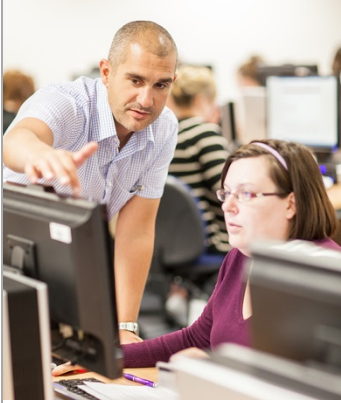




University of Essex



# Education Strategy



2013-19

## 2 Education Strategy

### University of Essex Education Strategy, 2013-14 to 2018-19

#### Introduction

1. The University of Essex's purpose 'is to contribute to society through excellence in research and excellence in education', with education and research being the University's two equal priorities, and the *Strategic Plan, 2013-14 to 2018-19* clearly sets out what the University seeks to achieve through the pursuit of education excellence:

*to offer our students a transformational educational experience, encompassing both the academic and the extra-curricular, which provides them with the opportunity to fulfil their potential as individuals by developing themselves within our living and learning community as independent learners equipped to take responsibility for their personal and professional development throughout their lives.*

*Strategic Plan, p.7*

2. To support achievement of this aim the University has made a number of commitments within our *Strategic Plan*:

*the University of Essex provides intellectually challenging and stimulating courses of study that are research-led in nature, and which are based on creative approaches to learning and teaching that reflect our commitment to innovation in curriculum design and delivery. Alongside this we provide our students with extensive and diverse extra-curricular opportunities that allow them to gain experience and develop their knowledge, skills, confidence and abilities. As a result all graduates of the University of Essex will be equipped to*

*succeed in further study and/or future employment (whether in the private, enterprise, public or not-for-profit sectors).*

*Ibid.*

3. This Strategy provides a framework for meeting this aim and these commitments, so that the University delivers to our students the transformational educational experience to which it aspires, and which our students deserve.

#### Underpinning values

4. Our graduates are characterised by their willingness and ability to understand and test accepted wisdom, and to respond creatively, innovatively, effectively and in collaboration with others when tackling difficult questions and new challenges. They are bold and inquisitive and we seek to inspire in them a desire to explore and embrace what we do not yet know. Supporting our students to develop these qualities and this mind-set, so that they can fulfil their potential while studying with the University and throughout their lives, is central to this Education Strategy. An Essex education transforms our students' lives and enables them to contribute positively to communities and societies around them.
5. Our students participate as full members of the University's academic community. Furthermore, their involvement in a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular learning and development opportunities places them at the heart of a life-changing living and learning community. The

foundation of an Essex education is the partnership between the University's students and staff through which the educational excellence to which the University aspires is realised. This partnership recognises the crucial but different contributions made by both students and staff. All staff delivering and supporting the educational opportunities that the University provides place the student at the heart of the learning experience, creating learning environments that seek to maximise student benefit. We expect all our students to seek to derive the maximum benefit from the educational opportunities available to them while at the University. An Essex education challenges our students to fulfil their potential, and provides our students with the opportunities to do this.

## Key themes

### *Research in the curriculum*

6. The University's scholarly community contains many research communities, both aligned to and cutting across the disciplines it offers. Integrating our students into these communities is central to the University's educational provision, as it is the mind-set and skills of the researcher that prepare our students most effectively for their lives and careers following their graduation. Active engagement in research promotes learning, instils confidence and ensures the development of critical thinking skills that underpin personal and intellectual growth. A personal research experience enables our students to develop the critical perspective that is emblematic of a transformational education.
7. Research is therefore at the heart of the University's curriculum and we are committed to research-led education in all its forms. This means that our courses enable our students to develop the advanced subject knowledge and understanding relevant to their discipline(s), including exposure to the most current research findings; teach our students how to define research questions, and understand the ways in which these questions can be approached rigorously, systematically and creatively; and allow students to engage directly in research, both individually and as part of wider research collaborations. The University respects the differences of approach between our research communities, and that these disciplinary differences will influence the way that Essex's approach to a research-led curriculum is delivered in specific disciplines. What does not vary is the commitment to ensuring that no matter the discipline that they are studying, our students are given a wide variety of opportunities to appreciate, acquire and apply the intellectual rigour, thirst for knowledge and investigative skills that underpin the University's research culture.
8. To meet this commitment across all levels of study the University will:
  - a. develop and deliver curricula that both ensure our students develop the core knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to their subject(s) of study and incorporate the latest research findings in their relevant disciplinary area(s), to deliver academic courses that inform,

## 4 Education Strategy

- stimulate and challenge our students
- b. ensure that the progressive development of the mind-set and skills to undertake independent research is integral to all of the University's curricula, and is supplemented by a range of extra-curricular support and opportunities
  - c. develop and implement distinctive approaches to the delivery and assessment of our academic courses, approaches that support students in gaining and demonstrating the ability to identify and respond systematically, creatively and effectively to research questions
  - d. include within all our honours and master's courses a requirement that students undertake a significant research project relevant to the discipline(s) they are studying, which acts as a capstone to their studies and ensures that they demonstrate the research mind-set and skills that are integral to being an Essex graduate
- experience that allows our students to develop a genuine world view, inter-cultural awareness and inter-cultural agility. These benefits are reinforced through engagement in a rich array of extra-curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities that allow all our students to participate as members of our living and learning community. This allows our students to help shape and transform their communities both at the University and once they have graduated.
10. Our scholarly community is also an open one. It encompasses and values the roles played by the Students' Union and our professional services and technical staff. It encourages and facilitates the links between disciplines that allow the major challenges and issues of our time to be considered in innovative and creative ways. Moreover engagement beyond the University community was central to the vision for the University of our founding Vice-Chancellor. The University is therefore committed to providing all of our students with opportunities as part of their studies to engage with communities outside the University (working in partnership with other educational providers, business, and the public and third sectors where such partnerships are to the benefit of our students), allowing students to access crucial learning opportunities that help them to realise their full potential. As lifelong members of the University, our students carry their capacity for learning, innovation and critical thinking into their lives becoming part of a diverse, international alumni community.

### Community

9. The University is a scholarly community committed to excellence in education, and maximising the benefit to students of the educational opportunities the University provides (both within and outwith the curriculum) is at the centre of this commitment. This community is diverse, and it is enriched by this diversity. The breadth of cultures, experiences and perspectives within the University's community provides a rich learning

11. Consequently the University will:
- a. draw on the rich international diversity of the University's staff, alumni and student community to enhance the learning experiences it offers to students
  - b. develop extra- and co-curricular learning opportunities that deliver real and significant additional benefit to our students, ensuring that the range and nature of these opportunities both recognise and draw on the full diversity of the student body
  - c. develop and implement approaches to the academic and pastoral support of students that are focused on helping students to maximise their talents and abilities while studying at the University
  - d. provide opportunities both within and outwith the curriculum for students to engage with staff, alumni and other students across the University's disciplines to consider major issues and challenges that affect the modern world
  - e. ensure that all students have opportunities while studying at the University to engage with communities outside the University, both within their courses and through a diverse range of extra- and co-curricular opportunities

### **Engagement**

12. As members of the University's scholarly community both staff and students must be fully engaged in the educational partnership that underpins the University's educational offer.

Without this engagement by both groups it is impossible to provide students with a transformational educational experience. Consequently there is a reciprocal obligation on staff and students to engage fully with the educational process, and promoting this engagement is essential to the success of this strategy in delivering the excellence in education to which the University aspires and which our students deserve.

13. In light of these commitments the University will:
- a. place the student at the heart of the learning experience, delivering courses, and extra- and co-curricular learning opportunities, which actively engage our students as members of a scholarly, living and learning community, in order to develop their capacity and capability as active and independent learners
  - b. work collaboratively with our students to draw on their views and experience to inform the development of the University's educational provision
  - c. establish clear expectations for the quality of teaching delivered by all members of the University, supported by transparent and consistent processes so that our students benefit from teaching that is innovative, effective and designed to maximise student potential
  - d. ensure that the University's appointment, retention and promotion processes identify, support and reward the achievement of education excellence by academic staff

## 6 Education Strategy

- e. ensure that formal and informal professional development opportunities that support staff engaged in learning and teaching to reach their full potential are available to all such staff

### *Learning environment*

14. The learning environments we provide for our students play a critical role in delivering the type of transformative educational experience that the University aspires to deliver. The educational environment in which students learn, i.e. the way in which we deliver and support learning and teaching, must support and challenge students to realise the full extent of their abilities.

15. Two elements of the learning environments the University provides for our students are critical: the staff engaged in delivering and supporting learning and teaching, and the facilities and resources made available to these staff to support the academic courses they deliver. To deliver the transformative educational experience to which it aspires the University will need to develop and implement a holistic approach that seeks to align these two critical elements of the learning environment, to maximise the benefit to students of the human, physical and virtual resources the University devotes to education.

16. The University will therefore:

- a. adopt an holistic and inclusive approach to the delivery and assessment of taught academic courses, where each course combines formal teaching, independent study, peer-assisted

learning and technology-enhanced learning in the most effective way to support students in achieving their full potential

- b. provide the support that those involved in delivering or supporting learning, teaching and assessment need in order to help them to develop their practice in ways that directly benefit the educational experience of our students
- c. align the development of the University's physical and virtual estate with the nature of the University's educational provision, providing consistently high quality physical and virtual spaces that support the delivery of excellent educational experiences for our students
- d. underpin our approaches to delivering and supporting learning and teaching, and the development of our physical and virtual learning environments, with the scholarship of how all members of our diverse student body learn

## Implementation

17. Realising this vision of an Essex education will be challenging. In order to ensure that the University delivers on our ambitions, over the period of this strategy, we will pursue the following strategic educational objectives:

Objective	Cross reference to University Strategic Plan
O1. To ensure that the University continues to maintain the high academic standards of our educational provision, and systematically enhances the quality of the learning opportunities we provide to our students.	Education Objectives 2 to 3, 7 and 9
O2. To review and revise the curriculum in order to ensure:	
a. that a range of forms of research-led education is embedded in all degree programmes;	Education Objective 3
b. that all students on honours and master's courses engage in a significant research project that acts as a capstone to their studies, enabling students to evidence their research skills and knowledge and for which they are prepared during the earlier stages of their degree programmes; and	Education Objectives 3 and 7
c. that all degree programmes are intellectually coherent and build students' knowledge and skills incrementally over the life cycle of the degree thus enabling development of the intellectual independence and mind-set that is characteristic of an Essex education.	Education Objective 2
O3. To provide all students, within and/or outside the curriculum of their degree course, with educational opportunities across disciplinary boundaries.	Education Objectives 2 and 3
O4. To provide opportunities for our students to develop their research skills and problem-solving capacity through engagement, both within and outside the curriculum, with contemporary challenges, thereby enhancing their employability.	Education Objectives 3 and 4

## 8 Education Strategy

Objective	Cross reference to University Strategic Plan
O5. To ensure that the assessment strategies for all our degree programmes encompass a diverse and inclusive range of modes of assessment (including group work) that supports the development of the knowledge, skills and mind-set of the Essex graduate.	Education Objectives 4 and 9
O6. To ensure that all students receive appropriate induction to their study and the University, and ongoing academic support that is aligned to their needs across writing, communication and numeracy skills.	Education Objective 11
O7. To review pastoral support both within and outwith academic departments to ensure that students are supported in ways that are appropriate to their needs, and so that they can realise their full potential through an Essex education.	Education Objective 11
O8. To foster international student mobility and increase student participation in these opportunities.	Education Objectives 5 and 6
O9. To ensure that all students have the opportunity to undertake community/work-based learning and to develop a framework that allows credit/recognition for student employment or community/work-based placement.	Education Objectives 6, 8 and 11
O10. To ensure that all students have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the communities within the University as well as the communities within society more broadly conceived.	Education Objective 8
O11. To review the University's Employability Strategy in light of the vision, aims and objectives set out in the University Education Strategy, and revise the University's approach to enhancing the employability of our students as necessary to ensure that this approach delivers the maximum student benefit.	Education Objective 11
O12. To ensure that the University engages with students at all levels of study using their views and feedback to enhance the educational opportunities provided.	Education Objective 13



Objective	Cross reference to University Strategic Plan
O13. To ensure that students engaged in representative and peer support roles receive appropriate induction, training and support.	Education Objective 13
O14. To ensure that staff engaged in the delivery or support of learning, teaching and research supervision receive appropriate induction, training and support for their continuing professional development.	Education Objective 14
O15. Ensure that the University's approach to recruiting, retaining, recognising and rewarding staff support the delivery of excellence in learning, teaching and research supervision.	Education Objective 14
O16. For all staff who are engaged in delivering teaching and research supervision at the University ensure we put in place support so that our students benefit from teaching that is innovative, effective and designed to maximise student potential.	Education Objective 15
O17. To ensure that the University's capital resources and infrastructure are developed and maintained to support the delivery of an excellent educational experience.	Education Objective 10
O18. To review the shape and use of the academic year to ensure that it supports, for all types of provision, the delivery of the transformational educational experience that the University promises.	Education Objective 2, 4 and 10
O19. To review continuously and enhance the pedagogic approaches in the University's taught and research degree courses in order to ensure that the modes of learning, teaching and assessment (including Technology Enhanced Learning) we employ support students in maximising their educational potential.	Education Objectives 9 to 10, and 12
O20. To ensure sure that the University's educational policies and procedures are readily available to our students, and that the University adheres to these policies and procedures so that students are treated equitably and fairly.	

## 10 Education Strategy

---

### Objective

### Cross reference to University Strategic Plan

---

- O21. To monitor, and where necessary review and revise, the University's processes for the management of educational provision, to ensure that these continue to support the delivery of strategic institutional objectives and (where relevant) that they continue to meet the expectations of external regulatory bodies.
-

## Responsibilities and oversight

18. Responsibility for the University Education Strategy is as follows:

<b>Strategy Owner:</b>	Pro-Vice-Chancellor – Education
<b>Strategy Manager:</b>	Academic Registrar
<b>Approval:</b>	Council (approved May 2014)
<b>Monitoring:</b>	In the summer term each year a report is made to Education Committee on progress against the objectives set out in this strategy, and the specific action plan for the year in question that was previously agreed by USG following consultation with Education Committee and Senate.
<b>Date of review:</b>	A holistic review of progress against the strategy will be undertaken in the summer term 2016, to assess progress in implementing the strategy's aims and objectives at the half-way point of the strategy. A further such review will be undertaken in summer term 2018 prior to the development of the new University Strategic Plan to come into effect in 2019-20.

## 12 Education Strategy

### About this document

This document has been produced in consultation with the University community as was approved by the University's Council in May 2014.

For further information about this document, please contact:

Dr Sonia Virdee  
Director of Strategic Planning and Change  
University of Essex  
Wivenhoe Park  
Colchester  
CO4 3SQ

**T** 01206-874681/2

**E** [svirdee@essex.ac.uk](mailto:svirdee@essex.ac.uk)  
[essex.ac.uk](http://essex.ac.uk)