



University  
of Glasgow

# **Learning and Teaching Strategy 2021 - 2025**

**(approved by Senate - February 2021)**

## Introduction

Our core educational purpose is to **develop and support our students through an excellent University experience so that they fulfil their academic potential and contribute in the fullest way possible to culture, society and the economy locally and globally throughout their lives.** We seek to create an inclusive environment where students develop meaningful relationships with one another and with staff, and through those encounters, create new knowledge, challenge received wisdom, build inter-cultural and leadership capabilities, and develop disciplinary excellence and an appetite for lifelong learning and enquiry. Rapid and seismic impacts on societies and economies around the world from the Coronavirus pandemic, combined with the fast pace of change resulting from the impact of technology, require flexible and adaptable graduates who can integrate knowledge across disciplines to bring creative solutions to complex world problems. **This strategy therefore aims to stimulate evolutions in our approach to teaching, to curriculum and assessment design, and in students' skills development that serve our educational purpose. These three pillars of the strategy are shaped by the values, creativity, ambition and commitment of students and staff, and that are needed to support students and staff to thrive in a rapidly shifting, internationally competitive higher education sector.**

## Key Internal and External Drivers

The **internal drivers** underpinning this strategy are **core values** that students and staff have identified as important motivators for our priorities and that underpin our ability to respond appropriately to external challenges:

- Ensuring that our learning and teaching is **inclusive** and supports a diverse student community whose needs and aspirations vary substantially, and that our academic policies and practices support and promote student and staff **wellbeing and inclusion.**
- Maintaining and promoting **academic integrity** and **respect** in terms of our behaviours and the approach we take to academic standards and quality.
- Working **collaboratively** across staff and student communities, campuses and international partnerships, recognising the **diversity of contributions** that shape and build an excellent learning and teaching environment, and valuing the benefits of collective endeavour.
- Recognising and promoting the importance of **continuing professional and skills development** for students and staff to realising our educational ambitions, enhancing quality in teaching and supporting learning, and supporting students' career advancement.
- **Harnessing** the full potential of the curiosity, creativity, and enterprise that characterise **the research-rich environment** in which research-led learning and teaching are shaped and experienced.
- Promoting **excellence** in learning and teaching through evidence-based approaches that shape our teaching and assessment practices, learning design, and partnership development, recognising those efforts and achievements in terms of career advancement.
- Evaluating our programmes, our teaching practices and our associated investments in technology in terms of their connection with, and impact on, **sustainability and in particular, climate change.** A strategy that advocates more engagement with learning technologies and with refurbishment of physical teaching spaces, has an impact on our carbon footprint and so actions resulting from this strategy need to be incorporated into the University's wider action plan in relation to climate change and sustainability.

There are many **external drivers** including demographic shifts, economic instability, the impact of Brexit, long term global impacts of the pandemic, and the changing role of private education providers. The impact of the pandemic on current and future students is also having a profound effect on their experiences and expectations of education, their health and aspirations, and the increased support that they will continue to need in the coming years. Inevitably, changes in the policy and funding landscape also influence our approaches, the nuances within them and the specific measures and outcomes expected, impacting in turn upon prioritisation over the timeframe of the strategy. Particular drivers that we envisage will prevail throughout the next few years are:

- The pace of **technological change and innovation** and the impact of this on: workplaces; job opportunities; societal debate; expertise, skills and ongoing upskilling; and for education providers, the impact on how we teach and assess, and on how students learn.
- **Attitudinal change**, both positive and negative, in relation to the perceived value of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and higher education expertise generally, from the point of view of individuals, governments and sponsors who fund education.
- Differential rates of **economic recovery** following the Coronavirus pandemic, along with ambitions for **social renewal and economic growth** across nations, and the need for universities to be part of the solution in terms of upskilling, fulfilling a meaningful civic role and in reducing inequalities in access to education.
- **Expectations from students** for flexible modes and programmes of study, international experiences and new forms of virtual mobility, skills development, engagement with employers and international partners, recognition from professional bodies, and values-led education that contributes to a sustainable and fulfilling future.
- The **requirement for Universities to adapt** to new forms of, and routes through learning such as growth in articulation and partnership routes, international developments that augment opportunities for physical and virtual mobility, and to emerging forms of academic credit such as micro-credentials and stackable degrees.

### [Building on our Response to the Pandemic](#)

The development of this strategy began pre-Covid. Commitment to the strategy at the start of 2021, is built on the fact that the University has already made substantial changes in approach to learning and teaching in our response to the pandemic. From April 2020, University guidance on approaches to learning design for blended and online learning has been created with these strategy pillars in mind. As such, the response made by staff and students across the University community has accelerated engagement with this strategy even before it was fully articulated, and these efforts have served as a huge catalyst for change already. The considerable gains in creating online resources, and in developing engaging online teaching, place us in a strong position to realise much of what follows and to continue to benefit from the considerable investments that staff have made in changing teaching practice to respond to the impact of the pandemic. Whilst the pandemic has propelled us to teach mainly online, **the University remains committed to an excellent, on-campus experience for students that realises the educational benefits of a blended approach to learning. There is opportunity during 2021 in particular whilst still teaching online, to evaluate the desired future blend of online and on-campus learning for students, decide how to make the best use of on-campus time, interactions, and spaces, and explore the potential for opening up opportunities for more online learning within on-campus programmes and further development of fully online degrees.** This strategy is designed to support ongoing investment in and development of this full range of provision in a way that acknowledges and supports students and staff in making these changes.

## Three Core Strategy Pillars

There are three core pillars to the strategy: (1) Evolving our approach to teaching and learning towards student-centred, active learning; (2) transforming curricula and assessment; and (3) professional and skills developments for students. Each pillar builds on foundations laid in the 2015-2020 learning and teaching strategy and provides focus for students and staff.

### 1. Evolving our Approach to Learning and Teaching: towards Student-Centred, Active Learning

There is a significant body of evidence that points to the positive impact of student-centred, active learning approaches on student engagement, retention and attainment. This requires a move away from a focus on the teacher, to a more distributed learning approach. Active learning approaches are supported by a blended approach to learning, that is, the “thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004, p.96-7). Blended approaches “use multiple methods to deliver learning combining face-to-face interactions with online activities...The flexibility inherent in this form of delivery enables teachers to rethink where and how they focus learning activity and students to develop self-directed learning skills and digital literacies” ([Advance HE, 2020](#)).

We will **promote, encourage and enable more pervasive engagement with student-centred active learning approaches**

Building on our existing commitment and practice in this approach, we will **promote, encourage and enable more pervasive engagement with student-centred active learning approaches**, which involves:

- Redesigning teaching so that students can engage more deeply in their learning of the discipline during contact time, through interacting with their peers and with staff and focusing on developing understanding.
- Maximising the benefits of learning technologies to create blended approaches that focus students more fully on understanding and engagement with material during class time for example, through exploring areas of uncertainty in the topic, engaging with feedback and identifying and creating learning resources.
- Taking a team approach to course design and delivery, involving more diverse staff inputs. This may include disciplinary, technical, administrative and skills development expertise to support active learning and increased student self- and peer-assessment.
- Creating interdisciplinary teaching teams that can support team-based learning where appropriate.
- Redesigning summative and formative assessment with both more readily taking place during classes and connecting to real world challenges as we transform the curriculum.
- Designing in opportunities for students to develop both responsibility for their own learning and the collaborative skills that are essential in group work and team learning and in extra-curricular activities such as volunteering, societies, employment and competitions.
- Enabling students to connect with their peers and develop the relationships that are essential to enabling wellbeing and retention.

We have a particular opportunity during the pandemic, having moved almost fully online, to take the opportunity to re-think how we use face-to-face time and spaces more creatively after the pandemic, to support active and blended learning.

## 2. Transforming curricula and assessment

Knowledge and received wisdom in many areas is changing rapidly. Students have access to resources that can render course content out-of-date more quickly than in the past, and big data is changing approaches to science and understanding societies. These changes need to be reflected in the programmes we offer. The research-intensive nature of the University provides significant opportunities for us to enable students to undertake research, create new knowledge, develop critical enquiry skills, engage with emerging research, and inspire creativity in problem solving. This is a foundational element of our research-led provision and we have well regarded programmes valued by students and by external and professional bodies. The rapidly changing external environment is, however, creating a greater impetus than ever, to **transform curricula and assessment in ways that draw on disciplinary knowledge to address the societal challenges that we face globally, reflect our values of inclusivity, wellbeing and sustainability, draw on best practice in teaching and assessment, and embed work-related, professionally recognised learning opportunities for students.** It is important, therefore, that we **reposition and reshape our programmes in order that they:**

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- Explicitly position what we do in relation to real-world challenges, drawing on research in the discipline, and connecting with the value-based commitments of the University in relation to sustainability, civic engagement, global challenges and the United Nations sustainable development goals.
- Embed approaches to programme and assessment design that foster creativity amongst students, promote problem-solving approaches, expand opportunities for knowledge creation, research and innovation and enhance students' self-evaluation skills and confidence.
- Reflect our values of inclusivity, wellbeing, integrity and respect in our learning and curriculum design through decolonising the curriculum, embedding our Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy and engaging in student-staff partnerships to facilitate co-creation.
- Articulate a programmatic approach to assessment and learning – clarifying where learning builds on prior study, how assessment operates across core courses, and where key discipline-specific and transferrable skills are developed and demonstrated.
- Ensure work-related learning opportunities for students, regular engagement with employers and increased provision of opportunities for student enterprise and student led activities that support engagement with practice.
- Enable meaningful flexibility so that students can undertake relevant courses in other disciplines, engage in interdisciplinary learning and projects and/or professional development courses for credit.
- Ease transition to study through routes of entry that support part-time workplace learners, articulation from Further Education and Foundation pathways, Transnational Education (TNE) relationships, international partnerships, virtual mobility study and new forms of collaborative partnership provision.

## 3. Professional and Skills Developments for Students

We are committed to a University experience in which students fulfil their academic potential. We will **work in partnership with students to support their development as flexible and adaptable**

**graduates who can work effectively with others to bring disciplinary skills and knowledge together to form creative solutions to complex world problems.** This presents two aspects of skills development: (1) depth of disciplinary knowledge and skills associated with their degree and relevant professional accreditation and (2) graduate attributes, dispositions and skills that facilitate success during study and post-graduation, including progression within a research career.

Building on the proposals for curriculum transformation are opportunities to create **short, stand-alone academic courses for all students**, irrespective of discipline, to develop insights and skills in aspects such as data literacy, numerical and statistical analysis, computation, philosophy of science, climate justice, racial equality, inter-cultural communications, enterprise, design thinking and science communication. Such courses can both enhance and augment disciplinary expertise, helping to develop relevant and related academic insights and skills, and could be taken for credit or for development.

In addition, there is a need to focus on students' **professional and academic development** through

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a focus on academic integrity, inclusive behaviours on campus and online, understanding of unconscious bias, group working, digital literacy and active learning, building these into student learning development, formal curricula and extended student induction.

There will also be an agreed programme of work in partnership with students through which we:

- Raise awareness of the importance of professional and academic skills development.
- Develop a greater understanding of the Graduate Attributes Framework amongst students.
- Create a portable portfolio tool or equivalent means through which students can articulate, demonstrate and then share evidence of their achievements across their academic study and alongside volunteering, internships, study abroad and exchange, and other related activities.
- Increase availability of and recognition for student focused CPD.
- Review and refresh the areas of short-course provision in light of employer feedback, engagement with students on internships and work placements, and industry analyses of skills gaps.

## Strategy Enablers

Achieving the ambitions outlined above in a way that benefits all students, will cause us to continue to challenge existing practices and refresh course offerings, and to consolidate and embed many of the excellent learning and teaching developments that exist across the University but that presently remain within pockets resulting in a 'patchy' approach. Reflecting the value placed upon working in partnership, the **strategy is best enabled through collaboration** within the University - across University Services', College, School, Institute and Subject teams – and with our international partners who support joint provision and international experiences. These collaborations bring together academic and professional services colleagues, technicians, GTAs, tutors, demonstrators and associate staff from the professions. Such collaborations between staff combined with student-

staff partnerships, provide the network of communities through which to develop shared expectations of the learning and teaching experience, and to realise the strategy.

Other enablers include the continued development of appropriate analytics and insights to inform interventions to improve retention, investments to enhance learning, and to shape our approach to a more personalised student experience. Similarly, developments associated with the SMART campus project and investments in improving the assessment and feedback systems and processes and enhancing the IT and physical infrastructure continue and remain fundamental to realising the strategy. However, there are four further key enablers that are of particular significance.

### Learning Environments & Infrastructure

There has been significant investment in our physical and digital infrastructure in recent years, with further investment planned. In order for students and staff to benefit fully from these investments, we will:

- Prioritise the development of, and ongoing investment in, teaching spaces and the digital infrastructure in order to create and maintain excellent and inclusive physical and digital spaces, building on the presumption that all spaces should facilitate collaboration.
- Continue to develop a more integrated approach to teaching and assessment technologies focusing on interoperability, consistency of experience, and sustained centralised support.
- Engage in further system developments to support curriculum mapping and curriculum change.
- Ensure that student and staff professional development opportunities and upskilling relate directly to making the best educational use of existing and new physical and digital learning environments and solutions.

### Staff Support and Development

Staff support and professional development is an important aspect of implementing the transformational changes envisaged in this strategy. As the response during the pandemic has shown, engagement in educational development and the roll out of staff support and upskilling, particularly in the use of technology, are key determinants of supporting changing practices. Whilst there has been considerable change in our approach to teaching because of the pandemic, there has not been the time to design our online and blended provision as we would under other circumstances. The transformations envisaged here, need to be pedagogically led not technology led. It remains important, therefore, when revisioning our future teaching, to create time and capacity to engage in evaluating what we have achieved and in renewing our focus on learning and assessment design. In order to support the implementation of this strategy, we will:

- Prioritise the creation and timely sharing of resources and guidance that set out the evidence base for changes in learning and teaching practice.
- Create opportunities for reflection on, and coordinated evaluations of, our own learning and teaching practice, in keeping with the University's commitment to enhancement of learning and teaching, and to scholarship of learning and teaching.
- Develop further support and guidance for staff engaged in scholarship of learning and teaching in order to evaluate and enhance our developments and to engage in informed, evidence-based dialogues with professional bodies about future educational approaches.



- Collaborate to review and develop support for all staff involved in teaching and supporting teaching and learning, and in particular ensure enhanced, funded support and development for GTAs.
- Agree with Schools and Institutes, models of staff engagement and devolved leadership to undertake changes envisaged in the strategy, ensuring appropriate resourcing, staff development opportunities and support for collaboration with employers and international partners.

### Consolidation of Online and Blended Learning Design and Technology Support and Expertise

Many of the developments outlined here can only be achieved through expanded and harmonised support for blended and online learning both in terms of learning design and learning technology expertise. There is, therefore, the opportunity and need to build on experiences during the pandemic and to invest appropriately in the support for ongoing transformation of our approach. As such, we will:

- Consolidate central learning design and learning technology support, ensuring widespread awareness of sources of expertise amongst central teams such as Information Services and Academic and Digital Development and to communicate and demonstrate how this expertise might be more easily accessed and drawn upon locally.
- Draw on the disciplinary, educational and technical expertise and experience across the University community to inform, engage with, and evaluate learning developments and technology adoption.
- Raise awareness of existing teaching and learning approaches, maximising the benefits of existing investments and allowing more comparative evaluation of approaches of how learning technologies enhance learning and teaching.
- Innovate, pilot and evaluate new educational approaches and supporting technologies, ensuring that new approaches integrate with existing digital infrastructures and support is provided.
- Enable more rapid and integrated diffusion of innovation throughout the University in order to increase engagement with MOOCs, micro-credentials, blended and fully online learning.
- Develop communications and decision-making processes that ensure that educational objectives determine investments in, and evaluation of, technologies and software solutions.
- Review and develop support for and within academic areas that is necessary to enable the student and staff developments and activities outlined in this strategy, particularly in relation to blended and online teaching.

### Enhanced Support for Enterprise and Student-Led Activities

Student-led activities play an important part in the student experience overall, as well as in supporting personal and skills development. Many student societies associated with academic programmes undertake a range of activity, but support for such work is not systemic or sustained. In the same vein, student competitions which often support mobility and interdisciplinarity, can only be afforded by some student communities and not others. As a result, not all students have equivalent opportunities to benefit from the benefits of academic-related or extra-curricular student activities<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This is distinct from the funding of the Student Bodies (GUSA, GUU, QMU and the SRC).



Student enterprise is also a key platform for many students across the University to develop not only their own businesses, but also an entrepreneurial mindset that will stimulate innovation, build confidence, and support contributions within a range of public sector, NGO, academic, social enterprise and other settings. We therefore need to:

- Expand student enterprise provision where it both supports new business start-ups, and allows all students to engage in enterprise education should they wish.
- Further develop incubator and accelerator programmes and resources.
- Create sustainable funding arrangements to support and grow student-led activities that build extra-curricular opportunities relating to programmes of study.