

Executive Summary of Business for Council



Title	Update on Preparation of Strategic Plan 2013-18
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Type	Report on current preparations and outline for further development, for Council to NOTE .
Date	November 2012
Summary	Report on current preparations for the new Strategic Plan, including the outcomes of consultation held so far, and plan for further preparations, including current outline draft of the Strategic Plan itself.
Recommendation	Council is asked to NOTE the report.

1. Context

The University's existing Strategic Plan, *Making the Future* (2009-2015), has served the institution well, but is now in need of significant revision.

This need is predominantly driven by our having met or exceeded our goals across several areas, most notably with regard to growth in student numbers. The external context has changed dramatically since *Making the Future's* publication, most prominently on the increase in HEU UG fees but also in a number of other, less recognised but highly significant, ways.

The University has not met its goals in some areas, perhaps most obviously in relation to growth of research grant income, and there are also other areas of under-performance needing to be addressed, e.g. student employability. The University has made significant improvement to its efforts in the former area, but this has coincided with a significant reduction in the overall availability of government funding for research, and our efforts have not so far been sufficient to overcome the negative impact of this, let alone to buck the trend and make the major advances in research income that are fundamental to us meeting our institutional aspirations.

A new Strategic Plan is therefore required.

It is important that we take the time and maximise our resources to develop the new Strategic Plan as a robust, challenging and targeted Strategy, one which is based on rigorous evidence and which proposes goals that inspire success but also demand concrete implementation and integration into the daily working practices and culture of the University.

In this context, the Vice-Chancellor has initiated preparation of the new Strategic Plan, and requests Council's review of the direction of preparations as set out in this paper.

2. Development and Consultation Process

Three major components are included in the development of the Strategic Plan and related consultation process:

1. Extensive review and approval by Council and its sub-committees, Senate and its major sub-committees, and through other appropriate elements of the University's governance structure;
2. Robust direction and planning from senior management;
3. Broad and open, inclusive consultation amongst the student, staff, and wider University community.

To achieve (1), we shall ensure that the Strategic Plan, its iterations, supporting data and evidence, are considered by Council and Senate at each of their meetings during the 2012-13 academic year, and shall direct appropriate sections or evidential data for detailed scrutiny by Council's Finance & Investments and Performance sub-committees. We shall ensure that iterations and sections are brought to Senate and its sub-committees as and when appropriate.

To achieve (2), we have established a Strategic Plan Steering Group, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. The Steering Group is composed of the VCEG members, two Heads of School, the Director of Communications, and the President of the Students Union. The Director of Research and Enterprise is currently standing in for the PVC (Research) on the Steering Group.

A member of the Governance Office team, Mr Dominic Dean, has been assigned to co-ordinate Strategic Plan preparations and support the Vice-Chancellor on this project.

A Strategic Plan Advisory Pool, comprising individuals with particularly relevant expertise from across the University, has also been established for the Vice-Chancellor and Steering Group to call upon and consult as necessary.

To achieve (3), a series of focus group sessions with various key stakeholders has already begun and will continue well into 2013. So far, we have held student focus groups, including with the Student Union Sabbatical Officers, Student Representatives, Presidents of Student Societies, and International Students. In early 2013, we shall initiate an equivalent series of staff focus groups and will also consider how we can involve other stakeholders such as alumni in a similar process, possibly through online means.

3. Results of Consultation to Date

Consultation and gathering of views and material for the new Strategic Plan began with the 'Size, Shape, Quality and Distinctiveness' debate that took place across a number of student and staff forums during 2011-12. The outcomes of this debate have been fed into the consideration and early drafting of the new Strategic Plan.

Consultation from September 2012 to the present has mostly taken the form of focus groups with various categories and representatives of students, from which the following points have emerged -

There was a high degree of consensus on the following positive points:

- Interdisciplinarity is seen as a strong positive factor in student recruitment and student experience;
- The University's location in Brighton is a huge positive factor and still under-exploited;
- The quality of the campus community, and particularly relations between students and teaching staff, is anecdotally considered to be superior to that at comparator HEIs;
- Academic events to which the whole University community is invited (for example, Sussex lectures) are essential to University identity, campus community and the interdisciplinary endeavour;

There was consensus that the following areas require improvement:

- The Library and other learning/social spaces provision still needs some refinement, and students are highly sensitive to the issue of space capacity keeping up with student numbers;
- Connectivity to the internet (speed and reliability) is an absolute priority for the practical student experience;
- The employability agenda still requires further attention, particularly on the exploitation of alumni connections and ensuring Sussex is an attractive brand to major, top-level employers;

The following were proposed as goals or campaigns:

- In order to ensure a coherent, rigorous academic experience alongside an interdisciplinary study offer, students should be guided in making explicit statements and plans of their own personal academic programme. Choice is important, but personalised academic advice should be available to guide that choice;
- In the Sussex traditions of interdisciplinarity and social engagement, all Schools and departments should be encouraged to offer teaching on the 'History of' their discipline;
- The opportunity for a placement year should be extended for all appropriate courses;
- Student Reps should have more interaction with the Careers and Employability Centre, and be more involved in developing the Employability agenda.

4. Risk, Scenario Planning, and Supporting Data

Consideration of risks, preparation and evaluation of mitigation strategies, and planning for different possible scenarios in a number of key areas, will be at the centre of our preparation of the Strategic Plan 2013-18.

In every aspect, the goals and statements included within the Strategic Plan will be supported by a clear set of evidence, including detailed data where appropriate. Some of this evidence will be available publicly via a Strategic Plan website where individuals can 'click through' to see the data supporting the Strategic Plan document itself.

Council, and/or its appropriate sub-committees, will also receive and review a full dataset, including the Risk Register for the Strategic Plan and the Scenario Plans.

The Strategic Plan Steering Group will co-ordinate preparation of this dataset in order to facilitate Council's review.

The Scenario Plans will address at least two key areas (with others possibly also to be included as the development of goals demands):

Student and Staff Growth

On this area, several growth scenarios will be considered and Council will be consulted on which would be the most appropriate scenario variants.

The scenarios will consider appropriate responses and mitigation strategies if growth diverges from the predicted range at several different points within the 2013-18 period.

The scenarios will consider the relation between student and staff growth, which may be affected by a number of variables including competitive pressure to improve SSRs or research-led appointments for individuals with significant research income.

Research Income, Research Students and Research Staff

Appropriate scenario modelling on this issue is still being considered in the context of REF preparations and review of the issue by the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee. As with Student and Staff Growth, scenarios will model variations from the planned trajectory. Research activity growth has a relationship with staff growth, and hence with student numbers.

Current Draft Outline Strategic Plan 2013-18

1. Introduction

1. Why now?

We anticipate that the period 2013-18 will present significant opportunities, albeit with challenges too. The evidence is clear that the most successful universities take swift and full advantage of new avenues to grow and to re-assert themselves in a globalised world. The potential for significant growth in student numbers is an obvious example of this, but opportunities also exist in relation to our untapped potential to develop research capacity to match and drive the quality of our research, to take full advantage of our geographical location, and to build on our distinctive features to improve the student experience at a time of rapidly increasing competition.

Making the Future (2009-2015) served the University well as its Strategic Plan, but it has become evident that we need to revise our Strategy sooner than planned, in order to take full advantage of greater than anticipated success in a number of areas and to respond to a vastly changed external climate.

2. Route to the Strategy

We believe the Strategic Plan will be effective if it builds from our shared values, is relentlessly outward-focussed, and includes tangible, specific goals that can be embedded in the work of all our staff and the contribution of our students.

We are therefore undertaking an extensive consultation process amongst the student, staff, and wider University community. This will include a series of student and staff focus groups, online publication of drafts of the Strategic Plan for comment, and intensive workshops for senior academic and managerial staff. Alongside this broad and open consultation, preparations and drafts for the Strategic Plan will be rigorously considered through the University's formal governance structure, starting with Council and its sub-committees, especially Finance & Investments Committee, and including Senate and its principal sub-committees.

2. Vision 2018

1. Size and Shape

The University of Sussex is currently on a trajectory of growth in numbers of students and staff and aims to maintain strong growth for the duration of the period covered by this Strategic Plan. This is important because –

- Volume of staff and students is key to sustaining teaching, learning and research in a number of disciplines that demand a ‘critical mass’ to be internationally competitive;
- We take seriously the moral imperative to translate our knowledge and research for the social and economic benefit of our local and global community, and growth enables us to increase our creation of positive change in individuals, organisations, and societies, doing the greatest good for the greatest number;
- Growth ensures our financial sustainability, and increases our financial resilience and institutional autonomy.

Our vision is to be a University of a scale to sustain its comprehensive and interdisciplinary academic endeavour for the future, and to make a real impact on human knowledge and wellbeing.

Growth is not possible in all areas all of the time, but the current climate does give opportunities for growth across most of our activities, in terms of both recruitment across subject areas and recruitment of UK and international students and staff. There is an imperative to take such opportunities when and where they arise.

Simultaneously, we are resolutely committed to a comprehensive University, undertaking research, teaching and learning across the Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Sciences, and Medicine, with an interdisciplinary ethos in all areas.

We will respond to the imperative to be more far-sighted and rigorous in planning the physical accommodation of our growing size by looking at options to expand our activities beyond the core campus in Falmer, both in terms of physical presence and of a major effort to develop our online and distance-learning activities.

2. Quality

Quality in teaching, learning, and research, so that it is innovative and inspiring, is our first priority. Quality in all our activities must be maximised, and continuously enhanced, in support of this.

We wish to demonstrate our quality to the world, and thus will continue to dedicate significant effort and resource to raise our position in the UK and world University rankings, and to maximise benefit to our reputation and income from the Research Excellence Framework and similar processes. As a *minimum*, we will be firmly placed in the top 15 to 20 of UK universities, and in the top 100 internationally.

However, even more important is the quality of academic work on the ground. Our students value being taken seriously as co-creators of knowledge, and so we shall expand and renew our already significant range of major academic events to which both students and staff are

welcomed from across all subject areas. Our students also value the quality of engagement they receive from individual members of academic staff, and we shall take action to ensure this quality is maintained and boosted by support for those staff who take the most active roles in guiding the intellectual and personal development of our students.

We recognise that high quality teaching and learning cannot take place without infrastructure, and that provision of sector-leading connectivity and IT facilities, libraries, learning and social spaces, must be a top priority, to be built from the start into new capital projects.

Helping our students create a better world as well as a great career

We also know that employability is increasingly important to our students, and that greater personal support for this is needed along with an even higher profile for Sussex amongst the best employers. We shall develop employability support that recognises and promotes the determination of many Sussex students to create a better world as well as a great career. We believe our graduates develop effective and sophisticated cognitive, analytical and problem-solving skills, and we want to both support this and translate it into the employment of our graduates in leading and important roles in their chosen careers.

Research quality underpins our whole academic endeavour. We shall develop new strategies to attract the best researchers to Sussex and to develop our 'home grown' talent, and shall renew and evolve the Research Themes to secure and drive the research agenda across the whole institution.

Our research strategy will be driven by the development of current areas of strength into major centres of innovation and excellence in research, and by the challenges posed by the world today. Research ethics and integrity will underpin all we do, and shall be integrated into both the student curriculum, especially for postgraduates, and into high-quality staff training. Our graduates will increase their understanding of both the philosophical and methodological bases of research, and the ethical foundations of scholarship, and we believe this will strengthen and nourish their future careers in business, academia, industry, social and ethical enterprise, and elsewhere.

A step-change in research income, research students, and research staff

A necessary part of this must be a step-change in our research income performance, thus supporting research staff and students, which will contribute to making Sussex a university with the capacity and resourcing of research to match its high quality. Achieving maximum benefit from the Doctoral School structures will create a vibrant doctoral research and education community, which is essential to high performance in research.

3. Distinctiveness

The University of Sussex can claim a unique place amongst British universities. This 'place' exists geographically, in our location overlooking Brighton; socially, in the diversity of our students and staff who are nevertheless united by the common pursuit of knowledge; and intellectually, in our interdisciplinary tradition and our combination of academic radicalism with rigorous criticality.

An Intellectual Mission

Our intellectual tradition, which is also our continuing mission, has two primary objectives: First, the unfettered pursuit of knowledge, free from boundaries of political or economic expediency, from dogma and from disciplinary rigidity. Second, the application and

translation of knowledge for the good of human society, locally and globally, socially and economically. We also believe that we can only pursue this mission whilst striving for institutional autonomy, including intellectual, political, and financial autonomy, secured by the sense of shared mission amongst our University community.

We assert that diversity amongst this community ensures rigour and ethics in our teaching, learning, and research.

Renewing Interdisciplinarity

Sussex was founded and first structured as an explicitly interdisciplinary university, and this remains one of its defining features today. In the next few years of growth, we shall reassert our claim to be foremost amongst British universities for the interdisciplinary endeavour, via a series of defined campaigns and initiatives. Our graduates are receptive to new ideas and critiques of established wisdom, and this important quality often arises from their interdisciplinary education.

Close to London, closer to the world

No other university occupies our geographical place. Members of our University are also citizens of one of the UK's most enterprising and lively cities, Brighton and Hove. We are close to London, with easy access to its vast academic and cultural resources and cosmopolitan life; yet we are even closer to the world, with Gatwick airport mere minutes away. Internationalism is embedded in the intellectual and social life of Sussex, and we shall actively strive to make our campus and institution ever more welcoming to international students and staff, and to ensure that we learn from them as well as they from us.

Despite the accessibility of London and other world cities, we are uniquely surrounded, at our Falmer campus, by a National Park, with a rich coastal and rural landscape stretching on all sides. We shall now take far more explicit and active advantage of this situation, by new academic initiatives emerging from the human and physical geography all around us, by development of our sports environment to exploit our access to some of the UK's best areas for coastal watersports, and by cultural activities more fully embedded within the Brighton and regional arts scene.

3. Major Goals

[List of eight highest-level goals for achievement by 2018, with a comment from each responsible manager or VCEG member on their plan for delivery. The goals should be strongly quantitative and should map on to the strategic campaigns below.]

4. Sussex Strategic Campaigns

Theme  Core Area 	Quality	Sussex Distinctiveness	Financial Sustainability	Environmental Sustainability	Innovation	Equality and Diversity	International
Research	<p>REF 2020 ambitions: to be in the top 20 institutions; to have at least 50% of our UoAs in the top 15 in their subject areas [subject to revision]</p> <p>Undertaking our research to the highest standards of research governance and integrity</p>	<p>Forum for discussion and debate, within and outwith the institution</p> <p>Recognised for our inter-disciplinary approach, leading to innovative insights and ground-breaking discoveries</p> <p>Undertaking work on global topics, with effects</p>	<p>Funding with contribution</p> <p>Efficiency and effectiveness in operation</p>	<p>Facilities that are maintained to meet appropriate standards, as well being state of the art, in order to deliver high quality research</p>	<p>Encouraging innovation in and of our research</p> <p>Looking for ways that our research can contribute to the innovation of others, by making available our research results in an accessible form</p> <p>Ensuring that innovation is recognised in institutional reward and resourcing mechanisms</p>	<p>Ensuring researchers and participants are fully considered and represented</p> <p>Enabling the development of our researchers to their ultimate capabilities</p>	<p>Working with (supply-side) partners nationally and internationally to have the capability and capacity to address important and exciting topics.</p> <p>Working with (demand-side) customers and non-academic users of our research to help translation into beneficial use, wherever appropriate</p> <p>Making use of our Global Sussex Community , to contribute to our research, and to assist its translation</p>

Theme  Core Area 	Quality	Sussex Distinctiveness	Financial Sustainability	Environmental Sustainability	Innovation	Equality and Diversity	International
Teaching and Learning	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC

5. The Sussex Experience

[Details of key attributes of Sussex that everyone – students, staff, alumni, visitors – should notice when on campus or interacting with the University, with an emphasis on the customer service element of the University's activities. Such attributes might include personalised service, efficiency in administration, treatment of students as responsible adults, respect for equality and diversity, etc. To include statements from Heads of School and Heads of Professional Services divisions.]

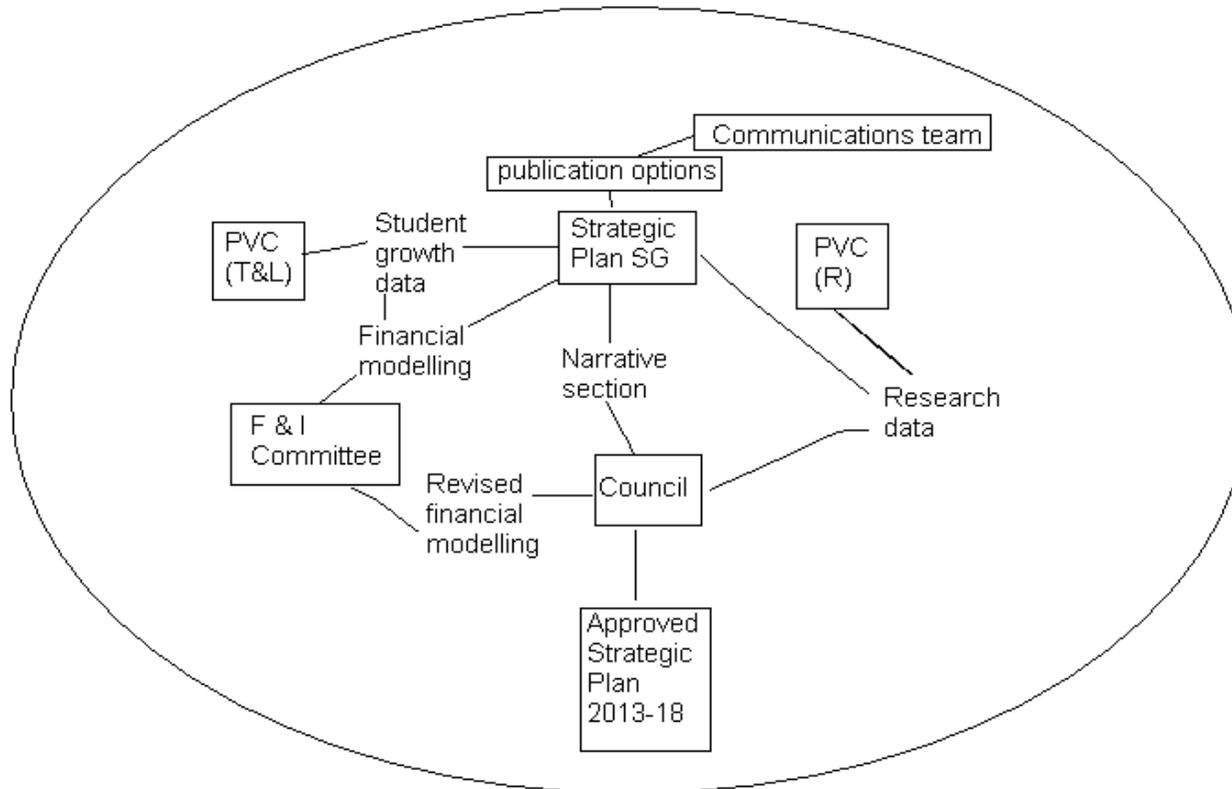
6. Timeline

[Timeline setting out goals towards 2018.]

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Appendix B

Approval Process and Timeline



Date	Task/Event
November 2012	Student Focus Groups
November 2012	Consultation with Schools on Distinctiveness and Interdisciplinarity
07/11/12	Update to Performance Committee on Strategic Plan developments
28/11/12	Update to Council on Strategic Plan developments
January 2013	Staff Focus Groups: Management; Academic; Early Career Academic; Professional Services
February 2013	Steering Group workshops on 1) Research and 2) Teaching – half days.
06/02/13	PSG to review supporting dataset
12/02/13	Equality and Diversity Forum asked to consider Strategic Plan goals on Equalities
March 2013	Meetings between the VC and HoS of each cognate area to review draft Plan
March 2013	Finance & Investments Committee to review financial implications/requirements
April 2013	Pre-Comms draft to come to Steering Group and then VCEG for approval
08/04/13	Update to Performance Committee on Strategic Plan developments
17/04/13	Update to Senate
26/04/13	Update to Council
05/06/13	Final review of Strategic Plan by Performance Committee and by Finance & Investments Committee
28/06/13	Council approval of the new Strategic Plan
Autumn 2013	Publication of the new Strategic Plan; dissemination and implementation