Learning and Teaching at the University of Sheffield 2016-2021
1. Vision

As outlined within the Our Education and Student Experience section of the University's Strategic Plan we want to offer the highest quality education and student experience. In so doing, we aim to enhance our reputation as an inspiring, engaged, research-led institution committed to supporting the development of our staff and students. This is underpinned by remaining true to our commitment to ethical responsible education for all, ensuring that our civic values are reflected through our partnerships and education beyond the University, in Sheffield, the wider region and globally.

This document sets a general direction with specific priorities for immediate attention. We want to build on the progress of previous activities, while encouraging a creative approach so as to ensure our long term sustainability. This involves valuing staff and providing them with the environment, resources and time to be able to develop and innovate as teachers within the context of their discipline and according to the needs of their students. At the same time, our students need to be challenged, enthused and supported as they develop a love of learning, curiosity and self-direction in their studies. A number of underlying principles shape this work:

- Flexibility - remaining responsive to our external environment whilst retaining our core values and thus ensuring the long term sustainability of what we do and believe in;
- Rich and constructive dialogue between staff and students - ensure our work is always shaped by our students and that we foster conversations and gather views effectively and carefully, including undergraduate, postgraduate taught and research students;
- Programme level view - moving away from a module level view of teaching to help create coherence and enable reshaping of teaching and assessment, encourage a team approach to teaching;
- Supporting staff - strengthen ways of evaluating innovative approaches through encouraging a collective perspective whilst offering appropriate individual incentives;
- Local focus - working with departments to establish their needs, ensuring appropriate support for change at this level and that their requirements are reflected in faculty-level plans, rather than driving everything through central initiatives;
- Workload - reflecting on the working practices and processes around learning and teaching to help us all work more effectively, in some cases stopping some activities altogether;
- Learning from what we do - evaluating the impact of our approaches and learning any lessons;
- Communication - better and more effective communication within and beyond the University about learning and teaching;
- Focusing on the development of our students - building on the outcomes embodied in the Sheffield Graduate, work with students, staff and external stakeholders to develop undergraduate and postgraduate taught graduate attributes that better reflect our institutional priorities.

This document sets out the strategic direction for learning and teaching by highlighting the key areas of focus for the coming five years. By establishing a number of major themes, it will allow all faculties, departments and professional services to plan their activities to support the overall vision. As such, the finer details of implementation will be worked through as an ongoing process over the five year period, mapping the key processes needed to create the environment for success.
2. Major Themes for Learning and Teaching

Excellence in practice
Developing high quality teaching that inspires and actively engages students in an inclusive, research intensive environment.

Activities under this heading include:

• **students as self-directed learners**
  We want all our students to have the opportunity to develop academically and personally, recognising the multiple environments from which our students come, and the personal characteristics they bring. Our teaching aims to inspire our students, challenge them, develop their curiosity and encourage them to take greater ownership of their learning, avoiding being passive recipients of knowledge. As a research-led institution, we aim to ensure students are exposed to, and take part in the processes and methods of authentic research, and building on the success and model of the Sheffield Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE), that they have opportunities to co-produce new knowledge alongside academics and external partners.

• **research-led teaching and learning**
  We have a clear commitment to producing new knowledge in our field, and integrating this within the design and delivery of programmes. We understand that the relationship between teaching and research differs by subject, and we now want to think in more depth about the different ways in which this relationship can be strengthened. This will include reflecting on how we relate the University’s strategic research themes to new programmes of postgraduate study, and also how we approach staff scholarship relating to teaching. Linked to this, we have taken steps towards exploring barriers to interdisciplinarity, spanning teaching and research.

• **staff development**
  We are committed to helping our staff develop their teaching both as individuals and as part of teaching teams. Recent changes to support staff development have included the introduction of the Learning and Teaching Professional Recognition Scheme (LTPRS) and within this, further enhancements to the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching (CiLT). We now need to develop better ways of sharing good practice so that staff at all stages of their career feel able and encouraged to access professional development resources. We will also aim to address concerns around the lack of time available for reflection and development, and to ensure parity of opportunity regardless of primary role focus. Other work will focus on gaining a deeper understanding of how we might recognise, celebrate and reward excellent teaching.

• **communities of learning within an inclusive environment**
  We want to ensure students feel part of an inclusive and welcoming academic community - whether organically or purposely developed - during their time at Sheffield, and to build on existing staff communities of practice based around the concepts of co-production, collegiality, cohesion, accessibility, and support. The University has a wide vision of inclusive learning, which is to enable all our students to achieve their full potential. There is still further progress to be made in order to achieve this, including work on curricula, and addressing gaps in attainment and progression related to protected characteristics. The challenges of achieving this with a large and diverse student body are recognised.
Outward facing ethos
Preparing students for the world beyond the University through authentic learning which forges connections with communities and external partners.

Activities under this heading include:

- **engaged learning**
  We are committed to considering our responsibilities as an institution to the wider public, and focusing on the ways in which our activities can positively affect society. Through the Engaged Learning Sheffield initiative which provides students with opportunities to work on issues of public concern in local, national and international contexts, we have made progress on ensuring our civic values are threaded through our curricula. We now need to further embed this ethos across the institution and strengthen linkages with other outward facing priority areas, while also capitalising on the effective platform for co-produced research which is presented by such learning and teaching partnerships. There is evidence of the success of sustainability education in initiatives such as Project Sunshine, and we aim to further disseminate this approach to our learning and teaching practice. The development of an institution-wide Sustainability Plan is one of the ways in which citizenship and sustainability within learning and teaching will be considered.

- **education and work**
  We want to ensure we equip our students effectively for their chosen path, recognising that employability is an important dimension to our education, and that placement and work based or work orientated learning form a crucial part of this process. Our focus on graduate attributes has led to an expansion in skills development for enterprise, entrepreneurship and employability, including developments both within and outside the curriculum. We have seen the development of a placements team, a programme of paid student work experience within the University, faculties and departments working to embed student engagement within their employability activities, often delivered in partnership with the Careers Service, and new degree-level apprenticeships at our AMRC. Students are increasingly keen to undertake placements both within and outside their programme, so this area will need to grow. As the landscape of higher education provision changes we will also need to explore new partnerships, for instance working with employers in developing further pathways and modes of delivery.

- **internationalisation**
  We want to continue to equip our graduates to work in diverse cultural settings and contexts, and also ensure that our programmes respond to the needs of and capitalise on our diverse student population. We have focused on the development of cultural agility, flexibility, language learning and the ability of our graduates to compete strongly in the global labour market and we now want to build on this excellent foundation including the activities offered by Your Global Sheffield, in order to make sure our students appreciate the academic and personal benefits of being part of an international learning community.

- **student diversity**
  We will aim to continue actively removing barriers to access and progression for those who are systematically disadvantaged, and to offer support to students to overcome the challenges they face whilst studying here. Our institution prides itself on being open and inclusive, and undertakes leading work in outreach and widening participation. This work includes research and evaluation intended to inform both our local practice and developments in the wider sector and recent initiatives to address barriers to progression through to post graduate level study, for example, through the provision of bursaries awarded on the basis of academic merit and widening participation indicators. As set out in our Access Agreement we will continue to support students from historically low participation neighbourhoods, mature students and other underrepresented groups to realise their full potential in the course of their studies and benefit from a full University experience.
Developing a flexible approach

Supporting innovation by exploring new ways of teaching, the spaces in which learning takes place, and the technologies we employ.

Activities under this heading include:

• **working across boundaries**
  We are committed to encouraging our students to learn outside their discipline. Collaborative activity varies widely across the institution, and we are now looking towards greater communication and coordination of internal and external collaborative activities, to encourage long term relationships and joined-up approaches across the University. Initiatives including Achieve More have exposed the structural obstacles to learning across disciplines presented by our current approach. We need to adapt our institutional structures in order to facilitate collaborative activity within the curriculum.

• **new routes to Higher Education**
  We will continue to strengthen and diversify the ways in which prospective students can join our community, including addressing issues around transition, against a backdrop of evolving government targets, and major changes to the landscape of pre-HE qualifications. The range of access routes we offer has changed over recent years - we have significantly expanded our foundation programme portfolio, our relationship with the University of Sheffield International College has evolved, and our apprenticeship provision has emerged.

• **modes of study**
  We will continue to explore a variety of new and different ways of delivering our programmes building on our prior experience including online, blended and flipped learning. Whilst recognising that face-to-face provision remains our primary educational approach, it is anticipated that there are still further evolutions for how we view and prioritise development of our online and on campus provision, including the parity and differences across the spectrum of delivery and offering an equivalent high quality student experience regardless of the mode of study.

• **infrastructure support**
  We aim to find an appropriate balance between physical and virtual spaces and between different modes of delivery, based on appropriateness within each subject area. Recent developments within physical and virtual spaces have opened up new possibilities, and innovations such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have changed how we think about the potential for interacting with our students. The spaces within which staff and students interact need a renewed focus, with blending between physical and virtual delivery offering new ways to support student learning. Staff will continue to be supported to develop their teaching and enrich our students’ learning experience, with a focus on digital innovation. We must always be led by the educational need, however; lack of technological understanding should not stifle digital innovation. It is important that staff are supported to find time for reflection, development and sharing of information with colleagues.
3. Creating the Environment to Deliver these Aims

This plan aims to outline a shared direction and encourage appropriate local level contextual implementation, whilst being mindful of avoiding an increased workload and large number of new initiatives. Consideration will be given to how the above themes apply in both undergraduate and postgraduate taught contexts. Through encouraging an holistic view of programmes and taking a flexible approach, we will ensure our ability to respond to external pressures without being wholly driven by them.

**We will do this by focusing on people and resources.** Each of the areas below will be expanded upon within the underpinning implementation plan which will be developed over the summer months:

**Improving constructive dialogue on learning and teaching** Enabling the sharing of good practice through online, face-to-face and formalised activities, and continuing to develop mechanisms to support the widest possible engagement from students in this dialogue, whilst ensuring our work is effectively communicated to external audiences.

**Addressing support issues** Providing support to enable a programme level approach, for better coherence and consistency. Ensuring staff are offered appropriate development opportunities to support a holistic view of their offering. This will relate to central developments such as the Student Systems Project.

**Revisiting reward and recognition** Ensuring a range of effective formal and informal mechanisms within our structures to reward and celebrate teaching and scholarship activities, provide parity between pathways, whilst understanding the time it takes to develop, grow and embed activities.

**Connecting across the institution** Ensuring our priorities for learning and teaching speak to those set out in other related areas of the University. This will include revisiting the graduate attributes.

Each year we will set a range of key priorities in order to provide focus and direction. These priority areas will be closely related to the themes and key people/resources areas outlined above.