

Senate Presentation and Discussion 2 June 2021 – A Brief Update

In 2020/21, we aim to provide a brief update following the Senate presentation and discussion ‘open sessions’.

The presentation topic on 2 June 2021 was ‘Looking Forward – Delivering on Strategy 2030. Approach for 2021/22 Academic Year and Beyond’. The presenters were:

- Sarah Smith, Vice-Principal Strategic Change and Governance & University Secretary - *Delivering on Strategy 2030*
- Barry Neilson, Director of Strategic Change – *Key Planning Assumptions*
- Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students - *Student Experience and Student Support*
- Jonathan Seckl, Senior Vice-Principal – *Research and Innovation*
- Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal (Interim) Corporate Services – *Estates Infrastructure*
- Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal and Chief Information Officer, and Librarian to the University – *Hybrid Working*

Attendees provided comments and asked questions around:

- The staff experience:
 - Ensuring that staff expertise, values and priorities remain central to the implementation of Strategy 2030
 - Staff health and wellbeing
 - The Scottish Government’s four-day working week pilot study
 - Proposals for review of the University’s Professional Services
 - Successful hybrid working practices as increasing numbers of staff return to campus
 - Recruitment practices in the context of hybrid working
- The student experience:
 - The balance between providing in-person and online student support
 - Arrangements for students who are unable to attend in-person teaching in 2021/22
 - Growth of Postgraduate Taught student numbers
 - Ways in which, in addition to expanding student mental health support, the University might increase student resilience
- Research:
 - The relationship between research grant success and research support resource
- Curriculum Transformation:
 - Whether now is the correct time to be embarking on Curriculum Transformation
 - The value of making the University’s finances as transparent as possible to allow all areas of the University to engage fully with strategic priorities such as Curriculum Transformation
- Community engagement:
 - Ways in which the University might better support the local community, particularly young people affected by the pandemic

- Senate meetings:
 - The best format for ensuring that attendees' questions are addressed and that presentations are accessible.

Staff Experience

- The importance of ensuring that staff members who feed into strategic discussions can see how their input makes a difference to high-level decision making is recognised.
- In relation to the implementation of Strategy 2030, and ways in which staff members' expertise, values and priorities might remain central to this, all staff members are invited to respond to the [communication](#) sent by the Vice-Principal Strategic Change and Governance and University Secretary on 29 April 2021. Responses will help those leading the work to firm up and prioritise those areas of work which will make the most difference in delivering the University's shared vision and purpose, and the communication also invites comment on the University's approaches to engagement and decision-making. The results of staff surveys and input from Staff Experience Committee will also help to guide the implementation of Strategy 2030.
- Significant action has been taken over the past year to support staff wellbeing (eg. granting additional respite days; allowing unused annual leave to be carried forward; pulling all staff wellbeing resources together within the [Health and Wellbeing hub](#)). However, the University will continue considering ways in which the pressures on staff might be reduced, and is taking steps to try to reduce the wait times for the Staff Counselling Service.
- The University will remain abreast of developments with the Scottish Government's proposed four-day working week pilot study and will consider this in conjunction with work already being undertaken on hybrid and flexible working.
- Staff members will be provided with additional guidance on conducting successful hybrid meetings to assist with the return of more staff members to campus.
- The University remains an Edinburgh-based institution. However, it is recognised that it may be necessary to reconsider existing recruitment practices going forwards to attract the best talent given that hybrid working practices make it possible for some University roles to be undertaken anywhere in the world.
- In relation to review of the University's existing Professional Services, colleagues' significant expertise and experience will be used to identify where there is scope for efficiencies or improvements in quality.

Student Experience

- Strategy 2030 commits to no growth for growth's sake, and this applies to all student groups. Taught Postgraduate provision will be considered as part of Curriculum Transformation, including creative thinking about the required components of a PGT programme.

- A guiding principles document for Personal Tutors and Student Support staff will shortly be circulated. This will cover the in person / digital balance for student support, specifically the discretion that staff and students will have to have establish what will work best for one-to-one meetings and the core levels of in-person presence that all areas of the University will operate to.
- The expectation remains that students will be on campus in academic year 2021/22. However, all centrally bookable teaching spaces are being equipped with a minimum of Level 1 hybrid classroom technology to ensure that hybrid teaching can be facilitated where required.
- Developing student resilience, amongst other skills, is being considered as part of the Curriculum Transformation work, both in terms of the vision for 'The Edinburgh Graduate' and how these skills might be developed as part of the curriculum. Insights papers on 'Graduate Attributes' and 'Skills for the Future of Work' are available on the [Curriculum Transformation Hub](#), and a paper on 'Wellbeing in the Curriculum' is being prepared. Staff are encouraged to respond to the papers, either via the Hub padlet, or by emailing curriculum.programme@ed.ac.uk. Given that the formal, full launch of a new curriculum is not expected until 2024/25 or 2025/26, the Director of Student Wellbeing (andy.shanks@ed.ac.uk) would be pleased to receive any further thoughts from staff about ways in which student resilience might be developed in the intervening period.

Research

- The University is in the process of reviewing the way in which it supports research through 'Growing Research Together'. It is hoped that it will be possible to accelerate the pace of this work and to make improvements within the next 12 months.

Curriculum Transformation

- Despite the current uncertainties, the University remains of the view that this is the correct time to embark on Curriculum Transformation, provided the work is undertaken at the correct pace. Staff members are strongly encouraged to continue engaging with the consultation around this work, either via the [Curriculum Transformation Hub](#) padlet, or by emailing curriculum.programme@ed.ac.uk.
- The University is actively discussing the best mechanism for funding cross-cutting, strategic projects such as Curriculum Transformation.

Community Engagement

- Community engagement will be given careful consideration as part of the Curriculum Transformation work. Consideration will also be given to ways in which the University's work in this area might be made more visible.

Senate meetings

- Alternative formats which would facilitate greater interactivity during online Senate meetings are being explored. Presenters at future meetings will be encouraged to ensuring that they are making use of accessibility best practice.