Consultation on the University’s Emerging Vision for Learning and Teaching

This paper invites staff and students to engage with a consultation regarding the University’s emerging vision for learning and teaching.

1 Excellence in education and an outstanding student experience

Students (and their parents and sponsors) have increasingly high expectations for their studies, and the University faces increased competition both within the UK and internationally for the most able students. The University’s student population is becoming larger and more diverse, and students are expecting different things from higher education, for example regarding the use of technology and preparation for careers.

In this changing environment, the University needs to be increasingly ambitious and proactive in order to be successful in delivering excellence in education and an outstanding student experience. The commitment of academic staff to teaching will continue to be central to delivering the University’s aims, as will students’ commitment to their own learning. However, concerted efforts at University level, in partnership with staff and students, will also be essential in order to provide strategic direction, stimulate innovation, and provide coherence to the overall student experience.

Over the last few years, the University has undertaken strategic projects to enhance student academic and pastoral support (via the Enhancing Student Support project) and broader student services (via the Student Experience project). It has also strengthened academic staff development via the establishment of the Institute for Academic Development, and is currently taking steps to increase recognition and reward for excellence in teaching. The University is also currently developing ideas regarding the future size shape of the student population (which may have implications for how the University approaches learning and teaching), and consulting on a new project to enhance support for Postgraduate Research Students.

The University is now planning to focus its attention on learning and teaching, building on lessons learned through engagement with the National Student Survey, by developing a vision that will guide developments for the next ten years.

2 Developing the vision

At the University’s senior management retreat in October 2013, the Heads of Colleges identified some key themes, and during 2013-14 I developed them into a draft vision, in consultation with EUSA and College Deans, and key committees including the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee, Knowledge Strategy Group, the Employability Strategy
Committee. This draft vision, which focusses on undergraduate programmes in particular, is **attached** as an annex.

The next stage of this process is to undertake more extensive consultation with the University community, in order to develop and refine the vision, and begin to translate it into an implementation plan.

While the specific concepts in the draft vision document are particularly relevant for undergraduate programmes, many of the ideas generated during this consultation will also be relevant for postgraduate taught activities. We will ensure that we capitalize on synergies between UG and PGT where possible, and plan to develop the PGT aspect of the University’s vision for learning and teaching as part of this consultation process.

I encourage you to engage with this exciting project, the anticipated timelines for which are:

**Semester one, 2014-15**

- Offer all Schools and Colleges the opportunity to meet to discuss the draft vision.
- Roadshows for staff (particularly for staff unable to attend School-based sessions), along with consultation activities with students and with support services.

**Semester two**

- Schools invited to set out how they anticipate that they would interpret and implement the vision in a manner relevant and useful to them and their contexts.
- Seek endorsement from Senate Learning and Teaching Committee, and from Senate, for the vision and for a longer-term implementation plan.

3  **Pilot activities**

Staff and students are already undertaking a range of innovative pilots that test and develop various concepts relevant to the draft vision, with support from the Principal's Teaching Awards Scheme and other sources. During 2014-15 there will be further opportunities to initiate pilots.

4  **Further information**

If you would like further information on this project, or if you would like to comment on the draft vision but do not have an opportunity to attend one of the consultation events, please contact:

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Further information on the project is also available at:

www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/projects/developingalandtvision

Sue Rigby, Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching)
11 August 2014
The emerging vision: key developments in learning and teaching for undergraduate programmes

1. **A portfolio approach for a complicated and unpredictable future** - Develop a curriculum that maximizes the value of the breadth offered by a four year degree to enable students to learn widely and develop an individual academic pathway towards a degree.

2. **Giving students agency to create their own learning** - put active and engaged students at the heart of their own journey through a degree – the student and their academic mentor are the centre of the process rather than the pattern of courses that compose a degree programme.

3. **Extend learning beyond the traditional knowledge-centred course** - use the length and credit-pattern of our degrees to facilitate time spent developing graduate attributes through, for example, credit bearing self-directed study, international or service experience, interaction with employers, entrepreneurship.

4. **Every student a researcher/practitioner** – students are linked to research or practice groups and activities from year 1. By year 4 they are deeply embedded in the active research/practice culture of their area of academic interest. Credit-bearing courses in multiple years value and permit evaluation of this engagement. We should explore the feasibility of an automatic offer of a PhD place to successful graduates (e.g. with a final degree mark of 65% or better).

5. **Course design for 21st century learners** - develop all courses within the curriculum towards the appropriate use of technology and student-centred pedagogy and away from passive learning styles. An ongoing focus on small group interactions with academics will be key to this, with a reduced emphasis on the ‘traditional’ lecture/closed exam model of teaching.

6. **Focus on multiple learning styles and learning for life** - expect all of our students to take at least one online course for credit within their degree, to broaden their variety of effective learning styles and help prepare them for lifelong learning. These will include courses provided by the University of Edinburgh and by partner institutions elsewhere (Virtual Mobility).