# University of Nottingham UK Plan for Teaching and Learning Activities in 2021/22

Introduction

This document draws from the five UK-Faculty plans for teaching, learning and assessment in 2021/22, and from the work of the UK-campus Education Planning Group[1]. The document provides an overview of the approaches being used by schools and departments, in partnership with professional service colleagues. Its purpose is twofold: to support consistent and scaleable delivery in 2021/22, and to point the way towards a refreshed framework for teaching and assessment from 2022/23.

The document is necessarily high-level. Its focus is upon UK campus-based provision as distinct from courses designed to be studied online at distance. While many of the approaches described are used at UNM and UNNC, it is noted that these campuses are operating in different contexts (e.g. course of the pandemic, national regulations and economic conditions). It is also recognised that there is no single model of teaching that works for all disciplines and for all students. For the detail of approaches in different disciplines, colleagues should refer to the specific Faculty plan and the School and Departmental plans that accompany this.

Planning for 2021-22 has been an iterative process. A set of University principles was circulated in March 2021. Faculties supplemented these where appropriate and provided guidance to their Schools or Departments to inform the development of local Enhancement Plans, which were due by the end of May 2021. The School/Department Enhancement Plans then informed the development of the Faculty plans, key elements of which are summarised in the University Plan. These documents have already informed the development of the timetable for Semester 1 2021-22, and will inform the creation of the timetable for Semester 2, with work on this beginning in September.
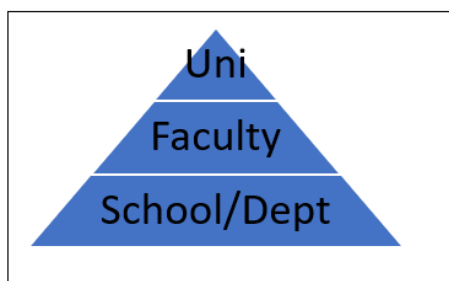
The plans guide our resource allocation & stop us spending effort on approaches that are not scaleable. If it is not in the plan, we should not be supporting it.
The plans are created in an iterative process; they are owned by Directors of Teaching in the Schools/Depts, the Digital Learning Directors, the APVCs and the PVC.

Strategic Context

In April 2021, the Education and Student Experience Strategic Delivery Plan was published. The five priorities of the plan set out the key areas of focus that lie at the heart of both our planning for academic year 2021-22, a transitional year that bridges 'Covid-recovery', and 'post-Covid renewal' from 2022-23. The priorities are not standalone. They intersect to provide us with a shared understanding of the drivers for our 2021-22 decisions.

Priority 1 signals our commitment to reflect on, listen to and learn from, the experiences of our students and staff through and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure that our education and student experience is

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[1] This is a sub-group of Education and Student Experience Committee. Chaired by the PVC for ESE, membership comprises the APVC for Teaching & Curriculum Leadership, the Faculty APVCs for ESE and the Director of Student Journey (Engineering), Chair of Quality and Standards Committee, Deputy Registrar, Director of Student Services, Head of Academic Processes, Associate Director of Educational Excellence, SU Education and Postgraduate Officer, and senior colleagues from Libraries, Digital Technology Services and External Relations.

inclusive, agile and responsive, that it is built on good practice, enables potential for both students and staff, and that our degree standards are maintained.   (Covid+)

Priority 2 recognises our need to stabilise and improve the core processes, systems and facilities upon which we and our students rely – which requires us to make decisions that are scaleable and able to provide consistent quality. (Infrastructure)

Priority 3 foregrounds the centrality of curriculum and pedagogy in our decision making, ensuring that we focus effort on student engagement and inclusive practice through the key 'learning activities' of knowledge acquisition, inquiry, discussion, collaboration, practice and production. (Curriculum)

Priority 4 puts student experience and wellbeing at the heart of our planning so that we enable our students to quickly feel part of our learning community, able to build their relationships with us and with each other (Student Experience).

Finally, Priority 5 recognises our ambition to diversify our student population, and to be as inclusive as possible. This is not only about recruitment and new types of course, but about progress and success. Priority 5 expresses our commitment to enabling the potential of all our students (Diversity and Inclusivity).

Covid-19 and 2021-22

Academic year 2021-22 is transitional. In spring 2020 and throughout 2020-21, we made rapid decisions that disrupted educational practice and student experience. Some of this disruption represented an acceleration of pre-pandemic enhancement activity, but some of it was an emergency response. The forthcoming academic year is the third to be 'Covid-compromised', at least in Semester 1. However, we have experience and evidence to help us foreground enhancement over emergency, and to work for the long rather than the short-term. In 2021-22, we are unlikely to face many challenges that we have not already faced. We know what it takes to quickly flip face to face and online delivery, and we understand how best to support those students forced to study remotely until able to travel. As part of our recovery roadmap, we have for 2021-22 reinstated our pre-Covid approach to extenuating circumstances, and are no longer reliant on exceptional Covid regulations. We have also reviewed our portfolio of student surveys, and have renewed our commitment to high-quality benchmarked student feedback via the Nottingham Student Experience Survey, the National Student Survey, and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey. We have worked exceptionally hard to deal with the challenges presented by the pandemic and to enable our students to progress and complete their studies – we know what we are doing.

From 2022-23 onwards, we hope that Covid will cease to constrain our activities and that Covid will no longer be part of the rationale for how we teach.

Our confidence and capability in 'non-traditional' teaching and assessment has grown. Within and across faculties and departments, we have shared our practice (the successful and the not-so successful), and we have learnt from the rich feedback provided through the Covid Student Experience surveys of 2020 and 2021, other sources of student evaluation and the research literature. We have worked together as a community of higher education professionals to identify our 'Covid-keepers', those elements of practice in 2020 and 2021 that have positively enhanced teaching and learning. One example of this is the further revision and refinement of the University's policy for online examinations in 2021-22, based on feedback from both staff and students, which recognises the positive effects of moving exams online as well as the various challenges that generates (further, see below). Another example is the strategic goal to remove our reliance on PC rooms with fixed desktop computers and promote the use of our teaching estate for more agile and flexible modes of delivery.

For 2021-22, in line with most universities, we are placing a priority on the health of our students and staff and building separate timetables for Semester 1 and for Semester 2. This will enable quick responses to any changes in local or national restrictions. It is important to note that the process of building the teaching timetable takes several months and decisions must be taken well in advance of delivery.

For Semester 1, in-person teaching will be prioritised for small group interactive classes, labs, seminars, and tutorials, with large group teaching sessions, for example large-scale lectures, mostly delivered online. The removal of social distancing measures as part of stage 4 of the Government's roadmap prompted us to review the draft timetable for Semester 1 and increase the proportion of face-to-face teaching for some areas where we are operationally able to do so, prioritising courses where the proportion of face to face is lowest and moving some interactive large-group teaching to face-to-face. These adjustments to the Semester 1 timetable have been made within the constraints of our estate and student numbers and with recognition that it is not possible to re-engineer the whole timetable in time for start of session. Subject to the progress of the pandemic, we will increase the proportion of in-person teaching in Semester 2. Work on the Semester 2 timetable will start in September 2021.

It is an ongoing task to explain the rationale for our 2021-22 decisions to students and their families. The Russell Group have published a statement on 'blended learning' to counter the media rhetoric that universities have delivered less and poor-quality teaching during the pandemic. At Nottingham, we have issued a number of communications to both new and returning students and will provide a slide to teaching staff to help them explain our approach to their students at start of session.

Teaching and Learning Activities in 2021-22

In developing our programmes and how we teach them, we are guided by the values at the heart of the university strategy: inclusivity, ambition, openness, fairness and respect. We are committed to inclusive approaches that both support and challenge students to achieve their potential, that articulate clearly the *what, why, how, when, where, for whom, by whom, and how well* of our education, and which embed opportunities for participation, engagement and interaction.

Educational enhancement is in our DNA – it never stops as we ensure our students develop the competencies, and gain the knowledge, to make sense of the world and how they can contribute to it. The principles, approaches and considerations set out below should be understood in this light: they draw upon our Covid-era experiences, but also our strategic priorities, to support Schools and Departments to provide an excellent education for their students, and to do it through approaches that are efficient and scaleable for the benefit of staff too.

The summaries draw on the faculty plans and from policy documents authored by the Education Planning Group. There is no information in this document that has not already been discussed with Schools and Departments.

Preparing to teach

Teaching materials and sessions
- Programme leads should ensure that all students have face-to-face activities each week, whether these are staff-led or student-led.
- Where delivery of lecture materials remains online and asynchronous, students should have access to live interactive 'lecture engagement' sessions.
- Staff should consider re-using online materials from 2020/21 where they are of suitable quality. Advice is available via Digital Learning Directors and in Faculty plans.
- Teaching should be co-ordinated and planned in order to support students with their time management; for example, by providing schedules and organizing activities sequentially rather than in parallel.
- Student workload should be considered when planning teaching – for example, by considering if the amount of material being provided is appropriate or excessive.
- We are also revising the University's guidelines on the use of Engage (lecture capture) and pre-recorded teaching materials, informed by our learning from the last two academic years.
- Staff should ensure that students understand how they will be taught, and how they can engage, with their course materials and sessions.

Accessibility and Inclusion

Online teaching and learning materials are expected to comply with government accessibility legislation by September 2021; this also aligns with the University's obligations under its Access and Participation Plan. An online institutional training package (time required: 30 minutes) has been developed which staff who are teaching in 2021-22 should access to ensure that they understand (a) their obligations and (b) what actions should be taken. Staff who are teaching in Semester 1, are asked to complete the course by 30 September 2021 and to ensure that their teaching materials are compliant with government accessibility legislation before they are delivered. It is recognised that full compliance may not be possible in all cases for Semester 1, and so further guidance will be issued by Teaching and Learning Committee prior to start of session.

Queries about the course should be directed to Learning Technologies.

Key points to note are that:

- Priority should be given to accurate captioning of new pre-recorded asynchronous video and audio content.
- Staff are not required to retrospectively correct the captions of historic asynchronous video and audio content.
- Automatic speech recognition is sufficient for live streamed content and the recording of live content.

Staff should be mindful of potential differences between demographic groups in how resources are accessed and experienced. In particular, staff should consider how materials can be accessed by students with hearing impairments and by students who use screen readers because they are visually impaired or have a learning disability. 'Accessibility checker' features are embedded in MS Office tools and in Moodle and can help to make sure that content is easy for all to read and access. We recommend trying to implement 'quick fixes' where possible. One relatively simple example is to consider whether sufficient colour contrast has been provided in teaching materials. In cases where staff are aware that some students might have difficulty accessing their teaching materials, consideration should be given to what anticipatory action can be taken to assist those students.

Crucially, we must make it clear to our students that we will work with them to meet their accessibility needs if they feel that these are not being met. Staff and schools should consider issuing this assurance through a variety of different means and media, e.g., welcome messages, Moodle pages, personal tutor meetings, Town Hall meetings etc. If students contact staff to request adjustments, it is our obligation to consider how best to meet their needs. Further advice on this can be obtained through School Disability Liaison Officers.

Preparing to Assess

Priority 3 of the Education and Student Experience Strategic Delivery plan focuses upon the institution-wide curriculum project. Ensuring that our methods of assessment are authentic, robust, proportionate and inclusive in all disciplines is integral to this work. Covid-19 has accelerated the move to online examination, and in many areas this has been successful and well-received by students. However, our infrastructure has struggled with the scale of online examinations. For 2021-22, we require a transitional period that continues the progress made since 2020, but also protects student welfare alongside the needs of those disciplines for whom the move online has presented particular challenges.

The curriculum updating cycle for 2022-23 facilitates more time for Schools and Departments to review their assessments. Options include more formative assessment and feedback, fewer 'high stakes' end-point summative assessments, and a greater range of continuous assessment, including open book 'take home exams', portfolios, policy briefs, presentations and reports.

Online Exams Policy for 2021-22

A revised Online Exams policy for the next academic year has been published following review of the operation of online exams in 2020 and 2021, developments in the sector, and feedback from students. This covers exams administered via Moodle and Rogō on the UK campus during the designated exam periods in 2021-22 (including reassessments in summer 2022). Assessments will be delivered online with the exception of courses with PSRB requirements or specific pedagogic needs that make on-campus and in-person invigilation essential.

The release and submission dates for online exams will be staggered to ensure that our technical infrastructure can cope with the volume of activity at any one time. The standard length for short-timed exams in 2021-22 will be 1, 2, 3 or 24 hours (other durations are allowed via Rogō). Following guidance from Disability Support Services, students on support plans will be given a blanket 50% extra time allowance for all short-timed exams and Moodle exams will include the additional 30 minutes for IT issues and upload time.

Academic Misconduct

In 2020-21 we saw an increase in cases of academic misconduct related to non-invigilated online open book examinations. We need to reduce the opportunities for academic misconduct in 2021-22 within the constraints of the assessment plans that have already been published to students. Measures that are being taken for 2021-22 include:

- ensuring that assessments do not make unreasonable demands of students.
- constructing examination questions and other tasks that require high level skills (e.g. interpretation, critical evaluation).
- engaging with students to ensure that they understand what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.
- sign-posting students to the Student Union 'Better By You' campaign that emphasizes that contract cheating and essay mills in particular tend to produce work of a very poor quality.

We are considering the adoption of an 'honour code' for students and are aware of the growing frustration felt by those students who are not engaging in academic misconduct towards those who are.

Supporting Students

While students are generally positive about the teaching they have experienced and appreciate the efforts of staff to support them, many report that their motivation and mental health has suffered during the pandemic. Self-isolation and/or lack of study space have further contributed to disrupt their learning. In planning how best to support students in 2021-22, Schools and Departments have access to the data from the two Covid Student Experience surveys (results available on tableau - VPN needed for access) and the 2021 national Student Academic Experience survey, as well as Student Evaluation of Module and School-level pulse surveys, to inform their planning.

Routes to addressing the concerns raised in the surveys include:

- Providing opportunities for students to access regular drop-in sessions with staff and making clear who to contact for a timely response if they need help. Many personal tutors are already providing excellent support in this way.

- The University's Student Academic Skills team provides a wealth of resources and support for students, including sessions focused upon community and belonging.

- Students who need study space should be directed to the UoN Libraries website which explains how to access study spaces on campus.

- Students who need wellbeing support should be signposted to the UoN Support and Wellbeing Service.

- During 2021-22, we will be using a new [Student Engagement Dashboard](#), a welfare initiative that will to help us identify students who may need additional support.

- In partnership with the Students' Union, we have developed a new set of principles governing student representation and Learning Community Fora.

Digital Capabilities

A new Moodle site called **The Digital Student** will be launched ready for this year's new student intake. For September 2021, it will support the digital competencies students need in their first month. By September 2022, it will also address those needed for the rest of the first year at university. This Moodle site replaces last year's Student Guide to Digital Learning, which is being repurposed as a pre-arrival guide only.

The Digital Student Moodle site will comprise the following:

1. An introductory short video for learners explaining the benefits and what to expect from the initiative.
2. Access to the Digital Discovery Tool, offering a self-assessment and personalised report.
3. A digital competency framework designed to support new students in the first month; leaners will be able to report those competencies with which they feel confident.
4. A set of bite-sized resources to support students with any of the competencies they wish to develop.
5. Badges to indicate digital competencies gained.

Summary: Education for the Future

Nottingham is a research-intensive global university that offers students from all contexts and cultures a unique opportunity to develop their academic and professional competencies, creativity and new ways of thinking and being. Our education is research-led, inter- and multi-disciplinary. It offers transformative and authentic learning experiences that lead to qualifications highly valued by employers, and lifelong access to our world-changing alumni networks. As our university strategy says, we offer "*An education that is more than a degree*".

Covid-19 has forced changes to our professional practice for different reasons and with different impacts upon staff and students. We have worried about student welfare and staff workload; both we and our infrastructure have struggled with the pace of adoption and scale-up. All of us are interpreting our Covid-era learning through the lens of our wider pandemic experience: what is a good experience for some, is a bad experience for others. This is acknowledged in the recognition that 2021-22 is a transitional year.

In 2021-22 we seek a period of greater stability during which we can continue to review our evidence base, work on our infrastructure, continue to grow our confidence and capability, and challenge our assumptions. Our goal is to arrive at a future-focused position for 2022-23 and beyond which proclaims our university values through an educational model that enables our disciplines to discover and act upon what really makes the difference for our students.

Sarah Speight
Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education and Student Experience
August 2021