

Future-proofing the curriculum for student and university success

Wonkhe x Adobe | June 2023

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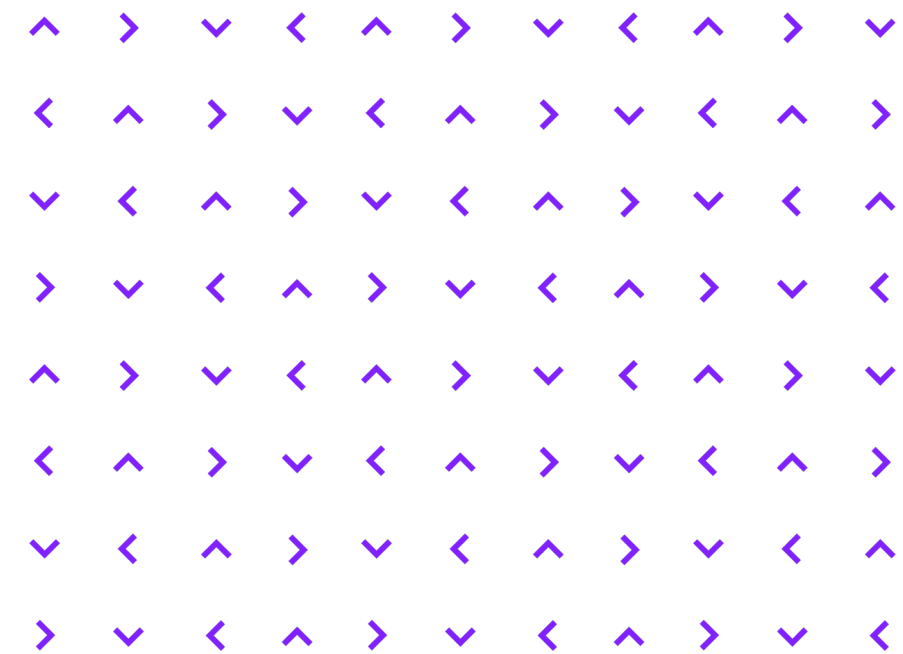


Why change the curriculum?

- To articulate a shared sense of educational purpose – resetting the university social compact
- To prepare students to thrive – engaging, well-structured student journeys with a trajectory towards the future
- To support (diverse) students effectively – acknowledging wellbeing, flexibility for complex lives
- To support staff – more creativity, more collaboration, more joy and less grind
- For institutional sustainability – reducing complexity, using resources effectively

“[Curriculum change] isn’t problem seeking or problem solving in its orientation, it is opportunity-seeking - the opportunity to make a generational change in how we educate students at the university - what we teach and how we teach it. ..how do we need to educate people to take their place in the world and do what’s meaningful to them?”

“It’s about the future - future-proofing core business so that we are enabling students to fly: to make the most positive contributions to global challenges, hit the ground running, have skills, values, competences that employers need - and to do that via an education that is authentic and reflects real-world environments.”



“Realising benefits to academic staff is part of the theory of change - people need to see how they can have more learning, less work, and more fun - those give people a reason to push through.”

“When you have local students, lots of commuter students, lots holding down jobs of more than 20 hours/week, lots from POLAR quintiles 1&2 or SIMD - we can’t keep trying to adhere to and deliver traditional timetabled courses . It now needs to be much more student-centric in terms of how the curriculum looks and feels, and how compassionate it is. We tend to think of student experience as being about the ‘sticky campus’ being lively and fun but for a lot of students it’s about getting to the end of the week in one piece.”

Curriculum frameworks



VALUES AND PRINCIPLES BASED

Capturing a broad, shared understanding of what it means to study here, why it matters, and what the impact of learning is for students.



PRODUCED THROUGH CONSULTATION

A long development process in which concepts are proposed, tested, and refined, involving many voices including academics, professional staff, students, alumni, and employers.



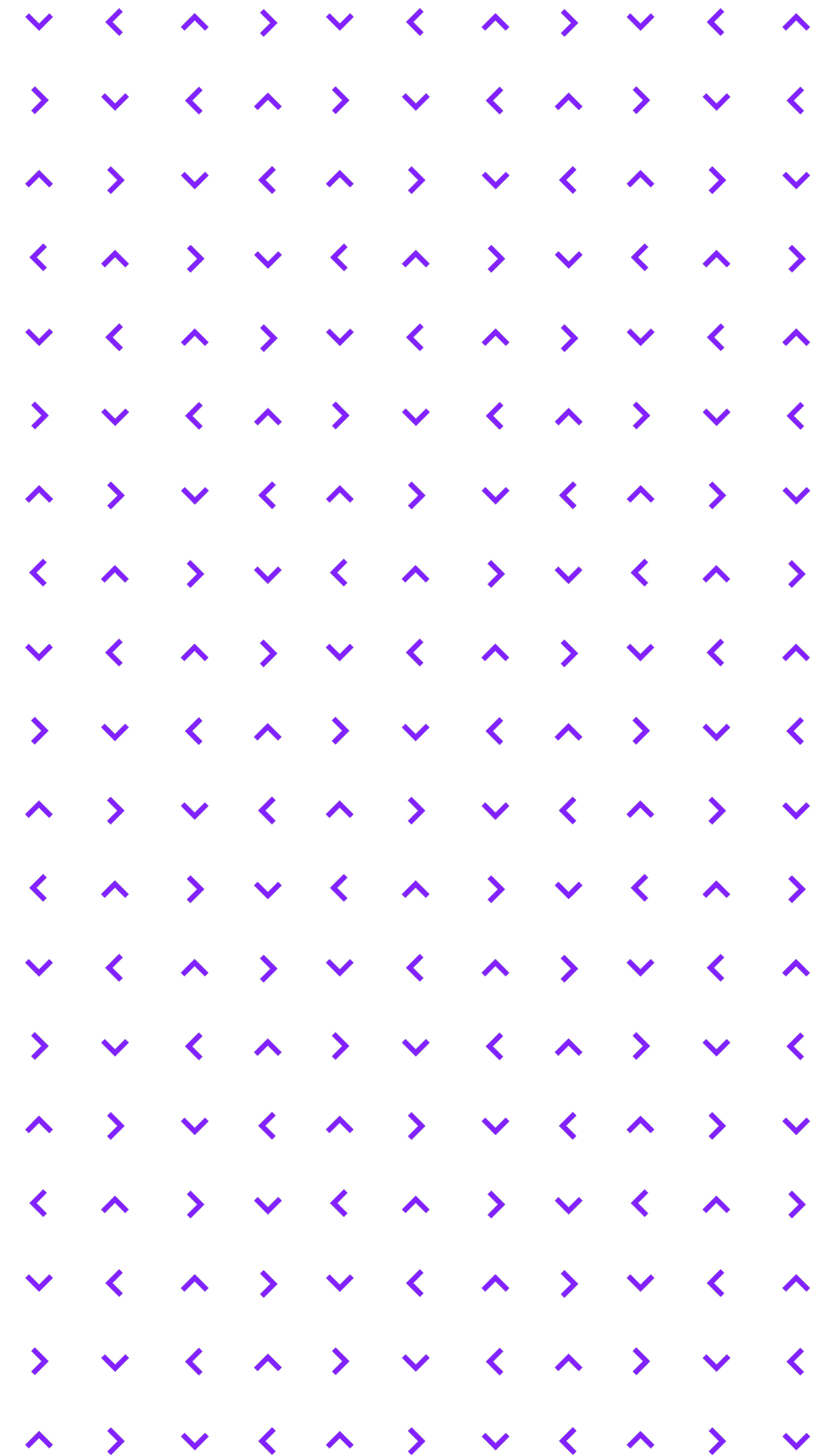
SENSITIVE AND FLEXIBLE TO DISCIPLINARY VARIATION

Establishing boundaries for practice, but neither directive nor didactic, and open to different disciplinary interpretations, areas of focus – encouraging creative interpretation.



PEDAGOGICALLY ON POINT

Underpinned by an evidence base of the pedagogies that best engage students and develop them as learners.



Some examples



Image illustrating the Bristol Futures curriculum framework. The full framework is available [here](#).

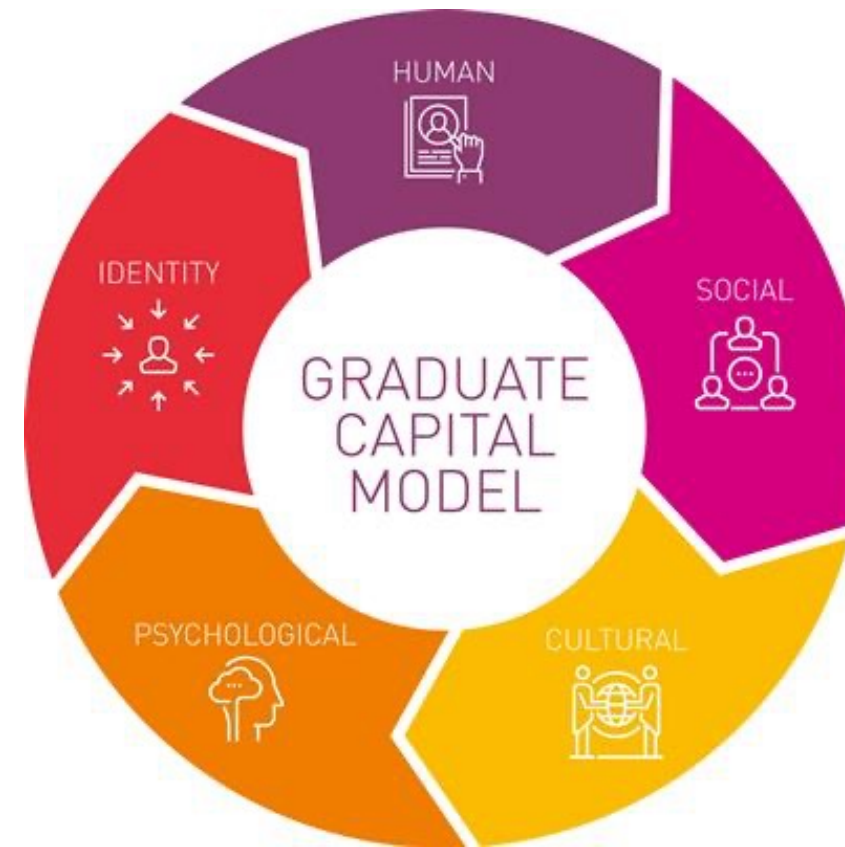


Image illustrating the University of Southampton's graduate capital model. More information is available [here](#).



Image illustrating the University of Reading's curriculum framework. The full framework is available [here](#).

"We had lots of external drivers for change: student employability, inclusion, student success. We had lots of academic staff keen and willing to address these issues but no idea where to start and what to do. Lots of well-meaning working groups were coming up with lots of well-meaning policies that lots of well-meaning committees would review, and then we would put them up on our website and here the story ended. And of course what we needed to do was to put it into the classroom. So the curriculum framework was born."



Pedagogic and structural change

Building programmes, not just disparate collections of modules or units

Student development journeys – induction, transition, and ongoing support

Experiential, authentic pedagogy and assessment

Research and teaching closer alignment

Mobilising the co-curriculum: business projects and placements, entrepreneurship, different disciplinary and interdisciplinary opportunities

Reducing assessment load

Sometimes structural change – semesterisation; credit harmonisation; programme simplification

“We want to bring a lot more authenticity - experiential learning, working with external partners, live brief projects that are cross-disciplinary, interdisciplinary - so that students can feel they are making a contribution in the world, that it’s not just simulated – we want to build these into every curriculum by 2030.”

“Co-curriculum - we’d sort of offered it for a while but as part of curriculum review it became compulsory either within year 2 or 3 of a programme - for credit students can either do a range of offers in humanities, social sciences, languages, or business, STEM modules but outside own discipline, or multidisciplinary projects.”

“We said you need to think about what research looks like in your discipline - methodologies, ethical issues, audiences, outputs - is that how research is showing up in your curriculum or is it just a specialist module or third year dissertation? We need to be weaving it through in authentic and creative ways.”

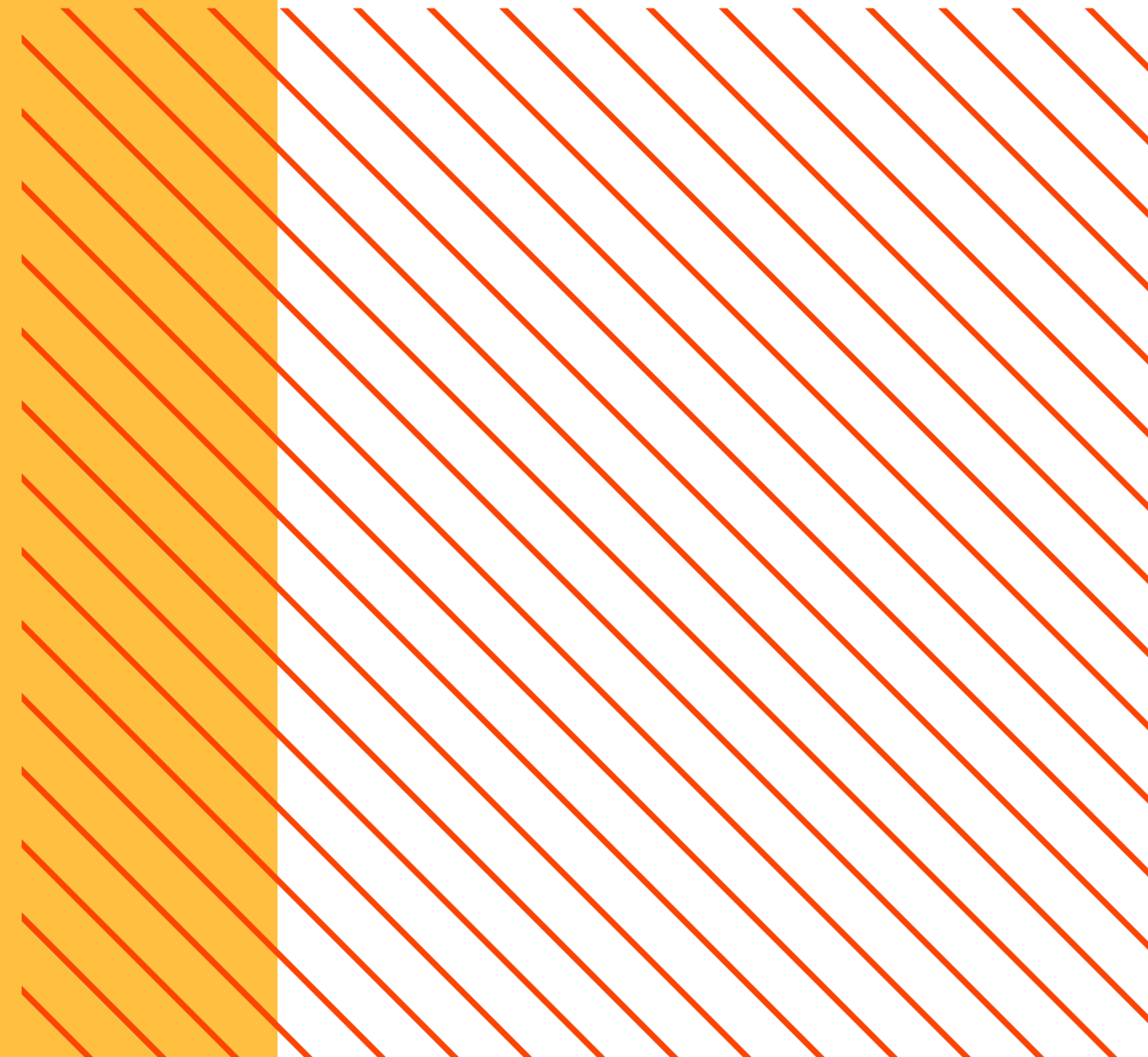


Questions for you!

1. What characteristics tell you if a course or programme curriculum is “future-proofed?”
2. What do you think works best to create sustainable change?
3. What impact do you personally want to see from university curriculum change agendas?
4. What’s missing from our analysis?

**** Go to Padlet to add your thoughts – link in the chat ****

**How does change
happen?**



Change comes from conversations

- Evidence -informed and theoretically grounded (but practical)
- Resourced: staff buy-out, new disciplinary or professional staff, enhancements funds
- Community and team-level interventions and participatory methods: workshops, consultancy projects, festivals
- Developing and supporting leaders in disciplinary contexts - programme, departmental, faculty
- Carrots (dialogue, resources/toolkits, flexibility of focus and scale) and, if needed, sticks (deadlines, structural change, managing politics of who's in the room)
- Co-production with students
- Removing or mitigating (real or perceived) barriers to creativity (esp regulatory eg CMA, quality assurance, PSRB requirements)

“Students have to be in at the beginning, co-designing – that can be spaces, tools, or curriculum as well. Consultation is a bit too late to make any meaningful changes - we all know what it’s like when you’re asked to proofread a document a bit too late!”

“Probably we didn’t have the leaders when we started, so we had to put work into leadership ...our focus was on bringing people together and creating shared vision, as well as good project management.”

“The sector is really quite wedded to the knowledge in/knowledge out model - experiential learning is still quite underdeveloped - we know it’s good but we can’t articulate it, we don’t have the tools or the language... Also we could draw more on research based on social modes of learning, communities of practice, experiential learning - we need to get better at drawing on those, not deep technical stuff but tools that are useful.”

“Work on the part of academics takes a great deal of courage because they need to be vulnerable - it is identity work and we recognise that and we want to support people through that process.”

“lots of coffee meetings, lots of cajoling”

Some questions/reflections

- The *pace* of change will be set partly by strategic imperatives and urgency of leadership, but also the tolerances and capacity of those doing the work
- *Impact* can be measured in project deliverables and strategic outcomes – such as B3 data – but also in culture
- *Building change capacity* is important but nebulous – to what extent do universities have a theory of *institutional* change and innovation?
- Is *knowledge exchange* taking a more central role in institutional missions as the place where research and teaching can connect?

“It’s pointless working with individuals, you have to work with programme teams and help them to make change. It’s better for a team to take a tiny step forward than for an individual to take 20 steps forward, which is why we need lots of people in a room.”

“It’s been quite grassroots until now - that has strengths but particularly now as OfS is beginning to talk about whole provider approaches to APP, and TEF is looking for evidence of institution-led initiatives - I am keen to identify common themes across the university that everybody has agreed we want to do – for example, sustainability is high on our list of priorities across the institution.”

“Personally I’m never entirely convinced by a change project that says ‘Ooh let’s have this big sparkly thing that talks about change’ - it sends people running in the opposite direction. We have quite a lot of change going on but try to think about it as staged development and evolution.”

“There are two kinds of innovation - the moonshot and the roofshot. Little innovations are OK, and everything doesn’t have to be transformative. We need to be alert to valuing the small changes that go down well and avoid “marquee stories” that aren’t always within everyone’s gift to replicate.”

“One thing that is ubiquitous across the sector is that challenges move faster than lags in metrics will allow senior management to be comfortable with. Everyone’s under pressure but you can’t change student experience overnight. Changing programmes you’ll see outcomes probably five or six years later. Often when you’re trying to do this it’s the lack of tangible impact that’s a derailing factor.”

Thank you

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