

MARYVALE INSTITUTE



LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

2020 - 2025

This strategy is designed as a working document, to be reviewed at least annually by the Academic Board, in line with changing developments in the sector and in the Institute.

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Version	Author [name]	Date	Brief summary of changes

Development of the strategy

The creation of this strategy resulted from Institute wide consultation, in which the permanent academics reflected on current practice and aims against the QAA Indicators of Sound Practice “The basis for effective learning and teaching”.

From this reflection emerged a set of seven principles:

1. A focus on individual learning supported by face-to-face and online sessions of lectures, seminars and tutorials;
2. Coherent curriculum design, supported by well-resourced and clearly presented course related written materials;
3. Provision for a range of learning resources appropriate for fostering student learning across a number of levels;
4. Establishment of systems of student support and guidance that encourage student progress towards a model of independent thinking based on a relevant knowledge base;
5. Ensuring that students receive appropriate levels of feedback in line with the maintenance of academic standards;
6. Fostering management of learning opportunities that includes and engages with student responses to their learning environment;
7. Provision of ongoing staff development in matters of pedagogy, that can be aligned with understanding of current research in appropriate subject specialisms.

Time for change

In 2020, along with the whole of the education sector, a review of the Institute’s delivery method was prompted by the international Covid-19 pandemic. The resultant emergency changes: a move to online lectures and tutorials, increased availability of online materials and online end of year assessment for undergraduate programmes, improved accessibility and proved popular with many of the students. There was a gradual realisation that Maryvale’s traditional mode of delivery could be considered outdated and inflexible in a rapidly changing world. The principles of part time distance learning remain the basis of the Institute’s delivery, but increasingly there was a need for opportunities for part time students to study at a time that most suits them, fitting in with their work, family, pastoral or religious commitments.

An additional consideration was the drive for care for the environment, as indicated by world-wide demand and in Pope Francis’ encyclical ‘Laudate Si’, which calls for “care for our common home”. The Institute could not, in all good conscience, continue to rely on

huge swathes of hard copy written material. The move to providing materials online began in a small way in 2019, with a trial on one module on one programme and was rapidly expanded in spring/summer 2020 as part of the Institute's emergency response to the pandemic restrictions. There are sound ecological and economic reasons for the move to online materials and for younger generations it is now an expectation that they would be able to engage with educational materials online.¹

The overriding aim for the next five years is to successfully adapt to new ways of delivery, making the best of technological advances, whilst retaining the ethos and character of the much loved institute that is Maryvale.

In a world with a plethora of online provision, Maryvale wishes to retain one of its unique selling points (USP), that of a face-to-face element of delivery. An element much valued by students and staff alike, it provides opportunities for formal and informal joint study; it allows for peer communication and the development of cohesive cohorts and for students to experience the spiritual life of the Institute through the chapel, shrine and grounds. The commitment to visiting the Institute for three days three times a year may be seen as demanding for students with so many other conflicting commitments. The face-to-face element will be provided through day schools or study days, a minimum of one per programme (or year group) per year. The focus of these days will be delivering that which cannot be delivered online: human contact – introducing fellow students and key staff - developing rapport and sense of community, the spiritual experience, field trips, familiarity with the Institute library and face-to-face explanation of the particular mode of study. Essential in year 1 of study, these days will continue through each year of study to refresh the grounding experienced in year 1 and renew contact points.

The aim is to introduce these changes over a period of 2 – 4 years, to minimise disruption and disadvantage to current students.

¹ Exceptions will be made for medical need for hard copy materials

Seven Key Principles

Current practices and aims were reviewed against the seven principles stated above.

Principle 1 – A focus on individual learning supported by online lectures, seminars and tutorials and face-to-face study sessions

Current practice supporting this principle

Introductory sessions provide a systematic grounding in the characteristics of the level of study, helping the student to understand what is expected of them at each stage;

An ongoing study skills strand provides guidance on managing time and resources for personal study, to help the student get the best from their own environment;

Individual and group tutorial sessions support students in the development of the maturity to work alone, and in partnership, to acquire a developed body of knowledge, capacity for study and independent thought and action;

Individual tutorials and guidance help to develop independent, focused and reflective learners.

Aims 2020 – 2025

- Gradually condense the face-to-face element to increase focus on knowledge, skills and experiences that cannot be delivered as effectively in a more remote manner to allow the students to get the best out of their face-to-face opportunities;
- Move the majority of lecture delivery online, to allow students more flexibility to study in their own time;
- Each programme to establish a calendar of seminars, workshops and tutorials to be available online, to be more closely related to the order of study, rather than focusing on three set dates per year;
- Each programme to be prepared to provide additional lectures, seminars, workshops and tutorials in response to particular issues raised by the students;
- Expand the associate staff to include global expertise from high quality teachers who, although not able to visit Maryvale, could deliver online.

Principle 2 – Coherent curriculum design, supported by well-resourced and clearly presented course related materials

Current practice supporting this principle

As evinced in the programme specifications, programmes are designed to develop skills and knowledge and critical thinking as part of a coherent gradual process of learning, application, reflection and adaptation.

Each programme goes through continuous review and enhancement, based on staff and student response, current thinking and external feedback. Every five years each programme undergoes a full curriculum review, seeking input from staff, students and experts in the field.

Module coursebooks are structured to encourage, model, and facilitate active learning.

Course materials are subject to a rolling programme of review and authors encouraged to update bibliography to ensure currency.

Programme Directors work with the Librarian to ensure library stock includes up to date background reading for each module. Student access to digital resources through the library has also been increased.

Programme Directors work with the coursebook tutors and librarian to ensure module coursebook readers are up-to-date and accessible for the students.

Aims 2020 – 2025

- Review coursebooks and other programme material to facilitate more interactive learning experiences for the students and to ensure coverage of a variety of learning styles;
- Remove the need for hard copy print, except in cases of medical need;
- Enhance guidance on how to get the best use out of online materials, to include how to annotate coursebooks;
- Develop assessments for learning which correspond to changes in summative assessment types;
- Continue library investment in digital materials to increase student access to the resources they need from their desktop, wherever they are in the world.

Principle 3 – Provision for a range of learning resources appropriate for fostering student learning across a number of levels

Current practice supporting this principle

Delivery is a blend of coursebooks, essential reading, lectures, seminars, workshops, peer review and tutorials, aiming to provide for different learning styles.

Delivery is beginning to make more use of technology, using *Moodle*, *Skype*, *Webinar*, *Zoom* and other online platforms. Students are introduced to this technology through individual or group sessions or pre-recorded guidance videos.

The acquisition of knowledge is supported by a continuous underpinning of study skills sessions on academic writing, critical thinking, presentation, library use and accessing appropriate resources.

All students have access to a personal tutor (often the Programme Director), with whom they can discuss progress, barriers to progress and different approaches.

Aims 2020 – 2025

- Review coursebooks and other programme material to facilitate more interactive learning experiences for the students;
- Increase use of the “Flipped classroom” approach to learning, allowing the student to read appropriate lecture material, study key documents, form opinions and formulate questions before engaging in meaningful discussion with the Tutor/Lecturer and fellow students focused on the material studied;
- Develop online library of lecture recordings, available to be accessed at a time of the student’s choosing. Recordings to be renewed every 2 – 3 years;
- Develop the use of *PeerMark* on *Turnitin* to efficiently carry out student peer review activities;
- Increase use of *Moodle* as a platform through which online resources are delivered and engaged with;
- Review curriculum schedules to enhance flexibility in these regards.

Principle 4 – Establishment of systems of student support and guidance that encourage student progress towards a model of independent thinking based on a relevant knowledge base

Current practice supporting this principle

As mentioned in principle 3, all students have access to a personal tutor with whom they can discuss progress, barriers to progress and different approaches.

Students are encouraged to network informally between study sessions to offer each other support.

Some programmes engage a “Student Advisor”, a recent graduate of the particular programme who can offer advice from a student’s point of view, from their own experience of completing the programme.

Other programmes include the use of peer reviewed presentations, enhancing the learning of students through the experience of giving and receiving first hand feedback.

Aims 2020 – 2025

- Promote and expand the use of “Student Advisors” to all programmes, formalising the role with a role descriptor;
- Incorporate a form of peer review into the learning strategy of each programme;
- Plan mandatory tutor contact points into the curriculum to ensure all students receive the same basic level of support from their personal tutor;
- Ensure sessions which focus on proximate preparation for each assignment are included in the academic programme, including targeted sessions in oral presentation skills.

Principle 5 – Ensuring that students receive appropriate levels of feedback in line with the maintenance of academic standards

Current practice supporting this principle

Marking criteria are clearly linked to the aims and learning outcomes of each programme.

All markers are required to familiarise themselves with the marking criteria and programme aims to ensure that feedback relates and explicitly to the intended outcomes.

All programmes make use of a marking grid which encourages the marker to give detailed feedback on those key elements which define the level of study and provide targets for the student which identify strategies for improvement.

Assessment is conducted and written online through *Turnitin*. Markers have access to instructional videos and other resources to support them in using this software; training is available to them when required. Students are introduced to *Turnitin* as part of their course inductions and receive ongoing support in its use.

Turnitin also acts as an anti-plagiarism tool, flagging up instances of plagiarism to both marker and student, therefore encouraging good academic practice among students and contributing towards the maintenance of academic standards.

Feedback in tutorials seeks to explore how the student has managed his/her recent assignments and how to improve the next one. Written feedback is also received from markers via *Turnitin*.

Aims 2020 – 2025

- Systematise tutor training to ensure all relevant staff have the opportunity for the necessary formation and include detailed guidance on the Associate Staff section of the VLE, to ensure that all markers understand fully the level, nature and extent of feedback required;
- Ensure the targets set by tutors are engaged with actively by the students (feedforward) and picked up by subsequent tutors in their feedback (see Principle 6 below).

Principle 6 – Foster management of learning opportunities that includes and engages with student responses to their learning environment

Current practice supporting this principle

Restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic have meant that the management of learning opportunities has changed substantially, since the student learning environment has moved entirely online. Consequently, lectures have moved to online platforms such as *GoToWebinar* and *Zoom*; video recordings are now made available on the VLE for students to view again in their own time and more opportunities for online seminars and tutorials are being offered. Also, online exams have been introduced, with attention being paid to students sitting across different time zones and any special circumstances that they may have; students have been provided with instruction materials for these exams, have undertaken a short practice exam to familiarise themselves with the new process and have been consulted every step of the way, with adjustments being made where relevant. The Library has also extended the availability of online resources to students.

Some programmes require students to include a response to previous feedback in their subsequent assignments, to indicate what they have learned and how they intend to apply it.

Assignments combine theological analysis with critical reflection on how students would apply their learning to their own environment; seeking answers to questions that may be posed in their home, work, parish and social setting.

Students are expected to engage with the development and enhancement of their programme and learning experience in a number of ways:

- Student feedback is sought at every stage, with anonymous evaluation forms submitted after lecture sessions, at the end of modules and at the end of the year. These forms are analysed by the Programme Director and responses to issues raised discussed at the Course Committee. As a result minor changes to the programme are added to the annual action plan and students receive an update at the start of the new academic year.
- Student reps are active in seeking feedback from fellow students, to present to the Course Committee for comment and/or response.
- Student reps and recent graduates play an active part in the quinquennial review of programmes, sharing their views of the curriculum, the materials and learning opportunities and their overall experience.

Aims 2020 – 2025

- Expand the requirement for students to engage with the marker feedback across the provision, as an example of good practice (see Aim 1, Principle 5 above);

- Seek appropriate ways to encourage student feedback from a distance (via discussion among Programme Directors and through use of the Academic Reviewer);

Principle 7 – Provision of ongoing staff development in matters of pedagogy, that can be aligned with understanding of current research in appropriate subject specialisms

Current practice supporting this principle

Academic Forum held three times per year, permanent academic staff, associates or guest speakers sharing subject knowledge and pedagogical developments.

Moodle staff development pages available to permanent academic, associate and support staff.

Each member of permanent academic staff entitled to two weeks research time per year.

Best practice shared at monthly Programme Directors' Committee.

Staff regularly attend training events on pedagogy and assessment put on by validating bodies and other institutions.

Aims 2020 – 2025

- Increased membership of HEA;
- Encourage Programme Directors to evidence practical response to the sorts of professional training indicated above in AMRs and/or at programme committees and through their annual appraisals;
- Expand offering of pedagogical training on Moodle staff development pages.

End of year assessment (undergraduate examinations)

Maryvale has been operating end of year assessment through written exams for approximately 25 years. These exams have taken place at Maryvale House and at centres set up annually across the world, from Dublin to Hong Kong and Newfoundland.

The feedback from Open University Validation Partnerships (OUVP) on the Institute's re-validation submission received in 2019 included the following statement "*The OU cannot continue to support exams delivered at off-site locations*". A combination of this and the Covid-19 pandemic meant that, for the summer of 2020, we needed to change the format of examinations; removing the need for external examination centres. Following research into alternative exam formats used across the sector, the format of Open Book Timed Tests (OBTT) was trialed and, after student consultation was introduced for all years of the B.Divinity programme in June 2020. Student response to the new format was overwhelmingly positive. Lessons were learned from this experience and built into the implementation of the changes on the Philosophy programme for the autumn 2020.

The ultimate aim is to introduce a combination of OBTT and oral exams across the two bachelors level programmes. OBTT would generally be used for years 1 and 3 and, for award level years: 2, 4 and 5, oral exams would be used, either alone or in combination with OBTT, as a point of authenticity.

Aims 2020 - 2025

The change in format will be introduced gradually, to avoid disadvantaging current students:

- 2020 - all year groups sit OBTT format (except for Y5 B.Divinity students for whom oral examinations are the norm);
- 2021 - as 2020;
- 2022 - Year 2s sit oral exams for the first time (or a combination of OBTT and oral as suggested by the curriculum), all other years sit OBTT apart from BDiv Y5 who will have oral exams as normal;
- 2023 - As 2022;
- 2024 - Years 2 and 4 sit oral exams (or a combination of OBTT and oral as suggested by the curriculum), all other years sit OBTT apart from BDiv Y5 who will have oral exams as normal;
- 2025 - Years 2, 4 and 5 sit oral exams (or a combination of OBTT and oral as suggested by the curriculum), years 1 and 3 sit OBTT.