

Academic Skills Strategy for Leeds University Library. 2017 update.



1. Context

The Library's Skills@Library service was established in 2008 and subsequently implemented the University's first Academic Skills Strategy (2010). It is the University's centre of expertise on academic skills development for students, providing both in-curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities for students. The service is based in the Laidlaw Library and is run by the Library's Learning Services team, who work in partnership with staff from schools and services across the University.

This updated version of the Academic Skills Strategy aligns with and supports:

- the University's strategic plan: Investing in knowledge and opportunity, in particular the aim "to give students outstanding academic and co-curricular opportunities"
- the Leeds Curriculum and its focus on research-led education in particular
- the aims of Leeds for Life to provide outstanding co-curricular opportunities
- the University's submission for the Teaching Enhancement Framework in both Learning Environment and Student Outcomes criteria areas
- the Library's aim "to provide outstanding student opportunities", as outlined in the Library's new strategic plan 2016-2021: Powering knowledge and opportunity.

2. Vision and principles

Our vision is for all taught students to become confident, independent learners and researchers through development of the academic skills that enhance their academic performance at university and future career.

The following key principles provide a basis on which the service is provided and measured:

- Proactive: a dynamic and responsive service, which is focused on continual improvement and adapts to changing student / University needs.
- Aspirational: taking a developmental (non-remedial) approach to actively engage with students as partners, to empower them to take responsibility for their academic skills development and to achieve to the best of their ability.
- Diverse, flexible and inclusive: acknowledging the diversity within the student body and delivering services in person and online, through the innovative use of digital technologies to enhance the student experience.
- Responsive: working in partnership with students to develop and enhance services by seeking out and acting on their ideas and feedback.
- Student-centred: working in partnership with academic staff to tailor support for specific student groups, and embedding this in the curriculum wherever possible.
- Expert provision: continual development of our own expertise as learning developers and teachers, ensuring all Learning Advisors and senior Learning Services staff have, or are working towards, a recognised teaching qualification.

3. Definition / scope

Academic skills are generic and transferable skills that underpin the learning development of undergraduate and taught postgraduate students in higher education, enabling them to be confident, independent critical thinkers and reflective learners. The service has a particular focus on developing student research skills to enable them to undertake their final year independent research project, as part of the Leeds Curriculum's focus on research-led education. The six key areas are:

- Analytical skills: including finding and evaluating information
- Research skills: including reading, note-taking, referencing and academic integrity
- Critical thinking
- Communication skills: including all aspects of academic writing, delivering presentations and digital literacy
- Independent learning: including planning, time management, preparing for examinations and mathematics (where required)
- Team working: including supporting peers.

4. Implementing the vision: our commitment

We will provide a high quality, comprehensive and accessible service to support the whole student journey from transition to university to taught postgraduate study, in support of the University's Strategic Plan and adapting to key University priorities as required.

- We will develop student academic skills within the curriculum by delivering tailored face-to-face teaching, online support and blended learning, designed in collaboration with academic staff to meet specific learning outcomes related to academic skills development within the subject context.
- We will support specific student groups or particular programmes / schemes / projects by working collaboratively with staff from other services or units (e.g. Educational Engagement, International Student Office, Language Centre).
- We will enable all taught students to self-select additional opportunities for assignment support and academic skills development by providing an open programme of face-to-face workshops and online webinars, contributing to the portfolio of co-curricular opportunities offered through Leeds for Life.
- We will further enable students to develop their skills and knowledge by maintaining a comprehensive website that includes information and activities linked to specific assignment types and skills topics, which academic staff can also reuse or embed in VLE module areas.
- We will support key student transition points through a suite of e-learning opportunities, which currently comprises: Flying Start, Library Quickstart and the Academic Integrity Tutorial (all for Level 1 or new students); Second Year Success; The Final Chapter (for students undertaking final year projects / dissertations); Skills for Success (for Masters students).

- We will support individual student queries by email or in person in the Laidlaw Library during core hours, with the option to book 1-to-1 consultations with Learning Advisors in person or online.
- We will enable students to improve their mathematics through drop-in services or by appointment with the specialist maths staff.

5. Current priority areas

The following four key areas, identified in the Library's strategic plan, will be a particular focus for the Learning Services Team over the next five years in support of the University's current key priorities for students:

- Supporting the University's TEF submission: ensuring academic skills activities contribute in a positive way to the TEF assessment criteria, in particular: Learning Environment (LE1) "physical and digital resources are used effectively to aid students' learning and the development of independent study and research skills" and Student Outcomes and Learning Gain (SO2) "students acquire knowledge, skills and attributes that are valued by employers and that enhance their personal and / or professional lives".
- Digital developments: increasing the availability of services online, in particular for off-campus or distance learning students and in support of the University's Digital Learning Strategy for Student Education. This will enable students to access support online and, in addition, to develop and enhance their digital literacy skills.
- Broader and more effective collaboration across the University: bringing together skills support across campus to ensure students can easily understand and access available opportunities.
- Understanding changing needs and enhancing tailored services: with a focus on developing and enhancing key services for specific student groups, in particular taught postgraduate and international students.

6. Review term

An interim review of the strategy will take place in 2019, prior to the update of the Library's Strategic Plan in 2021.

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June 2017