STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE 2010 - 2015

1. Context

1.1 The Strategy for Enhancing the Student Experience supports the University’s strategic goal, ‘We will be a university that enables a student experience of the highest standard possible’.

1.2 The University has always taken a student-centred approach to learning and teaching and in 2005 it approved the 'Brookes Student Learning Experience Strategy' (BSLES) to operate from 2006 to 2010. During the academic year 2009/10 the University consulted widely on its new institutional Strategy to take it forward to 2020. In February 2010 this was agreed and is known as Brookes Strategy 2020.

1.3 Thus, this document supports the overall Brookes Strategy 2020 and is also a further development of the ideas and the projects of the BSLES.

2. Strategic objectives

2.1 There are two linked strategic objectives. These follow from the strategic goal, as articulated in 1.1 above, build on the progress already made, and respond to external developments. They are:

2.2 We will ensure that learning and teaching are at the leading edge and relevant to contemporary contexts.

2.3 We will provide an environment where students are proactively engaged in shaping their experience through influencing learning and extra-curricular policy, processes and outcomes.

3. Principles underlying the SESE

3.1 Oxford Brookes is a student-centred University, committed to the creation of inclusive and participative learning communities, a strong relationship between teaching and research, and the importance of continuing professional development for all staff involved in supporting student learning. This document is designed to include all students, full time, part time, undergraduate, postgraduate taught, postgraduate research, distance learning, and students attending Brookes’ programmes at collaborative partners. Many of these groups will need particular, differentiated and focused, attention and resources.

The University will continue to enhance the student learning experience based on the following principles:
3.2 The importance of learning

3.2.1 Students will have the opportunity to learn in ways that make a creative contribution to personal growth, professional development and preparation for making a constructive contribution to society.

3.2.2 Students will have the opportunity to practise habits of learning that will be useful throughout their lives and will help them to be responsive in a rapidly changing world. This includes being able to use technology to shape their own learning environment and interactions.

3.2.3 Students will be encouraged to see learning as both a collaborative and individual activity in both formal and informal settings. The student experience will be enhanced by the promotion of a diversity of educational opportunity and encouragement of widening participation in higher education.

3.3 The shared responsibility between staff and students for learning

3.3.1 Students will be expected to take responsibility for their own learning, to actively engage with feedback and assessment, and to develop their own justifiable ways of thinking about and constructing their view of the world.

3.3.2 All University staff involved with learning will seek to inspire students and to foster their intellectual development, wider well being, self-efficacy and learning. Student support arrangements will place an emphasis on pro-active interventions to address obstacles to learning encountered by individual students and to promote effective approaches to learning and personal development.

3.4 The importance of the curriculum

3.4.1 The curriculum will be designed to reflect the connectedness of knowledge, such that academic study can be integrated with relevant practice and the wider social experience of students.

3.4.2 The curriculum will enable students to develop their own intellectual positions in a critical fashion, while appreciating the strengths of other constructions and arguments. Particular importance will be given to international perspectives and the views of those from a variety of cultures.

3.4.3 The curriculum will provide students with an awareness of ecological and sustainability issues, and encourage them to be responsible global ‘citizens’.

3.4.4 A research-informed curriculum will enable learners to benefit from collaboration in a research community as producers of knowledge through research-based learning.

3.4.5 The curriculum will be enriched by technologies that empower students’ development as self-regulating, digitally literate learners, able to shape their own learning interactions and author their own digital artefacts.
3.4.6 The curriculum and support services will provide students with frameworks to support reflection about their lives after graduation and their preparations for making that transition.

3.5 **The importance of continuing professional development**

3.5.1 All staff who support learning will seek meaningful feedback from students about their experience of learning, and will use this to improve the quality of learning opportunities offered by the University.

3.5.2 All staff who support learning will participate annually in high quality professional development to ensure that their practice is evidence-based, informed by the scholarship of learning and teaching, and employs up-to-date learning tools and technologies.

3.5.3 All academic staff who support learning will undertake research and scholarship to help inform their teaching and curriculum development.

3.5.4 All academic staff who support learning will engage with processes of evaluation, reflection and research into pedagogic practice since these are key to being better teachers, and to the University becoming and remaining a premier learning and teaching institution.

3.6 **The formative place of assessment**

3.6.1 Assessment is to be regarded as a fundamental and integral part of course design, and one that is intended to shape as much as to assess learning. Assessment will be designed at programme level, and not simply at module level, in order to ensure that assessment shapes learning in a coherent and holistic fashion, consistent with the aims of the programme.

3.6.2 A fundamental purpose of assessment will be to help students learn by providing formative feedback. Students will be given supportive, constructive and timely feedback as an essential part of learning. Such feedback will enable students to build on their positive achievements and have a clear sense of what they need to do to improve.

3.6.3 Assessment will be designed so that a range of qualities and skills can be fostered, recognised, and validly assessed.

3.7 **The importance of environments that support learning**

3.7.1 The University will provide physical learning environments, both formal and informal, that are accessible to all and afford opportunities for a variety of learning styles and approaches. It will also provide appropriate contemporary technologies, which facilitate learning and support virtual learning communities. The University will seek to promote effective social learning through, among other things, the inclusion of collaborative learning tasks in the curriculum and the provision of high-quality social learning spaces.

3.7.2 The physical environment will be augmented by digital environments and technologies in ways which support a distinctive Brookes learning experience as described in this document.
3.7.3 Learners will have the opportunity to engage in formal and informal learning environments which support students’ autonomy and flexibility in managing their personal learning and promote their ability to engage actively and creatively in learning, research and professional communities both within and beyond the institution.

3.7.4 Learners will be provided with choices over information tools and assistive software to enable them to access the University through their preferred mode and location, i.e. at home or on campus, wired or wireless, mobile or fixed, using their own or a university-provided pooled device; and make use of other freely available tools in ways that support their learning.

4. Supporting the objectives

4.1 A challenging, relevant and internationalised curriculum

The University will seek to provide an appropriate curriculum for the 21st Century which enables Brookes’ graduates to demonstrate the skills and ‘adaptive expertise’ that will enable them to take up valuable and satisfying careers, and contribute to society and the economy. The curriculum will be regularly reviewed and updated. It will reflect current knowledge and challenge the students. We will involve students in the design and review of the curriculum. We will continue to actively implement and review the ‘Brookes’ Assessment Compact’.

(http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/BrookesACompact.html)

Every undergraduate programme will include the development of the following five core graduate attributes:

a) Academic literacy

Disciplinary and professional knowledge and skills, understanding the epistemology and ‘landscape’ of the discipline, and what it means to think and behave as a member of that disciplinary and/or professional community of practice.

b) Research literacy

Ability to be a critical consumer of research, and also, where possible, to design and undertake at least a small-scale research project in the discipline, using appropriate methodology.

c) Critical self-awareness and personal literacy

Understanding how one learns, the ability to assess the work of oneself and others, and to identify one’s strengths and weaknesses. The ability to organise oneself and perform as an autonomous, effective and independent learner. The ability to relate to other people and function collaboratively in diverse groups, including the development of appropriate interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence and adaptive expertise.
d) Digital and information literacy

The functional access, skills and practices necessary to become a confident, agile adopter of a range of technologies for personal, academic and professional use. To be able to use appropriate technology to search for high-quality information; critically to evaluate and engage with the information obtained; reflect on and record learning, and professional and personal development; and engage productively in relevant online communities.

e) Global citizenship

Knowledge and skills, showing cross-cultural awareness, and valuing human diversity. The ability to work effectively, and responsibly, in a global context.

Knowledge of global perspectives on how disciplinary knowledge is represented and understood within other cultures; cross-cultural capability beginning with an awareness of our own culture and perspectives and the development of the confidence to question one’s own values and those of others responsibly and ethically; and responsible citizenship, actively engaging with issues of equity and social justice, sustainability and the reduction of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination.

4. 2 Postgraduate programmes will build on the undergraduate attributes. We will clarify and publish an approach to graduate attributes for postgraduate programmes.

4.3 Engaging students in the life of the University

4.3.1 Representation and student engagement are not an end in themselves. “The purpose of representation is to secure social, educational and institutional change, large or small, grand or gracious, collectively or individually”. [Digby Jacks, President NUS, 1973].

4.3.2 The University has well-developed processes for listening to the student voice. The University will continue to work closely with the student representation team in the Students’ Union to induct and train student representatives for their role.

4.3.3 The University is committed to developing further opportunities for students to become more effectively engaged in the academic life of the University, both through the formal relationship with the Student Union and the day to day contact between staff and students, individually and in groups.

4.3.4 Specifically, this will involve seeking opportunities for students to provide input and play a role from the outset in the development of new programmes. Building on the successful experiences of the Brookes’ Assessment Compact and the introduction of Academic Advisers and Student Support Coordinators, we will work with the Students’ Union to identify opportunities for students to contribute to academic development projects, as members of working groups, organising focus groups or carrying out research, as appropriate. We will seek new and improved ways to reach students on part-time, distance learning and collaborative programmes.
4.3.5 We will work with a range of units within the University, including the SU, to design and introduce a number of student-led and extra curricular initiatives, which will develop and enhance personal and leadership skills and attributes for employability. These initiatives will include volunteering and community work in and around Oxford. We will seek to introduce student mentoring where possible across the University.

4.3.6 We will provide the digital environments and technologies that enable students to easily create and support their own groups and networks comprising Brookes students and staff and relevant groups and individuals.

4.3.7 The University will seek to increase the involvement of students and staff in the wider social and cultural life of the institution, through support for an enhanced range of social, cultural and sports activities and events.

4.4 Evidence-based policy development and evaluation

4.4.1 For policy development

4.4.1.1 Academic development and student experience, strategic planning and evaluation will be aligned to the overall University strategic planning processes. The themed audit on student data also concluded that improvements should be made to the quality of data collected and published internally. In order to respond to these two drivers we will require an evidence base of richer information than is currently available. This should ensure that strategic decision-making is founded on robust and readily available data sources, and that it improves the ability of academic areas to assess performance at a programme level. To provide this richer, robust evidence base, the University’s existing data around students and programmes needs to be enhanced.

4.4.1.2 We will develop a sophisticated ‘Academic Performance Tracking Tool’ (APTT), and train users in each faculty and across the institution’s support units. This will be designed to analyse, *inter alia*, performance and progression by programme module and student demographic. It will produce information to guide the University on pro-active interventions and on academic development practice and projects.

4.4.2 For teaching and learning

4.4.2.1 All staff who support student learning are required annually to undertake appropriate professional development. We will bring forward a scheme for Continuing Professional Development, and review and revise the PDR system to ensure that this is built in and that professional development plans respond to the evidence base from, among others, Peer Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. CPD outcomes will be reviewed annually in the PDR.

4.4.3 Evaluation of pedagogic developments
4.4.3.1 Making use of our internationally recognised in-house expertise in educational development, we commit to routinely carrying out impact assessment, review and revision of all significant academic development initiatives and of measures taken forward in the SESE and the consequent strategy maps. Impact assessments will be sustained and iterative. They will assess the process as well as the end product of developments. In this way, we will continue to collect, analyse, and where appropriate, publish findings from local, primary educational research data, especially where robust relevant data does not exist elsewhere.

4.4.4 Infrastructure and services in support of learning

4.4.4.1 Under the Brookes Strategy 2020 the fourth Strategic Goal is that infrastructure and services will be “Characterised by its sector leading, high quality, sustainable and cost effective services, operating within a culture of continuous improvement”. The accompanying objective is to “Develop and enhance the quality and efficiency of the University’s infrastructure and services”. To this end, in the period 2010-2015 we will complete approximately £200M worth of building projects, including the new library and teaching building in Headington.

4.4.4.2 The University’s infrastructure and services will be focused on supporting the quality and effectiveness of learning, teaching and research, and, in general, on enhancing the total experience of students.

5. Strategy maps

5.1 The Strategy for Enhancing the Student Experience will form the basis for a number of strategy maps, which will capture the supportive initiatives listed above and facilitate their implementation and evaluation. AESC will approve and review an annual Academic Development Plan.