

1. Context

The University's primary aim in learning and teaching is to maintain and enhance the excellence of the academic experience of all its students.

This aim reflects the University's **mission** which is to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

The aim also reflects the University's **core values** of

- an extensive portfolio of academic subjects in all major subject groups;
- quality and depth of provision across all subjects;
- the close inter-relationship between teaching, scholarship, and research;
- residence in Cambridge as central to most courses;
- education which enhances the ability of students to learn throughout life;
- opportunities for participation in sport, music, drama, the visual arts, and other cultural activities;
- the relationship between the University and the Colleges as fundamental to the nature of Cambridge;
- the interdisciplinary nature of the Colleges as a major stimulus to teaching, learning, and research;
- the enhanced quality of experience for students through College membership.

2. Ethos and culture

The strategy for achieving the University's aim in learning and teaching should be firmly grounded in the ethos and culture of the University as an institution where

- students and staff are of the highest calibre and from a diversity of backgrounds;
- student retention and standards of achievement are outstanding;
- teaching at all levels is informed by research and carried out predominantly by people engaged in research at the highest international level;
- the supervision element of teaching involving face to face teaching in very small groups is an essential element of teaching and learning;
- course content is in the main academically- rather than employer-driven;
- there is a significant level of local autonomy in learning and teaching delivery;
- there is strength in teaching both at undergraduate and graduate levels;
- students are in the main young, full-time and residential;
- academic support provided by both the Colleges and University institutions is an integral part of the student experience; and
- the University's graduates are highly sought after by employers.

Question 1: Do you agree that this summarises those key factors of the ethos and culture of the University which impinge on learning and teaching?

Are there others which should be added or substituted?

3. External factors

The strategy should also take into account external environmental factors which affect learning and teaching in the University:

- recent legislation such as the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, the Data Protection Act;
- external regulation provided by bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency, Research Councils, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies, the Office for Fair Access;
- government agendas such as widening participation, the sustainability agenda, work-related learning, employability, and regional activity;
- HEFCE and external funding regimes;
- Competition from other HE providers in the UK and overseas;
- sectoral support agencies such as the Higher Education Academy and its Subject Centres;
- the provisions of the Bologna accord.

Question 2: Do you agree that this summarises the key environmental factors which impinge on learning and teaching in the University?

Are there others which should be added or substituted?

4. Strategic Goals

The Learning and Teaching Strategy will be broken down into several broad goals. These goals should represent achievements that the University would like to see itself working towards in the period 2006-7 to 2011-12. The goals should be ones which could realistically be achieved in that period.

Goals could reflect maintenance of current excellence in the University, and/or innovation and enhancement of current practice, and/or eradication of weaknesses.

Given the University's core values, its ethos and culture, the outputs of recent deliberative bodies both inside and outside the University¹, and factors present in the external environment, the following broad areas could be seen as possible candidates in which Learning and Teaching Strategy goals should be set:

¹ E.g. QAA Audit, reports of International Working Groups, Joint Committee on Academic Performance reports

4.1 Reflection on and critical analysis of learning and teaching provision

In order for the University's provision to remain current, relevant and of high quality there need to be opportunities for reflection and self-analysis. At what levels and through what kinds of processes is this best undertaken? How can reflection on the University's activities best be translated into action?

4.2 Central facility for pedagogic support, innovation and co-ordination

Despite much good practice in Fs and Ds, and the presence within the University of the CARET, there is currently no facility in the University which can support innovation across the pedagogic spectrum. There is no central facility which can co-ordinate the translation of central policy into action, or support and co-ordinate bids for pedagogic funding, or support the achievement of goals and targets in the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

Should a University goal be to establish such a facility?

4.3 Equality and diversity in the student experience

The student body is increasingly diversified with subsets of students presenting special support needs: students from non-traditional backgrounds, those from overseas, part-time students and those in continuing education; students with disability or from minority ethnic groups. The non-traditional backgrounds of some entrants and the school-university transition and overseas-Cambridge transition are seen as warranting special consideration. Is the University experiencing difficulties in integrating students from diverse backgrounds into a single cohort for teaching purposes?

Does the University need to set goals to ensure that all students, from whatever background, have the same opportunities to prosper and succeed in the University?

4.4 Place of technology in learning

Many institutions within the University use IT either as an integral part of teaching and learning or to support it. Nevertheless there is currently no university strategy on the use of technology in learning and teaching and no university-wide understanding of the place of e-learning and distance learning in relation to other pedagogic modes. Several institutions within the University are key players in the delivery of e-learning (CARET, Language Centre, ICE) but there is no one body which can co-ordinate and capitalise on such expertise. There is no University-wide virtual learning environment.

Should the University set goals in these areas?

4.5 Skills and training

University courses are academically-, not employer-driven: even courses with strong vocational elements still retain a clear academic agenda. Skills acquisition and training are not expected to be embedded in curricula, nor do they form a significant part in the assessment process. Students are encouraged to take advantage of opportunities for skills acquisition and personal development planning outside the curriculum, through the government's Progress File agenda (undergraduates), or through the requirements of Research Councils (graduates).

Is this emphasis correct? Should the University be doing more to structure opportunities for skills development? Should skills acquisition be embedded more directly in curricula? Should skills be assessed directly?

4.6 Staff development

Staff development provision is a crucial mechanism for maintaining excellence and encouraging change in culture and practice. In some HE institutions staff development related to learning and teaching is part of a central pedagogic facility. Should this be considered in Cambridge? Time is often seen as limiting factor in attendance at SD activities. How best can staff development activities be integrated within a research intensive university structure? Should a postgraduate level teaching qualification be required for University teaching?

4.7 Recognition and reward of teaching excellence

Reward and progression in the University, while acknowledging teaching contribution, stress the importance of research excellence. Is this balance correct? Should teaching activities be rewarded more explicitly? Should the University explore new ways to identify and reward teaching excellence and find ways to utilise this resource to enhance teaching and learning practice?

4.8 Contribution of Colleges

The relationship between the University and the Colleges is seen as fundamental to the nature of Cambridge; Colleges play an essential role in the learning and teaching provision of the University. Is there scope for greater collaboration or co-ordination of Colleges-University activities?

4.9 Dissemination of Good Practice

Dissemination of good practice is another important mechanism for encouraging change in culture and practice. There is much good practice in University institutions but until recently no strategy in the University for its dissemination. Institutions risk reinventing the wheel or repeating mistakes made elsewhere. Should the University be working harder to spread or promote the spreading of good practice? Should it

be encouraging the importing of good practice from other HE institutions?

Question 3: You are invited to comment on each area.

Do you think that the Learning and Teaching Strategy should contain goals that relate to the above areas?

Do you have specific comments about any of the areas?

Do you agree that the areas identified pay due attention to the external factors listed in section 3?

The comments under each heading are intended to start discussion: you do not have to confine your comments to the examples mentioned.

Question 4: Are there other areas of University learning and teaching activity which you think should be represented by goals in the strategy?

Please provide any other comments about this exercise which are not elicited by the questions above.

Name of respondent.....

Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of a body or group? (Please say which one)