

Education Committee

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Paper Title: Principles for Teaching, Learning and Assessment (White Paper)

Proposed Resolution: Education Committee is asked to discuss the White Paper, ahead of its consideration by Senate in June.

Appendices:

Hyperlinks are to Sharepoint-only appendices

Appendix 1: [Active Pedagogy](#)

Appendix 2: [Assessment for Learning](#)

Appendix 3: [Inclusive Learning Design](#)

Appendix 4: [Resilient Curriculum](#)

Appendix 5: [Digital Learning](#)

Appendix 6: **Feedback and responses from Green Paper consultation**

Appendix 7: **Implementation plan**

Appendix 8: [FEC Feedback](#)

Appendix 9: [Consultation Design](#)

Appendix 10: [References](#)

Previous Committee Consideration and Financial Approvals:

Education Committee (12 October 2022), FECs (October 2022), Provost's Board (31 October 2022), Education Committee (31 October 2022), Education Committee (8 February 2023) Senate (22 November 2022), Education Committee (17 May 2023),

Other related papers:

S/18/08 Guidelines for Curriculum Reform

S18/105 Curriculum Reform: Principles and Policies

EC/21/31 Curriculum Reform 2.0: Teaching, Learning and Assessment

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Senate endorsed a comprehensive approach to curriculum reform in June 2019 [S/18/105], building on the previously approved and implemented Principles for the Development of the Taught Curriculum. While much of this agenda was paused in light of Covid, the past three years have nonetheless seen rapid and wide-ranging innovations. We need to integrate the best of these developments with our existing approaches. We will therefore update our approach to teaching, learning and assessment, identifying and building on good practice developed during the last few years, and providing an equitable, inclusive, and innovative foundation for excellence.
- 1.2 An Education Committee Task and Finish Group, initiated in February 2022, has undertaken focus groups with students and staff, and commissioned a broad literature review and analysis of current policies and procedures, with the purpose of developing draft principles and objectives for learning, teaching and assessment. Draft principles and objectives were reviewed by Faculty Education Committees, with minute extracts (included as **Appendix 6**) considered by Education Committee alongside additional departmental and student feedback. Feedback to date has been extensive, helpful and welcomed. The proposals have been revised in response to comments received, and feedback will be considered again at the next

stage of development (particularly where, for example, comments relate to implementation or other future work). This Green Paper is now recommended to Senate by Education Committee.

- 1.3 The White Paper will place the new Principles in the context of, and be integrated with, both historic developments - including the original Principles for the Development of the Taught Curriculum and Curriculum Reform - and newer initiatives and agendas such as decolonisation and sustainability. The White Paper includes a clear timeline, summaries of the support available to facilitate these developments, and a schedule for implementation - we expect this to be a long-term initiative with action scheduled over 4-5 years following approval. Final proposals will reflect disciplinary differences, acknowledging that implementation of some objectives will mean different things in different departments.

2. Key Issues and Analysis

Strategic Context

- 2.1 Teaching and learning of the highest quality are at the heart of Durham's identity as a higher education institution. It helps the university recruit an exceptionally strong and diverse student body from across the globe, promising each student the opportunity to participate in "the Durham difference". It is one of the key reasons academic staff are drawn to and remain at Durham. It determines our domestic league table rankings and plays a crucial role in our world university rankings. In the form of tuition, it underwrites over half the university's annual income.
- 2.2 Durham is committed to regularly reviewing and revising its programme offering. Major, institution-wide developments over the last 10 years have include the introduction of the Principles for the Development of the Taught Curriculum, and the subsequent adoption of Curriculum Reform in 2019. However, over the last three years, the landscape of higher education has changed significantly. Durham's student body has grown, and its student profile is becoming more diverse. Best-practices in teaching and learning have been transformed by scholarly research and new digital technologies. Spurred by the pandemic, new pedagogies and different technologies have been adopted, and expectations have changed.
- 2.3 To keep pace - to ensure that Durham's educational offerings remain strong and vibrant - we must build on emergent practices and embed the best of what we have learned from recent experience. We must update the principles and practices that guide our teaching, learning and assessment, and ensure that we are able to offer opportunities and success for all. To this end, we must re-engage with previously paused work on Curriculum Reform, with a particular focus on learning from recent experience in the sector and at Durham.

Curriculum Reform

- 2.4 "'Curriculum reform' refers to the systematic analysis and improvement of programmes of study. It concerns what, when, why, and how students are taught. Its primary goal is to ensure that, through well-designed modules and programmes of study, Durham offers all students a transformative educational experience". [S/18/105, §1.2]
- 2.5 Senate agreed in 2019 that a "well-designed programme of study" would¹:
 - be research-led, beginning at Level 1 of undergraduate programmes;
 - be progressive and intentional, building to, through, and from the degree, from first to final year;
 - be focused on student learning gain - on the educational distance travelled from matriculation to graduation;

¹ LTH 7.1, §5. Document EC/21/31

- be inclusive, and fully accessible to students regardless of background, identity, personal characteristics or disability;
- use technology and innovations in pedagogy imaginatively and appropriately;
- provide a balanced and pedagogically justified mix of instructional activities and class sizes;
- incorporate a balanced and pedagogically justified mix of forms of assessment (formative and summative; exams, writing assignments, problem sets, etc.);
- respect and support the full array of activities and responsibilities students and academic staff experience as part of their membership in the university community;
- be built on a learning community that encourages staff and students to work as partners in that learning community.

- 2.6 “Curriculum Reform” encompasses many aspects of education, including things like developing new programmes of study, reviewing the role of elective modules, updating basic concepts like the definition of a contact hour, and aligning the timetabling “footprint” of modules. **For present purposes attention will be restricted to how Durham students are educated: the principles and policies guiding teaching, learning and assessment.** While they will need to be applied with consideration of their specific context, these principles and policies pertain to both undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, and all modes of study.
- 2.7 Improving teaching, learning and assessment is a comprehensive process, but it does not (typically) require root-and-branch change. Through annual and periodic reviews, teaching staff and academic departments already engage in cycles of module and programme improvement. **The purpose of this exercise is to update the principles and policies that guide these activities.** Any subsequent implementation will therefore take place on a longer- term basis, over several years.

Aims and performance Indicators

- 2.8 With the development and implementation of an explicit set of principles for high quality teaching, learning, and assessment at Durham University, we have six key aims to increase:
- **student engagement** through improved participation in learning opportunities and building greater confidence in being able to demonstrate knowledge and skills learned;
 - **student success** through improved knowledge and skills development relevant to programme learning outcomes, ensuring that students successfully develop appropriate graduate attributes, and through the elimination of awarding gaps;
 - **educational effectiveness** by constructive alignment of learning outcomes, curriculum, and assessment design and ensuring that modules and programmes emphasise high-value educational activities;
 - **educational efficiency** through improved use of staff and student time, and utilisation of the teaching estate.
 - **student and staff well-being** by providing flexibility within a framework for staff and students, improving mental and physical health through reduced stress and greater inclusivity; and,
 - **staff excellence** in teaching, learning and assessment through improved capability, confidence and esteem for all staff contributing to teaching, learning, and assessment.
- 2.9 Through these measures, we expect improvements in a number of areas related to student and

staff performance and satisfaction, namely;

- **student satisfaction**, as measured by national surveys (NSS, PTES, JISC) and local analyses (MEQs and tools found in the DCAD teaching excellence toolkit);
- **student attainment**, as measured by continuation and completion rates, and degree and graduate outcomes, with special attention to attainment gaps for underrepresented and disadvantaged students;
- improved **diversity and inclusion**, as measured by campus culture and reputation for education based on inclusion and respect;
- **staff satisfaction** with their role as teachers, as measured by staff surveys; and,
- **contribution of teaching activities to staff progression and promotion**, as reflected by DPPCs, FPCs and UPC.

1. Overarching Considerations

- 2.10 By far the greatest point of feedback was the impact of these proposals on workload. While some of the principles set out below can be easily embedded in existing review processes, others will require more focused input. Discussions at Faculty and Department levels will guide implementation of the principles in their contexts, balancing workload within broader strategic priorities.
- 2.11 Concerns were also raised about the appropriateness of underpinning administrative processes that would support the application of these principles, and the impact on the workload of Teaching and Learning staff. Alongside the implementation plan, we suggest a review of the documentation and process that support teaching and learning with the aim of ensuring these processes are consistent and simplifying and streamlining them where possible.
- 2.12 We anticipate the embedding of these principles over the next four to five years, acknowledging that many departments are already meeting the objectives in many areas. DCAD will provide support, training, and guidance for departments based around the Implementation Plan detailed in Appendix 8, discussion at Department and Faculty levels will help determine priorities and approaches.

New Principles and Objectives

- 2.13 Five Principles, each with a series of underpinning objectives have been developed. These are summarised below, with more detail on the background, development and evidence base included in the linked appendices.
- 2.14 **Active Pedagogy:** All programmes will use active pedagogic approaches (**Appendix 1**).

AP1: In addition to traditional approaches, programmes will employ a range of active teaching approaches including, but not limited to, problem-based learning, collaborative learning, discussion-based learning, experiential learning, project work, enquiry-based learning, and flipped learning.

AP2: As far as possible, synchronous teaching activities should provide core content in advance, focus on opportunities for students to undertake activities, interact with peers and the lecturer, and give and receive feedback.

AP3: Students will be consulted and given the opportunity to be actively involved in the design and development of curricula and pedagogic approaches.

AP4: Disciplinary and pedagogic research will underpin all programmes of study through research-led content, development of research-oriented skills, undertaking research-based activities, and using research-informed pedagogies.

2.15 Assessment for Learning: All assessment will embody the principles of assessment for learning (more detail in **Appendix 2**).

AL1: Programmes will use a range of pedagogically- and discipline-appropriate assessment approaches including, but not limited to, peer assessment, self-assessment, group assessment, and digital assessment.

AL2: Programmes will employ strategies to develop students as self-assessors and effective independent lifelong learners.

AL3: Assessments will be designed to provide flexibility of formats and topics where possible to evidence learning outcomes.

AL4: Programmes should balance formative and summative assessments that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and improvement.

AL5: Amounts of assessment, and types and amounts of feedback provided, will be appropriate, timely, and consistent.

AL6: Assessment design, including measures to ensure validity, reliability, and fairness, such as marking schemes, criteria, and rubrics, will be explicit and shared with students.

AL7: Programmes will be designed to ensure that students have the opportunity to complete a diverse range of assessments that have real-world relevance.

2.16 Inclusive design: Learning opportunities will be designed to be inclusive, accessible, and representative of a diverse student body (**Appendix 3**).

ID1: Modules will be designed to meet the principles of Universal Design for Learning, focusing on engaging learners and providing alternative materials and activities to meet learning outcomes where possible.

ID2: Learning should be explicitly scaffolded with materials provided in advance of taught classes and learning supported through guided tasks outside of taught sessions as appropriate to the topic and level of study.

ID3: Learning materials and activities should be designed to ensure that they are accessible to students with disabilities and additional needs, or reasonable adjustments made to provide alternatives.

ID4: Learning materials and activities will be designed to ensure that they are inclusive and representative of a diverse student body.

2.17 Resilient curriculum: All programmes and modules will be designed to be robust and responsive to changes in the external and internal environments (**Appendix 4**).

RC1: Modules will be designed with explicit constructive alignment of learning outcomes, curriculum, and assessment.

RC2: Where possible, modules will be designed and delivered using blended learning approach with provision of online asynchronous learning materials and activities alongside synchronous teaching.

RC3: The level of curriculum detail included in module documentation should be sufficient to allow students to make informed choices while providing staff flexibility to respond to changing circumstances.

RC4: Modules within programmes should be designed with consistent approaches, with explicit consideration given to the learning experience for joint and combined honours students.

RC5: Responsibility for core modules should not lie with a single individual to allow both for resilience in delivery and collaborative design of learning opportunities. Similar considerations should be given to all modules, wherever possible.

2.18 **Digital learning:** All programmes will use digital learning approaches appropriate for the discipline, curriculum, pedagogy, and context (**Appendix 5**).

DL1: Programmes will provide significant opportunities for all students to develop skills in digital learning and digital literacies appropriate to the discipline.

DL2: Modules and assessments will be designed to use the most pedagogically appropriate digital tools and resources as supported by Durham University.

DL3: Modules will have a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) presence appropriate to their pedagogic design (e.g. traditional, flipped classroom, blended, fully-online,).

DL4: Teachers are encouraged to curate and embed open educational resources in their modules, and make their own resources openly available.

DL5: Innovations in digital pedagogy will be evaluated to develop an evidence-based approach to digital learning practice.

Risks

2.19 **Risks:** these guidelines directly respond to strategic risk SR7, “failure to provide world -class teaching and learning experience.” By implication, they have bearing on SR3 (“failure to maintain financial sustainability”) and SR5 (“failure to achieve undergraduate and postgraduate student recruitment quality and mix”).

2.20 **Equality:** These principles seek to ensure that Durham’s educational experience is fully inclusive. A full EIA will be completed before the final policy is presented to Senate.

2.21 **Environmental:** These principles include a commitment to sustainable curricula.

2.22 **Social Responsibility:** N/A

2.23 **University Purpose and Values:** These principles relate to teaching, and in particular pedagogy, which is the core activity of the University.

2.24 **Legal, Regulatory, Policy or OfS Compliance:** the principles and objectives aim to ensure we continue to comply with all relevant existing and emerging legal (e.g. CMA, Equality Act) and regulatory (e.g. the evolving and expanding OfS requirements) obligations.

3. Consultation and previous committee consideration

3.1 The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Task and Finish Group was initiated at the February 2022 meeting of Education Committee. It provided regular oral and two written updates to Education Committee. This is the first formal report of the group to Senate. DSU Undergraduate and Postgraduate Officers are members of Education Committee and the Task and Finish

Group.

3.2 To inform these principles and draft objectives, consultation was carried out with students and staff. Students were engaged and recruited via the Students' Union. This initial consultation was undertaken in four stages:

- **initial student consultation**, took place between 30th March and 12th April 2022, with participants recruited via the Students' Union and student Associations. Twelve students took part in five focus groups;
- **initial staff consultation**, took place between 12th May and 30th June 2022, with all university teaching staff invited to take part via Heads of Department. Forty-four staff participated in thirteen focus groups;
- **second student consultation**, took place between 6th June and 13th June 2022, with participants recruited via the Students' Union and student Associations. Sixteen students took part in five focus groups;
- **second staff consultation**, took place once focus groups outcomes had been written up and initial proposals drafted. Earlier versions of this Green Paper were considered through the formal committee structure, via staff and student representatives at Faculty Education Committees, as well as at Provost's Board and Education Committee.

3.3 In the second phase of the consultation, we asked for feedback on the draft principles from a wide range of stakeholders, giving multiple opportunities for individuals to get involved.

- All departments were asked to review the Green Paper, discuss at Boards of Studies or other appropriate meetings, and provide written feedback or give verbal feedback at departmental meetings with the PVC Education.
- All staff were given the opportunity to feedback on the principles in an online questionnaire, which was advertised in Dialogue as well as being highlighted to relevant staff groups (i.e. Learning and Teaching administrators and relevant colleagues in the Library, Academic Office, and Careers).
- All students were given the opportunity to feedback on the principles in an online questionnaire, which was advertised in Dialogue and promoted through the Students' Union.
- Feedback on the principles was gathered in student focus groups, in which over 70 students took part.

4. Next Steps

4.1 Following approval by Senate, these principles will be adopted by Durham University as a guide to pedagogic and curriculum development over the next five year period, supported by DCAD as described in the Implementation Plan (Appendix 7).

Appendix 7: Implementation Plan

Five principles have been developed as part of this work, which we recommend implementing across two phases. Given the centrality of digital tools in education, this will underpin all areas of implementation,

Phase 1 (Sept 2023 – June 2025)

- Active Pedagogies
- Assessment for Learning

There is a direct link between teaching approach we use and the assessments student's take. Therefore, the first phase focuses on these two key areas of activity.

Phase 2 (Sept 2025 – June 2027)

- Inclusive Learning Design
- Resilient Curriculum

In the second phase DCAD will support departments to review and further enhance curricula, built on the key principles of accessibility and inclusivity such as Universal Design for Learning. This pairs well with the key principle of the resilient curriculum to ensure teaching is consistent for all students.

Working Within Existing Processes

Improving teaching, learning and assessment should not require root-and-branch change. Departments will already meet some of the Objectives outlined for each Principle, therefore the approach we propose will start with an audit of provision to identify priority areas for development, in each department, followed by targeted changes during annual cycles of module and programme improvements. DCAD will develop self-audit tools for this purpose and provide materials and workshops to support the work of departments.

To ensure we fit into the normal change cycle, two-year phases are utilised to allow adoption for changes in module and programme specifications and their evaluation. This high-level plan below focuses on Phase 1, an implementation plan for Phase 2 will be brought to a later meeting of Senate.

Active Pedagogies

Active pedagogies enhance student engagement through peer interactions and hands-on activities, scaffolded by timely provision of learning materials and lecturer feedback. Throughout, the focus will be on research-led education, developing students' research-oriented skills and using research-informed pedagogies to enhance the overall learning experience

DCAD will support departments to embed active teaching approaches, relevant to the discipline, through provision of self-audit tools, training, and consultancy services to develop, evaluate and refine these approaches.

Assessment for Learning

Assessment for learning approaches enhance students' self-assessment skills and confidence, through formative and summative assessments that offer low-stakes practice, constructive feedback, and ongoing improvement, while providing tailored feedback and guidance that adapts to individual student learning needs.

DCAD will support Departments to review existing assessment provision and look to ensure assessment is engaging, relevant and, where possible, showcases real-world applications of the knowledge and skills gained in the program.

Digital Learning

Digital tools underpin teaching and learning in all disciplines; used successfully, appropriate tools lead to engaging teaching and effective learning.

To support digital skills development, DCAD will launch a professional program for staff and students to ensure they are able to maximise the benefits of the digital tools available; a Digital Learning Users Group, combining Faculty representatives with digital learning experts from DCAD and CIS will review and recommend effective digital tools and resources to meet the needs of each discipline.

Appendix 9: Consultation design

Phase 1

The aim of this consultation was to provide a wide base of evidence to inform an updated suite of policies for learning, teaching, and assessment. As such, as well as using a sector literature review, we felt it was important to give as many staff and students the opportunities to have their voices heard as a part of the consultation.

1. The consultation took three phases: Phase 1: initial student consultation, took place between 30th March and 12th April 2022, with participants recruited via the Students' Union and student Associations. Twelve students took part in five focus groups.
2. Phase 2: staff consultation, took place between 12th May and 30th June 2022, with all university teaching staff invited to take part via Heads of Department. Forty-four staff participated in thirteen focus groups.
3. Phase 3: second student consultation, took place between 6th June and 13th June 2022, with participants recruited via the Students' Union and student Associations. Sixteen students took part in five focus groups.

All students were asked to complete an anonymous demographics questionnaire.

7.1 Student demographics

Of the twenty-eight students who took part in the student consultations, twenty-three completed the demographics questionnaire.

Breakdown by course:

Anthropology, Sociology, Education	1
Business	2
Computer Science	1
DCAD	1
Earth Science	1
Economics/Finance	2
Education	1
Geography	8
Law	1
Modern Languages & Cultures	3
Psychology	1
No response	1

Breakdown by college:

Castle	1
Collingwood	1
Grey	2
John Snow	3
South	1
St Aidan's	4
St Cuthbert's	1
St Hild & St Bede	3
St John's	2
St Mary's	1

University	1
Ustinov	1
Van Mildert	1
No response	1

Breakdown by year:

Year 1 (undergraduate)	9
Year 2 (undergraduate)	3
Year 3 (undergraduate)	4
Year 4 (undergraduate)	1
Masters	5
PG research	1

Of the 23 students, 22 were studying full-time and 1 part-time.

In terms of gender, 16 identified as female, 5 as male, 1 as non-binary, and 1 provided no response.

Participants were aged between 18 and 26 years, with an average age of 21 years.

The majority of participants identified as white or white British (12), with representation from participants who identified as Arab (1), Asian – Indian (1), Chinese (3), Filipino (1) and Pakistani (1).

Four of the participants disclosed a disability.

7.2 Staff demographics

Staff attended thirteen focus groups, which were targeted to ensure that colleagues in a range of different areas and roles were included.

Group	Code
Health & Social Science	A
Arts & Humanities	B
Science	C
Business School	D
Teaching staff (1)	E
PGR students who teach	F
Directors of Education	G
Teaching staff (2)	H
Professional services	I
Mixed group (1)	J
Mixed group (2)	K
Mixed group (3)	L
Mixed group (4)	M

7.3 Department representation

The majority of academic departments were represented in this consultation.

Dept	Number
Archaeology	1
Biosciences	2
Chemistry	1
Classics & Ancient History	1

Computer Science	1
DCAD	2
Earth Sciences	1
Economics & Finance	5
Education	3
Engineering	1
English	2
Geography	1
SGIA	2
History	1
Law	1
Library	1
Management & Marketing	1
Maths	4
Physics	4
Psychology	3
Sociology	2
Sport & Exercise Science	3
Theology & Religion	1

Phase 2

In the second phase of the consultation, we asked for feedback on the draft principles from a wide range of stakeholders, giving multiple opportunities for individuals to get involved.

- All departments were asked to review the Green Paper, discuss at Boards of Studies or other appropriate meetings, and provide written feedback or give verbal feedback at departmental meetings with the PVC Education.
- All staff were given the opportunity to feedback on the principles in an online questionnaire, which was advertised in Dialogue as well as being highlighted to relevant staff groups (i.e. Learning and Teaching administrators and relevant colleagues in the Library, Academic Office, and Careers).
- All students were given the opportunity to feedback on the principles in an online questionnaire, which was advertised in Dialogue and promoted through the Students' Union.
- Feedback on the principles was gathered in student focus groups, in which over 70 students took part.