# UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 MARCH 2023

**Present:** K Leydecker (Chair), M Beers, J Bjorkvist, D Burslem, D Dyker, P Edwards, H Gannicliffe, B Henderson (to agenda item 5), J Huttich, F Lovie, R Philp, T Potts (from agenda item 11), A Price, L Rattray, R Slater, R Taylor, C Torres-Baragan, M White, T Wolfe and H Crabb (Clerk).

**Apologies:** M Campbell, M Haq, R Lyne, V Mabonso Nzolo, T Slaven, A Speight, A Stuart and H Sveinsdottir

**In Attendance:** E Jonsson (agenda item 13)

1. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 November 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

2. **MATTERS ARISING**

2.1 Table of Actions

The Committee received the Table of Actions arising from the previous meeting and noted the following:

2.1.1 School-Level Energy Data & Carbon Footprint Reporting

The Committee was advised that development work was ongoing to build a Power BI dashboard to facilitate reporting on various sustainability metrics.

2.1.2 Cycle to Work Scheme

The Committee was advised that the Cycle to Work Scheme had been extended such that it would now be open for 6 months per year and the package value limit increased to £2K. The Committee noted that it would ultimately transition to become part of the Employee Benefits Scheme (which may result in it becoming available on an ongoing basis).

The Committee was advised that the Big Issue E-Bikes would be arriving shortly on campus and noted that geo-fenced areas for their removal/return had been identified. The Committee welcomed the discount which had been negotiated to support staff and student use.

2.1.3 THE Impact Rankings 2023

The Committee was advised that consideration was being given to the proportionality between the effort required of the completing the THE Impact Rankings submission and the benefits derived from it. The Committee noted that initial data around the submission process had been collated and it was anticipated that the outcome of this review would be reported following the publication of the 2023 rankings in late May.

**Action: HS**

2.1.4 SDG Report 2022

The Committee was advised that a small number of hard copies of the SDG Report had been produced and been distributed at the Queen Consort visit and to key external stakeholders (e.g. MSPs). The Committee was also advised that the dissemination of the electronic document was underway, including to local Council offices and Elected Councillors. The Committee welcomed the inclusion of some of the case studies in other publications (e.g. the forthcoming REG Report) and noted that progress against the SDGs would be reported in the submission to the UN Academic Impact Report.

2.2 Communications Plan

Report on item deferred to next meeting.

**3. DRAFT SCHEDULE OF BUSINESS**

The Committee received and approved a draft Schedule of Business for the remaining meetings in 2023. The Committee endorsed the list of proposed strategic discussion topics and members were invited to suggest additional items for discussion on an ongoing basis throughout the cycle of meetings.

**4.** **SUSTAINABILITY RISK REGISTER**

The Committee received and considered the Environmental Sustainability section of the University’s Strategic Risk Register. The Committee agreed to endorse the Register subject to

* Separation of Risks 1 and 2 to highlight the risks associated with a lack of resource preventing Net Zero progress i.e. Risk 1 would highlight the financial/planning risks and Risk 2 would highlight the Net Zero risks; and
* Risk 4 – include end date in progress column.

**Action: FL/MW**

The Committee was advised that the revised drafting to underpin the separation of Risks 1 and 2 would be discussed in more detail at the forthcoming institutional Risk Workshop.

**5.** **ABERDEEN 2040 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

The Committee received the Sustainability Commitments (16-19) section of the Aberdeen 2040 Implementation Plan and noted in particular the updates on activities which had been conducted up to January 2023. The Committee agreed to endorse the updates subject to:

* Inclusion of a further update on the Interdisciplinary Fellows’ recruitment process (Commitment 18) **Action: ER**

The Committee was advised that guidance for public bodies on carbon off-setting had recently been published and that an analysis would be presented as part of the strategic discussion item planned for the next agenda.

The Committee was also advised that consideration would be given at institutional level to the sustainability of the current level of activity across all 4 Commitments in view of workload pressures reported by staff and the current resource constraints.

**6. GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES & SKILLS**

The Committee welcomed the work which had been led by John Barrow, Dean for Employability & Entrepreneurship, to develop the Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and Skills and create a framework to support their recognition and reflection in a meaningful way for students. The Committee was advised that the development phase had included (i) workshops (to brainstorm and scope out the vision and design principles), and (ii) a review of current frameworks to identify key attributes and skills sought by employers.

The Committee was advised that 15 attributes and skills had been identified and which aligned with Aberdeen 2040 and the educational strategic vision (adaptability & resilience, communication, creativity, digital fluency, inclusivity, independence, interdisciplinarity, international awareness, leadership, problem-solving, self- and social-awareness, self-motivation, sustainability, teamworking and time management).

The Committee was advised that helpful feedback had been received from Senate and that this would be incorporated in the next draft. The Committee noted that the next phase of work would include engagement with students and external stakeholders (including professional bodies and alumni) to further develop the framework ahead of it being returned to Senate for endorsement.

The Committee welcomed the direction of travel outlined and provided the following feedback for consideration in the next phase:

* Inclusion of a reference to the Pathfinder initiative to influence the regional skills development agenda and ensure that the Graduate Attributes are included in sector-wide skills development discussions;
* Consider where sector-specific views/skills requirements might fit within the overall framework;
* Review the framework to ensure that student community engagement is sufficiently recognised within it e.g. volunteering/other enhanced transcript opportunities;
* Inclusion of complex systems/competency-based critical thinking skills as articulated in the SDGs; and
* Consider whether the 4 Aberdeen 2040 Themes could be used as a structure to ‘group’ topics within the framework and highlight the value-driven aspects that make the Aberdeen offer to students distinctive.

The importance of operationalising the framework was highlighted, including the need to have sufficient support and ‘wrap-around activities’ (e.g. mentoring, careers guidance) available to students to encourage the development of self- and social-awareness skills, and particularly the courage to deliver constructive challenge, upon graduation.

**7. UPDATE FROM AUSA**

The Committee received and noted the update on sustainability activities which had been undertaken by AUSA since the previous meeting.

The Committee welcomed the progress which had been made including (i) the award of a significant grant towards the e-bike scheme implementation (for AUSA members, which can include staff and students), (ii) the CFINE food pantry project, (iii) the Fair Trade Community grant award, (iv) the Hedgehog Friendly Campus submission, (v) the ambitions in relation to the Green Impact Students’ Union award, (vi) the discount achieved for staff and students using the ShareBike scheme, (vii) Carbon Literacy training, (viii) the Alternative Freshers’ Fayre and (ix) the establishment of a student-led group to discuss transport across the City.

The Committee noted the concerns which were raised regarding the cancellation of the Climate Week North-East event and suggested that a collaborative approach between all interested parties be integrated into future planning processes.

The Committee was advised that the priorities in the interests, concerns and expectations of environmental student societies and groups appeared to be moving from carbon emissions and climate change to concerns about biodiversity and nature.

The Committee welcomed the positive feedback received from AUSA in relation to the timeous and transparent activities which had been undertaken on Fossil Fuel Divestment, particularly in relation to the communication of the policy.

**8. UPDATE FROM DEAN FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

The Committee received and noted the update on activities undertaken by the Dean for Environmental Sustainability.

The Committee welcomed the progress made in relation to (i) the Climate & Sustainability Assembly (scheduled for 15 March), (ii) the reports produced by the Just Transition Lab, and (iii) the film produced by the North East Climate Action Network (featuring Tavis Potts).

The Committee recognised the contributions made to the Queen’s Jubilee Sustainability Initiative which had resulted in the publication of the Accelerating Towards Net Zero Report and welcomed in particular the visual representation of the breakdown of sector-wide carbon emissions contained within it. Concerns were raised around the lack of clarity around the definition of what constituted ‘student accommodation emissions’ (i.e. whether it extended to private accommodation or was restricted to University owned and/or managed accommodation.)

The Committee noted the future plans to engage with Scottish Government representatives (via the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan Education Sub-Group) and colleagues across the HE sector (via the Advance HE workshop) and welcomed the networking and collaborative activities being undertaken.

**9. STAFF SUSTAINABILITY TRAINING: BASELINE E-LEARNING MODULE**

The Committee was advised that the Sustainability team had identified and assessed options for the delivery of a core, baseline sustainability e-learning module for staff to raise awareness and levels of engagement with the Aberdeen 2040 sustainability commitments. The Committee noted that the initial focus would be the establishment of a baseline level of understanding of sustainability and related climate and nature issues.

The Committee noted that sustainability training across the HE sector generally comprised (i) a short introductory e-learning module, (ii) department-specific workshops, and (iii) Green Champion schemes. The Committee was advised that at this stage, the development of an introductory online training module was the main priority and additional activities would be presented for consideration in due course.

The Committee was advised that several external training modules had been reviewed but deemed not to meet the University’s requirements – particularly in relation to a lack of capacity to customise the package with local context and content. The Committee noted that Carbon Literacy training had been considered as an option but had been assessed as being better suited to an ‘enhanced’ level of delivery and its full-day format (and cost) was not a viable solution for a University-wide roll-out.

The Committee agreed to endorse the proposal that an in-house e-learning module (for inclusion in staff induction materials in the first instance) is developed using the Articulate software platform which is currently used by the Staff Training & Development team. The Committee recommended that the development process draws upon the experience and expertise available across the university (students, educators, online education/IT teams, HR etc.) with a view to the package potentially being rolled out more widely, including to the student community and potentially other regional organisations, in future.

**Action: FL**

**10.** **BIODIVERSITY UPDATE**

The Committee welcomed the actions which had been taken to contribute to the development of a Biodiversity Policy and Action Plan, particularly in relation to (i) the Climate & Sustainability Assembly, (ii) the enhanced focus on biodiversity within Project Boards, (iii) the MSc Sustainability Transitions Thesis Project on ‘Insetting’ (nature-based carbon sequestration), and (iv) the establishment of a student summer Internship to map biodiversity on campus.

**11. STUDENT TRAVEL**

The Committee welcomed the presentation from Estrid Jonsson, Sustainability Team Intern, outlining the findings and recommendations arising from the project which had been conducted on student travel to study emissions.

The Committee was advised that emissions sources regarding student travel to study at the start and end of each term was unaccounted for in the University’s emissions profile and that as a result, an undergraduate student internship was established to develop a methodology for calculating the emissions total.

The Committee noted that in developing the methodology, account had been taken of (i) the data which was available, (ii) desk-based research, and (iii) discussions with colleagues elsewhere in the sector in relation to key issues including: student data, list of worldwide countries, region classification, travel modes and class, number of journeys and a default starting destination (capital city) to all trips from a specific country.

The Committee noted and endorsed the proposed methodology based on the following:

* 7 regions (Africa, Asia, North America, South America, Oceania, Europe, Home/UK);
* Starting location assumed to be the country’s capital
* For journeys from Europe – assumptions based on economy travel on short-haul flights to Aberdeen via London;
* For journeys from Home/UK students – assumptions based on a 50/50 split between rail and average car journeys direct from home to Aberdeen;
* For journeys from other regions – assumptions based on economy travel on long-haul flights to Aberdeen via London; and
* One return trip per student per year.

The Committee was advised that emissions resulting from students travelling to study had increased by 44.5% between 2021/22 and the baseline of 2015/16. As a result, the estimated emissions using the methodology rose from 7,175 tCO2e in 2015/16 to 10,364 tCO2e in 2022/22 (despite the total student population remaining broadly stable in this period). The Committee noted that this reflected a Brexit-related decrease in European student numbers and an increase in the Asian student population (with a corresponding rise in emissions associated with travel of Asian students). The Committee also noted the impact of, and interdependencies between, the institutional student recruitment strategy and the net zero commitment (including carbon off-setting).

The Committee endorsed the proposal that a student travel survey be conducted to provide data to support the assumptions on student travel choices and modes, with the outputs from this exercise being used to further refine the methodology. The Committee also recommended that consideration be given to a communication/dissemination strategy to enhance the level of awareness and understanding of the issues surrounding student travel and emissions.

**Action: FL**

**12. NET ZERO UPDATE**

The Committee welcomed the progress which had been made across various Net Zero-related activities, including (i) target setting, (ii) student travel to study emissions (see item 11), (iii) the development of the Sustainability Power BI Dashboard, (iv) the rolling programme of net zero projects and the establishment of the Hillhead Heating Project, (v) Zero Waste Scotland training, (vi) the publication of the Standardised Carbon Emissions Reporting Framework (see item 15), and (vii) the proposal to establish 3 Sustainable Transitions MSc projects for the current cohort of MSc students to undertake between May and August 2023.

**13. CAMPUS ENERGY/HEATING UPDATE**

The Committee was advised that the SFC/Salix loan application had been approved and that the Hillhead Heating Network Project Board, chaired by David McGloin as Project Sponsor, would start meeting shortly to oversee the project. The Committee noted that the main construction works would be completed in summer 2025 due to the need to schedule activities in holiday periods to minimise disruption to Hillhead residents. The Committee was advised that the Project Board would report to the Sustainable Heating Programme Board and that its attention would now focus on wider campus heating infrastructure matters.

**14. UPDATE FROM INTERDISCIPLINARY CENTRES**

The Committee received and noted the report on sustainability-related activities within the Interdisciplinary Centres since the previous meeting. The Committee welcomed the wide range of activities being undertaken, the funding proposals submitted and/or in development, the news/media activities reported and the impact of the Centres’ activities on the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Committee anticipated positive direct and indirect contributions from the recently appointed Interdisciplinary Fellows to the sustainability agenda and welcomed the enhanced research capacity they would bring.

The Committee noted in particular the award of £100K from NERC to fund ‘discipline-hopping’ activities in areas of relevance to the NERC Discovery Science agenda and highlighted the contribution the projects would make to enhancing interdisciplinarity in this field.

The Committee recommended that the report be circulated to Heads of School, the University Research Committee and School Directors of Research to raise awareness of the valuable interdisciplinary work which was ongoing.

**Action: Clerk/ER**

**15. ROYAL ANNIVERSARY TRUST**

The Committee noted the Royal Anniversary Trust publications (‘Accelerating Towards Net Zero’ and the Standardised Carbon Emissions Framework for Further & Higher Education) which had been provided for information.

**16.** **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Sustainable Development Committee will be held on Tuesday 30 May 2023 at 10.35am – 12.25pm via Microsoft Teams.