Abertay's Learning Enhancement Strategy 2020-25

Abertay's Purpose

As defined by our new 2020-25 strategic plan, the university's purpose is three fold:

1. To offer transformational opportunities to everyone who has the ability to benefit from Abertay's approach to university education.
2. To inspire and enable our students, staff and graduates to achieve their full potential and to have a positive impact on the world around us.
3. To prepare students for the world of work and a life of learning.

This Learning Enhancement strategy has been developed to support and complement the university's overall Strategic Plan and Digital Strategy and provides more detailed teaching and learning objectives and initiatives.

Learning Enhancement strategic objectives

Abertay is a distinctive modern university based in the centre of Dundee with an inclusive approach to teaching and supporting our students' learning. We have a long history of engaging with the local and surrounding communities as well as attracting a growing number of international students. We aim to prepare our students for succeeding in a global context where society continues to face many complex challenges such as climate change, social justice and economic uncertainty. Notions such as the 4th industrial revolution (information technologies), the circular economy and the rise of the intangible economy are all revolutionising society. Technology continues to evolve apace and the full impact of Artificial Intelligence is still to be felt. Given this context, graduates' individual meta-skills[1] such as resilience, entrepreneurship and creativity are all key for enhancing productivity, in addition to highly developed subject knowledge, research and soft skills, including digital capability[2]. The health (physical and mental) and wellbeing of our students and staff is another key principle of our pedagogic philosophy.

As set out in the University's new Digital Strategy, digital technologies will be central to the future of learning and teaching in the higher education sector. At Abertay, technology will support, in an integral way, all our teaching in whatever form. It will be used to support both existing and new approaches to pedagogy, including adaptive and adaptable learning environments as well as supporting a range of study modes and interactions, adjusting to changing educational models as required e.g. on campus, blended and online distance.

Given this challenging context and direction of travel, we will focus on taking deliberate steps around five key strategic priority areas for the next five years:

1. Teaching Excellence
2. The Student Journey
3. Digital Education

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[1] See for example, https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/44684/skills-40_a-skills-model.pdf
[2] https://digitalcapability.jisc.ac.uk/what-is-digital-capability/

4. Academic Partnerships
5. Pedagogic research

A series of illustrative "indicators of success" are provided for each of the actions in this new strategy. These are not intended, however, to be the sole indicators of success; they are illustrative and we will continue to draw on a rich and evolving range of data sources, not just metrics during the period of this strategy. Subject areas will be expected to develop additional subject-specific indicators.

1. Teaching Excellence

We wish Abertay's reputation for providing a distinctive, leading quality student experience to be recognised both nationally and internationally. We also wish to enhance our reputation for nurturing, recognising and valuing teaching excellence. The following actions are planned to achieve this objective:

1.1 <u>We will improve active student engagement.</u> Abertay's pedagogic philosophy is founded upon active learning and providing our students with opportunities to put into practice theoretical knowledge gained. Students are considered partners in programme design and learning opportunities and we expect all our students to engage in their own learning and take full advantage of the learning opportunities provided to them by the university.

Indicators of Success: a) A significantly enhanced learning environment for all on campus students through continuing to invest in our teaching estate coupled with our IT infrastructure. b) A new Student Partnership Agreement between the Student Association and the University outlining the ways we will work together on areas of common interest will be finalised in June 2020 for implementation from academic year 2020/21. c) The University has a fully functional and effective student representative system. d) Student satisfaction for the NSS themes of "learning community" and "student voice" are enhanced over the period (78.8% and 78.4% in 2019, respectively) to >82% by 2023, triangulated by comparable module survey improvements.

1.2 <u>We will review our Abertay Graduate Attributes</u> in 2019/20 to reflect the university's new strategic plan and the changing context in which we find ourselves, outlined above.

Indicators of success: a) revisions to our Abertay Graduate Attributes are agreed by June 2020 and embedded in all curricula by 2021/22. b) Our programmes explicitly highlight how they develop in our students the new Abertay Graduate Attributes in Programme Specifications and Module Descriptors (finalised in spring 2021 for implementation from 2021/22).

1.3 <u>We will invest in our new Abertay Learning Enhancement (AbLE) Academy. Launched</u> in 2019/20, the new Academy is founded upon peer support, sharing and developing good practice and whose members both actively contribute to and learn from leading pedagogic research and the latest technological advances. The Academy will run a range of developmental activities and initiatives for staff (individuals and teams) including bespoke support to enhance quality and consistency of all our provision.

Indicators of success: a) >90% academic staff have actively engaged with AbLE by 2023 (e.g. attended AbLE events, been mentored, other recorded forms of support) b) Overall student satisfaction (as measured by both NSS and internal surveys) is at least 89% by 2021 and maintained or improved thereafter. c) Student retention is enhanced, as per indicators provided in 2.1 below.

1.4 <u>We will maintain and enhance our inclusive[3] pedagogic approach</u> for students and staff across all nine protected characteristics in terms of curriculum content, delivery, inclusion, accessibility, assessment, student support and learning environments.
Indicators of Success: a) Divisions are able to articulate how they meet this aim (e.g. through case studies, annual monitoring). b) All our students report an equitable student experience regardless of race, gender, sexuality, religion etc.

1.6 <u>We will support and provide national professional recognition opportunities for all</u> who teach and support student learning. This includes our AdvanceHE-accredited postgraduate certificate in Academic Practice, academic mentoring and Abertay's Going for Gold CPD scheme.
Indicators of Success: a) Staff appointed for teaching and supporting student learning (including relevant professional services staff) gain appropriate national professional recognition within two years (three years for part-time staff). b) New academic role profiles and promotions lead to a parity of esteem between teaching and learning, and other academic activities such as research, knowledge exchange etc.

2. The Student Journey
We wish to enhance our students' journey throughout their time at Abertay, recognising the diverse range of entrants and the changing external education landscape. The student journey lifecycle can be presented diagrammatically as follows:

The following actions are planned to achieve this objective:

2.1 <u>We will improve student retention and success.</u> We wish all our students to achieve their full potential. Retention and success of our students is therefore an ongoing priority. We will extend the range of support available to students and capitalise on advances in technology such as learning analytics and artificial intelligence (AI), where appropriate, in order to increase flexibility, improve efficiency and also enhance personalised student support from the point at which a student accepts an Abertay offer.
Indicators of Success. a) Retention rates after year of entry rises above benchmark to at least 91% (HESA PI, 88% in 2019). b) Completion rates rise above benchmark to at least 85% (HESA PI, 72.4 % in 2019).

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[3] Examples of adopting an 'inclusive pedagogic approach' are: Decolonising the curriculum (Race Equality); Universal Design for Learning (Disability); LGBTQ Inclusivity; Implementing an Inclusive Curriculum for Women in Engineering Education(gender); Transformative Learning Through Internationalization of the Curriculum in Higher Education

2.2   We will enhance all student transitions, addressing any outstanding student touchpoints. A very significant number of our students enter Abertay with advanced standing through articulation agreements with local partner colleges etc. Over the past 5 years there has been significant change in the way we support students on their journey. This requires us to revisit and update the work undertaken previously to map the journey to ensure that student support is provided efficiently and effectively at all points and identify where points of concern still exist thus precipitating appropriate actions to remove/reduce, as required.

Indicators of Success: enhanced student satisfaction (as measured by NSS and internal module surveys).

2.3   We will create a greater sense of belonging amongst our students. Students who feel that they belong to an institution are more likely to attend and engage and ultimately be successful. This sense of belonging and positivity should also result in improved measures of student attendance, engagement, satisfaction and achievement. Building on research in the academic literature, we will undertake work to evaluate our students' current sense of belonging and the impact of specific actions, including our continued investment in our teaching estate, IT infrastructure and working with the Student Association to improve our co-curricular offer such as sports and student societies. All of these aspects are important factors to realise our aspirations of creating a "sticky campus"[4].

Indicators of Success: a) enhanced NSS student satisfaction in the themes of Learning Community (78.8% in 2019) and Student Voice (78.4% in 2019) to >82% by 2023, triangulated by comparable improvements in internal student surveys. b) enhanced student retention from 2019 benchmark, as per indicators in 2.1 above.

2.4   We will enhance our students' preparation for the world of work in the digital age. This will include digital literacy (see 3.3 below) but we will also ensure all of our programmes have work-related learning[5] built in to all stages such that students not only learn new knowledge but they are able to apply their learning in practical situations. We will strengthen our engagement with business, industry and the public sector to ensure our provision is continually up to date and relevant. We will revise our Abertay Graduate Attributes to reflect the meta-skills, attributes and behaviours required for the 4th industrial revolution (1.1 above).

Indicators of Success: a) Rise in the number of students employed in graduate level jobs to at least 75% (currently 68%). b) Increase in the number of students taking up work experience opportunities. c) Rise in student satisfaction for NSS q. 7. "My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt" (82.7% in 2019). d) 80% for the JISC Digital Tracker scale 'My Course prepares me for the digital workplace' by 2025 and remaining ahead of the sector benchmarks, (Abertay scored 57.2% in 2018, the sector scored 41%).

2.5 We will extend our CPD opportunities for our graduates, business, industry, the public sector and the wider community through a portfolio of new credit-bearing micro-credentials in order to meet the changing demands of the modern workforce and in recognition that today's graduates will undertake

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[4] http://www.efficiencyexchange.ac.uk/12560/the-sticky-campus-improving-our-students-sense-of-belonging-through-active-learning-coffee-and-cake/

[5] Work-related learning is an umbrella term for any planned credit and non-credit bearing activities that use the context of work to develop knowledge, skills and understanding useful in work. This includes learning through the experience of work, learning about work and working practices, and learning the skills for work.

a number of changes during their career that will require upskilling but not necessarily a complete degree programme (undergraduate or postgraduate). These will allow students to study small bite-sized chunks of learning both within and outwith their degree and some will also be offered to the wider community for CPD. A key focus of this initiative is to offer more breadth and personalisation of study than is possible with current degree structures, and enhance our ability to provide more agility and flexibility at the edges of a degree to ensure students graduate with the latest knowledge and skills, both within and outwith, their chosen discipline.

Indicators of Success: Define (in 2020) and development (2020-22) of an enhanced and sustainable CPD offer delivered using online/ blended/ work-based modes.

3. Digital Education

Digital technology is set to transform education in a similar way to other industries such as manufacturing, the automotive industry, retail, financial, smart homes, healthcare, transport and logistics. Abertay has a strong reputation for its academic programmes in the digital domain but not in the application of digital tools in our teaching and learning or through the use of smart technology to support the business. As such, we wish to develop our digital capability in the context of our university's three-fold purposes above such that our graduates and staff are ready for work in the 4th industrial age[6]. The core of our teaching and student support will be delivered through face to face contact, enhanced by new and emerging technologies. We are committed to nurturing confident and digitally literate students and staff, whilst using digital technologies to provide accessible, inclusive, engaging and inspirational teaching and learning throughout our portfolio. Digital learning is student focussed and will align staff and support services around the provision of learning opportunities fit for the digital age. The following actions are planned to achieve this objective:

3.1 <u>We will embrace technologies and innovative ways of learning that are appropriate for our context, strategic aims and ambitions.</u> This will include augmented and virtual reality, blended learning, inquiry and problem based learning, active learning spaces and online education. We will also develop expectations and guidance around delivery, digital literacies, assessment and student support.
Indicators of Success: a) All on campus programmes have blended learning embedded at all stages from 2021/22. b) A re-definition of what constitutes formal contact in our blended learning pedagogy.

3.2 <u>We will undertake a systematic benchmarking of current digital education provision and support</u> at Abertay in 2020 and subsequently develop a set of threshold, leading and aspirational standards for digital and online teaching, including associated guidelines for core technologies (such as VLE, Electronic Management of Assessment, Content Capture, e-portfolios etc). Practices will be monitored as evidenced through internal QA documentation, systems and processes e.g. Programme specifications, module descriptors, annual monitoring etc.
Indicator of Success: We will produce baseline policies for use and there will be an ongoing annual cycle of improvement against the benchmarks set.

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[6] See, for example, https://www.weforum.org/focus/fourth-industrial-revolution

3.3 We will enhance the digital literacy of our students and staff through embedding in the curriculum, assessment and digital capabilities CPD including a portfolio of micro-credentials covering both subject and soft skills which may also be offered externally.

Indicators of Success: a) Increased performance in the JISC digital tracker survey for students- e.g. a target of 80% for the scale 'My Course prepares me for the digital workplace' by 2025 and remaining ahead of the sector benchmarks, (Abertay scored 57.2% in 2018, the sector scored 41%). b) Increased performance in the JISC digital tracker for staff- e.g. a target of 90% of staff consider themselves as "among the first" or "early" adopters of digital technologies for teaching by 2025 and remaining ahead of the sector benchmarks (Abertay scored 75.8% in 2018, the sector scored 60%).

3.4 We will enhance technology-enabled assessment. This will include: adopting a greater diversity of authentic assessments across our portfolio through harnessing appropriate digital technologies, enhancing formative assessment and moving to complete electronic management of all assessment, including summative written exams, by 2023.

Indicators of Success: a) All modules should have at least one technology-enabled assessment (formative or summative) with associated feedback. b) An increase in the use of assessments that test students' digital literacy in the context of their discipline in addition to their subject knowledge and wider employability skills. c) All paper-based, written assessments to be fully digital by 2023.

3.5 We will embed Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and/ or Data Science across the Abertay Portfolio. In addition to curriculum content, we will adopt AI to support student assessment and feedback.

Indicators of Success: a) All students will be given the opportunity to learn about AI in the context of their programme by 2022. b) AI to support assessment and feedback will be embedded across provision by 2025.

4. Academic Partnerships

The university has a variety of partnerships with both local partner colleges and, increasingly, international institutions. These include articulation, franchise, study abroad, staff/ student exchange and work-based learning partners. The School of Design and Informatics also has a number of non-credit bearing games-related online modules running on the FutureLearn platform. Going forward we wish to enhance our partnerships and modes of delivery to provide a more flexible offer, particularly for postgraduate taught provision and international students. The following actions are planned to achieve this objective:

4.1 We will strengthen our existing partnerships with both local colleges and international providers. A significant number of our students (>30%) enter Abertay with advance standing as a consequence of the university having excellent existing partnerships with local colleges and a growing number of international partnerships. We will continue to solidify and enhance these partnerships over the next five years.

Indicators of success: a) Increase in existing partner student numbers, coupled with associated b) enhanced student transitions, retention, progression and achievement over the time period.

4.2 We will extend our online provision including some delivery with partners. This will include credit-bearing modules, programmes, micro-credentials and non-credit bearing courses (e.g. MOOCs).

Indicators of Success: a) We will develop 5 new online qualifications by 2025. b) In addition, we will increase the number of online modules within our core campus-based provision by 10 by 2025.

4.3 <u>We will increase the number of franchise partnerships and enhance our transnational education provision</u>.
Indicator of Success: The total target income for new online and franchise provision (4.1 and 4.2 above) is £500k per year by 2025.

4.4 <u>We will develop our taught postgraduate portfolio</u> so that it is attractive to students, sustainable and supported by research.
Indicator of Success: rise in the number of PGT students.

5. Pedagogic Research[7]

Building on the success of previous initiatives such as the Abertay Learning Enhancement Fund (ATLEF, 2013-19), we wish to build our institutional capacity and reputation in the sector for pedagogic research. The following actions are planned to achieve this objective:

5.1 <u>We will apply a research-informed inclusive pedagogy</u> which positively impacts the 'how, where and what' of our teaching, learning and assessment activities and their evolution (as evidenced in our student feedback and NSS data). Adopting this approach will actively develop the Abertay Graduate Attributes in our student populations, giving them knowledge and skills which are transferable and can be applied in their post-graduation destinations.
Indicators of Success: Programme documentation, HESA graduate employment data and alumni case studies.

5.2 <u>We will develop and support a pedagogic research community of practice</u> which will support and nurture those new to the discipline, and which will foster internal and external collaboration and funded activity.
Indicators of Success: Volume of pedagogic research output (5% annual growth in the dissemination activity extracted from PURE), number of pedagogic research studentships and grant/knowledge exchange income).

5.3 <u>We will have an external facing pedagogic research web presence</u> which showcases and celebrates the teaching, learning and assessment innovations in which our staff have engaged.

5.4 <u>We will gain a national and international reputation</u> for our pedagogic research-informed teaching, learning and assessment practices.
Indicators of Success: a) pedagogic research citations, requests to present our 'expertise', and through NSS qualitative and quantitative data). b) An increase in high quality pedagogic research is submitted for REF 2027 within both subject based and, potentially, education-specific units of assessment.

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[7] Indicators align with those in the Research and Knowledge Exchange strategy.