



Social Purpose Position Statement

Reclaiming Social Purpose: a distinctive agenda for Lincoln Bishop University

For Lincoln Bishop University people are everything: we flourish together when united by social purpose. (Strategy 2030 'Our Vision', p.29)

Summary

Lincoln Bishop is a university defined by its distinctive Social Purpose. Our Social Purpose is rooted in our mission, inspired by our Anglian foundation, and lived through our culture of care, inclusion and public service. We aim to deliver public benefit and promote social good through education which empowers individuals and transforms communities. We pride ourselves on developing personal and professional capabilities, skills (academic, analytical, critical and presentational), and promoting an ethical, people-centred and values-led approach.

This means that we do not define our portfolio of academic activities solely in terms of narrowly instrumental or transactional goals. Our portfolio is informed by a theory of change and designed to generate social good, giving back to the communities we serve through our graduates, our partnerships, and their beneficial impact. This statement sets out how our Social Purpose will be amplified and mainstreamed through the delivery of Strategy 2030, and how the University will seek to measure and report its Social Purpose activities through that period. This approach will allow Lincoln Bishop to present its clear Social Purpose as a differentiator, setting it apart in the eyes of students and stakeholders, at a time when the value proposition of the university sector as a whole is being increasingly questioned.

Commitments

During the period of Strategy 2030, the University commits to:

- Using the convening power of the University to bring people together to advance learning and knowledge
- Making a civic contribution by working collaboratively with the City, County and Combined County authorities



- Seeking opportunities to engage with public, private and third sector employers through the dissemination of expertise to inform practice and the translation and application of research through knowledge exchange
- Reflecting the value we place on public service through our expansion of programmes supporting professional development and career pathways in teacher education, healthcare and business services, whilst reinventing our humanities provision as 'applied humanities' aligned to the creative, cultural and heritage sectors.
- Ensuring that a range of personal and professional development opportunities linked to our social purpose are embedded across our portfolio. These will be both intra-curricular (whether through placements, through subject specific content or through cross-curricular interventions aligned to our graduate attributes) and extra-curricular (through career development, volunteering, mentoring and a range of other activities).
- Breaking down barriers to educational access, pioneering new, flexible modes of study in support of social mobility
- Prioritising partnerships that address the socio-economic challenges within the communities we serve

Social Purpose and Strategy 2030

Lincoln Bishop's Social Purpose is amplified by the ambitious plans for strategic change and organisational growth which we are currently delivering. As set out in Strategy 2030:

At Lincoln Bishop University, we believe everyone can create positive change. As a dynamic and diverse university, rooted in the communities of place, practice and profession that we serve, we are driven by the aspiration of our students, the expertise of our staff and the shared ambition of our partners. We place people at the heart of what we do and are committed to realising the transformative impact of higher education to empower individuals and shape society. By bringing people together to advance learning and knowledge, we continue our commitment to social purpose and build a better future, full of possibility. (Strategy 2030 Mission Statement, p.27)

We offer inspiring and transformational education to students facing barriers to participation and success. Our academic portfolio encompasses learning and teaching, student experience and careers development, and research and knowledge exchange. We serve a broad range of partner organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors, both through offering professional pathways and translating research and expertise into practice. This brings tangible public benefits through our cultural, educational, health and economic impact in communities across Lincolnshire and beyond.

Our distinctive social purpose is defined by a virtuous circle of opportunity and partnership. The access pathways and transformative educational opportunities we offer enable our students to progress into professional careers, through which they in turn deliver social good through their



positive impact on the communities within which they lead; this positive impact is enabled and redoubled through our wide range of partnerships and the commitment to public service which is core to our ethos. We open up horizons of educational opportunity and public service for our students, who, as they progress into professional careers as our alumni, themselves act as agents of further change within their communities.

That is why that Lincoln Bishop in Strategy 2030 has identified Social Purpose as a cross-cutting strategic theme as we develop and grow into a new stage of our history. Our Social Purpose agenda is defined by our strategic commitment to do *'all we can through projects, programmes, courses, research and knowledge exchange to make a positive impact on society, locally, nationally and internationally.'* It commits us to *'working in partnership, responding with imagination and energy to socio-economic challenges within the communities we serve, dedicated to breaking down barriers to opportunities, promoting equality, diversity and inclusion, and advancing social mobility'* (Strategy 2030, p.34).

Concretely, this is articulated through three interlocking sets of commitments set out in Strategy 2030.

Firstly, we are growing a distinctive academic portfolio informed by Social Purpose. *'Drawing on the University's historic commitment to public service through teacher education, we have grown a distinctive academic portfolio around social purpose - to now encompass healthcare and a wide range of business services - offering occupational routes to professions aligned to priorities for higher skills and graduate employment'* (Strategy 2030, p.29). This portfolio will offer place-rich academic programmes which provide routes to professional occupations, via a wide range of access pathways. It will align with identified priorities for higher skills and graduate employment within Greater Lincolnshire and beyond. and create a platform for the translation of research and expertise into professional practice.

Secondly, Social Purpose continues to inform our civic profile, our research and knowledge exchange plans, the wide range of links we have within the social economy of our city and region, and the emphasis we place on placements, volunteering and real-world experience for our students. *'Our civic contribution, focused distinctively on social purpose, is amplified by active engagement with public, private and third sector employers through knowledge exchange, to translate research and expertise into real-world impact'* (Strategy 2030, p.29).

Thirdly, the impact of both our teaching portfolio, our research and knowledge exchange activities, and our civic engagement will be furthered through *'maintaining a diverse portfolio of collaborative partnerships in pursuance of our social purpose locally, nationally and internationally'* (Strategy 2030, p.48).



Why Social Purpose Matters, Here and Now

We are living through a period in which the value of universities is subject to a heightened level of public scrutiny, both in the UK and globally. The public benefit delivered by the UK HE sector as currently constructed is increasingly being questioned. The unwritten covenants and unspoken social contracts that underpinned a half century of dramatic expansion are under prolonged and profound strain. Although the UK's universities were seen as a national success story through the turn of the 20th century and the start of the 21st, OECD analysis has more recently shown how in the past decade the UK has suffered from a disjuncture between the dominant HE delivery and funding models, and emerging demand for accessible quality educational opportunities which are aligned to career, personal and skills development. Adult education participation rates are now amongst the lowest in the developed world, whilst increasing numbers of 18–21-year-olds seeking alternative options and pathways between skills- and work-based learning are complex and difficult to navigate.

As a result, students, their families, policy makers and media commentators are asking insistent questions of the university sector. These are questions about the public benefit and value for money delivered by current models of university education; questions about the efficacy of a university degree as a passport into professional advancement and an enabler of social mobility; and questions about the accountabilities and responsibilities of universities to the communities they were founded to serve.

We believe that Lincoln Bishop, as a Social Purpose University, can answer these questions with clarity and conviction. Lincoln Bishop's distinctive mission and commitment to education with a Social Purpose thus serves as an important differentiator. Our model of values-led education, empowering individuals to lead change, today responds to the aspirations and values of an increasing number of potential students of all ages and backgrounds. Articulating and elevating our Social Purpose is therefore timely, in allowing us to respond to these broader challenges, offer a persuasive description of the value of our offer to students and their families, and to employers, civic and educational partners, and policy makers.

Social Purpose, Mission and Renewal

Our Social Purpose is encoded into the DNA of our core academic activities, social experience, research and knowledge exchange. At Lincoln Bishop, our distinctive Social Purpose is integrated by design into our portfolio of academic programmes, educational and knowledge exchange partnerships, the careers and voluntary opportunities we offer our students, our civic and employer engagement, and the impactful research and consultancy activities we support.

The inspiration for this approach can be traced back to the origins of our University, reaching back to 1862. Inspired by an Anglican tradition of public service and pastoral care, our founders opened up opportunities for disadvantaged and disenfranchised groups in Lincolnshire to enter the teaching profession, at a time when universal provision of public primary education was being established and economic and political rights were being opened up to the mass of the population. This foundational



story informs a different ethos from the culturally dominant traditions of university education in the western world, whether those of ancient universities growing out of medieval traditions which privileged a secluded search for pure knowledge for its own sake, or of modern civic foundations created to provide useful and usable knowledge in the new industrial societies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Our University's name, academic portfolio, and corporate/organisational structure have changed at regular intervals through the intervening period, reflecting broader educational and societal developments. Along with other members of the Cathedrals Group, and cognate institutions with their origins in local philanthropy and teacher training, we now offer a distinctive people-focused ethos informed by public service, local accountability, and a desire to educate for change. The further changes that we are introducing now build on the core elements of that founding mission and its defining Social Purpose.

Next Steps, Outcomes and Metrics

We will provide an annual summary through the University Executive Group to Council and to the wider University community and its partners of key developments against each of our Social Purpose commitments.

In addition, as management capacity and resources allow, we will seek to develop a dashboard of Social Purpose metrics, demonstrating thought leadership in the sector and developing credentials which are aligned with our distinctive institutional mission. To do so, our Social Purpose Working Group will need to lead on the following:

- Capturing and mapping the range of partnerships that we operate, through a periodic capture and collate exercise, allowing us to consider how we can broaden and deepen our impact.
- Developing a Social Purpose framework, based on existing Social Value Audit methodologies, allowing us to measure our impact.
- Use the insights from these exercises to set future strategic goals and enrich our core teaching and research activities.
- Identify potential collaborations which will add mutual value through our rich network of alumni, educational partners, and stakeholders across the private, public and voluntary sectors.