Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2017-22

Vision

The LTA strategy will support the University's vision

> "To be recognised as a catalyst for individual and regional prosperity and pride with national and international relevance, reach and impact"

by raising the aspirations and educational attainment of our learners. We will achieve this through the provision of an accessible and relevant environment for learning, teaching and research. We will focus on building progression routes into higher education, into employment and throughout careers for the "lifelong University of Cumbria learner".

Purpose

This Strategy is intended to provide a clear statement of the University's values, principles, priorities and expectations with regard to learning, teaching and assessment. It sets out a framework within which Academic Departments will operate. The Strategy encompasses all areas of work with our learners: on- and off-campus activity, undergraduate and postgraduate provision, accredited and non-accredited study; and all modes of delivery whether by University core staff or by collaborative partners. The scope of this strategy relates to students' direct experience of learning, teaching and assessment, and to the design and review of programmes of study. It sets our priorities for professional development of staff, the enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment, and support for our students.

The strategy does not define a single approach but provides a set of principles for Academic Departments to work within in the context of their disciplines, ensuring that local practice offers an excellent learner experience. The Strategy builds upon existing excellent practice and defines future approaches through statements of commitment to our students. It is organised around four themes:

1. Excellence in Learning & Teaching
2. Responsive Learner Support
3. Employability & Graduateness
4. Developing Digital Capabilities of Students & Staff

Aims

This strategy articulates the ethos, focus and direction of learning, teaching and assessment at the University of Cumbria. It aims to:

- Develop confident, resilient and socially aware learners
- Provide an environment for the development of professionally relevant, research informed and innovative programmes
- Champion our values of respect, professionalism, aspiration and integrity

- Support staff in the development and enhancement of their role in providing excellence in higher education

University of Cumbria Graduate Attributes

Students completing a programme of study at undergraduate or postgraduate level at the University of Cumbria are provided with opportunities to develop a range of skills and knowledge that will equip them for graduate employment. As a result of their studies University of Cumbria students will become:

- Enquiring and open to change
- Self-reliant, adaptable and flexible
- Confident in their discipline as it develops and changes over time
- Capable of working across disciplines and working well with others
- Confident in their digital capabilities
- Able to manage their own professional and personal development
- Global citizens, socially responsible and aware of the potential contribution of their work to the cultural and economic wellbeing of the community and its impact on the environment
- Leaders of people and of places
- Ambitious and proud

Our Students will be recognised as individuals within a wider community and will often study in work contexts or professional environments. We will offer them innovative ways to study, at levels from Foundation to Doctorate. They are equal participants in the University's learning community and co-creators of curriculum.

Our learning environment will be flexible, distributed and 'fit for purpose' in being diverse and multi-faceted. It is led and facilitated by staff who are expert practitioners, engaged in research and scholarly activity and at the forefront of their disciplines. We will continue to embed the use of digital technology for learning and skills development. Above all, our learning environments offer an accessible, safe space for critical challenge and, where relevant, experimentation.

Our curriculum will foster aspiration and career readiness through work-based, experiential and inter-professional learning. It will demand research-informed teaching designed and delivered by passionate, dynamic and confident staff, drawing on industry-based knowledge and expertise. The curriculum will include content which is relevant to the world of work, emphasising problem-solving and the interaction of theory and practice. It will challenge students intellectually, promoting independence and confidence. Authentic assessment and effective feedback will enable student success and achievement.

Our Partnerships and External Engagement will ensure that our programmes are forward-looking and our curriculum is contextually relevant. Our partners are recognised and engaged as part of the whole learner journey.

Measures

Our progress and performance in relation to this will be measured by external indicators

- National Student Experience Surveys (NSS, UKES, PTES, PRES)
- Percentage of staff attaining D2 of the UK Professional Standards Framework
- Student non-continuation
- DLHE (graduate level employment)

And internal indicators

- Student progression
- Student achievement (good honours)
- Student engagement/completion of Career Ahead
- RDAP measures; Academic Staff: Active & Recognised role with learned societies, professional bodies and/ or associations & Collaborative research with other HEIs or research institutions
- Staff engagement with academic professional development

Targets for these areas will be established for start of 2017/18 and monitored through the University's deliberative committee structures.

Theme 1: Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Students at the University of Cumbria are part of an inclusive learning community that recognises diversity. They have opportunities to learn by interacting with others, creating a collegiate, facilitative and dynamic environment. Teaching, assessment and student support will allow equal and equitable opportunities for students to optimise their potential and develop autonomy.

We seek to create a stimulating and innovative community of learning, whether encountered on campus or at a distance, on placement or in the workplace. Facilitated by our expert practitioner staff, this community will develop in a learning environment that is well equipped, flexible, and stimulating. To maintain this environment, we will prioritise the needs of learning and research and actively develop relationships with external bodies to place students in the widest possible range of relevant settings.

The curriculum is co-created to reflect contemporary disciplinary practices and current and future workplaces. It is focused on employability skills and enrichment opportunities for lifelong learning, developing a range of attributes to prepare students for a global job market. It will be systematically and critically reviewed to ensure that it is current and meets the needs of our stakeholders. Using the principles of Universal Design for Learning it will be inclusive, accessible, effective, relevant, contextualised and innovative. Approaches to learning, teaching and assessment will be evidence-informed and will embrace pedagogic research and practice.

We will continue to develop learning partnerships that enhance the region and promote opportunities for access to higher learning. Partners and external bodies contribute to, feedback on, and support the professional and personal development of our learning community and environment.

We Will:

1.1   Embed a robust approach to peer review of learning, teaching and assessment in academic departments

1.2   Ensure all core staff who teach and support learning attain HEA Fellowship/Senior Fellowship status

1.3   Systematically review our curriculum to ensure its accessibility, currency, and inclusion of research at the cutting edge of the discipline

1.4   Provide physical and virtual learning environments focused on flexibility and fitness for purpose in terms of pedagogy, employability, and discipline

1.5   Foster and reward social and independent learning within formal programmes of study

1.6   Provide learning activities to develop students as inquiring, expert and confident practitioners

1.7   Embed authentic assessment opportunities to support the development of University of Cumbria Graduate Attributes

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- NSS – Q 1-4 (teaching on my course), 5-7 (learning opportunities), 8-11 (Assessment & Feedback), 15-17 (Org & Management)/UKES (Q 22, 23, 25, 27) /PTES (Q 1,3,5, 11)/PRES (Q 1, 7)
- HEA Fellowship status
- Good Honours Classification
- Staff engagement with academic professional development

Theme 2: Responsive Learner Support

We provide responsive learner support that promotes student success. Our approach to learner support is designed to: support retention and progression; champion inclusivity and accessibility; prepare students for opportunities beyond study; and promote independence and resilience, enabling our students to achieve their potential.

Student success is enabled through highly qualified academic and professional service staff, mentoring programmes, and peer support. Successful students are resourceful and make discerning use of all learning opportunities provided across the University. Our students are taught by academics and expert practitioners who facilitate learning through structured inquiry. They are provided with access to high quality academic resources through physical and digital libraries and are supported to develop skills that enable them to be critical, reflective, discerning and independent learners and researchers.

Our curricula encourage an academic discourse that is clear, challenging and inclusive. We utilise differentiated strategies and approaches to learning, teaching and assessment that augment professional skills, enhance academic enquiry and promote confidence.

Experiential learning within real and simulated professional environments will be supported by practitioners who are skilled and knowledgeable in their disciplines and professions and understand how learning through work is facilitated and evidenced.

We Will:

2.1 Provide responsive support for students that is tailored to their current and future needs

2.2 Foster increasing student independence by equipping students with the skills to identify and respond to their own problems and challenges

2.3 Provide students with opportunities to experiment with and test their growing knowledge and skills in actual or simulated work environments

2.4 Ensure our staff are actively involved in our students' journey and have the skills and knowledge to support them

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Indicators:
- Completion of pre-entry support programmes
- NSS – Q12 – 14 (Academic Support), 18- 20 (Learning Resources)/UKES (Q24,26)/PTES (Q9, 13) /PRES (Q 3, 9)
- Student progression
- Student retention
- Student achievement (good honours)

Theme 3: Employability & Graduateness

Workplace experience is part of every course of study, whether through formal placement, simulated work environments, or contact with industry experts. We will develop curricula that require students to set vocational goals and to pursue them through formal study, volunteering, work-based learning or reflection on employment-related experience.

Where appropriate, our students will learn in environments which replicate the relevant workplace setting. The use of specialist facilities is embedded within programmes to provide our students with a realistic experience of their professional context. Our campuses offer space for students to work independently, collaboratively and autonomously according to their own goals. Where significant learning takes place off campus, in the workplace or in the community, this is enabled through the curriculum structure with clear mechanisms for the support of students via workplace mentors, placement providers, employers and digital environments.

The curriculum is designed in consultation and through communication with key stakeholders, including employers, Professional and Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and community organisations. A balance is maintained between subject skills and knowledge and skills for working with others, self-management, teamwork, problem-solving and resilience. A focus on professional competency and readiness for work is embedded within programmes so that, on completion of their studies, our students can operate confidently and effectively in their chosen careers and be active in personal and career development.

The University is committed to ensuring that external partners are selected for the quality of student opportunity they provide, and that they are comprehensively inducted and supported for their work with students.

We will:

3.1 Promote students' employability through the integration of work-related experience wherever relevant in all programmes

3.2 Continue to work with existing partners, and develop relationships with new partners, to ensure that students have relevant, challenging and enriching experiences while on placement or observing in industry

3.3 Integrate University of Cumbria Graduate Attributes within all programmes

3.4 Require that Staff engaged in curriculum design, delivery or review demonstrate that their teaching approach and learning materials fully consider the needs of the student as a developing professional

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Indicators:
- DLHE (graduate level employment)
- Completion of career ahead
- NSS Optional (Personal Development), PTES (Q 15), PRES (Q 11,13)

Theme 4: Developing Digital Capabilities of Students & Staff

Students are provided with opportunities to develop the full range of digital skills necessary to be successful in the global workplace.

The University provides access to a range of digital environments and resources that are developed and maintained to support a high-quality learner experience. Where possible we ensure that students can access these environments through a variety of personal and mobile devices. Our physical campuses are technology rich and accessible, and promote learning and critical thinking through engagement with the digital environment and technologies.

Our students encounter a professionally relevant and stimulating curriculum which exploits the benefits of digital technologies and is taught by staff who possess the necessary digital capabilities. The capabilities associated with information literacy, digital creation, critique and scholarship, digital communication, digital collaboration and learning are embedded within our programmes and modules.

Digital technologies enable us to support and develop innovative learning partnerships regionally, nationally and internationally.

We will:

4.1   Promote students' development of digital capabilities through embedding of digital skills within academic programmes

4.2   Ensure that students experience a consistent and effective virtual learning environment through the implementation of protocols and standards

4.3   Require that staff undertake regular staff development in digital technologies and maintain their own digital capabilities

4.4   Seek to share our digital environments with our partners to provide high quality learner experiences

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Indicators:
- Learning technology analytics
- Staff engagement with academic professional development
- NSS (Q18/19)
- Digital Learning Resources analytics