



**Brunel**  
University  
London

# TRANSFORMING LIVES

Education and student  
experience strategy

2021-2030



## OUR COMMITMENTS

- 1. ACTIVE:** A blended and interactive approach to learning and teaching will be adopted across all programmes.
- 2. CREATIVE:** The opportunity for transdisciplinary study is offered across all programmes.
- 3. FLEXIBLE:** All disciplines will offer a diverse range of study modes, allowing students to benefit from education throughout their lives.
- 4. EXPERIENCE:** All students will have experiences beyond their academic studies.
- 5. COMMUNITY:** An intellectual culture around education.



## TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Transformative learning goes beyond acquisition of skills and knowledge, to support learners in critiquing how knowledge is acquired and communicated. This can lead to changes in thinking, perceptions, beliefs and values which can transform how the learner interprets the world around them.

Education for Sustainable Development Guidance, Advance HE/QAA March 2021.



# INTRODUCTION

Access to education is a fundamental human right and higher education has the power to be transformative for both the individual and wider society.

As a University we recognise that we have a responsibility to contribute to this by opening up access to those who will benefit from our provision, supporting their academic achievement and preparing them for successful futures. This Education and Student Experience Strategy supports the Brunel 2030 Vision of engaging and inspiring students through research-informed teaching and experiential learning to become global citizens who can make a difference.

Brunel University London is proud to be a diverse community with students and staff from a variety of backgrounds and with connections across the globe. We are known as one of the world's most internationally focused institutions, and we aim to be recognised across the world as a catalyst of social mobility, where all students can fulfil their ambitions irrespective of their social and cultural backgrounds.

We thrive as a university because of our staff, our civic and business engagement in West London, and extensive network of partners across the world. Our education as well as research and innovation are locally and globally relevant. Strong connections with business, industry, creative arts, health care providers, government, schools and academic institutions inform teaching and create opportunities for students to engage with the wider society.

As an institution we positively contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to achieve a more equal and inclusive world by 2030. But we need to do more – the challenges are stark, and students must be prepared for a world facing complex problems and where economic, social and environmental factors are interconnected. We will therefore explicitly integrate the principles of Education for Sustainable Development in our curricula; the 17 SDGs represent a holistic approach to a better future for all, and we want our graduates to have the confidence and capability to use their knowledge and attributes in critical and creative ways to bring about societal change. Our ambition is to provide a student-centred and life-enriching education that gives students self-assurance and resilience to positively impact their own and others' lives and to face a future perhaps not yet imagined.

This strategy builds on our strengths and continued commitment to all our students and their educational experiences. It is underpinned by a quality-assured education that is recognised by: accrediting bodies and valued by employers; award-winning teaching innovation and student support initiatives; and enhancements informed by the student voice. We want to keep pushing forward and challenge ourselves to do better for our students, and this strategy sets out five commitments that will ensure our students and staff are ready to meet the challenges of a fast-changing and unpredictable world.

**Professor Mariann Rand-Weaver,  
Vice-Provost Education.**



The Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE) is a UK-wide scheme introduced in 2016 that recognises and rewards collaborative work that has had a demonstrable impact on teaching and learning. Brunel has received two awards for sector-leading innovations: Integrated Programme Assessment (2016) and Digital Assessment (2019).

## SUPPORT INITIATIVES

Brunel Summer Internship Programme award: The National Undergraduate Employability Awards 2020 Best Widening Participation Initiative.

We were one of the first universities to introduce a Disability and Dyslexia triage service to help students access the best support for their circumstances; and the 'one at a time' flexible counselling service. All students can access support for any mental health issues.

## OUR COMMITMENTS:

**1. ACTIVE:** A blended and interactive approach to learning and teaching will be adopted across all programmes.



The rapid transformation of our provision in 2020 demonstrated how technology can be effective in making education more flexible and inclusive. While we will remain a University focused on delivering an excellent experience on campus, we want to build on our achievements to offer a blended approach to learning and teaching that combines the digital and physical environments. This will allow us to benefit from digital transformation and investment in online teaching, and offer flexibility to students, allowing time on campus to be dedicated to high-quality in-person interactive provision that can fit around their lives.

We know that the best learning experience is one where students are actively engaged and develop an enquiring mind set. We will stimulate this by creating an environment that does not rely on the passive transfer of knowledge, but where on-campus learning is centred around participatory interactive activities where students, individually and in groups, explore their subject and connect with the Brunel community. We will introduce 'curriculum co-creation' student interns, giving students a role in shaping our provision in a meaningful way. We will also give students the opportunity to personalise their studies through the option of a supported Independent Study module on an approved topic of their own choice.



**2. CREATIVE:** The opportunity for transdisciplinary study is offered across all programmes.

The great challenges that face the world require a transdisciplinary approach that *“transgresses the boundaries between scientific disciplines and between science and other societal fields and includes deliberation of facts, practices and values”*\*.

Future success therefore does not rely only on possessing information, but on the ability to understand a diversity of views and expertise, and to mobilise knowledge in meaningful, purposeful and reflective ways to bring about societal change. The experience of transdisciplinary working will develop professional values, attitudes and capabilities that are needed to successfully navigate professional life in the 21st century.

The cross-fertilisation of ideas and knowledge will broaden perspectives, promote enriched understanding and trigger imaginative and innovative solutions. The ability to work in teams that cross disciplinary boundaries is highly valued by employers, and we will provide all students with the opportunity to develop innovation literacy by working with peers from different disciplines on complex, real-world problems evaluated within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.

**3. FLEXIBLE:** All disciplines will offer a diverse range of study modes, allowing students to benefit from education throughout their lives.



Education is a lifelong process, and we want to offer opportunities to access higher education learning at all life and career stages, including for those making a career change, continuing their professional development, or studying for personal enrichment. This means diversifying our traditional offering, and we have to rethink both access to (who is it for?) and exit from (what qualification do they leave with?) higher education.

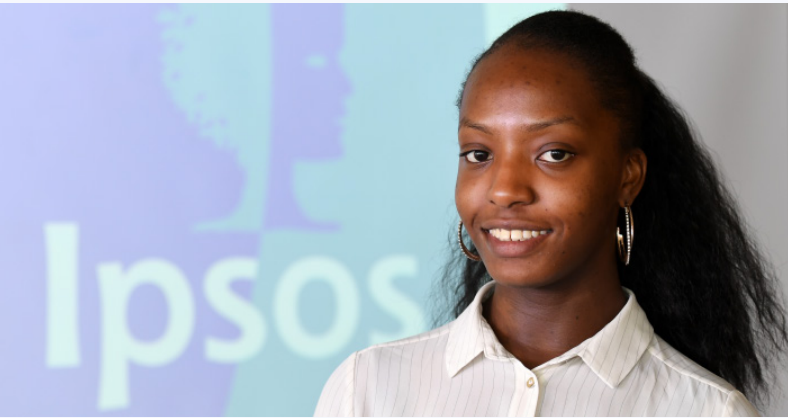
The fall-out from the COVID pandemic with the loss of many jobs is compounding the impact of technology replacing jobs in many sectors. There is therefore a great need and important role for higher education to contribute to upskilling and retraining. We will increase our engagement with local businesses and industry to understand their needs and seek to co-create programmes. We will create not only more flexible ways to engage with learning, but also flexibility in how qualifications are achieved. To provide a genuine offer to those who are returning to higher education or accessing higher education for the first time, programmes will cater for students entering with a wider range of experiences and qualifications (including via novel pathways from further education) and for those whose needs are met by taking tailored short courses, one or more modules, one or two years of a degree programme, or an apprenticeship.



\*Wiesmann et al in Handbook of Transdisciplinary Research, Hadorn et al 2008.



**4. EXPERIENCE:** All students will have experiences beyond their academic studies.



Brunel has always understood the value of work placements to students' future success, and this remains a key offering. But we also know that there are many different ways in which students can, and already do, experience the world outside their studies. We will therefore recognise a range of different experiences that allow students to get a broader perspective on their university education, including shorter periods of experience locally, nationally or internationally, and support them to reflect on the value of these experiences for their ongoing professional development.

All students will be able to tailor a personalised learning experience by choosing to engage in volunteering, employment, exchange, internship or placement, and we are strengthening our local, national and international partnerships to actively create new opportunities that will ensure an inclusive approach. The combination of a diverse curriculum and experiences give students a solid foundation to question and be critical of sources of knowledge, resulting in socially responsible graduates who can view the world from the perspectives of others.

The drive to ensure our education remains relevant and links learning to life influences our approach to assessment. As we regard assessment to be a critical part of the learning process, we view assessment as not just an opportunity to grade students, but as an opportunity to learn. This is reflected in an assessment philosophy that is grounded in being authentic and integrated, providing students with opportunities to use the competencies they will need to demonstrate in their professional lives. We will build on our existing expertise in programme-level assessment and digital examinations to rethink and redesign assessment.

**5. COMMUNITY:** An intellectual culture around education.

The Brunel community benefits from having students and staff from all over the world; a world that is more connected than ever as a result of technological innovations, but that faces a series of complex challenges. We want our students to become active citizens that contribute to tackling these global challenges, which means our curricula must deliver Education for Sustainable Development, be outward-looking and informed by diversity, inclusion and social justice.

To make the above commitments possible, it is imperative that our staff are supported to provide thought leadership, advance their research-informed teaching practice and build an evidence-base for pedagogy that supports transformative learning and develop students in ways to which we aspire. While formal training is part of this offering, it is equally important to strengthen the intellectual culture around teaching, fostering an innovative and inspiring community that encourages creativity and experimentation without fear of failure. We want our staff to contribute to scholarship and influence the global discourse on 21st century education, including anti-racism and fully inclusive curricula, and to model the lifelong approach to learning we want to engender in our students.

We will engage staff – academic and professional – and students in our endeavour to create a learning community that reflects our principles, values and aspirations. We will extend excellent practice such as peer-mentoring of teaching and build on innovative initiatives such as the Brunel Academy for Transformation of Teaching and Academy Fellows. To capitalise on the value we know our students can bring to our learning and teaching community, we will actively seek to increase and diversify existing opportunities to co-create their learning experiences.





### EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

“ ESD empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. It is about lifelong learning, and is an integral part of quality education. ESD is holistic and transformational education which addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment. It achieves its purpose by transforming society. ”

UNESCO, 2019.



### EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE

The challenges posed by the SDGs are as relevant locally as globally, and examples of activities include:

- Internships in organisations with sustainability impact, e.g. NGOs.
- ‘Living what they are Learning’ through volunteering.
- Campus Living Lab.
- Transdisciplinary team projects.
- Discussion on topical issues, e.g. health inequalities; homelessness; poverty.
- Research projects, e.g. climate change; clean energy; disease.



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