

Social Responsibility & Sustainability Strategy 2010-2020

Looking to 2020 and beyond

The University of Edinburgh is justifiably proud of the many contributions made to Scotland, Europe and the world since our founding in 1583. With the world now on the brink of global economic, social and environmental changes more far reaching than those of the 18th Century Enlightenment – and the scientific, economic and social revolutions that followed – the University faces new challenges.

In 2083 the University will celebrate 500 years since its foundation. How will our successors look back at our contributions to the world in the first half of the 21st century? Will Edinburgh's researchers have helped shape a world where energy, food and water resources are secure for all?

What roles will Edinburgh graduates have played in stabilising CO2 levels through technical solutions, policy development or business leadership? Will Edinburgh's medical research have helped eradicate major infectious diseases? The decisions we make now will determine the extent to which we help shape the future – or merely respond to events.

Professor Sir Timothy O'Shea, Principal and Vice-Chancellor

Creating opportunities from global challenges

There is a growing recognition across the world of the urgency of tackling a range of difficult, complex and inter-related issues such as human well-being; food, energy and water security; and climate change. The need of governments, businesses and others to understand and respond to these challenges creates significant opportunities for the University community.

Professor Sir John Beddington, Edinburgh alumnus and chief scientific adviser to HM Government, argues that 'business as usual' will lead to a 'perfect storm' of food, water and energy shortages – with all the social, environmental and economic disruption that will entail – by 2030¹.

New scientific, technical, economic and policy responses will be necessary, but not sufficient, to address these challenges.

Critical analysis from diverse perspectives will be essential to understand the relationships and potential conflicts between the challenges and proposed responses.

Indeed, there are many possible and often mutually exclusive, visions of what a desirable future might be – and how such a vision might be achieved.

Our role will always be to understand what is happening, to question accepted wisdom, to challenge simplistic analysis and to communicate with others. In doing so we shall help develop holistic solutions to the challenges facing the world and its people.

The infographic, titled "Global challenges" and attributed to the Government Office for Science, illustrates nine interconnected global challenges. Each challenge is represented by a small image and a label: Urbanisation (city skyline), Population (crowded city), Alleviating poverty (poor people), Energy demand (smokestacks), Climate Change (hand holding a burning globe), Water demand (dam), Food demand (globe with wheat), Biodiversity (various animals and plants), and Infectious diseases (microscopic view of cells). The challenges are arranged in a grid, with "Climate Change" centrally located and "Alleviating poverty" and "Water demand" positioned to its right. The text "Global challenges (Beddington 2009)" is at the bottom.

¹ "Food, Energy, Water and the Climate: A Perfect Storm of Global Events?" www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/goscience/docs/p/perfect-storm-paper.pdf

Choosing our future

We aspire to make world-leading contributions to understanding and addressing global challenges. Our overarching approach is not to direct academic endeavour, but to create the conditions in which students and staff are inspired and supported to engage with and contribute to social responsibility and sustainability throughout the University and beyond. Collaboration between disciplines across the University will be central to this endeavour.

A whole-institution approach to social responsibility and sustainability

We aim to develop – and make explicit as an exemplar for the University community and others globally and locally – a whole-institution approach to social responsibility and sustainability.

Recognising that the terms are contested, social responsibility and sustainability refer here to our contribution to both understanding and addressing social, environmental and economic global challenges. More specific definitions may be required to enhance communication in certain circumstances, for example during the adoption of particular standards or practices.

Our approach is four-fold; we shall:

- 1. Lead by example**, explicitly embedding our commitment to social responsibility and sustainability in our policies, strategies and procedures;
- 2. Actively support best practice, innovation and leadership** in relation to social responsibility and sustainability: in learning and teaching, research and knowledge exchange and across our services and physical infrastructure;
- 3. Recognise and communicate** relevant activity by students, staff and alumni;
- 4. Demonstrate and report** our main social, environmental and economic impacts.

This strategy builds on and develops a longstanding commitment to social responsibility and sustainability, and brings together the University's existing policies and commitments on these and related issues².

This document is partly a blueprint; but more realistically it is an initial route map that sets out our aspirations, our direction and our first steps on the journey towards how we might be in 2020.

The detailed planning and prioritisation will come as these commitments are progressively embedded within the University's annual planning and resource allocation process and future strategic plans.

Learning & Teaching

We shall create conditions where students and staff develop their knowledge, skills and experience to engage with and contribute effectively to tackling global challenges in Scotland and worldwide.

Leadership in education for active citizenship

The University objectives are to:

- LT 1 Gain international recognition for supporting all students to be proactive, independent, critically analytical and reflective learners and communicators, able to engage with global challenges facing society and to recognise their significance for interdisciplinary study.
- LT 2 Be respected as a leading international provider of higher education, lifelong learning and continuing professional development related to understanding and engaging with global issues.
- LT 3 Offer every student opportunities to study the broader aspects of the global challenges, social responsibility and sustainability and to explore in depth how their chosen subjects relate to them.
- LT 4 Draw widely on the University's whole-institution approach to social responsibility and sustainability as a resource for learning and teaching.
- LT 5 Offer students a range of opportunities to engage in community and other activities relating to social responsibility and sustainability.

We aim to produce graduates fully equipped to achieve the highest personal and professional standards. (p1)

Our strategies... include encouraging the themes of sustainability and social responsibility in programme and course development and delivery. (p31)

Strategic Plan 2008-2012

² Including: Sustainability Policy in 2000; University's Strategic Plan 2008-12; Internationalisation Strategy 2009; Universitas 21 Statement on Sustainability; the Universities & Colleges Climate Commitment for Scotland; and the 10:10 campaign to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 10% in 2010.

Research and Knowledge Exchange

We shall critically evaluate policy responses and interventions to the global challenges from a perspective open to dialogue across disciplines.

We shall collaborate with local and global partners in industry, civil society and academia to contribute to development of holistic solutions.

Realising the potential of multidisciplinary teamwork, strategic partnership & collaboration

The University objectives are to:

- RKE 1 Establish cross-college research themes focussing on dialogue across disciplines to address global challenges that respond to the opportunities offered by major research funders and other external bodies in the UK and internationally.
- RKE 2 Create a network of research experienced alumni working across the world in academia, industry, government and civil society, who remain engaged with and contribute intellectually to the University's research, knowledge exchange and teaching on global challenges.
- RKE 3 Promote opportunities for staff to offer their expertise to address global challenges, individually and in multidisciplinary teams, through engagement with civil society organisations and commercial consultancy.
- RKE 4 Establish a 'New Enlightenment' programme of engagement, across multiple disciplines, with the local community, the city-region and other partners to discuss, understand and respond to global challenges and their implications.

This means... taking ever more seriously our commitments as a socially responsible organisation (p2)

We aim to... equip staff to realise their full potential as direct contributors to the success of the University (p17)

...deliver efficient and timely services that are customer-focused and of world class quality (p18)

...provide a modern, efficient and stimulating working and learning environment to sustain world-class academic and support activities (p21)

...embed equality, diversity, sustainability and social responsibility as fundamental principles, and assist all staff and students to realise their full potential (p31)

Strategic Plan 2008-2012

People, Services & Infrastructure

Our success in benefiting from the opportunities and rising to the challenges that the future holds will rest squarely on the high quality of our people, services and physical infrastructure.

We shall develop and showcase best practice, informed by and informing the University's research and teaching missions.

Practising what we teach, researching our practice

The University aspires to serve as a living laboratory – practicing what we teach and researching our own practice. Our objectives are to:

- PSI 1 Encourage and support members of the University community to become effective agents of positive change, drawing on the University's own teaching resources, including the Global Academies.
- PSI 2 Apply our own research and expertise to inform our policy and practice, and offer issues in need of study as dissertation topics.
- PSI 3 Manage our physical infrastructure and the procurement of goods and services in ways that maximise efficiency and effectiveness while minimising social, environmental and other risks.
- PSI 4 Collaborate with other organisations to share our expertise and develop best practice in addressing social responsibility and sustainability.
- PSI 5 Establish efficient and effective systems to record, report and act on our main social and environmental impacts.

We aim to... contribute to the economic, social, cultural and environmental development of Scotland and the world (p11)

...provide holistic solutions to important global challenges (p10)

...maximise the contribution of our knowledge, skills, and expertise towards influencing and realising Scottish and UK government objectives while simultaneously benefiting society as a whole (p13)

Strategic Plan 2008-2012

Our Priorities

Our priorities at the initial stages are to:

- P 1 Ensure that the University's objectives set out in this strategy are embedded promptly and appropriately in all strategies and policies that are currently under review or in development.
- P 2 Support staff effectively as they put this strategy and accompanying implementation plan into place.
- P 3 Communicate effectively, internally and externally, our current expertise, opportunities, activity and achievements related to social responsibility, sustainability and the global challenges – including progress in the implementation of this strategy itself.

In the initial stage – until the objectives set out in this strategy are firmly embedded within the University's annual planning and resource allocation process – progress will be monitored by and reported annually to Sustainability and Environmental Advisory Group and incorporated into the Planning and Resource process under the guidance of Central Management Group.

Governance and monitoring progress

Implementation of this strategy is to be taken forward under the aegis of the colleagues named against each action in the annual implementation plans. However to assist with coordination and oversight, progress will be monitored and reported by the following committees:

- Sustainability and Environment Advisory Group convened by Vice Principal Prof Mary Bownes,
- SEAG Operations Group, convened by Nigel Paul, Director of Corporate Services.

As we implement and evaluate the achievement and outcomes, we shall revise and extend implementation plans for each subsequent year.

Vice Principal's Conclusion

Our journey towards 2020 and beyond will be evolutionary as we build on a wealth of existing expertise and achievement.

We are however determined to act promptly and decisively to maximise the opportunities, anticipate future developments and maintain our outstanding status in a rapidly changing world.

This strategy sets out our aspirations, our direction and our goals for 2020. Annual implementation plans will expand on the specific actions to be undertaken in each year.

The strategy will be reviewed as these commitments are progressively embedded within the University's annual planning and resource allocation process and will be incorporated in future University Strategic Plans.

Professor Mary Bownes, Vice Principal, Research Training and Community Engagement