Avoiding a rhetoric of resistance and imposition: Strategies for successful implementation of central policy

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Welcome

- This paper starts by critically reflecting on the success of an implementation strategy that unifies practice across four Colleges. At the same time, we will explore how a broad University strategy articulates with and can be successfully implemented in the specific disciplinary context and culture of one of the constituent Colleges – Social Sciences. We believe there is much to learn from taking a step-back to assess, critically, how well the strategy worked, and consider the methodological value to other institutions.
- Our five-point strategy was to articulate that the ‘problems’ identified centrally were ‘local’ problems and that co-producing solutions delivered ‘ownership’.

Outline of the central policy

- L&T Strategy: blueprint for change amidst a rapidly evolving world
- Aiming to work across 4 colleges, distinct in disciplinary focus, regulations and culture
- Aiming to skill—surface towards career success
- Covid-19 to unprecedented growth – 25% increase in student numbers between 2019 and 2023
- L&T strategy had the promise of a ‘north star’ unifying and aligning efforts to transform curricula across the 4 colleges
- As exciting as this is, unification can be considered a threat to the rich and diverse College cultures.

Learning & Teaching Strategy: Implementation

L&T STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

A&F Practice & Policy

You may have heard of the **Practice and Policy** Workstream as part of the A[illegible] Project and the development of the Learning Through Assessment (LTA) framework. The purpose of the A&F Practice and Policy Workstream is to promote the Vision and Principles as outlined in 'Learning Through Assess[illegible]en' to enable enhancement to the University's approach to assessment and feedback.

Transforming Curricula

The purpose of the **Transforming Curricula** Workstream is to lead on the implementation of the transforming curricula elements of the Learning & Teaching Strategy. This involves: identifying existing good practice in programmatic approaches, inclusive curricula, work-related learning and inter-disciplinary learning; stimulating and where appropriate commissioning new work; championing and facilitating sharing of good practice; and ensuring that the values in the strategy underpin curricula transformation.

Student Skills & Professional Development

The purpose of the **Student Skills and Professional Development** (SSPD) Workstream is to lead on the implementation of this pillar of the the Learning & Teaching Strategy. This involves identifying opportunities and appetite for skills-based courses, models/approaches to such provision, greater embedding of skills within the curriculum, a coherent framework and approach to promoting student engagement with skills development and the Graduate Attributes framework

[illegible]ving Teaching Practice

[illegible]pose of the **Evolving Teaching Practice** Workstream is to create a shared [illegible]ers[illegible]nding and approach to developing and supporting active learning [illegible]oss[illegible]e University. This entails the articulation of long-term ambitions for [illegible]tive[illegible]earning, consistent and coherent messaging around active learning and [illegible]ear[illegible]rticulation of the requirements of the associated physical and digital [illegible]fra[illegible]ructure.

Strategy 1: An honest understanding of our problems

MA Soc Sci: the largest general degree at the University (2500 students).

Scottish general degrees have a complex structure: breadth in years 1 and 2, and focused 'honours' learning in years 3 and 4. Typically, it's the GPA from honours that leads to degree classification.

Current Configuration of the Pre Honours MA Soc Sci						
	Semester 1			Semester 2		
Year 1	Politics 1a	Sociology 1A	History 1a	Politics 1b	Sociology 1b	Economic & Social History 1b
Year 2	Politics 2a	ESH 2a	Management 1a	Politics 2b	ESH 2b	Management 1b

Strategy 1: An honest understanding of our problems

MA Soc Sci: in year 2, level 1 credits do not progress opportunity (no route to honours)

Sociology, Politics, Economics and Management are very popular to year 2 students

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Year 2	Politics 2a	ESH 2a	**Management 1a**	Politics 2b	ESH 2b	**Management 1b**

Opportunity to make learning count

- Popular class sizes exceed 500 students.
- Our estate struggles to accommodate this size of cohort, leading to ‘double teaching’.
- Some of this pressure comes from year 2 students, and these numbers are difficult to predict
- Many students resist joining smaller subjects, reporting that learning was not relevant to their degree or career ambitions.
- At the same time, smaller subjects rely on year 2 students, with a good conversion record in Economic and Social History, Central & East European Studies and our ‘with’ Quantitative Methods degrees.
- These subject areas represent research themes and learning programmes (such as Erasmus) that significant add to the reputation of Glasgow – distinct place of learning

Strategy 2: Building an evidence-base

To arrive at the ‘right solution’ we created an evidence base of degree plans and combinations (joint degrees) students graduated with.

The evidence told us that over half of the degree combinations available, had fewer than 5 graduating students over the last 8 years.

We were holding learning combinations open for students, that were not wanted.

Removing under-used combinations, removed timetabling complexity helping match large lecture theatres to the largest classes.

- 297 named degree plans which contain Social Science subjects
- 141 named degree plans on the MA Soc Sci alone
- 46 named degree plans are duplicates with other Colleges
- 95 unique UCAS plan codes

- Thanks to Professor Eamonn Butler McIntosh, Director of Education, School of Social & Political Sciences

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Strategy 3: Modelling impact to reveal unintended outcomes

The evidence base was used to model the consequences of removing 55% of degree combinations. This had unintended consequence,

1. Limiting access to three smaller subjects. Modelling helped us adapt, protecting smaller subjects and in turn, this helped us strengthen relationships with colleagues as they saw us protect elements of a shared community.

2. Analysis of second year options allowed us to examine popular combinations that students destined for a single honours were selecting. This led to protection of a Social & Public Policy and Economics combination

Thanks to Yvonne Harkness, Dr Nicola Birkin, Dr Andy Judge and Laura MacFadyen

3. We were able to remove 40% of degree combinations.

Note on resources: New 0.5FTE Associate Dean role, data savvy; team including professional services and academics with sustained track record of working within Glasgow's ancient bureaucracy, new data analysis facilities and strong support from College leadership

Strategy 4: Articulate ‘our gains’

- Communicating our willingness to protect subjects, built trust, and this encouraged colleagues to see potential gains:

- Co-developing new courses/new destination for year 2 students with the Transforming Curricula workstream.
- Innovative assessments that surface skills helping students recognise ‘work-readiness’ with the Student Skills and Professional Development workstream.
- Responding to the Evolving Teaching Practice and Assessment and Feedback workstreams to showcase pedagogical advancements.

Skill and method

New courses would:

Engage students in skill and methods training embedded within each course ‘transition through’

10 credit courses to encourage ‘risk-taking’

Assessments with a nod toward employability ‘tell me about a time when ….’

Content of courses wasn’t so exciting ….

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First programmatic response to the Sustainability Strategy, SDGs and Impact.

Strategy 5: Lead from the front

- In summer 2023, a paper outlining the College's problems, and how we could work with the workstreams towards a stronger student experience was reviewed by the College Management Group. Their support, led to CoSS co-producing a 'pilot' of new provision; solving local problems (enabling ownership) as we articulate with the central vision.
- The University's Sustainability Strategy (USS) has also played a crucial role as a unifying force in implementing the L&TS. Aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the USS has inspired academic leadership, as evidenced by the Times Higher Education's Impact agenda.
- A broad theme of sustainability gave us the agility:
- To both showcase excellence and unify as a College
- Showcase excellence and unify as a University
- A broad enough theme that allowed 'movement' in line with global priorities (Post-2030 SDGs, Climate Action).

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Transforming Curricula

→**Prof Maureen Bain**, MVLS Dean for Learning and Teaching

→**Dr Michael McEwan**, Senior Lecturer, Academic and Digital Development

→**Prof Jo Edson Ferrie**, Associate Dean: Skills & Methods, College of Social Sciences

→**Dr Ashley Lewis-Cole**, Curriculum Support Manager, Learning & Teaching Strategy Unit

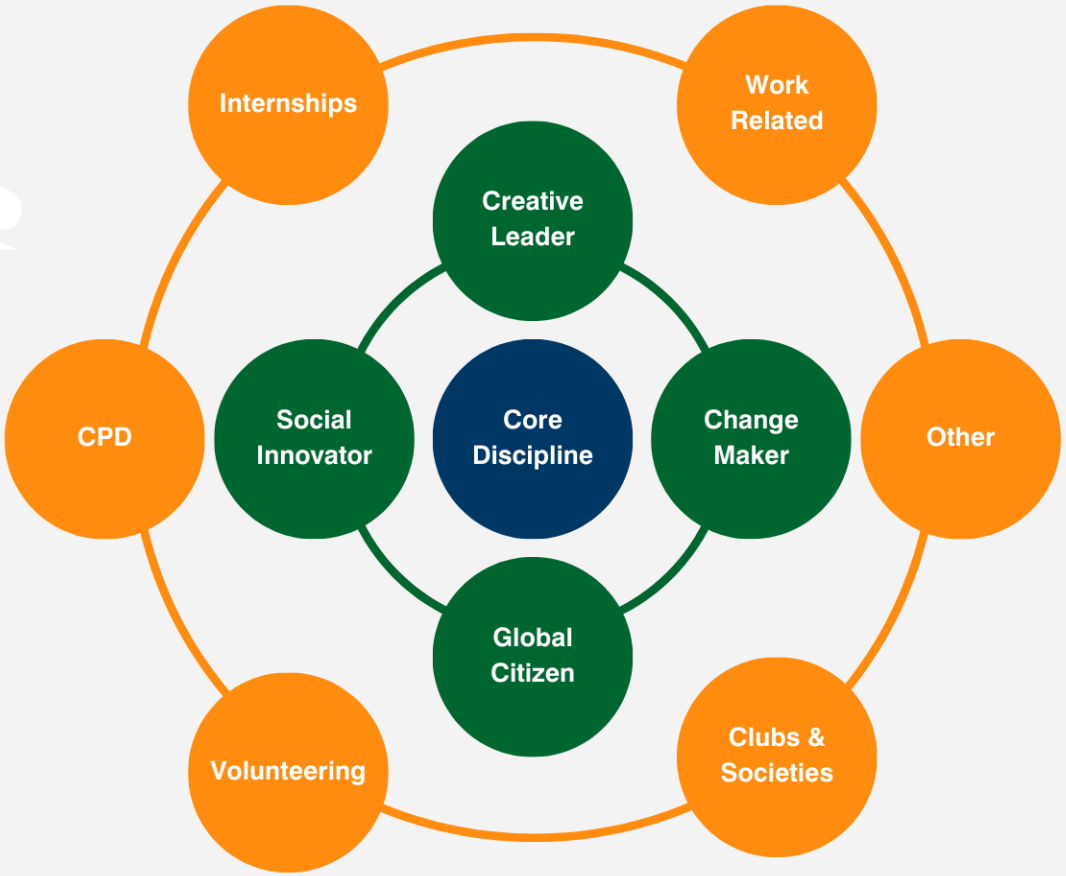
→**Karla Cagney,** Senior Project Manager, Programme Delivery

More about our team

What is the Curriculum for Life (C4L)?

- C4L will engage students in learning that is challenge focused, applied, work-related where appropriate, and experiential where possible.

- In offering C4L, students will have opportunity to learn in non-traditional ways as part of a credit bearing suite of courses, alongside their chosen degree pathway, significantly enhancing their development as an intellectual enquirer, life-long learner and ‘real world’ problem solver whilst at Glasgow.
- Sense-checked with Edinburgh, Hong Kong & Georgia Tech



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State of play

- Strong identity for new course IDEA
  - Interaction, Disrupt, Enhancement, Applied
- Skill surfacing is embedded within course design/content and assessment (no exams, essays need defending)
- Launch of 6 courses in 25/26, pilot 1 year earlier than planned
  - 3 from College of Social Sciences – I am leading one on human rights realisation
  - 2 Medicine, Veterinary & Life Sciences
  - 1 College of Arts and Humanities
  - All Colleges (including Science & Engineering) have courses in the pipeline for expansion in 2026/27
- Early adopters provide scope for a strong evaluation before a formal launch in 26/27.
- Business Case under review, outlining central pump priming to develop and deliver pilot
- Plan to make 20 credits mandatory for all year 2 General Degree students will ensure classes are viable/sustainable
- Rules around course closure if they do not meet standards.

1. An honest understanding of our problems
2. Building an evidence-base
3. Modelling impact to reveal unintended outcomes
4. Articulate our ‘gains’
5. Lead from the front

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