

Strategic Plan Discussion Vision 2030

Introduction

The University of Worcester's strategic plan guides the University in its ongoing efforts to enhance our core commitments to excellence in teaching, research, human flourishing and community impact.

This discussion document is intended to serve as a guide, which helps us on our way to developing a new University strategic plan. It aims to convey a broad sense of direction while also fostering wide-ranging discussion and engagement.

It offers contextual material, shares ideas and poses questions about our future. It also signposts further reading, to underpin and inform discussions. It is hoped and expected that additional topics will be raised and explored, that new ideas will be debated.

Everyone who wishes to participate in the development of the plan will have the opportunity to do so. Feedback will be gathered through meetings, surveys and conferences as well as digital channels. The final strategic plan will be considered and adopted by the University's Board of Governors following this highly collaborative, and inclusive process with students, staff, alumni and a wide range of partners in business, education, health, government and the wider community.

Context

The deliberations about the previous strategic plan took place during a period of turbulent change and uncertainty. In the years since the 2019 publication, there has been a global pandemic, Brexit, war in Europe and the Middle East and a change in Government. Concerns and clashes on climate change, free speech, inclusivity, mental health, racial discrimination and other topics intensified. Politics became more polarised.

At Worcester, the biggest institutional weakness has been a fall in demand for many of its courses from home students. This decline in demand has led to the University's income stagnating in cash terms and falling in real terms.

There are many reasons for the decline, including the lasting disruption caused by the pandemic- which has had a particular impact on students studying at partner institutions. 'Competition' has created an unequal playing field with the spending power of large institutions disrupting and distorting demand. The governing political party until July 2024 expressed hostility to universities on many occasions, passing hostile legislation, while the OfS, the higher education regulator failed students, the sector and society.

A growing proportion of students, particularly mature students, have been 'put off' higher education, despite all the evident benefits economically, socially and culturally.

The new strategic plan will need to address these immediate challenges, while also charting a purposeful course of action that defines who we will be in 2030.

The national context changed abruptly in July 2024, with the election of a new government with the new Secretaries of State for Education and for Science deliberately concerned to reset relationships, arguing that universities are "public goods" and stating that "the war is over". These early, most welcome initiatives create an optimistic context to undertake planning for the next decade.

Much more broadly, the new Government has committed to being 'mission driven', focusing its efforts on five key areas: growth, the NHS, clean energy, safer streets and opportunity. Universities will be key to realising these ambitions and for delivering sustainable and equitable change.

The new Strategic Plan gives the opportunity to communicate the purpose and benefits of higher education to students, parents, and the wider public; to work towards widely shared national goals and to affirm our vital role in society.

Discussion

The University of Worcester has navigated much of this past period well, which gives a powerful springboard for the development of the Vision 2030.

Worcester has been successful by being ahead of the great majority of universities in:

- **Educating highly employable, productive graduates**

Worcester is consistently one of the best and, in some years, the very best university in the country for sustained employment.

We have consistently excellent employment rates 1, 3 and 5 years after graduation. 6 years after its foundation, our new Law School was 3rd in the UK for graduate prospects, with only Oxford and Cambridge ahead.

- **Social innovation and civic impact**

The Hive is a truly outstanding facility for the people of Worcestershire as well as for the University. It is a uniquely successful library.

The University of Worcester Arena is a national and international beacon of inclusion. The University's civic impact has underpinned success in obtaining significant grants from the Local Economic Partnership and Towns Fund as we are seen as an agent of regeneration, economic growth and social cohesion.

- **Growing the health workforce**

We recognised the acute shortage in the health workforce and developed new provision long before most. We have had the biggest increase in nursing and midwifery numbers of any university in the UK. In the last 2 years, we have begun new courses in Medicine, Diagnostic Radiography and Nutrition and Dietetics. We led the national campaign to reverse the 2011 cuts to nurse training numbers. More recently we have been active national campaigners to increase medical student numbers.

- **Maintaining very high-quality teacher training in the face of adversity**

The 2023 Ofsted report on teacher education at Worcester is amongst the very best inspection reports on teacher education in the 21st century. The report's opening sentence succinctly summarises the inspectors' view of our "outstanding" provision. "Trainees benefit from an exceptional learning experience at the University of Worcester."

There are many other successes including the effective, responsible way in which the university contributed to public health and community cohesion during the pandemic, our nationally recognised work in student suicide prevention and postvention, the Silver award in the 2023 TEF, signifying "Very High Quality" with four "Outstanding" Gold features), a continuing excellent record in gender equality, environmental sustainability, inclusion, maintaining a broadly collegial, purposeful atmosphere and more.

The question before us now is what strategy to adopt?

The University's Executive Board has identified possible aims and questions that will likely be fundamental to the University's Vision for 2030.

The aims build on the successes of our existing strategy and outline who we will be, while the questions prompt discussion about how we will get there.

The aims and questions do not cover — and are not intended to cover — all the issues and subjects that are important to the University or that require planning of various kinds. They instead focus on opportunities, challenges, and trends that seem likely to be pivotal if Worcester is to sustain and enhance its capacity to make a significant impact for good in the world through education, research and innovation.

Aims

We will offer an exceptional learning experience

Students at Worcester will receive a tailored learning experience, where they are all valued as individuals and supported to achieve their full potential. Worcester graduates will be global and local agents of change through successful transition into professional employment.

We will be an anchor in Worcester and the wider region

We will play a central role in national and local renewal working with organisations, communities and individuals.

We will help Worcester to become a flourishing City of Culture through a strong creative arts programme and a vibrant 'Liberal Arts' offer, which will enable such subjects as English, Geography, History to thrive.

We will work with alumni and graduates to attract talent and promote Worcester as a University City.

The university will build upon its reputation for being socially responsible by continuing our progress to make the University, City and region more environmentally sustainable.

We will expand the University's beneficial impact by becoming a major centre for:

- **Health, medical, social care, well-being and sport education**
- **Research and innovative practice with a focus on health and well-being**
- **Educating the early years, school and college workforce**
- **Educating business professionals, driving entrepreneurship and contributing to a vibrant economy**
- **Professional education for Law, Criminal Justice, Probation and Policing**
- **An educational renaissance in the Black Country, particularly through our work with FE College, NHS and other partners**

We will break down barriers to opportunity

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion will continue to be a core aspect of our university values. Our university culture will reflect open and inclusive practices across staff, students and partners. We will build upon our inclusion work by ensuring that all members of the university community have the opportunity to flourish.

We will be a financially resilient

We will establish long-term financial sustainability of the university, so we are able to meet our strategic ambitions and remain an important asset in the region. This will be achieved by growth in student numbers, growing our income from research and consultancy, diversifying the streams from which income flows to the University and building a University endowment.

Do you agree with the proposed aims?

- **Is there anything that should be added or removed?**
- **Do they reflect the character and values of the University?**
- **Do they adequately address the long-term missions set out by the Government?**

Key questions

The University's Executive Board have identified five themes and a series of subsidiary questions to help prompt discussion about the future.

Questions about the University's strategic direction

How best can Worcester sustain teaching and research excellence that makes a difference in the world?

- Should we further specialise in our current areas of strength, or continue to offer a broad subject portfolio?
- To what extent and how should the University reform its undergraduate course structure to provide a sustainable subject mix?
- Should we work with partners to create a multi-level educational institution to serve the region?
- Will we remain an institution where the majority of our teaching is delivered in person?
- Should we aim for postgraduate and continuing professional development work to grow to comprise a much more significant proportion of our total work?
- What proportion of our educational work will be carried out in partnership with others – particularly Colleges, Multi-Academy Trusts, Health Trusts and bodies and employers? How will we expand and nurture these partnerships?
- How can we systematically develop strong work-based learning components to our work – including apprenticeships, work placements, projects and internships?

Questions about teaching and research

What academic initiatives should Worcester pursue to ensure we sustain teaching excellence?

- What educational approaches will best create a strong sense of community, invite high levels of engagement and foster connections on a 'human scale'?
- How can Worcester enable more undergraduate and graduate students to contribute to the world?
- What innovations would help foster a culture of learning that enables *all* members of the campus community to flourish and deliver on the objectives detailed in our Access and Participation Plan?

- What initiatives could help us reach new populations of students -particularly those living in educational cold spots?
- How can we do a better job of helping students translate their educations into meaningful lives and careers connected to a larger purpose?

How can Worcester most effectively support research and innovation across all divisions of the University?

Can digital innovations transform the way we study and work?

- We now have powerful new ways to communicate with one another, acquire information, and perform tasks. How do we harness the continuing and rapid evolution of technology, including online media and artificial intelligence, to inform our teaching, improve efficiencies and upskill staff?
- What goals should the University have for its online initiatives and offerings, and how should it pursue those goals?
- Do we have the right expertise, technology and course portfolio to deliver an outstanding online learning experience?
- How do we prepare our students for a world where technological development, including artificial intelligence, is reshaping jobs, the economy and the organisation of society?
- How do we prepare for and respond to the new digital threats to emotional well-being, civic discourse and cyber security?

Questions about student and staff experience

How do we support and promote the mental and physical well-being of our students and staff so that they have a genuine opportunity to thrive and engage with the University?

- Is it possible to take a campus-wide, integrated approach to well-being?
- What evolution is required in our approach to student support services?
- How can we continue to benefit from a staff body that is positive, loyal and innovative?
- How can we help students and staff feel proud to belong to an organisation whose values and purposes they share and believe in?
- How can we best support staff to develop their skills and capabilities as professionals in higher education, to pursue their career development goals, and to gain recognition through accreditation and qualification?

Questions about how the University connects with its communities beyond the campus

How can we change lives through civic engagement?

- What principles should guide Worcester's engagement with its alumni, friends, neighbours, partners and other communities that are important to the University?
- What is the role of the University in national renewal?
- How best can we cultivate an ethic of civic engagement among our students, both during their time here and after they graduate?
- What is our role in advancing solutions for a sustainable future?

Questions about how the University stewards its resources

How do we return to financial stability?

- Over the next 5 years, how can we grow home student numbers?
- How can we increase our research funding?
- How will we ensure that our staff resources are deployed efficiently and effectively, and that costs are managed as we grow, so that we can continue to offer secure and satisfying employment?
- What assumptions, principles and models should the University use to manage its financial resources effectively and efficiently over the long term?
- How should the University steward, renew and further develop the physical facilities that are critical to the quality of its teaching and research mission?

How will success be judged?

- What indicators will help us gauge progress towards our stretching but achievable aims?

Further reading

Mission-led Government

- [Mission Driven Government](#) (Labour website, September 2024)
- To deliver on its missions, the government must support institutional diversity
- [NHS Long term workforce plan](#) (June 2023)

Higher Education context, policy and funding

- [Increasingly, university is a place where you are told what to think rather than taught how to think](#) (Michelle Donelan, Conservative Home 2022)
- [Must do better: the Office for Students and the looming crisis facing higher education](#) (House of Lords Industry and Regulators Committee)
- [Bridget Phillipson's speech at the Embassy Education Conference](#) (23 July 2024)
- [UK's science minister declares end to Tory 'war on universities'](#) (Guardian 8 September 2024)
- [Beech-side views: Back from the future](#) (The Pie, 4 September 2024)
- [UUK Blueprint](#) (UUK, October 2024)

University of Worcester: facts, figures and key reports

- [University of Worcester Financial statements](#)
- [University of Worcester current courses](#)
- [University of Worcester Ofsted Report](#) (2023)