Birkbeck University of London

STRATEGY for
LEARNING AND TEACHING ENHANCEMENT

2012-2017
Revised 2014
INTRODUCTION

Birkbeck University of London occupies a unique position in UK Higher Education as the only multi-School university to specialise in providing face-to-face part-time degree programmes for adults. Birkbeck is a global top 200 university and ‘London's Evening University’ where undergraduate students mostly work during the day and study in the evening. The College’s early vision of the power of education to transform and improve lives remains at the heart of the College’s mission. We are committed not only to teaching excellence but to the innovative organisation and flexible delivery of our teaching in ways that genuinely respond to the needs of our students.

The College’s Strategy for Learning and Teaching Enhancement aims to deliver that commitment. It provides the strategic framework for the development of learning and teaching at Birkbeck during the period 2012-17. It provides the guiding principles for the development and enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment, setting the context for the remit of the College Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee and School teaching and quality enhancement activities. The Strategy has been explicitly designed to fully engage staff and students with its aims and to promote ideas for future learning and teaching enhancement activities as well as priorities/targets for which the College can be held to account. An implementation plan has been developed and is reviewed on a termly basis. The Strategy is in two Parts: firstly setting out its aims, objectives and actions and then the institutional context.

The Strategy for Learning and Teaching Enhancement was approved by Academic Board on February 27 2012. Its subsequent revisions were approved by Academic Board on xxxx

PART 1: AIMS

The Strategy for Learning and Teaching Enhancement aims to ensure the best possible learning experience in higher education for the widest range of students, enabling our students to realise their full potential in an academic culture of developing and enhancing excellence in teaching. It aims to encourage, develop and enhance the pursuit of knowledge through an integrated, flexible and innovative approach to learning and teaching, working with new methodologies and new technologies in learning, teaching and assessment. The Strategy aims to develop and enhance our approaches to learning and teaching enhancement through awareness of student diversity and issues of equality.

Specifically, the Strategy aims to:

1. develop and enhance learner support, retention and progression
2. develop the distinctiveness of a Birkbeck degree through enhancing innovative curricula developments for learning, teaching and assessment
3. develop and enhance a flexible and transformative approach to learning and teaching
4. develop and enhance the quality of learning and teaching
5. develop the College’s capacity to respond rapidly to new and changing opportunities in higher education whilst retaining our commitment to our mission
6. provide an inclusive working and learning environment for our students and staff so that all may develop to their full potential
AIM 1: To develop and enhance learner support, retention and progression

Objectives:

1.1 To define and determine student achievement and success at Birkbeck

i. Data sets to be developed which measure the impact of retention and achievement by student characteristics and level of qualification on entry to inform the development of policies and practices for student achievement and success.

ii. Each School TQEC to measure levels of retention and success by programme and department (via programme monitoring) to inform the development of policies and practices for student achievement and success.

1.2 To identify and be responsive to the changing needs of our students:

i. Each School TQEC to examine its student data on an annual basis to identify factors which may inform School strategies for learning and teaching, and to report to School Executives accordingly for inclusion in School strategic plans

ii. The Learning and Teaching Working Group to make recommendations regarding the development and enhancement of the role of admissions tutors

iii. The Learning and Teaching Working Group to make recommendations regarding the development and enhancement of the personal and academic tutor system

iv. Assistant Deans Learning and Teaching to work with their Schools to develop learning and teaching practices in the light of the needs of a changing student body with a greater requirement for academic and pastoral support, especially in the early stages of their study.

1.3 To develop an enhanced approach to learner support and retention through learning and teaching

i. The PVM Learning and Teaching to work with the learning support officers to ensure the development of appropriate academic learning support, including academic English learning support, for all learners.

ii. The Learning Development Working Group, reporting to TQEC, to develop an integrated approach to learner support and to make recommendations on the development and enhancement of key learning skills as appropriate for academic, personal and professional success

iii. Assistant Deans Learning and Teaching to work with Assistant Deans with responsibility for retention to examine and enhance current practices in learning and teaching within the Schools in the light of the retention strategy and to report to School Executives accordingly for inclusion in School strategic plans
1.4 To develop an enhanced approach to progression

i. Each School TQEC to examine its School’s approaches to progression, to identify clear routes for progression, from certificates through to doctoral study, and to report to School Executives accordingly for inclusion in School strategic plans

ii. School TQECs to consider and make recommendations about the inclusion of supported pathways at level 4, especially for full-time students

1.5 To develop an enhanced approach to assessment for learning

i. To develop resources for those teaching and supporting learning to develop ways to enhance assessment for learning for all students.

ii. School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committees to work with departments to develop action plans for enhancing assessment and feedback, drawing on NSS scores and other evidence.

iii. The Assistant Academic Registrar (Operations and Projects) to develop guidelines for programme development and guidance for internal review which encourage the development of assessment strategies across programmes, ensuring an appropriate balance between formative and summative assessment.

AIM 2: To develop the distinctiveness of a Birkbeck degree through enhancing innovative curricula developments for learning, teaching and assessment

Objectives:

2.1 To enhance the development of an integrated approach to research-led teaching

i. ADs Learning and Teaching to work with academics in their Schools to ensure that up-to-date knowledge and developments in the field are embedded in all programmes

ii. ADs Learning and Teaching to work with academics in their Schools to enhance students’ development of research skills, at the appropriate level and subject

iii. The Assistant Academic Registrar (Operations and Projects) to revise guidance for completion of programme module proposal forms, and quality monitoring guidance, to encourage demonstration of engagement with research-led teaching

2.2. To further develop a range of combined and joint honours degrees, as well as interdisciplinary undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, within and across Schools

i. Schools will continue to consider ways to further develop multi- and inter-disciplinary programmes

2.3. To develop a distinctive range of options and electives as appropriate
i. Schools to identify and develop options and/or electives within undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and make recommendations regarding their implementation across the College.

2.4. To further develop a range of methods for learning, teaching and assessment that are appropriate to level, subject and diverse groups of learners

i. Each School will review appropriate forms of learning, teaching and assessment and consider how best to enhance provision, ensuring that learning, teaching and assessment at all levels is flexible and fit for purpose.

ii. Assistant Deans Learning and Teaching to explore the potential for whole year learning

2.5. To develop learning through engagement in critical and informed debate both through and across disciplines

ii. The Centre for Transformative Practice in Learning and Teaching to offer seminars and/or workshops in its annual programme of events to encourage staff to explore ways to develop learning through engagement in critical and informed debate

2.6. To enable students to learn in an institution that values learning, teaching and the development of knowledge as collaborative endeavour

i. The Learning and Teaching working group to develop and take this work forward and to make recommendations to TQEC

AIM 3: To develop and enhance a flexible and transformative approach to learning and teaching

Objectives:

3.1. To offer our students an integrated range of flexible, research-led / research-informed programmes across all levels of provision

i. Executive Deans to indicate annually through their portfolio review an explicit framework and strategy for programme development

3.2. To develop accelerated (three year) degree routes in addition to our four year provision

i. Each School TQEC to develop flexible degree routes as appropriate, and to report to School Executives accordingly, for inclusion in School strategic plans

3.3. To utilise new and innovative developments, including technology enhanced learning
i. Each School to review appropriate forms of learning, teaching and assessment in order to utilise new and innovative developments
ii. Each School TQEC to consider and implement ways to best utilise new technologies to deliver more flexible learning, teaching and assessment
iii. The Assistant Academic Registrar (Operations and Projects) to revise programme proposal and module proposal forms, and internal review reports, to encourage demonstration of engagement with technology enhanced learning

3.4 To offer more flexible and transformative learning opportunities throughout the year

i. Working with the Learning and Teaching Working Group, the PVM Learning and Teaching to develop proposals for more flexible opportunities for learning through the academic year, including learning across all three terms and across the whole year
ii. The PVM Learning and Teaching to develop options for increased flexible blended learning opportunities across Schools and through enhanced learning support in the College, including developing flexible and/or blended modes of delivery and making use of new developments in technology enhanced learning
iii. The Centre for Transformative Practice in Learning and Teaching to offer seminars and/or workshops in its annual programme of events to encourage staff to explore ways to develop transformative practice in learning and teaching

AIM 4: To develop and enhance the quality of learning and teaching

Objectives:

4.1. To continue to provide a range of opportunities to promote and enhance excellence in teaching, and to develop new ones, including:

i. The College’s HEA accredited PGCE: HE, primarily for Birkbeck academics and lecturers
ii. The College’s HEA accredited Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Supporting Learning, primarily for Birkbeck’s postgraduate teaching assistants
iii. The College’s Fundamentals of Teaching programme, primarily aimed at those undertaking limited teaching and/or support of learning
iv. An annual learning and teaching conference
v. Learning and teaching workshops and seminars to share good practice and pedagogic innovations, offered centrally through the Centre for Transformative Practice in Learning and Teaching and locally within Schools and departments
vi. A professional development programme for learning and teaching, offered through the Centre for Transformative Practice in Learning and Teaching
vii. An annual cycle of Birkbeck Excellence in Teaching Awards
viii. An annual cycle of Distinguished Teaching and Scholarship staff awards
ix. Identification of and support for applicants to the HEA National Teaching Fellowship Scheme
x. Support for those teaching and supporting learning with sufficient experience to apply direct for membership as Associates or Fellows of the HEA
4.2. To further develop student representation to enhance the quality of learning and teaching

i. School TQECs to develop and ensure student representation through class representatives; student-staff exchange meetings; and engagement with student surveys and evaluations.

AIM 5: To develop the College’s capacity to respond rapidly to new and changing opportunities in higher education whilst retaining our commitment to our mission

Objectives:

5.1 To develop ways to support and enhance the achievement, success and retention of full-time students in changing Birkbeck contexts.

i. to support the retention, achievement and success of full-time students in their academic studies through the development of study skills and academic English
ii. to support the retention, achievement and success of full-time students through supporting their learning transitions into and through each level of study, and to support their effective return to learning following interruption
iii. to support the retention, achievement and success of full-time students through developing ways in which they engage with learning throughout the whole year
iv. to develop a menu of options for flexible blended learning, up to and including a complete blended module, and to roll this out across the Schools and College

5.2. The PVM and Assistant Deans Learning and Teaching to respond to and make recommendations to TQEC regarding new and changing opportunities for all Birkbeck students

AIM 6: To provide an inclusive working and learning environment for our students and staff so that all may develop to their full potential

Objectives:

6.1 School TQECs to ensure that their Schools develop and enhance inclusive learning environments for all students
6.2 Centre for Transformative Practice in Learning and Teaching to support staff in developing inclusive practices that value the diversity of the student body to enhance the learning experiences of all students.
6.3 HR and its Learning and Organisational Development team to ensure support to provide an inclusive working environment for all staff.
PART 2: INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

2.1 MISSION

1 The principal aims of the College include providing flexible higher education courses which meet the changing educational, cultural, personal and career needs of learners, in particular those who live or work in the London region, and enabling students from diverse social and educational backgrounds to participate in our courses. The College maintains and develops excellence in research and provides the highest quality research training in all our subject area, making available the results of research, and the expertise acquired, through teaching, publication, partnerships with other organisations and the promotion of civic and public debate.

2 The College aims to respond positively to change whilst remaining true to its Mission. We are working towards implementing more flexible learning and teaching opportunities to better suit the needs of our students, offering our students an integrated range of flexible, research-led programmes across all levels of provision.

3 These are uncertain times of significant change for higher education. Substantial funding cuts, increases in tuition fees and the introduction of student loans has initiated greater discussion across the sector, as well as within the College, about enhancing learning, teaching and the student experience.

4 The Strategy focuses on developing and enhancing learning and teaching in changing times, building upon and combining key elements of the College’s previous Learning and Teaching and Quality Strategies 2009-2012 as appropriate. It has been revised mid-cycle following successful implementation of actions and significant changes in the College’s student body.

5 This Strategy (and its subsequent revision) and the areas of potential development and enhancement have been drawn up by a working group of the College’s Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Master for Learning and Teaching, and approved by the Committee. In addition, a wider group has been consulted.

   Working Group: Pro-Vice-Master for Learning and Teaching (Chair); Assistant Deans Learning and Teaching in each of the 5 Schools; and the Assistant Academic Registrar (Operations and Projects).

   Consultation Group: School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committees; School Executives; Pro Vice Masters; College Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee; Academic Board Executive Committee; Academic Board; and the College’s Equality and Diversity Officer.

2.2 ACADEMIC CULTURE

6 Birkbeck has long been committed to developing and delivering excellence in learning and teaching, fostering an academic culture that values the synergies between learning, teaching, research, scholarship and professional practice.

7 Learning and teaching at Birkbeck is grounded in our unique mission, including our responsiveness to the needs of diverse and non-traditional students. This mission, and our commitment to widening access, is developed within and enhanced by an academic culture of teaching excellence.
The College recognises that for widening access to be sustained and embedded, it needs to ensure the ongoing development and implementation of inclusive curricula and learning, teaching and assessment practices, informed by the latest developments in pedagogic innovation, scholarship and research.

Work in critical pedagogy is embedded within the institution and the College works both to enhance pedagogic approaches for its learners, and also to develop critical approaches to learning for practitioners and professionals.

Birkbeck’s programmes range from short courses, certificates, foundation and undergraduate first degrees to taught and research postgraduate programmes within a strong multi-School context, covering subject areas across arts and humanities, business and management, law, science and the social sciences.

Students studying at Birkbeck can expect to:

- Be part of a world-class institution for learning, teaching, research and the development of knowledge
- Study primarily in the evening in an institution located in one of the world’s leading global cities
- Develop learning through engagement in critical and informed debate both through and across disciplines
- Learn in an institution that develops research-informed learning, teaching and the pursuit of knowledge as collaborative endeavour.

2.3 OUR STUDENTS

Birkbeck students come from an increasingly wide and diverse range of home, work and educational backgrounds, and from prior learning acquired through employment and experience to traditional A’ levels. There are approximately 15,000 students at Birkbeck, enrolled on undergraduate certificates, undergraduate degrees, taught postgraduate and postgraduate research programmes.

The student population is composed largely of students who remain in employment while undertaking their course of study. Their ages range from 18 to 60+. 45% of students are in their twenties and 25% are in their thirties.

The College is achieving sustained growth in its non-traditional student population. A key feature of this growth has been a concerted focus on genuinely broadening access rather than deepening participation within an already diverse student community. Between 2009 and 2013 the proportion of black and ethnic minority students increased from 29% to 39%. 40% of undergraduates qualify for financial support.

In September 2007 the College launched a major widening participation initiative - Birkbeck Stratford. Birkbeck has added new modes of evening study in new subjects in an area of London with one of the lowest levels of higher education participation. Birkbeck Stratford has provided the platform from which to launch a range of creative outreach initiatives. In 2013 the Birkbeck/UEL partnership came to maturity with the opening of a new joint building ‘University Square, Stratford’. The Birkbeck Stratford initiative has also had a major impact on encouraging people from east London to study at Birkbeck’s Bloomsbury campus.

Birkbeck has long encouraged applications from students without traditional qualifications and has a wide range of programmes to suit most aspirant students. Birkbeck recruits undergraduate students to three year evening programmes through the UCAS system and to four year evening programmes through direct recruitment. 30% of UCAS entrants are aged
between 18 and 20, 30% are aged between 21 and 25 and 30% aged between 25 and 35. As part of our commitment to flexible study patterns we are exploring new ways of learning including accelerated and decelerated options and flexible models blending classroom and off-site learning.

2.4 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

17 The College has a Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee (TQEC) which is a Committee of Academic Board. It reports to Academic Board on the implementation of the College’s mission in relation to all learning, teaching and quality assurance and enhancement related matters.

18 The College has five Schools, each with executive and budget-holding powers and led by an Executive Dean. Each School has in place an Assistant Dean with specific responsibility for learning and teaching, and its own School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee, reporting both to the College TQEC and to the School Executive Board.

19 Schools will examine the aims identified within the Strategy and address these in their own context. The ways in which the aims are prioritised will be represented explicitly in School strategic plans, with targets designed to include actions that will address these priorities against short, medium and longer term goals. Each School Executive and School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee will ensure the aims of the Strategy are adopted and prioritised as appropriate, and owned by all staff.

20 Assistant Deans Learning and Teaching will liaise with one another to ensure the sharing of experience and good practice across the College, particularly exploring opportunities for economies of scale where common practices can be utilised. This work will be explicitly developed through the Learning and Teaching Working Group, which reports to TQEC.

21 Each of the Strategy’s aims will be tied into regular processes such as internal review, programme reporting and development and portfolio review in order to facilitate ongoing consideration rather than a snapshot report being made at a specific point in time.

22 The Assistant Deans Learning and Teaching will produce an annual report to the College TQEC on engagement with the overall Strategy which should include discussion of individual aims as relevant. This report will also be considered by the relevant School TQEC and the School Executive Board. In turn, overall progress made learning and teaching enhancement aims is examined through a mid-cycle review with ongoing identification of further potential aims through regular processes and activities operated by Schools and the College as a whole. The College TQEC will ensure this takes place through annually reviewing the aims and objectives of the Strategy, re-prioritising as appropriate to ensure their currency.

28 Of key importance to any strategy is the evaluation of the effectiveness of its implementation, and this will be annually monitored by the College TQEC. Assistant Deans Learning and Teaching will explicitly consider implementation in their programme reports. Evidence for measuring the extent of implementation of the Strategy for Learning and Teaching Enhancement might include, but is not limited to, recruitment and retention data; results of the National Student Survey and other forms of student feedback; annual programme reports; internal review documents and reports, including presentations on enhancement in learning and teaching; and accreditation by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

29 Amongst the outcomes of these processes at all levels there will continue to be inputs into the development of strategy, planning, operational processes, management and organisational structures as the College learns from its experiences and informs its approach to enhancement.
This Strategy should be read in conjunction with the College’s Retention Strategy and Widening Participation & Student Support Strategy.