# Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy 2017-2020

Preamble

Since the original LTA Strategy there have been significant changes in the structures and processes in the University concerned with aspects of teaching, learning, assessment, curricular design, programme management, and quality.

There is now a formal process for the ready proposal and approval of specific policies (eg attendance, feedback, external examiner role, etc) which operates through AMT, UMT and Academic Council. In addition, there are annual commitments agreed under the HEA’s Strategic Dialogue process (and associated Compact) and new requirements under QQI and the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning.

Consequently, the more operationally-oriented aspects of the previous LTA Strategy template can now be addressed through such mechanisms (primarily via the LTA Sub-committee and the AMT).

This new version of the LTA Strategy, therefore, is more closely mapped to the priorities identified in Vision 2020 and seeks to outline means by which those broad goals can be achieved in the same time period (ie 2017-2020).

*October 2016*

## 1. Vision 2020 – Teaching & Learning

The University’s Strategic Plan (2015-2020): Vision 2020, identifies a key set of institutional values and expresses a commitment to high quality teaching and the support of student learning. This is emphasized through a focus on the development of graduates with distinctive attributes.

“We aim to educate students who, as graduates, will demonstrate a capacity for independent critical thinking, creativity and innovation, dynamic teamwork, socially responsible leadership, and a commitment to lifelong learning.”

Further there is recognition that

“The development of new pedagogies and programmes will be essential, as will the continued recognition and reward of excellent teaching,”

and that,

“we can ensure that the NUI Galway teaching and learning environment will be valued for its exceptional quality.”

The University’s Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy reflects these ambitions and aims to deliver on these broad goals, as well as specific measures of success identified within Vision 2020. Five primary areas are highlighted in Vision 2020, which form the basis of this strategy:

* Graduate Attributes
* The Teaching & Learning Environment
* Professional Development
* Curricular Innovation
* Alignment of Research, Teaching & Learning

## 2. Relevant Structures and Processes

The Academic Management Team (AMT) oversees strategic and operational issues related to teaching and learning, its remit as determined by the decisions of Academic Council and the University Management Team (UMT). AMT is informed by the Learning, Teaching & Assessment Sub—Committee which is comprised of Vice/Associate Deans and representatives of the Library, Student Services, ISS, SU and CELT.

The Quality Office facilitates the development of new and revised polices (many of which, in the teaching and assessment areas, arose as a result of the first LTA Strategy). The mechanism for the proposal and approval of new policies which is now in place, allows the LTA Strategy now to focus on overarching principles (thus reducing duplication of effort) and provides a means by which policy can be updated efficiently and rapidly.

The Academic Simplification project instituted significant changes in the design and operation of programmes and modules. These new processes have also aided the delivery of specific actions identified in the original LTA Strategy and programme structures and progression requirements are now in the remit of the Academic Regulations Committee.

Further, each College has established a Curriculum, or Teaching & Learning Committee, chaired by a Vice or Associate Dean. Each School also, typically, has a Learning, Teaching & Assessment Committee for the management of programmes at the School level.

## 3. Graduate Attributes

Vision 2020 states that the University will publish a set of statements that articulate the key attributes of graduates who have fully engaged in their programmes of study and availed of a range of experiential opportunities open to them[[1]](#footnote-1).

NUI Galway’s University Level Graduate Attribute Statements, approved by Academic Council in 2015 are as below.

NUI Galway provides opportunities, both through its formal programmes and the broader student experience, to develop a wide range of knowledge, skills and dispositions.

The attributes which a successful, fully engaged student can develop at NUI Galway include:

* Knowledge
  + Academic achievement and expertise
  + Ability to solve new challenges and problems
* Skills
  + Able to make sense of complex information from a variety of sources
  + Communication skills in a variety of contexts, styles and media
  + Teamwork, collaboration and effective leadership
  + Creative, enterprising and resourceful
* Disposition
  + Personal responsibility and a commitment to lifelong learning
  + Valuing of ethical and professional standards, integrity, responsibility and good citizenship
  + Appreciation of the importance of place, identity and culture in a global context

Graduate Attribute statements are most valuable when used by students to reflect upon and steer their individual academic and personal development. Students may, for example, identify opportunities to further enhance or develop their skills, or identify where in their programme of study (or co-curricular/extra-curricular activities) they have demonstrated their achievement of each of the attributes.

An effective means of capturing, recording, and showcasing the attainment of these attributes requires to be developed and implemented. Conceptually (and technically) such can be facilitated through the use of Open (digital) Badges which whilst providing an additional form of certification, may also be reflected in subsequent versions of the Diploma Supplement issued at graduation.

In addition, an agreed set of attribute statements provides a effective means of reviewing programme and course design, highlighting potential areas in which students may be provided with additional opportunities to develop these particular skills and dispositions[[2]](#footnote-2).

In some disciplines, including those for which there is professional accreditation, there may be a need to provide an augmented list comprising a small number of additional statements or reference to a set of required attributes provided by the appropriate professional body.

In all cases, students’ attention should be drawn to the University Level Graduate Attribute Statements as an overarching context for their studies and learning experience.

## 4. The Teaching and Learning Environment

Vision 2020 states that the University will:

“Provide an outstanding teaching and learning environment that enables our students to articulate and achieve their ambitions, and benefit from optimal learning facilities and supports.”

In the broadest definition, the ‘learning environment’ includes the physical, the virtual and the psychological/social. Each of these has important influences on student engagement and success, in addition to the opportunities afforded to staff to provide effective and innovative programmes of study. Each is constrained by budgetary considerations and the institution faces challenges to meet this stated goal in an era of reduced resources.

It is timely to undertake a comprehensive review of the teaching and learning environment, focusing first on the physical infrastructure that underpins our teaching mission: the lecture theatres, study spaces, the Library, laboratories and general classrooms. Secondly, the growth in hybrid, blended and online programmes (and the likely trajectory of such growth) posits challenges to not just the technical infrastructure but budgeting arrangements for licensing of core technologies and our ability to keep pace with rapid technological development.

The Library’s recently published Strategic Plan and associated proposal for refurbishment provides a valuable starting point for a review, as do several outputs of international projects on ‘learning space design’. The importance of sustainable investment in the ‘virtual landscape’ has also been highlighted by the reports of the *European High Level Working Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education,* and by the *Digital Roadmap* of Ireland’s *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning*. Vision 2020, further states that the University should:

“Develop greater opportunities for part-time, flexible and blended learning, further enhancing our national leadership in the provision of online learning.”

In terms of nurturing the potential of our students to fulfill their academic (and personal) potential, the institution has already committed to explore the concept of ‘learning communities’, albeit with a need for clearer definitions and the adoption of models appropriate to discipline and level of study.

“We are committed to supporting students in their transition to university study and their ongoing academic progression by creating appropriate learning communities. In harnessing the diverse strengths of students, researchers, and support services, we can ensure that the NUI Galway teaching and learning environment will be valued for its exceptional quality.”

## 5. Professional Development and Recognition

Vision 2020 states that:

“NUI Galway’s reputation for teaching excellence in rightly celebrated,”

and that we must:

“Ensure that those who teach and design our programmes are provided with professional training and development opportunities.”

NUI Galway has a long-established, flexible, professional development framework in Academic Practice which can provide the basis by which this goal is met, subject to appropriate levels of resourcing being provided. This qualifications framework consists of:

* The Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching & Learning in Higher Education
* The Postgraduate Diploma in Academic Practice
* The MA in Academic Practice.

Additionally, there are ‘standalone’ modules, workshops and other training provision available via CELT.

The *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning* has published (summer 2016) a national Professional Development Framework, which outlines a set of criteria, domains of knowledge and practice, and a flexible model for provision. It is expected that local frameworks and qualifications will be quickly aligned with the national model, allowing for enhanced mobility, collaboration and the emergence of standards and a shared frame of reference for issues regarding curricular best practice.

Given the centrality of teaching and learning to the mission of the University, it is important that recognition, reward, and promotion opportunities adequately account for high quality performance in this domain, incentivising not just curricular innovation but also responsibility for the challenges associated with the sustainable management and coordination of programmes.

## 6. Curricular Innovation, Programme Design and Management

Vision 2020 states that the University will:

“Review, revise and develop new curricular to ensure that our portfolio of programmes is innovative, responsive to local, national and international demands, and attractive to high-achieving students.”

Responsibility for programme design lies with the Colleges and reviewing and revising programme offerings is a key aspect of quality assurance and enhancement. Successful innovation also requires the availability of accurate and timely information and data, basing major decisions on evidence and on a compelling case which is cognizant of the external context, the developments in academic fields, in other institutions, and the identification of future needs.

The Office of the Registrar in partnership with the AMT will periodically undertake a review of the institution’s complete portfolio of programme offerings, to identify areas of strength, scope for synergies and new cross-disciplinary initiatives. Such a review will incorporate analysis of trends, identification of new opportunities, resource implications and comparison with appropriate other similar institutions. Commitment to a process of curricular reform has been given in the HEA compact and, for example, the recommendations of the review of programmes in Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences will begin to be implemented in AY 2018-2019.

The design of new programmes and the revision of existing offerings can be facilitated by the implementation of Learning Design principles and via the support of expertise in CELT (and, for flexible programmes, CALPD), providing scope for innovation in pedagogy, assessment and the effective use of technologies and media.

The Quality Assurance requirements on the institution which accrue from the Universities Act and the remit of QQI, include structures for student feedback on programmes, modules and their learning experience. Vision 2020 states that the University will implement a

“Centralised student feedback system that informs the design and delivery of teaching, learning and support service activities.”

The design of such a system and its integration into routine practice of Colleges and Schools will be outlined in QA221 its revisions during the period of this strategy. There is a recognition that such activity requires the identification of appropriate tools and resources in order to deliver meaningful and complete information, but that such information is a vital part of the design and operation of high quality programmes. The national student survey (ISSE) also is a valuable tool at the level of disciplinary categories as well as institutions and sectors.

Investment is also required to ensure that our student enrolment, registration, records, and course management are ‘fit for purpose’ and able to accommodate new types of programme, increasing diversity in the student population and widening markets. Vision 2020 commits the University to

“Develop our ICT systems further to support flexible modes of learning”

which ensures continued resourcing for existing technology supports for the delivery of teaching and the support of learning on-campus and online.

### Partnerships & Collaboration

The University will, according to Vision 2020:

“Complement our teaching and learning activities through external engagement with employers, alumni, mentors, practitioners and community partners.”

Specific goals and targets are identified, including the objective of providing opportunities for ‘work-based learning’ on 80% of our programmes by 2020, and ensuring that programme boards have appropriate employer representation.

‘Partnership’ of course also includes students and initiatives such as ‘Explore’ have helped to build collaboration between students, academic and non-academic staff. This forms a solid basis upon which to support an emphasis on collaborative projects which address issues of pedagogy, curriculum, and academic engagement, which may also be complemented by initiatives to renew and strengthen student participation in aspects of quality review and enhancement.

### Access, Participation & Lifelong Learning

CALPD and the Colleges and Schools with which it works in partnership, commit to deliver the Vision 2020 goal:

“Advance lifelong learning and provide for the continuing professional development needs of employees in our region and beyond.”

Combined with developing strategies for Employability and for Access and student support, the University will be in a powerful position to identify the key imperatives in these areas and align supports and actions.

## 7. Alignment of Research, Teaching and Learning

Vision 2020 recognises that universities serve multiple missions: teaching, the promotion of lifelong learning, research, scholarship, innovation, entrepreneurship, preparedness for employment, civic participation, cultural preservation, and creativity. The two primary areas of academic activity, teaching and research, are all too often seen as in opposition to one another, competing for attention, time and resources. An effective university is one which can develop synergies between these two domains (and the others listed), harnessing the talents of different individuals and supporting changes in emphasis along their career track. Career progression requirements should adequately reflect this diversity of mission, encouraging all staff to flourish in their domains of responsibility and individual academic pursuits.

As Vision 2020 puts it:

“In particular, we value research-active teachers who communicate a sense of the excitement of new ideas and seek to inculcate a spirit of enquiry in their students. Research-led teaching and engaged students generate a creative and stimulating environment, with optimal learning outcomes.”

This means, that the University will,

“continue to promote research-led learning as an informing principle, aligning taught programmes with our areas of research strength, and providing opportunities for student participation in research,”

whilst also,

“seek(ing) to establish clear national leadership and build an international reputation in our areas of teaching and research strength.”

Clearly, much of this can be achieved through implementation of the goals outlined in sections 5 and 6 (Professional Development and Recognition, Curricular Innovation and Programme Design). However, there is still scope for a study of the existing and potential links which can be forged between the research and teaching activities across the University. There is potential, for example, to ensure that students have a greater exposure to modes of learning which align with research and academic enquiry, as there is also in using research on teaching and learning to inform practice. Scholarship and enquiry, therefore, are underlying principles for the University’s engagement with society, economy and culture.

## 8. Actions and Implementation

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| Section | Action | Related Plans/Strategies[[3]](#footnote-3) | Responsibility | Timeframe |
| 2. Relevant Structures and Processes | Each College to ensure that it has in place an appropriate committee and vice/associate Dean to oversee issues of learning, teaching and assessment. |  | Colleges | December 2016 |
|  | Policies and procedures regarding aspects of teaching, learning and assessment, to be progressed and approved through the mechanism outlined in QAXXX |  | LTA Committee, AMT, Quality Office | December 2016 |
|  | A summary handbook (and online version) to be produced and circulated to all staff which contains all the existing policies relating to teaching, learning and assessment and describes the responsibilities of the relevant committees and offices within the University |  | Quality Office | June 2017 |
| 3. Graduate Attributes | Publish and circulate a set of University level Graduate Attribute Statements |  | CELT, LTA Committee, AMT | December 2016 |
| Each College to identify whether they require to augment the University Attributes with a small number of discipline/profession specific statements |  | Colleges | December 2016 |
| Programme reviews to incorporate identification of where Graduate Attributes are developed within programmes | Review of Programmes, Quality Review | Quality Office, Colleges | March 2017 |
| Scheme for recording and recognition of skills and experience associated with the Graduate Attribute Statements   1. Proposal document 2. Badging/Portfolio development 3. Extended pilot 4. Information systems review 5. Full-scale deployment | Employability Strategy; Curricular review; All Aboard project | CELT, Student Services, VPSE, Colleges | 1. December 2016 2. July 2017 3. AY 2017-2018 4. Dec 2017 5. 2018-2019 |
|  | Identify and review opportunities for work-based learning, particularly with regards to the targets identified in Vision 2020 and to inform the development of the Employability Strategy | Employability Strategy | Colleges, CDC | September 2017 |
| 4. Teaching & Learning Environment | Comprehensive Review of the Teaching & Learning environment   1. Undertake review including comparison studies, identification of trends, resourcing needs and concluding recommendations 2. Incorporate of revised version of ‘Building Digital Capacity for Teaching & Learning’ 3. Approval/implementation of recommendations | CELT operational plan, Library Strategy | 1. CELT, Library, Buildings, ISS, Colleges 2. UMT | 1. September 2017 2. September 2018 3. January 2018 |
|  | Commitment to renew and sustain range of existing technology supports for teaching and learning when licence renewal/tendering required (eg (Blackboard, Collaborate, Kaltura, Turnitin, etc) |  | UMT | December 2016 |
|  | Organisation and hosting of Conference/Symposium on ‘Learning Communities in Higher Education’   1. Develop proposal for range of potential models 2. Initiate coordinated pilots of learning community models |  | CELT, Student Services, SU | 1. June 2017 2. Jan 2018 3. AY 2018-2019 |
| 5. Professional Development and Recognition | Review and revise the postgraduate, professional programmes and modules offered by CELT to align with the National Professional Development Framework |  | CELT | December 2017 |
|  | Review the academic career progression requirements to ensure that due recognition is given to the range of appropriate professional responsibilities required of staff and their professional development achievements. |  | Office of the Registrar, VP P&I |  |
|  | Review the criteria and operation of the *President’s Awards for Teaching Excellence* in light of developments at the national level and identified institutional priorities in teaching and curricular design. |  | CELT, LTA Committee | June 2017 |
|  | Promote and support maximum uptake of all opportunities for CPD provided to staff, recognising the value of such and the workload implications |  | Colleges & Schools,  Office of the Registrar | ongoing |
|  | The University to ensure that it maintains and develops links with national and international bodies with responsibility and interests in the areas of teaching, learning, assessment and curricular design, including appointing representatives (eg Coimbra Group Working Groups, National Forum Associates, OECD IMHE) |  | Office of the Registrar, CELT | ongoing |
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| 6. Curricular Innovation, Programme Design and Management | Colleges to ensure that they have appropriate supports and structures in place (including ready access to relevant data, decision support systems, and clear staff roles/responsibilities) to efficiently and effectively maintain and develop their portfolio of offerings at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. |  | Colleges, AMT, Office of the Registrar, Academic Secretary | ongoing |
|  | Develop process for periodic review of the institutional portfolio of programme offerings at undergraduate and postgraduate levels |  | Office of the Registrar, Academic Secretary, AMT | September 2017 |
|  | Continue to review and reform programmes on offer in each College in the light of emerging trends, recruitment targets, societal need and to promote student academic success. |  | Colleges, Office of the Registrar | ongoing |
|  | Ensure that Policy on student feedback on modules and programmes (QA221) is fully compliant with expected norms for Quality Assessment and Enhancement, and that appropriate supports are put in place for its implementation in Schools, Colleges and Programmes |  | Quality Office, Office of the Registrar, AMT | January 2018 |
|  | Undertake a review of the student information and records system, with a view to identifying the features required for a revised system |  | ISS, Student Records, Office of the Registrar | Report to AMT/UMT December 2016 |
|  | Development of a joint support service/process for flexible course design and delivery through collaboration between CELT, CALPD , the Library (and other services at appropriate stages in the process) |  |  |  |
|  | Continued provision of training and consultation supports for course design and innovation and with regards to the particular needs of students with a disability |  | CELT, Disability Support Service | ongoing |
|  | Reviewing the CPD needs of employers and citizens in the region and developing responsive programmes, modules and supports. |  | CALPD | ongoing |
| 7. Alignment of Research, Teaching and Learning | Complete a review and mapping exercise that identifies the existing and potential links between areas of recognized research strength and programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, including the opportunities for students to engage with research activity/topics throughout their study. |  | CELT, Research Office, Colleges, Office of the Registrar | December 2018 |
| *Linked with action in section 5:* | Review the academic career progression requirements to ensure that due recognition is given to the range of appropriate professional responsibilities required of staff and their professional development achievements. |  | Office of the Registrar, VP P&I |  |

1. Individual programmes have their own *Programme Level Learning Outcomes*. Graduate Attributes, however, are broader statements of capability and disposition which aim to capture the essence of what it is to be a 'graduate' and be ready to move on to the next level of study, research, employment, cultural or societal contribution.  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For example, there may be scope in some programmes for providing students with more experience of making presentations, to help refine their skill and confidence in this important attribute. Similarly for the development of teamwork and collaboration, or the highlighting of ethical and professional issues and standards. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In addition to Vision 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)