University of Nottingham Strategy Green Paper: Teaching and Learning

Submission from Teaching & Learning Committee

Introduction

This submission is based on a strategy workshop conducted by Teaching & Learning Committee in December 2018 and a subsequent discussion at a meeting of the committee in April 2019.

The overall view of the committee as expressed in its April meeting was a need for the strategy to recognise the importance of ensuring that the fundamental quality of our educational provision is maintained and enhanced. This objective needs to be given priority over innovations and transformative changes; however beneficial and desired these might also be. Only when we can be assured that our students are consistently receiving sufficient enthusiastic, committed and informed teaching and support; have available to them the printed and digital materials they need for their studies; and are learning and studying in spaces that are all fit for purpose can we fully turn our attention to embracing cutting-edge technologies and novel educational practices.

Much of this is about improving the status and recognition of teaching within the University and having appropriate rewards and incentives for staff engaging heavily in teaching and excelling at it. The committee clearly felt that there was still much to be done in these regards.

Below are suggestions arising from the committee with regard to each of the consultation questions in the Green Paper.

Staff have suggested that the University should aim to be at the forefront of innovation in curriculum design, learning, teaching and assessment. What developments should we prioritise?

Curriculum Design

- Undertake further reviews of the curriculum portfolio in schools, faculties and across the University, with a particular view to reducing the number of specialised programmes and introducing new interdisciplinary programmes.

- Increase substantially the University's online provision – in terms of more Masters programmes for distance learning students, new online CPD offerings, and a greater proportion of online content (as part of blended learning) for campus-based students.

- Introduce a range of new degree apprenticeship programmes in response to employer demand. These may either be new programmes or modified delivery of existing programmes to apprentices.

- Examine opportunities for expanding year-round provision (based on the experience with the Vet School dual-intake approach); this could include vocational summer schools, CPD, and the award of micro-credentials as well as delivering degree programmes on a non-standard pattern.

- Review existing degree programmes and modules to ensure that their content appropriately reflects and values the diversity of the student population and the diversity of world cultures.

- Create a better match between student preferences and the range of module options available, both to increase student satisfaction and manage staff workloads more effectively.

Learning/Teaching

- Reinforce the provision of academic development support (e.g. acquisition of effective study practices and behaviours) to students.

- Ensure there is a sufficient range of good-quality spaces for different teaching needs and that these spaces are effectively governed, drawing heavily on user experience.

- Encourage and support the use of digital materials, techniques and facilities within blended learning.

- Ensure that good academic practice is being fully disseminated and adopted.

- Put in place frameworks for expanding peer-to-peer learning.

- Prioritise initiatives to reduce the administrative burden on academic staff so as to free time for contact with students

- Set an aspiration to become a paperless university, with TLC continuing to support the roadmap for e-management of coursework, online exams, paperless labs etc.

Assessment

- Undertake reviews of assessment in individual programmes to ensure that the volume of assessment is the minimum necessary to test key learning outcomes.

- Make better use of curriculum mapping software and curriculum design expertise to support programme-level assessment.

- Increase the transparency and specificity of marking criteria so as to improve feedback and bolster student confidence in marking fairness.

- Encourage and support the effective use of e-assessment and feedback.

- Increase the use of work-based and placement-based assessments where appropriate.

- Make greater use of peer assessment as a learning tool and to improve assessment literacy.

- Develop guidance on assessment design that reduces opportunities or temptations for students to engage in academic misconduct.

How should we create stronger connections between the University's research and teaching?

- Reinforce the status and recognition of teaching; and its weighting in recruitment, promotion, and reward decisions; so as to encourage the commitment of research-active staff to their teaching responsibilities.

- When allocating internal research funds, build in a requirement to explain how the research undertaken will feature in or support teaching.

- Arrange for the pairing of academic staff who respectively have a strong research presence and a strong teaching focus in the same discipline.

- Encourage the use of problem-based learning as a means of allowing students to engage with the research in the area they are studying.

- Increase the opportunities for undergraduate students to engage in research; either as a core or optional part of their degree programme or through participation in their school's research activities and events.

What change do you think would have the most impact on the teaching and learning experience of University of Nottingham students?

Student Engagement

- Identify and implement measures designed to close the degree classification attainment gap for certain groups of students e.g. by diversifying academic staff recruitment and providing training for staff on classroom behaviours.

- Ensure that the support available to postgraduate students and their opportunities for engagement are on a level with undergraduates.

- Actively involve students in programme reviews and revisions of programme and module content.

- Increase opportunities for celebrating student success.

- Review student evaluation mechanisms (e.g. SET/SEM) to ensure they support positive engagement.

- Ensure that the feedback loop is always closed when student views are sought and recorded.

- Work with the Students' Union on strengthening student representation and providing better briefing for student representatives.

- Engage our Alumni in curriculum development, mentoring/coaching and professional/digital competencies work by partnering with CARO to develop Faculty-level strategies.

- Proactively publish data relating to teaching and learning (e.g. attendance, retention, progression) as a way of driving change and demonstrating accountability.

Transitions

- Strengthen induction to higher education activities for students, particularly those from a widening participation background.

- Develop routine engagement with secondary schools/colleges to deepen understanding of students' prior experience and transition challenges.

- Ensure that all teaching and learning activities are geared to supporting student well-being.

- Continue to embed professional competencies in programmes and modules.

- Identify and implement measures designed to close the employment outcomes attainment gap for certain groups of students.

- Review processes and practices around teaching and learning (e.g. concerning extenuating circumstances) to ensure they appropriately prepare students for the realities of the workplace.

Systems and Environment

- Invest in improvements to the physical libraries and their stock of printed and digital learning materials.

- Continue to enhance systems and processes for creating and communicating the teaching timetable.

- Ensure that adequate study and social/communal spaces feature in developments of the University's estate.

- Explore how learner analytics can be used to support student continuation and success.

- Ensure welfare teams are appropriately resourced and enabled to work proactively with schools to provide appropriate and timely support for students.

- Prioritise ease and convenience of use for academic staff and students in undertaking system developments so as maximise time available for teaching and study.

- Make appropriate use of a Bring Your Own Device approach to facilitate digital learning and assessment.