FOREWORD

The Learning and Teaching Strategy is a central component of the University’s standards assurance and quality enhancement framework. This Strategy sets out the University-wide priorities and aspirations in Learning and Teaching for the period 2013/14 – 2017/18, to ensure the quality of the student learning experience and to enhance it, where appropriate.

The Strategy has been developed over the past six months through an institution-wide process, branded the ‘Big Conversation’. Initially drafted by a cross-institutional group of staff, it has been developed through consultation with academic colleagues, professional support staff, employers and students. Their engagement has been both valuable and informative and the final Strategy has embraced much of the feedback received.

The Strategy is informed by the University’s Corporate Plan (2011/12 – 2015/16) and overarching objectives, and is also closely aligned with, and complements, other key strategies (e.g. Employability and Marketing, Internationalisation, Library Services, Widening Participation, ICT Strategy etc). The Strategy is relevant to anyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning including, importantly, our students. It encompasses, but is not limited to, academic staff, graduate teaching assistants, library staff, specialist support staff and technicians. It also includes those staff, not directly employed by the University, but who interact with our students, through for example, collaborative partnerships and supporting placement learning.

Its overarching aim is to provide students with a high quality, challenging and rewarding learning experience that equips them with the knowledge, skills and confidence necessary to demonstrate critical intellectual inquiry, to progress in their career, to adapt to change, and to become responsible global citizens who make meaningful contributions to their profession and their communities. Its strategic intent is to enhance the student experience through the provision of well-designed, flexible, inclusive, relevant and accessible programmes and curricula that promote student engagement and success. In that sense, it represents both continuity and renewal. It recognises and builds upon the progress which the University has made over the past five years in relation to retention, assessment and feedback, employability and student representation. It also encompasses new dimensions reflecting the known challenges facing the University and those areas in which we have made less progress in relation to our previous ambitions viz the research-teaching nexus, creativity and innovation in course provision and curricular design and delivery, and meeting the expectations of stakeholders in respect of the provision of public information. It also commits us to involving students more in operational development and quality enhancement.

Fundamentally, the Learning and Teaching Strategy (2013/14 – 2017/18) is an enabler; the strategic intent is to provide institutional coherence, oversight and leadership whilst enabling the Faculties to shape and tailor their delivery in ways that are appropriate in the contexts of their disciplines. It recognises the important and crucial roles of academic and professional support staff in its effective implementation. It also recognises the need for concomitant investment in our infrastructure, and changes to administrative processes, and in, institutional culture if our vision is to be realised.

In striving to achieve our goal we have identified four overarching priority themes to shape and focus our activities viz student engagement and partnership, employability and graduateness, flexibility and responsiveness, and recognition and reward. These are articulated in three strategic aims and one enabling aim, each with their own supporting objectives. Annual action plans focussed on the three key strategic aims, will set out in more detail how these commitments will be prioritised and delivered, assign responsibilities for achieving them, and identify key operational performance indicators and strategic performance measures. An overview of the Strategy is provided in Figure 1.
The Strategy has been formulated in the context of a higher education environment which is experiencing ongoing turbulence, far-reaching and unprecedented change. Much of this change is driven by changing social behaviour embedded in technologies which have become, and are increasingly becoming, ubiquitous. Whilst the technologies themselves are in many ways peripheral, the social and behavioural shifts which they inspire and open up, are central. The online learning landscape has itself changed dramatically over the past year. Consideration will need to be given as to how Ulster can make the most of the opportunities that recent developments in massive, open and online learning (MOOCs) present.

The Strategy aims to better position the University to be more resilient and adaptable in the wake of these uncertainties. It is therefore, dynamic, in the sense that it is expected to evolve and change over the period in response to emergent and evolving higher education contexts and University priorities.

I would like to express my appreciation to all those who supported and contributed to the development and formulation of the Strategy, in particular, Carol Cochrane, Roisin Curran, Vicky Davies, Sarah Maguire, Patricia McCullough and Damian McGivern.

I look forward to our future work together in delivering our challenging goals.

Denise McAlister CBE
Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching & Learning)
UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER
LEARNING & TEACHING STRATEGY
2013/14 - 2017/18

VISION

Empowering learners to excel in professional life through transformative higher education

GOAL

To lead innovation in learning through flexible, inclusive and accessible provision

We will realise our goal through the following three strategic aims:

- To provide appropriate learning opportunities which are flexible, responsive to, and inclusive of, the needs of students, professions, industry and the wider community.
- To provide transformative, high quality, learning experiences through the promotion of meaningful staff-student partnerships that engender a shared responsibility.
- To enhance Ulster’s role as a sector leader for student employability as an integral part of the wider student experience.

and enabling aim:

To provide a supportive environment, in which innovative approaches to learning, teaching and leadership are encouraged, recognised, valued and rewarded, for all staff and students in the University
Strategic Aim 1

*To provide appropriate learning opportunities which are flexible, responsive to, and inclusive of, the needs of students, professions, industry and the wider community.*

**Key Enabling Objectives**

- To promote, embed and develop safe, yet challenging, learning environments that support active learning, through a learning and teaching ethos underpinned by current and appropriate discipline-specific and pedagogic research and scholarship, building, where appropriate, upon new and emerging technologies.

- To promote and embed inquiry-based activities across the curricula which are designed to develop a range of generic, infoliteracy, critical inquiry, and/or subject specific research skills, and their transferability into professional settings and/or further study.

- To promote inclusive and flexible learning provision and communities in order to respond to student diversity and preferences, and the needs and expectations of practising professionals.

- To develop close partnerships with schools and colleges to raise the aspirations and attainment of leavers with academic potential to enable successful progression to Ulster.

- To ensure that opportunities and expectations are continually, and pro-actively, explored to enhance the range, relevance, coherence and sustainability of all programmes, including life-wide learning and learning for leisure.

- To broaden the portfolio of appropriate and sustainable collaborative programmes and activities, particularly in the international context, to diversify the student body and provide opportunities for new income streams.

- To provide appropriate, flexible, well equipped and managed learning and teaching spaces (both physical and virtual) that reflect and/or anticipate pedagogic developments and stimulate collaboration in learning and teaching, research and administration.

- To continually reflect on and enhance programme structures and streamline administrative processes and procedures, as appropriate, in order to assure and enhance quality, and maintain standards, while reducing bureaucracy.

**Key Risks**

- Failure to provide the resources and support required to effectively promote and embed technology facilitated learning and management information systems, resulting in a reduction in flexible, accessible, inclusive and innovative learning opportunities and operational inefficiencies.

- Failure to capitalise upon the impact of changes in the HE funding model(s) and emerging policy contexts.

- Failure to adapt, exploit and optimise on a diverse range of market opportunities responsive to learner and employer needs and demands.
Inflexible, inappropriate and unattractive programme provision including their associated pedagogies and modes of delivery.

Failure to adapt existing processes and/or structures which act as a barrier to creative approaches to standards assurance, quality management and enhancement.

Failure to achieve the overall Academic Plan and effectively oversee and manage its constituent parts.

Indicative Operational Performance Indicators

Student Profile Data
Staff and Student Surveys
Employer Feedback
UCAS Application Data Conversion Rates
Evaluation and Revalidation Reports
External Examiner Reports

Key Strategic Performance Measures

DEL Regulated Academic Plan
DHSSPS Contract Numbers
Non-Regulated Academic Plan (including international and fully on-line student numbers)
GB Academic Plan
National Student Survey Results and Response Rates
HESA Widening Participation Benchmark
Strategic Aim 2

To provide transformative, high quality, learning experiences through the promotion of meaningful staff student partnerships that engender a shared responsibility.

Key Enabling Objectives

- To develop students’ knowledge, skills and confidence through active learning experiences with fellow students from diverse backgrounds, to engender a sense of student belonging and identity.
- To develop supportive partnerships and learning communities amongst and between students and staff to engender mutual respect and trust.
- To develop ways of working that foster students’ active engagement with their learning and career progression and values their contributions to shaping the design and delivery of programmes.
- To effectively embed Ulster’s Principles of Assessment and Feedback for Learning in the practice of all involved in the student learning experience.
- To ensure that all students are clear about what they can reasonably expect of their course and what is expected from them.
- To embed within the curriculum opportunities for students to develop as global citizens, socially, ethically and environmentally aware, sensitive to international contexts and cultures.
- To exploit opportunities within course design and programme delivery for internationalising the curriculum and the student body.
- To provide explicit opportunities for students to learn about sustainability, formally and informally, engaging with communities and employers.
- To develop and implement more efficient and effective methods for collecting, analysing and responding to student feedback on a timely basis.

Key Risks

- Failure to adopt a partnership approach resulting in staff and students missing opportunities to work collaboratively in pursuit of transformative change.
- Failure to secure the necessary quality and level of human and infrastructural resources to successfully implement the Strategy.
- Lack of effective oversight (academic, corporate, financial) thereby undermining awards standards, the quality of the student learning experience and the University’s Highly Trusted Status.
- Failure of academic staff to see the relevance of the embedding of issues such as sustainability and internationalisation.
Indicative Operational Performance Indicators

Internal Non-Continuation and Progression Data
Student Satisfaction Ratings/Surveys (PTES and PRES)
Student Profile Data
External Examiner Reports
Student Complaints and Appeals
Evaluation and Revalidation Reports

Key Strategic Performance Measures

HESA Non-Continuation and Progression Rates
National Student Survey (NSS)
PhD Completion Rates
HESA Widening Participation Benchmark
QAA Institutional Review Report
Strategic Aim 3

To enhance Ulster’s role as a sector leader for student employability as an integral part of the wider student experience.

Key Enabling Objectives

- To provide students with opportunities to avail of flexible work-based learning opportunities in a wide variety of settings in the UK and internationally.
- To build upon and further support enhancements for work-based/related learning opportunities for students and graduates through the development of new, flexible models of provision.
- To encourage faculty approaches to employability in curriculum design and delivery that are transparent to both potential and current students, their families, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Through Faculties and Schools, to continue to pro-actively engage with professional, regulatory and statutory bodies to gain co-terminus awards, where appropriate.
- To actively promote, support and enhance student employability as delivered through a range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and associated awards working in partnership with the Students’ Union, as appropriate.
- To embed and make visible Ulster graduate attributes throughout all programmes of study.
- To embed and make transparent within our programmes the skills and learning opportunities that encourage entrepreneurship and enhance employability and enterprise.
- To widen and strengthen engagement with industry and business locally, nationally and internationally to enhance the student learning experience, support student and graduate employability, and promote Ulster’s portfolio of taught programmes.
- To encourage personal reflection and the acquisition of subject-specific, critical thinking and broad-based skills to enable students and graduates to achieve success in their career paths and make a valuable contribution to society.

Key Risks

- Continued depressed graduate employment market.
- Failure to effectively research and match the University’s course provision to employer and regional skills shortages and priorities.
- Reducing opportunities for work-based and work-related learning opportunities;
- Insular student aspirations and perspectives.
- Failure to provide accurate, reliable, relevant and accessible information to meet the needs of stakeholders.
- Poor articulation and presentation of the Ulster brand to our target audiences.
Indicative Operational Performance Indicators

Increased percentages of students gaining professional level jobs
Engagement of Undergraduate students with the Ulster EDGE award
Increased percentage of students availing of placement opportunities
UCAS Application Data and Conversion Rates
Student Employability Data (DLHE)
PSRB Reports
Matrix Accreditation Reports
Employer Feedback
KIS Data

Key Strategic Performance Measures

HESA Benchmark of Graduate Employability
National Student Survey
Enabling Aim

To provide a supportive environment, in which innovative approaches to learning, teaching and leadership are encouraged, recognised, valued and rewarded, for all staff and students in the University.

Key Enabling Objectives

- To provide appropriate initial and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for early career and experienced academic and professional support staff to develop and enhance the capabilities and capacities needed for effective learner engagement.

- To further develop communities of practice, including students, in order to promote scholarly dialogue and encourage and facilitate the sharing of effective practice between and within subjects and departments including engagement with appropriate (inter)national initiatives and professional networks.

- To promote, support and recognise professionalism, leadership, achievement and excellence in learning and teaching through a range of internal and external opportunities.

- To build capacity and competence in academic and professional staff in support of the University’s local and overseas internationalisation agendas.

- To promote and encourage professional reflection, critical thinking and pedagogic research on the student learning experience by all those involved in the facilitation of learning and teaching.

- To create opportunities for staff and students to gain both formal and informal education and training in the developing infolitieracies including data analytics, and their associated pedagogical implications.

- To formalise career paths and implement promotion and recognition procedures that value and reward the contributions made by staff to the development, support and leadership of teaching excellence.

- To increase the proportion of, and support for, staff seeking internal recognition of effective learning and teaching practice through alignment to the UK PSF, and teaching excellence through appropriate internal/external awards.

- To lead, encourage, support and disseminate scholarship of learning and teaching and pedagogic developments, by staff and students, locally and (inter)nationally through the Centre for Higher Education Practice.

Key Risks

- Inadequate or poor engagement by staff in professional reflection and development and related CPD activities.

- Failure to strategically align and make provision for capacity and capability development plans at faculty, school, departmental and individual levels.
• Failure to articulate and implement University-wide Organisational Development/Human Resources strategies, systems and procedures to deliver the transformative change required to successfully implement the Strategy.

*Indicative Operational Performance Indicators*

Staff Exchanges  
Professional Development Scheme Uptake  
Pedagogic-related Public Output  
Engagement with CHEP  
Internal and National Teaching Fellowship Awards  
Compliance with CPD Policy for Academic and Non-academic Staff  
HESA Benchmarking Framework for Internationalisation

*Key Strategic Performance Measures*

Annual Promotion and Advancement Statistics  
Staff Surveys  
Development Appraisal and Review Uptake  
Percentage of staff with an academic teaching qualification professionally recognised with the UKPSF.
Implementation

Implementation of this Strategy will be through the development of annual action plans and key operational performance indicators, the formulation of which will be facilitated through an annual de-briefing event for staff and student representatives on the ‘Big Conversation’, to be organised under the auspices of the University’s Centre for Higher Education Practice and endorsed by the Senior Executive Team (SET). The key implementation roles are:

1. University Teaching and Learning Committee

   The University Teaching and Learning Committee has delegated responsibility for the review and oversight of the University’s Learning and Teaching Strategy including those policies and procedures relating to learning, teaching and assessment and quality assurance and enhancement of learning and teaching.

2. Senate Sub-Committees

   The Strategy informs, is informed by, and complements other related University strategies. These are overseen by, and are accountable to, relevant Senate Sub-Committees viz Research and Innovation, Educational Partnerships and International Affairs, Library, Information and Student Administrative Services, Academic Development and Enhancement. Annual action plans pertaining to the Learning and Teaching Strategy may be reported, as appropriate, via these channels.

3. Faculties

   Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees will develop and oversee Subject/School Learning and Teaching Action Plans for the implementation of the University’s Strategy to ensure that they reflect school and subject/discipline-specific context and needs.

4. University Research Degrees Committee and Heads of Research Graduate Schools

   The learning experiences of postgraduate research students will continue to be managed and overseen in accordance with Chapter B11: Research Degrees of the QAA Quality Code by the University’s Research Degrees Committee (RDC) and the Heads of Research Graduate Schools. RDC reports to Senate through the University’s Research and Innovation Committee chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

5. Student Voice

   Student representation at University, Faculty and Course/Programme levels will continue and will be enhanced in some areas through membership of project teams and working groups dealing with aspects of learning, teaching and assessment. In particular, the University will seek to further support the excellent work being undertaken by the Students’ Union and to work collaboratively with them in furtherance of our joint goals. More generally, opportunities for students to provide feedback both formally (e.g. Students’ Union Forum) and informally, through focus groups, will be enhanced as part of the
University’s participation in the HEA’s Students as Partners project. Student representation on Revalidation Review Panels will continue.

6. **Central Departments**

All central support Departments (viz Student Administration, ISD, Finance, HR, Physical Resources, etc.) have a crucial role to play in the effective implementation of the Strategy. They too will be required to demonstrate how they propose to implement, respond to, and be accountable for, areas of the Strategy which are relevant to them.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

The University’s Teaching and Learning Committee chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) will continue to oversee the monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy and the progress being made, both formatively and summatively, in respect of each of its Strategic and Enabling aims.

The key supporting objectives will also be reviewed annually to ensure their currency and validity and will be updated, where necessary, to reflect new University priorities as reflected in the Corporate Plan and in response to external regulatory changes and government policy.
### COMMON TERMS AND USEFUL LINKS

| CHEP | Centre for Higher Education Practice  
Aligned with the Staff Development Unit, the Centre functions as a facilitating and enabling arm of Teaching and Learning, with its primary role to progress the implementation of aspects of the Learning and Teaching Strategy in collaboration with other key players within the institution. Its aim is to promote a learning experience that is enriching, distinctive, and challenging and which addresses the needs and aspirations of students and staff.  
http://www.ulster.ac.uk/centrehep/index.html |
|------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Corporate Plan | University of Ulster Corporate Plan 2011/12 to 2015/16  
http://www.ulster.ac.uk/corporateplan/ |
| CPD | Continuing Professional Development is the means by which people maintain their knowledge and skills related to their professional lives. It can involve any relevant learning activity, whether formal and structured or informal and self-directed. CPD obligations are common to most professions. |
| DEL | Department for Employment and Learning  
The Department’s aim is to promote learning and skills, to prepare people for work and to support the economy. It provides funding and support for NI HEIs in relation to taught programmes of study and research.  
http://www.delni.gov.uk/ |
| DLHE | Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education  
The HESA employment indicator is based on the DLHE survey and expresses the number of graduates who say they are working or studying (or both) as a percentage of all those who are working or studying or seeking work  
http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2071 &Itemid=141 |
| DHSSPS | Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety  
The Department’s mission to improve the health and social well-being of the people of Northern Ireland. The Department commissions pre and post-registration student places and training in Nursing and the Allied Health Professions.  
http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ |
| EDGE | The EDGE Award  
A vehicle by which the University can formally recognise activities that promote opportunities for employability skills development  
http://edge.ulster.ac.uk/ |
| HEA | Higher Education Academy  
A national and independent organisation, funded by the four UK HE funding bodies and by subscriptions and grants, to champion excellent learning and teaching in HE with a mission to use their expertise and resources to support the higher education community in order to enhance the quality and impact of learning and teaching. They do this by recognising and rewarding excellent teaching, bringing together people and resources to research and share best practice, and by helping to influence, shape and implement policy. |
### HESA
**Higher Education Statistics Agency**
The official agency for the collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative information about higher education. The Agency was set up by agreement between the relevant government departments, the higher education funding councils and the universities and colleges in 1993, following the White Paper “Higher Education: a new framework”, which called for more coherence in HE statistics, and the 1992 Higher and Further Education Acts, which established an integrated higher education system throughout the United Kingdom.

[http://www.hesa.ac.uk/](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/)

### KIS
**Key Information Set**
Key Information Sets (KIS) are comparable sets of information about full-time or part-time undergraduate courses and are designed to meet the information needs of prospective students. The KIS comprises the items of information which students have said they find most useful when making choices about which course to study, e.g. some items are measures of student satisfaction from the National Student Survey (NSS) and some are from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE). The KIS also contains some information provided by universities and colleges.

[http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/find-out-more/key-information-set](http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/find-out-more/key-information-set)

### Matrix Accreditation
**The Matrix Standard**
A unique quality standard for organisations to assess and measure their advice and support services, which ultimately supports individuals in their choice of career. The matrix standard is a challenging outcome based standard that is not only a benchmark of the quality of the services an organisation provides, but also a key improvement and enhancement tool.


### NTF Awards
**National Teaching Fellowship Scheme**
The Scheme is part of the HEA’s programme to raise the status of learning and teaching in HE and to recognise and reward excellent learning and teaching. It is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland (DELNI). Up to 55 awards of £10,000 are made to recognise individual excellence.

[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ntfs](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ntfs)

### NSS
**National Student Survey**
A national survey, which has been conducted by Ipsos MORI annually since 2005. It gathers opinions from mostly final year undergraduates on the quality of their courses across six key designated areas. Aimed at current students, the survey asks undergraduates to provide honest feedback on what it has been like to study their course at their institution. The NSS is widely recognised as a Key measure of student satisfaction. As an annual survey, its results often drive improvements across HEIs in relation to the quality of teaching and the overall student learning experience.


### PTES
**Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey**
Administered by the Higher Education Academy the survey is designed for taught postgraduate students, with reference to the experience of their course, learning and teaching, and skills development. The survey collects feedback from postgraduate taught students in a systematic and user-
| **PRES** | **Postgraduate Research Experience Survey**  
Administered by the HEA the survey is designed for postgraduate research students, with reference to their experience of supervision, the research environment and their development as a researcher. The survey collects feedback from current postgraduate research students in a systematic and user-friendly way. Results are anonymous, allowing comparison against the sector and within benchmarking clubs, while ensuring that they are used for internal enhancement.  
[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/PTES](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/PTES) |
| **PSRB** | **Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies**. Many higher education courses leading to a professional or vocational qualification are required or choose to be accredited by a professional, statutory or regulatory body. Academic accreditation may involve registration, professional exam exemption or fast track to membership. |
| **QAA** | **Quality Assurance Agency**  
The remit of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education is to safeguard quality and standards in UK universities and colleges, so that students have the best possible learning experience. The QAA, as the regulator, works with DEL and higher education institutions to maintain the quality and academic standards of the higher education sector in NI.  
[http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx) |
| **UKPSF** | **UK Professional Standards Framework**  
Provides a general description of the main dimensions of the roles of teaching and supporting learning within the HE environment. It is written from the perspective of the practitioner and outlines a national Framework for comprehensively recognising and benchmarking teaching and learning support roles within Higher Education.  
[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf) |