

# University of York

## Learning and Teaching Strategy 2015-2020

### Preface

Key Objective 2 of the University Strategy is “To offer outstanding teaching and learning”. This relies on the vital and continuing role of the many outstanding individuals who teach and support learning, and on excellent resources. But the University Strategy also notes that students experience their education as programmes of study, and so focuses attention on a new and distinctive approach to programme design. This approach --- the “York pedagogy” --- leads the seven themes of this supporting strategy, where it is developed in more detail and connected to the other themes of portfolio, students, staff, organisation, infrastructure and quality. University Teaching Committee and its strategy subgroup authored this document, it was revised following consultation with the whole University community, and now sets out our learning and teaching plans for 2015-2020 in an integrated way.

We begin with a statement of values (Section A) then expand these into corresponding sets of principles (Section B). Plans for the next five years are then presented in seven strategic themes (Sections C1 to C7). The Strategies reference the Values and Principles (with citations of the form [A.3, B.3.1]) and the University Strategy at <https://php.york.ac.uk/vc-blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Final-University-Strategy-2014-2020.pdf> (with citations like [University strategy key objective 2 subsection 1]). These connections show that what we will we do in the seven strategic themes builds on solid foundations and shared convictions.

The University’s learning and teaching values extend to the education of research students. For simplicity, strategic statements about research students are localised in the Research Strategy.

The Strategy will be supported by an implementation plan.

### Section A: Values

Our strategy for learning and teaching is underpinned by five values.

- A.1 Excellence is the University’s responsibility and commitment.
- A.2 Knowledge and understanding are valuable in themselves. University education equips students to make their own contributions to the advancement of knowledge.
- A.3 The ability to make meaningful choices is a fundamental good and a challenge. University education enlarges students’ options, equipping them for a

range of careers, and provides the tools of discovery, analysis and discrimination to inform the act of choosing.

A.4 University education lifts collective capability, benefiting humanity and enriching society in general.

A.5 Justified distinctiveness is worthwhile. York seeks to offer a distinctive learning experience that sets our graduates apart.

## **Section B: Principles from values**

For each of the five values we identify a set of principles to guide our strategy.

### **B.1 Excellence in learning and teaching:**

B.1.1 In recruiting staff who will teach or support student learning, we should require the highest standards of commitment to teaching and learning, proven ability or clear indicators of potential. [University strategy, key objective 2, subsection 2]

B.1.2 We should develop our staff's teaching capacity through initial and continuing professional development, reward of excellence, provision of support, and with management frameworks for dealing with underperformance.

B.1.3 We should organise learning and teaching with clarity, efficiency, and fairness.

B.1.4 We should provide high-quality infrastructure and resources for learning and teaching, including physical and virtual spaces, information and knowledge resources, and skills support.

B.1.5 We should have robust mechanisms for assuring academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience for all awards issued in our name. We should take particular care when teaching is delivered by third parties, to ensure that it meets our standards and is consistent with our expectations.

### **B.2 Our valuing of understanding and knowledge in themselves implies:**

B.2.1 Our teaching should be research-led. It should engage students in the joy of discovery and invention and expose them to research. It should include insights from our own contributions to our disciplines, and be broadly informed by current research.

B.2.2 We should seek out and apply robust research evidence for effective learning design, practice, and support for learning.

B.2.3 We should foster innovation in teaching and learning, harnessing the creativity of our own teachers, and sharing evidence of methods that enrich student understanding.

B.2.4 We should ensure that students, academic and professional support staff have effective input to the setting of policy, design of programmes and delivery of learning and teaching.

B.2.5 We should foster in students the recognition that freedom of thought, self-reflection, the development of an ethical outlook, and the testing of ideas through observation, experiment, debate and reason are cornerstones of understanding.

### **B.3 To expand students' choices:**

B.3.1 The development of fundamental learning abilities should be intrinsic to every programme. These learning abilities include the ability to analyse, critical thinking and written and oral expression. They facilitate students' progress in their chosen discipline; they enlarge the range of opportunities graduates might consider and enable them to make reasoned judgements about which to take; they are transferable and highly applicable to the world of work.

B.3.2 We should provide other activities that expand student choices and enhance employability. These include opportunities for experience of people, places, cultures and ways of doing business, and exposure to work contexts that instill an understanding of the expectations of professional behaviour. [University strategy key objective 3, key objective 2 subsection 5].

### **B.4 To develop human capability:**

B.4.1 We should continue to seek the best students on academic merit. [University strategy, key objective 2, subsection 3].

B.4.2 Having met our entry requirements, all students should be supported to do their best. By inclusive design of learning and targeted transitional support where appropriate (e.g. for students new to the UK), we should empower all students to gain the most they can from a York education.

B.4.3 Recognising that despite inclusive policies and widened participation, gaps due to social class, disadvantage, disability and public versus private schooling reopen after university, and that other inequalities persist, we should equip all students to play the fullest role in society that they are able. This will include fostering the intellectual tools, ability to form networks, resilience, self-confidence and self-awareness that close the gap of social advantage.

B.4.4 We should maintain and develop the links with employers, professional bodies and other third parties that ensure students' disciplinary expertise is well matched to these external expectations and needs. [University strategy, enabling objective 3]

### **B.5 To develop distinctiveness:**

B.5.1 We should write a concise statement of distinctiveness and maintain its currency. We should do this by assessing the University's heritage, traditions, geography, and current reputation from a global perspective. We should seek out evidence from higher education practice elsewhere. We should understand what is possible given our resources and constraints.

## Section C: Strategic Themes

In this section, seven strategic themes are presented which set out what we will do from 2015 to 2020. The themes inter-relate, but are presented in sequence, to address first what we plan to deliver (pedagogy and portfolio), then the key people who will be involved (students, staff) and finally the enabling factors (organisation and management, infrastructure and quality assurance).

### C1 The York Pedagogy

C1.1 The York pedagogy is based on the principles that we seek, analyse and apply evidence in learning and teaching design [B.2.2]. It offers a consolidated realisation of the principles that we organise for clarity [B.1.3], foster innovation [B.2.3] and develop students as independent learners [B.2.5, B.3.1, B.4.3]. It is a distinctive York perspective [A.5, B.5] and is summarised in section 1 of key objective 2 of the University Strategy.

The relevant quote from the University Strategy is:

*We will articulate a University of York pedagogy and apply it to all our programmes*

*We will apply the best evidence on effective teaching and learning to define our institution's learning culture and set expectations for our programmes.*

*We will put programme design and student work at the heart of our pedagogy.*

- o Every programme will have distinctive and clear objectives, and each stage of study will be designed to offer progress towards those programme objectives.*
- o Carefully-designed student work will enable students to make progress. Students will understand the work they are expected to do and how that work will contribute to the achievement of the programme objectives.*
- o Interactions between students and staff will be designed to encourage, inform and propel students' work. Students will receive the guidance, support and feedback they need to make progress, and they will understand what they can expect from the University in support of their learning.*

*The design of programmes and student work will support the students' development as autonomous learners.*

*All new programmes will be designed in accordance with our pedagogy. By 2017-18, all programmes in the University will comply with the principles of the University pedagogy.*

C1.2 Central to the pedagogy is the design of student work, that is, the totality of activity students do, inside and outside contact time, in order to learn. Carefully-

designed student work will engage and challenge our students by drawing directly on activities known to enhance learning, for example spaced and interleaved practice, retrieval of previously-learned material in new contexts, collaboration, and development of transferable skills. Because the effectiveness of student private study is correlated with learning gain, highly variable between students, and often capable of significant improvement even for the best students, our programmes will demonstrate an explicit understanding of how students spend their study time and an explanation of how this work is designed to lead students to fulfill the programme learning outcomes.

C1.3 We will prioritise the careful, collaborative design of a small number of concise, stretching yet achievable learning outcomes for each programme. These will capture the distinctive characteristics of the programme and its graduates, which can be easily communicated to inspire and inform our applicants and students. We will explain how the outcomes are achieved progressively over the course of the programme through student work, teaching, assessment and feedback. This will enable students to understand the coherence of their programme, their stage of development within it, the relevance of modes of teaching, learning and assessment, and the transferability of skills and knowledge to new situations including those encountered in placements or employment. The programme learning outcomes will be developed and owned by the academics offering the programme, reflect scholarship in the subject matter and, where appropriate, PSRB (Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body) requirements. They will embed the values in this Strategy of the pursuit of knowledge, enhancing students' choices and developing human capability [A.2, A.3, A.4]. We will provide guidance and support to departments in designing and reviewing programme learning outcomes.

C1.4 Contact time with staff, whether face-to-face or virtual, synchronous or asynchronous, will inspire and engage students. The creativity, enthusiasm and clarity of York's staff will continue to be central to providing appropriate and challenging content (for example in lectures), developing insight through structured, interactive discussion (seminars) and practical work (labs), and providing students with timely advice on work in progress. All types of staff-student contact will guide and support students towards optimal use of *all* their study time for productive learning. There will be a complementary expectation on students to engage with contact events and show commitment to their studies.

C1.5 Assessment and feedback will be coordinated at programme level, to ensure that the nature, pattern and volume of assessment and feedback within individual modules supports progressive development towards programme learning outcomes, provides timely and useful formative work in an efficient way, and avoids excessive volumes of summative assessment, which creates unnecessary pressure for both students and staff.

C1.6 We will use pilots of mechanisms to help departments understand and visualise the experience of student work through their programmes and map its connections to learning outcomes. We will learn from the pilots and adapt our

approach as we apply schemes progressively to undergraduate and then postgraduate taught programmes. [B.2.3]

C1.7 The design of new programmes will be supported with documents that apply the York pedagogy.

C1.8 Work on the York pedagogy will be scheduled to meet the commitment in the University Strategy that by 2017-18 all programmes (UG and PGT) will comply with its principles. This will be a major driver of teaching innovation over the period. We will also maintain support for innovation through infrastructure developments (see Section C6) and funding of awards to departments to make rapid progress with specific initiatives (University strategy, key objective 2, subsection 4).

## **C2. Portfolio of Programmes of Study**

C2.1 We will explore opportunities to enhance the range and relevance of programmes<sup>1</sup>. Criteria for portfolio development will include our ability to offer research-led and research-informed teaching [B.2.1] and to recruit excellent students [B.4.1]. We will continue to provide opportunities for reflection on the portfolio in departments through Annual Programme Review and Periodic Review. We will continue to help programme teams to bring forward proposals for new developments with appropriate consideration of any risks [B.1.5]. [University strategy, enabling objective 1].

C2.2 We expect to see new formats of learning and teaching, particularly at PGT level. We will be flexible in adapting to these, but will adhere to our principles in Section B of this strategy. We will develop clear policy on the options, constraints and resources for alternative modes of delivery. We will have similar consideration to the expanding formats and modes of continuing professional development, lifelong learning and other supplementary programmes.

C2.3 We will continue to draw on partnerships with employers and the local community to inform the curriculum. We will develop programme outcomes and content with due regard to enterprise and teamworking skills and an understanding of the general expectations of professional behaviour. [University strategy key objective 2, subsection 5][B.3.2][B.4.4]. We will encourage within our programmes the inclusion of industry years, time abroad, or other curricular innovations that connect to the world of work. (See also C3.4.)

C2.4 We will continue to explore collaborations, including new programmes, with other institutions in the UK and abroad. These will only be pursued where there is a clear fit with University Strategy, academic standards can be assured, quality will be excellent, and there is a robust business model. Where appropriate, these

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<sup>1</sup> The University Strategy commits us to achieving growth to remain competitive, but “*this must not be at the cost of quality – on the contrary, growth should serve to enhance academic excellence, to raise standards overall and to make the University more resilient. It follows that the scale and pace of growth will be informed by the academic enhancement it can deliver*”.

collaborations will support the flexibility and internationalisation of learning. [B.1.5][University strategy enabling objective 3, subsection 1]

C2.5 The University Strategy commits us to growing our distance-learning provision. (Enabling objective 1.3). We will introduce further high-quality programmes where markets exist, in line with our emerging plan. [B.1.3, B.1.5]

### **C3. Students**

C3.1 The Learning and Teaching Strategy co-ordinates and links key objective 3 in the University Strategy (“To offer all our students an outstanding and valuable experience”) with the Employability Strategy. Here the primary expression of those links is that students are a vital and integral part of York’s learning community.

C3.2 We will engage students at all levels as part of our learning community in the development, monitoring and improvement of learning and teaching policy and in programme development and review. We will continue to seek the best ways to make this engagement effective. [B.2.4]

C3.3 We will develop a ‘partnership agreement’ which will make clear the expectations of our learning community. It will specify commitments to students in respect of teaching and learning, alongside undertakings from students about their engagement. Students will sign the partnership agreement at the beginning of their studies, and its commitments will be sustained through ongoing interaction between students and staff. The agreement will improve student understanding of their responsibilities as independent learners, the importance of attendance and other engagement, and concepts of professional behaviour. We will inform development of the partnership agreement with a careful review of practice elsewhere, including the collection of evidence about effectiveness and the associated issues of engagement monitoring and sanctions for non-compliance. [B.2.5]

C3.4 Through the York pedagogy, in particular the design of primary learning outcomes [C1.3], we will improve students’ development of transferable skills and their capacity to apply these to new situations, including those which are likely to be experienced in employment. Students will develop as global citizens, socially and environmentally aware, and sensitive to international contexts and cultures. They will benefit from the international and cultural diversity of students and staff of the University, and be encouraged to experience periods of study abroad, the York Award and the community activity of Colleges. [B.3, B.4, University strategy, key objective 3, subsection 4].

C3.5 We will recognise the needs of students with disabilities, and aim for inclusive practices in our teaching, assessment and support for learning. [B4.2]

C3.6 We will continue to develop our support for students’ effective transition into higher education and into postgraduate level study, reflecting the principle of developing fundamental learning abilities. This requires an appropriate balance between the provision of complementary central services and resources, and the

embedding of skills development in programmes and modules as an integral part of the York pedagogy [B.3.1]. We will monitor developments in compulsory education and their implications for student transition.

#### **C4. Staff**

C4.1 We will set out clear expectations of applicants for academic posts, with respect to their commitment to and capabilities in teaching and learning design [B.1.1]. We will ensure that students have an effective voice in staff recruitment: all interviewees will give a lecture or other teaching activity as part of the selection process, students invited to attend and their comments incorporated with staff comments in a report to the selection panel.

C4.2 There will be opportunities for postgraduate students to contribute to teaching and demonstrating, where appropriate. Postgraduates who teach will demonstrate competence and enthusiasm for teaching and the abilities to communicate and work effectively with a diverse population of learners.

C4.3 We will implement the Statement of Teaching Performance Expectations, agreed by Senate in February 2015. The Statement will guide departments, teaching teams, and priorities for the design of professional development opportunities. Where appropriate, it will support individual performance management. [B.1.2]

C4.4 We will build a stronger culture of programme leadership and of staff working in programme teams, contributing to curriculum development from a programme-level perspective as required by the York pedagogy.

C4.5 We will continue to provide a portfolio of professional development opportunities for academics and other staff whose role is in support of student learning [B.1.2]. Where appropriate, this provision will be aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework and therefore facilitate external recognition through the HEA. We will enhance our support for programme leaders with a new course. We will expect and support our staff to engage in professional development regarding digital fluency to ensure that the design of all programmes and modules benefits from a critical appreciation of the effective use of all kinds of digital tools in teaching and learning. (See also [C6.4])

C4.6 Staff and postgraduates who teach will be appropriately recognised and rewarded for excellence in teaching and in the support for learning and teaching. The University Strategy includes the commitment to recognise and reward teaching excellence of staff in the promotions system, including a route to professor. We will continue to complement this with an internal teaching award scheme and support for staff involved in student learning to engage in scholarship and to achieve external recognition for innovation and excellence. [B.1.2]

C4.7 As the University moves towards more effective and transparent modelling and assignment of workload, we will adopt models that take account of the staff time required for the various components of designing and delivering excellent modules

and programmes, with appropriate weight to assessment and feedback, and including responding to new developments. Evidence from this source, alongside consideration of sector norms, will inform the University's planning and resources processes.

## **C5. Organisation, management and governance**

C5.1 Boards of Studies and their Chairs carry out a vital role in overseeing learning and teaching in departments and in supporting the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. To ensure their effectiveness, we will review the roles and the clarity of responsibilities of Boards of Studies, Chairs of Boards of Studies, Boards of Examiners and their Chairs, Teaching Committees and their Chairs, Programme Leaders and/or convenors, Year leaders and other departmental structures. This will produce a consistent set of models of good practice and a single meaning to the vocabulary used. [B.1.3]. We will ensure that combined programme boards work effectively and that their role in communication between departments is clear and understood.

C5.2 We will ensure effective programme leadership, with authority to shape student work holistically throughout the programme, and to coordinate staff working together as programme teams. Leaders of combined programmes will be supported to design a coherent student experience. [B.1.3] We will ensure that excellence in programme leadership is recognised through teaching awards.

C5.3 We will review practices that are common to departments but implemented in different ways. We will test the academic grounds for difference. Efficiency will not be prioritised over quality, but the analysis of difference will include questions of institutional consistency and fairness, as well as best practice for particular disciplines. Practices that we will review include module evaluation, attendance monitoring and the varied approaches to weeks 8-10 of summer term. [B.1.3]

C5.4 We will continue to consider the role of Faculty Boards in learning and teaching, and monitor the roll-out of the Graduate Research School Board as it takes over some Teaching Committee responsibilities. We will ensure that the International Pathway College and expansion in Distance Learning are appropriately organized and overseen.

## **C6 Physical and virtual infrastructure**

C6.1 We will continue to invest in high-quality, well-equipped teaching and learning spaces and in physical and virtual information, Library, IT and learning resources for all students. These will support current good practice, recognise emerging needs, and, where possible, anticipate changes in pedagogy and in the way students learn. The improvement of physical space will include the provision of a new teaching building on the Heslington West campus, from 2016-17. [B.1.4]

C6.2 We will continue to invest in effective timetabling for teaching and examinations, through the embedded timetabler pilot, and by monitoring and refinement of our timetabling processes.

C6.3 Our students expect to use technology to facilitate their learning and to streamline administrative processes. The development of digital literacy skills is essential for their employability and lifelong learning. In line with our e-learning vision statement we will exploit appropriate technology in student work, in teaching, and to enable a range of assessment and feedback methods. Where possible and pedagogically reasonable, we will enable students to make effective use of personal mobile devices as learning tools. [B.1.4]

## **C7. Quality Assurance<sup>2</sup>**

C7.1 Our procedures and policy framework will continue to support programme development and innovation, ensure that academic standards are secure and manage any potential risks to the student experience. We will adapt our documents and procedures to reflect the York pedagogy and provide explicit evaluation of its implementation. Our procedures will follow the principles of equality and diversity. [B.4.2][B.4.3]

C7.2 Effective student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement is crucial. This includes receiving and responding to student feedback, and the direct engagement of students in quality review activities and policy development. (See also C3.2.) [B.2.4]

C7.3 We will continue to use national metrics of student satisfaction and engagement. Where appropriate, we will specify targets for improvement and accountability for actions to achieve these. We will continue to work on improvement of our NSS results, including support for departments as they act to reach the target of 95% of respondents satisfied by 2018. We will enhance our insight into student engagement by participating in the UK Experience Survey and by designing a new internal survey for non-finalist undergraduate students. We will strengthen our communication of actions taken in response to student feedback. [B.1, B.2.4]

C7.4 We will monitor closely, and engage with national and international consultations and developments relating to quality assurance and enhancement, including on the future of quality assurance and external examining, measurement of learning gain, adoption of grade point averages, and other changes or proposed changes in the quality framework. [B.2.2, B.5.1]

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<sup>2</sup> The University Strategy states that “*We will continue to deploy robust processes for quality assurance and use these processes as vehicles for innovation and enhancement. All programmes will be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain relevant and up-to-date. We will respond swiftly and decisively to student feedback about our programmes*”.

### Cross-referencing values, principles and strategy statements

This table summarises how the long-term perspective of sections A and B is realised within section C. References are to paragraphs in the document; so the values, stated in section A, are preceded by "A." the principles, stated in section B, by "B.". Strategy C1's theme is The York Pedagogy, C2 Portfolio, C3 Students, C4 Staff, C5 Organisation, C6 Infrastructure, C7 Quality Assurance.

<b>Value</b>	<b>Principle</b>	<b>Realised by strategy</b>
A.1. Excellence, ownership	B.1.1 Staff recruitment B.1.2 Staff development B.1.3 Organisation B.1.4 Infrastructure B.1.5 Quality assurance	C4.1 C4.3-7 C1.1, C5.1-4, C2.5, C7.3 C6.1-4 C2.1, C2.4, C2.5, C7.1-4
A.2. Fostering Knowledge	B.2.1 Research-led B.2.2 Research-informed B.2.3 Innovation B.2.4 Participation B.2.5 Freedom and reason	C1.3, C2.1 C1.1-3, C2.4, C7.4 C1.1, C1.6, C1.8, C3.2, C4.1, C7.2 C1.3, C3.3
A.3. Equipping individuals	B.3.1 Learning abilities B.3.2 Employability	C1.3, C3.3, C3.6 C2.3, C3.4
A.4. Building human capacity	B.4.1 Recruiting excellence B.4.2 Inclusive support B.4.3 Closing social gap B.4.4 Employers' needs	C2.1 C3.5, C7.1 C1.1, C1.3, C7.1 C3.2, C3.4
A.5. Justified distinctiveness	B.5.1 Developing and summarising distinctiveness	C1.1-8, C7.4