

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGY FOR 2005-10

1. Introduction

The University of Sheffield's Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy for 2005-10 supports the University's mission and strategic objectives as presented in the Corporate Plan. The overarching aim of the strategy is to ensure that the highest standards of excellence are maintained within the student learning experience, both inter- and extra-curricular, by:

- educating students within a research-led learning environment, designing a curriculum and learning environment reflecting and informed by the process of research and delivered by staff working at the frontiers of academic enquiry and professional practice;
- supporting the vision of the "Sheffield graduate", providing opportunities for all students to fulfil their potential and develop the skills, attributes and values that are essential to entrepreneurship and employment, lifelong learning and global citizenship
- providing fair, valid and reliable assessment, both formative and summative, together with meaningful and timely feedback, applying the University's "Principles of Assessment" (presented in full in Appendix 1) and associated regulations.

2. Context

2.1 Supporting a research-led learning environment

The University is committed to supporting a learning experience which reflects the process of creating and deepening knowledge by engaging students in learning activities that mirror the processes and activities of research, for example participating in laboratory experiments, fieldwork and open-ended collaborative inquiry etc. Students are encouraged to engage with the key issues and debates of their subject area, developing an understanding of general research processes and those specific to that discipline, exploring the contested nature of knowledge and engaging in the process by which knowledge is created. Whilst students across the University, of course, experience a curriculum informed by the work of high quality researchers and delivered by staff working at the frontier of academic enquiry, it is the active engagement of students within the processes of research that characterises the University of Sheffield's research-led learning environment.

2.2 Building upon existing excellence

The University's LTA Strategy for 2005-10 builds upon the extensive progress in enhancing the quality of learning and teaching at the University in recent years. This is reflected in the excellent outcome of the University's QAA Institutional Audit, the securing of two Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs), the take-up of the University's virtual learning environment (WebCT) and the wide range of innovative curriculum development projects supported through the University's Learning and Teaching Development Grant Scheme.

2.3 Responding to key drivers

The Strategy responds to a number of key drivers, both internal and external, that influence learning and teaching. Internal drivers include the desire to develop suitable

educational initiatives that build on previous initiatives and move beyond working with enthusiasts to achieving wide-scale strategic enhancement; supported by planned changes to the learning and teaching physical infrastructure with unprecedented investment in the University's physical estate; feedback from students and staff; and the commitment to discipline-sensitive quality enhancement activities. External drivers include the rapidly changing market place, in terms of student expectations and the requirements of employers and statutory bodies, changes to quality enhancement funding models and national thematic priorities and initiatives eg professionalisation of teaching, e-learning, CETLs, Higher Education Academy etc.

3. Characteristics of the Sheffield Graduate

The aspiration of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is to create conditions and opportunities for students which enable them to graduate with the abilities to:

1. demonstrate a sound knowledge-base within their academic subject, and the skills and competencies to apply that knowledge appropriately;
2. carry out extended independent enquiry, formulating relevant questions and engaging critically with a wide range of evidence;
3. demonstrate the core capabilities and skills of information literacy, interacting confidently with the nature and structure of information in their subject and handling information in a professional and ethical manner;
4. explore the history of and challenge the processes of knowledge creation, applying creativity, enterprise and innovation, to push against the boundaries of current practice;
5. be a constructive team member working collaboratively towards a shared goal and demonstrate transferable skills, where appropriate working across academic disciplines, professional and organisational boundaries;
6. communicate effectively, orally, in writing or by other means as appropriate, and in accordance with agreed conventions, and handle ICT packages and specialist software efficiently, effectively and innovatively;
7. critically reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, and plan their personal and career development to fulfil both work and personal responsibilities and aspirations;
8. work independently, setting their own goals and the strategies for achieving them;
9. overcome problems through effective planning, monitoring and evaluation whether working independently or as part of a team;
10. identify the wider social, cultural and economic context of their academic knowledge and skills base, and relate their understanding and practical abilities to the needs of individuals and communities;
11. recognise their responsibilities as active citizens and apply their knowledge and skills productively, respecting diverse viewpoints and treating others as equals.
12. demonstrate that they are fit to practice and progress in their chosen professional field, working responsibly, safely and ethically, recognising their limitations, and meeting the requirements of relevant statutory bodies.

The demonstration of these characteristics will be evaluated through a mixture of assessment (both summative and formative) and through the use of personal development portfolios.

4. Objectives of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy

In realising the vision of the Sheffield graduate, through the implementation of its LTA Strategy the University will ensure that studying at Sheffield will provide **students with the opportunity to:**

1. develop understanding of the **processes of knowledge creation** and of the fluidity, uncertainty and contested nature of knowledge in their discipline(s);
2. **engage critically** with the intellectual and creative works that constitute the focus or evidence base of their discipline(s), including the problems it poses and the questions it raises;
3. achieve the learning outcomes of their programme and reflect upon that achievement with the help of **appropriate assessment and feedback**;
4. **work collaboratively** and participate actively with tutors, peers, researchers and others;
5. access **high quality learning and information resources** in a variety of formats and become **information literate** by seeking out , evaluating and engaging with a wide range of information resources effectively and ethically in support of their critical engagement with their discipline;
6. become involved in **inquiry-based learning**, as a means of actively engaging with the questions and problems of their discipline(s) and of developing a range of inquiry-related capabilities and skills;
7. learn to **communicate effectively** through a variety of media and enhance their communication skills through written and oral presentation opportunities as appropriate coupled with appropriate feedback;
8. extend their skills in the use of **information and computing technology (ICT)**;
9. become confident and skilled in **applying research methodologies and techniques**, and in interacting with diverse sources and formats of information;
10. develop **enterprise and employability** through participation in work-based learning opportunities such as work shadowing and placement, employment skills development programmes, and activities that support entrepreneurship;
11. plan their **career development** and engage consciously in planning their own personal development, reflecting on their progress as learners, identifying and developing capabilities that are essential to scholarship, employability and lifelong learning;
12. extend their **cultural and social awareness** and sensitivity;
13. **extend their international horizons**, for example, in collaboration with international students, by taking part in international visits, exchanges and placements, or by learning foreign languages;
14. **participate in voluntary activities** of benefit to the wider community;
15. **influence this university** through participation in departmental/institutional activities.

Students who study at postgraduate level will have additional opportunities to:

16. explore their academic subject in **greater depth** focusing on a specific and specialised area by undertaking further study and/or research;
17. **critically analyse** the knowledge, ideas and research of their discipline and **apply that knowledge** to new scenarios or to professional practice
18. enhance the skills developed at undergraduate level, further developing their ability to take **independent responsibility for learning** and knowledge creation.

5. Implementation of the Strategy

The University will achieve the objectives of the strategy through a cohesive implementation plan, made up of six strands. These will:

- a) promote the development of departmental LTA Strategies as the primary, and most appropriate, tool for enhancing the quality of the student learning experience;
- b) support networks of champions and special interest groups to encourage the sharing of good practice within and beyond institutional boundaries;
- c) undertake institution-wide projects to develop key themes of the Strategy, to provide consistent and cohesive support, guidance and resourcing;
- d) assure the quality of the student learning experience through rigorous internal and external review mechanisms;
- e) promote professional teaching standards, providing opportunities for all staff engaged with students through teaching or learner support to develop as appropriate to their role and teaching responsibilities;
- f) recognise and reward excellent practice in learning and teaching.

Strand 1 - Departmental LTA Strategies

Departments will develop their own LTA strategies based upon the institutional framework presented here. In producing their strategies, departments will be encouraged to reflect upon their current provision as compared to the opportunities listed above and identify areas of existing strength and areas for improvement and enhancement. Departments will be encouraged to celebrate areas of strength through Strand 2 below and to develop a localised, forward-looking, triennial LTA Strategy to identify priority areas for improvement and enhancement and proposals for how to achieve those goals. This approach will ensure that quality enhancement activity is discipline sensitive and focused upon local needs where maximum impact can be made. A clear framework of support and resources will be available to departments to help in implementing their plans. Appendix 2 presents a mapping of each of the objectives against primary stakeholders and support available for that theme.

Strand 2 - Networks and Special Interest Groups

Through the development of networks, the University will support the sharing of good practice and build upon existing excellence across the University. The Faculty-based Directors of Learning and Teaching Development (DLTDs) will facilitate Faculty-level networks of departmental Learning and Teaching Development champions to share experiences, issues and ideas. In addition there will be a number of special interest groups that will explore particular aspects of the Sheffield learning experience in greater depth eg inquiry-based learning, Personal Development Planning, WebCT, student support, information literacy etc. These networks will draw upon resources and expertise available within the University and offered by the Higher Education Academy and other external agencies. eg professional bodies and associations.

Strand 3 – Institution-wide Support and Developmental Projects

Institutional support operates at a number of different levels to ensure that projects and enhancements are effectively and efficiently resourced and developed. This includes the development of academic practice and the evaluation of its impact upon the student learning experience. This is likely to be based upon proposals put forward by departmental champions and enthusiasts. The University will also support centrally any new or existing over-arching institution-wide projects where this approach is considered more appropriate and effective than multiple projects at a local level. Examples of

projects that will continue into the strategy period include; provision and support for the virtual learning environment (WebCT), Work-based learning support, Personal Development Planning, Institutional Assessment Policies and Practice, and CETLs (Centre for Inquiry-based Learning in the Arts and Social Sciences – CILASS; White Rose Centre for Excellence in the Teaching and Learning of Enterprise – WR CETLE). The development of institution-wide modules will also be explored and progressed under this strand.

Strand 4 – Quality Assurance

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Institutional Audit (November 2003) awarded the University “broad confidence” in the quality and standards of its provision; the best available judgement. The focus of Institutional Audit is on the effectiveness of the University’s internal review mechanisms for assuring the quality and standards of its educational provision. The University achieves this through robust procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review, in particular its programme approval process, annual reviews of teaching quality, and Independent Evaluation of Teaching (IET), the last of which incorporates the use of external subject specialists. These processes are designed to encourage critical developmental reflection by staff, rather than being narrowly defined tests of compliance. They draw on a wide evidence base, including quantitative and qualitative student feedback, and observations from external examiners and professional accrediting bodies.

Strand 5 – Promote Professional Standards

The University offers a structured programme of staff development for all new lecturers on the theme of learning, teaching and assessment (Certificate in Learning and Teaching). This programme supports the development of practice, awareness of change in learning and teaching and reflective practice through portfolio centred assessment. The University is also further developing its support for new staff who engage with student learning as appropriate to their role (eg postgraduate students, part-time and hourly paid staff, learning support professionals). The University also supports participation in the MEd in Teaching and Learning for University Lecturers and the EdD programme offered by the School of Education in addition to a range of continuing professional development activities and short-courses for staff who do not wish to undertake a formal programme of study. Staff are encouraged to develop their professional practice through engagement in internal networks, special interest groups and developmental projects outlined in an earlier strand and to take advantage of external opportunities including membership of the Higher Education Academy (for which the University will fund individual joining fees).

Strand 6 – Recognising and Rewarding Excellence

The University rewards teaching excellence through established mechanisms including promotion, discretionary salary increments, contributory bonus scheme and annual Senate Awards for Excellence in Learning and Teaching. The QAA Institutional Audit report (published April 2004) stated that “the University’s current procedures for the recognition and reward of academic staff gave the appropriate recognition to excellent performance in teaching and the support of students’ learning”. The LTA Strategy will increase the opportunities for staff to demonstrate the qualities and achievements needed to support their case for promotion or the other rewards mentioned above, recognising experimentation, creativity and reflective practice as key attributes of teaching excellence. Engagement in development projects, participation in networks and a general increased awareness of good practice will encourage staff to include evidence of teaching excellence within their portfolio application.

6. Inter-relationship with other Strategies

The LTA Strategy is one of a suite of strategies that directly impact upon the profile of the student body and the quality of the learning experience. This suite includes the University's Widening Participation (WP), Information Services, Estates and Human Resources (HR) Strategies. Consistent with the approach taken in developing the University's Corporate Plan, the importance of the inter-relationship between the various strategies is recognised. The LTA Strategy is presented with close reference to those associated strategies, reflecting shared goals and sensitive to specific inter-dependencies.

Specific overlaps are recognised with regard to:

Related Strategy	Focus
Widening Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assistance to students from WP groups regarding the transition into higher education• Academic skills support enabling students to fulfil their potential
Information (also noted is link to Library Strategic Plan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivery of learning through information technology including e-learning strategy, virtual learning environment• Availability and effective use of learning resources
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rewards and recognition for excellence in learning and teaching• Staff development re learning and teaching and professional teaching standard
Estates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General physical learning and teaching infrastructure• Opportunities for experimentation with physical space• Changing space requirements arising out of blended learning solutions

7. Management, evaluation and development

Each Strand of the Strategy has an associated action plan which identifies key milestones, actions and resources required to ensure that the objectives of the strategy are met. This plan is project managed by staff within the Teaching and Learning Support Unit and progress is monitored and evaluated regularly to ensure ongoing development of the process of delivering and embedding the strategic vision.

Responsibility for overall management of the LTA Strategy lies with the Learning and Teaching Committee, a sub-committee of the University's Senate. Progress against targets is reported regularly internally to Senate and to Senior Management Group and externally to HEFCE via the University's Annual Monitoring Statement.

Principles of Assessment

Principle 1 - Assessment should be valid

Validity ensures that assessment tasks and associated criteria effectively measure student attainment of the intended learning outcomes at the appropriate level.

Principle 2 - Assessment should be reliable and consistent

There is a need for assessment to be reliable and this requires clear and consistent processes for the setting, marking, grading and moderation of assignments.

Principle 3 - Information about assessment should be explicit, accessible and transparent

Clear, accurate, consistent and timely information on assessment tasks and procedures should be made available to students, staff and other external assessors or examiners.

Principle 4 - Assessment should be inclusive and equitable

As far as is possible without compromising academic standards, inclusive and equitable assessment should ensure that tasks and procedures do not disadvantage any group or individual.

Principle 5 - Assessment should be an integral part of programme design and should relate directly to the programme aims and learning outcomes

Assessment tasks should primarily reflect the nature of the discipline or subject but should also ensure that students have the opportunity to develop a range of generic skills and capabilities.

Principle 6 - The amount of assessed work should be manageable

The scheduling of assignments and the amount of assessed work required should provide a reliable and valid profile of achievement without overloading staff or students.

Principle 7 - Formative and summative assessment should be included in each programme

Formative and summative assessment should be incorporated into programmes to ensure that the purposes of assessment are adequately addressed. Many programmes may also wish to include diagnostic assessment.

Principle 8 - Timely feedback that promotes learning and facilitates improvement should be an integral part of the assessment process

Students are entitled to feedback on submitted formative assessment tasks, and on summative tasks, where appropriate. The nature, extent and timing of feedback for each assessment task should be made clear to students in advance.

Principle 9 - Staff development policy and strategy should include assessment

All those involved in the assessment of students must be competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities.

Objectives and stakeholders

Obj.	Objective key words	Stakeholders
1.	processes of knowledge creation	Students, academic departments, professional bodies, HEA subject centres, LDMU, CILASS, Library
2.	engage critically	Students, academic departments, ELTC
3.	appropriate assessment and feedback	Students, academic departments, LDMU, TLSU, statutory bodies
4.	work collaboratively	Students, academic departments, CILASS, ELTC, health employers
5.	high quality learning and information resources	Students, academic departments, Library, CiCS, LDMU, CILASS, WRCETLE, WRCE, health employers
6.	inquiry-based learning	Students, academic departments, CILASS, LDMU, health employers
7.	communicate effectively (orally and in writing as appropriate)	Students, academic departments, CILASS, WRCETLE, WRCE, LDMU, ELTC
8.	information and computing technology	Students, academic departments, CiCS, LDMU, Library, CILASS
9.	applying research methodologies and techniques	Students, academic departments, Library, CILASS, LDMU.
10.	work-based learning opportunities; enterprise and entrepreneurship	Students, academic departments, Careers Service, Recruitment (WP team), WRCE, WRCETLE, LDMU, health employers
11.	career development & PDP	Students, academic departments, Careers Service
12.	cultural and social awareness	Students, academic departments, Student Union, ELTC
13.	extend their international horizons	Students, academic departments, International Office, MLTC, ELTC, Students Union
14.	participate in voluntary activities	Students, academic departments, Students Union
15.	influence this university	Students, academic departments, Students Union, Staff/student committees, TLSU
16.	greater depth at postgraduate level	Students, academic departments,
17.	critically analyse and apply that knowledge to new scenarios/practice	Students, academic departments, professional bodies
18.	further independent responsibility for learning	Students, academic departments, Library