

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

MINUTE OF A MEETING of the Sustainability, Social & Civic Responsibility Committee held via Microsoft Teams on Thursday 10 March 2022.

- Present:** Sandy Tudhope (Convener), University Lead on Climate Responsibility and Sustainability
 Lesley McAra (Vice Convener), Assistant Principal, Community Relations
 Laura Cattell, Head of Widening Participation
 Juan Cruz, ECA Principal
 Scott Davidson, Deputy Director SRS & Head of Sustainability
 Dave Gorman, Director of Social Responsibility and Sustainability
 Claire Graf, Joint Unions Liaison Committee Representative
 Pete Higgins, Director, Global Environment & Society Academy
 Gary Jebb, Director of Place
 Matthew Lawson, Senior SRS Learning, Teaching and Reporting Manager
 Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services
 Anne Payne, CSE Registrar
 Rachael Robertson, Deputy Director of Finance
 James Saville, Director of HR
 Beth Simpson, Students' Association VP Community
 Rona Smith, Director of Strategic Planning and Insight
- In attendance:** Sarah Ford-Hutchinson, SRS Communication Manager, for item 4
- Apologies:** Colm Harmon, Vice Principal (Students)
 Gavin McLachlan VP and Chief Information Officer
 Theresa Merrick, Director of Communications & Marketing
 James Smith, Vice Principal International
 George Sked, Director of Procurement

1 Minute

A

The minute of 5th October 2021 was approved as a correct record.

The Convener welcomed new member Scott Davidson, Head of Sustainability and Deputy Director of SRS. Anne-Marie Coriat, College Registrar for MVM, had also agreed to join the Committee.

A recording of the session would be shared with three Case Studies in Sustainable Development students working on a living lab project on sustainability decision making and inclusion.

2 Matters Arising

The Director of SRS had followed up on living wage with the HR Partner Reward and attended the Living Wage City meeting. Work in this area would be developed further once the new Head of Social Impact was in post.

The Director of HR flagged the need for one central ownership point to keep track of the schemes UoE had signed up to and take these forward in a strategic and coordinated way.

Action – LM & JSa to have an initial catch up to talk through these commitments further, then follow up with ST and DG on next steps.

STRATEGIC AND SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

3 Climate Strategy Refresh

B

The current [Climate Strategy 2016-2026](#) had been cutting edge in 2016, but things had moved on significantly in terms of net zero carbon and the broader sustainability

agenda, which UoE would need to respond to in order to be sector-leading. These included: a significant number of other UK HE institutions were now measuring their full scope 1, 2 & 3 emissions; moving from net zero carbon by 2040 to absolute emissions working within a set carbon budget; carbon ‘tunnel vision’ versus including action on other planetary emergencies such as biodiversity loss, land use change, and nitrogen and phosphorus cycles. Four working groups would be set up focusing on learning and teaching, research, operations, and partnerships and enterprise to explore expanding the climate strategy and would report back at the next meeting with their recommendations on thematic areas, targets, and a proposed process for approval.

The Convener recognised the success of the previous strategy and actions plans in delivering tangible results, and agreed that it was timely to reflect on where to go next, noting the complexity as the focus widened beyond carbon emissions.

The VP Corporate Services expressed support for broadening the agenda, noting the need to signal that this broadening would also include the need to move beyond Strategy 2030. The challenges in fully accounting for scope 3 emissions were recognised, particularly given UoE’s reputation for high disclosure. Reputational impact would need to be carefully managed.

The Director of Strategic Planning and Insight was generally supportive of the paper, flagging a data integrity issue that needed to be worked through, and emphasising the importance of being clear on the definite outputs of the review, to manage the expectations of colleagues who would be engaging with it.

The Director of Place highlighted the difficulty of achieving the current stretch targets, and advised caution in moving the goalposts to make this task even more challenging.

The vice convener noted that teaching and research were already including other planetary emergencies, and flagged tracking impacts (in terms of equality, diversity and protection of natural resources) as a challenging but important aspect of the process.

The Joint Unions Liaison Committee Representative advised that the review consider the more visible aspects of the University’s footprint for students and the local community, including plastic packaging in UoE outlets and waste management.

The Head of Sustainability thanked attendees for their feedback, noted the risks involved in expanding the scope, the need to take a fully informed, realistic and honest approach, and to be clear on material impacts and actions, interim targets and ultimate aims for each new area.

The Committee strongly endorsed the proposals in the paper and thanked the Head of Sustainability for taking the review forward.

Action – SD to follow up with Sean Smith, Professor of Future Construction and Director of the Centre for Future Infrastructure within the School of Engineering. Working on net zero social housing, Prof. Smith could contribute valuable insight to the strategy refresh.

4 Climate & Sustainability Survey 2021

C

The SRS Communication Manager, in attendance for this item, summarised the results of a climate and sustainability survey conducted between August and October 2021. The survey, which had been run every other year since 2015, was designed to provide a baseline on how the staff and student communities viewed UoE’s performance in this area.

While response rates had been low, there was sufficient spread across colleges and departments to be considered representative. The 2021 survey aimed to assess: interest in climate change and sustainability; awareness and opinions of UoE activities in this area; which issues staff and students wanted most progress on; and how these were integrated into their studies, staff role or professional development, comparing responses to results from previous years.

Key recommendations arising included: increasing collaboration with academics and the curriculum; improving UoE's climate and sustainability narrative in student recruitment and induction; continuing to provide students and staff with clear advice and engagement activities; and continuing to communicate progress on climate and sustainability goals and encourage engagement.

Committee members recognised the challenges of interpreting the results of surveys with relatively few participants as a percentage.

The Head of Widening Participation agreed that there were opportunities to do more to integrate this messaging into induction, both centrally and within schools.

The Senior SRS Learning, Teaching and Reporting Manager noted that the findings reinforced work being done by the short-life working group on climate and sustainability in learning and teaching, and could be incorporated into the follow up paper that group planned to submit to the Curriculum Transformation Programme Board. As a result of the findings, SRS had already ramped up its engagement with Student Recruitment and Admissions. This week for the first time a session was hosted for prospective students on climate and sustainability – the first of three planned sessions.

The VP Corporate Services endorsed the recommendation to reinforce marketing of UoE's credentials in this area to prospective students.

The ECA Principal highlighted interesting examples from within the College (including the reuse hub, and plans to adapt a studio to be off-grid), and members agreed that including these kinds of examples would be key in developing the narrative.

The vice convener highlighted whole university courses, the student leaders programme, and suites of programmes and pathways EFI were running at PG level as opportunities to harness for this agenda. In framing the narrative, it was vital to focus on demonstrable, measurable impact to avoid virtue signalling. The Director of Place concurred, noting the need for a consistent narrative.

The convener recommended asking the IAD Deputy Director / Head of Learning and Teaching to present to the Committee on high level ways of embedding sustainability and climate into the curriculum.

Action – ST to follow up with VM.

The Convener thanked the SRS Communications Manager for an excellent presentation.

ITEMS FOR FORMAL APPROVAL/NOTING

5 Forests and Peatlands Sequestration Programme - Structure & Proposed Governance

D

The Committee noted this version of a paper submitted to University Executive on 15 Feb 2022, updating members on progress identifying an optimal programme structure and governance for the carbon sequestration programme.

Following discussions on tax and legal issues, the thinking had moved away from a subsidiary to a programme board, which had now been agreed in principle. A gender-balanced board had been drawn up and a chair had been agreed. The board would report in to University Executive. Further work would be done to map where the various strands of climate change and SRS more generally reported in. A forests team was being recruited, with the lead due to start on 21 March, and discussions were ongoing with Estates and Legal Services on how to approach land acquisition. A key area for this committee would be developing links to learning and teaching, research, and community and social impact.

The convener thanked the Director of SRS and other contributing colleagues for the progress achieved to date. This was an exciting opportunity of great importance to the University, and the Committee was particularly keen to support the co-benefits.

6 Sustainable Travel Policy (STP)

E

Members noted this briefing paper submitted to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee on 24 Feb 2022, updating the committee on the roll-out of UoE's new STP and recent procurement of a new Travel Management Company (TMC). The Director of SRS thanked colleagues in Procurement, Finance, Health and Safety, and SRS for their hard work over the last two years.

The new STP aimed to lock in cost and carbon savings achieved during the pandemic, improve management of health and wellbeing issues around travel, and promote climate conscious travel. The policy was now live, and work was ongoing to address the initial snagging issues coming forward.

The Director of Strategic Planning and Insight welcomed the new policy, and in particular the headline points in section 5, which were easy to digest and apply to decision-making. The policy had attracted attention outwith UoE, and had the potential to be sector-leading. There would be a challenge in baselining, and tracking the impact of the policy as distinct from post-covid behaviours more generally. A dedicated data role within the Head of Sustainability's team should help unpick the implications.

The Joint Unions Liaison Committee Representative highlighted carbon savings from the reduction in commuting associated with hybrid working, as well as the importance in terms of inclusion of UoE ensuring its conferences offered a digital option, and actively campaigning for other institutions to follow suit.

The vice convener flagged the implications for the estate if UoE wanted to further promote and facilitate hybrid options (in terms of investment in space and technology), and noted that EFI offered a suitable environment to host large-scale conferences in a hybrid format.

7 Future Planning of Committee Cycle & Reporting

The Senior SRS Learning, Teaching and Reporting Manager gave an overview of upcoming work within SRS to further support the Committee. The success of SSCRC was noted in terms of providing advice, scrutinising policies and proposals, and providing a forum for debate. This had been strengthened by the update to the membership and remit in 2020, adding offering advice to the Principal, Court, and University Executive on SRS issues, and overseeing delivery of the Social and Civic Responsibility Plan as well as key developments in other related areas.

SRS would work with the convener, vice convener and colleagues in GaSP to strengthen this focus on oversight and delivery, including developing reporting and wider evaluation of the University's progress on these issues. Building on success to date, recommendations would be provided to develop a more strategic approach to the arrangements around meetings of the committee, take a long-term view of topics, look at how to better evaluate progress, engage key stakeholders to contribute to the committee, and how the committee linked in with other governance structures.

Action – ML to bring recommendations on planning and reporting to add value and enhance good governance to the next meeting for discussion.

The convener welcomed this opportunity to reflect on the committee's effectiveness and ensure it operated as strategically as possible.

8 Reflections on COP26

These reflections would be integrated into a wider proposal on how UoE could engage more systematically at the UN level going forward. While the focus in the past had been on the University's own operations, this was increasingly shifting toward influencing, partnerships, and global impact.

Action – ST to bring the proposal to the next meeting, focusing on climate and sustainability aspects.

9 Talloires Network & Social Impact

The Director of the Edinburgh Futures Institute summarised developments since their presentation on the Network at October's meeting.

UoE intended to put two initiatives forward for the MacJannet student leadership prize run by the Network: students as agents of change, and the All for Paws veterinary practice. Nominated programmes had to be student-led, supported by university policy and resource, co-created with the community and with demonstrable community impact. The deadline was 30 March, with winners to be announced in June. The premises leased by the Vet School for All for Paws was not in use full-time, and could be made available for other initiatives (such as the free legal advice service).

Edinburgh Local and Global were looking at UoE's response to the crisis in Ukraine, and were putting together SharePoint pages outlining actions that could be taken that were helpful and genuinely added value.

Action – LM to share a copy with JR for the minute.

Action – LM & JSm to update the group at the next meeting.

10 SRS Department Changes & Recruitment

The Director of SRS gave a brief verbal update on changes to the department structure, including recruitment of a new Head of Sustainability, Head of Social Impact, and Forest, Peat and Rural Land Manager.

With the Head of Sustainability now in post, there were a few modest adjustments required to better align their area to future need, and in particular to support Estates on net zero and work toward circular economy targets.

The incoming Head of Social Impact was due to start this month, and would meet with committee members to get an overview of activity, start to explore the space and see how to add value.

Recruitment for the Forests team was ongoing, to be led by Yvonne Edwards, chartered forester and ecologist.

Action – All members who felt they should be in contact with the new Heads and who had not yet had a meeting to get in touch with JR.