

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE: The Vision

Institutional Background

The University College arose from discussions during the 2007/08 Review of Undergraduate Education as a cross-University approach to the articulation and integration of the *Purposes of a Manchester Undergraduate Education (The Manchester Matrix)* complementing work taking place in core discipline areas. The College is a major contributor to the University's strategic vision where "all students will benefit from opportunities to acquire the core skills, knowledge and personal attributes necessary for employment and further study, and will benefit from the wider educational experience provided by the University College."¹

Following the meeting of the University's Senate in June 2011 the College has been established and will commence delivery of teaching to undergraduates in September 2012. The College is led by an Academic Director and is responsible to Senate, and the wider University, via the Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students).

Wider Context for Curriculum Change

The College initiative developed primarily from intellectual concerns about the concept of a broader curriculum and the preparation of students to engage in debates outside their core discipline as preparation for a lifetime of critical engagement and ongoing learning. This intellectual concern situates the College within broad ranging global debates about the purpose and nature of higher education and its contribution to the development of individuals and society. The goal of supporting students in becoming mature thinkers capable of acquiring, interpreting, and analyzing knowledge, contributing effectively to their own development and to the world around them as a responsible citizen sits at the heart of the mission of a socially responsible 'good' University. In many respects this is a classical vision of the very purpose of a university but one, many educators argue, that has been lost sight of in recent years. Contemporary debates are very much centred on how that vision might be recovered and developed further to reflect the demands of a dynamic globalising world, the changing demands of the world of work and the impact of the very considerable expansion of access to and enrolments in tertiary education.

Although there is a compelling intellectual argument for a broader curriculum that allows students to explore the rich and diverse portfolio of opportunity that the University provides, it would be remiss not to consider other drivers influencing the changing landscape of higher education. The University competes in a competitive global market place, where there is increasing evidence of cutting edge curriculum reform with Hong Kong, Australia, and the USA with a wide number of UK institutions following in their wake. For many years there has also been some emphasis on a broader curriculum in Europe with more recent innovations including the development of English language Honours Colleges in leading Dutch universities and growing English language higher education provision across Northern Europe. Distinctive and attractive curricula building on the assets of the University of Manchester and the city will help to differentiate the University brand in an increasingly crowded marketplace.

Over recent years there has also been an increasing emphasis on the employability of graduates. Ensuring students have the best opportunities to develop the skills, abilities and attitudes to enter the workplace

¹ The University of Manchester Strategic Vision 2020, <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=11953>, accessed 02nd February 2012

successfully is a task that must be embedded in the academic mission of the University. Through diverse curriculum opportunities, and the consequent development of academic and transferable skills, study through the College implies an agile learner able to step outside their comfort zone and engage with new knowledge areas, as well as giving students a broader range of skills. In this manner the College can contribute to this agenda complementing the important work of schools and disciplines on Employability.

The Ethos of the College

The University's motto, *Cognitio, Sapientia, Humanitas* (Knowledge, Wisdom, Humanity) underpins the pedagogic and intellectual mission of the College. At the heart of the College ethos lies a commitment to providing a space for students and staff from across the University to explore creative encounters between the disciplines, engage with the richness and diversity of the University's teaching and cultural resources as well as those of the city, and develop understanding of the impact of different approaches to learning and knowledge production. By drawing on the social and cultural assets of the city, as well as those of the University, the College can capitalize on Manchester as a learning environment and situate student learning in a dynamic and international community.

Whilst research at Manchester has successfully bridged traditional disciplinary boundaries and innovative and fruitful cross-cutting research themes have been developed, the opportunity to showcase and engage students with this work has not been fully realised. The College can provide a novel site for enhancing the University's commitment to research-led teaching to be accessed by students from across the University and for the development of innovative and distinctive curriculum models.

In aligning itself to the motto and mission of the University, and in situating the College within the wider debate on reimagining and reclaiming the classical goals of a University education, teaching at the College must always aim to develop in students the skills, abilities and attitudes to engage critically with the world, to understand and articulate their own positions in relation to those around them, and to proactively acquire, synthesize and apply knowledge in pursuit of their goals.

The College Core

The core of College activity will be the commissioning and management of a portfolio of course units. All College courses will conform to the highest academic standards and will operate in line with University regulations, policies and procedures. The College will convene an Academic Board to monitor standards and consistency across the course portfolio and to serve as an examination board.

Proposers for College courses will be asked to consider certain questions as part of their proposal:

- How does this course address the *Purposes of a Manchester Undergraduate Education*?
- Is this course innovative in curriculum and/or assessment design and delivery?
- Can the teaching team demonstrate high teaching standards?
- Has the team considered how the cultural assets of the University and the City might be integrated into the course?

At the heart of the College will be those courses that truly bridge disciplines. These courses will likely focus on big issues and global challenges drawing on multiple perspectives and will be designed so that students from all parts of the University can participate without being unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged by their preexisting knowledge or understanding of a specific discipline. These courses will likely exclude students from disciplines closely aligned to the subject of the course as they would be unfairly advantaged in comparison to students from a radically different disciplinary background.

It is hoped that all College courses will have 'flags' attached described the skills and competencies that each course develops. These flags will link to the *Purposes of a Manchester Undergraduate Education* and should help students make well-informed choices about their curriculum. Courses which involve practical application of knowledge or skills or 'real-world' interaction will also be flagged to support the employability agenda.

The Wider Vision

Providing a space where people from all disciplines can come together collaboratively aligns with the earliest definition of a 'college'. As the University College is situated outside all faculties there is an opportunity to use College as a space for interfaculty academic and related activity thereby building new networks and capacity for inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary teaching and research. Using the College as a hub to articulate and coordinate some of the opportunities arising from improved interfaculty communication thereby opening up new areas for exploration by staff and students. This provision could also be augmented by the development of an activity programme to support teaching and learning development drawing on internal and external expertise. This will allow staff to explore, collaboratively, the challenges presented by interfaculty activity and the teaching of atypical student cohorts.

We also hope to establish the *Manchester Signature Lecture Series* to showcase the people, activities, and relationships of the city and its university and serve as a point of engagement for students, past and present, members of the University and the wider community as a whole. Manchester's history as a dynamic centre for the science, engineering, medicine and social change will serve as the background and starting point for a series of lectures that touch on a wide variety of subjects.

The *Manchester Signature Lecture Series* will showcase the talent, innovation, and knowledge of the University to a diverse audience serving as a public face of a broad and liberal University by engaging students, staff, alumni and the local community in the work of the University. These lectures will support and promote wider initiatives, and will build on the strong history of social responsibility and engagement at the University and in the city of Manchester.

These lectures will show the intimate interconnection between knowledge, research, and innovation, dovetailing with the College's efforts to bring developing research areas into teaching, and the wider public engagement agenda.