Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy 2018-2025

1: Introduction: Delivering Strategic Theme/Objective 1 of *Open for Change*

The *Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy: 2018-2025* is designed to enable the first strategic theme/objective of *Open for Change*[1]:

> '*We will strengthen the distinctiveness of the Chichester student experience as high-quality, personalised, accessible and aspirational.*'[2]

It sets out how this strategic theme/objective will be delivered/achieved and the key performance indicators (KPIs) that we will use to measure progress in this regard.[3] An intended outcome of successfully undertaking the work detailed below is that the University will gain a strongly differentiated position in the highly competitive (and challenging[4]) higher-education landscape.

2: Statement of our Ideals and Sensibility

A statement of our **shared ideals and sensibility**[5] that inform all of our work as it relates to learning, teaching and the student experience, and that we will draw upon/return to as we go about it, are as follows:

a) Our approach to learning, teaching and the student experience emphasises **relationality** and **community**. People matter to us and we understand higher education (or 'studying') as something that is undertaken *with* others. This means that all our staff will work with each other and our students to sustain and strengthen an **inclusive, supportive/caring** and **authentic learning community** to which all feel that they **belong**[6] (and are a **welcome[d]** part), that they can **contribute to shaping and changing** and that is built upon **positive relationships**. It is through these positive relationships that members of our community – made up of staff and students together ('one but not the same')[7] – will feel **valued, respected, encouraged, inspired** and **developed** (including in terms of their **personal growth** and **aspirations**) and be **empowered** to **exceed** their **expectations**. This emphasis on community and positive relationships shape who we are and how we understand our purpose and role;

b) We believe that a higher education experience should be **open** and **accessible** to everyone who has the ability and desire to benefit from it. This belief underpins our commitment to addressing, so as to **reduce and remove**, the various **real and perceived barriers** to accessing, completing and succeeding at, a university education;

c) Our **primary focus** is on ensuring that our **students have the best experience possible** during their time at the University. We aim for **every student to have an outstanding learning experience** (and experience of associated services and support). In relation to this aim we recognise that we are all singular learners with specific hopes, aspirations, goals and needs. Therefore, we will work in close **partnership** with our students, identify and develop the best ways to **listen** to – and have **dialogue** with – them, be **proactive** and **responsive** to their **feedback** and ensure that the learning and teaching that takes place reflects excellent practice;

d) The **common identity**, precisely because the University has a clear educational mission[8] and vision[9], shared by all of us who work as part of this learning community and whatever our role and responsibilities, is that **we are all educators**; we are all engaged in – and committed to working together on – the task of education. We think that this task is better described and understood as a **vocation** rather than a job; accordingly, we are dedicated to **'going the extra mile'** for each other as we carry it out;

e) We **affirm non-binary** (i.e. 'both/and' rather than 'either/or') **ways of thinking about what we do as educators**. For example, we want to be a University that is known for delivering *both* **outstanding learning and teaching** (and an excellent **student experience** more broadly) *and* the **highest-quality research** because we understand them as inextricable/interwoven, mutually re-enforcing and enriching and, given this, in the best interests of our students. As educators, we **do not consent to being just one thing**[10], i.e. 'teacher' or 'researcher', nor do we consent to think of our students in such binary ways. Accordingly, we **resist** all unhelpful **'teaching versus research' binary ways of thinking** as we go about the task of education and are committed to exploring ways to outwork our positive **non-binary approach** however it might be described (e.g. 'research-led teaching', 'teaching-led research', students as '[co]producers of knowledge' or 'partners in learning', etc.). This commitment includes all of our staff **embracing the importance and value of engaging in the task of education and learning together with students at all academic levels**. Together – students and staff – we will aim to produce and disseminate knowledge and understanding across our learning community and wider society more broadly. We want all staff and students to be **consistently engaging with developments within their chosen field of study** and **sharing their learning and expertise with diverse interested group**s;

f) Because we agree that there is **no 'one' or 'right' way of teaching and learning** (although we will, on a regular basis, refresh staff awareness of institutionally agreed minimum threshold expectations and good practice in certain areas), and that **different pedagogical approaches are to be welcomed**, we **reject prescriptive step-by-step instructions** on how exactly teaching and learning should take place, as if it were something that can be pre-programmed and which forgets the singular learner(s) and situation that constitutes every educational encounter. However, we do also acknowledge that there are **more or less helpful ways of 'being' as educators, ways to 'be' that determine the effectiveness of our learning relationships** whatever our preferred methodological approach (i.e. **no 'right way to teach/learn' but, rather, 'more or less helpful ways to ''be'' as we teach/learn'**). Therefore, we are concerned with emphasising and developing a **shared relational sensibility towards teaching, learning and the student experience**. Paradoxically, perhaps, for an educational institution this shared relational sensibility is something that will be **'caught not taught'** by students and staff and we believe that being mindful of this is 'key' to maintaining the high-quality of our pedagogic culture and supporting a strong sense of learning community. We draw upon this relational educational sensibility when reflecting on, and engaging with, the learning and teaching initiatives/discourses that are circulating in the higher-education sector; our relational emphasis will underpin our response to all of these issues;

g) The **hallmarks of this relational educational sensibility** include, but are not limited to, the following: **Treating students as we would wish to be treated** as learners; Communicating with, and acting towards, students in ways that make it demonstrably clear that **we are 'for' them** (in terms of working for their success, growth and wellbeing, etc.); Supporting our students (and colleagues) to **deal with any anxieties/fears, unhappiness, concerns**, etc. that are obstructing their progress as learners and growth as individuals; Helping students to **deal positively and productively with uncertainty and ambiguity and be accepting of difference** (including instilling the confidence to 'model' being different themselves); Take pride in **noticing people** – our students and prospective students – and **listening to, and learning from**, their views and experiences as well as **caring about their needs**;

h) Our approach to learning and teaching is based on an understanding of education as concerned with **valuing and developing the 'whole person'**, i.e. 'hearts, bodies and minds'. Such an approach will involve the **formation of graduates** who will be **motivated** and **equipped** to help **make the world a better place** through **positive engagement** with **local and global challenges**. Accordingly, we will work with our students to **make connections between** their **academic studies and various concerns of contemporary society**. In part, this will include **furthering mutual understanding and tolerance**. It will also encompass the consideration and development of **transformative ideas and solutions to societal challenges**. Whatever the precise connections made, they will be rooted in our strong institutional commitment to **social justice** – predicated on the belief that **education can transform people, society** (including having a profound impact on social mobility) **and the environment** – and to facilitating creative and productive exchanges between those of different convictions;

i) We will **equip** our **students** to **successfully negotiate and establish themselves with confidence in a global economy** (including in an, as yet, less than inclusive global knowledge economy). In part this will involve a focus on **employability** and **enterprise** skills, giving students an opportunity to **acquire** those **attributes, attitudes and skills (including digital skills) relevant to the pursuit of a professional career**. It will also include, through our approach to learning and teaching, **raising and developing their aspirations and confidence**. We will work to **form graduates who are able to operate in fast-changing/'fluid' contexts** with confidence – including having confidence in their ability to **make a transformative contribution to society** – and who are resilient enough to successfully **resist attempts to limit** what they are capable of achieving. We will support our students to adapt and thrive in the precarious twenty-first century world, helping them to **develop life-skills that strengthen their agency/control and efficacy** in terms of who, and what, they want to be and achieve;

j) We understand that there is an important **pastoral dimension** to effective learning and teaching, and ensuring a positive student experience more broadly. Accordingly, we are committed to **supporting students to work through and, ultimately, overcome the various challenges that they may be dealing with (including personal, economic, mental, physical, societal, etc.)**. We recognise that helping to address such issues is part of the task of education. Furthermore, we also recognize that the **learning process can sometimes be hard and/or troubling** and that, in response to this difficulty, we can develop psychological defence mechanisms[11] to protect ourselves from the challenge of a particular learning environment. Given this, we will **reach out to our students** in our learning relationships; we will look and listen closely, try to grasp patterns, forces and connections, to recognize our students as they look and feel and experience the world, so as to help them recognise and understand themselves, and the contexts that they are in, better;

k) The emphasis of this strategy is on **what we can do** – as educators in a learning community and in partnership with our students – **collectively**, rather than loading large amounts of responsibility on particular individuals. Given this, we will ensure that we **focus upon, and explore, ways to be and think together as educators that are positive, encouraging, empowering and that 'feel good'**. This will include exploring ways to think about the task of education at this university that help us **organize and manage ourselves to make it better**; we attach importance to **being together and thinking together about education** that feels good. We will remind ourselves that **the concept of 'perfection' is not a valid or desirable one** when it comes to reflecting on learning, teaching and the student experience. Instead, we will **encourage one another – and our students – to take risks, to experiment, to be radically imaginative,** etc. In short, **we regard education**, broadly construed, **as a 'beautiful risk'**[12]. We acknowledge that we will, at points, fall short of some aspects of the ideals/sensibility and proposals/targets that are put forward in this strategy but **will not become fixated on, or put off by, failure** (i.e. we will not give up or settle). Rather, we will **continue to allow ourselves to be productively motivated and galvanized by these ideals and proposals.** Our approach here will take inspiration from an articulation by Samuel Beckett: *'Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better'*;

l) We **recognise and affirm the opportunities presented by new (including digital) technologies** for learning, teaching and the student experience. Although, for us, **'education is not an app'**[13], we do believe that new technologies/digital literacy can enhance staff and student learning relationships and, to this end, we will continue to explore them. Specifically, we believe that **technology has great potential for learning if utilised in careful and caring ways; such careful and caring utilisation is something to which we are committed.** We also recognise and affirm the need to **demonstrate and enable the development of the digital skills to support our graduates to engage** with, and **thrive** in the midst of, **life opportunities.**

3: How will we deliver/achieve this strategic theme/objective?
('We will strengthen the distinctiveness of the Chichester student experience as high-quality, personalised, accessible and aspirational')

Whilst not definitive this section sets out the main ways that we will deliver/achieve Strategic Theme/Objective 1 of *Open for Change*. In each case, there is statement about how delivery will be enabled followed by the identification of specific operational steps/initiatives.

I. Inspire and motivate staff and students to work together in effective ways to ensure that we continue to be a University that is known for delivering outstanding learning and teaching informed by high-quality research:
   • Support the development of approaches to learning and teaching that are student-centred, inclusive and flexible;
   • Work in partnership with students to enable them to become independent learners and researchers;
   • Ensure that our campuses, and all of the learning spaces that we inhabit, reflect our relational, community emphasis.

We want all of the spaces where learning – formal and informal – takes place to be distinctive. Specifically, we will create spaces within which students, staff and visitors can enjoy learning (in various forms); spaces that they are attracted to spending significant amounts of time in; fit-for-purpose spaces that facilitate deep learning relationships (including conversations, reflection/contemplation, group work and the opportunity to engage with the work and thoughts of others through time) and that represent that Chichester approach/difference. We will avoid creating 'non-relational' spaces that are not designed to put people at the centre;

- Improve processes and mechanisms for gathering as wide a range of student feedback as possible and for responding to it effectively across all of our provision (including giving clear guidance and training to staff in relation to module evaluation);
- We recognise that metrics across the sector can shift considerably from year to year. Given this, and alongside the specific target figures that we have identified in our KPIs, we will – at a more general level – always aim to be in the top 25% of the HEI sector for all teaching, learning and student experience metrics (including retention – linking to point II below);
- Annual improvement in NSS metrics;
- Achievement of Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 'Gold' and Ofsted 'Outstanding' ratings;
- Invest resources in projects which support teaching innovation and promote student engagement in learning, teaching and assessment development, as well as the student experience more broadly (including institutional support with researching and facilitating innovations in – leading to the enhancement of – learning and teaching);
- Provide creative and flexible approaches to assessment (e.g. the introduction of coursework only re-assessment) and timely, 'best practice' feedback that motivates and engages students (including clear guidance and training being given to staff in this regard);
- Systematically review and improve our internal operational organisation and management of all learning, teaching and student experience matters given that there is a strong correlation between organisation and management and overall student satisfaction;
- Maintain an institutional commitment to enhancement through a systematic approach to the development, application and dissemination of good (research-informed) pedagogic practice in relation to learning, teaching and assessment. This will include the regular delivery of a cross-institutional conference and discussion and review of this strategy;
- Actively support and involve students (and staff) from minority backgrounds (in terms of participation and progression in/at this higher-education institution, and including international students) in learning, teaching and student experience initiatives so as to enhance the pedagogic quality, cultural awareness and inclusivity of our community;
- Systematically review our curriculum across all areas so as to affirm and ensure inclusivity, diversity and equality;
- Establish projects to explore the use of new technologies to support part-time and distance learning;
- Ensure that all teaching is evaluated and that staff who teach are observed in accordance with current University policy;
- Provide relevant and effective continuing professional development to support all staff within the UK Professional Standards Framework;
- Review and enhance institutional processes and criteria to support career progression on the basis of outstanding learning, teaching and research.

II. Build up the confidence, aspirations and resilience of every student through an engaged and responsive admissions, academic advisor and module co-ordinator system so as to optimise student retention and progression:
- Positive measures for student access, progression and retention;
- Review and enhance Academic Advisor/Personal Tutor system across the University (including issuing clear guidance on a regular basis and ensuring that a named academic is allocated to every student from point of arrival and throughout their time with us);
- Student retention and progression will be enhanced further by our proactive learning and information services that support the bespoke and changing learning needs of students, e.g. by ensuring that students are able to access a range of appropriate study skills support.

III. Continue to provide a proactive, accessible and bespoke range of centralized student support and wellbeing services:
- Provide institutional support and resources to develop the breadth and depth of student support and wellbeing services (including in relation to those transitioning into higher-education) that meet the changing needs of our students;
- Establish projects to identify the needs of, and strategies to effectively support, specific groups of students;
- Student Support and Wellbeing and Careers and Employability teams will be located in fit-for-purpose spaces on both campuses that ensure physical accessibility (as well as accessibility remotely);
- Provide sufficient high quality learning resources on both campuses;
- Ensure that our Learning Resource Centres (LRCs) remain firmly centred on providing students (and staff) with the space, resources, services and support needed to enable them to succeed in their academic studies (including research).

IV. Ensure that all our staff recruitment and interview processes include an essential requirement to understand and actively embrace our distinctive sensibility, the qualities, values and characteristics expected of everyone working for our University:
- Specific discussion to take place at every interview in relation to *Open for Change* and the *Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy: 2018-2025*;
- Ensure that all new staff appointed to learning and teaching roles who do not have a relevant teaching qualification undertake appropriate staff development, such as the Post Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching.

V. Enhance the digital literacy of staff and systematic development of our digital learning environment to ensure that it meets the present and future learning and teaching needs of our students and staff:

- Online submission and marking/feedback introduced across the University;
- Implementation of a regular cross-University development programme in the utilisation of new learning technologies to: (a) ensure that all staff have the digital skills required for them to work effectively with students and colleagues; (b) develop the digital literacy of academic staff to support a blended and engaging approach to learning and teaching; (c) develop intellectually stimulating and inspiring educational activity; (d) fully embed the use of leading edge digital learning technologies into the academic life of the University;
- Ensure that information is accessible, using digital technologies to enable students and staff to participate and engage with each other both when on and off campus;
- Use assistive technologies to break down barriers to higher-education and widen participation;
- Recognise, and act upon, the opportunities to maximise digital skills needed in employment as part of the learning experience whilst studying at the University;
- Evolve our digital learning environment to meet present and future learning and teaching needs of our students and staff.

VI. Embed both employability and enterprise education in all undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes:

- Produce confident students who have in-demand and real-world knowledge and skills;
- Support employability champions in each department to develop the integration of enterprise and employability skills in programmes;
- Audit, disseminate and utilise existing staff expertise and networks to promote enterprise and employability development;
- Provide support and information to staff to develop a focus on enterprise and employability within modules where appropriate;
- Ensure all students have access to work-based learning opportunities through placements and paid internships where possible;
- Design assessments to ensure that students receive feedback on the development of their employability skills;
- Recognise and celebrate student volunteering and endeavour through the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR).

VII. Equip our students to make the most of life opportunities:

- Annual improvement in employability metrics;
- Embed teaching on building resilience across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes;
- Increase the number of non-alcoholic social spaces and small-to-medium sized communal social (and study) spaces;
- Ensure up-to-date and accessible sporting facilities for all students (across all programmes of study);
- Provide support and information to staff to develop a focus on social justice/global citizenship/sustainable development within modules where appropriate;
- Audit, disseminate and utilise existing staff expertise and networks to promote education for social justice/ global citizenship/sustainable development;
- Encourage collaborative learning activities between staff, students and external partners to create an environmental awareness and sustainability ethos throughout the University and the region;
- Promote the University's engagement with Education for Sustainable Development locally, regionally, nationally and internationally

Notes

1. *Open for Change* is the University of Chichester's Strategic Plan (2018-25).
2. *Open for Change*, p7.
3. These KPIs are 'ideals/sensibility' led, i.e. they have been developed on the basis of our relational approach to learning, teaching and the student experience. However, we will also remain aware that in the very act of attempting to measure/assign numerical value to every aspect of something that is profoundly relational – such as learning, teaching and the student experience – we might (unintentionally) end up damaging it. We seek to avoid this whilst remaining accountable for, and transparent about, the progress that we make.
4. This strategy is designed to enable the University of Chichester community to deliver/achieve this strategic theme/objective during challenging times of increasingly constrained resource for UK higher-education institutions (and the competition for this resource that, as a result, takes place between these HEIs). Yet, whilst mindful of – and responsive to – such challenges this strategy has not been constructed on the basis of a 'deficit' perspective; at Chichester our approach to learning, teaching and the student experience isn't primarily shaped by 'negatives' ('threats', 'weaknesses', 'deficiencies', etc.). Rather, it affirms many of the University's strengths and includes various principles and indicators that relate to what we think is most important about being part of, and contributing to, our educational community. We believe that our commitment to, and working out of, this strategy will enable us, at this crucial moment, to preserve and enhance what makes the University of Chichester a unique and transformative place and, in doing so, respond to whatever challenges emerge in positive ways, ways that continually and unashamedly highlight and profile 'the Chichester difference' regionally, nationally and internationally.
5. An alternative wording that could be used here is that of 'descriptive principles', i.e. what we hope an observer would see/hear/understand in watching/listening/analysing our relational approach to learning, teaching and the student experience.
6. We recognise that the word/concept 'community' can, sometimes, be perceived as exclusionary and off-putting. Accordingly, and although we wish to continue using this term, we will strive (a) for as inclusive and 'porous' a learning community as possible, and, (b) to continually challenge ourselves, and reflect carefully on challenges from others, regarding questions of 'belonging' and 'being-together', including better or worse ways to belong to, and be together in, a learning community; i.e. we will constantly think about ways to 'be community differently/otherwise'. For example, we think that one aspect of a 'good education' should help us to understand that a community is always constituted on the basis of that which it excludes (and to regularly ask/reflect on who/what might be being excluded from a particular community – including *this* community – and on what basis). We will also deploy this insight when reflecting on, and reviewing, the curriculum that we offer, so as to help ensure inclusivity, diversity and equality.
7. For further details see the *University of Chichester Community Commitment Charter.*
8. 'Our Mission: To provide outstanding education, advance knowledge and benefit the world.' (*Open for Change*, p3).
9. 'Our Vision: To achieve national and international recognition for the excellence of our teaching, research and innovation. We will secure full acknowledgment as an outstanding university with a strong externally-facing focus. As the only university in West Sussex, we recognise the economic, social and cultural importance of "place" and the need to meet both local and global challenges.' (*Open for Change*, p3).
10. This expression is adapted from the work of Édouard Glissant and, more recently, Fred Moten.
11. Similar, in some respects, to what Wilhelm Reich described as 'character armor' in his book *Character Analysis* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 1990, 3rd enlarged edition).
12. This wording is taken from a book title, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, by Gert J.J. Biesta (Paradigm Publishers: 2013).
13. This wording is taken from a book title, *Education Is Not an App: The future of university teaching in the Internet age*, by Jonathan A. Poritz and Jonathan Rees (Routledge: 2017).