

Learning and Teaching Strategy 2009-2013

Introduction

As a University we value: the highest academic and professional standards; social, cultural and economic responsibility; environmental sustainability; diversity; equality of opportunity; integrity and leadership. Our mission is to be a globally competitive, research-intensive, student-focussed university that takes seriously its economic, social and cultural responsibilities to the Eastern region, the UK and the world.

The University is committed to growth through regional and international partnership and to developing its multi-campus footprint. It aims to recruit the best and most appropriately qualified students and give them an educational and social experience that will benefit them for life.

At Essex, research, teaching and knowledge transfer enjoy parity of esteem. In this Learning and Teaching Strategy we identify future aspirations in learning and teaching and put the building blocks in place to ensure that these aspirations are realised. It is a shared vision, grounded in partnership between students, academic and support staff, external agencies and employers.

The Strategy has been shaped by the attributes that define our graduates: academic abilities, employability skills and personal and social qualities (see appendix 1).

Institutional Priorities for Learning and Teaching

In realising its vision for learning and teaching, the University has identified four main strategic aims:

- 1. Engage our students in a high-quality, student-centred and collaborative learning experience founded on the expert knowledge of academic and support staff**

Essex is a University that excels in both research and teaching, and as such successfully nurtures its students within a high-quality, challenging and inspiring learning environment. Excellent teaching integrated with the latest research and developments in our subject areas will continue to underpin the University Learning and Teaching Strategy and characterise the student experience.

- 2. Enhance the quality of the student learning experience by providing a supportive and well-resourced learning environment**

Our focus is on developing an accessible, inclusive and student-centred learning experience: one which is able to evolve quickly in response to individual needs of those entering, or returning to, higher education. Our objective is to provide increasingly flexible and well-resourced provision, sustained by a team of committed and professional academic and support staff. As a University with an international mission, a core objective is to ensure that our teaching is equally supportive and inclusive of all nationalities, faiths and creeds.

3. Empower our students through academic knowledge, graduate qualities and skills that are vital for their future success

The University of Essex student experience is not confined to academic performance, but is about developing independence, experiencing a different cultural and social environment, and preparing to enter or return to working life. Qualities developed, such as analytical and critical ability, independent judgement, research, organisational and communication skills, are highly valued by employers. Our aim is to increase opportunities available beyond the lecture hall, including volunteering, part-time work, placements, and other employment-focused activities and events, equipping students with improved skills for life and the workplace or progression to higher study.

4. Enable those who teach and support student learning to develop their scholarship and professional practice

The University is committed to developing effective and innovative staff to meet its strategic objectives for teaching, research, and knowledge transfer. It values highly-qualified staff committed to enhancing the quality of the student learning experience, and therefore encourages and will facilitate engagement of all staff with its Professional Development Framework. Engagement is determined by the personal and professional aspirations of the individual, the changing context of higher education in the UK, and the University's vision and objectives.

Objectives and Key Projects

The University will achieve its strategic aims for learning and teaching through the objectives and key projects below.

1. Engage our students in a high-quality, student-centred and collaborative learning experience founded on the expert knowledge of academic and support staff:

Objectives

- Inspire students through high-quality, intellectually-challenging teaching informed by world-leading research and the highest academic standards.
- Develop flexible curriculum structures to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student profile.
- Employ appropriate, diverse and innovative methods of assessment that lead to progressive development of knowledge and understanding.
- Provide timely and effective feedback to promote reflection and improve performance.
- Promote the use of relevant learning technologies and modes of delivery appropriate to direct, distance and blended learning contexts.
- Work in partnership with students to ensure their views are central to the cycle of continuous quality enhancement.

Key Projects

- Introduce Faculty-level Learning and Teaching strategies that articulate how teaching is informed by discipline based research.

- Establish links between institutional Learning and Teaching and Widening Participation strategies in line with the new funding methodology for Teaching Enhancement and Student Support, and through the University's Education Outreach and Widening Participation Strategy Committee
- Develop regulations and policies that facilitate innovative teaching and diverse assessment practices.
- Expand and extend the use of learning technologies in learning, teaching and assessment building on examples of excellent practice across the University and its partners.

2. Enhance the quality of the student learning experience through the provision of a supportive and well-resourced learning environment:

Objectives

- Provides effective physical space and online environments for student learning.
- Develop an infrastructure for learning and teaching that is inclusive, flexible and accessible.
- Implement an investment programme in specialist equipment and resources to align with the institution's strategic vision for learning and teaching.
- Anticipate and respond to the diverse and evolving needs of learners by providing academic support and guidance, enabling them to realise their full potential.
- Develop a holistic management information system that integrates learning and teaching with other aspects of the university experience.

Key Projects

- Build a new University Student Centre and Library extension to support collaborative learning, provide improved access to student services, and increase both the range and volume of academic resources available to students.
- Develop and implement diagnostic tests for literacy, numeracy and English Language skills for first-year undergraduates, and provide additional targeted in-session support where necessary.
- Establish mechanisms to provide targeted and integrated study skills support for students.
- Continue development of a consistent set of portals delivering information and a wide range of online services throughout the student's relationship with the University, from enquirer to alumnus.

3. Empower our students through academic knowledge, graduate qualities and skills that are vital for their future success:

Objectives

- Develop students' knowledge, understanding and skills that characterise academic excellence in their chosen discipline.
- Enhance students' self-reliance and intellectual independence by developing powers of critical analysis and evaluation.
- Encourage students, through the process of Personal Development Planning, to integrate academic learning with life and work experiences, enhancing their employability.
- Develop students' abilities to plan and manage their careers and to articulate their strengths and potential contributions to current and future employers.
- Enable individual students to realise their academic potential through inclusive teaching and support mechanisms.

- Increase cultural and social awareness through engagement within the University and in local, national and international contexts.

Key Projects

- Implement an Employability Framework which explicitly identifies and records opportunities to develop employability skills within programmes of study, across central provision and within extra-curricular activities.
- Introduce a campus-based work placement scheme for all students to enable them to acquire realistic yet flexible work experience and professional training without compromising their academic achievement.
- Increase demand for Study Abroad among students and increase the proportion of programmes that provide this opportunity.
- Develop the network of Student Support services to help students to get the most from their studies and manage their transition through University including support for international and disabled students.
- Reinforce links between the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Disability Equality Scheme.

4. Enable those who teach and support student learning to develop their scholarship and professional practice:

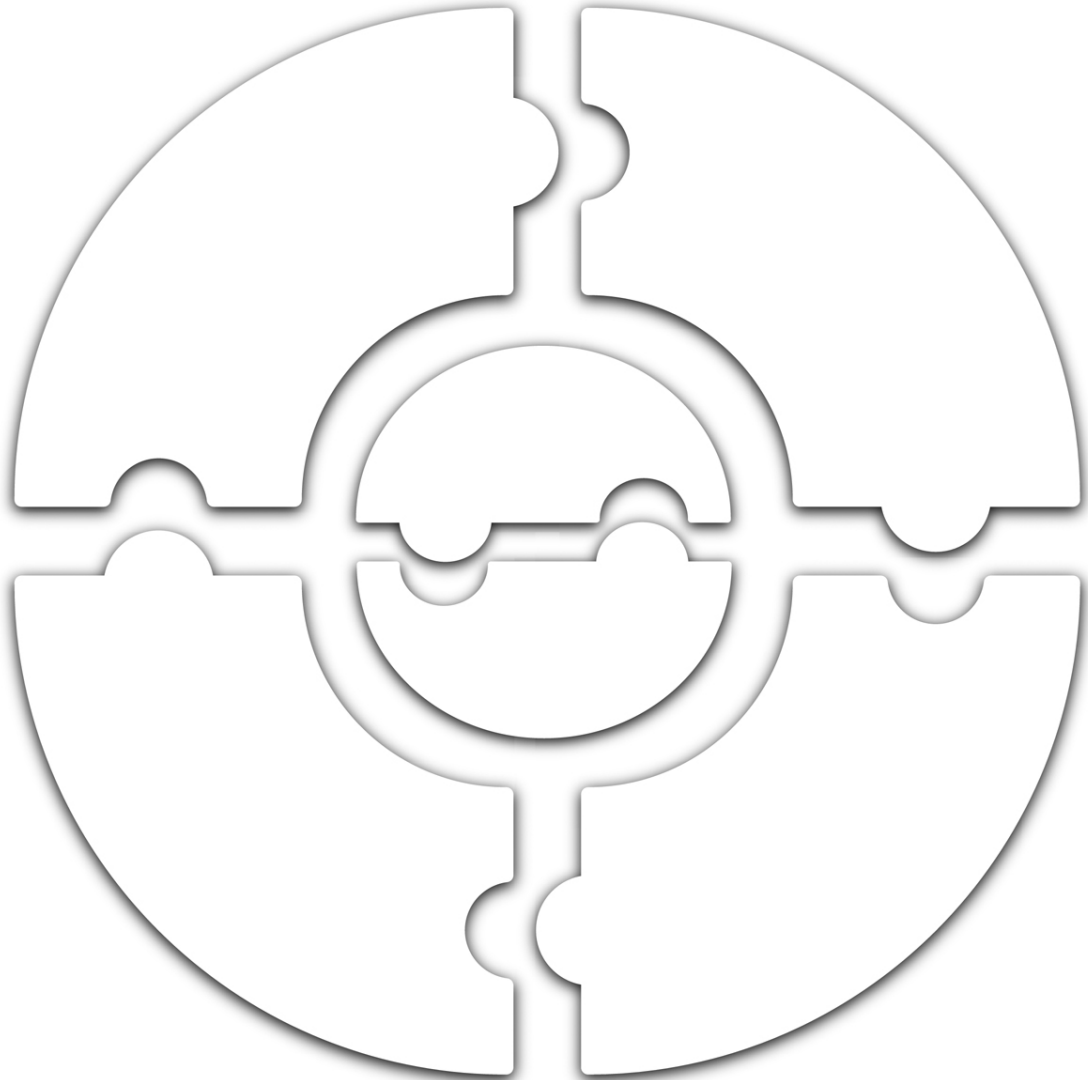
Objectives

- Provide coherent, structured professional development opportunities that enable staff to gain qualifications, credit and recognition in line with their aspirations and institutional goals.
- Cultivate a community of academic practice that celebrates and shares excellence and innovation in learning, teaching and scholarship.
- Support learning and teaching projects that seek to innovate and enhance the student learning experience.
- Review the communications between academic departments and student support that enable the institution to anticipate and respond to the needs of students with particular learning needs and disabilities.
- Encourage staff to broaden their experience through interactions with collaborative partner institutions and the wider HE sector, both nationally and internationally.
- Recognise and reward individuals who make exceptional contributions to teaching and supporting student learning.

Key Projects

- Develop and validate Masters-level modules to accredit continuing professional development of new and experienced academic, support and research staff at the University and amongst our collaborative partners. Share best practice with similar Masters-level continuing professional development modules, aimed at supporting the professions of teachers, health professionals, and the children's workforce.
- Encourage and support relevant staff to meet the appropriate standard of the UK Professional Standards Framework in Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education.
- Reinforce recognition of teaching achievements in institutional human resources policies for review, reward and career progression.
- Recognise and reward innovation and excellence by funding initiatives through the Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund (TALIF) and the Essex Excellence in Teaching Award (ETA).

- Secure funding from the Higher Education Academy's National Teaching Fellowship scheme.
- Expand the sharing of good practice and teaching approaches through staff development events, online guides and publications and external collaboration.



Appendix 1

The University of Essex aims to help its students develop skills in the following domains, with different students achieving different combinations of skills and levels of attainment:

Academic development

- Knowledge of relevant scholarship and awareness of the limits of present understanding
- Familiarity with research methods (and associated ethical and professional issues), ability to apply specialist techniques, and willingness to objectively evaluate new ideas
- Literacy, numeracy, ICT, internet and web skills
- Analysis, evaluation, communication and presentation skills

Career development

- Career planning and awareness of labour market
- Job search, application, interview and self-presentation skills
- Willingness to acquire the skills and training needed for future career development
- Awareness of the need to be flexible and open to possible future career changes

Personal development skills

- Setting goals, planning and implementing actions, coping with set-backs and pressure
- Self-awareness, self-motivation, self-reliance, self-confidence and self-discipline
- Intellectual curiosity, imagination, creativity, initiative, adaptability and open-mindedness
- Interpersonal skills (engaging with others to establish rapport and good working relationships)
- Awareness of the importance of engaging in activities promoting physical and mental health

Professional working skills

- Teamwork, leadership and negotiation skills (including leading and being led by others)
- Experience of working on live project or case studies
- Planning and management skills (planning, managing and completing a task on time)
- Professionalism, loyalty, responsibility, integrity (achieving high standards in the workplace)

External awareness

- Respect for the ideas, cultural values and the rights of others
- Awareness of social, economic, cultural, ethical, environmental and sustainability issues
- Sense of local, regional and global perspective
- Appreciation of the value of enterprise, entrepreneurship, commerce and business skills

Experience of Work

- Learning from voluntary, placement or paid work experience and from internships or study abroad
- Understanding of work and organisational cultures
- Familiarity with expectations of the workplace
- Mature and level-headed approach to life and work