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The YSJ Pedagogy



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Introducing the YSJ Pedagogy

The YSJ Pedagogy articulates why we teach in the ways that we do at York St John University. It outlines the grounding ethos of our learning, teaching and assessment in terms that are designed to be relevant and recognisable across all subjects and levels, and which we can use to articulate to stakeholders why our approach is valuable.

The YSJ Pedagogy is designed to evolve with the urgent challenges faced by students, staff and the higher education sector as a whole. It aims to address social inequalities, including awarding gaps for underrepresented students, and contribute to the University's continued financial sustainability. Key themes and concerns include:

- **Climate Emergency:** Addressing the accelerating climate crisis
- **Technological Change:** Leveraging rapid technological advancements, including generative AI
- **Uncertainty about future employment:** Preparing students for an uncertain job market
- **Wellbeing and Mental Health:** Recognising the increasing mental health challenges for students and staff

Helping meet our strategic goals

Implementing the YSJ Pedagogy will help us achieve key strategic measures of success:

- Top quartile in student satisfaction measures
- Increased educational equality of opportunity
- Consistently exceeding national quality benchmarks
- Empowering students to secure meaningful employment or further study

Core Principles

The YSJ Pedagogy will:

- **Embody University Values:** Reflect the fundamental values and mission of York St John University
- **Enable Implementation of Strategy:** Help embed the University for Social Impact Strategy through the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Framework, School Roadmaps and thematic enabling plans
- **Value Academic Distinctiveness:** Recognise the uniqueness of different subjects and their methodologies
- **Be Universally Relevant:** Apply across all subjects, courses and levels of taught provision
- **Articulate Pedagogical Expectations:** Define expectations for undergraduate and postgraduate courses
- **Integrate with Existing Frameworks:** Complement frameworks like the YSJ Academic Framework and the Inclusive Education Framework
- **Foster Innovation:** Encourage innovation and the sharing of good practices within our community

Implementation

By embedding the YSJ Pedagogy, we aim to create a supportive, innovative and inclusive educational environment that prepares our students for the future. The YSJ Pedagogy will not dictate course content but will enhance quality, rigour and academic standards. It will foster consistency whilst allowing for local ownership and autonomy. It will not compromise professional accreditations or conflict with PSRB requirements but will support continuous improvement in teaching.

Commitment to Values

The YSJ Pedagogy will maintain and strengthen our commitment to curricula which embody our values:

- **Critical Thinking and Creativity:** Promote these skills through curricula and academic practice to address social justice and societal challenges
- **Equality of Opportunity:** Reform practices contributing to awarding gaps as per our Access and Participation Plan objectives and commitments
- **Decolonisation and Anti-Racism:** Decolonise our curricula and adopt anti-racist teaching practices
- **Inclusive Education:** Implement the Inclusive Education Framework
- **Wellbeing and Mental Health:** Embed the University Mental Health Charter
- **Ecological Justice:** Embed the UN Sustainable Development Goals in curricula

Towards Competence-Based Education

Competence-based education is becoming more established in the sector, shifting from a focus on knowledge acquisition to a holistic, values-driven learning approach. The OECD defines it as involving 'the mobilisation of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to meet complex demands' (OECD, *The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030*, 2018, p. 5). We consider that this method will develop the skills and behaviours our graduates need through the integration of three key domains:

- **Knowing:** Understanding and connecting with disciplinary and course-specific concepts and content
- **Doing:** Applying knowledge, skills and attributes to positive effect
- **Being:** Reflecting on personal and intellectual development and applying the resulting learning to tackle societal challenges

In this approach, 'knowing', 'doing', and 'being' are interconnected and equally valued, ensuring that graduates are not just knowledgeable but also capable of continuous learning and adaptation. Such meta cognitive learning is crucial for both professional and personal success.

The YSJ Pedagogy supports a competence-based approach to learning, teaching and assessment because it has the potential to support our students to make meaningful connections between their modules and empower them to draw fuller connections between their degrees and their future endeavours. By clearly defining the general and specialist competencies we aim to develop, we can:

- Enhance student engagement with and commitment to their studies
- Empower students to impact their communities, workplaces and society as change agents

Designing and Delivering Competence-Based Courses

When designing courses, explicitly stating the competencies students should develop helps clarify assessment criteria and boosts students' ability to articulate and evidence their learning. This approach will ensure that Work-Related Experiential Learning (WREL) is fully integrated into assessments, aiding graduates in the job market where employers increasingly focus on competencies.

By adopting a competence-based education model, we will prepare our students not just to learn but to thrive and adapt in an ever-changing world.

Features of our YSJ Pedagogy

Drawing on the best practices within our University and the wider higher education sector, the YSJ Pedagogy identifies five key features of our learning that support the development of competencies for all our students:

1. Active and Experiential Learning

- **Collaborative Learning:** Students engage actively with peers and tutors
- **Constructive Learning:** Students explore, critique, create, problem-solve and reflect to deepen engagement and confidence
- **Holistic Support:** Integrated academic support
- **Meaningful Assessments:** Varied and impactful assessments
- **Positive Impact on continuation and completion:** Enhances student retention and reduces awarding gaps
- **Student Agency:** Empowers students in their learning journey

2. Personalised and Tailored Learning

- **Relational and Dialogic relationship with students:** Acknowledging diverse backgrounds and learning preferences in ways that show students they matter to us
- **Shared Responsibility:** Commitment to making meaningful change through our knowing, doing and being in the world
- **Flexible Design:** Sustainable and structured choices and flexibility in learning design and assessment
- **Inclusive Curriculum:** Diverse learning, teaching and assessment which ensures all students can access and see themselves in the curriculum
- **Comprehensive Support:** Academic tutoring, professional support and guided independent study
- **Effective Assessment and Feedback:** Utilising formative assessments, iterative feedback and enhanced digital literacy to enhance outcomes

3. Collaborative and Connected Learning

- **Partnerships:** Collaboration and co-creation with staff, students, community groups and employers
- **Research-Informed Teaching:** Connecting learning with research and developing students' critical thinking
- **Experiential Learning:** Work-related experiential learning opportunities including with businesses, the public sector and third-sector organisations
- **Authentic Assessment:** Applying knowledge and skills to new and relevant situations
- **Inclusive By Design:** Learning designed with the widest audience in mind with accessibility features and characteristics likely to engage a diverse audience built in from the start

4. Compassionate and Inclusive Learning

- **Noticing and Acting to Reduce Suffering:** Recognising, alleviating and preventing suffering within educational communities wherever possible
- **Removing Barriers:** Overcoming structural impediments to learning so that all our learners can flourish and succeed
- **Transparent Dialogue:** Actively listening and engaging with students
- **Trauma-Informed Practice:** Using insights from trauma-informed practice to support students to engage with confidence, trust and criticality with sensitive and intellectually challenging content

5. Critical and Challenging Learning

- **Critical Thinking:** Developing students' evaluation and critical-thinking skills
- **Empowerment:** Encouraging students to challenge assumptions and to solve complex problems creatively
- **Building Confidence:** Giving students confidence to act and encouragement to reflect on what they do and the positions that they take up
- **Holistic Support and Collaboration:** Integrated support from academics and professionals to foster student growth and success
- **Independent Learning:** Fostering a growth mindset, self-efficacy and enabling students to uncover the 'hidden curriculum' in HE
- **Research-Informed Curricula:** Embedding research-led, research-oriented, research-tutored and research-based approaches to teaching design and delivery

Visualising the YSJ Pedagogy as a journey for students and staff

Diagram 1: represents the YSJ Pedagogy as a student learning journey, based in our values, providing spaces and opportunities to develop competencies through means of the five features and leading to the acquisition of our graduate attributes and 'educational gain'.

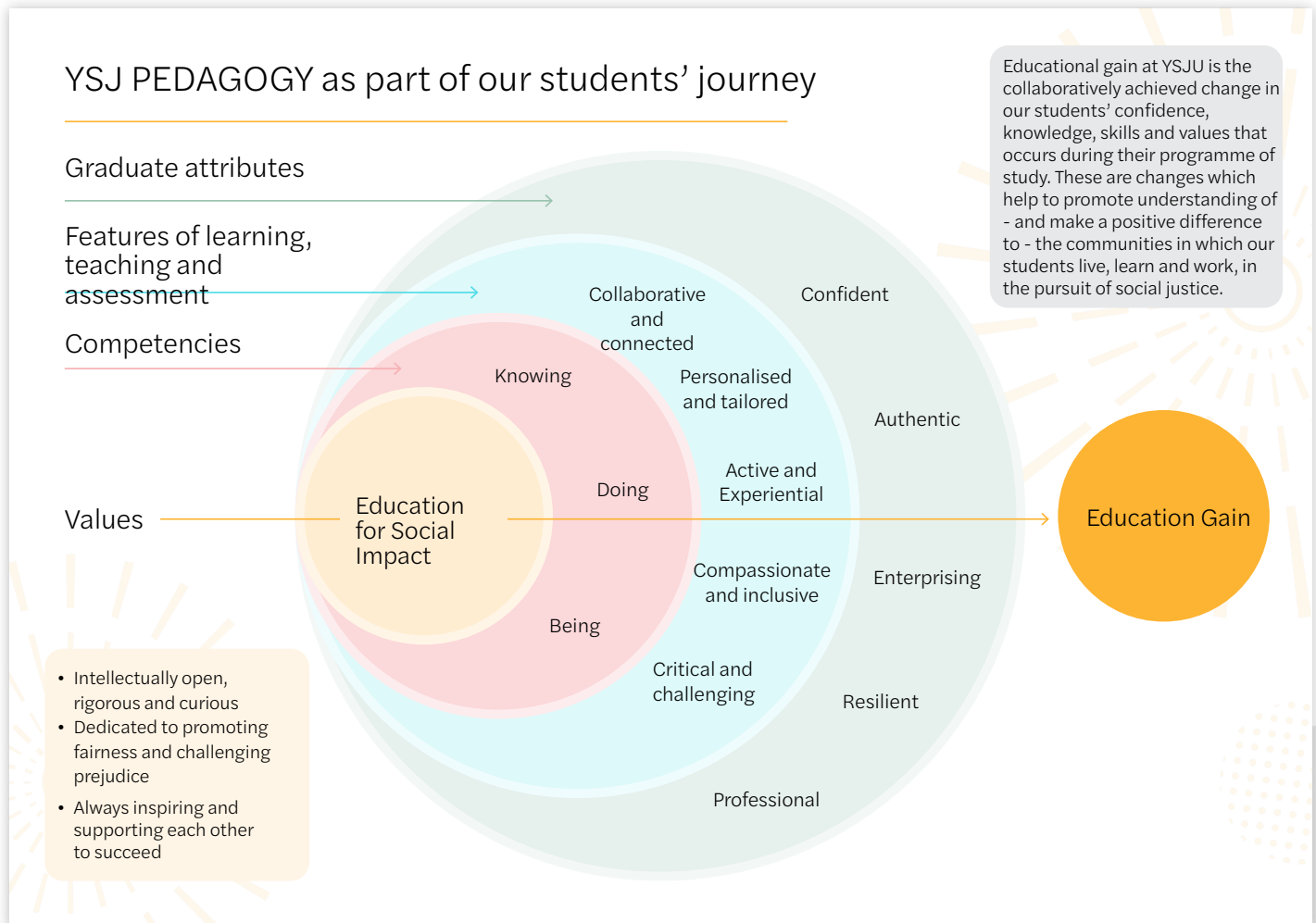
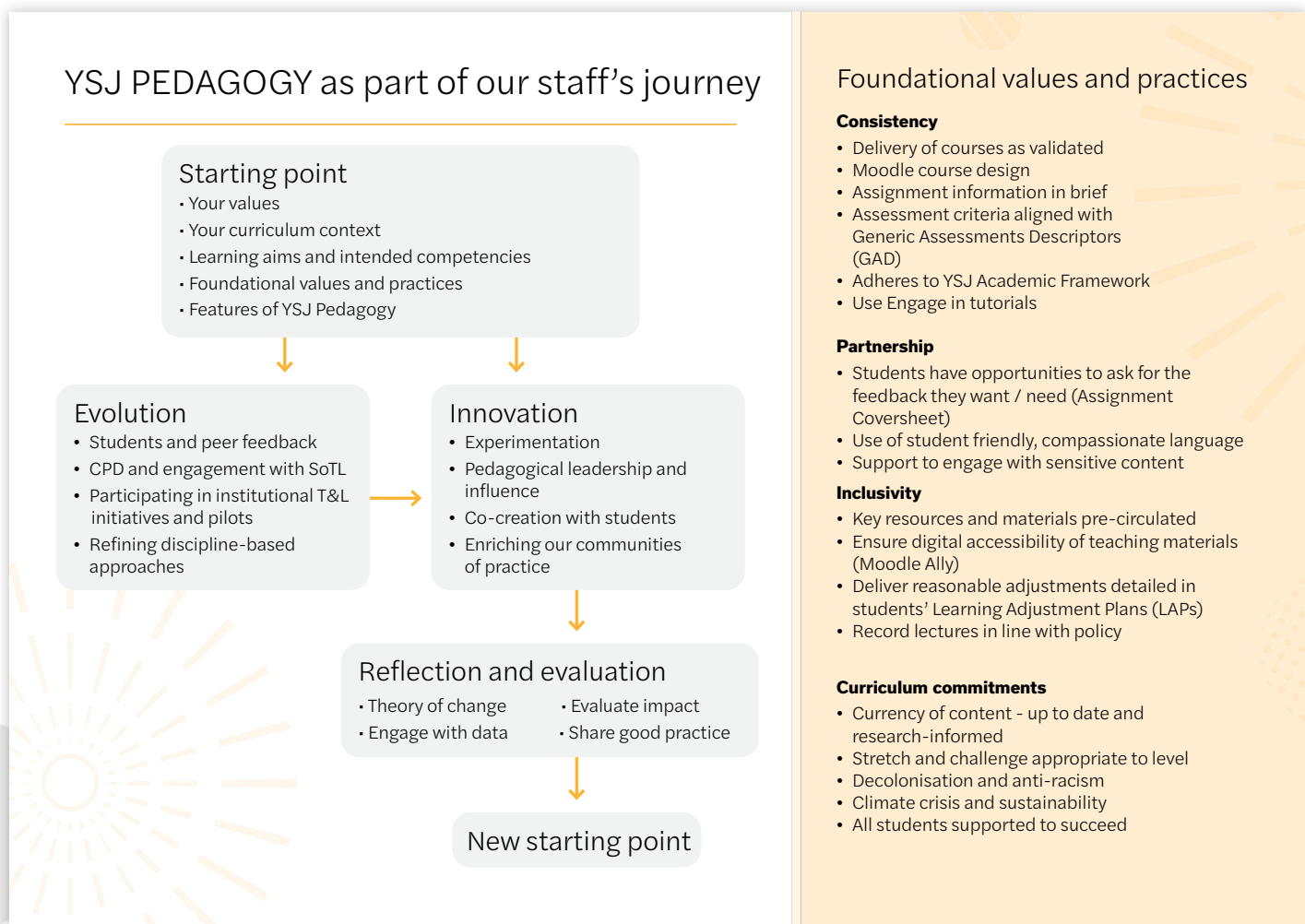


Diagram 2: outlines the parameters, requirements and fundamental practices which are required for consistent, high-quality education, and delineates the space held open for innovation and evolution of practice.



Implications for Teaching, Learning and Assessment Delivery

Undergraduate Delivery Methods

The features of the YSJ Pedagogy enable students to engage in learning activities that build confidence and a sense of belonging. They recognise the different starting points and levels of educational capital and familiarity that our students have.

At YSJ, undergraduate teaching is delivered in person, with no hybrid or hyflex options for validated contact hours. However, we offer online asynchronous opportunities to consolidate learning, such as:

- Reviewing lecture recordings
- Flipped classroom activities
- Discussion groups
- Collaborative project work
- Quizzes and online tests
- Formative assessments

At YSJ, we firmly believe that in-person learning, characterised by active, collaborative interactions and peer learning, offers all our undergraduate students confidence-building experiences that can form the foundation for their success. These features address student concerns about isolation and loneliness, and contribute to our whole-university-approach to supporting mental health as part of our commitment to the University Mental Health Charter. For a degree of personalisation and flexibility, online delivery of academic or module tutorials and individual supervisions (e.g., for dissertations) can be accommodated based on student preferences. Online-only courses should align with the YSJ Pedagogy in ways appropriate to the discipline.

Postgraduate Taught Delivery Methods

Postgraduate taught programmes can deliver up to 20% of validated contact time online to foster students' academic confidence and independence. Online elements must:

- Demonstrate the features of the YSJ Pedagogy, including active and collaborative activities where possible
- Not exceed 20% of validated contact time, complying with UKVI restrictions
- Be clearly identified for students and in validated documents

Balance of Activity Types

A range of activity types and multiple means of engagement should be selected to cater to diverse student needs, preferences and backgrounds. Activities like seminars, presentations, workshops, practicals or simulations use active learning techniques to enable students become competent practitioners in their fields. Consideration should be given at validation and during regular module review to the balance of activities appropriate to the module content and the implications of these for academic success, student belonging and staff workload.

Lectures provide foundational knowledge but are most effective when facilitating enquiry-based or problem-solving learning. The YSJ Pedagogy emphasises that one-way information transmission should make up only a small part of our approach, with all lectures including engaging, interactive elements.

Examples of good practice, including case studies, can be found at <https://blog.yorks.ac.uk/tatlblog>. Implementation plans - ensuring the YSJ Pedagogy is fully adopted across the University - will include an array of CPD, training and opportunities to share practice.

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