

LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGY

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this Learning and Teaching strategy is to provide a framework for faculties, schools and disciplines for the delivery of the best possible learning experience for all students. By articulating our strategic approach, it aims to promote a shared understanding among staff, students and other stakeholders of what it is we do, and why, to deliver excellence in learning and teaching. It complements a range of other strategies and policies that the University of Bristol has in place to support the learning experience¹, and is derived from our overall Education Strategy². We recognise that education is a holistic experience; this Strategy, focused on learning and teaching, sits within a broader framework for education. Bristol prides itself on the quality of the learning and teaching it provides: it meets the challenges of rising student expectations and a changing external environment by a continuing focus on excellence and innovation in its educational offering and aspires to provide the best possible teaching and learning environment. In return we expect our students to engage actively with the learning opportunities we provide.

2.0 Principles

This section outlines the fundamental characteristics of our approach to learning and teaching at the University of Bristol

Our Learning and Teaching Strategy is underpinned by the following principles:

1. Our learning and teaching are research-led.

In the University of Bristol context this means that research is fundamental to the design and delivery of our programmes at all levels. Teaching is informed by research reflecting advances in our disciplines and is delivered by current practitioners, many of whom are recognised as world-leading. Research-led learning is also fostered, from embedded research skills development to dissertations/projects in which students develop their own research questions in consultation with a supervisor. Such learning activities are frequently linked to ongoing research pursuits taking place in internationally-recognised laboratories and/or associated with internationally recognised projects. Our students learn how to engage with and be critical of academic literature through research-informed reading and writing strategies. Our students are supported in acquiring and demonstrating research practice in their assessed work. We ensure the development of research skills are threaded through our programmes and provide a variety of research training experiences in undergraduate final projects or on postgraduate programmes; the best of which are published. Our postgraduate students carry out research at the frontier of their disciplines, and their contributions are essential to advancing the world-leading research and teaching enterprises at our university. Moreover we encourage the use of pedagogic research to ensure excellence in our teaching and learning.

¹ See: www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/facultyadvice/policy/

² www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/facultyadvice/policy/educationstrategy/

2. Our learning and teaching are fundamentally based on our world-leading disciplinary expertise in education and research.

The distinctive character of the disciplines at Bristol shapes our curricula and pedagogies. Evidence of best practice in all disciplinary areas shapes curriculum design and delivery. We develop intellectual and practical disciplinary insights and skills in all our programmes, and, in addition, a significant amount of our PGR activity is characterised by interdisciplinarity, which we also aspire to develop within our taught portfolio. We involve external expertise in delivery as appropriate and all eligible programmes are influenced and externally recognised and accredited by professional bodies. Our research collections are responsive and reflective of disciplinary excellence and we aspire to enhance learning and teaching through the integration of source materials into the curriculum.

3. A commitment to innovation in learning and teaching.

We foster innovation by providing support and training in pedagogy (e.g. by means of the CREATE programme), we bestow University fellowships and development grants to encourage innovative developments in learning and teaching, and celebrate achievements by means of University and student-led teaching awards. We promote staff up to professorial level based on the excellence of their teaching. We excel in sector-leading initiatives such as the ChemLabs and eBiolabs Dynamic Laboratory Manual. We make extensive use of innovative digital tools and evidence based contemporary teaching methodologies. At the postgraduate level, we lead nationally in cohort-based research training and aim to provide opportunities for postgraduate students to engage in teaching and undertake development or training.

4. A commitment to the internationalisation of our curriculum such that the learning and teaching we provide is internationally relevant, developing students' skills to contribute to global questions and work in diverse environments.

Bristol maintains a strong presence at the forefront of active research fields, which helps to attract staff from all over the world: we pride ourselves on being an international scholarly community of staff and students. We seek to incorporate worldwide concerns into our curricula (such as climate change science and policy, diseases with a global impact, the emergence of antibiotic resistant bacteria, sustainable development), and to deepen our international focus and are cognisant of the requirements of international professional qualifications in developing and reviewing our programmes. We seek to diversify our curricula to ensure that our teaching and learning is representative of our student body and wider society.

Where appropriate, we enable and encourage undergraduate students to undertake a formal period of study or work placement in another country as part of their degree programmes, and seek to further expand upon these opportunities. We regard international students as important members of our University community, and their range of experience and perspectives contributes to our academic endeavour

5. An approach to assessment and feedback practices that promotes effective student learning.

Assessment and feedback are designed to actively engage students by fostering learning and supporting their attainment of knowledge, critical understanding and skills. Learning strategies

are influenced by both pedagogic principles and professional standards, and from student feedback on methods and practices that promote independence in learning. Across the University a range of forms of assessment (and technologies if appropriate) is employed to promote developmental student learning and to measure achievement against a set of intended learning outcomes. We are committed to supporting the cycle of learning by providing timely and constructive feedback in many forms that supports our students' future success.

6. Our learning and teaching is developed in partnership, with our students, with other academic institutions in the UK and beyond and with industrial and other specialist collaborators.

We have developed a vision for partnership working with our students across the University³ and with external collaborators⁴, and we continue to embed this way of working across our learning and teaching provision, as detailed below.

- With our students:
 - Students are represented on the relevant University, faculty and school education committees and contribute to university strategic consultations.
 - Students play an active role in the design, development and review of teaching and learning practices, and provide feedback to staff on their experiences. This happens in a range of ways: via a strong student course representation system, Staff Student Liaison Committees, as well as informally.
 - Students are involved in the creation, design and review of specific developments in curricula and pedagogies, and are able to influence their learning experience through continuous opportunities for evaluation.
 - Students are able to take full advantage of opportunities to shape learning and teaching and we aim to ensure that any new developments involve students, as appropriate.
- With other academic institutions:
 - Our programmes are richly informed by academic contacts, including external examining, research collaborators, ERASMUS teaching exchanges.
 - Training for research postgraduate students includes cross-institutional Doctoral Training Entities, delivering programmes in conjunction with a multitude of universities (including our partners in the GW4 alliance) as well as cotutelles (dual PhDs).
 - We have a long established network of undergraduate opportunities via ERASMUS and other academic exchange schemes.
- With industry and other specialist collaborators:
 - Many of our staff have active professional relationships and collaborations with researchers and industry, professional, clinical and other contacts who contribute to our learning and teaching strategies and research training.
 - Programmes with Study in Industry allow our students to experience research in an industrial environment or at a research institute or another research intensive university.
 - The Careers Service has extensive links with employers which faculties and schools can draw upon to help enrich their curricular and co-curricular activities.

³ Bristol Student Partnership Vision 2015-2020

⁴ Policy Framework for Educational Collaborative Arrangements

7. A supportive university environment in its broadest sense is integral to successful learning and teaching.

This not only manifests itself in our provision of learning resources but also in the support structures and frameworks that we provide. In terms of the former we seek to provide learning and teaching spaces that are fit for purpose (modern, inclusive and technically well equipped) and access to specialised research facilities and teaching equipment. We will continue to invest in successful innovative technology to support learning and teaching. We regard the residential experience we provide for first year undergraduates as an important foundation in students' development as successful learners.

Academic Personal Tutors and Senior Tutors engage with students about their academic progress, future aspirations and other concerns. Specialist support services work in partnership with academics to proactively support the well-being, personal resilience and self-reliance required by all of our students to successfully manage their studies and achieve their full academic potential. We are committed to continuing to develop our approaches to academic and professional support.

The University is committed to developing an academic skills framework that is available to all students, and which supports the transition to university study, academic progression and success and the development of employability skills. To help our students thrive academically, we recognise the diverse nature of our student body, and take account of differing student backgrounds and needs, as well as ensuring diversity in our learning and teaching approaches.

The design and delivery of our programmes are flexible and responsive, paying due regard to varying learning needs and styles and our students' educational experience before they join us. We strive to develop more inclusive learning and teaching practices that will benefit all students.

3.0 Strategic Aims

The University of Bristol has identified the following key strategic areas that it will focus its efforts upon:

1. Transition to Study at Bristol

We are committed to ensuring that our students thrive in our demanding yet supportive academic environment and actively contribute to our learning and research community. We assist our students' transition to study at the University of Bristol such that they become independent learners.

We will do so by continuing the work of the Transition to University Study Group, to oversee the development of a coordinated transition to university study approach for all taught students that supports them in the initial transition into and then subsequently through their programme of study, whilst reflecting the diverse and changing skills and experiences of our new students. This will include providing a Welcome Week that provides an appropriately welcoming and informative start to students' studies through coordinated events and sessions.

2. Our Curricula and Pedagogy

We will continue to deliver a diverse range of research-led programmes, firmly based in disciplinary excellence but informed by intra- and inter-disciplinary developments and that are internationally relevant. We will ensure that our teaching methods and approaches to learning are both informed by our substantial experience, student feedback and the best research in pedagogy and underpinned by a robust quality review process, where good practice is drawn out and appropriately disseminated.

We will continue to develop the 'distinctive Bristol Offer' and foster the attributes of a Bristol graduate by providing our students with opportunities to develop core and specialised skills and to engage with the professional and wider community in ways that complement their curriculum.

We work in collaboration with other universities and appropriate organisations to broaden the range of learning opportunities available to our students.

3. Assessment and Feedback

We will ensure that assessment and feedback to students on their work promotes effective and independent student learning and contributes to academic success. We will ensure assessment and feedback practices are appropriate, valid, inclusive, reliable and transparent, clearly communicated and regularly reviewed.

We will build upon the recently established 'Institutional Principles for Assessment and Feedback in Taught Programmes' such that a common approach is formed within the university that establishes expectations in respect of assessment and feedback, articulating the cyclical relationship between learning, assessment and feedback and improving students' understanding of their learning experience. In doing so, we will engage students in the design and review of assessment and feedback processes to ensure that all students are able to demonstrate how they meet the learning outcomes of their programmes.

4. Student Success

We take delight and pride in our students' successes and support them to achieve their goals. We ensure that our learning and teaching is characterised by the highest possible standards, and we continually enhance what we do, in partnership with our students. We are committed to involving students in the design and review of teaching and learning practices; ensuring that students have the opportunity to engage in their education. We will ensure that best practice is recognised by staff and students by listening to and acting on students' evaluation of their experiences. We set expectations for our students and provide the framework in which they can succeed in their studies.

We will establish a matrix of work processes, metrics and systems to help monitor student success. This matrix will aspire to support: transparency and student self-reliance; staff in tutor and teaching roles; and the provision of metrics that underpin a culture of continuous improvement in the university.

5. Staff, Facilities and Infrastructure

We will continue to invest in our learning environment and manage it for the benefit of all. We will ensure excellence in teaching by the ways that we both induct and support our staff engaged in teaching through the CREATE scheme, Staff Review and Development and the annual provision of University Teaching Fellowships and Development Grants. We reward and celebrate teaching in a range of ways, through our promotion scheme and in the annual Bristol Teaching Awards. We will also continue to develop common

role profiles for those members of staff in educational positions such that responsibilities for fulfilling specific functions and tasks are clear to all.

We will continually invest in learning resources (infrastructure, materials and virtual offerings) so that our students experience a first class offering.

6. Employability and Future Lives

We will continue to ensure that our approaches to learning and teaching position students for further success after their time with us. We ensure that students acquire the knowledge, skills and experience while with us to ensure their success in future life, particularly in employment. We will use the new Careers and Employability Strategy and ensure that the employability of our students is a whole-institution responsibility to facilitate early engagement of all students and strive to understand students' needs by collecting and analysing information with respect to students' career planning and levels of work experience. We are also committed to using our alumni networks to further our current students' future success.