

Education Strategy 2010-16

LEARNING IN PARTNERSHIP



UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL
EDUCATION STRATEGY 2010-2016

Executive Summary

The University of Bristol is already recognised as a leading international university that delivers research and education of the highest quality. It is, nevertheless, intent on strengthening this reputation as a, research-led institution that offers a world-class education to the most talented students from all backgrounds across the world. As it enters its second century the University is also determined to continue to combine traditional values and excellence with innovation.

It is implicit in this Strategy that teaching, learning, research, scholarship and enterprise are complementary. In an increasingly competitive environment, with growing pressure to provide what individuals want and societies need, it is imperative to differentiate the University of Bristol from its competitors. This Strategy aims to define the distinctive nature of Bristol's educational mission and to reaffirm the values that have always sustained it.

The Education Strategy's starting point is the **University Vision and Strategy 2009-2016**. The Strategy maps onto the priorities in the *Vision and Strategy document*, underpinning them with a series of objectives. It is designed to set the direction for education in the University for the next six years, and so it is intended to be broad enough to allow faculties and support services to develop their own prioritised action plans, within the overarching framework. The Strategy is also intended to be sufficiently flexible such that the relevant supporting sub-strategies work effectively towards meeting its wider objectives.

We want our students to have a rewarding time at Bristol and the Strategy offers a definition of what that means. It focuses on what students from diverse backgrounds need if they are to be able to take advantage of the opportunities available, to thrive academically and personally and to be successful in a "global" context.

Introduction

The University of Bristol is committed to excellence in research, and the belief that this should inform student learning comprises one of the distinctive features of the Bristol educational experience. We believe that research, scholarship and enterprise, combined with teaching and learning, conducted within a community where such activities are valued both for their own sake, and for the benefits they bring, is what defines a university. We, thus, reaffirm a liberal approach to education in which all the academic subjects we offer are considered worthy of study in their own right, and in which education is enriched by engagement with society's interests, concerns, priorities and aspirations. We also value the creation of a learning community in which students can interact with a wide range of fellow students and staff from diverse cultures and backgrounds.

We aim to offer our students the academic and personal development opportunities that will equip them to respond to the intellectual, social and personal challenges that they will encounter throughout their lives and careers.

Our overarching goal is to produce Bristol graduates with the following characteristics:

- equipped to demonstrate impact, excellence and distinctiveness in their chosen field
- ambitious, entrepreneurial, innovative and creative
- high ideals and values that reflect our own
- highly employable, world wide
- adaptable with the potential to be leaders in work and in the community.

This Strategy stresses the need to provide an excellent, intellectually demanding education, relevant for the 21st century, for a talented and diverse student population. We want our students to enjoy a rewarding and fulfilling experience at Bristol and to benefit from a rich learning

environment which supports their diverse learning and cultural needs. We recognise that students from different backgrounds have differing learning and cultural needs and that these must be catered for if they are to be able to take advantage of the opportunities available and thrive academically and personally. Our aim must be that they reach their full potential during their programmes of study, while acquiring the skills that they will need to be successful in their future careers and in other aspects of their lives. To achieve this we must provide an environment in which students can manage their programme of study according to their needs, supported by excellent teachers. The Strategy endeavours to define what constitutes excellent teaching and the value placed on it by the Institution, endorsing the need for Bristol to remain synonymous with professional excellence in this regard.

We aim for the “Bristol Student Experience” to be defined by:

- A diverse student body comprising excellent individuals, who, *regardless of background*, have the potential to excel in, and contribute to, the kind of education we offer.
- The opportunity to engage with intellectually challenging curricula, incorporating the latest thinking and research, in each subject area. Students will acquire in depth knowledge grounded in strong traditional disciplines, whilst also developing the flexibility of mind to engage, analyse and synthesise across discipline boundaries.
- Innovative programmes which incorporate the opportunity to engage with research methods and the research activities of staff; with curricula encompassing increasing amount of independent learning as students progress through their programmes;
- A stimulating and supportive environment in which to learn, where students work in partnership with excellent, creative teachers and where both staff and students understand that they have a responsibility continuously to improve the quality of the educational experience.
- Independent active learning with new undergraduate students being supported, during their initial transition to University, to understand what this means.
- Qualifications and characteristics that are valued by employers throughout the world as a guarantee of quality.
- Being educated for global citizenship. This is a key element of the education we aim to provide. Creating an excellent academic environment involves being connected with the world and, in focusing on global citizenship, we are building on the principle that a university can and should aim to support students’ personal and social development, as well as encouraging their intellectual growth. This emphasises an aspect of our institutional culture that is currently underplayed against our reputation for research and teaching excellence.
- Being part of a cosmopolitan and diverse community dedicated to learning, discovery and enterprise and offering numerous opportunities to take part in social, sporting and cultural activities. We will encourage our students to develop their extra curricular activities: in the world of work, through part-time employment; or the cultural or sporting life of the University, through the Students’ Union; or in the local community. We will emphasise the ways in which such involvement will stand our students in good stead, as people who are willing and able to participate, innovate and lead.

Framework

The University’s Vision and Strategy 2009-16⁶ provides the framework for the Education Strategy:

The University of Bristol’s mission is “To pursue and share knowledge and understanding, both for their own sake and to help individuals and society fulfil their potential”. This is underpinned by a Vision where the University of Bristol is an international powerhouse of learning, discovery and enterprise, whose excellence is acknowledged locally, nationally and globally and that is:

⁶ <http://www.bris.ac.uk/university/vision/>

- *dedicated to academic achievement across a broad range of disciplines, and to continuous innovation and improvement*
- *research-intensive, supporting both individual scholarship and interdisciplinary or thematic research of the highest quality*
- *a centre for intellectually demanding, research-informed education that nurtures independence of mind and helps students achieve their personal goals and serve society's needs, both during and after their time here*
- *an inclusive and collaborative community of scholarship that attracts and retains people with outstanding talent and potential from all walks of life and all parts of the world*
- *a stimulating and supportive environment for all students and staff, distinguished by a commitment to high standards, respect for the individual and a strong sense of collegiality*
- *committed to operating in a sustainable manner*
- *engaged with society's interests, concerns, priorities and aspirations*
- *a major contributor culturally, environmentally and economically to Bristol and the South West*
- *well led and responsibly run, with an emphasis on consultative decision-making and open communication as well as personal responsibility and accountability.*

In The University's Vision and Strategy 2009-16 the priorities for **Education and the Student Experience** are to:

1. Attract and retain academically gifted and highly motivated students from a wide range of backgrounds, creating a diverse and international University community.
2. Provide an education of the highest quality that is research-led and focused on the needs and expectations of our students.
3. Ensure students have a fulfilling, demanding and intellectually stimulating experience while at University, that prepares them for employment and worldwide opportunities when they leave.
4. Provide effective and enabling educational leadership and structures that support educational enhancement.
5. Ensure that learning takes place within a high-quality environment that enables both students and staff to achieve their full academic potential.

In addition the **STUDENT** focussed priorities are to:

6. Ensure a fair and transparent system of student representation that provides students with the opportunity to shape their educational and extra-curricular experience.
7. Support a vibrant, active and democratic Students' Union.
8. Ensure the provision of learning and skills opportunities that enhance students' future employability.
9. Offer a rewarding extra-curricular experience that provides for students' health, well-being and personal development.
10. Provide advice and support for students' personal welfare and ensure effective integration into the University and local community.

EDUCATION AND THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Priority 1	Attract and retain academically gifted and highly motivated students from a wide range of backgrounds, creating a diverse and international University community.
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We will recruit our students solely on the basis of their ability and potential to succeed within the learning environment that we offer. To this end, we will ensure that our admissions processes are open, fair and transparent. We will encourage applicants from non-traditional backgrounds and a variety of progression routes. We will recruit high-quality overseas students from a range of countries, working where appropriate with international partners. Our intention is to maintain our undergraduate population broadly at its present size, while growing our postgraduate student numbers.

1.1 We will aim to attract and recruit a diverse body of gifted and motivated students, each with the potential to excel in, and contribute to, the kind of education we offer. In particular, we will work with other UK higher education institutions and a range of strategic partners to promote fair access to research intensive universities such as Bristol.

*(See **Widening Participation Strategy**⁷ for action plan)*

1.2 We will enhance the international character of the University by increasing the numbers of international students in the University, and by striving to deepen their integration into the University community.

*(See **International Student Strategy** for action plan).*

1.3 We will maintain a fair admissions procedure that assesses a candidate's potential to succeed on the basis of a holistic assessment of their abilities, motivation and achievements.

*(See **Admissions Principles and Procedures** document⁸ for details)*

1.4 We will develop and promote a flexible range of routes for entry to the University, both on an individual basis and by entering into strategic partnerships with other educational institutions.

1.5 We will support our undergraduate students during their initial transition from secondary or further education to University, by offering appropriate academic and pastoral support during that period. We will also recognise our obligation to provide our overseas students with English language and study skills support as necessary.

⁷ <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academicregistry/raa/wpur-office/strategy-documents-publications/>

⁸ <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/governance/policies/>

Priority 2 Provide an education of the highest quality that is research-led and focused on the needs and expectations of our students.
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We will offer intellectually challenging taught programmes informed by our excellent research base. Our curricula will be dynamic, flexible and internationally relevant, embracing innovation and delivered and assessed using the most appropriate methods and technologies. We will encourage students to participate as active partners in their own educational experience and to become self-confident independent learners. We will support our postgraduate research students while also encouraging them to become independent researchers in their discipline. We will provide academic support for our students through the provision of academic personal tutors and other specialist support for learning, as required by individual students

- 2.1 We will continue to adopt a flexible approach to programme design and delivery, ensuring that the curriculum in taught programmes is intellectually challenging, informed by research and that it meets the highest academic standards.
- 2.2 We will endeavour to ensure that, wherever possible, students experience the culture of research and the excitement of discovery.
- 2.3 We will promote the development of internationally relevant curricula, incorporating a global perspective where ever appropriate.
- 2.4 We will encourage the collaborative development of programmes and shared learning resources and will explore ways of facilitating student mobility.
- 2.5 We will encourage students to become partners in their own learning, working with others in a community of scholarship.
- 2.6 We will give students the academic support they need to facilitate their success at the University; we will maintain and embed the personal tutor /academic supervisor system for all students.
- 2.7 We will ensure that students have an appropriate workload, within a framework of agreed expectations, which will enable them to achieve their academic potential.
*(The **Student Agreement** and faculty workload statements provide details of this objective)*
- 2.7 We will encourage and help postgraduate research students to take ownership of, and responsibility for, their own learning so that they become self sufficient, independent scholars/researchers in their discipline.
- 2.8 We will work to develop and implement consistent and fair methods of assessment institution-wide and will introduce an enhanced transcript to record our students achievements based on the template offered by the Higher Education Achievement Record.
- 2.9 We will adhere to a robust quality assurance framework that guarantees the quality of students' learning opportunities. This will include external examiners' evaluations, the annual review of programmes, faculty quality assurance processes and periodic strategic reviews of departments. *(See also objective 6.2.)*

Priority 3	Ensure students have a fulfilling, demanding and intellectually stimulating experience while at University, that prepares them for employment and worldwide opportunities when they leave.
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We will embed within our programmes the skills and learning opportunities that enhance the future employability of our students and prepare them for a globalised environment. In addition to our professional programmes, we will offer opportunities for all students to learn about and acquire skills for enterprise as well as to study issues of global importance such as environmental awareness and sustainability. We will offer students opportunities for personal development through their subjects of study, embedded within their courses, and by taking part in social, sporting and cultural activities beyond their curriculum and also by acquiring and making best use of work experience and study abroad. We will foster an appetite for lifelong learning in our students.

- 3.1 We will review the content of our degree programmes in order to ensure that we embed, and make transparent, the skills and learning opportunities that increase the employability and, where appropriate, the entrepreneurship abilities of our students. (See also priority 8)
- 3.2 We will work with organisations that employ our students, including industry, business, the professions and the wider community, to ensure that our current and future programmes continue to meet societal needs, as well as to ensure the continued accreditation of our professional programmes by the relevant statutory bodies and institutions.
- 3.3 We will offer students opportunities to learn about global environmental and sustainability issues.
- 3.4 We will increase students' awareness of the benefits of studying at a university with a global focus and an international constituency, so that they gain an understanding of the international cultural, professional and academic context of their chosen discipline and develop the skills and knowledge they need to participate, innovate and lead in an international context.
- 3.5 We will aim to offer our students the opportunity to develop their language skills and to travel through the development of 'study abroad' and 'exchange' opportunities or through dedicated arrangements with various partners in specific disciplines where possible.
- 3.6 We will foster a desire for lifelong learning in our students that will influence their attitude beyond graduation.

Priority 4 Provide effective and enabling educational leadership and structures that support educational enhancement.
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We value education and research equally and students can expect to be taught and supervised by academic staff who are committed, enthusiastic and excellent teachers and researchers. We will continue to provide academic staff with appropriate training and reward for teaching through our People Strategy. Education at Bristol will continue to be actively championed and well led at University and faculty level, with key faculty roles and committee structures playing a vital part in leading, implementing and monitoring our Education Strategy as well as having an important quality assurance function. We are committed to assuring the quality of education at all levels, with students, academic staff and support services working in partnership. Enhancement and sharing effective practice are fundamental to this process. We will listen to students' views and encourage their participation in the development of policies for quality assurance and enhancement of our educational offerings. We will strive to ensure that the environment for teaching and learning is free from discrimination and unfair treatment.

4.1 We will continue to ensure that there is effective and enabled leadership of education and management structures which emphasise and further develop the role of Faculty Education Directors as leaders for education and learning.

4.2 We will ensure that academic appointment, progression and promotions procedures incorporate excellence, or the potential to achieve excellence, in teaching and the support of student learning, as key criteria for success.

*(See **People Strategy** for implementation of this objective)*

4.3 We will aim to develop academic staff so that they engage students in innovative, relevant and challenging curricula that draw on the research environment and we will ensure that students continue to be taught by leading research staff in all subjects.

4.4 We will support the professional and career development of all academic staff engaged in teaching, through the provision of an accredited programme of study in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and the provision of specialist strategic, practical or project-management support to academics throughout their teaching and educational leadership career.

4.5 We will encourage and recognise staff, for their excellence in teaching and in the support of student learning, through the continuance of University Teaching Awards and the provision of University Teaching Fellowships.

4.6 We will develop a University framework for the establishment of Graduate School/s in each Faculty which will enhance and make more consistent the learning experience of research and taught postgraduate students, by improving the support infrastructure and by recognising the need for high quality educational leadership of such Schools.

4.7 We will develop and implement clear and consistent University-wide policies which are designed to provide practical support and guidance for staff in all aspects of the educational portfolio (recruitment, admissions, teaching, learning, assessment), thereby assuring the quality of the student learning experience.

4.8 We will develop effective communication systems (e.g. websites, handbooks, fora, etc.) at all levels to ensure that the policies and guidance described in 4.7 are made available to their intended audience.

Priority 5	Ensure that learning takes place within a high-quality environment that enables both students and staff to achieve their full academic potential.
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We aim to provide students with the best environment for their education. We will ensure that resource planning enables us to provide high quality learning infrastructure that takes account of emerging pedagogies and the learning needs of students. Our information, library and student services will work collaboratively to provide the highest quality support for learning and scholarship, within a modern and appropriate environment. We are committed to providing an efficient student-centred and increasingly online student administration service. Our teaching will be based on a robust and sustainable financial model that enables educational infrastructure needs of all kinds to be met.

- 5.1 We will ensure that programmes are delivered using the most appropriate technology. We will enhance our virtual learning environment and e-learning tools, integrating them with on-line administrative tools to give students efficient and effective support as well as helping staff to optimise their ability to deliver high quality teaching, assessment and feedback.
- 5.2 We will work to provide the best available learning environment in terms of library and learning spaces as well as resources such as books and IT systems.
*(The **IT Strategy and the Library Strategy** detail how we will meet this objective)*
- 5.3 We will build on existing good practice in learning, teaching, assessment and related administration, in a way that will increase efficiency, through the adoption of common processes and increased use of on-line systems.
- 5.4 We will review the financial sustainability and academic standards of all programmes and related units in a coordinated way, informed by the future strategic direction of the relevant School and Faculty, in order to improve efficiency and cost effectiveness and safeguard the financial health of the University.
- 5.5 We will support work which establishes a stable and sustainable financial base for the University and which will enable educational infrastructure needs of all kinds to be met.

STRATEGY FOR OUR STUDENTS

Priority 6	Ensure a fair and transparent system of student representation that provides students with the opportunity to shape their educational and extra-curricular experience.
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Working in partnership with the Students' Union, we will ensure the development of open, transparent and accessible democratic structures for student representation at all levels. We will review and refine our system for representation at course, departmental and faculty level, seeking involvement and feedback from students to inform the future development of educational curricula and of academic and pastoral support services. We will continue to ensure student involvement in key decision-making bodies including Senate and Council.

- 6.1 We will encourage the development of robust structures for student representation at all levels so that students may play an active role in School, Faculty and University decision-making processes and we will involve students in internal and external quality assurance processes.
- 6.2 We will ensure that student feedback is gathered through both internal and national surveys and that it is used to inform the quality of our offering and the development of our educational programmes and is also taken into account on social and cultural matters.
- 6.3 We will support the Students' Union as it works to develop and sustain an effective "Student Course Reps" system through the provision of training to help representatives perform effectively at School, Faculty and University levels.

Priority 7 Support a vibrant, active and democratic Students' Union.
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We see the University of Bristol Students' Union as a vital element of the student experience, in providing the voice of students within the University, in the local community and at national level, and in fostering a diverse and cohesive student community. We will provide financial support and a physical environment for the Union that is fit for purpose and that meets students' social, cultural and recreational needs

- 7.1 We will provide appropriate support so that the Students' Union is fit for purpose and meets the social, cultural and recreational needs of all students, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, UK or international, thereby enhancing the student experience.
- 7.2 We will encourage the Students' Union and its sabbatical team to work in partnership with academic departments and student support services in order to meet its goals of supporting, representing and developing the students of the University through all its varied strands of activity.
- 7.3 We will work closely with elected student officers and representatives in an effort to ensure that we are kept fully aware of any emerging issues and can thereby address the needs of our students.
- 7.4 We will encourage the development of a positive working partnership between the Students' Union and student representatives in University residential accommodation so that effective support is provided to students living in University residences.

Priority 8 Ensure the provision of learning and skills opportunities that enhance students' future employability.

We will provide access to a wide range of quality information and careers advice to help students understand and develop the necessary skills to equip them for whatever they choose after graduation. In addition to skills acquisition through their academic programmes and together with the Students' Union development unit, we will offer students opportunities for personal development which will enhance their prospects for future employability

- 8.1 We will enhance the employability of our students by offering, in collaboration with the Students' Union, a wide variety of opportunities (including specifically tailored courses delivered by the Careers Service) for students to acquire and develop the skills which will make them more competitive in the world of work.
- 8.2 We will encourage our students in their personal development by helping them acquire and enhance their capacity for team-work and leadership through social, sporting and cultural activities.
- 8.3 We will recognise the value of these achievements through the implementation of the **BRISTOL plus award** and we will aim to record them through implementation of an enhanced transcript based on the template offered by the Higher Education Achievement Record.

*(The **Employability Strategy** describes how we will achieve these objectives)*

Priority 9 Offer a rewarding extra-curricular experience that provides for students' health, well-being and personal development.
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In addition to ensuring an excellent teaching and learning experience, we will offer a range of opportunities that enable students to develop as individuals, and provide an environment that promotes a proactive approach to health and well-being. Through the Students' Union, our students will be given opportunities to join over 200 different clubs and societies, encompassing both academic and social interests. They will also be able to participate in sporting activities for all levels, from beginners to talented athletes, and in exercise and health programmes, and to take part in a wide range of community volunteering programmes, working closely with the University. We will recognise outstanding achievement across these activities.

- 9.1 We will encourage students to reflect on their learning in a societal context and to undertake thoughtful and effective dialogue with the public.
- 9.2 We will encourage the Students' Union to support a student volunteering programme, developed in collaboration with local community partners.
*(The **Engaged University Strategy** describes these objectives)*
- 9.3 We will encourage students to realise the value to their personal development by participation in our widening participation schemes as peer mentors, student ambassadors or school student tutors and other related activities.
- 9.4 We will make a significant contribution to the creation and development of the culture of a 'Healthy University' by providing, sport, exercise and health programmes of the highest quality that are accessible to all students.
- 9.5 We will provide a comprehensive sports development programme, which will encourage participation of students under a policy of "Sport for All".
- 9.6 We will provide a sports performance programme that enables talented students to fulfil their potential.
*(see **Sport, Exercise and Health Strategic Plan** for objectives 9.4, 9.5 and 9.6)*
- 9.7 We will provide students with a wide range of artistic and cultural opportunities such as the chance to take part in the performing arts, including music and drama.

Priority 10 Provide advice and support for students' personal welfare and ensure effective integration into the University and local community.
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We will ensure student welfare through the provision of high-quality student services including health services; counselling; a chaplaincy; specialist provision for disabled students; sport and exercise facilities, and financial advice, as well as by supporting the Students' Union in its aspiration to provide independent advice and support to students. We will offer a residential experience for at least the first year for both home and international students that will foster the development of diverse, cosmopolitan student communities. We will provide pastoral support to ensure their successful transition into university life. We will encourage students to achieve effective integration as residents into the local community.

- 10.1 We will continue to provide personal and pastoral support, facilitated in partnership with students, via academic departments and specialist support services.
- 10.2 We will improve the coordination and promote the development of our professional student support services that support student learning with particular reference to the needs of specific student groups (e.g. international students).
- 10.3 We will enhance the role of the university residential offering so that it better supports student learning and offers students excellent opportunities to develop their life skills so as to enhance their chances of success.
- 10.4 We will facilitate the development of an inclusive sense of community in university residences, so that social activities reflect the diverse cultural makeup of our student population.

*(The **Residential Strategy**⁹ describes the action plan that supports objectives 10.3 and 10.4)*

⁹ <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/planning/programmesandprojects/residences/strategy.html>



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