



Research Rich Learning Policy

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1. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Research rich learning underpins design principles of all Northumbria programmes, at all stages of study from UG to PG. It is one of the four Pillars of the Programme Framework for Northumbria Awards (PFNA). The key principle underpinning the Research Rich Learning Policy is for students to be actively engaged with research as participants of research and inquiry. It provides flexibility in its application to all courses, enabling discipline-specific autonomy, while promoting the core aims of critical scholarship, linked to employability and student engagement.

1.1 Northumbria Strategy 2018/23

Northumbria's Corporate Strategy 2018/23 states:

Our ambitious Vision puts academic excellence at the heart of everything we do; high-quality research creates new knowledge that benefits society and research-rich education transforms our students' lives.

And: 'Transformed student and stakeholder outcomes through:

- Teaching and learning that provides a research-rich, experiential and inquiry-based educational experience for all students
- Partnership working as a stylistic trait that achieves shared goals and is recognised by staff, students and stakeholders
- Outstanding student and stakeholder experiences and outcomes

This implies the development of a culture in which students are inducted as partners into the communities of practice of teaching, research and enterprise across the disciplines, throughout their learning journey.

1.2 Student Satisfaction and Experience

The Research Rich Learning Policy seeks to engage students fully with their learning journey by providing discipline-specific opportunities to engage with research that capitalises upon their interests and abilities. In doing so it is anticipated that students will experience the intellectual stimulus to succeed, which will prepare them for leadership in employment, and / or engagement in further study.

The Research Rich Learning Policy seeks to equip students with skills of intellectual autonomy, collaborative working, critical and independent inquiry, discipline-specific creativity, and project management - skills which are all associated with excellence in research. These skills are identified as key graduate attributes, desirable to employers seeking autonomous, engaged and self-directed candidates who can demonstrate initiative and leadership. Evidence shows that early engagement of undergraduates with research rich learning, applied research skills, authentic projects, conferences, and associated outputs can also raise awareness of postgraduate study and PGR research opportunities.

2. A FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH RICH LEARNING

Boyer's (1990)ⁱ model of scholarship offers a conceptual framework for developing 'critical scholarship' in linking research, teaching and engagement through critical inquiry.

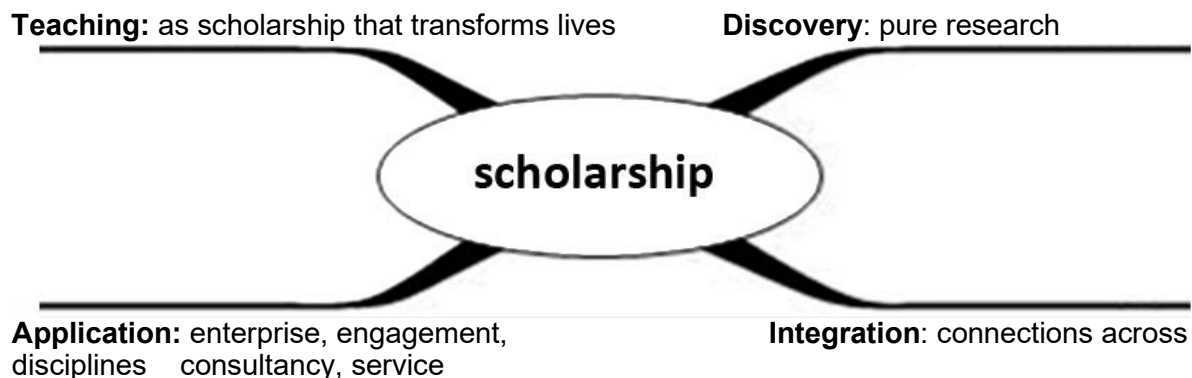


Fig. 1: NU Framework for Critical Scholarship (after Boyer, 1990)

Theories of Research Informed Learning (RIL) advocate approaches that move from teacher-centred 'transmission' models of higher education, towards the teacher assuming the role of facilitator to encourage active, self-directed learning on the part of the student. Such approaches allow students to take responsibility for their own learning by requiring engagement with higher level academic skills of inquiry and research. In this way students are inducted into a disciplinary/professional community of learners where academics and students are partners in learning.

Through the adoption of the Research Rich Learning Policy, the activities of the teacher and the learner will be increasingly aligned towards the co-creation of knowledge through critical scholarship. The research (discovery), application and integration activities of teacher - as set out by Boyer in the above diagram - will provide currency and methodology for the benefit of the student.

2.1 A Framework for Research Rich Learning and Teaching

Jenkins and Healey (2005)ⁱⁱ categorise RIL activities into four different methods, which can be used to map research rich learning across programmes. In all of these approaches a shift towards student-centred and inquiry centred activities in which students actively engage with their learning is advocated.

Lecturer focus, with students in the role of audience:

- **research led teaching / learning:** the curriculum is structured around subject content and that content is based on the research interests of staff (learning about research)
- **research orientated teaching / learning:** the curriculum emphasises understanding of the knowledge production process, and methods of inquiry in the subject (learning how to research).

These first two approaches to research informed learning tend to restrict students to the roles of passive recipients of learning; however, they can be developed through careful curriculum design to engage students more actively as participants in their learning journey. *Active student engagement with students in the role of participants:*

- **research based teaching / learning:** the curriculum is based on student-centred inquiry and research activities (conducting research).
- **research tutored teaching / learning:** the curriculum emphasises learning focused on students actively discussing research, and critically engaging with research papers and in research discussions.

Research based and research tutored teaching are favoured because of their focus on students as participants. The intention of Northumbria's Research Rich Learning Policy is to shift all methods of research informed learning towards engaging students actively as participants.

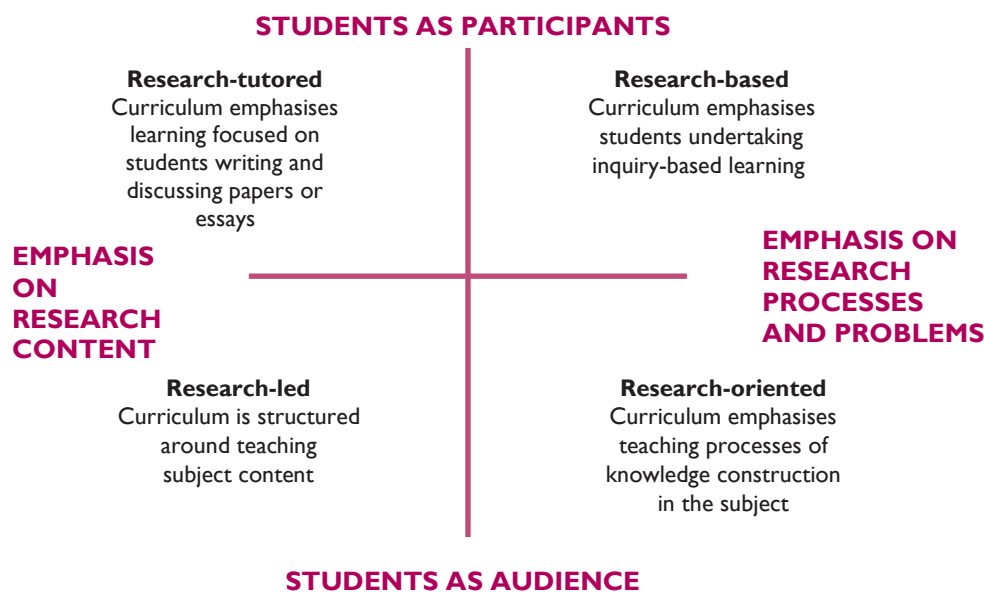


Fig. 2: Taxonomy of Research Rich Learning (after Jenkins & Healey, 2005)

This taxonomy can be utilised by programme teams to identify research rich learning activities, and to map inquiry-led experiences across their curricula. All four methods effectively link teaching to research, and each discipline area can use the taxonomy appropriately to suit their signature pedagogy, with a focus on actively engaging students in learning. Programme teams are required to consider how students are engaged in learning through these different approaches, and how they are effectively implemented at different academic levels (Levels 4-7) through the student's learning journey.

In addition to the taxonomy presented in Figure 2, there is a fifth approach, which directly benefits student learning:

- **Pedagogic research:** here, the curriculum is designed by observation, evaluation and active research into the teaching and learning process (doing research). Students, as partners with staff, can play an active role in contributing to research to enhance teaching, for example, evaluating curriculum design, in order to enhance research informed learning and the student experience.

3. EMBEDDING RESEARCH RICH LEARNING AT NORTHUMBRIA

The aim of Northumbria's Policy is to embed student engagement in critical scholarship across all NU undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. A key focus of the Policy concerns how research can be used to benefit learning and teaching from the first year of undergraduate study onwards. Through this approach, students are introduced to research rich learning at the beginning of their programmes, stimulating intellectual growth, academic skills, and critical curiosity. Subsequent years consolidate these attributes, culminating with a capstone experience in their final year.

3.1 Developing Northumbria Graduate Attributes

The Northumbria attributes of initiative and autonomy must be progressively developed through research rich learning from the outset. Students should be engaged in the co-production of knowledge, developing their skills and identities as Northumbria graduates in a scholarly community of practice.

The Scottish QAA Enhancement Theme adopted a broad definition of research, which includes:

- practice/consultancy-led research
- research of local economic significance
- contributions to the work of associated research institutes or other universities and various types of practice-based and applied research including performances, creative works and industrial or professional secondments

(QAA Enhancement Themes: Research Teaching Linkages Sector Wide Discussions Volume 1, p. 23)ⁱⁱⁱ

This wide definition of research provides Northumbria University with a unique opportunity to combine research, teaching and engagement in achieving the Corporate Strategy. Our students value the opportunities we create for them to be engaged in research that prepares them for leadership in professional practice, and for further study. Many of the graduate attributes associated with research mindedness are similar to the attributes sought by employers, hence the close link between research informed teaching and the employability agenda, for example, problem solving, teamwork, project management, leadership, communication and digital literacy skills.

The QAA Scottish Enhancement Theme, 'Research Teaching Linkages: enhancing graduate attributes'^{iv} has identified research linked graduate attributes, which can be found in appendix 1. These attributes provide a useful starting point in evaluating research linked graduate attributes across Northumbria programmes.

3.2 Programme Design and Delivery

The successful implementation of research rich learning must address how research can benefit undergraduate and postgraduate teaching from the first semester of study. The links between research and teaching are hardest to establish in the first year of undergraduate programmes, given the gap between secondary education teaching and higher level research skills. By developing programme structures that explicitly demand and support self directed inquiry, research rich learning enables students to take ownership of their learning, and to read for a degree rather than to passively consider their education as a financial transaction. The incorporation of research rich learning needs to be constructively aligned across programmes, so that students are enabled to develop the skills they need cumulatively from the first year. The following guidelines are proposed for the individual years of undergraduate study, the nature of which will vary depending on the discipline and/or professional context:

- Level 4: students should be introduced to the academic literacies required to perform successfully in higher education. Programme teams will encourage student inquiry, in conjunction with discipline-specific taught content, to support this step change in academic ability. Students should be provided with opportunities to undertake bounded research inquiry and forms of self directed study. In this formative year, it is expected that students will be introduced to research methodologies and knowledge construction, gaining confidence in approaches to research and critical thinking, with sufficient guidance to enable students to engage in well structured and bounded inquiry based learning.
- Level 5: students should be provided with bounded, but flexible, negotiated opportunities for greater critical inquiry; possibilities for options, exchanges, experimentation, and self-directed enquiries will be opened up, enabling students to make career and study choices that will inform their future studies. During this year students should be given more opportunities to operate as *participants* in research projects (see fig. 2). Students should be encouraged to develop their critical thinking, and of taking responsibility for their own study, such as by defining their own research projects and literature based reviews.
- Level 6: students will capitalise on the academic experiences of the previous years, synthesizing their learning and experience through a summative 'capstone' assignment which demonstrates autonomous learning, academic rigour, self-directed purpose, and intellectual ambition. This discipline-specific, summative assignment will be expected to reflect the academic rigour of the traditional dissertation. However, creative, complex and applicable formats will be encouraged that suit the subject; for example: a final design project underpinned by individual inquiry, a practice project, a comprehensive business plan, a peer-reviewed journal paper etc. These outputs may also serve as key components within a Northumbria University graduate's portfolio for employability.
- Level 7: students will engage in autonomous discipline specific research and enquiry. This will include creative, complex formats relevant to the subject, for example design and practice projects that contribute to the employability of graduates.

4. DEVELOPING THE TEACHING-RESEARCH NEXUS

The development of a functioning and effective Teaching-Research nexus is critical to embedding inquiry based learning into programmes of study at Northumbria, and cannot be automatically assumed to exist (Hattie and Marsh, 1996)^v. An active strategy to successfully link research with learning and teaching strategies is required: “There is little evidence to support an intrinsic relationship between teaching and research. Both research-intensive and teaching-intensive universities need to set out to consciously create a meaningful relationship within their institutions” (Jenkins and Healey 2005: 3).

This policy advocates four key strategies to promote the teaching-research nexus:

- Developing institutional awareness and institutional mission
- Developing pedagogy and curricula to support the nexus
- Developing staff and university structures to support the nexus
- Developing research and business engagement policies and strategies to strengthen the nexus

4.1 Developing institutional awareness and institutional mission

- Develop plans to demonstrate the centrality of research rich learning to the University Mission
- Raise awareness through targeted events (e.g. faculty enhancement days)
- Enhance the information and research base by updating the web presence, and publicising existing good practice in research rich learning at Northumbria
- Involve students in institutional strategy, and the development of a shared understanding of research rich learning’s potential to enhance the student experience
- Utilise NSS qualitative data to identify student expectations and perceptions of research rich learning as a strategy for enhancing student satisfaction and engagement, with particular regard to Q2 ‘Staff have made the subject interesting’, and Q4 ‘The course is intellectually stimulating’
- Promote staff and student engagement in pedagogic research and relevant enhancement activity and build capacity for research rich teaching amongst staff

4.2 Developing pedagogy and curricula to support the nexus

- Develop and audit programme specifications, teaching policies and learning practices, and curriculum design to support the research teaching nexus at institutional, faculty and department level
- Embed research rich learning as a component in Programme Design and Delivery in order to ensure that all programmes explicitly identify where research rich learning is mapped across modules and programmes; in particular, incorporate active inquiry based student learning that develops Northumbria graduate attributes as independent and creative producers of knowledge
- Engage staff in discussions about the challenges and opportunities in embedding research informed learning into the curriculum, and how to constructively engage with the research-teaching nexus
- Investigate and popularise student perceptions of research and research rich learning. Engage students in discussions of how research rich learning can be embedded in the curriculum, explaining its relevance in terms of academic performance and employability.



- Identify different types of research informed learning at Northumbria, using the Healey / Jenkins categories; provide links to case studies from Northumbria that demonstrate successful examples of these categories, especially focussing on students as active partners in learning; demonstrate how and where the Jenkins/Healey categories are mapped across the curriculum
- Explore challenges and effective approaches to assessing research rich learning

4.3 Developing staff and university structures to support the nexus

- Use education enhancement funds to identify and support faculty, department and discipline based initiatives that can develop Northumbria's research rich learning policy; projects with the potential to be extended across the University may be developed as university wide research rich learning projects.
- Develop resources for use by programme teams to stimulate ideas for embedding research rich learning into curricula
- Provide staff development which encourages the implementation of research rich learning approaches, in particular those which involve students as participants.
- Embed research rich learning into the Northumbria's Professional Recognition Scheme, and the Learning and Teaching Development Programme, and in pathways for promotion and reward that promote an integrated critical scholarship of research, teaching and engagement
- Embed research rich learning in programme and module approvals, review procedures and processes
- Audit existing synergies between units, committees and structures for teaching and research
- Provide structured opportunities to develop collaborative dialogue, projects and working between research and teaching staff
- Incorporate enterprise, business and engagement staff into research rich learning related activities

4.4 Developing research and business engagement policies and strategies to strengthen the nexus

- Audit how research and business engagement policies can strengthen research rich learning
- Audit links between research centres and the curriculum, and identify opportunities for students to engage in research rich learning through research and business engagement initiatives
- Incorporate a submission process requirement of proposed research bids to explicitly consider opportunities for students to engage in research rich learning
- Promote the Research Rich Learning Policy at Northumbria Research Conferences

5 ACTIONS TO TAKE FORWARD RESEARCH RICH LEARNING FROM 2015

The following actions are being taken to take forward Northumbria's Research Rich Learning Policy:



Objective	Action
Developing Institutional Awareness and Institutional Mission	Prepare Northumbria Research Rich Learning Policy for further discussion and development by faculties (involving research active and teaching focused academics, and students), Services and the Student Union.
	Collaborate with the Student Union to investigate and popularise student perceptions of research and research rich learning, explaining its relevance to Northumbria attributes and employability.
	Research rich learning to be promoted through Education Enhancement funds by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. publicising projects that address different aspects of research informed learning b. showcasing research rich learning enhancement projects
	Develop a web resource to support and publicise research rich learning at Northumbria.
Developing Pedagogy and Curricula to Support the Nexus	Embed research rich learning into programmes via Programme Design and Delivery
	Work with faculties to identify a range of discipline specific exemplars across Northumbria in relation to the Jenkins-Healey quadrant, and showcase these on the website
	Work with faculties to identify challenges in implementing research rich learning, and develop effective approaches to addressing these (e.g. ethical issues in inquiry based learning, assessing research rich learning)
Developing Staff and University Structures to Support the Nexus	Offer workshops on research rich learning via the Learning and Teaching development programme.
	Map research rich learning onto Northumbria's Professional Recognition Scheme (NUPRS)
	Develop tools to facilitate mapping by programme teams of research rich learning opportunities across programmes to support the implementation of the Programme Framework for Northumbria.
Developing Research and Business Engagement Policies to Strengthen the Nexus	Work with leaders of research and employability policies and strategies to identify synergies, and identify opportunities for students to engage in RRL through research and business engagement initiatives.

Appendix 1: QAA Enhancement Themes Research Teaching Linkages: Enhancing Graduate Attributes list of research graduate attributes:

“At undergraduate level:

- critical understanding informed by current developments in the subject
- an awareness of the provisional nature of knowledge, how knowledge is created, advanced and renewed, and the excitement of changing knowledge
- the ability to identify and analyze problems and issues, and to formulate, evaluate and apply evidence-based solutions and arguments
- the ability to apply a systematic and critical assessment of complex problems and issues
- the ability to deploy techniques of analysis and inquiry
- familiarity with advanced techniques and skills
- originality and creativity in formulating, evaluating and applying evidence based solutions and arguments
- an understanding of the need for a high level of ethical, social, cultural, environmental and wider professional conduct.

And at master’s level:

- conceptual understanding that enables critical evaluation of current research and advanced scholarship
- originality in the application of knowledge
- the ability to deal with complex issues and make sound judgments in the absence of complete data.”

(QAA 2009 p9) ^{iv}

References

ⁱ Boyer, E. (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Special Report

ⁱⁱ Jenkins and Healey (2005) *Institutional strategies to link teaching and research*. York: The Higher Education Academy (ISBN 1-904190-91-X)

ⁱⁱⁱ QAA Enhancement Themes Sector Wide Discussions Volume 1 Research Teaching Linkages
[file:///C:/Users/gdqr4/Downloads/sector-wide-project-report-volume-1%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/gdqr4/Downloads/sector-wide-project-report-volume-1%20(2).pdf) (accessed 2 1 21)

^{iv} *Research-Teaching Linkages: Enhancing Graduate Attributes – Overview (2009)*
[file:///C:/Users/gdqr4/Downloads/research-teaching-linkages-enhancing-graduate-attributes-overview%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/gdqr4/Downloads/research-teaching-linkages-enhancing-graduate-attributes-overview%20(1).pdf)

^v Hattie, J.A.C. & Marsh, H. W. (1996) The relationship between research and teaching—a meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 66, 507-542.