1. Introduce alternative perspectives

Interdisciplinary learning develops critical abilities, increases empathy for ethical and social issues, enables students to tolerate ambiguity and accommodate, synthesise and integrate diverse perspectives. It broadens perspectives and encourages creative thinking; as well as increasing students’ ability to listen and perception of bias (Newell, 1990). However, at present, only 28% of King’s students report that their course regularly encourages them to approach a topic from an alternative disciplinary perspective. An additional 45% of students reported that this sometimes happens. Some 23% of students state that they are never encouraged to use alternative disciplinary perspectives.

**Put it into practice:** Present multiple perspectives and techniques as approaches to research questions and highlight how different disciplinary epistemes operate in use. Balance group discussions and activities with more didactic coverage of key ideas. Use interactive teaching and learning strategies to motivate students to determine the practical significance of new abstract notions. A narrative presentation style can link different themes sequentially and give students an ordered approach to diverse ideas. Emphasising influential names can be a useful strategy for underscoring the significance of each new field as it is introduced.

2. Use case studies and problem-based learning

Interdisciplinarity is ‘a means of solving problems and answering questions that cannot be satisfactorily addressed using single methods or approaches’ (Klein 1990:196). Using different disciplinary perspectives to reflect on the relationships between sets of knowledge is a useful way into a broader appreciation of how knowledge boundaries can be spanned to enable new understandings. At present 89.5% of King’s students report forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information. This kind of synthesis in knowledge making is a vital part of research as well as learning. However, 9.5% of students reported that they ‘never’ developed new ideas or understandings in this way.

**Put it into practice:** Projects, case studies and problem-based learning make abstract perspectives more tangible. Taking a thematised, problem-based approach to a key social, economic and political questions can address the fragmentation of knowledge within your discipline. Connect course content to social problems or ideas. Emphasise the problem-orientated nature of scientific knowledge to create interdisciplinary learning opportunities. For example, a programme that attempts to enable students (including those whose concentration is not within the sciences) to ‘do’ science rather than simply understand sciences within the traditional science curriculum.

3. Combine ideas

Students’ ability to combine ideas from different courses when completing assignments, or during class discussions is a bell weather for the coherence of interdisciplinary curricula at King’s. At present, 49% of students report that they often combine ideas in this way. Over a third of students (35%) report that they ‘sometimes’ combine ideas from different courses for assignments or during class discussion. However, 11% ‘never’ work in this way.

**Put it into practice:** Consider the extent to which your programmes synthesize the cross-disciplinary elements of the curriculum as opposed to leaving it to students. Are disciplinary elements synthesised to produce a body of knowledge that transcends the components and offers a distinctive view? It may be necessary to condense disciplinary content to make space for interdisciplinary electives or add in core modules. Introduce interdisciplinarity through themes or clusters of courses to increase coherence and provide greater meaning across the curriculum.

Students have greater motivation to engage with diverse theories and concepts when they are introduced in relation to case materials. Currently 41% of King’s students already regularly connected their learning to social problems or issues. A further 38% state that they sometimes connected their learning in this way. Another 16% of King’s students report having never benefitted from this aspect of interdisciplinary working.
4. Tailor your approach for mixed groups

Interdisciplinary teaching can be more demanding than teaching within a discipline and requires the development of specific teaching skills to be affective. Develop your teaching skills outside of your usual discipline to communicate with students outside your usual departmental programmes.

**Put it into practice:** Establishing levels of knowledge within cross-disciplinary groups at the start of a lecture or class is important. Finding out what students already know will help you to pitch your teaching at the right level of academic challenge and identify and correct student misconceptions. Present key terms or multiple choice questions in your opening slides, based on what you expect students to know already. Use a show of hands for each answer to quickly identify gaps in prior understanding. You can then use the lecture to focus on new knowledge related to existing understanding.

5. Enrich undergraduate learning environments

Interdisciplinarity is not just about the formal curriculum. Exposing undergraduate students to aspects of postgraduate research culture can promote encounters with knowledge sets, methodologies and skills from more than one established academic discipline.

**Put it into practice:** Make sure your students make the most of regular research seminars, communal workspaces, and postgraduate symposia with staff involvement alongside taught modules. Convene weekly lecturers delivered by established academics to classes in mixed subject groups, to enhance student’s exposure to new ideas and disciplinary differences.

6. Use team teaching

Team teaching by experts in different fields can be central to the success of interdisciplinary curricula. This requires extensive commitment from research active staff and can raise questions about sustainability. However, the combination of different ideas and the representation of differing teaching expertise in the classroom can drive innovative teaching practice. For example, the introduction of professionals to team teaching makes a wealth of experience and knowledge available to students.

**Put it into practice:** To promote the sustainability of team teaching plan new modules collaboratively with colleagues from different fields to promote shared ownership. Where experts are drawn in to established courses, ensure that all teaching staff are clear on the content of the course and how their contribution is valued and informs student perspectives. Capitalise on the resource that diverse academic experiences represent by developing authentic scenarios for problem-based student learning activities.

7. Highlight extra and co-curricular opportunities

Outside the classroom there are increasing opportunities for King’s students to participate in interdisciplinary co-curricular learning activities. Extended learning opportunities are also available in the summer term for students who have already completed their studies and exams for the academic year, prior to leaving London accommodation.

**Put it into practice:** Promote co-curricular opportunities at King’s to students, such as the King’s Experience Interdisciplinary Award and King’s Undergraduate Research Fellowship (students can apply for fellowships within and outside their department). Highlight wider learning opportunities that will enhance students’ interdisciplinary development in other Departments and Schools and the city at large. Many students will have several weeks between the end of their exams and vacating their London accommodation. Highlight public and scholarly activities that are available over this summer period for those students that want to expand their disciplinary horizons.

Find out more

King’s Undergraduate Research Fellowship
[www.kcl.ac.uk/ugrad-research-fellowship](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/ugrad-research-fellowship)

King’s Experience Interdisciplinary Award
[www.kcl.ac.uk/interdisciplinary-awards](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/interdisciplinary-awards)

Further reading

