University of St Andrews
End of year 2 report: June 2016

1. What are the outcomes of your student transitions work this year for your institution?

The outcomes of our student transitions project for year two are linked to four strands of work, which were identified by students and staff in year one as institutional priorities for the theme. In addition, a number of initiatives were established at School level with the help of an Enhancement Theme funding scheme. The outcomes of these top-down and bottom-up approaches to the theme are noted below.

**Strand 1: Transition from student to professional**

a. Increased student awareness of the University’s commitment to inculcating professional values and behaviours, with particular reference to the Sponsio Academica.

b. Increased awareness amongst students of the importance of developing professional values and behaviours for their subsequent working lives.

c. Increased staff awareness in CAPOD (Centre for Academic, Professional and Organisational Development) and the Careers Centre of the types of professional behaviours employers value, leading to a refinement of the Professional Skills Curriculum (PSC) and Careers Sector Guides. [This information will be cascaded to Careers Links/Student Employability Reps in Schools in AY 2016-17].

d. Improved professional conduct resources in the PSC, featuring input from alumni on sector-specific professional skills.

**Strand 2: Transition through collaborative programmes**

a. Enhanced additional support, both academic and professional, for students undertaking an external work placement.

b. Expanded academic culture sessions and associated online resources to ease the academic transition from St Andrews to our partner institutions for undergraduate (UG) students.

c. Provision of detailed information about complex issues relating to visas, finance and immigration to enhance the transition from St Andrews to partner institutions.

d. Increased understanding of the challenges, both academically and culturally, of postgraduate (PG) students undertaking a colocation programme and how to enhance support at key transition points.

**Strand 3: Transition from taught postgraduate (PGT) to research postgraduate (PGR) study**

a. Creation of new policy and improved regulatory governance of PGT to PGR transition.

b. Greater uniformity of guidance provided by Schools and supervisors in relation to students moving to a PGR degree.

c. Establishment of a Director of PGT network to increase communication and disseminate good practice across Schools.

d. Embedded PGT to PGR transition events to help a greater number of PGT students think about moving on to PGR study.

e. Improved CAPOD support for PGTs writing dissertations via the creation of writers’ boot camps.

**Strand 4: Building student confidence, resilience and independence**

Creation of a schedule of work for the last year of the theme. (See response to Q5 for more information).
Funding scheme

Students and staff have designed and implemented transitions-related initiatives at a local level with the support of Enhancement Theme funding. Five applications were funded in year two (listed below). This brings the total number of funded projects to 15.

a. Factors influencing the well-being of first year students (staff-led).
b. Online pre-arrival English language and academic orientation module (staff-led).
c. Art exhibition to raise awareness and promote understanding of mental health (student-led).
d. Interactive movies to prepare Chemistry students for lab sessions, and to build confidence and good practice (staff-led).
e. School of History fourth year conference (student-led).

Staff and student awareness of the funding scheme and funded initiatives has increased following the establishment of a Good Practice Exchange. A marketplace stall format enabled staff and students to browse the posters and interactive displays and talk to the funding recipients. The event will run again in May 2017, and members of the Theme Leaders Group are welcome to attend.

Outcomes of other students transitions work

a. Increased awareness of the concept of transition and the Enhancement Theme via a student-led photo competition, exhibition and prize-giving.
b. A plan of work for the multimedia element.

2. In what ways have students been involved in Student Transitions projects and in shaping the institutional strategy for the Theme work?

a. Both students and staff were consulted on their views of institutional priorities for the theme during a scoping exercise in year one. This feedback influenced the four strands selected for the three-year project.
b. Two student reps (one UG and one PG) sit on the institutional team. The reps were consulted and given an opportunity to shape the plans of work for each strand. As an example, two of the six initiatives for strand four were added further to the PG Rep’s feedback and ideas. In addition, draft plans were shared with focus groups before being finalised.
c. 6 of the 15 initiatives funded through the funding scheme are student-led, and two of these were showcased by the funding recipients at the Good Practice Exchange.
d. Transition guides (which will form St Andrews’ multimedia element) will be designed and developed by student interns. Following the suggestion of the team’s incoming UG Rep, these guides will be plugged into an existing orientation app for new and returning students.
e. The idea to complement the Student Transitions photo competition with an exhibition was suggested by the Head of the Student Associations’ Photographic Society, who worked in partnership with the institutional team on this aspect of the project, and took responsibility for advertising the event to students. The exhibition was hosted by the UG Rep.
f. Ideas and input from our student interns has proved invaluable. For example, one intern attended our study abroad fair, and met with student volunteers who had just returned from their year abroad. With the data gathered from these interviews and an online survey, the intern developed an extensive online resource for finding accommodation abroad. She also designed our first Study Abroad Pre-Departure Guide and Country Guides for the USA, Canada, Australia and Singapore.
g. PGR students were involved in the PGT to PGR transition events to present on the life of a PhD student and to meet PGT students from their discipline at the break-out sessions.
h. PGR students were consulted at focus groups to ensure that changes instigated as part of the theme were working for the students.
3. How have your inter-institutional collaborative activities developed during 2015-16? What have you learned to date?

Our two main collaborations in AY 2015-16 were in the areas of student resilience and the transition from student to professional. Members of St Andrews’ institutional team (Theme Leader, Director of Careers and Head of Student Development) met with counterparts at the Universities of Aberdeen and Dundee in June 2016. The meeting fulfilled our aim to network, generate ideas and share examples of innovative initiatives and best practices that enable students to develop professional skills. More specifically:

   a. It sparked several ideas that we want to follow up on and explore for St Andrews, including subject-specific book groups for incoming students, ‘call back’ skills days for new graduates who have not yet found employment, mixed student groups working on applied university projects (a student ‘hackathon’ in independent learning week) and credit-bearing employability skills modules.

   b. It highlighted areas that St Andrews is pioneering in. We would be happy to share resources about electronic badges and the PSC programme.

   c. It would be fruitful to keep in touch with the group, and perhaps organise follow up visits to discuss some points in greater depth and explore possible collaborations.

Colleagues from the University of Edinburgh (Theme Leader and Academic Transitions Adviser) were invited to St Andrews in March 2016 to share their institutional team’s approach to building student resilience and how area fits into a wider Academic transitions toolkit for staff. We plan to explore the toolkit over the summer months.

Other valuable collaborative endeavours include the Enhancement Theme conference, SHEEC, the Theme Leaders Group, the Student Network, and research projects commissioned by the QAA. The Enhancement Theme conference’s keynote speakers provided useful definitions of transition (e.g. transition as induction, development and becoming).

4. Did your plans for 2015-16 run as planned? What have you learned from the processes you have used? Have there been any unintended consequences/unexpected findings?

On the whole the plan of work for 2015-16 ran as planned. Establishing a core institutional team to focus on the strands of work and a separate judging panel for the funding scheme has been extremely successful. This is the first theme in which we have invited a PG Rep to sit on the institutional team, and we have benefitted hugely from her input, ideas, enthusiasm and commitment to the theme. The group meetings have worked very well and greatly extended awareness of where opportunities for further cross university collaborations exist. It was also useful to have a joint internship across two departments to extend awareness of each other’s work.

The focus groups for postgraduates as part of strand 2 did not work well, as students were reluctant to participate. Students were more willing to complete an online survey than to speak to a staff member or an intern in person. However, the undergraduate students were more willing to provide advice and assistance, both in person and electronically. This may be due to the fact that many of them had just returned from their study or work abroad programme and were eager to share their experiences.

In terms of unexpected findings, the PG student surveys highlighted that many students did not understand the co-tutelle application process. This is something that we will highlight to students more in the future as information is available online. We have now added a link to our pages from the study@ PGR pages so that students are aware from the outset what the process involves.
5. What aspects of the Student Transitions Theme are you planning to focus on during 2016-17? To what extent have these been shaped by your work this year?

In addition to rounding off our work on the first three strands, the institutional team will implement the plan of work for strand 4 (see below), and continue to promote the funding scheme and fund student and staff-led initiatives. We plan to increase the Enhancement Theme funding cap from £500 to £1,000 and increase the number of funding calls from two to four. In addition, the institutional theme leader will establish more regular scheduled communication to staff and students in relation to theme progress. Lastly, a student intern will design two transition guides to feature in the orientation app for incoming and returning students. This will form our multimedia element for the QAA.

Activities for strand four include:

a. **Carrying out a gap analysis and mapping exercise** to establish what we already do to build student confidence, resilience and independence; evaluate how useful these initiatives are; identify any gaps in provision; and carry forward good practice. (This piece of work is being taken forward by a student intern in Student Services [SS]).

b. **Creating a health and wellbeing map.** Taking inspiration from the maps produced by the University of Exeter, this will aim to encourage students and staff to be actively involved in managing their own physical and mental wellbeing, while making full use of resources across the University. (This piece of work is being taken forward by a student intern in SS).

c. **Investigating the introduction of ‘Love your PhD’ networking sessions** (over lunch or coffee), where doctoral students can share their experiences of dealing with challenges and get advice on the various sources of support and advice provided by the University.

d. **Encouraging Academic Skills Coordinators to deliver a workshop** on building student, confidence, resilience and independence as part of School-based student-led programmes.

e. **Helping wardens to share good practice** with each other in terms of initiatives that help to build student confidence, resilience and independence in Halls of Residence, and encouraging students returning to Halls to act as peer mentors to new students.

6. Looking back at your original plans for the whole Theme ([www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/institutional-work](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/institutional-work)) what do you envisage will be the effects of the Theme for staff and students at your institution, by the end of the Theme?

a. Students will be equipped with professional values and behaviours to enable them to excel in their chosen fields during their studies as well as post-graduation.

b. The University will provide an improved academic experience resulting in increased levels of student satisfaction amongst UG, PGT and PGR students who benefit from the University’s collaborative partnerships.

c. Students will benefit from an improved first experience of truly independent research in the final dissertation phase of their Masters degree.

d. The institution will benefit from an increased number of students moving from PGT to PGR study within St Andrews.

e. Student satisfaction will increase in relation to the transition from PGT to PGR study.

f. Students will benefit from initiatives and resources that aim to strengthen their confidence, resilience and independence.