

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC BOARD: 9 FEBRUARY 2016

Refreshing and reinterpreting the curriculum

PURPOSE: To propose a framework for curriculum refresh, by which to articulate the expectations for curriculum change in the Strategic Plan.

DECISION: For approval

Why a framework is proposed

Course teams need guidance on the principles and parameters within which to plan any changes that may be required to achieve the Strategic Plan Ambitions, as described in the Actions. The challenge here lies in balancing sufficient specification without unduly constraining interpretation within disciplines; i.e. how the actions will translate into course design, without constraining course development, or being overly prescriptive. It is proposed that this challenge may be addressed by creating a framework, which course teams can use to highlight where change is needed, as well as to guide them in making those changes. This framework should be based on established sources (Appendix 1), such as that published by the HEA for internationalisation. The use of such a framework would have several benefits:

1. To provide a common basis for description
2. To set out expectations, without prescribing what these will look like in context
3. To afford external validation (where national frameworks are used), which may have benefits for an NTU application to the Teaching Excellence Framework in future rounds.

The framework presented below is based on several assumptions, in addition to those above:

1. It will evolve as course teams develop ideas and new understandings are created. It is proposed that Academic Board review the framework at well-publicised intervals.
2. A framework which is articulated as intended outcomes is more useful (and less constraining) than one which prescribes course features.
3. Recurring themes across the sources (e.g. diversity, inclusivity, integrated thinking), should allow course leaders to connect Actions, making changes that meet several expectations at once.
4. A risk of using a framework is that of over-engineering, whereby the cumulative impact of expectations of the Strategic Plan actions related to the curriculum adds to the complexity of considerations for course design and approval. An unintended consequence might be that course teams cope with the complexity by 'satisficing' the expectations. In drafting the framework, therefore, criteria from source material have been adapted rather than imported, to give a more concise version. The aim has been to provide a framework that is neither too bland, nor too complex.
5. A limitation of a framework is that, when a course leader uses an inventory or checklist, this does not necessarily give them access to the hinterland of knowledge

and experience represented therein. They may well need time and scholarship to consider, for example, what Education for Sustainable Development will look like at module level. It is proposed that this be ameliorated by provision of guidance and workshops, but it should be recognised that there is a limit to what can be achieved in this regard in the given timeframe. Fortunately, there is considerable expertise within the institution for all of the Actions, and the University will need to call on this in the coming months.

It should be noted that, in refreshing the curriculum, course teams must also adhere to NTU standard underpinning principles for course design:¹ this includes, for *undergraduate* courses, that the minimum module size is 20 credits, and that larger modules should be multiples of 20 credits.

Framework for curriculum refresh

Version 1.0 February 2016: Following agreement at Academic Board

Note: Academic Board agreed that all undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses will be reviewed against the following framework. Course teams must articulate how they have engaged with all of the criteria. The framework represents both a threshold and an indication of developmental direction.

Action	CO101 All students will develop relevant professional attributes gained through meaningful work placement or experience embedded into the design, learning, and assessment of every course.
<i>Ref</i>	<i>Item</i>
E1	Early in the course, students are engaged in learning core employability skills (e.g. CV, interview, selection, search, networking) and in career planning activity.
E2	The course includes a number of opportunities for all students to translate theory into practice in a range of relevant work-like contexts or simulations (e.g. employer-led projects, activities with employer involvement, work that is held to professional standards).
E3	Later in the course, there is a synoptic assessment, allowing students to combine learning in relation to their employability from a range of activities and experiences, and which requires a significant element of reflection in relation to their future employability aspirations. This synoptic assessment is integrated into an appropriate module.
Action	CO303 We will continue to address differences in attainment between and obstacles to equal access to opportunities across all student groups.
<i>Ref</i>	<i>Item</i>
S1	Is the course design informed by data on disparities in progression and attainment for the equality and diversity groups, and international, BTEC, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds?
S2	Is student engagement reviewed regularly during the course to identify and support at risk students, and to encourage highly engaged students?
S3	To build students' social and cultural capital, to what extent does the course include: communication of high expectations for all students; support for students' confidence to achieve these; discussion of expectations of learning in HE; and the steps required to achieve academic success?
S4	To what extent does the course design recognise that students learn in different ways (implementing a range of practices such as active learning, ongoing induction, co-curricular activities and pre-arrival and post-arrival strategies)?

¹ *Nottingham Trent University Quality Handbook*, Section 12: Course design. Available at: www.ntu.ac.uk/adq/quality_handbook/handbook_sections/index.html

S5	To what extent is developing students' understanding of assessment practices integrated into course design?
S6	To what extent does the course facilitate early social integration to support peer relations through, for example, induction activities, collaborative learning and teaching, opt-out peer mentoring, and staff-organised social events?
Action	VI203 Initiatives that stimulate staff-student research collaboration will be supported as part of the overall approach to personalisation.
<i>Ref</i>	<i>Item</i>
	<i>Student research activity within the curriculum should be supported appropriately; staff-student research collaborations should be well-founded and beneficial for both. Course teams are asked to use the following prompts to frame their articulation of student research in the curriculum:</i>
R1	Research-tutored: engaging in research discussions
R2	Research-based: undertaking research and inquiry
R3	Research-led: learning about current research in the discipline
R4	Research-oriented: developing research and inquiry skills and techniques
Actions	CG201 All courses must integrate comparative international curriculum content. CG203 We will reform curriculum structures to facilitate greater international mobility.
<i>Ref</i>	<i>Item</i>
I1	Example or case. Are global exemplars and perspectives embedded and debated?
I2	International opportunity. Are a range of accessible opportunities for international and intercultural learning provided and promoted?
I3	Networking opportunities. Are on-going intercultural and international dialogue and partnerships facilitated?
I4	Teaching awareness. Is the content, language, pace and modes of delivery and assessment adapted to the learning context(s) and the diversity of learners?
I5	Co-ordination/structure. Does the course structure (such as timing and format of assessments, induction, modes of delivery) facilitate international mobility and collaboration?
Action	ES404 We will continue to be recognised as a leading exemplar of an environmentally responsible and sustainable organisation.
<i>Ref</i>	<i>Item</i>
F1	Students explore how aspects of the discipline contribute to one or more of the Sustainable Development Goals. ² The course provides opportunities for students to explore the potential of their discipline to interconnect with other disciplines or areas of expertise and make creative leaps forward. (Knowledge and understanding)
F2	The course examines relationships between environmental, social and economic systems from local to global level. (Knowledge and understanding)
F3	Leadership for sustainable development is encouraged through challenging assumptions and negotiating alternatives to unsustainable current practices, especially within the student's own discipline. (Skills)
F4	The course encourages systems thinking in terms of recognising connections and interactions between factors, and understanding that actions often have multiple consequences. (Skills)
F5	The course encourages commitment to lifelong learning about adapting to future challenges of meeting social and environmental responsibilities. (Attributes)

² sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs

F6	The course facilitates and supports dialogue and debate on critical issues related to global social responsibility within the wider sustainability agenda, fostering respect for different values and world views. (Attributes)
F7	The course encourages the capacity for independent, evidence-based integrated thinking as the foundation for developing their personal ethical code. (Attributes)
Actions	CO205 Every course will attain appropriate accreditation where available. CO301 Academic colleagues will be given the skills, tools, and capacity to enhance a tutorial system that will underpin a personalised learning experience for all our students. CO302 Every course team will articulate the mechanisms by which personalisation is facilitated.
-	No criteria are proposed for these actions. For CO301 and CO302, it is proposed that that course teams provide narratives describing their approach in their course specifications.
[Action]	NTU Digital Framework informs course design
	Course teams are asked to use the NTU Digital Framework to inform course design relating to learning outcomes for digital practice
<p>Note: The following Actions are not requirements for course design, but some course teams may elect to include them in the curriculum:</p> <p>CO102 Every student will have the opportunity to make a civic contribution which may be embedded within their course (e.g. through involvement in volunteering or a student society).</p> <p>CO204 Alumni Fellows will be extended to all courses.</p> <p>CG101 Our subject area portfolios in every School will contain provision that targets recruitment from international markets.</p>	

Appendix 1: Sources for the framework

<i>Action</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Expert group</i>
CO101	Future of Work Experience paper (Eade, 2015). Criteria adapted from the arguments in this paper.	Student Employability and Enterprise
CO303	Success for All. Bespoke framework, drawing on 4 HEA and HEFCE reports and findings from NTU action research projects. 21 items.	ASQC Sub-group for Success for All
VI203	Nature of undergraduate research and inquiry typology (Healey & Jenkins 2009). 4 aspects	There is a newly-formed TILT practice and scholarship group interested in this area.
CG201 CG203	HEA Internationalising higher education framework (2014), as used at NTU by review in Newstead et al (2015). 8/9 items (of 23)	TILT practice and scholarship group for internationalisation
ES404	Future Thinking Criteria. 17 criteria, combining aspects of 4 indices (QAA, LiFE index, PRME, United Nations)	Sustainability Action Forum
-	NTU Digital Framework	Centre for Professional Learning and Development

References

Eade, D. 2015 Future of Work Experience: fulfilling our commitment to Creating Opportunity and in particular the delivery of an assessed, meaningful work placement or experience embedded into every course. Paper to UET.

Cousin, G., and Cureton, D. 2012. Disparities in student attainment. York: HEA.

Higher Education Academy, 2015. Framework for student access, retention, attainment and progression in higher education. York: HEA.

Mountford-Zimdars, A., et al. 2015. Causes of differences in student outcomes. Report to HEFCE by King's College London, ARC Network and The University of Manchester. HEFCE.

Thomas, L., 2012. Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme. York: HEA

Healey, M. & Jenkins, A. 2009. Developing undergraduate research and inquiry. York: HEA. Available at: www.heacademy.ac.uk/resource/developing-undergraduate-research-and-inquiry.

Higher Education Academy, 2014. Internationalising higher education framework. York: HEA. Available at: www.heacademy.ac.uk/internationalising-higher-education-framework

Newstead, C, Gann, R, Kirk, S and Rounsaville, C. 2015. Disciplinary perspectives on internationalising the curriculum. NTU.

Quality Assurance Agency, 2014, Education for sustainable development: guidance for UK higher education providers. Gloucester: QAA.

LiFE index framework for learning, teaching and research: www.eauc.org.uk/life/home
Principles for Responsible Management Education: www.unprme.org

United Nations, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld

NTU Digital Framework v1.0: (NOW login required)

<https://now.ntu.ac.uk/d2l/le/content/297511/Home?itemIdentifier=D2L.LE.Content.ContentObject.ModuleCO-1686939>

Appendix 2: recap of the process for curriculum refresh

