

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

MINUTE OF A MEETING of the Social Responsibility and Sustainability Committee held in the Raeburn Room, Old College on Tuesday 25 February 2020.

Present: Sandy Tudhope (Convenor), University Lead on Climate Responsibility and Sustainability
 Lesley McAra (Vice Convenor), Assistant Principal Community Relations
 Michelle Brown, Deputy Director and Head of SRS Programmes
 Gavin Douglas, Deputy Secretary Student Experience
 Dave Gorman, Director of Social Responsibility and Sustainability
 Pete Higgins, Director, Global Environment & Society Academy
 Gary Jebb, Director of Estates
 Tracey Slaven, Deputy Secretary, Strategic Planning

In attendance: Gavin Donoghue, Deputy Director Stakeholder Relations, for Theresa Merrick

Apologies: Laura Cattell, Head of Widening Participation
 Hugh Edmiston, Director of Corporate Services
 Claire Graf, Joint Unions Liaison Committee representative
 Craig Hennessy, Functional Lead, Service Excellence Programme
 Theresa Merrick, Director of Communications & Marketing
 Rachael Robertson, Deputy Director of Finance
 George Sked, Director of Procurement
 James Smith, Vice Principal International
 Rosheen Wallace, Students' Association VP Community

1 The minute of 24 October 2019 was approved as a correct record.

A

2 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

STRATEGIC AND SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

3 Social & Civic Responsibility Plan – Integrating the SDGs

B

The committee noted this update on work undertaken on the Social & Civic Responsibility Plan, as part of Strategy 2030. A Working Group had met in December and February, looking at targets, ambitions and objectives around the SDGs. The Group highlighted the need to differentiate between aspects that were a focus for the organisation, and those that were a focus for research and teaching.

Members welcomed progress achieved to date, noting parallel efforts in some Schools and Support Groups who were looking at how to integrate the SDGs into their own plans. The SRS Department did not own this work, but were working to embed it and ensure a coordinated approach across the University.

Action – TS to follow up with College Registrars to extract SDG content from School Plans.

Action – MB to review School Plans to help align them with central efforts.

The Committee strongly endorsed the draft delivery plan, which covered well activities within the region and potential opportunities, but felt that more could be done to clearly articulate the University's global impact, including specific examples of how it was helping communities adapt to change. These examples should be presented in a nuanced way that acknowledged the University's history and position.

Action – PH to share with MB outputs from the short life working group on embedding the SDGs in the curriculum.

Action – GD to share with MB details of work with CEC on anti-poverty measures.

Action – MB to check the wording on zero carbon buildings with GJ.

Action – All members to send any other comments to MB by 6th March.

Action – MB to take the delivery plan to University Executive in March.

Next steps would include development of a strategic performance framework and a communications plan.

4 Mapping of Research in Relation to the SDGs

C

The Deputy Director of SRS presented this review of the SDGs in University research. SRS met with the Research Office in the summer to discuss testing a pilot approach, settling on the Leicester methodology which used a publication count based on SCOPUS to map research outputs. It was acknowledged that this methodology might not be reflective of CAHSS outputs. It also did not capture the quality or impact of a publication. The Research Office were reviewing the approach and would hopefully take ownership of this work in future. Page 3 of the annex compared UoE's performance to the rest of the HE sector both within the UK and globally, highlighting the University's strengths. UoE was currently seeking Zero Waste Scotland funding to establish a Circular Economy hub, which should further enhance its performance. This analysis was not intended as a league table but a prompt to further conversation and a first step towards developing a more comprehensive approach.

The Committee endorsed the paper and proposed next steps, including using the headlines in SDG reporting and engagement with Schools, and reviewing the Leicester methodology against other mapping and analysis tools. Members recommended looking through REF impact case studies with a bearing on the SDGs, and reviewing grants awarded in the last few years (particularly from the Global Challenges Research Fund) and impact statements to funding bodies in order to round out the results and help identify strong projects addressing the SDGs. The Committee emphasised the need to build excellence in under-represented areas rather than just focusing on existing areas of strength. Rather than being simply responsive, it was also key to emphasise what UoE was doing to inform the next set of SDGs.

Action – MB to ask Conor Snowden to come feed back to SRSC.

Action – TS to flag to senior managers that UoE was not currently using the language of the SDGs when discussing the social, environmental and cultural impact of the University, and to follow up on REF.

ITEMS FOR FORMAL APPROVAL/NOTING

5 Responding to the Climate Emergency

D

The Director of SRS had attended this morning's meeting of University Executive to give a sense of the range of progress since the climate emergency discussions at the Strategic Away Day in June. UoE now had more confidence about what its emissions might be in 2040. Concern about carbon associated with expansion of the supercomputer centre had been flagged, as this would double the University's emissions. These were national facilities, but run by UoE. Further discussions with UKRI would be required. This could be an opportunity to expand current sequestration proposals. Once key decisions had been made the University's Climate Strategy would be updated. It was acknowledged that there could be a spike in emissions in the 2020s.

UE had asked for a firm proposal on forestry by the end of May, as well as agreement on what to do on aviation. UE endorsed trial of a levy on flights, advising a careful approach to consultation and messaging, keeping associated admin processes as simple as

possible, and ensuring visibility of the connection between action and outcome. The levy would just be one of a wider package of measures, including restricting UK flights, subsidising rail travel, and enhancing business travel data. The Committee recognised the merits of an incremental approach, given the effectiveness of nudge-based methods in promoting behaviour change, and recognised the need for clear leadership from senior management. There would need to be a granular review of routine activity, including PhD vivas and external examining, to identify what could most readily move online, as well as a corresponding investment in enhancing the University's VC facilities.

For heat and energy, the timeline was less clear. One possibility was requesting an increase in funding for the Sustainable Campus Fund. The aim was to establish three to four major projects, such as introducing hydrogen into the gas pipeline at KB, technologically innovative ideas for Easter Bush, and large scale district heating for the Bioquarter. The ambition was to be market-leading in this space. While it was not this Committee's role to tell SRS or Estates how to allocate their resources, members strongly supported these plans and felt they were ripe for funding. The Committee was also supportive of work by Estates and SRS to provide living lab opportunities. Members asked that it be made clear in subsequent papers that these measures were also about protecting and enhancing biodiversity.

Action – ST & DG to discuss further how to take these work streams forward.

6 University Position on Carbon Sequestration and Carbon Offsets

E

SRS Committee noted this position paper on carbon sequestration and carbon offsets agreed at University Executive. As noted in paragraph 3.1, the University planned to reduce demand for energy and resources and only look to sequester what it could not eliminate (principally flights). In the light of significant staff and student interest, members welcomed clarity on this issue.

7 Draft Social Investment Fund Document

F

The Committee noted this paper from the Director of SRS drawing together information pertaining to the University's £8M commitment to social investment. SRS Committee had played a role in helping set the overall direction for the fund. Part of the journey toward professionalising the fund, this draft would be developed into a prospectus. Work on impact and risk was ongoing and research was being commissioned to help inform investment decisions.

Members discussed whether the fund could invest in internal projects and spin-offs. While this was possible, it would not help diversify risk. The fund was intended to achieve multiple goals, including financial and social impacts. One aim was to increase the amount of Edinburgh-specific investment. It was important to develop a rigorous framework around the fund to help guide decision making, without over-burdening it with administrative processes, placing excessive demands on senior staff time, or over-spending on advice. Operation of the fund would align with the Community Engagement and SRS Strategies.

Action – TS to share with DG any thoughts on establishing an appropriate amount of research and scoping work.

8 Social Investment Performance

G

Members noted this update on early performance of the Social Investment Fund. Quarterly reports were being produced to include how much had been invested, returns to date, and a short commentary highlighting key issues. Edinburgh Innovations were integrating this work into their other business. The Treasury Manager in Finance and Investment Team in EI would take it forward.

9 Sustainability Awards, Champions and Building Capacity for Sustainability Across the University

H

The Deputy Director of SRS updated members on the Sustainability Awards for Offices and Labs and alignment with Strategy 2030. The aim was to embed sustainability across the University, ensuring all staff and students had the tools to integrate it into business as

usual. The framework criteria for offices and labs had been reviewed to see where efficiencies could be made, and to strike a balance between not overloading teams or reducing participation to a tick box exercise. The lever of the new Strategic Plan had brought interest from areas which had not previously engaged on these issues. The paper included recommendations for how to manage the growing scheme, including involving students in office audits, and introducing peer reviews of labs. Rather than operating to current timelines, the scheme could transition to running year round. Some concerns had been raised about expanding sustainability criteria to include promotion of vegetarian and vegan diets. Altering this to 'climate conscious diets' was preferred.

Members welcomed the proposed changes, particularly empowering Sustainability Champions to make changes locally, and recommended including more brief video clips focusing on individual stories and staff discussing their personal choices.

Action – All members were encouraged to attend the Awards ceremony in March.

10 THE Impact Rankings Submission

The Committee noted this update on the University's submission to the Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings 2020. While recognising the potential issues and challenges with such a ranking, members felt it was valuable for UoE to participate in the conversation. The submission focused on those SDGs recommended by the Committee and where information was available, recognising that there were stories, particularly around research impact, that had been missed. The results would be published in April.

The Committee thanked Matthew Lawson for his work bringing together the submission, recognising the constraints of the timeframe and of the information available. Next steps would include reflecting on the process for next time, working from this baseline in order to widen involvement and engagement. The aim was to have a champion for each SDG the University would submit against.

Action – MB to share the results with the Committee, including some reflections on performance and process.

Action – MB to take the updated paper to University Executive in May, and PRC and Court in June.

11 Community Engagement Delivery Plan

The Assistant Principal Community Relations gave a verbal update on developments. The Committee had agreed at the previous meeting in October to proceed with the delivery plan. However, once the timetable was drafted, it was realised that it would not allow enough time to co-create a plan with the community and other areas of the University. The delivery plan would have to align with the Civic and Social Responsibility Strategy, which would also slow down the process. A revised timeline had been produced, including further community consultation in March, submission of a draft to SRS Committee in June, going on to University Executive. The aim was to submit a final plan to the Committee in October, going on to UE for sign off before being launched. This revised timeline should allow for sufficient consultation to make for a whole institution approach, connecting to relevant strategies vertically and horizontally, as well as increasing opportunities for community engagement.

Members welcomed the update, recognising in particular the need for UoE to take a socially responsible approach to events such as the Fringe, and the resultant displacement of local populations.

12 Any Other Business

SRS Committee Membership

Members acknowledged the need for representation from HR on the Committee.

Action – ST, DG, LM & MB to meet to review current committee membership, check it was fit for purpose, and secure additional representation where required.