Academic Strategy 2017-2022

Purpose

1. We are founded on values, centred on students, focused on learning, and our Academic Strategy provides a framework and direction to ensure that we stay true to that mission. We will continue to be known for giving our students outstanding support to learn in a community which values them as individuals; a breadth and richness of experience which prepares them for rewarding lives and successful careers; and making an outstanding contribution to the wellbeing of Gloucestershire.

2. Through learning with us, we want our students to enrich their own lives and the lives of those around them. To achieve that we have set out the attributes we wish to develop in our Graduates. The development of those attributes requires an academically challenging and supportive environment, ensuring our students produce their very best work. Our student centred approach to learning, guides students carefully in their independent study, ensuring that when they come together as a group with a tutor during scheduled contact time, the environment and the learning techniques allow sharing, dialogue and full interaction. Each student has a personal tutor, a critical component in monitoring their progress and providing support and encouragement through their learning journey. Our Academic Strategy provides the framework that each subject community works within to achieve our mission.

3. We will continue to respond to emerging developments in the sector, notably the implementation of the Higher Education and Research Act and the continuing evolution of the Teaching Excellence Framework, whilst also providing clarity about the developments most necessary to ensure our own strategic goals are achieved. Those goals are fundamentally about the learning opportunities and environment for our students, recognising that a critical part of that environment is excellent teachers and those providing professional services. The environment also extends beyond the University, with the local community an increasingly important aspect of the learning environment, and a component of our wider civic responsibilities as an anchor institution.

4. The overall approach to improvement is vital in an environment where Higher Education's value is being challenged. The final Ambition in this strategy is an enabling one, setting out the focus of our whole system approach to improvement. Our approach recognises fully the importance of students as co-creators of the environment they learn in. We will continue to work in partnership with the Students' Union, building on our excellent progress in this area through the Rethinking Enhancement initiative.

5. There are many areas that ultimately contribute to the experiences our students have, but the focus of this strategy is providing Academic direction. It is supported by several other strategies that ensure the environment and opportunities for students and staff are of excellent quality, and makes reference to those strategies where necessary. The Academic Strategy is important, partly because it is more than the sum of a strategy about teaching & learning and research & practice. The Teaching Excellence & Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) exemplifies the important synergies between the main components of our academic endeavour. Ultimately, student learning is greatest in an environment that recognises those synergies across areas of our academic practice. The delivery of the Academic Strategy involves all staff, and our achievements to date are a credit to the efforts of all staff.

Goals

6. The Strategic Plan (2017-22) outlines our Goals for the next five years as follows:

   i. Goal 1: To provide a breadth and richness of experience that enables all our students to reach their full potential;
   ii. Goal 2: To provide teaching and support for learning of the highest quality;
   iii. Goal 3: To undertake research and professional practice which enrich students' learning and create impact and benefit for others;
   iv. Goal 4: To build partnerships which create opportunity, innovation and mutual benefit for the communities we serve

7. The Strategic Plan also identified the attributes we expect a Gloucestershire Graduate to have: Engaged; Enquiring; Empowered; Empathetic; Ethical. As articulated in the Strategic Plan, transformation is a deliberate function of our University learning communities, which engender belonging, embed passion for learning and foster subject expertise. Learning communities model ethical leadership, form a bridge between our local and global worlds, and provide the structure, trust and security that support the development of social and cultural capital. The implementation of the Academic Strategy will promote the expected attributes for each of our graduates. There is also a fundamentally important association between many aspects of our Academic Strategy and the Sustainability Strategy, with many of the priorities and actions mutually reinforcing. The Graduate Attributes, and the impact our graduates will make, is an excellent and central example of this association.

Progress and Consultation

8. The previous Academic Strategy was implemented for three years (2014-17). Good progress was made in implementation, and full updates are received annually by Academic Board. Of particular note is the good performance in the recruitment of students within a competitive environment, the development of subject communities, the continued refresh of our portfolio of courses, the launch and implementation of Your Future Plan, the good teaching performance as assessed through the Teaching Excellence & Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), the good research performance as assessed through the Research Excellence Framework (REF), and the focus on enhancement through the Rethinking Enhancement initiative. We recognise that there is more we need to do in terms of growth of student numbers, the evolution to support the way our students will choose to learn, and the development of the learning environment to make best use of our new knowledge and knowledge exchange work, and the opportunities for students as key contributors and beneficiaries within that exciting environment.

9. With the new Strategic Plan in place, it is now time to consider how the Academic Strategy should evolve in light of the strategic goals we have set ourselves for the next five years (2017-22). We have consulted widely on the Academic Strategy for the next five years, building on a stimulus paper taken to Academic Board in 2017, with further discussions at Academic Affairs Committee, Research Committee, and within Schools and some Professional departments. We also invited members of Council to a special meeting to discuss the emerging strategy. Those discussions have also been supplemented with inputs through a consultation email address launched through Staff News in the autumn term. We are grateful to all colleagues, students and others who have take the time to provide inputs and feedback. In making continued good progress in implementation, it is important to recognise the role of all colleagues. Although we don't mention each of our academic Schools, their fundamental role in bringing the Academic Strategy to life is acknowledged at the outset, in terms of academic leadership and sustained high quality teaching, learning, assessment, practice and research, and the importance of academic services in supporting the work of each School.

Ambitions

10. In summary, our Academic Strategy will focus on the following four ambitions:

    i. **Developing Attractive and Competitive Subjects.** An ambition that reflects the importance of the concept of the Subject Community, our target for growth in student numbers, and the promotion of our graduate attributes, reflecting our commitment to an enriching experience for our students underpinned by the enabling 'Your Future Plan' initiative. This ambition also reflects the need for continuing evolution of our course portfolio (both UG and PG) to ensure it is up-to-date, professionally enriched, engaging for students, and viable in cohort size.

    ii. **Delivering Excellence in Learning & Teaching.** An ambition that reflects the importance of excellent learning opportunities and excellent teaching, recognising the emerging TEF assessment criteria and metrics, the ongoing Review of Assessment, the ongoing developments in Technology for Learning, and the role of teachers in building confidence and resilience within our students. This ambition requires continuous improvement of our pedagogy and the application of technology to support learning, along with increasing the active engagement of students in their own learning.

    iii. **Ensuring Impact through Research and Practice.** An ambition that reflects the importance of research and practice, and particularly the impact on learning opportunities and teaching, and also the impact of research on practice beyond academia, along with the rising importance of impact for the next REF exercise.

    iv. **Building an Engaging Approach to Enhancement.** An ambition that reflects the importance of a 'whole system' approach to continuously improving learning & teaching and research, and the culture change required to achieve that. In other words, this is an enabling ambition, helping us achieve the other three ambitions. The means to continuously improve our outcomes in terms of course viability, student attainment, student satisfaction, and our overall TEF and REF ratings is the primary focus for this ambition. We will build on the outcomes of the Rethinking Enhancement initiative, re-emphasising the embedded components, including the involvement of students as co-creators and the risk-based approach to prioritise effort and resources. We recognise the need to ensure that the processes and systems we have put in place through Rethinking Enhancement do deliver the underlying goal of promoting a new focus in all course teams on continuous improvement and innovation. With the enduring focus on individual course quality, we will also take deliberate steps to promote cross-school opportunities for students and staff.

11. The presentation of each ambition below should be supplemented by acknowledgement that there is considerable overlap across the ambitions. It is also important to acknowledge that the highlighted actions are the top level, top priority actions, and that many additional actions will be required over the coming years. Inevitably, the actions are also likely to evolve over time, as the wider sector changes and develops, and we consider the implications for the University of Gloucestershire.

12. Ambition One: **Developing Attractive and Competitive Subjects**

13. Attractive and Competitive Subjects are key to our success, and while courses will come and go over time, subjects will endure and ensure courses are never isolated and at risk from 'one deep' staffing models. Courses will also reside in a subject environment that has necessary resources, including expertise, space and equipment, engaging in all academic areas of business, including teaching, research and business development. Subjects provide a community that is attractive for prospective students and staff. The subjects will interpret and embed the graduate attributes, ensuring an enriching experience for students, and that employability is a key focus. To achieve that ambition, subjects must be of a critical size, and therefore growth of subjects is essential for our overall growth strategic goal. In the next phase of the Academic Strategy, the core aspects to drive development of our subjects are:

- Continuing investment in physical and virtual community to promote a sense of belonging and engagement for students and staff, including co-location, social learning space, fit for purpose teaching space, and technology enabled collaboration and communication.
- Consideration of the concept of a library within the context of each subject, and integrating plans with wider co-location and social learning space considerations.
- Growth in every subject, but strategically identifying the most appropriate growth opportunites, and recognising our education mission and position as an anchor institution. Continual alignment with the local economic needs and ensuring local progression pathways for students will form important components of our growth plans.
- Building on the 'Your Future Plan' initiative, continuing to provide opportunities for students beyond the formal course curriculum while seen as an integral part of the course, underpinned by our Graduate Attributes, and leading to excellent outcomes for our graduates as reflected in upper quartile outcomes in the Graduate Outcomes Survey.
- Ensuring that students see no distinction between course curriculum and wider co-curriculum opportunities, that students understand the value of engaging with both curricular and co-curricular activities, and that we communicate the 'course' in that broader sense effectively for students, driving overall student engagement and outcomes.
- Building on our Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) developments, ensuring that the benefits for students drive the next phase as a core aspect of the implementation of the Employability Strategy.
- Building partnerships internationally and domestically, built upon mutual subject aspirations, and of benefit for our students.

Action	Lead	Timeline
1.1 Continue to use subject communities as the driver for space developments on campus, co-locating where possible, while also recognising some facilities and equipment will be shared resources	DW	2018-2022
1.2 In addition to ongoing careful review of existing portfolio, undertake regular review, informed by robust market demand analysis, to identify significant growth areas and bring the new course developments to fruition	ROD & CS & DF	2018-2019

1.3 Continue to develop the plans for courses for those in employment, including significant growth in the portfolio of apprenticeships	SM	2018-2020
1.4 Consider where strategic partnerships might provide advantage to each subject community, particularly in light of the graduate attributes, Brexit and growth	ROD	2018-2022
1.5 Develop collaborative partnerships so that validated and franchised courses delivered through partners are of equivalent standard to UoG courses	MA	2018-2022

14. Ambition Two: **Delivering Excellence in Learning and Teaching**

15. Excellence in Learning & Teaching is fundamental to our success as a learning-led University. The expertise and development of our staff is at the heart of our approach, while focusing on those aspects that matter most to students. Particular focus will be placed on challenging and supporting students to ensure they produce their best work. This means keeping under continuous review how we strike the right balance in being supportive towards students and maximising their opportunities to succeed while still upholding academic rigour and challenge. We will also focus on technology for learning, assessment for learning, and that the curriculum supports the wider employability aspirations of each course. Our education for sustainability focus provides opportunities to innovate in line with our graduate attributes (the 5 Es). In the next phase of the Academic Strategy, the core areas to ensure we deliver excellence in learning and teaching are:

- Ensuring assessment practice is excellent, central to learning and fundamental to maintaining standards, and challenges students to produce their best work.
- Rapidly developing technology for learning, promoting engagement and student centred learning, where students are assisted to prepare for contact time through collaboration and drawing on excellent resources.
- Build on our successful Personal and Module Tutor arrangements, providing tutors with an enhanced tutor portal with enhanced data visualisation features, to assist their important work supporting students.
- As an explicit aspect of course learning and teaching approaches, ensure student wellbeing is considered as vital for optimal learning through deliberate building of student resilience and confidence.
- Supporting Academic Staff Development within the context of the implementation of transparent and clear Academic Career Pathways.
- Ensuring the qualifications and building the achievements of our teachers, recognising that the teaching aspects of the pathways is absolutely central to our success as a business.
- Ensure that the Teaching Pathway of the Academic Career Pathways promotes the most important aspects associated with excellent student learning opportunities, engagement and learning gain.
- Building on our ACE initiative, develop our classrooms and other learning spaces in support of our student centred learning approach.
- In an emerging TEF environment, ensure our data to support teaching, learning and assessment provides a versatile and agile context to respond well to this environment.
- Continually review degree outcomes over time, by subject and by student characteristics, as a core component of our overall approach to quality and standards.

Action	Lead	Timeline
2.1 Continue the Review of Assessment, ensuring every course has an assessment strategy that promotes learning and ensures standards are clear	AP	2018-2020
2.2 Building on technology for learning advances, ensuring student engagement requirements drive the future planned significant developments	DJ	2018-2020
2.3 Ensure student resilience and confidence is a feature of learning approaches in every course, supporting wider work on student wellbeing as a feature of Your Future Plan	SD & CF	2019-2021
2.4 Design and implement Academic Career Pathways, ensuring they bring clarity about our academic priorities, and promote and support the learning opportunities and environment for students	DJ & RD	2018-2020
2.5 Continue to invest in classrooms and other learning spaces in line with the developments needed to fully achieve our student centred learning approach; developing social learning spaces where possible to encourage independent and group learning by students	DJ	2018-2020
2.6 Review the University's minimum requirements for all years in all courses for contact hours and scheduled learning activities	MA	2017-2018
2.7 Provide tutors with a portal that builds on the current personal tutor portal, but integrates existing and new data, and provides enhanced functionality	DJ	2018-2020
2.8 Submit to the Teaching Excellence & Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) exercise with the aim of achieving a Gold rating	MA	2019-2020

16. Ambition Three: **Ensuring Impact through Research and Practice**

17. Impactful Research and Practice is fundamental to our mission, and is an important component in ensuring our student learning opportunities are of the highest quality. But in a teaching led University, we must select and prioritise carefully within the limits of what we can afford. We will continue to prioritise our 6 selected Research Priority Areas and our proposed 12 Units of Assessment for the next REF. We will identify and support those academic staff who have a credible prospect of submitting outputs of the required quality to the next REF, recognising that that will be a minority of staff. Through the work on academic career pathways, we intend to promote and value other contributions to supporting outstanding teaching and learning including excellent professional practice and business

development. Involving students in the development and application of knowledge can be a way to ensure a high quality learning environment.

18. Our targeted Units of Assessment for REF 2021 have been clearly identified for the past three years, aligning to the Research Priority Areas (RPAs) for the University, all with clear and accountable leadership, and a clear policy for quality requirements. We have now also begun aligning the Postgraduate Research (PGR) with the wider research priority areas, recognising that we need to better engage our PGR community with the wider research priorities and develop a stronger sense of community. We have improved the research data we hold, with complete clarity for Research Committee on the quality of published and accepted outputs, and the overall progress of each Unit of Assessment. All REF QR funding is targeted at the RPA level with complete transparency about the distribution model.

19. In the next phase of the Academic Strategy, to ensure impact through research and practice, we will:

- Continue the focus on outputs and their quality, and ensure those outputs are accessible and used to promote the excellence within the priority research areas.
- Increase the focus on the range and quality of impact case studies as a demonstration of the application of new knowledge in our priority research areas.
- Underpinned by high quality data, ensure the environment for research is strengthened in our priority research areas and the aligned Units of Assessment.
- As a key component of the environment, ensure all Units of Assessment deliver against their external funding targets, as a clear demonstration of the quality of the research.
- Continue to draw on our team of UoA External Advisors to ensure our outputs, impact and environment are internationally excellent and world leading in line with our (10*) quality policy for research.
- We are looking to further strengthen the working together of structural managers (Head of School and Academic Subject Leaders) with research leaders, ensuring that data on performance is shared and the quality of Staff Review & Development (SRD) conversations improve.
- Improve the clarity about research performance expectations at each level in the teaching & research and research academic career pathways, ensuring alignment with the core eligibility criteria for REF.
- Derive maximum benefits from knowledge exchange activity in areas of subject strength, within a context of HEIF and the wider industrial strategy.
- Form strategic partnerships drawing on mutual academic benefits, including international partnerships that span more than one subject area.

Action	Lead	Timeline
3.1 Continue to develop the research priority areas, ensuring clarity of aligned UoAs and mapping to subject communities, building our reputation and league table position through our selective investment	DJ	2018-2020
3.2 Increase the quality of research outputs, building a critical mass of 3*/4* in every UoA	DJ	2018-2020
3.3 Ensure sufficient 3*/4* quality impact case studies in every UoA, and develop impact work to ensure it becomes business as usual in every School, and the leading aspect of our knowledge exchange work	DJ	2018-2020

3.4 Ensure the features of research environment, such as equality work and the metrics of income and doctoral completions are strengthened in every UoA	DJ	2018-2020
3.5 Build greater alignment between Postgraduate Research and the priority research areas, ensuring all PGR students rate positively the communities they join, leading to improved PRES satisfaction rates	RJ	2018-2020
3.6 To ensure best use of our supervision resource, improve significantly the proportion of initially enrolling PGR students who successfully complete	RJ	2018-2020
3.7 Ensure every Staff Review and Development discussion is clear on whether the delivery of REF-able research outputs is an agreed objective; and if not, what contribution each person will make, over and above core teaching roles, to a rich and broad experience for all students	DJ	2018-2020
3.8 Develop the bidding and post award support for external research income as part of the broader business development support, to ensure research income targets are met	GJ	2018-2020
3.9 Submit to REF, with the aim of achieving all output and impact at International quality or World leading quality (i.e., 3*/4*)	DJ	2020

20. Ambition Four: **Building an Engaging Approach to Enhancement**

21. Our enhancement work to ensure we implement in full the Academic Strategy will build on the fundamental cultural change initiative called 'Rethinking Enhancement'. The recognition of Schools as the principal provider units, has been coupled with an empowered approach to quality. The rebalancing of assurance and enhancement, the risk based approach, and the simplification of governance have all ensured that quality assurance is streamlined and more effective. We must be agile and responsive, based on a whole system approach of feedback and improvement. A cornerstone of the enhancement focus is the recognition that it depends on co-creation with students as partners. This requires a high level of engagement from students as well as our academic colleagues. This extends far beyond representation models, requiring an enduring partnership way of working. The pillars of our new quality framework are a six yearly (periodic) review of the provider unit, annual course enhancement review, continuous reflections and actions at the course level, and a risk based standing panel for validation and modification to courses. This is a pioneering approach that is gaining interest in the sector, and requires ongoing cultural shifts. The direction of travel is in line with the national context for Quality Assessment in England. The shifts we have already made position us well for TEF into the future.

22. In the next phase of the Academic Strategy, to build an engaging approach to enhancement, our focus will be:

- Strengthening and deepening our partnership with students as fully engaged co-creators, recognising fully their place in our enhancement led environment, and working closely with the Students' Union to support this.
- To ensure our courses maintain a focus on the graduate attibutes, and the skills employers deem most important, find further ways to engage potential employers within our enhancement framework.
- As we move into the next phase, following Rethinking Enhancement, there is more work to do in embedding and reviewing the new approach, and particularly supporting Schools in their responsibilities in this area.
- The development of ASLs and ACLs will be within this cultural context, ensuring their development as our academic leaders is grounded in the real challenges at any point in time, and reflecting feedback through the staff survey.
- The reflections and actions on a continuous basis should involve students to a greater extent, and the course specific arrangements for that involvement will remain an important focus.
- The new dashboard side of the course portal has received positive reviews, and this approach to data provision is a useful template for further data improvement projects (e.g., tutor portal) as part of the data improvement plan.
- The ongoing development of a whole system approach to enhancement, delivering continuous improvement, and minimising the risk of oscillations in performance at a course level.
- Supplementation of our student satisfaction annual surveys with real time feedback from students, through our simple online feedback tool called 'SimOn', on areas of strength and areas for improvements, with a genuine partnership approach to progressing responses to the feedback.
- Recognise the importance of partnerships internally and externally in an enhancement framework, including potential employers, subject associations, professional bodies, those representing local workforce and economic needs, and the local, regional and international partners providing educational pathways.

Action	Lead	Timeline
4.1 Develop the components of our whole system approach to academic enhancement, including the development of the technology to ensure those leading have sight of early indicators	DJ & AP	2018-2020
4.2 Promote the ongoing development and use of the course portal to achieve the goal of continuous focus by course teams on enhancement and innovation	DJ & MA	2018-2022
4.3 Review progress with the implementation of Rethinking Enhancement	MA	2018
4.4 Ensure our excellent support for students is matched with academic challenge and personalised learning, providing an overall environment where students are expected to produce their best work	DJ	2018-2022
4.5 Through annual School Enhancement Plans, ensure there is a prioritised, agreed agenda for pursuing enhancement in each School	AP	Ongoing

4.6 As a critical component of the feedback from students, ensure our arrangements for student surveys are streamlined and effective	AP	Ongoing
4.7 Ensure our own whole system approach to enhancement is aligned with the external requirements of HESA data futures and broader sector data and reporting requirements	DJ	2018-2020
4.8 Implement Academic Career Pathways as a central component of our overall approach to enhancement, ensuring learning opportunities and the learning environment for students are top priorities in what we promote, support and review as valued and recognised contributions over and above core teaching.	RD	2018-2020
4.9 Building on our partnership with the SU, extend and deepen the co-creation work as a cornerstone of our enhancement work	AP	Ongoing
4.10 Ensure our educational partners are aligned with our whole system approach to quality enhancement and assurance, and supported to set expectations within their own organisations.	AC	Ongoing

Key Performance Indicators

23. We will draw on indicators of academic performance that align with TEF & REF, and our other statutory reports. These indicators comprise:

   a. Student enrolments (new and returning)
   b. TEF outcome as a whole, plus
      i. Student Survey (NSS, PTES, PRES, ACE, ISB) outcomes
      ii. Graduate Outcomes (DLHE, LEO)
      iii. Engagement metrics as known determinants of learning gain
      iv. Contact time metrics
      v. Degree classification outcomes
      vi. Staff teaching qualifications and fellowships
   c. Volume and pattern of reflections and actions in the course portal
   d. REF outcome as a whole, plus
      i. Output profile
      ii. Impact profile
      iii. Environment profile
      iv. Research income and pipeline
      v. PGR student enrolments and completions
      vi. Number of UoA submissions
   e. Professional Body accreditations and endorsements
   f. Pattern of promotions through each of the three academic career pathways
   g. Appeals & Complaints