

Strategic Plan 2005-2010

We are delighted to present the first strategic plan of the Higher Education Academy. Our audience is all who are interested in our work, but principally our key stakeholders: higher education institutions; their staff who enable and support student learning; national organisations; and the many individuals, groups and external bodies who support our principal aims.

The Higher Education Academy began its work in 2004, and much of our immediate focus has been on the preparation of this strategic plan. It has emerged from an intense period of consideration by the Board and our senior staff, and following consultation with the higher education community. The principal messages from that consultation were that, while we are in a strong strategic position, we need to clarify our focus and priorities and to demonstrate our effectiveness with our stakeholders.

We believe this plan will enable us to do that. In our mission we stress the primacy of improving the student learning experience. In our aims we identify the triple focus on national policy, institutional support, and subject and staff development. Each aim is supported by a number of objectives linked to more detailed activities, and the establishment of key performance indicators. These latter elements will form the basis of annual operating plans for detailed implementation and evaluation.

The plan is designed to take us through to 2010, but it is not set in stone. In the dynamic environment in which higher education finds itself that would be foolish. So we will review our progress each year, and make amendments as necessary, and we will conduct a full review in 2008.

A successful strategic plan is not a public relations document. Nor is it designed to sit in a drawer or lie on a shelf. To be effective it must be a living organism owned by all involved in the organisation. We are confident that this plan meets those criteria. Underneath the prose there is energy, enthusiasm and commitment to deliver the key objectives, and to make our essential contribution to improving the learning experience of more than 2 million students in U.K. higher education.

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Professor Paul Ramsden, Chief Executive*



Introduction

United Kingdom higher education institutions enjoy an enviable reputation for the quality of their teaching, learning and student support. This has been built on the professionalism and commitment of their staff, in the face of mounting pressures, not least those of time and resources. These pressures will intensify over the next 5 to 10 years, while new challenges are becoming evident.

These include an increased focus on accountability to students for the quality of the education and services they receive; the growing importance of e-learning; an increased emphasis on issues of wider participation, retention and graduate employability; the introduction of new forms of reporting student achievement; the quality of research training environments; increased competition from overseas providers; growing international perspectives on curricula and standards issues; and the differing policy contexts of the countries within the UK following devolution.

The purpose of the Higher Education Academy is to support staff, their institutions, and the whole sector in meeting these challenges and enhancing the learning experience of students. Building on and extending the work of predecessor organisations, we will provide a comprehensive, integrated and coherent focus on improving the student learning experience. We will act as an adviser, broker and consultant to our stakeholders in all matters related to improving the student learning experience, both undergraduate and postgraduate. We seek no role as a regulatory body.

We will be responsive to the needs of our stakeholders, but also exercise leadership in promoting good practice, anticipating changing agendas, and developing new programmes. We intend to shape the world we operate in, not simply react to it. We recognise the significance of variety of institutional missions and believe that this diversity is one of the key strengths of the sector. Being both receptive and innovative will be the central challenge we must meet to be successful.

Context and Positioning

A detailed analysis, developed from our consultation process, of the opportunities and threats facing the Academy and our strengths and weaknesses in addressing them, has concluded that the Academy is in a favourable strategic position. There is no other organisation of similar size and scope in the UK. All stakeholders recognise the importance of our work and have indicated initial support. The issues we will help our stakeholders address are unlikely to become less intense. There is a substantial body of work in our predecessor organisations to build on, and we have highly capable and professional staff.

To exploit this strategic position successfully we need to be clear about our focus and priorities, demonstrate that our advice and support is well-grounded and effective, be open, participative, and consultative in our processes, and act in a spirit of partnership with the many groups and other organisations with a similar focus. We will do this through the aims and objectives of the strategic plan and their detailed implementation.

Meeting Stakeholder and Partner Expectations

The Higher Education Academy intends to work with universities and colleges, discipline groups, individual staff and organisations to help them deliver the best possible learning experience for all students. We will also work with the governments of the UK and their funding bodies to create the best policy environment to enable this to happen.

Institutions can expect us to influence national policy on their behalf; to provide them with tools, practical solutions and research evidence; to organise networks for senior managers; to provide national recognition of the programmes which they offer to their staff; and to supply continuing curriculum, pedagogic and developmental support for their staff.

Disciplines and subjects can expect us to supply subject-focused support services via subject centres; to organise discipline networks; and to provide advice, information and resources.

Individual staff can expect us to provide support and networking for teaching, learning and supervision through the subject centres; to facilitate their professional standing and professional development; and to provide access to the best possible evidence about how to improve the student learning experience.

Organisations and associations can expect us to support collaborative activities; to provide strategic advice in a competitive international climate; to influence national policy; and to help build the sector's capacity for evidence-informed activities designed to improve the student learning experience.

Governments and funding bodies can expect us to contribute constructively to the development and implementation of policy which influences the student learning experience and to use effectively the funds provided to us for this purpose.

Students can expect us to involve their national representatives in policy development and to put the student learning experience at the centre of our work.

Our focus on the student learning experience will lead us to work on all aspects of the student learning lifecycle – including strategies for retention, the effective uses of e-learning, the development of enterprise capabilities, and support for excellent research training environments.

Underpinning our work is a commitment to:

- Equality and diversity
- Partnership
- Sharing good practice
- Accountability
- Transparency
- An international perspective
- Maintaining high standards of service

Mission

The Academy's mission is to help institutions, discipline groups and all staff to provide the best possible learning experience for their students.

Strategic aims and objectives

1. To be an authoritative and independent voice on policies that influence student learning experiences

- a. To become a credible provider of strategic policy advice
- b. To establish relationships with key stakeholder bodies to advise and influence public policy related to the student learning experience.

2. To support institutions in their strategies for improving the student learning experience

- a. To develop programmes of support based on HEI needs
- b. To work with institutions in developing their capacity for institutional research (IR)
- c. To inform and advise institutions on issues concerning the learning experiences of diverse student groups including overseas students

3. To lead, support and inform the professional development and recognition of staff in higher education

- a. To facilitate the development and implementation of a standards framework for professional recognition
- b. To accredit institutional programmes
- c. To develop accreditation routes for different staff groups and different types of institutions
- d. To support registered practitioners and other individual practitioners

4. To promote good practice in all aspects of support for the student learning experience

- a. To work with the sector to provide high quality information, advice and support on curriculum, learning, teaching and student assessment
- b. To be a key source of and ensure effective use of information and resources on academic practice and aspects of supporting the student learning experience
- c. To promote best practice in the internationalisation of the student learning experience

5. To lead the development of research and evaluation to improve the quality of the student learning experience

- a. To play a leading role in identifying research and evaluation issues relating to the student learning experience
- b. To synthesise and disseminate information from research, evaluation and other sources about all aspects of the student learning experience
- c. To provide high quality evaluation advice and services associated with improving the student learning experience

6. To be a responsive, efficient and accountable organisation

- a. To find out what institutions and networks need from the Academy to support their work with students
- b. To ensure responsible use of resources
- c. To gain recognition as a good employer
- d. To deploy professional systems
- e. To develop and implement a marketing and communications strategy