Discovery-Led and Discovery-Enabling Learning Strategy

2016-2020
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Who we are and will be...

We will put student benefit at the heart of our decisions about education and the student experience, because our students matter and learning matters.

At a time of unprecedented change in higher education our commitment to providing the highest quality student learning experience must be paramount. Recognising that in recent years that aspiration has proved challenging, we must appreciate our corporate responsibility, be self-aware and refocus our efforts to achieve these goals.

All University of Leicester students, wherever they are and however they study, will enjoy the best education and experience we can imagine. All members of the University contribute to our students’ learning, which is enriched by our research and scholarship and supported by every means to enable them to succeed.

Students graduating from our programmes will be resourceful, independent and resilient. Proud of their achievements they will maintain a lasting connection with us. As well as a continuing curiosity about themselves and others, they will have the qualities of integrity, openness of mind, breadth of perspective and concern for ethics that equip them for professional success and active, informed citizenship now and into the future.

We will work to support social mobility by ensuring that we reach out to those who have the potential to benefit from higher education but whose background and social experience militate against such an aspiration.
Our commitments

Offering a vibrant, successful academic portfolio
1. We will develop a distinctively flexible, exciting curriculum, so that students have opportunities to balance disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary breadth and follow undergraduate and postgraduate programmes that fit their plans for the future.

Assuring and enhancing quality
1. A commitment to academic quality and standards is a crucial element of our creative and collaborative approach to improving our teaching and our students’ learning and experience.
2. We will support all staff in developing their teaching skills and ensure that our processes allow them to demonstrate, and be recognised and rewarded for, their roles in developing, delivering and enabling the best education we can imagine.

Excellent recruitment, induction and transition
1. We will enrich and support future students, through an excellent programme of relationships with schools and colleges, accurate and engaging information for all prospective students, teachers and parents, and an unyielding commitment to widening participation in higher education.
2. Our welcome, induction and approach to the first year of higher education will build engagement, a sense of enjoyment and belonging, and the capacity for success, independence and pride.
3. We recognise that there are progressive transitions to, within and from higher education and we will support our students in moving successfully throughout all these stages.

Transformative teaching and learning
1. Our curricula, teaching and assessment will be enjoyably challenging: the best education is demanding, transforming and enlivening, and it will focus on future employability and professional success.
2. Our education will be enriched by research and scholarship, both discipline-based and in pedagogy.
3. We will make sure that our students can engage in and, where helpful, combine different forms of learning, by face-to-face contact, distance, blended, part-time, or work-based, all of which aim to be the best they can be.
4. Our programmes and modules will provide a variety of high-quality learning, assessment and self-evaluation opportunities; by focusing on feed-forward as well as feedback, we will better prepare our students for the opportunities, behaviours and demands of the professional workplace.
5. We will ensure that every student has an opportunity to engage in a professionalising and transforming experience in a work placement or an internship, as a volunteer, an ambassador or a mentor.
6. We will imagine and advocate for a teaching and learning estate, resources and technologies that support our ambitions.
A student experience that engenders success

1. We will do what is best for our current and future students, recognising them as individuals and with educational benefit and employability as our first considerations.

2. Our communications with and support for students will be engaging, informative and positive; they will generate an atmosphere of mutual respect and convey a sense of the obligations as well as entitlements that stem from membership of a larger educational community.

3. We will engage in dialogue with our students and their representatives, in order to foster their creative and constructive contributions and their sense of responsibility for their education, and to encourage them to take a lead in projects that will improve their learning and experience.

4. We will encourage our students to be independent, to learn for life, to value their education and to contribute as alumni to our ongoing work in education and scholarship.
Our priorities, 2016-2020

A vibrant, successful academic portfolio will be delivered by:

- Changing our undergraduate and postgraduate taught offer to introduce greater flexibility, agility and responsiveness to changing markets and demand, including the introduction of the Pathways Project;
- Ensuring that we best utilise and develop different modes of programme delivery, by face-to-face, distance, blended, part-time, work-based or MOOC;
- Implementing the changes to our academic provision, including standardisation of credit hours, credit weighting, assessment loading and levels of variation; successful roll-out of new academic year in 2017-18.

Assuring and enhancing quality will be delivered by:

- Generalising an approach to programme and module development that brings together programme teams with educational designers, quality advisers and marketing advisers from the early stages of each development project;
- Developing approaches to help us:
  - identify, recognise and reward excellence in teaching and student-centred practice, including ways of enabling staff to demonstrate excellence;
  - support each individual in enhancing the quality of their teaching, assessment, feedback, curriculum design and student support;
  - create a stronger academic career development path around teaching, student experience and student recruitment;
  - better utilise and draw together the talents of our teaching-focused staff.

Excellent recruitment, induction and transition will be delivered by:

- Implementing the revised Schools and Colleges Partnerships strategy to enable us to:
  - fulfil our aspirations in widening participation and access to higher education
  - better target our approaches to schools and provide more support to staff engaging in recruitment activity within schools
  - increase applications and raise our entry standards
- Developing and implementing a universal peer mentoring scheme for all new students;
- Developing the idea of a ‘Fabulous First Year’ for undergraduate programmes into a set of concrete projects;
- Supporting students through each stage of transition, particularly between programme years.

Transformative teaching and learning will be delivered by:

- Supporting and resourcing a culture of innovation and the sharing of ideas and approaches to enhancing the student learning experience;
- Drawing on scholarship and pedagogical research to enhance our approach to programme delivery;
- Building internationalisation and sustainability into the curriculum and student experience;
- Developing a strategy and schedule for a twenty-first century teaching and learning estate, and twenty-first century teaching and learning resources and technologies;
A student experience that engenders success will be delivered by:

- Further emphasising the role of the student voice and a balance between obligations and entitlements through a new Student and Staff Charter;
- Building on our already strong relationships with the Students’ Union and student representatives and developing ‘partnership projects’;
- Creating a stronger focus on retention and engagement and to identify and support students at risk;
- Building on our strengths and growing profile in employability and professional futures by engaging more directly with employers and expanding opportunities for students to engage in internships, work placements and volunteering activities.
Our Culture

An excellent, transformative learning experience for all our students is critically dependent on an enabling culture. This culture will engender a sense of belonging and common purpose for our students and all staff, academic and professional service.

Staff will be encouraged to be innovative and creative in their teaching and support of learning. This approach will be fostered by active collaborations within and between academic and corporate service departments and divisions.

We will recognise that we are all learners and will support and encourage our students and colleagues in their development.

We will recognise, applaud, reward and share excellence in the support of student learning in all areas of the University’s activities.

In developing our approach to education we will foster and build relationships and value the different contributions that all members of the University can make to enhance that education.

Our Environment

The physical, virtual and cultural environments all underpin the effective implementation of the Learning Strategy.

We will support the development of a physical estate that supports student learning in the 21st century with a mix of formal, informal, flexible, social and common spaces to best suit our approaches to teaching and learning and to foster the engagement of students with their disciplines, with each other and with staff.

We will support the development of the digital campus through the effective use of the virtual learning environment and the wider range of learning-enabling resources for teaching, assessing and supporting our students’ education and skills development, while also recognising the benefits and values of face-to-face interactions.

We will work towards the establishment of a ‘One-Stop Shop’ for Student Services, comprising the co-location of the front-facing elements of Student Welfare, AccessAbility, Counselling & Well-Being and Careers Development Services.
Our Measures of Success

Our success will be measurable through a range of qualitative and quantitative metrics. Progress against these will be reviewed annually, but over the first three years of the Strategy (2016-2018) critical indicators will include:

Measures:
- Successful outcome of the 2016 QAA Higher Education Review; monitored by APC
- Improvement in the national rankings based on the student experience to re-establish Leicester as a Top 20 University; monitored by ULT
- Retaining our ranking in the top 5 research-led HEIs for widening participation; monitored by Admissions and Planning Offices
- An increase in the number of undergraduate applications per place and the relative quality of the admitted students *; monitored by Admissions Office, External Relations and report to ULT

Project Outcomes:
- Successful initial implementation of Pathways in 2016 – 17 with more programmes engaging in subsequent years; monitored by College Academic Committees (CACs) & APC
- Successful implementation of curriculum and academic year restructuring; monitored by Registry, CACs and APC
- Completion of the Student Journey Project including: re-implementation of SITS; full auto-scheduling of the timetable; integration of electronic grading in the VLE with SITS; monitored by Registry and ITS reporting to ULT

Targets:
- Progressive improvement in the National Student Survey (Target 90% satisfaction, currently 85%), Post-Graduate Taught Experience Survey and Post-Graduate Research Experience Survey*; monitored by CACs and APC
- Improvement in the rankings for the DELHE survey (Target upper quartile of HEIs and exceeding benchmark, currently on benchmark, ranked 56th)*; monitored by Careers Development Service and Careers Development Advisory Board
- A significant increase in the proportion of staff holding a recognised teaching qualification, including HEA Fellowships (Target 90%)*; monitored by Planning Office, report to APC & ULT
- An increase in student retention (from 91.6 to 94% - equivalent to Top 20 mainstream universities)*; monitored by Planning Office, CACs and APC

*These KPIs should be directly translated into the Learning Strategies for each College and reported on by departments through the Annual Developmental Reviews
Linkage to Other Strategies

The Learning Strategy is closely dependent on a number of divisional strategies aside from the University’s overarching Strategic Plan, these include:

- **Physical Environment Strategy**
  - creation of the One-Stop Shop for student services,
  - high quality teaching space,
  - development of flexible social and group learning space.

- **Digital Strategy**
  - ‘digital by default’,
  - electronic submission, marking and feedback,
  - full roll-out of Lecture Capture supporting changes to approaches to teaching.

- **People Strategy**
  - reward and recognition of teaching
  - improved appraisal processes
  - increased proportion of staff having teaching qualifications.

- **Marketing Strategy**
  - supporting student recruitment

- **Student Services Strategy**
  - supporting student success and retention
  - One-Stop Shop

- **College Learning Strategies**
  - underpinning the implementation of the Learning Strategy
  - meeting the identified targets.