

University of Gloucestershire

Promising Futures Sustainability Review, 21st May 2015

Summary Report from the External Review Panel

Introduction

This report summarises the findings and advice of the External Review Panel convened on 21st May 2015 to consider progress and achievements under the University of Gloucestershire's first sustainability strategy, *Promising Futures 2009-15*. The panel's reflections concern the key areas assessed in the review: strategic positioning; profile and distinctiveness; governance; outreach and partnerships; academic development; operations; and student engagement.

Key observations made by the panel are summarized below, with actions the University could consider when constructing its new sustainability strategy. Recognising the need for the University to make its own decisions on strategic, resourcing and staffing matters, the panel offered suggestions from an external viewpoint, with the aim of supporting this process.

1. Strategic Positioning

- The panel affirmed that the strategic ambition of the University in sustainability had been distinctive, innovative and “valuable to the institution and to the sector more widely”. The strategic goals had mostly been achieved and the panel remarked that “the sustainability initiative at the University is of the highest quality and quite rightly Gloucestershire is one of the leading lights within the sector for sustainability”.
- The ‘whole institution’ approach adopted by the University was viewed as “sector-leading”. It was felt that this should continue, as it is a distinctive strength in the University's strategic approach. The panel commented on the need to retain the cross-institutional remit of the Sustainability Team, which fits well with the holistic ethos of sustainability outlined in the University's Strategic Plan and in the *Promising Futures* strategy.
- However, it was noted that “turning a university into a sustainable organisation needs to be seen as a long term objective, which underpins shorter term priorities”. This is known to be challenging and although there had been significant success under *Promising Futures*, more time would be needed to extend engagement and ensure that this success continues.
- Concern was expressed about the need for senior leadership on the departure of the present Dean of Sustainability. The panel highlighted that “sustainability needs to be led by a non-core function, neither an academic faculty or estates and facilities, because it is too easily marginalised”. They pointed to the need to position the new lead role appropriately so as to inform executive decision-making and broker senior collaboration at this critical juncture.
- The panel pointed to the importance and additional benefits to be gained by positioning sustainability within the executive group. Providing leadership through an existing member of executive (ideally without other major portfolios) would create “the opportunity to forge partnerships with and develop significant advocacy through other executive leaders”, helping to enable “steered engagement of all key players across the University”.

Recommended Actions:

- 1.1 Continue and consolidate the ‘whole institution’ strategic approach, which brings positive benefits to the University and to the sector.**
- 1.2 Appoint a Sustainability Team lead who can effectively broker senior collaboration and inform executive decision-making. Consideration should be given to the added benefits of this person reporting directly to the Vice-Chancellor.**

2. Profile and Distinctiveness

- The panel affirmed the unique status achieved by the University in sustainability and the importance of retaining this profile. The University is now widely recognised for its sustainability efforts and is known in the sector for its success in this area. At the same time, institutions that are active in sustainability have looked to the University to guide their own development and made use of its expert advice, change models and strategic approaches.
- It was noted that the University’s “outward-looking stance” had been particularly important in building its profile in sustainability. The panel underlined the importance of continued interaction across the sector, with higher education agencies and at the international level, to ensure that it can continue to innovate and show leadership.
- The panel drew attention to the consistent message from staff that the University must not allow itself to be overtaken by sector competitors who are now moving quickly in this area. This risk would be mitigated not just by providing ongoing resources, but through careful focus on “individuals, positioning, leadership and maintaining focus on the long term”.
- The panel remarked that “Gloucestershire has a unique resource and initiative and this should be commended and more importantly continued to further benefit the University and the sector”. It was felt that there is potential to offer shared services with other institutions (e.g. RAU) and to continue collaborations and sharing expertise with other universities (e.g. developing academic links). This would help to extend the University’s leadership and legacy in the sector, offering a unique strand to its next phase of strategic development.

Recommended Actions:

- 2.1 Continue to build external profile and demonstrate sector leadership, to influence higher education policy and practice in sustainability.**
- 2.2 Continue to provide ongoing resources and to adopt a strategic approach to their use, to secure long term impact and maintain a competitive edge.**
- 2.3 Consider ways to share services and professional expertise in sustainability with other institutions and extend benefits to the University through this type of activity.**

3. Governance

- The panel pointed to the strength of the governance arrangements that had been developed and observed that this enabled effective participation across the University on sustainability. The Sustainable Development Committee stood out as an important and very active part of this equation; its ability to influence, inform and to co-ordinate efforts was noted as an outstanding feature in the review.
- It was thought to be important to refresh the Sustainable Development Committee TORs, to define its strategic, operational and communications functions clearly. This would also help to clarify “the role and key accountabilities of the Sustainable Development Committee compared to other key committees and groups with a role in the area at the University”.
- The panel pointed to the potential contribution of Human Resources in relation to staff development, training, performance and recognition, as well as the role of Marketing and Student Recruitment in helping to communicate effectively about sustainability at the University, both externally and with potential students.
- In relation to reporting and monitoring functions, there was thought to be potential to “sharpen the quality assurance, tracking and improvement system for the area” at the next stage, with “clear accountabilities for action on agreed improvement priorities that emerge”.

Recommended Actions:

3.1 Continue with the existing role of Sustainable Development Committee and refresh its Terms of Reference.

3.2 Ensure that Sustainable Development Committee continues to work with clarity in relation to the strategic, operational and communications elements of its role.

3.3 Consider ways to refine quality assurance, tracking and improvement mechanisms for sustainability.

4. Outreach and Partnerships

- The UNU RCE Severn was considered to have “real short term potential to make a step change” in the University’s public engagement and partnership strategies, acting as a gateway between the University and the community. The panel remarked on how it represented an “enormous opportunity, both from a student experience and recruitment point of view (BiGGY), and an external partnership/community perspective”.
- The panel drew particular attention to a potential new role for the RCE that would be institution-wide, as a platform to convene people and groups with outreach responsibilities across the University. It could become the hub for key stakeholders in this area, to build collaborations, broker new initiatives and co-ordinate efforts, bringing in external resources, both financial and in kind. Providing a space for the RCE to act as a connector for people and ideas both within and beyond the institution would open up new developments and bring significant benefits, by “looking beyond the university gates and focusing on partnership projects between students, staff and local and regional communities”.

- It was felt that the RCE is integral to the sustainability agenda and extending its role as the University's community gateway would enable it to play an important part in "attracting other local, regional and international partners on sustainability issues, civic engagement, academic partnerships and student placements." The panel noted how this approach would enable the RCE to continue to build the community of practitioners in sustainability, enable "regional sustainability managers to meet and share best practice" and demonstrate how sustainability is a "cultural shift not just a competitive advantage."
- The panel noted that using the RCE as a focus for internships and placements, linked to Degree Plus, clearly benefits the student experience as well as partnerships development. Its offer to students could be scaled up through collaboration with academic staff to create placement opportunities. They also pointed to the clear need to place students in operational departments to innovate for sustainability as part of the University's core work in this area, an approach to improving practice and learning that is gathering pace in other institutions.
- The panel also remarked on the way in which the international platform offered by the RCE provides an important and established mechanism for development of global partnerships (e.g. the UE4SD EU project). This offers potential for "joint action projects in common priority areas with RCEs and their host universities elsewhere".

Recommended Actions:

4.1 Develop the UNU RCE Severn as the community gateway of the University and central to its partnership development and public engagement strategies.

4.2 Consider the allocation of hours to staff members with outreach and partnerships responsibilities, enabling them to network and collaborate through the RCE and encouraging more joined-up approaches in this area.

4.3 Continue to offer placements through DegreePlus, with special focus on operational departments, to support sustainability learning and innovation.

5. Academic Development

- The EfS work was noted as a significant achievement and income generator, in an area that can be "the hardest nut to crack due to the nature of curriculum ownership". This was evident in the way that teaching staff articulated and owned their EfS work and the panel felt this success was "in large part due to the face to face mentoring of the Sustainability Team".
- The panel affirmed that "the current process, through the *Learning for Sustainable Futures* project, is clearly working well and is highly valued by staff by those we saw". It noted that academic staff made multiple requests for this support to continue and the approaches used with the academic staff interviewed seemed very effective. They remarked that the "EfS elements have been well articulated and academics have a very good understanding of the benefits to incorporating sustainability within their courses".
- The panel highlighted the sense that demand has now outstripped the institution's staffing capacity to respond and to provide professional support in EfS (currently one 0.5 FTE post). This also seemed to be the case for student engagement, as documented in the QAA institutional review, where sustainability in the curriculum was marked by both students and staff as one of the institution's good practice features in enhancing the student experience.

- There was a need to continue supporting those who are already engaged in EfS but are not yet fully aware of “the leadership role they could play in updating and invigorating their discipline”. The University could enable them to embrace this role through professional development and recognition, as well as mentoring and peer-to-peer learning.
- In light of the QAA outcomes, the next UG validation cycle was identified as an important opportunity for EfS development through curriculum design and review systems. The panel noted how both quality assurance and teaching leads had pointed to this opportunity to co-ordinate and deepen the embedding of EfS, building on established good practice.
- The panel asked questions about “embedding of sustainability in the Learning and Teaching strategy/plan” as part of the institutional Academic Strategy. They noted the support of senior academic staff for this to be made visible, as well as the potential for more explicit focus on the development of graduate attributes and alignment of EfS with the employability agenda.
- Research and consultancy in EfS had been an important activity for profile development and income generation, but the lack of strategy in research was viewed as “disappointing as it is a huge missed opportunity and somewhat undermines the understanding of the majority of colleagues around sustainability”. There would be value in reconnecting the Sustainability Team to institutional research agendas, to create stronger alignment of the teaching, learning and research components of academic development in sustainability.

Recommended Actions:

5.1 Continue to invest in EfS work to support curriculum renewal and educational enhancement, giving focus to professional support to staff as well as departments.

5.2 Given that demand is now outstripping supply for EfS support, consider increasing the staffing allocation for the EfS role.

5.3 Building on the QAA review outcomes, focus on the integration of EfS into quality assurance systems, particularly through future validation and review exercises.

5.4 Realign sustainability research with teaching and learning development in EfS, to ensure stronger alignments and benefits for academic subject communities.

6. Operations

- The panel commented that on the operational side, there was strong progress in some areas, such as the outstanding work of the University’s contracted caterers, BaxterStorey. This was marked as a real success story in partnership working, with BaxterStorey and the University having pushed each other to new levels of achievement in sustainable food and procurement.
- The panel also noted signs of good progress in other areas, commenting on the evidence of a strong relationship developing with ICT Services and the need to map actions in this area to progress under the next sustainability strategy. They were pleased to see alignments emerging with Library and Information Services and although there was a long way to go, a foothold had been gained in this area with the potential for further collaboration.

- In terms of absolute carbon reduction, it was noted that there had been “significant headway made” but there were also still many important gains yet to be made. The panel observed that gains so far could be attributable to “quite easy but significant wins” and that it was “unclear how these have been achieved”. Areas in which the panel had expected to see achievements, but these had not been reported, included: night time electricity usage; monitoring and shutdown policy for desktop IT; and metering data on key carbon impacts for scope 1 & 2.
- The panel remarked that overall, operational benefits of sustainability “do not seem as well understood or articulated across the University as the EfS benefits are”. They noted a lack of strategic framing and approach to carbon management reduction; for example, articulation of the business case and clear alignment with business planning and financial strategy had been absent from the panel responses. The panel commented on the need to “restart effective systematised approaches and processes which are not dependent on individuals” and that would link effectively with health & safety, risk, business continuity, EDI and compliance.
- There had been “significant joint action” on sustainability at the operational level, but with several new appointments (e.g. in maintenance, procurement, ICT and catering) this type of joint activity would need to be maintained. On the other hand, there was a “unique opportunity to establish common goals and working practices” and to “ensure that they are drawn into the process”. They observed that in this area, “clear knowledge and obvious collegiality could signal renewed effectiveness if collaboration is encouraged to meet and exceed targets”.
- Alignment of carbon responsibilities with job roles was “well advanced” but the need for co-ordination and leadership was underlined, including development and implementation of induction and training plans on sustainability for front line as well as managerial staff.
- The panel observed that resourcing for future carbon projects needed further consideration and that the carbon management plan could be “re-established through a financially driven process such as that operated by the Carbon Trust”. Senior leadership would be required to ensure that it “pervades all operational and estates projects, both capital and revenue”, since major estate development “will need to be very bravely driven in line with this agenda”. They noted that “as new building projects come online, the existing carbon reductions could be overturned” and that it was “not clear where the next carbon projects were coming from”.
- It was observed that creation of a “searchable clearing house on sustainability” would enable “periodic stocktakes of effective action” and facilitate access to relevant data when required, helping to increase impact in the operations area in particular. This could be linked to the development of the University’s information strategy and may help to facilitate effective communication and collaborations (both internally and with external stakeholders).

Recommended Actions:

6.1 Focus attention on significant gains that still need to be made in the operational area, including in night time electricity usage; monitoring and shutdown policy for desktop IT; and metering data on key carbon impacts for scope 1 & 2.

6.2 Address the need for strategic framing and common language to enable stronger articulation and ownership of carbon management, as well as joined-up approaches across the institution in this area.

6.3 Progress the development and implementation of induction and training plans on sustainability for front line as well as managerial staff in operations areas.

6.4 Ensure that sustainability considerations pervade all estates projects and prioritise the identification and sourcing of funding for this.

7. Student Engagement

- The panel also remarked that student engagement “needs to be strategically and structurally aligned” and that the ‘student journey’ perspective as mapped by the Sustainability Team map would be a useful tool for this. They noted that “it needs driving and facilitating, but effort should not be wasted in doing student engagement for sustainability, just ‘for the sake of it’ and there could be greater focus on “operationally high impact sustainability areas of the student journey, e.g. arrival and departure; start and end-of-term reuse in halls”.
- The work of the Sustainability Team to co-ordinate and collaborate with key groups in supporting the student experience (e.g. Student Union, Student Services, Chaplaincy) was recognised as very valuable. In future the focus should be to “work closely with the Students' Union to deliver continued student engagement projects that have most impact” and that “the sustainability officer role which is currently vacant might be a way of facilitating this”.
- The panel commented on the “real risk that gains made regarding student engagement on sustainability over the last few years will fall away once the Student Green Fund project ends”. High impact student engagement work had been put in place under the Greener Gloucestershire initiative, but with funded staff roles ending in 2015, ongoing collaborative effort would be needed to maintain momentum. The panel felt it was important to address this gap and look at ways that staffing capacity could be maintained for this area.
- The RCE Severn’s work to create internships and placements with DegreePlus was thought to have real benefits for students. There were several remarks about the potential in the estates team portfolio to create regular placement/internship opportunities linked to sustainability that would connect campus sustainability practice and learning opportunities. The panel noted the visible signs of support from staff for this, as well as the role of the Sustainable Development Committee, in enabling and brokering the development of more activity in this area.
- It was thought that the University could “establish a more systematic approach to getting the full student voice represented when giving feedback to the University on its sustainability strategy, priorities and performance”. Student demand appears to be rising but there is a need for precise understanding of their interests and more interaction with the alumni community.

Recommended Actions:

7.1 Consider investing in a joint part-time post to re-establish the student engagement role, working in close collaboration with the Student Union to look after the student experience.

7.2 Continue the student engagement work through partnerships with the Student Union and other departments, the DegreePlus scheme, and by increasing the offer of sustainability internships based within University departments.

7.3 Establish a more systematic approach to sourcing feedback from across the student community on sustainability strategies, priorities and performance.

8. Resourcing

The panel appreciated the difficulty of increasing institutional resource allocation to sustainability and recommended the following approaches to address the challenge:

- Savings associated with cost efficiencies through energy management could be ring-fenced, to invest in areas of work that are important to the carbon and capital development agendas.
- Colleagues with outreach and partnerships responsibilities could be enabled to collaborate more effectively, to avoid duplication of effort and use human resources effectively.
- One request for change in the Sustainability Team staffing allocation would be to consider an addition equivalent to 1.0 FTE, divided 0.5 on EfS and 0.5 on student engagement.

Recommended Actions:

8.1 Ring-fence savings from energy management to invest in priority areas important to carbon reduction and capital development.

8.2 Consider ways to share staff responsibilities and find efficiencies in outreach and partnerships work, to enable stronger collaboration in this area.

8.3 Consider an additional staffing allocation of 1.0 FTE in the Sustainability Team, to respond to the need for EfS support and student engagement activity.

Summary of Recommended Actions:

- 1.1 Continue and consolidate the ‘whole institution’ strategic approach, which brings positive benefits to the University and to the sector.
- 1.2 Appoint a Sustainability Team lead who can effectively broker senior collaboration and inform executive decision-making. Consideration should be given to the added benefits of this person reporting directly to the Vice-Chancellor.
- 2.1 Continue to build external profile and demonstrate sector leadership, to influence higher education policy and practice in sustainability.
- 2.2 Continue to provide ongoing resources and to adopt a strategic approach to their use, to secure long term impact and maintain a competitive edge.
- 2.3 Consider ways to share services and professional expertise in sustainability with other institutions and extend benefits to the University through this type of activity.
- 3.1 Continue with the existing role of Sustainable Development Committee and refresh its Terms of Reference.
- 3.2 Ensure that Sustainable Development Committee continues to work with clarity in relation to the strategic, operational and communications elements of its role.
- 3.3 Consider ways to refine quality assurance, tracking and improvement mechanisms for sustainability.

- 4.1 Develop the UNU RCE Severn as the community gateway of the University and central to its partnership development and public engagement strategies.
- 4.2 Consider the allocation of hours to staff members with outreach and partnerships responsibilities, enabling them to network and collaborate through the RCE and encouraging more joined-up approaches in this area.
- 4.3 Continue to offer placements through DegreePlus, with special focus on operational departments, to support sustainability learning and innovation.
- 5.1 Continue to invest in EfS work to support curriculum renewal and educational enhancement, giving focus to professional support to staff as well as departments.
- 5.2 Given that demand is now outstripping supply for EfS support, consider increasing the staffing allocation for the EfS role.
- 5.3 Building on the QAA review outcomes, focus on the integration of EfS into quality assurance systems, particularly through future validation and review exercises.
- 5.4 Realign sustainability research with teaching and learning development in EfS, to ensure stronger alignments and benefits for academic subject communities.
- 6.1 Focus attention on significant gains that still need to be made in the operational area, including in night time electricity usage; monitoring and shutdown policy for desktop IT; and metering data on key carbon impacts for scope 1 & 2.
- 6.2 Address the need for strategic framing and common language to enable stronger articulation and ownership of carbon management, as well as joined-up approaches across the institution in this area.
- 6.3 Progress the development and implementation of induction and training plans on sustainability for front line as well as managerial staff in operations areas.
- 6.4 Ensure that sustainability considerations pervade all estates projects and prioritise the identification and sourcing of funding for this.
- 7.1 Consider investing in a joint part-time post to re-establish the student engagement role, working in close collaboration with the Student Union to look after the student experience.
- 7.2 Continue the student engagement work through partnerships with the Student Union and other departments as well as the DegreePlus scheme and by increasing the offer of internships based within University departments.
- 7.3 Establish a more systematic approach to sourcing feedback from across the student community on sustainability strategies, priorities and performance.
- 8.1 Ring-fence savings from energy management to invest in priority areas important to carbon reduction and capital development.
- 8.2 Consider ways to share staff responsibilities and find efficiencies in outreach and partnerships work, to enable stronger collaboration in this area.
- 8.3 Consider an additional staffing allocation of 1.0 FTE in the Sustainability Team to respond to the need for EfS support and student engagement activity.

Members of the External Review Panel:

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Victoria Hands, Sustainability Hub Director, Kingston University (*Specialism: Institutional Change; Corporate Agendas*)

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Dr Peter Rands, Director of Sustainability Development, Canterbury Christchurch University (*Specialism: ICT; Estates; Procurement*)

Professor Geoff Scott, University of Western Sydney, Emeritus Professor, Former Pro Vice-Chancellor (*Specialism: Education; Quality Assurance; Institutional Leadership*)

Emily Thompson-Bell, Students' Green Fund Programme Manager, National Union of Students (*Specialism: Student Experience; Action Projects*)

Martin Wiles, Head of Sustainability, University of Bristol (*Specialism: Carbon; Sustainability; Whole-of-Institutional Approaches*)

University of Gloucestershire Staff Members who participated in the Panel Review:

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