

The Active Curriculum

Information and Guidance for Co-Chairs of Working Groups

(Staff and Students)

Background

The Active Curriculum is a bold and comprehensive curriculum framework that will provide a distinctive approach to course design, pedagogy and an enhanced student experience at ARU founded on the premise of 'active and collaborative' teaching approaches and students being 'active' agents in their own learning. It has been designed following extensive consultation with academic staff and members of the Student Union.

The ARU Green Paper titled *Designing our Future* was released on 9 January 2017. This was a consultation document that sets out a series of options and questions that we will need to consider in prioritizing our efforts and shaping the future of our University. One of the key questions the Paper poses is 'Why, as a prospective student, would I choose to study at ARU?' One of the things that will influence students' decision to study at ARU is the quality of the student learning experience and this – to a very large extent – is influenced by the strategic use of curriculum design – i.e. the way that curricular content, modules, course structure, pedagogy, learning support, assessment, co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities are integrated within a coherent educational framework that enables student to achieve the University's 'Graduate Attributes'.

The Active Curriculum will increasingly influence and transform course design, delivery, pedagogies, assessment and all aspects of the learning experience of students. It is intended to provide the conceptual 'glue' that integrates, synthesises and embeds the varied strands of development over the past few years, whilst providing a distinctive 'brand' for learning and teaching at ARU which will enable the University to set itself apart from its close competitors, and attract students who want a more 'active', immersive and participative HE experience. The Active Curriculum will apply to both UG and PGT provision, whilst respecting the fact that some flexibility is likely to be required in order to conform with PSRB and accrediting body requirements. It was agreed that 'Inclusive' learning & teaching

should not be a separate strand of the Active Curriculum, but should, instead, underpin **all** activity/initiatives as a defining characteristic of the student experience at ARU.

The structure of the proposed Active Curriculum

The structure of the Active Curriculum is as set out below:



Pedagogical Strands (Yellow) and Literacies (Purple) of the Active Curriculum

Key characteristics

The Active Curriculum has the following characteristics:

- 1) *Cross-disciplinary* – applies across all disciplines.
- 2) *All-embracing* – addresses curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular contexts.
- 3) *Research-informed* – it is founded on extensive pedagogical research and examples of best pedagogical practice in the sector.
- 4) *Distinctive* – a strong and unique identity for learning and teaching at ARU.

- 5) *Accessible* - it can be easily understood by students and by staff alike.
- 6) *Flexible* – it accommodates a range of approaches/practices.
- 7) *Inclusive* - respects diverse needs.
- 8) *Integrative* – it integrates and links together recent enhancement projects at ARU.
- 9) *Aligned with existing policies* – e.g. the *Employability Strategy 2015/16-2017/18*, and *Principles' for Student Partnership*.

How the SIX pedagogical 'Strands' relate to staff and students

STRAND	STUDENTS	STAFF
Strand 1: Active learning	Students are engaged in active learning in both classroom (physical) and online (virtual) learning environments.	Staff employ teaching and learning strategies and approaches that engage students as 'active participants' both in classroom, lab, and online settings.
Strand 2: Research-informed learning & teaching	Students are exposed to the research of their module tutors and other examples of research, engage with our staff and with each other in a dialogue about research, and participate in and undertake research-related activities and assignments.	Staff draw on their own research to inform their teaching, engage students in a dialogue about research, integrate examples of research into the delivery of modules and provide students with opportunities to undertake research-related activities and assignments.
Strand 3: Peer learning	Students learn from and with each other, both in group-work activities in class or practice, via group-based assessment and via 'buddying' systems, and more formal peer-mentoring contexts.	Staff provide opportunities for students to engage in peer-to-peer dialogue, discussion and debate, and thereby encouraging high levels of peer learning.

Strand 4: Students as partners and co- creators	Students work in partnership with staff to shape and influence their learning experience, and participate in enhancement-related activities.	Staff develop effective working partnerships with students & actively engage them in shaping and influencing the nature of the learning experience.
Strand 5: Placement & practice-based learning	Students engage with opportunities to apply their learning and their skills in practical contexts and work-based placement and/or clinical settings.	Staff create and support opportunities for students to apply their learning and their skills in practical contexts and work-based placement and/or clinical settings.
Strand 6: Co- & Extra- curricular learning	Students engage with opportunities provided by ARU to develop their learning and skills outside of the formal curriculum.	ARU provides opportunities and support for students to develop their learning and skills outside of the formal curriculum.

How the SIX 'Literacies' relate to staff and students

LITERACIES	STUDENTS	STAFF
Digital Literacies	The capacity of our students to maximise their learning and performance by engaging effectively with digital learning environments (e.g. LMS).	The capacity of our staff to employ digital learning environments (e.g. LMS), digital learning resources and digital learning and teaching tools
Independent Learning Literacies	The capacity of our students to develop both the attitudes and skills of the independent, autonomous learner.	The capacity of our staff to employ pedagogical strategies that encourage & empower students to develop and apply their skills as independent learners.
Information Literacies	The capacity of our students not just to locate information quickly and effectively but also to critically evaluate information, and integrate it effectively within their studies.	The capacity of our staff not just to locate information quickly and effectively but also to deploy it effectively and integrate it efficiently into their teaching.

Academic Literacies	The capacity of our students to develop and apply the critical reading, academic writing skills and referencing skills required to meet the demands of study and assessment in higher education.	The ability of our staff to ‘model’ good practice in the application of academic literacies for the benefit of their students.
Assessment Literacies	The capacity of our students to engage in a dialogue relating to the rationale and purpose of assessment, and to understand the criteria on which they are assessed, and to understand and relate their own performance in relation to the descriptors set out in ARU marking scales.	The capacity of our staff to build constructive alignments between module outcomes and assessment, to design relevant and authentic assessments that have clear marking criteria and that drive high levels of student engagement. Staff effectively employ formative and summative assessment.
Pedagogic Literacies	The capacity of our students to understand why they are being taught in particular ways, and to develop insights into pedagogic practices, pedagogical research and principles, as well gaining insights into their own learning strategies and preferred learning styles.	The capacity of our staff to build effective alignments between module outcomes and the pedagogies they employ to support students to achieve and demonstrate mastery of them.

Implementation

The implementation of the Active Curriculum is being coordinated by Dr Adam Longcroft, Deputy Head of Anglia Learning & Teaching. Following endorsement by LTASC in April 2017, Dr Longcroft set about establishing an Active Curriculum Steering Group which would drive forward the concept at institutional level. The membership of the Steering Group was finalised in July 2017. It has cross-University representation, including key academic staff (including DLTAs/Deputy Deans), senior staff from central support services (e.g. Library, Student Services, IT Services) and staff and student sabbatical officers (VPs) from the Students Union.

The Active Curriculum Steering Group endorsed the establishment of a series of small Working Groups that will focus on specific Strands and Literacies during 2017/18, and 2018/19. It was also agreed that it would be desirable to avoid establishing too many Working Groups during the current academic year, and to prioritise those aspects where progress had been more limited in recent years. The Working Groups will be chaired by an experienced staff member and co-chaired by a student representative, student sabbatical officer or SU staff member identified by the Students Union. Students will also be strongly represented within the membership of each Working Group. A staff Chair for each of the Working Groups has already been identified. Dr Longcroft will be meeting with each during October/November to provide a detailed briefing on the role and the expectations associated with it. Dr Longcroft will do the same with student/SU co-chairs once they are confirmed.

Establishment of Working Groups

Working Groups established in 2017/18 are as follows:

Working Group 1	Working Group 2	Working Group 3	Working Group 4
Research-led Teaching & Learning	Placement and Practice-based Learning	Co- & Extra-Curricular Learning	Pedagogic Literacies Assessment Literacies Independent Learning Literacies
Staff Co-Chair:	Staff Co-Chair:	Staff Co-Chair:	Staff Co-Chair:
Toby Carter, FST	Francis Weeley, FHSCE	Matt Kay, Student Services	Philip Kirkman, FHSCE
Student Co-Chair:	Student Co-Chair:	Student Co-Chair:	Student Co-Chair:
Laura Douds (Vice President, FST, SU)	TBC	Johanna Korhonen (Vice President, ALSS, SU)	TBC

The Function of Working Groups

The Steering Group has agreed a set of 'Guidance' which would govern the activities of the Working Groups:

- a. Working Groups shall meet on at least 3 occasions in each academic year.

- b. Working Group membership can include staff and students who are not members of the Steering Group
- c. Each Working Group should have a student 'co-chair' working closely with a staff chair. Staff chairs may be drawn from either Professional Services or Academic Faculties.
- d. Chairs of Working Groups do not necessarily have to be members of the Steering Group. In cases where a Chair is not a member of the ACSG they will be briefed on their role and the ACSG Guidance on the Operation of Working Groups.
- e. Working Groups should make their own arrangements for ensuring that proper notes/minutes of meetings are maintained and communication between the Chairs and members works effectively.
- f. Each Working group shall report to the Steering Group on a regular basis.
- g. Each Working Group shall include members who can provide a student voice (i.e. either student representatives, or Officers of the SU)

Each group is to focus on the following:

- 1) Carrying-out research into existing practices and examples of best practice within ARU, and aiding in the dissemination of these across the University.
- 2) Carrying-out research into existing practices and examples of best practice in the HE sector (outside ARU), and aiding in the dissemination of these across the University.
- 3) Identifying areas for development, liaising as necessary with key stakeholders to bring forward to ACSG concrete proposals for new initiatives, projects or proposals which enhance the embedding of the strand or literacy within teaching practices of staff or the learning experience of students.
- 4) Developing resources associated with the embedding of the Strand or Literacy that can support teaching staff in their teaching practice (which can be added to the Good Teaching Exchange on the AL&T website), or support student learning.
- 5) Ensuring an appropriate alignment with the forthcoming Education Strategy.
- 6) Using a CANVAS site or use other online resources (e.g. Google Docs) to share information, archive material or facilitate collaborative working.

The Chair of ACSG will host a series of 1 hr 'Active Curriculum Briefing Sessions' open to staff and students during the 2017/18 academic year. Co-Chairs of Working Groups will be invited to attend these briefings. Dates TBC.

Co-Chairing – making it work

Inevitably, co-Chairing a working group will present a challenge to both of the chairs concerned since this is still far from the 'norm' for university groups of this kind. However, it is a concrete reflection of the emphasis placed on student partnerships at ARU and status of student partnerships as a separate 'Strand' in the Active Curriculum itself.

In order to facilitate effective working/management of working groups it is recommended that the co-chairs

- 1) Meet as soon as possible (i.e. November) to develop the agenda for the first meeting, and to discuss how they would like to manage the meeting, and subsequent ones.
- 2) Circulate meeting agenda(s) to members of the working group at least 1 week prior to each meeting.
- 3) Agree who will introduce agenda items, and how minutes will be recorded (ideally by a volunteer who has been identified in advance).
- 4) Identify what rooms might be suitable for meetings, and when to convene meetings, and how long they should be (1 hr minimum, 2 hrs max probably)
- 5) Consider how they can utilise the expertise of the members of the group – e.g. by ensure that each member of the working group is tasked with 'actions' which draw on their experience and expertise.
- 6) Draw upon the 'Briefing Document' provided by ACSG for their area. These will be sent to co-chairs as quickly as possible.

Appendix 1

Active Curriculum 'Strands' and 'Literacies': Current Progress

This paper provides a basic overview of current progress and initiatives which are already in place, or well-established at ARU in relation to the key Strands and Literacies that feature within the Active Curriculum. This is far from being exhaustive and Steering Group members are invited to 'add' other examples of work already in progress or perhaps even well-advanced in each area.

Note: It could be argued that a 7th 'literacy' is needed, which focuses on 'Cross-cultural Learning' – i.e. understanding of different cultures, inclusive learning etc. An Internationalisation Strategy Group with cross-University membership was convened (chaired by Gary Packham) that did some focused work on this theme during 2016/17. Gary has taken up a new portfolio (June 2017) and status of the Strategy Group remains to be clarified.

STRANDS

Strand: Research-informed learning and teaching

- No institutional approach or philosophy.
- Variable implementation at faculty level.
- Briefing paper on 'Research-led Teaching & Learning' was provided to members of ACSG by the Chair (Dr Longcroft) at its 2nd meeting.

Strand : Placement and practice-based learning

- Well-developed in some areas with vocational degrees – e.g. in health-related subjects.

- Relevant to degree apprenticeships.
- Requires investment in staff and infrastructure.
- Scope for exploring wider range of formats for placement and practice-based learning – e.g. short- medium and longer term, focus on specific levels of study, location (local, national, international) etc.

Strand 6: Co- and Extra-curricular learning

- Various schemes in place, including:
 - Subject-based student societies – ARU-SU commitment to enhance the number of these.
 - Anglia Ruskin Employability Programme (ILM accredited).
 - ARU-SU volunteering scheme.
 - Vice-Chancellor’s Student Leader Award.
 - Faculty/department activities.
- Alignment with student engagement and partnership.

LITERACIES

Literacy : Assessment literacies

- Extensive resources (e.g. the Anglia Assessment Album) and staff development under ‘Making our Mark’. See: <https://www.anglia.ac.uk/anglia-learning-and-teaching/good-teaching-practice-and-innovation/assessment-and-feedback/making-our-mark>
- Student resources and personal development for reps piloted.
- Improvements being introduced as part of Canvas implementation.
- ARU Assessment Protocol was developed in collaboration with staff & students & is integrated into PGCERT & L&T in Practice. It should also be a point of reference for

course (re)development & review meetings. <https://www.anglia.ac.uk/anglia-learning-and-teaching/good-teaching-practice-and-innovation/assessment-and-feedback/assessment-protocol>

Literacy : Independent learning

- Cross-faculty, consultant-led project on Directed Independent Learning, with recommendations for institutional change. A report on the project, including a set of recommendations for change, was considered by LTASC on 24 October 2017, and an Implementation Plan addressing the recommendations will be developed during Nov/Dec 2017.
- Dialogue with ARU-SU continues, and further research into student perceptions of Independent Learning will be pursued in partnership with the SU.

Literacy : Pedagogic literacies

- Staff assessment literacy supported via AL&T Staff Development programme.
- New Centre for innovation in HE focuses on raising the profile of pedagogical research.
- HEA-accredited professional recognition scheme.
- Little provision on this strand for students at present, though AL&T have contributed sessions on this at key Faculty events open to students.