



Learning and Teaching Strategy (Revised 2002)

1. Introduction

The University of Plymouth is proud of its achievements in learning and teaching and will continue to build on its recognised strengths. This Learning and Teaching Strategy is informed by the fundamental changes taking place in the external environment, including the national priority to increase participation in higher education, and the impact they are having on curriculum, pedagogy, learner support, retention and the physical learning environment. These include:

- the increasing diversity of the student body;
- the need to ensure fair access to higher education;
- the importance of maintaining and improving student retention;
- the requirements of employment;
- the needs of graduates as life long learners;
- approaches to regional planning and development;
- the globalisation of education;
- advances in communication and information technology.

2. The Institutional Context

2.1. The Strategy reflects the institution's Mission and Values, is closely linked to the institution's Strategic Plan, and relates to other key institutional strategies, including Widening Participation, Human Resources, Equal Opportunities.

2.2. The Strategy builds on the institution's many strengths and achievements in learning and teaching and in particular:

- a broad portfolio of campus-based undergraduate and postgraduate teaching;
- consistently high assessment ratings in the Quality Assurance Agency's Teaching Quality Assessments;
- an acknowledged record for teaching innovation;
- an established strategy for widening participation in HE;
- a successful collaborative network of Partner Colleges, providing access to HE across the Southwest peninsula;
- an innovative foundation programme in science,
- the establishment of the Institute for Science Education to address issues of transition;
- the lead institution for three FDTL projects;
- the award of three National Teaching Fellowships;
- selection as the host institution for the National Subject Centre for Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences;

- established programmes for training new entrants to teaching in HE;
- comprehensive provision for supporting the continuing professional development of teaching and support staff;
- an established institutional student feedback process – the Student Perception Questionnaire;
- integrated learning support services and systems;
- successful research and consultancy, including RAE ratings which are among the highest in the post-'92 Universities;
- a variety of successful national and international collaborative partnerships.

3. The University's Mission

3.1. The Learning and Teaching Strategy has been developed within the context of the University's Mission

“To be a University of excellence, which:

- *delivers teaching and research to world-class standards*
- *fosters scholarship and culture;*
- *serves the region;*
- *develops responsible students capable of critical reasoning and practical action*
- *is open and accessible*
- *is an effective community working in partnership with others.”*

It is further informed by its key values:

Scholarship - The University is committed to the discovery, transmission, dissemination and application of knowledge and good practice in an environment, which fully supports the freedom of intellectual inquiry, of creativity, and of professional development.

Capability - The University is committed to developing capable and adaptable graduates who are independent and rational thinkers, have employment and life skills, are sensitive to environmental and social needs, can work collaboratively, and who are equipped for life long learning.

Community - The University is committed to the well being of (its) staff and students, and to their personal and professional development in a culture of trust and equality of opportunity. As a community (it) will be responsive to the needs and aspiration of others, demonstrating a sense of social responsibility, and working collaboratively with others in our region and beyond.

Accessibility - The University will strive to maximise educational opportunities for all able to benefit, and will provide courses which are flexible in entry requirements, in modes of attendance and in level, and which allow progression.

Effectiveness - The University will be effective in all that it undertakes, seeking value for money, having regard for the environment, and striving through good management to make sustainable use of our human, physical, technological and fiscal resources.

Quality - The University will strive for the highest quality and standards in teaching and research, in (its) support of students, in all (its) other activities, and in (its) working environment.

4. Background to the Revised Strategy

- 4.1. The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy was approved by the Academic Board in June 2000 and has provided a framework for development since that time. The Teaching and Learning Policy Committee has identified key priorities annually, though has also encouraged individual Faculties to re-order these to meet their own priorities. Many aspects of the strategy are still evolving and several of the themes identified in the Action Plan build on work initiated in the first two years of the strategy's existence.
- 4.2. The Strategy has its roots in a number of institutional teaching and learning developments dating from the early 1990s. Internal initiatives such as the 'Change Agents' programme, the Technology –Supported Learning programme, and the Student-Centred Learning Initiative, together with externally funded projects, such as SEED (FDTL); JEWELS (DfES Innovations), and SWANDS (HEFCE Improving Provision for Disabled Students) have all contributed to the on-going debate on learning, teaching and assessment practice.
- 4.3. The University's Teaching and Learning Policy, "Developing People," provides the key philosophy and principles which inform the strategy.

"The primary aim of our collective endeavours is the development of people. Through our teaching and their learning, we aim to produce people who have knowledge and understanding and the ability to apply it, and who are equipped with the necessary skills, attitudes and confidence to play a constructive and creative role in society throughout their lives.

Informed by supporting principles – self-awareness, dialogue, collaboration and flexibility – and alert to best practice in learning and teaching in Higher Education, the University will improve the quality of learning for all students by:

- *enhancing teaching effectiveness and in doing so acknowledging that the role of the lecturer is evolving to become a manager of other people's learning rather than a transmitter of knowledge;*
- *strengthening the support which learners receive, from induction to graduation;*
- *ensuring wherever possible that adequate resources are directed towards achieving these ends;*
- *exploiting the diverse resource we have in all who work and study (in the University) to provide a rich educational experience matched to the increasingly varied backgrounds and aspirations of our students;*
- *ensuring that all learning and teaching is directly underpinned by the active research and scholarship of teaching staff."*

- 4.4. The development of a learner-centred culture is also pivotal to the strategy. The institution characterises this as "student-centred learning", which is defined as an active process through which students are encouraged to develop deep approaches as learners, and take responsibility for their own learning. The institution seeks to provide students with the best possible educational

experience in a flexible, stimulating environment which enables students increasingly to:

- have *access* to the resources that will help them most as individual learners
- *interact* with staff and *collaborate* with other learners
- develop skills and *self-awareness* of their own learning processes
- become increasingly *independent* in their learning
- *reach their potential* in the subjects they study

5. Strategic Goals and Objectives of the Learning and Teaching Strategy

The key goals and objectives of the Strategy aim to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in the University and collectively to address national priorities: widening participation, ensuring fair access, maintaining and improving retention rates, enhancing employability, and encouraging and disseminating good practice. These are identified more specifically in the Action Plan.

The key goals and objectives are:

- 5.1. To provide educational experiences which enable students to reach their own potential; to acquire subject knowledge and appropriate professional skills; and to develop as “*capable and adaptable graduates who are independent and rational thinkers, have employment and life skills, are sensitive to environmental and social needs, can work collaboratively, and who are equipped for life long learning*” by:
 - 5.1.1. designing curricula which are current and relevant, informed by good academic practice, underpinned by current research and professional practice, and prepare graduates to play a constructive and creative role in society throughout their lives;
 - 5.1.2. ensuring that all programmes develop employment and lifelong-learning skills and attributes, alongside academic and subject specific skills;
 - 5.1.3. encouraging students to be self-aware, proactive and helping them to engage more actively in their own development and in the task of learning;
 - 5.1.4. increasing opportunities for input into the development of the curriculum from employers and the community, and, as appropriate providing opportunities for work experience.
- 5.2. To increase the flexibility of the institution’s undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in mode, place, time and access by:
 - 5.2.1. working collaboratively to develop a wide-ranging portfolio of programmes, which can be accessed on campus or at a distance, regionally, nationally and internationally;
 - 5.2.2. using pedagogies and modes of learning which increase flexibility and independence in student learning, and high quality staff-student interaction, both on campus and face to face at a distance, including at home and in the workplace;
 - 5.2.3. exploring opportunities and markets to expand delivery of programmes at a distance, particularly at Masters level and as CPD;
 - 5.2.4. increasing the use of interactive distance learning technologies to support inter-campus and inter-institutional delivery.

- 5.3. To ensure that modes of learning, teaching and assessment are effective in meeting learning outcomes, and use new technologies appropriately by:
 - 5.3.1. monitoring and reviewing teaching and learning practices across all modules/ programmes to ensure that they provide high quality learning experiences;
 - 5.3.2. ensuring that guidelines for programme design include the definition of learning outcomes, encourage the use of appropriate pedagogies, use assessment methodologies appropriate to the learning objectives, define the resource needs, and establish systems for regular evaluation and feedback;
 - 5.3.3. adopting pedagogies and new educational technologies, which facilitate student-centred learning;
 - 5.3.4. applying strategies for assessment which best meet learning outcomes, enhance learning, and provide appropriate modes of assessment, both formative and summative;
 - 5.3.5. developing new approaches to assessment including the use of Computer Assisted Assessment software;
 - 5.3.6. ensuring that new communication and information technologies are used appropriately, enhance learning, and support different styles of learning;
 - 5.3.7. supporting the design and development of resource-based learning materials, including the use of the worldwide web;
 - 5.3.8. establishing processes to evaluate the effectiveness of new communication and information technologies in supporting learning.

- 5.4. To develop systems of student support and guidance, which enhance the student learning experience and help to support retention by:
 - 5.4.1. encouraging the development of personal support and guidance systems as a collaboration between departments and central services;
 - 5.4.2. ensuring that systems for learning support match the requirements of individual programmes;
 - 5.4.3. developing a specification for the provision of on-line learner support;
 - 5.4.4. identifying the particular needs of students studying off-campus, including those at Partner Colleges;
 - 5.4.5. reviewing the key periods of induction and transition in relation to student learning needs;
 - 5.4.6. providing resources to help students in understanding their learning and assisting them in developing different approaches to learning;
 - 5.4.7. developing robust evaluation and feedback systems to inform and improve processes.

- 5.5. To foster excellence in teaching, and support academic and support staff as they develop new roles in the context of a rapidly changing educational environment by:
 - 5.5.1. recognising and rewarding high quality teaching;
 - 5.5.2. providing high quality support and development to enable staff to enhance the quality of their teaching;
 - 5.5.3. increasing opportunities for continuous professional development in teaching, both within the University and in partnership with other institutions in the UK and overseas;

- 5.5.4. continuing to prepare new teachers and support staff for their changing roles in Higher Education through participation in the Learning and Teaching in Higher Education programme;
 - 5.5.5. working collaboratively with the Institute for Learning and Teaching, the Staff Educational Development Association, the Learning and Teaching Support Network, and other professional bodies;
 - 5.5.6. promoting and sharing best practice in learning and teaching within and between individual disciplines;
 - 5.5.7. supporting research into pedagogy, subject based teaching, and innovative practice, and establishing mechanisms for discussing and disseminating such practice.
- 5.6. To plan, develop and maintain the physical environment and infrastructure with sufficient flexibility to meet the changing needs of students and staff; by:
- 5.6.1. contributing to the review of current plans for the development of the physical learning environment against the key strategic goals and objectives of this Strategy;
 - 5.6.2. developing an appropriate range of flexibly-designed accommodation to meet the varying demands of different modes of learning, teaching and assessment adopted in different discipline areas;
 - 5.6.3. ensuring that planning for developments in Communication and Information Technology are informed by academic practice and the requirements of changing patterns of learning and teaching;
 - 5.6.4. planning for increased use of multiple media and other educational technologies across campuses and at a distance, and considering the implications for support, training, and the technical infrastructure;
 - 5.6.5. monitoring the ability of current institutional academic support services to respond to the changing needs of students and staff.
- 5.7. To design administrative systems and procedures, which support and enable flexibility in student learning by:
- 5.7.1. developing operational administrative systems and procedures, which are flexible, responsive to student and staff need, and underpin the principles of this Strategy;
 - 5.7.2. ensuring that wherever possible the specifications for new administrative systems include the requirement to interface with existing student data systems;
 - 5.7.3. identifying the requirement to provide appropriate links from administrative systems to “academic” software, e.g. the Student Portal, Perception (CAA);
 - 5.7.4. encouraging the development - within normal resource constraints - of administrative procedures which are “student centred” and encourage flexibility.

6. **Development and Implementation of the Strategy**

- 6.1. The Teaching and Learning Policy Committee is responsible for advising the Academic Board on matters of policy, and has a key role in monitoring the implementation of this Strategy. Operational priorities are identified as part of the institution’s normal planning processes, and seek to address the strategic goals and objectives in a structured and timely manner.

- 6.2. At the heart of the Strategy is the process of learning, which is necessarily organic in nature. The Strategy can only therefore provide an evolving framework to support that process. By its nature the Strategy must continue to evolve to meet changing circumstances, and as such is kept under regular review.
- 6.3. Academic Board, Teaching and Learning Policy Committee, the Quality and Standards Committee, Faculty Boards, representatives of Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees, representatives of the Partner Colleges, the Teaching Fellows, Quality Evaluation and Enhancement Unit, and Educational Development have been involved in the revision of this Strategy.
- 6.4. The Strategy – as approved in June 2000 – is seen as providing a framework for institutional developments in learning and teaching over a 5-7 year timescale. All parts of the University, including FE Partners, are encouraged to play their part in supporting its goals and objectives, and to assist in its implementation. Faculties and Partner Colleges will be expected to identify key priorities for action which will be monitored annually by the Teaching and Learning Policy Committee.
- 6.5. A number of FE Partner Colleges have already developed Learning and Teaching strategies some covering both the HE and FE aspects of their provision, others focussing more specifically on their HE work. Several have specifically structured their strategies around the key goals of the University's Strategy. In the review process all partners have committed to the key themes.
- 6.6. In developing the University's agenda for learning and teaching, a number of key themes have merged which have provided a useful focus for the implementation of the strategy. Individually the themes address a variety of strategic goals and objectives and collectively have been mapped across all the goals and objectives in the Strategy. The thematic approach has been particularly helpful in matching faculty agendas to the institutional strategy. The Action Plan focuses on the institution's targets for the next three to four years.

7. Monitoring and Review

- 7.1. The Teaching and Learning Policy Committee will continue to maintain an overview of the implementation process on behalf of the Academic Board.
- 7.2. It will review progress on the Action Plan annually, and report to Academic Board. It will also be responsible for agreeing the input to the institution's Annual Operating Statement to HEFCE.
- 7.3. Through its programme approval and review processes, the Quality and Standards Committee will also play a particular role in monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the Strategy.
- 7.4. The Quality Evaluation and Enhancement Unit will from time to time contribute audit reports to the Teaching and Learning Policy Committee on the extent of implementation of aspects of the various themes, and provide insights into effectiveness of practice, and examples of good practice.

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