

# University of Cambridge Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2009-12

## 1. Purpose of the strategy

This sets out University-wide priorities in learning and teaching for 2009-12. The General Board's Education Committee will annually review this strategy, taking account of other University strategies (e.g. Widening Participation, Continuing Personal and Professional Development, International Students, Estates, and Equality and Diversity) which bear on teaching and learning. This strategy will also be reviewed and, as necessary, updated in light of the outcomes of the annual planning rounds with the Schools (and other institutions whose provision affects teaching and learning), and, at need, amended in light of the University's financial position.

The General Board will agree and periodically review an action plan (as proposed by their Education Committee) consistent with this strategy which will set out objectives, priorities, timescales, the bodies responsible for particular activities, and any resource implications.

## 2. Strategic aims

The University's strategic aims in learning and teaching are to:

- continue to provide a stimulating educational environment;
- attract and support outstanding students from the UK and overseas;
- maintain, within the resources available and paying due heed to student demand, the widest range of courses, including 'minority' and strategically important subjects, in disciplines where there is a critical mass of research-active staff;
- develop knowledge and skills which are relevant at all stages of each student's career and which equip students to continue to learn throughout life;
- produce graduates who are the future leaders in their field.

In support of these aims the University will, within the resources available and in partnership with the Colleges:

- maintain the standard of its degrees and other qualifications at the highest internationally competitive level;
- through faculties and departments, continue to engage with relevant professional and regulatory bodies;
- maintain and enhance the quality of student learning opportunities;
- support students in reaching their full potential both academically and in extra-curricular activity;
- promote the principle of students taking responsibility for their own learning; and
- maintain the primacy of small group teaching.

## 3. Context

These aims are firmly grounded in an institution where, for the majority of programmes, students are required to be in residence and where:

- students and staff are of the highest calibre and from a diversity of backgrounds;
- student retention and standards of achievement are expected to remain outstanding;
- teaching is informed by research and carried out predominantly by those engaged in research at the highest levels;
- the supervision element of teaching is central;

- course content is, in the main, academically, rather than employer, driven;
- there is a significant level of local autonomy in the delivery of provision (the quality of which is assured by proportionate central mechanisms);
- students are, in the main, full-time but other modes of study are allowed within specific qualifications;
- support provided by both the Colleges and the University is an integral part of the student experience;
- the University's graduates are highly sought after by employers and other HEIs internationally; and
- the protection of the University's reputation and 'brand' is critical.

Care will continue to be given to the maintenance of standards within what is likely to be a reduced resource base, primarily through scrutiny of External Examiners' reports, local student feedback and the National Student Survey (NSS) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), Learning and Teaching Reviews, the annual monitoring process and the General Board's other internal quality assurance mechanisms.

#### **4. External factors**

Reviews of this strategy and the associated action plans will take account of:

- changes to pre-university curricula and forms of assessment;
- government policy (in areas such as widening participation, sustainability, and skills development);
- legislation bearing on teaching and learning;
- external regulation, policies and guidance (provided by bodies such as HEFCE, the Quality Assurance Agency, Research Councils, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies, the Office of Fair Access and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator); in particular the University will ensure that its provision is of a standard that can satisfy external scrutiny;
- competition from other HE providers in the UK and overseas; and
- the provisions of the Bologna Accord and other international influences.

#### **5. Undergraduate provision: the Tripos system**

The University will continue to offer an undergraduate education which encourages students to sample the breadth of a subject or cognate group of subjects before specialising, and also to promote mobility across Triposes.

Whilst no overall growth in undergraduate student numbers is planned, overall numbers and the balance between subjects will be agreed annually with the Colleges (through the Undergraduate Admissions Committee) and the Schools (through the Annual Planning Round).

During this period, the General Board, through their Education Committee, expect to pay particular attention to:

- the support of the supervision system by encouraging University Teaching Officers to contribute to supervisions and Direction of Studies;
- the need to make academic expectations clear to students at the application stage and during their studies through clear information about workloads, development of study and examination skills, and marking criteria;

- the school-university transition and skills development (through Widening Participation activities and the outcomes of the TranSkills project);
- means of encouraging course sharing and paper borrowing as a way to promote interdisciplinarity and of minimising unnecessary duplication of provision across Triposes; and
- encouraging and rewarding teaching innovation and excellence through individual initiatives and the career structure.

## **6. Postgraduate provision: general**

The General Board, with the Board of Graduate Studies (BGS), will give particular attention to postgraduate matters during the period, so as to maintain the University's international reputation in this area and to sharpen up its competitiveness (especially in attracting PhD students).

In response to the annual planning round, the Postgraduate Admissions Committee will manage numbers in association with the Colleges. Further steps will be taken to improve the effectiveness of the University's admissions procedures with particular attention to increased funding opportunities, earlier funding and college placement decisions, and the distribution of particular categories of postgraduate students across the Colleges.

The BGS will, as one means of maintaining the quality of supervision and embedding what can reasonably be expected by and of graduate students, monitor the effectiveness of, and compliance with, its Code of Practice. That Code sets out the specific responsibilities of the student, the supervisor and other parties with particular graduate student responsibilities in each University institution. The BGS will require more frequent reporting by graduate supervisors. It will identify the most effective forms of student support and of securing and acting on feedback (particularly in relation to international students), and will determine University-wide means of measuring student satisfaction (through PRES and other means) and of addressing generic issues which arise from student surveys.

The BGS will also identify means of better engagement with each of the Research Councils so as to maximise the opportunities available and to put the University in a stronger position to be able to respond quickly and effectively to changing Research Council policies.

## **7. Postgraduate provision: Masters courses**

The General Board, through the Education Committee and Board of Graduate Studies, will develop a framework to ensure greater consistency in the level of the University's Masters courses and compliance with European frameworks. In particular, the General Board, with the Board of Graduate Studies, will encourage the conversion of courses which are explicitly tailored towards preparation for a PhD degree from MPhil to MRes programmes.

Steps will be taken to ensure that what students may reasonably expect of their course and what is expected of them is made more explicit at the outset.

The BGS will keep under review the number and range of MPhil courses, paying particular attention to the financial viability of courses attracting small numbers of students.

Increased fee differentials amongst Masters courses are envisaged, with more programmes charging 'premium' fees to reflect costs and the market. The quality of these particular courses will be subject to monitoring through External Examiner reports, Learning and Teaching Reviews and destination data.

The Board will continue to monitor the actual and potential impact on the University's Masters degrees of the 'Bologna' Accord, by contact with UUK's Europe Unit, through

departmental contact with professional bodies and by monitoring the destination data for those graduates.

## **8. Postgraduate provision: the PhD**

In addition to rolling out the MRes (see para 7), the General Board will identify better means of embedding generic skills training of postgraduates. Working with the Senior Tutors' Committee, the Board will develop guidelines to ensure that all graduate students who wish to supervise undergraduates are given appropriate training. The training of PhD supervisors will be further encouraged in collaboration with the Centre for Personal and Professional Development (CPPD).

The BGS will seek to improve PhD submission and completion rates both to meet Research Council requirements and to reinforce the University's position in the REF. PhD numbers across subjects will be reviewed, and efforts will be made to increase home student PhD numbers, without sacrificing quality, through improved funding opportunities.

The General Board will encourage all Schools to set up graduate schools, separately or in collaboration, and to appoint a Director of Graduate Education (or equivalent).

## **9. International policy**

The General Board will agree a protocol for international activity to assess opportunities, risks and benefits, and for identifying which types of activity require their approval. Any provision (award-bearing or other) offered in collaboration with another institution will need to meet the University's expectations for such arrangements, including compliance with the precepts in the QAA's Codes of Practice on collaborative provision and flexible distributed learning.

Ways will be found to ensure that students needing additional support with English language are identified as quickly as possible, and appropriate language teaching made available to them.

## **10. Lifelong learning and continuing professional development (CPD)**

The direction of travel for the Institute of Continuing Education (ICE), set out in the General Board's Strategic Review of 2008-09, will be pursued by the new ICE Strategic Committee. In particular, the General Board and the Institute's Strategic Committee will aim to improve the integration of ICE's activities with those of other University institutions and to ensure that the Institute's provision has actual or potential linkages with provision elsewhere in the University. Steps will be taken to ensure that the activities of the University's main Continuing Professional Development providers (ICE, the Judge Business School, the Institute for Manufacturing and the Cambridge Programme for Sustainability Leadership) are complementary. The potential for other institutions to become better engaged with CPD activity will be pursued.

## **11. Skills and personal development**

Skills training will focus on areas of demonstrable student need and demand.

The General Board will aim, in collaboration with the Colleges, to ensure that students are adequately supported to: make the most of what Cambridge has to offer, and to develop the necessary skills for life, and to continue to generate graduates of the University who are sought after by employers and Higher Education Institutions world-wide.

The General Board will aim to facilitate the transition from school to University through targeted activities within its widening participation activities and through rolling out the outcomes of the TranSkills project. The Skills website will be monitored for usage and developed in the light of user feedback. Stock will be taken of the uptake of the University's and the Colleges' initiatives in student personal development planning, including the Springboard and Navigator programmes, to assess the future level of investment in these activities. Within the resources available, the General Board will continue to support non-specialist language learning opportunities, with the award, as appropriate, of diplomas and certificates to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The development of further student mobility schemes beyond those which already exist will be dependant on the University institutions concerned identifying the necessary resources. In any exchange arrangements, particular attention will be paid to the quality of the incoming students.

## **12. Communication and engagement**

The General Board will seek to develop improved methods of identifying and disseminating good practice to encourage enhancement of teaching and learning. Efforts will continue to engage the Education Section's departmental and faculty Quality Contacts and to promote and develop the Learning and Teaching Support (LTS) initiative. Information gathered through the Education Committee's new annual monitoring updates will be reviewed to identify areas for improvement and good practice. The Committee will annually analyse the outcomes of the National Student Survey and act on issues of concern.

School level involvement in educational matters will continue to be promoted, including encouraging the establishment of School Directors of Education and/or School Teaching and Learning Committees. The General Board will establish, and agree detailed terms of reference for, the Teaching and Learning Services Steering Group, as recommended in the General Board's review of teaching and learning support services (July 2008). The Steering Group will be a joint sub-committee of the Education Committee, determining policy, and the ISSS, setting IT strategy. It will include representatives from all stakeholders including users and suppliers and consideration will be given to how it interacts with other bodies, particularly the Education Committee.

The Education Committee will establish means of interacting with the Equality and Diversity Committee on matters affecting students, including Equality Impact Assessment reports.

The Education Section, working with CUSU and the GU, will develop ways of increasing student engagement and will continue to build relationships with, and to support, Faculty Board and Council of the School student representatives.

Projects intended to inform and enhance learning and teaching will, within the resources available, be endorsed by the Education Committee subject to the following criteria:

- The proposal should state either a clear set of hypotheses that will be investigated and the means by which they will be tested or a defined area for exploratory research and the associated protocols.
- Where relevant, the proposal should justify the statistical power associated with the sample size: conclusions should be statistically sound, otherwise systematic analysis must be demonstrated.
- If the justification for the proposal involves ongoing expenditure beyond the period of the grant, the source of that funding should be identified.

Confirmation must be given that (a) the final report will be submitted to the Education Committee in advance of submission to the project sponsors and (b) it must include an explanatory summary in a format meaningful in a committee context and with an indication of decisions or options arising from the project's conclusions.

In considering projects producing innovative technology/software the following additional criteria will be applied:

- The proposal should state the intended deliverables and associated beneficiaries.
- It should specify the means and evidence by which the effectiveness of the technology will be measured, including the statistical power.
- It should indicate the cost and means by which the technology will be carried forward beyond the period of the grant, and how it is intended that these costs will be met.

The efficiency of the University's examination review and student complaints procedures will be kept under review. Generic issues identified through particular cases (either internally or by the OIA) will be considered via annual reports to the Education Committee.

#### Management tools and information

The Teaching and Learning Services Steering Group will develop ways of enhancing the University's capability to analyse and act on data generated through CamSIS, CamCORS, CamGRAD, CamTOOLS and CamDATA.

The relevant bodies will review and enhance the value, for informing policies, of statutory annual reports for which they are responsible (including the Admissions and Student Numbers issues of *Reporter*, the annual report of the Board of Graduate Studies, and Examinations data). Links with the Careers Service will be strengthened to ensure that data on the employability of graduates are collected and analysed

Approved by the General Board on 4 November 2009