1. What have you learned about student transitions from the work that you have carried out in the first year of the Theme? Have there been any unintended consequences/unexpected findings?

Students and staff at the University have responded very positively to the new theme. Understanding the breadth of what transitions means to different groups of staff and students has meant that a key element of the work to date has been gathering examples, grouping them into themes, prioritising them and formulating realistic goals that can be met in the time frame. More details about this process are outlined in question 2, below.

An unexpected finding was realising just how much work is already undertaken to help students transition into, through and out of University, and that this encompassed academic staff, professional services and student-led activities.

It became clear that not all staff and students were aware of the breadth of activities, so a learning point is that improving awareness and establishing a joined-up approach across Schools, Professional Services and the Students’ Association will be important as the theme progresses.

Several areas of potential work were identified, and some of these had not been anticipated. For example, the Students’ Association was keen to focus on ‘student accommodation to private accommodation’ as a key transition point; something that staff had not identified. Discussions around the theme of ‘unexpected transitions’ generated some unpredicted examples of the student experience, both positive and negative.

A key learning point was the need to narrow the focus of the project by identifying strategic priorities that would allow a depth of focus, and create manageable projects. It was challenging to select themes to prioritise, and the three priority areas outlined in question 4 will be given dedicated resource. Project leads (in one case co-leads) were appointed for each, and this has already produced several new ideas and approaches, taking the operational plans for each key theme into unexpected areas e.g. developing a ‘professional values’ awareness week for students in semester 1.

2. Did your plans for 2014-15 run as planned? What have you learnt from the processes you used?

The key milestones are noted below together with some reflection.

a) **Establish a new institutional team:** We successfully set up an enthusiastic and engaged team with membership comprising members of academic and professional services staff and the Director of Representation from the Students’ Association. The team’s remit included assessing funding applications made to the University’s Teaching Development Fund. In light of the level of interest and number of proposals received from staff and students for projects and initiatives
that aim to enhance student transitions, we are giving consideration to a new model: A judging panel is likely to meet once per semester to consider proposals made to both funds, and a core institutional team will meet every 6 weeks to: lead and progress the University’s strategic priorities for the theme (outlined in section 4); increase student and staff engagement; organise dissemination events; produce the multimedia element, etc. Membership will be aligned to these priorities.

b) **Launch the theme.** Student Transitions was launched at a learning and teaching open forum event in December 2014 and featured external speaker Dr Simon Haslam. The session provided a valuable opportunity for group discussion to scope existing effective student development and support activity related to transition points, and to note areas where provision could be enhanced.

c) **Identify strategic priorities for the theme and determine how these will be taken forward.** Various consultation channels were used to identify key areas for review and development including: the launch event; the Student Associations’ Education Committee; the University’s Learning and Teaching Committee; and the University’s Service Directors’ Group (Student Experience Sub Group). The new University strategy and recommendations from ELIR also shaped the direction of the theme at St Andrews. This was followed up by more in depth one-to-one conversations between the institutional lead and relevant colleagues including the Proctor, the Director of Representation, the Head of Student Development, and the Directors of Careers and Student Services.

Narrowing down the scope of the theme and the key institutional priorities took slightly longer than anticipated but we are confident that our chosen portfolio of work reflects the needs of both students and the institution.

d) **Launch a funding scheme for ‘grassroots’ projects.** As with previous themes, the University devoted a strand of Enhancement Theme funding towards a competitive bidding process for staff and student-led projects. By using various communication channels and using a targeted (rather than blanket) approach, we attracted 17 proposals in the first year. 10 received funding (student-led and 6 staff-led). Successful proposals include:

- Meet the Academics - ‘Speed Dating’ Event
- Transition to Postgraduate Study (Distance Learning Perspective)
- Return to study: supporting re-engagement
- Make Yourself At Home: An Interactive Guide to a Hall of Residence
- Transition to New Medical School - a student’s perspective

In order to give sufficient attention to our institutional priorities for the theme, we intend to reduce the number of funding calls from two to one per semester.

e) **Identify, select, and prepare examples of good practice.** The University provided the following five examples of current exemplary transitions practice:

- The Academic Skills Project: Helping undergraduate students develop discipline-specific skills. *This initiative was subsequently presented at the 2015 Enhancement Theme conference*
- General Degree Mentoring Project
- 4-week and 10-week Pre-sessional Courses and Presearch
- The Professional Skills Curriculum: Developing employability skills in students at the University of St Andrews
- The Saltire Scholars Undergraduate Internship Programme.
Once a new core institutional team has been established, the institutional lead will suggest that members review the examples provided by the rest of the sector, particularly those related to St Andrews’ strategic priorities for the theme.

f) **Attend sector events.** The institutional lead attended all of the events organised by the QAA with the exception of the Theme Leaders’ Group meeting in June 2015. The TLG meetings provided a very useful forum and the development of a strong network of institutional leads. Consideration will be given to potential collaborative activity. Early publication of dates for the student network meetings scheduled for academic year 2015-16 would be much appreciated.

g) **Develop a communication/engagement strategy and brand for the theme.** Our communication and engagement strategy seeks to identify the most effective channels to promote the theme within each staff and student cohort. The Students’ Association Design and Marketing Officer has been involved to develop a strong brand with wide appeal.

3. **How has the work this year shaped your future plans for your Theme work?**

Extensive consultation and planning during year one of the theme has enabled the team to scope out priorities at institutional level for years 2 and 3. In addition, this exercise has enabled us to adopt a more focused call for proposals with respect to our funding scheme. (See question 4 for further information).

A number of follow-up opportunities and ideas emerged from our attendance at the Enhancement Theme conference including the excellent student panel who shared their experience of transition, as well as the lively and thought-provoking debate on the concepts of tough love versus handholding when supporting students through transition. We may replicate the format of these sessions within our own institution.

4. **What aspects of Student Transitions are you planning to focus on during 2015-16?**

At institutional level, we plan to explore and enhance the following transitions:

a) **The transition from student to professional.** We plan to equip students with an understanding of the professional expectations placed upon them whilst at University and post-graduation. This will involve increasing students’ awareness of:

   • the University’s commitment to inculcating professional values and behaviours
   • the importance of developing professional awareness and behaviours for their studies and subsequent working lives.

b) **Transitions into and through collaborative programmes.** We plan to review the support already in place on a diverse range of programmes which incorporate significant academic transitions, including undergraduate and postgraduate collaborative degrees, Study Abroad and credit-bearing work placements. This will help us to identify any gaps in provision, to make recommendations and to ensure that elements of good practice in any specific area can be carried over to other similar programmes as appropriate.

c) **The transition from taught postgraduate study to research postgraduate study.** We plan to:

   • improve the process and student experience of the transition from a postgraduate taught to a research degree
   • encourage more students to make the transition by informing more students of their
options and improving their first experience of truly independent research in the final dissertation phase of their Masters degree.

Project leads are in place for each of these key areas, and plans of work have been drafted for consultation with students and staff.

We will continue to encourage staff and students to bid for Enhancement Theme funding for projects, events or initiatives. By funding such projects, we aim to enhance the following the transitions, which also emerged during the scoping exercise:

- The transition from pupil to student
- The transition from abroad to St Andrews
- Transitions from the perspective of under-represented groups
- Unexpected transitions
- The transition from dependent to independent learner
- The transition from University accommodation to private accommodation.

As part of this portfolio of work, we aim to promote and foster student growth in terms of confidence, resilience and independence.