefits and challenges. Examples of activities and outcomes through inter-institutional collaboration would be helpful.**

Our two main collaborations were in the areas of student resilience (University of Edinburgh) and the transition from student to professional (Universities of Dundee and Aberdeen). Meetings with our counterparts fulfilled our aim to network, generate ideas and share examples of innovative initiatives and best practices that enable students to develop resilience and professional skills.

As a result of sharing ideas and practices with Aberdeen and Dundee, St Andrews implemented a successful Employathon, where mixed student groups work on applied university projects during Independent Learning week. We are continuing to investigate 'call back' skills days for new graduates who have not yet found employment as one way to support recent alumni; an objective included in the University's new employability strategy.

Reciprocal visits made by St Andrews and Edinburgh provided colleagues with a useful opportunity to participate in and experience an Enhancement Theme team meeting outwith their own institution. The Theme Leader and Academic Transitions Adviser from Edinburgh shared their team's approach to building student resilience and how area fits into a wider [academic transitions toolkit](#) for staff. There was useful discussion about the drawbacks and benefits of badging interventions with 'resilience'. We now signpost Edinburgh's Transitions Toolkit to staff and students, and a shared interest was identified in terms of pre-arrival surveys. Edinburgh's experience in the latter will be helpful as we embark on this initiative with the help of a student intern.

Inter-institutional collaboration is a useful way to bring together different perspectives and expertise, encourage creativity, and facilitate the development of closer and stronger working relationships. In terms of challenges, we are mindful that each institution is unique, and this may lead to different ideas on the preferred direction/nature of joint initiatives. Also, there is potential for collaborative activity to divert energy and resources away from core aims/deliverables. However, these challenges can potentially be overcome where there are good personal relationships, careful planning, a focus on the big picture, and clear and agreed mutual benefits.

**9. To help facilitate the sharing of practice please provide a list of the case studies further developed during Year 3 to include student reflective commentary on successful transitions practice (5 examples) and details of your student-facing multimedia resource. You might also wish to report on any aspect of work that you are particularly proud of and want to promote.**

Student commentaries were submitted in connection with the following initiatives:

- a) Interactive videos to enhance independent learning/confidence in the Chemistry teaching lab
- b) Online resources to support outbound Study Abroad students
- c) A St Andrews PhD: encouraging PGT students to continue to PGR study at St Andrews
- d) Online skills and study tool for the non-traditional student (distance learning perspective)
- e) Online Pre-arrival English Language and Academic Orientation Module (Study Ready).

We are particularly proud of the innovative use of our induction app, which acts as our student-facing multimedia resource. Over the course of Year 3 we have redesigned the app to focus not just on Orientation week activities, but to provide much more information about the academic experience, academic skills and professional skills. Ten video resources have been made in support of this, as well as significant amount of new content. The aim is to provide students with this type of information at a much earlier stage than previously to smooth their transition to University. The app will be further highlighted at the International Enhancement Conference in June 2017.

**10. Identify the ways in which your institution has contributed to Theme evaluation and other commissioned work.**

The Universities of St Andrews and Dundee have been commissioned by QAA Scotland to conduct an evaluation of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme work. The theme leader and other stakeholders in St Andrews have participated in interviews to share their views and experiences of this theme. The theme leader has also agreed to assist with focus groups as part of this project.

**11. As a result of engaging with the current Enhancement Theme, what has changed/is done differently within your institution and across the sector? It may be helpful to reflect on changes in strategy, policy, practice and how these changes have affected the student learning experience.**

St Andrews' engagement in the theme has shaped a range of strategies, policies and practices at the University. Substantial revisions were made to key policies and regulations as part of our efforts to smooth the *transition from PGT to PGR study*. The Senate Postgraduate Regulations were revised to clearly define the taught degree programmes for all learner types and the associated exit awards, and the introduction of a 'Change in Registration' policy now governs the transitions between PGT and PGR degrees. In addition, major revision of the 'Policy for Students and Supervisors of Taught Postgraduates' removed duplication, omissions and conflicting information, thereby improving student and staff clarity. The resulting 'Final Module in a PGT Programme Policy' sets out an expectation of good practice, including recognition of alternative assessment methods, early allocation of supervisors and defines supervisor and student responsibilities in terms of meetings, research training, feedback and assessment.

The establishment of 'Directors of PGT' network to share good practice and issues led to School and University-level enhancements. A formal proposal was formed to change to a Pass/Merit/ Distinction classification and to revise the use of the 20-point scale in marking and classification. This has been approved by the Learning and Teaching Committee and will be implemented next academic year.

The 'Transition to PhD' events in November 2016 received excellent participant feedback, and will continue to be embedded as part of our Masters student provision after the end of the current Theme. Our first PGT writers' boot camp was fully booked with 30 participants, and a further two are scheduled to run in July. Further writing support workshops will be held between these events. This model will continue to be used to support extended writing skills in PGTs to equip them for PhD study after the theme ends.

As part of our work to enhance the *transition from student to professional*, the Careers Centre's Careers Sectors guides were rewritten to reference relevant professional behaviours which dovetail with the University's Professional Skills Curriculum (PSC) topics. In addition, the PSC workshop in Professional Conduct was expanded and updated via a student internship, and marketed to students at multiple points of the year. Engagement with this workshop increased from 34 quiz attempts in 2015-16 to 236 attempts in 2016-17. Finally, the St Andrews Award was successfully collapsed into the PSC to give a single professional/employability skills award in St Andrews. This has led to a new skills analysis and improved reflective element to the PSC and the successful addition of a number of Careers and Enterprise workshops into the programme. Indications at the time of writing point to an increased number of students completing the award before the 1 June deadline.

Our work in the area of *student confidence, resilience and independence* has had a number of practical consequences, including a student-focused wellbeing workshop programme. This included a 6-week course 'Roads to Resilience', as well as individual sessions on confidence, perfectionism and motivation. Along with the wellbeing map of St Andrews, these sessions are part of a longer term strategy to proactively engage with students, encouraging and enabling them to take responsibility for their own mental health and wellbeing before they reach crisis point. Both initiatives will be continued in 2017-18, as feedback has been positive. Students commented that the "informative and

helpful” sessions gave them new ideas they hadn’t thought of before, and they found it valuable to “hear from like-minded people and share experiences with people who understand”. Both initiatives will be continued in 2017-18. An ‘approaches to addressing failure’ gap analysis revealed a wide range of attitudes, and a number of good practices, across the University’s Schools and Departments. The report is currently under review and will be used to inform future practices.

Resilience training was incorporated into an Orientation Week session for incoming Taught Postgraduates entitled ‘Kick-Start your Masters: an introduction to Mastersness’. Feedback from participants was positive, with some highlighting this aspect as the most useful part of the session. We intend to embed the session into CAPOD’s induction programme for PGT students, probably dividing the session into two with one focussing solely on resilience and mindset for Masters study. We will also examine the feasibility of running a follow up session later in the semester. For the UG cohort, resilience workshops were run locally as part of a PGR-led school based scheme which delivers disciplinary academic skills training. These workshops ran in Social Anthropology, Psychology and Biology; these attracted mixed numbers of students but were generally well received. In the future, we will consider the best way of marketing such sessions to the UG cohort to increase buy in, as well as investigating rolling out the training to further disciplines.

We are also currently planning to use the PGR-led school based scheme to roll out the face-to-face element of a ‘Making Feedback work for you’ initiative, which was originally introduced as a pilot scheme. Along with an online module, these sessions will encourage students to adopt a growth mindset and provide them with techniques for making the most of feedback. Additionally, all CAPOD’s study skills tutors were familiarised with a resilience model to help inform their practice when running 1:1 academic skills sessions for students; tutors reported increased confidence in supporting students facing adversity in their studies. A workshop on ‘Coping with Transitions’, which covered resilience and self-coaching techniques, was also offered to all students about to embark upon a year abroad. We intend to follow up with those who attended the session, during or after their year abroad, to assess whether the workshop had a positive impact upon their ability to navigate the myriad transitions associated with study or work abroad programmes.

Our institutional team PGR representative for year 3 led a series of ‘Love your PhD’ networking lunches, an idea generated by our PGR representative for year 2. These were attended by PhD students from a range of disciplines, with the recent sessions being completely full. The aim of these lunches was to provide a space in which PGRs could cultivate positivity in the research. They were a forum where attendees were invited to discuss the challenges and – in particular – the successes so far in their PhDs, in order to share opportunities as well as solutions to common problems. These sessions gave our rep experience and new skills in co-ordinating professional development provision for PhD students. Feedback immediately after the events was very positive:

- *"Really nice idea in providing lunch & focusing on positivity in your PhD - much needed."*
- *"It was very useful. I liked the relaxed nature, and I got to meet people from other schools".*

Feedback gathered 6 weeks after each event provided evidence of some lasting impact:

- *"I feel that it improved my comfort zone and confidence to share experiences with others. Some of the tips were helpful, in particular my need to balance my work time and pleasure time to ensure I have a sustainable lifestyle!"*
- *"I have incorporated some of the suggestions of the other attendees. It was good to chat informally about doing a PhD with people from other disciplines."*

A range of projects were undertaken as part of our *transition through collaborative programmes* strand, benefitting St Andrews students who are preparing to study or work abroad as part of their degree programme, and students completing a collaborative degree programme. Increased resources

are now available for students on finding accommodation abroad, navigating immigration regulations across a wide range of destinations, preparing for a different academic culture, as well as advice on some of the practicalities of living abroad and of reintegrating to St Andrews after a period away. In addition, a new Work Placement Policy was approved, which supports a more consistent approach to approving and supporting students on credit-bearing work placements across the University. Finally, resources were improved for Joint PhD students based on feedback from the cohort about their experience of transitioning through a research project supervised by two institutions. More broadly, the work undertaken as part of the theme has helped us to identify areas for further focus and development as we continue to widen participation to international programmes.

Lastly, 24 innovative School-based projects and initiatives were funded through the theme. Noteworthy examples include a student-led conference and the creation of interactive videos in the Chemistry teaching laboratory. Students received funding for a *Code First: Girls Northern Conference*, which aimed to inspire and empower women to start a career in technology and entrepreneurship. One of the students who led this project went on to win St Andrews' Student Leader of the Year Award, recognising both her involvement with the conference and other 'women in tech' initiatives.

The introduction of the new interactive videos in the School of Chemistry has had a profound effect in the context of developing laboratory techniques and fostering confidence. General feedback indicates that students find the resources very helpful in acquiring good laboratory practice skills and gaining confidence in learning to use unfamiliar equipment/techniques. For example:

*"What really helped my confidence was that I was able to read up on material beforehand when I wanted to, so that I walked into the lecture hall or laboratory feeling as if I knew more what I was doing than I would have felt otherwise. Especially the videos as preparation for experiments; they were a huge help."*

## **12. Reflecting on the totality of Theme activity what are your perceptions of both the short and longer term impact of the Theme? It may be useful to refer to the Theme's Logic Model here.**

St Andrews focused on four strategic priorities during the course of the theme: the transition from student to professional; transitions through collaborative programmes; the transition from PGT to PGR study; and building student confidence, resilience and independence.

Students are now better equipped with professional values and behaviours to enable them to excel in their chosen fields during their studies as well as post-graduation. The University now provides an improved academic experience for students transitioning into and out of collaborative degrees, Study Abroad and credit-bearing work placements, and this has resulted in increased levels of student satisfaction. Students now benefit from an improved first experience of truly independent research in the final dissertation phase of their Masters degree, and the institution will benefit from an increased number of students moving from PGT to PGR study within St Andrews (14 students in 2015-16 as compared to 52 in 2016-17). Feedback from focus groups held in Semester 2 of 2016-17 indicated that student satisfaction has increased in relation to this transition. Lastly, students now have access to a greater range of peer-led and University initiatives and resources aimed to strengthen their confidence, resilience and independence. This aspect of our provision will continue to grow over the coming months, and will include even greater student involvement through the University's student leadership initiative - 'StAnd Together' – a collaboration with the University of St Andrews Students' Association.

As noted in section 11, the theme's impact is visible at local, as well as institutional, level. A total of 24 student and staff-led projects (representing 14 schools/departments and 4 professional services units) received funding. As sustainability was a key element of our application and funding criteria, we are confident that these initiatives will have a lasting benefit to the University and students at all levels.

**13. Recognising that this is the end of the current Theme, what one piece of advice would you give to colleagues supporting the next Theme?**

Set up an institutional team with staff and students who bring enthusiasm and commitment, as well as expertise relevant to the institution's focus for the theme. The team at St Andrews has been instrumental to the success of the three-year project. It also recommended that team leaders define not only the desired outcomes and impact of their initiatives, but also how these will be measured at the end of the theme.

Ros Campbell  
18 May 2017