SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY STRATEGY 2013-2017

MISSION

Our institutional mission is “to be recognised throughout the world as a renowned international university focussing on society’s future needs and challenges, employing the best staff and delivering a unique and stimulating intellectual experience for students”.

In an era of significant societal challenges, an effective sustainability and social responsibility strategy will contribute to the delivery of that mission by ensuring that limited resources are used efficiently and that our business is managed in a way that minimises our environmental impacts, while demonstrating awareness of our ethical and social responsibilities.

This strategy celebrates our positive impacts and demonstrates the shared purpose and values of our university community in tackling these global challenges. Adopting a whole-institution approach, we will encourage our staff and students to recognise the contribution they can make, both as individuals and collectively, to support and be part of this institutional commitment.

AIM

The Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy places the commonly accepted definition of sustainable development at its heart. We will “seek to meet our present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. We will do this by ensuring that all aspects of institutional strategy are considered within an environmental, social and ethical framework that informs the development and delivery of institutional objectives.

Our Strategic Plan 2011-2015 identifies the twin principles of sustainability and social responsibility as a foundation for all our activities and establishes them as being among the core values that define our idea of a university.

As well as our environmental sustainability commitments, this strategy encourages broader engagement with what these values mean in a university context. It recognises that the sustainability legacy and impact of the University will be measured not only by carbon emissions or landfill tonnage, but by the sustainability of our decision-making, by the quality and global relevance of our research, and by our role in developing active and engaged graduates with the attributes necessary to tackle the challenges facing society.

IMPLEMENTATION THEMES

The actions necessary to operate by those values cut across administrative and academic boundaries and require a framework that reflects the breadth of the challenge. This document identifies four broad implementation themes, with objectives and activities detailed under each. These themes provide the framework for developing a whole-institution approach and will be supported by an implementation plan with more detailed actions and targets.

| Theme 1: Leadership and Communication [i.e. CULTURE] |
| Theme 2: Estate and Infrastructure [i.e. CAMPUS] |
| Theme 3: Partnership and Engagement [i.e. COMMUNITY] |
| Theme 4: Learning, Teaching & Research [i.e. CURRICULUM] |
We are committed to the twin principles of sustainability and social responsibility as foundations for all our activities”.
University of Aberdeen, Strategic Plan 2011-2015

Developing a whole-institution approach to sustainability and social responsibility.

To ensure a whole-institution approach to sustainability and social responsibility, consideration of these issues must become part of our institutional culture. We are committed to ongoing review of our policies and business practices to enhance efficiency and to achieve a consistent improvement in our sustainability and social responsibility performance.

Institutional decisions routinely consider the environmental impact of proposals alongside issues such as risk, resource implications and equalities. But more can be done to ensure that institutional decisions and policy developments embed life-cycle thinking and factor in economic, social and ethical impacts alongside resource implications.

As part of that shift in institutional culture, we will cultivate a sense of individual and collective ownership of these issues. We will, through appropriate induction and training, encourage our academic and support staff to recognise the role they can play. We will encourage local ownership of these matters by sharing responsibility with key colleagues in academic and administrative units and by recognising the work that they undertake in support of these objectives.

We will make a visible and consistent commitment to these goals by putting in place appropriate communication mechanisms, including new web resources. We will raise awareness of our institutional targets and why they are important, and will provide updates on our progress and celebrate our successes. By placing operational and academic achievements side-by-side we will encourage a sense of shared endeavour.

Objectives:

Over the course of this strategy we will:

► Ensure that sustainability and social responsibility is routinely considered as part of all institutional decision-making and embedded in new strategies and policies.

► Amend and review existing policy and practice to ensure that sustainability and social responsibility are given due consideration.

► Introduce appropriate communications mechanisms to engage staff and raise awareness of institutional commitments.

Actions:

During the strategy period we intend to:

► Introduce a sustainability web portal to share information on academic, student and administrative initiatives.

► Introduce a Local Sustainability Advisers scheme to encourage local ownership of sustainability issues and to empower colleagues to develop solutions.

► Introduce a Sustainability Awards scheme to recognise and celebrate individual and collective endeavour.
“We aim to maintain an estate and infrastructure which support world-class academic activity and public engagement in the most efficient and sustainable way possible”.
University of Aberdeen, Strategic Plan 2011-2015

Improving the environmental performance of our estate and infrastructure.

We are committed to constant improvement of the environmental performance of our estate and infrastructure. We recognise that in pursuing our educational and research objectives, we have a responsibility to exercise proper control over our activities, promoting the sustainable use of resources, discouraging wasteful practices, preventing pollution and reducing our carbon footprint.

While the core business of higher education is inherently positive, the quantifiable environmental impacts of our activity emerge largely in the fabric and operation of our campuses and infrastructure. Increasing demands for space and complex technological infrastructure mean that the University must continually develop its understanding of best practice in areas such as the environmental performance of buildings and resilient, energy-efficient information technology.

In support of these requirements we have put in place policies that detail our commitments and targets in Environment, Utilities, and Waste as well as stand-alone plans for Sustainable Travel and Carbon Management. These documents are publicly available and are regularly reviewed.

Through our Carbon Management Plan we are committed to ongoing emissions reductions in line with national and international targets. While these goals are challenging we will, alongside technological solutions, foster awareness in the University community of the action that individuals can take to achieve the behaviour change necessary to reach our targets.

We are committed to sharing best practice within and beyond the sector. As signatories to the Universities & Colleges Climate Commitment for Scotland, we welcome the opportunity to learn from colleagues in other universities. Moreover, we recognise that all public sector bodies in Scotland have a duty to act sustainably. We will continue to work with partners, such as the NHS, to deliver mutually beneficial projects.

Objectives:

> Ensure that we have in place robust mechanisms to record, manage and report on our main environmental impacts.

> Improve the visibility and awareness of the environmental impacts of our estates and infrastructure projects, seeking external recognition where appropriate and sharing best practice within and beyond the sector.

> Report annually on our progress against the Carbon Management Plan and support sector-wide initiatives such as the Universities & Colleges Climate Commitment for Scotland (UCCfS).

Actions:

> Complete a major solar energy project at our largest student accommodation site (Hillhead) and investigate further schemes such as biomass and additional solar projects.

> In line with anticipated Scope 3 emissions reporting, put in place a mechanism that provides a robust estimate of our emissions from business related travel and commuting.

> Work in partnership to introduce new shared data-centre projects and progress server virtualisation projects.
“To continue to promote partnership working in all that we do and to engage fully with our regional, national and international partners, our stakeholders and our alumni”.

University of Aberdeen, Strategic Plan 2011-2015

**Being a socially responsible partner and promoting shared values in all that we do.**

We are an organisation international in ambition but also firmly anchored in the local community. We have a complex network of local and global links with academic, industry, non-governmental, civic and other partners. We also have direct and indirect relationships with groups and individuals, most notably our alumni but also the people of Aberdeen.

The purpose of these partnerships is diverse. We have:

- inter-university relationships that support research, encourage student exchange and promote our internationalisation agenda;
- social partnerships with charitable organisations, for example to reuse IT in the developing world or to offer workplacements to those being helped into work;
- an extended supply-chain through our activities as a major procurer of goods and services, and have an extensive investment portfolio;
- an eclectic local, national and international audience for our public engagement programme and a globally distributed alumni community.

These relationships bring considerable opportunities and benefits but also demand that we recognise our social responsibilities. We have a duty to ensure that these partnerships reflect our respective values and, where possible, foster a shared sense of purpose and common values.

Within our supply chain we must remain mindful of the behaviours of the companies in that chain. Where possible, we have a duty to make socially responsible and ethical choices in procurement. We are proud to have been a Fair Trade University since 2007 and will continue to work with sector agencies to develop a wider approach to supply-chain assurance.

Our public engagement programme is an important part of our civic contribution and includes public lectures, concerts, museums, exhibitions and major festivals. All are part of our mission to share knowledge, celebrate culture and engage the public in discussion of our research.

**Objectives:**

- Apply due diligence in the establishment of all new partnerships, to ensure that they are based on the principles of mutual benefit and respect.
- Work with sector agencies to introduce a robust system of supply chain assurance.
- Investigate opportunities to work in partnership with local government in the provision of cultural and public engagement opportunities.

**Actions:**

- Implement a Sustainable Food policy and action plan, undertaking to report regularly and to monitor progress.
- Embed our new model University Festival which celebrates institutional research and embraces our new approach to public engagement.
- Embed, and support with appropriate training, local procedures to reflect emerging sector-wide commitments to sustainable procurement.
“We are recognised as an international leader in pioneering a comprehensive programme designed to help Aberdeen graduates to leave the University academically excellent, intellectually flexible, and committed to personal development, while also being critical thinkers, effective communicators and active citizens”.

University of Aberdeen, Strategic Plan 2011-2015

Providing a research and learning environment that supports active citizenship and where solutions to societal challenges are sought.

While efforts to minimise the environmental and social impacts of university business represent the operational foundation of this strategy, the true sustainability legacy of the University will be realised through the impact of our teaching and research, and the contribution of our graduates as active, global citizens.

The University aims to undertake research that makes a positive difference on the local, national and international stage. As well as independent research, a series of four cross-university themes build on areas of current research excellence and encourage research that addresses key societal questions in Energy, Environment & Food Security, Pathways to Healthy Living and The North.

These themes take an interdisciplinary approach and embed in research strategy our commitment to the values of sustainability and social responsibility. Through knowledge exchange and our public engagement programme we will ensure that this research is shared for the benefit of all.

Inter-disciplinary teaching is at the heart of our ongoing curriculum review process, enhancing the student learning experience and informing our graduate attributes. Alongside ‘academic excellence’, ‘critical thinking & effective communication’, and ‘learning & personal development’, our graduate attributes encourage students to become ‘active citizens’, with an awareness of ethical and moral issues and an understanding of their social and civic responsibilities.

We will work to ensure that all staff and students understand the role they play in the development of an environmentally sustainable, socially responsible and ethical society, and encourage and support them in their efforts to maximise the University’s positive impacts.

Objectives:

> Work with the Aberdeen University Students’ Association to encourage students to undertake co-curriculum opportunities and support active citizenship through volunteering, community and other socially responsible activities.

> Encourage all students to pursue, as part of their curriculum, inter-disciplinary courses linked to our research themes.

> Investigate opportunities to promote the use of the campus as a ‘living laboratory’, with staff and students informing operational sustainability and in turn learning from the experience.

Actions

> Develop an institutional policy on ‘Sustainability in the Curriculum’ and embed sustainability as a graduate attribute.

> Introduce a Students Taking Active Roles (STAR) award category targeted at students involved in sustainability related activities.

> Undertake an update audit of undergraduate courses to identify those with sustainability content.
IMPLEMENTATION & OVERSIGHT

Further detail regarding the actions to be taken in support of this strategy is outlined in a separate Sustainability & Social Responsibility Implementation Plan and in local operational plans.

The risks associated with sustainability and social responsibility, and the actions being taken to mitigate those risks, will be reflected in a Sustainability & Social Responsibility Risk Register.

Strategic oversight, co-ordination and the monitoring of progress will be overseen by the Advisory Group on Sustainability and Social Responsibility (AGSSR), chaired by a member of the University senior management.

CONCLUSIONS

The environmental and social challenges facing society are widely acknowledged. They include resource depletion, the need for alternative fuels, a changing climate, increasing populations, public health concerns, and the associated pressures on food and water security.

Through the expertise and dedication of academic colleagues involved in world-leading research we can play a part in addressing many of those challenges. Moreover, the contribution we make in preparing future industry and civic leaders for a life beyond study is a vital part of our mission.

This strategy is the first such strategy produced by the University of Aberdeen. It provides a high-level framework within which we intend to develop a whole-institution approach to sustainability and social responsibility.

Through this strategy we aim not only to reduce the environmental and social risks associated with our operations but to celebrate our successes and recognise the individual and collective contribution of our academics, students and support staff in living up to our institutional values.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond
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Principal and Vice-Chancellor