

UoN Strategy – Consultation Green Paper

Nottingham University Business School Social and Environmental Responsibility Group Tri-Campus Feedback - 15th April 2019

The Social and Environmental Responsibility Group (SERG) at the Nottingham University Business School (NUBS) in the UK, China and Malaysia hereby present our collective feedback on the strategy document following SERG's consultative meetings in our three campuses.

- 1) We the undersigned are strongly disappointed and concerned by the limited attention paid to sustainability in the entire strategy document. Sustainability is a source of competitive advantage and value creation, and therefore central to contemporary strategy across all forms of organisations. The evidence does not suggest that this is going to change soon.
 - a. We believe sustainability should be at the core of what we say and do at the University. This should strongly come through in the entire strategy document.
 - b. The strategy in its current form, in our considered view, does not demonstrate we are a University that takes sustainability seriously, or one that recognises the value that sustainability can bring to our strategic performance and civic mission.
 - c. For example, at our overseas campus in Ningbo, China the motto is '**not only the first but also the best**', yet we are concerned that the strategy will not let us live up to this standard with regard to sustainability.

- 2) We ask that sustainability be embedded more strongly and explicitly in our strategy. The University's mission, vision, values and culture should reflect our commitment to ethics, responsibility, environmental leadership, integrity and inclusivityⁱ.
 - a. In fact, both the mission and vision do not clearly capture what Sir Jesse Boot profoundly prescribed at the opening of the Trent Building and University Park in 1928, "*...in each succeeding age the University will spread the light of learning and knowledge and bind science and industry in the unity that is so essential for the prosperity of the nation and the welfare of our fellow citizens...*"
 - b. The current vision: "**To deliver the very best teaching to our students and to transform lives around the globe through world-leading research**" should consider the University broader mission of holistic education.
 - i. Teaching is not the only means of creating knowledge and of learning.
 - ii. We recognise that sustainability learning happens outside of the classroom. How does our vision capture this?
 - iii. The concept of "teaching" is not empowering enough.
 - iv. What kind of citizens and leaders are we developing? What is the role of the University in producing global (hopefully, responsible) citizens?
 - v. What about our impact through global partnerships that are not just about teaching or research?
 - c. Our current mission states "**[...] A place that transforms lives and shapes the future**". The university in our humble opinion must be working towards 'a sustainable' future. In fact, all references to 'the future' in the entire document should reflect sustainability principles and idealsⁱⁱ.

- 3) The strategy pays significant attention to the **economic dimension of sustainability (i.e. financial information)**. Sustainability in the document is equated mostly with growth and the institution's financial health. Although this is important for any organisation, we observe that the development agenda privileged by the University seems that of 'quantitative' as opposed to 'qualitative' growth.
 - a. A radical approach is called for.
 - b. We generally believe there is a poor choice of words in the entire document. Too much emphasis on financial terms like reducing costs: in fact, costs are thought in traditional accounting sense. What about thinking in terms of value, or impact?
 - c. Quantitative increase is a narrow and problematic perspective on value creation.
 - d. We strongly believe that the University should aim towards flourishing and not growing in numbers or size.
 - e. We need to demonstrate our contribution to the triple bottom-line: people, planet and profits.

- 4) The strategy does not give us the confidence that we are truly committed to making a difference. It is written in a language that makes sustainability peripheral to the University's business. The language used in the strategy document fails to internalise our vast experiences as well as our positive social, economic and environmental footprints.
 - a. We have missed the opportunity to create a compelling strategic narrative using our numerous sustainability stories that could be captured and which could inform such a narrative.
 - b. The University has some great sustainability success stories that demonstrate 'we walk the sustainability talk'. Some examples of sustainability-related best practices include: UoN's pioneering Research Beacons work on modern slavery, future foods; numerous Green University rankings and awards; NUBS's Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) work; our wide range of students' engagement that addresses different social and environmental concerns including activities by the Sustainability Society, ENACTUS, to name but a few.
 - c. There is great potential to build on this going forward as a distinguishing feature of the University.

- 5) We need to connect the strategy to the 'global challenges' as envisioned in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)
 - a. The SDGs have become a call to action for all societal actors including Universities to play a significant role in building a more sustainable future. The call for SDGs mainstreaming continues unabated as evidenced by the new University ranking on the SDGs, new accreditation requirements, research funding priorities, for example.
 - b. We strongly believe that we should play a leading role on the SDGs. To this end, we recognise and acknowledge that our Research Beacons are addressing some of the global challenges. However, as a University, we do not seem to strongly identify with the SDGs, or communicate our progress despite our research progress and impact stories.
 - c. The University needs to publicly endorse and commit to the SDGs Accord. As thought leaders, we must endeavour to communicate and report against the SDGs. NUBS as a PRME champion has proactively begun to embed the SDGs in our teaching, research, operations, student engagement and partnerships. Our journey has only begun and you can see our progress in our latest UN PRME report: <http://www.unprme.org/reports/NUBSPRMESIPReportJan2019final.pdf>
 - d. There is a need to identify some core areas of strength across the three campuses that address specific UN SDGs, and leverage our international geography and diversity to positively contribute to making a solid impact.

- e. Opportunities exist to enhance partnerships with other campuses around sustainability initiatives and work on the SDGs. For example, running tri-campus campaigns and grand challenges tri-campus workshops. We need the facilities to be able to do that, which do not require flying around the world all the time. The infrastructure should be supportive of this - currently our video conference facilities are not up to scratch.
 - f. Opportunities exist around the creation of teaching and research excellence hubs around sustainability (Cross-School), which could also serve as ways to generate more income by running highly specialised block executive courses.
- 6) Redefining our strategy will provide a better direction to the formulation of the UoN's sustainability strategy, its implementation, communication and the measurement of progress.
- a) Does the strategy help define our future sustainability goals, objectives and targets?
 - b) How ambitious should our sustainability objectives and targets be? Do the targets have clear timelines? For example, what declarations and commitments do we wish to make: do we aspire to be carbon neutral by 20xx?, or become slavery-free across all our value chains by 20xx?
 - c) What is our internal culture? Does this limit our ambitions? Are we risk-averse? How do we change the internal culture to support creativity and innovation?
 - d) Are our staff and students aware of our sustainability strategy? How are we proactively engaging them to create a more sustainable organization?
 - e) One of our current values is **"think globally, deliver locallyⁱⁱⁱ, and engage personally"**: We believe 'small actions can make a big difference' and every member of the University community has a role to play in delivering a sustainable future. So, how do we turn sustainability into business as usual? Should not we strive to integrate sustainability into every employees' roles and responsibilities? What about our students? Do we have a sustainability pledge that galvanises individuals to action?^{iv}
 - f) What set of knowledge and skills should our students and staff possess in order for them to engage meaningfully with the sustainability agenda? Do we train and support them?
 - g) Do we pass our sustainability values down our supply chains? How do we do this? Is sustainability one of the requirements in our third-party contracts? How do we conduct due-diligence across our supply chains?
 - h) How do we measure and publicly report progress against our sustainability targets? What systems do we have in place to enable this?
 - i) What are our key performance indicators (KPIs) particularly on **social sustainability**? We applaud the University's efforts towards measuring environmental sustainability in as far as our buildings are concerned, etc.
 - j) There is a need to review the investment portfolio to consider divestment beyond fossil fuels to include other 'sin stocks' such as arms, tobacco, alcohol, fur etc. where appropriate, and inclusion of investments in projects which explicitly and effectively contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 7) We believe there are numerous opportunities to embed sustainability in different sections of the paper (e.g. People, culture and organization; civic engagement, etc.) which all might have a unique sustainability angle. Hereunder, we articulate specific comments:
- a. **People, culture and organization**
 - i. The key words/phrases are "diversity", "value all staff", "international outlook", "honour our public benefit" and "communities in which we are embedded".

- ii. "Think globally, deliver locally, and engage personally" mantra is very relevant and unique to and a special thing about UoN. We need to ensure that this is promoted and supported.
- iii. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion should not be anecdotal and nominal. There is a need to maintain and value diversity, which should go beyond gender and nationalities, and to consider these for both staff and students.
- iv. Staff and students should be valued and supported to excel. This is critical to help move into a sustainable future.

b. Student life

- i. Make student learning tailored to their needs: e.g., NUBS can consider Industry driven programmes alongside the traditional models. With the industry driven programmes, learning time is shared between course work and industrial engagement. At least this can be a means to link the University and Industry more instrumentally.
- ii. The undergraduate research project can also take two forms: research or industrial attachment. This allows flexibility for students to choose the option that tailors their career goals

c. Our international geography

- i. Give students, faculty and administrative support staff more opportunities for international experience – both physically and through digital connectivity. Provide incentives and infrastructure.

d. Our civic role

- i. Create spaces for students and staff to engage in public / civic work. Do we promote community engagement of staff in work-time? What incentives and schemes are available?
- ii. How do we manage and deal with controversies and sensitive issues across the three campuses? What can we learn from each other?
- iii. Can we promote community service learning or other forms of experiential learning in our formal curriculum offerings? There is a need to promote "civic duties" in our pedagogies for example: UG course on Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice where the first-year BSc Business and Management students work to tackle a particular issue in Nottingham e.g. homelessness, poverty, future foods and culture shocks.
- iv. As a university which claims to be global, can we address those global problems which are global in nature, and at the same time promote responsiveness to unique challenges of the environment in which each of our campuses operates? For example, the society of Ningbo where our campus is located, depends on the marine economy and deep-sea fishing, while at the same time making a global impact on the environment and society by participating in the global supply chains.

e. Our infrastructure

- i. Invest in infrastructure to connect the campuses. Make more use of digital classrooms, electronic boards, etc.
- ii. The new generation students and continuous education / Exec MBA / Executive Education all require a mix of brick and mortar class and digital class experiences
- iii. Our infrastructure needs to support and promote a culture of learning and engagement. What spaces do we have? Our learning spaces should be multipurpose to allow for different creative uses by students and staff.
- iv. Our infrastructure seems to be quite disconnected in allowing and facilitating extra-curriculum learning opportunities. Both facilities and accommodations within timetabling are needed to enable extra curricular activities: for

- example, a free week during semester when extra curricular activities can be organised.
- v. All new investments in infrastructure, including construction of new and refurbishment of old buildings in all campuses, need to take into account the environmental impact.
 - vi. Our infrastructure, by design, should promote sustainable consumption of all goods and services, taking example of such global initiatives as circular economy, zero-waste economy, or the economy of communion.

We the undersigned SERG members are committed to support the University to meet its sustainability/SDG goals within our spheres of influence.

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ⁱ There are numerous examples of Universities that embed sustainability in their strategy. A member gave the example of the University of Winchester whose values are about compassion and the flourishing of people and planet (“We are a community committed to making a difference, passionate about seeing individuals and communities flourish. Our values of Compassion, Individuals Matter and Spirituality shape how we do this and why – we believe academic freedom leads to big ideas which in turn lead to social justice and creativity for a better world.”). Their strategic direction is equally interesting with a focus on addressing the most pressing challenges we face as defined by the SDGs (see: <https://www.winchester.ac.uk/about-us/our-future/our-strategy/>).

ⁱⁱ ‘Sustainable’, ‘green’, ‘secure’, or any appropriate adjective that defines the future we want as a University.

ⁱⁱⁱ Some members felt that the term “deliver locally” should match the nature of our ‘global university’ by ensuring we apply a broad definition to the term and not be limited to our locales e.g. Nottingham or East Midlands region. This should also allow both staff and students as “global citizens” to bring local issues into our teaching, research and community engagement activities.

^{iv} Examples of Sustainability pledges: <https://www.uc.edu/af/pdc/sustainability/pledge.html>; <https://sustainability.gwu.edu/lifestyle>