

TRANSFORMING LIVES: UNIVERSITY OF SUFFOLK STRATEGY FOR LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT 2018 - 2023

Transforming lives
through education,
research,
knowledge exchange,
innovation and
entrepreneurship



**University
of Suffolk**

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INTRODUCTION

The learning, teaching and assessment strategy draws together key sector-wide and institutional priorities to support the provision of an excellent quality academic experience that inspires and challenges students to take a lead role in their learning, working both independently and in partnership with peers, staff and external stakeholders to enable them to achieve their full potential as highly employable and enquiring professionals, creatives and entrepreneurs.

PRIORITY OBJECTIVES

1. Contribute to improved National Student Survey and future Teaching Excellence Framework outcomes
2. Enhance 'learning gain' – progression, continuation, attainment, work readiness
3. Enhance graduate employability
4. Contribute to future Research Excellence Framework submissions by building on existing expertise in pedagogic research

ACTIONS

Students will experience learning, teaching and assessment that is active and independent, inclusive, employer engaged, and research informed:

Active and independent learning

All students will be supported to become actively engaged in their learning, to participate in stimulating and meaningful contact sessions and be guided to reflect on their learning, so that they can take the lead on further enhancing and deepening their understanding beyond the classroom. Students will experience a diverse range of learning activities in contact sessions that provide opportunities to construct their own knowledge, understanding, skills and attributes, facilitated by academic staff.

A progressive model of learning, teaching and assessment will support students to develop autonomy, so that by the end of their studies, students are adept, independent learners with the capacity to think critically, to adapt to new situations and to work effectively both alone and in teams.

Three distinct phases are identified to support the transition towards autonomous learning, with the level of guidance and contact time gradually tapering as students progress through their studies. Students will be introduced to active and collaborative learning at level 4. Recognising a greater need for direction and support in this 'guided' phase, contact time will be greater than in subsequent levels, detailed guidance provided for independent study and assessments will be smaller and more frequent with regular opportunities for formative feedback. During the 'negotiated' phase at level 5, students will draw on experiences from the guided phase and, with a reduced level of guidance, use a blend of suggested and self-determined materials and activities to take a greater level of responsibility for their learning. During level 6, students will progress to the 'independent' phase, with a greater level of expectation that they will take a lead on their own learning, sourcing and critically evaluating appropriate materials and methods, determining and addressing independently their learning and development needs.

Three-phase approach to be clearly defined and articulated to students at each phase of learning, e.g:

Guided (Level 4): Students will receive detailed guidance provided on how to prepare for contact sessions and guided follow up reading. Advance notice of the nature of the major activities planned for each contact session. Structured engagement in contact sessions and detailed guidance on how best to reflect on learning and assessment feedback. Smaller, more frequent assessment with early opportunity for formative feedback.

Negotiated (Level 5): Students will draw on level 4 experiences to prepare for contact sessions, using a blend of suggested methods and materials and those they source and begin to evaluate for themselves. Students to be supported to identify and negotiate with staff, appropriate learning activities to meet their needs. Students will engage in collaborative work with reduced guidance

and direction and reflect on and address more independently their own learning needs.

Independent (Level 6): Students will draw on level 4 and 5 experiences to use the module learning outcomes to shape their learning and preparation for contact sessions and to work collaboratively and independently with minimal structure and direction and with an expectation of growing autonomy.



To further support students to take an active role in their learning, an increased emphasis will be placed on developing academic skills appropriate to their field of study. In some subject areas, a discrete 'study skills' module has been established and where this is effective, it should be retained but for most courses, an embedded approach to academic skills, aligned to curriculum content and assessment strategy, is recommended.

Peer mentorship is widely recognised as having reciprocal benefits for both mentor and mentee and so a comprehensive framework of peer mentorship will be developed to extend the reach of peer mentorship throughout the student journey from pre-entry to completion, engaging more students as mentors and involving alumni in the support of final year students.

Inclusive learning

Inclusive practice in learning, teaching and assessment recognises and values the diversity of students and appreciates that learning experiences are enriched by varied perspectives.

The strategy will support course teams to embed approaches to inclusive learning, teaching and assessment that are designed to address sector-wide challenges in addressing differential outcomes for students from groups traditionally under-represented in Higher Education.

Staff will be supported to embed within their courses, a range of approaches designed to remove or mitigate barriers to active participation in learning and to provide diverse opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and strengths at assessment¹.

¹ Department for Education (2017) Inclusive Teaching and Learning in Higher Education as a route to Excellence

The following principles underpin inclusive practice:

- Learning is enriched by the varied experience of students
- Accessible learning is relevant and approachable by all students
- The curriculum and means of delivery are central to accessibility
- Students with full access to learning and teaching are more likely to engage with learning

Simple measures that might be taken by course teams include for example assessing the accessibility of all materials provided, ensuring that compatible teaching materials are made available on Bright Space in advance of contact sessions, providing a diverse range of learning opportunities and assessment methods, reviewing reading lists and course materials to ensure diversity and to reduce cultural bias.

Employer engaged

Approaches designed to enhance graduate-level employability will be embedded in to curricula. This will be facilitated in part by a collaborative approach to curriculum development that will engage students, alumni, employers and practitioners to ensure that both the curriculum content and the assessment methods are well-aligned with the needs of employers and equip graduates to be independent, flexible and well-equipped to identify opportunities. We will be working with our industry partners to define a set of Graduate Attributes, these should include:

- Digital competencies;
- Communication skills (both verbal and written);
- Global citizenship
- Entrepreneurship

An institutional set of learning outcomes for personal development for achievement by level 6 has been produced and approved and course teams will need to ensure that these are embedded in to their curricula.

Employability advisors are already providing an excellent level of support to students with 1:1 drop in sessions and timetabled whole cohort contact sessions tailored to each course. It is proposed that this provision is extended so that students on all courses have an opportunity to engage with the employability visors.

In addition to courses subject to professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements, all course teams will be encouraged to embrace options for adopting industry standards or accreditation where they exist. Some of these opportunities may lie beyond the scope of an undergraduate programme but could be offered as an optional certificate.

All students will have opportunities to engage with employers, practitioners or charitable organisations. For some courses, practice placements are integral to learning and form a significant part of the programme. In subject areas where meaningful placement opportunities are difficult to secure, engagement might take other forms, e.g., commissions, live briefs, consultancy, small scale research projects or audits of practice. Such projects would provide students with experience of working collaboratively and inter-professionally to deliver a project of real value to an employer, with the potential to enhance highly skilled employment.

All students will engage with enterprise and entrepreneurship, aligned with their subject area and embedded in to curricula. Such approaches have been demonstrated to be inclusive, enhance creativity and innovation, enhance learning attainment and grades, improve highly skilled employment and increase graduate start-ups².

² Quality Assurance Agency (2018) Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers

Research informed

Working in collaboration with the Director for Research and aligned with the Strategy for Research and Scholarly activity, the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) will establish an enhanced staff development plan, with a streamlined selection of staff development opportunities to support enhancement in skills for conducting subject, interdisciplinary and pedagogic research.

Course teams will be supported to develop increased opportunities for students to engage with peers, staff and employers / practitioners / charitable organisations to conduct small scale, collaborative 'real world' research, further enhancing graduate employability and community impact.

The Centre for Integrated Research across Educational Spaces (CIRES), established in 2017-18, has already initiated several funded projects that are focused on supporting successful transitions between levels of learning and during the second half of the academic year 2018-19, a selection of pedagogically focused research streams will be established, aligned with the goals of the learning, teaching and assessment strategy.
