

BATH SPA UNIVERSITY'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2009/10 TO 2011/12

VISION STATEMENT AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Vision Statement

- 1.1 The vision of Bath Spa University is to raise its national, proven reputation for high quality, taught degree programmes, giving students an excellent learning environment and helping them maximise their potential. Bath Spa University will deliver a wide range of subjects, underpinned by high quality research and scholarship, and will actively engage with businesses.

Strategic Objectives

- 1.2 11 strategic objectives underpin our Vision Statement. They are to:
- i) Continue to improve the quality and relevance of our academic provision.
 - ii) Deliver a high quality of student experience and increase the amount of employer responsive provision.
 - iii) Fulfil our HEFCE, TDA and CWDC contracts.
 - iv) Undertake research and scholarly activity.
 - v) Raise income from non-governmental sources.
 - vi) Manage finances and assets in a sound, business-like fashion.
 - vii) Increase the number of international students at the university and taught provision in other countries.
 - viii) To take full advantage of technology in all our activities including e-learning tools to support all academic staff and students.
 - ix) Reduce, reuse and recycle wastes and to maintain and enhance biodiversity.
 - x) Ensure equality of opportunity for staff and students and widen overall access to the university.
 - xi) Recruit and retain the highest quality staff.

GENERAL APPROACH

General Approach

- 2.1 Bath Spa University (BSU) will build on its proven strengths. The University will continue to stress the high quality of its taught provision. It will seek to maintain its healthy financial position both by prudent management and by strong recruitment of students.
- 2.2 BSU offers a wide range of programmes of study and delivers a significant programme of research. The direction of purpose of the institution derives naturally from the unusual array of positive features it possesses. These include:
- Strong market share of applications and a significantly higher ratio of applicants to places than many comparable institutions

- Attractive to mature, local students
- A very high level of student satisfaction
- Committed and capable staff
- The high degree to which staff research and scholarship inform teaching
- Unique and highly attractive sites
- Attractive balance of being a small institution while offering a wide range of programmes of study
- The proportion of our graduates gaining jobs or in training is higher than the national average
- Commitment to the environment
- We are financially sound and offer excellent value for money
- Recent, very positive QAA institutional audit that confirmed the quality of our courses, including those at FECs and at FD level.

We are increasingly and accurately portraying ourselves as a distinctive institution, a university which is different from the huge city and/or campus universities in the UK – in other words, we are an excellent feature in a national system that values diversity.

- 2.3 BSU's objectives are set firmly within those of national policies for education. Our student numbers are largely controlled by these policies. Where they are not so tightly controlled as in, for example part-time, overseas work we have planned both in the light of our own corporate goals and the national context.

Key Themes

- 2.4 There are seven key themes, which pervade all the objectives of the plan, but which focus our mission to provide the highest quality learning experience. They are:
- A continued high level of student support and a strong and real commitment to widening participation. These cover all aspects of our work including academic, but with an increasing focus on ancillary issues such as counselling. We will continue to implement a wide range of strategies to recruit students from under-represented groups and to continue to provide a high level of support services for disadvantaged and disabled students, thereby widening participation.
 - The development of courses and programmes of study in the light of Government and HEFCE Council policy. The University would wish to take advantage of any opportunities for growth where they can be managed effectively, where quality can be at least maintained, and where such growth is consistent with this strategic plan. These activities will contribute to our efforts to widen participation.
 - Greater collaboration with regional and local FECs, HEIs and others. This includes working closely with business and increasing the amount of foundation degree and co-funded provision in response to Government priorities.
 - Development and implementation of strategies for learning. This will lead to more student-centred learning and greater use of ICT in teaching. It will also drive forward excellence in teaching and learning and underpin our wish to improve the employability of our students.

- The estates strategy is fully integrated with the other key components of our corporate strategy, especially the plans for student numbers and for finance.
- Continuous marketing of the University, locally, regionally and nationally to raise our profile in order to publish job opportunities and increase the number of students applying for our course.
- Reaffirmation of the University's successful financial strategy, which addresses both financial health and audit control.

Building on Strengths

- 2.5 BSU will continue to stress the high quality of its taught provision. It will seek to maintain its financially healthy position, both by prudent management and by strong recruitment of students. It will maintain a diverse curriculum with particular emphasis on the Arts and strengthen its research base.

TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF BATH SPA UNIVERSITY

Introduction

- 3.1 Bath Spa University has developed its teaching-led mission in recent years and confirmed its status as one of the country's premier post-92 institutions: one in which many academic staff are engaged in internationally significant research, some of which is world-class. The ten characteristics listed below aim to provide a set of high-level planning co-ordinates for a university whose full maturity was marked in 2008 by the award of research-degree awarding powers.

1. Teaching Quality

The continuing excellence of teaching at Bath Spa is central to its teaching-led mission. We will continue to demonstrate how our internal policies and procedures are all shaped by the overriding objective to maintain and wherever possible to enhance that quality, which we consider to be central to the students' learning experience. We also recognise the intimate if complex relationship between research, scholarship and teaching, and are firm in our belief that a teaching-led university must support and sustain research across the spectrum of its academic provision.

2. Academic Staff Development in Furtherance of the mission.

The University has a good track record of staff development (and of recognising and rewarding its excellent teachers) and we will remain committed to enhancing this to support the attainment of our mission, to meet the challenges of change, and to help staff develop their individual careers. The University's Centre for Learning and Teaching Development will play a key role in identifying and helping to meet the developmental needs of our academic staff by, for instance, delivering a new Masters-level programme ('Professional Practice in Higher Education') which address topics within the whole business of higher education. Similarly, the Centre will build upon our record of engagement with external organisations such as the Higher Education Academy (and in particular its National Teaching Fellowship Scheme) and the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, by promoting staff membership and participation.

3. Student-Centred

We will continue to make it clear to prospective students that that they will be taught by experts whose principal concern is to maximise their chances for academic success and to prepare them for the world of work. In certain areas (as in those subjects and schools involved in Artwork, the University's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning) we will emphasise that they will be taught by highly successful professional practitioners, who will bring specific expertise to bear upon their learning experience. Further, we will strive to embed student perspectives in all our discussions about teaching and learning. By making the student learning experience the centre of all we do, we commit ourselves not only to the systematic gathering and sharing of knowledge about our students, but also to using evidence of students' experiences as a vital yardstick of the quality of our provision.

4. The Whole Teaching Spectrum

We will continue to see ourselves as offering progression routes through the whole teaching spectrum, from foundation degrees to PhD in certain subject areas. We also have the opportunity to develop our local reputation, and links with the local community, by offering 'extra-mural'/evening classes of the kind routinely offered by many universities, including the University of Bath. In this context we will capitalise on our location in a world heritage city by developing provision in the areas of heritage studies and heritage management.

5. Employability and the curriculum

The need to equip students for graduate-level employment remains an abiding concern for Bath Spa University. Recent changes to the undergraduate modular scheme are aimed, in part, at ensuring that the skills associated with graduate-level employability are delivered with the grain of the curriculum; we need to continue to ensure that academic staff see themselves as playing a central role in this. The development of our provision associated most closely with the creative and cultural industries will help us to broaden and deepen the curriculum and to build links with national and regional businesses that are of a particular kind. Future curriculum development might, in this context, involve journalism, advertising and masters-level provision integrating business and arts subjects.

6. Delivery through partnership

Our successful links with FECs help to secure us in our region and are vital to our ability to deliver teaching across the whole spectrum from foundation degree to doctorate. In respect of demonstrating our commitment to teaching quality, we need both to ensure that our administrative and quality assurance procedures are secure, and recognise our maturing relationship with FEC partners, but that we play an important role in developing learning and teaching in partner FECs, and that we are promoting professional standards amongst their staff delivering our courses, as well as our own.

7. A national contributor to teaching excellence

Our Centre for Learning and Teaching Development will take the lead in helping us to become a national provider of staff development activity, not merely a consumer of it. The Centre will work towards developing learning and teaching staff development events for staff external to the University – building upon the profile for excellence we have established, in part, through our notable success in the Higher Education Academy's National Teaching Fellowship Scheme. Similarly the Centre will make a significant contribution to national developments in HE pedagogy by leading on institutional bids for external funding from bodies such as the HEA and JISC to support research and innovation.

8. Research informed teaching, and excellence in research

Bath Spa's highly creditable performance in RAE 2008 confirmed that we have many academic staff producing internationally recognised research, and some whose work is world class. We need now to develop strategies to ensure that we maximise our potential for generating non-Hefce research income (from research councils and the like) which will both help us to sustain that activity, and act as one of the determining metrics in the Research Excellence Framework, which is set to replace the RAE. This means identifying those individual staff members and staff teams capable of bidding successfully for support, and managing their time partly to that end. We will invest in a research infrastructure which will promote and support such bidding. The establishment of research groups and centres (involving staff and postgraduate research students) is aimed at building our profile and encouraging collaboration both within and without the university. We will also continue to audit research and scholarship across the institution in order to demonstrate its intrinsic value to the curriculum and the student learning experience. Our teaching will be informed by research of high quality, and by research into teaching and learning. We will continue to promote pedagogical research both for its intrinsic worth and in order to promote our mission. We will also maximise our potential to engage in Knowledge Transfer activities which will bring the research outputs of our staff to the notice of the community at large.

9 Working with business and other sectors

We are unlikely ever to be involved with business in the high-profile research projects that some universities pursue because of our particular subject mix and strengths, but we plan to be able to point to a whole range of links – especially with local businesses – which are demonstrably of direct benefit to students and the curriculum in the way they involve employers in the design and delivery of our courses. We also plan to continue our extensive links with both the public sector (e.g. Local Education Authorities, museums and galleries) and third sector (e.g. charitable) organisations in the delivery of policy-based and practice-based research. We expect particular impetus to this aspect of

our work to be given by those subjects most intimately connected with the local creative, cultural and heritage industries.

10 International dimension

The University is well placed through its location, reputation and overseas relationships to make the most of the opportunities offered by the further internationalisation of its activities. We aim to ensure that all students experience an educational environment that actively promotes knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity and global perspectives. Further, we will build upon extant links and expertise to increase our numbers of international students, by involving the academic schools more closely in the marketing and recruitment process. This will involve developing sustainable, long-term academic partnerships with overseas universities, encompassing staff and student exchanges and, where appropriate, research collaboration.

Performance Indicators

- 3.2 We have developed a set of Performance Indicators that relate to each of these 10 characteristics and helps guide progress to achieve our mission. See section 6.

SWOT ANALYSIS

4.1 As part of developing this strategic plan we have undertaken a SWOT analysis. This is presented below:

4.2

a) Strengths		b) Weaknesses	
1.	Small size – flexible, adaptable	1.	Small size
2.	Popular with students	2.	Types of Graduate jobs and salaries
3.	Financially robust	3.	Limited space reduces development opportunities including academic diversification
4.	Focussed Strategy – teaching led	4.	Student facilities – library, open access IT, sporting
5.	High quality teaching	5.	Research income
6.	Good RAE 2008 outcome		
7.	Recent QAA reports on the quality of our Foundation Degrees and PCET provision	6.	Limited range of curriculum an obstacle to FE collaboration
8.	Longstanding commitment to collaboration with FE	7.	CETL coming to an end
9.	Sites and location		
10.	Our excellent reputation with major agencies e.g. HEFCE and QAA		
11.	Record in delivering access and widening participation		
c) Opportunities		d) Threats	
1.	Development at Newton Park	1.	Substantial borrowing to secure accommodation
2.	Amend our offer to reflect student demand		
3.	Life Long Learning Network	2.	Ofsted / TDA reduce ITT numbers
4.	Increase the amount of postgraduate provision	3.	Student applications reduced in the light of increasing competition
5.	Increase the income for business / industry	4.	Work with FECs causes quality problems
6.	Build upon RAE 2008 outcome	5.	Continuous downward pressure on teaching income
7.	Develop and exploit fully Corsham Court		

4.3 Against the identified weaknesses and threats we will take the following actions:

- W1 We have grown significantly in recent years and now have over 6000 students registered. This decreases the risk of being inefficient, but we remain aware of this in all our activities.
- W2 Action here is described under section 6.6.
- W3 We are engaging in extensive discussions with all stakeholders regarding major development at Newton Park. If these are successful it will fully alleviate the space problem. However, we are also developing a fall back position, not as good as the Newton Park development proposal, but that will continue to make the site attractive to students. We have already spent £6M in developing on Sion Hill campus and are improving our Corsham Court site to turn it into a research centre for masters and PhD students.
- W4 The recently extended library, the significantly increased number of open access computers and the new Students' Union building has helped here as will the major refurbishment of Sion Hill. A new development at Newton Park will provide an excellent resolution to this in the medium to long term. In the meantime we will continue to take advantage of every possibility to improve student facilities in these critical areas.
- W5 Our successful RAE 2008 outcome has increased our confidence and will to pursue research income more vigorously.
- W6 We continue to widen our offering especially into the arts subjects. However, where we do not have a suitable course the Western Foundation Degree Consortium, a partnership of six local HEIs allows, in an open and transparent way, the HEIs to work together to provide a wide ranging curriculum opportunities to FECs. FECs are not now obliged to choose a single partner HEI but can chose the best suited.
- W7 Some of the CETL – funded activities will cease, but we will absorb the best aspects into our core budget.
- T1 Aim to achieve annual balanced budgets, and implement value for money initiatives to achieve cost reductions wherever practicable.
- T2 The formal outcome of the current Ofsted re-inspection will not be known in time to include its impact within this plan. We are assuming, though, a successful outcome and proceeding on this basis. Nonetheless, this process has exposed the very real risk that the Ofsted inspection regime imposes on us. We will be taking strong action to minimise this risk by ensuring that our ITT quality is robust. This will involve reducing the geographical areas of student placements which, in turn, may result in a reduction in student numbers and income.
- T3 This is a continual threat, partly because of our relatively small size. We very actively monitor student applications throughout the year and, in setting intake targets, pay very close heed to previous recruitment outcomes. Our history suggests that, while we need to be very alert and certainly never complacent, we remain a popular university for students.
- T4 Working at arm's length inevitably causes increased complexity and increased risk of failure. We continue to address this by channelling much of the quality assurance work through a single point, the School for Development and Participation. Recent QAA evidence suggests that our procedures are strong in this area, but we continue to monitor these relationships closely with regular, annual reviews.
- T5 We are already implementing changes to increase our efficiency and are making good progress to ensuring financial inability. However, this is a critical area currently and in the medium term at least and we will continue to bear down on our costs and exploit all appropriate avenues to increase income.

RISK ASSESSMENTMost Significant Risks

- 5.1 The top six risks identified as having the highest potential impact on BSU are:
- i) Escalating costs and a reduction in the unit of funding per student (SO vii)
 - ii) Building portfolio not appropriate for BSU development plans for the next five to ten years (SO xii).
 - iii) Inability to recruit to funding contracts, including by FE partners (SO iii).
 - iv) Network/system/security problems (SO ii)
 - v) Inappropriate partnership arrangements (SO i, SO iii and SO ix).
 - vi) Major changes in government policy e.g. the abandoning of the expansion of H.E. or the abandoning of the 'social' agenda (participation and access) (key theme 2).

Monitoring and Action Taken

- 5.2 Close monitoring is undertaken of indicators underlying these six risks (and all risks in the risk register):
- i) Sound financial planning enables controls to be put in place. The university can mitigate against the worst effects of the financial squeeze, and is implementing a financial strategy to reduce projected expenditure by 10% over the next two years.
 - ii) We are seeking development at Newton Park but we are also maintaining contingency plans should our goals for Newton Park not be achieved.
 - iii) Weekly monitoring of applications and acceptances is carried out. Popular courses are closed early and Clearing allows a good degree of flexibility and control.
 - iv) There is a system of daily health checks in place that is reviewed regularly. Automated network monitoring systems issues alerts if threshold is reached. There is an agreed schedule of disaster recovery tests. An enterprise strength backup system has been introduced, as has an application monitoring system. The anti-virus management system has been enhanced.
 - v) All FE provision for BSU awards operates under common regulations and there is a programme of visits by BSU staff with formal reporting arrangements. The teaching qualification for FE staff was inspected by Ofsted in 2008 and given the highest grade possible
 - vi) We are flexible and respond quickly to changing circumstances. We will not over-commit on the possibility of future increases in student numbers, but plan realistically. Our curriculum will continue to be developed to ensure continuing popularity with students. This above all will underpin our ability to flourish in any environment.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Introduction

- 6.1 We have developed a suite of performance indicators (PIs) relevant to a teaching-led university. To measure progress towards our vision statement and strategic objectives we have compared these PIs with those of our peers.

Background

- 6.2 These indicators were developed such that they would be appropriate to:

1. Our Corporate Strategy.
2. The characteristics of a teaching-led university (Section 3).
3. The performance indicators applied to us by government agencies.

- 6.3 We are seeking to establish a range of performance indicators for a number of purposes particularly those referred to in the paragraph above. Ideally we would have a dynamic amount of accurate and timely information which would give us a good indication of how we are progressing over time towards our corporate objectives and towards achieving the characteristics by high quality teaching-led university. In addition we would incorporate into our own indicators those which were applied to us by the government agencies and which can have a significant affect on the future. The realistic target was not to have the perfect system but to produce a helpful set of flexible and responsive indicators in order to help managers of the institution act to improve our performance and to do so with confidence.

Performance Indicators

- 6.4 The result is a comprehensive set of 27PIs. Each PI has been graded as good (above benchmark), satisfactory (at or about benchmark) or poor (below benchmark). By comparison with our peers there are fifteen good PIs, six satisfactory PIs and six poor ones.
- 6.5 We are now actively working to address the poor PIs, to improve the satisfactory ones, and at least to maintain our performance in the good indicators. These actions are also reflected in the annual operating plan which has SMART objectives.

ANNUAL OPERATING PLAN**Section 7**

7.1 The annual operating plan for BSU for 2009 / 10 is as follows:

	<u>Action</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>	<u>Timetable</u>	<u>Outcomes</u>
1	Exploit the opportunities of CETL after funding ceases	Dean Academic Development	Three year project	Benefits of CETL spread across the university
2	Monitor student applications throughout year	DVC (A Thomas)	Throughout the year	HEFCE contract achieved; maximum recruitment again TDA contract
3	Improve employability of graduates	Dean Academic Development	May 2011	Graduateness and salary of BSU graduates improves
4	Develop high quality teaching and residential accommodation	DVC (T Dewberry)	Three years	New development agreed and underway
5	Continue to market the university to potential students and the wide public	Head of Marketing	August 2011	Applications increase above section and peers' averages
6	Achieve balance budget	Director of Finance	Annual	Balanced budget achieved
7	Ensure BSU's academic offer remains attractive	Vice Chancellor	August 2011	Increased number of post graduate students
8	Ensure effective use of Corsham Court	Professor George	July 2010	Research Centre established and utilised
9	Increase income from business, including co-funding	DVC (A Thomas)	October 2010	Income significantly increased
10	Increase amount of student social and learning space	DVC (T Dewberry)	October 2010	Number and amount of space increases
11	Increase research activity	Dean Academic Development	July 2011	Increase in income for research above costs