

Bristol Futures Curriculum Framework

The University of Bristol's curriculum framework embodies the distinctive education we offer our students, and our aspirations for the future of education at Bristol. The framework has six connected dimensions which together contribute to a shared vision for education at the University of Bristol. At the heart of the framework is the idea of making a difference, which encompasses the idea that a good university education should challenge and change the way we think and act in the world, and our interactions with it. Our curriculum framework aims to enable students to make a difference in their disciplinary fields, across disciplinary boundaries and as individuals in a complex, challenging and rapidly changing world. 'Making a difference' implies that students' intellectual journeys are personally transformational, with the outworking of this change being evident in interactions with the city, the environment, workplaces and the global stage.

Why a curriculum framework?

The framework is a touchstone to enable programmes to re-imagine why they do what they do in relation to the aims, content, design, outcomes, teaching, learning and assessment of their curriculum. It is designed to help programme teams to engage in thoughtful and purposeful curriculum design in teams, in relation to dimensions to which a sample of the academic and professional community at Bristol (n=170) have contributed. It expresses some of the values and hopes of this community about education and the student experience at Bristol. The idea of the framework is to capture what is distinctive in a Bristol education, what we aspire to and how we imagine education changing in the next five to ten years.

What are the benefits of having a curriculum framework?

- Consistent and coherent curriculum design
- A team approach to programme design
- Articulating our implicit values about education
- More imaginative programme design
- Thinking space about curriculum
- Innovation, creativity, and new ways of teaching
- Reducing repetition, duplication, and poorly aligned content
- Judicious trimming of content without compromising rigour
- Ensuring a steady build-up of challenge for students through the levels of degrees
- A more consistent and engaging student academic experience
- More rewarding and fulfilling teaching.

How will the curriculum framework be implemented?

BILT's curriculum enhancement programme team will support programme teams to design their curricula in relation to the framework dimensions. Teams will bring their disciplinary understandings, ideas and values to curriculum workshops. They will engage in a process of mapping the units on programmes, using ideas and approaches which link to the framework dimensions in appropriate ways.

The Bristol Futures Curriculum Framework

The dimensions of the framework derive from seven curriculum cafes held with 170 members of staff and a small number of students. The dimensions are data-driven, but also relate to educational principles and curriculum theory.

Inspiring and innovative

Our curriculum will encourage students to learn through teaching and assessment methods which challenge them to be agents in their own learning. Students will work on complex real-world issues and problems, applying their knowledge in ways which nurture curiosity, develop persistence, and foster collaboration. We will challenge routine and traditional approaches to 'covering content' with more reflective, interactive and active approaches to teaching and learning. Our curriculum will create space for experimentation, risk-taking, fun, and openness to making mistakes and taking wrong turns, developing an enterprising and innovative mindset.

Intellectually stimulating

Our curriculum will stretch students and take them out of their comfort zones, building their capacity to work at problems without feeling defeated. Students will be intellectually challenged by troublesome knowledge, while being supported to grow in confidence, resilience and achievement. Bristol's research-rich environment will translate into teaching and assessment methods which give students a taste for doing research from day one of their degrees. Students will be encouraged to be critical consumers and curious producers of knowledge through opportunities to observe, critique, replicate and undertake research.

Inter/disciplinary

Our curriculum will give students the opportunity to have deep roots in a discipline, learning how to think, act, talk, write and be a scholar in a field. Students will become well-versed in the theory, practice and language of their disciplines, typically through wide reading, public lectures, critical exposure to media, field trips and contact with experts. Students will learn more about their disciplinary traditions through opportunities for boundary-crossing into other discipline areas. Our curriculum and teaching will enable students to value engaging beyond the narrow field of their discipline, whether in how we teach, or in more structured opportunities. This liberal education will give students questioning mindsets, increase their access to society's conversations, and help them to succeed in the world of work.

Personal development

Our curriculum will provide space, time, and opportunity for students to reflect on their own values and identities in relation to their academic experience and future ambitions. Through teaching, assessment and personal tutoring, we will seek to build students' capacity to be self-aware, take initiative, and be autonomous. The curriculum will encourage students to reflect on their academic experience and their personal development to support well-being. It will aim to pose questions, choices and problems which develop resilience, welcome openness, and allow for learning from failure. Overall, the Bristol Futures Curriculum aims to foster student flourishing through carefully scaffolding learning, and through developing solid pedagogic and peer relationships. Students' personal development is integral to an education which equips them for work and life beyond university.

Sense of belonging

Our curriculum will foster a sense of belonging through opportunities for collaboration and community in social and teaching spaces, and online environments. It will enable students from all walks of life to thrive intellectually: students from different communities and nations, and with different beliefs, talents and ways of knowing. We will create space for dialogue in the curriculum, encouraging students to build relationships which develop empathy, valuing provisional ideas and equipping students to operate without all the facts. Our curriculum will strive to build an inclusive environment through bridging divides between those traditionally viewed as insiders, and those who may feel strangers and outsiders. It will enable students to feel at ease expressing different perspectives, building trust, openness and a sense of belonging.

Global and civic engagement

Our curriculum will bring abstract global challenges into focus through providing a civic platform for exploring them and enabling students to contribute to making a difference. We will build strong networks and relationships with external partners in the city and beyond, enabling industry, small business and voluntary sector organisations to shape aspects of our curriculum. Our teaching and assessment will pose real world problems for students about global and civic challenges, for example sustainability, climate change, inequality, and populism. The curriculum will create opportunities for interaction with local and international partners to debate problems, and for students to contribute their time, talents and knowledge to the community in mutually beneficial ways.