



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Social Responsibility and
Sustainability Strategy 2010–20



Edinburgh Sustainability



Creating opportunities from global challenges

There is growing worldwide recognition of the urgency required to tackle a range of complex and inter-related global issues, such as human wellbeing, food, energy, water security and climate change. The need of governments, businesses and other organisations to understand and respond to these challenges creates significant opportunities for the University of Edinburgh community.

Professor Sir John Beddington, Edinburgh alumnus and Chief Scientific Adviser to the British Government,

Global challenges

- Urbanisation
- Energy demand
- Food demand
- Population
- Climate change
- Biodiversity
- Alleviating poverty
- Water demand
- Infectious diseases

Global Challenges (Beddington 2009)

argues that, due to the social, environmental and economic disruption we face today, a “business as usual” approach will lead to a “perfect storm” of food, water and energy shortages by 2030¹.

New scientific, technical, economic and policy responses are necessary in order to address the challenges that lie ahead, and critical analysis from diverse perspectives is essential if we are to understand fully the relationships and potential conflicts that may arise from any proposed responses.

Indeed, there are many possible, and often mutually exclusive, visions of what a desirable future might be – and how such a vision might be achieved.

Our role will always be to understand what is occurring, to question accepted wisdom, to challenge simplistic analysis and to communicate with others. In doing so we will help develop holistic solutions to the challenges facing the planet and its people.

¹ *Food, Energy, Water and the Climate: A Perfect Storm of Global Events?* www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/goscience/docs/p/perfect-storm-paper.pdf



The William Rankine Building at the University's King's Buildings features integrated photovoltaic panelling, which generates onsite power.

Choosing our future

We aspire to make world-leading contributions to understanding and addressing global challenges. Our overarching approach is not to try to direct academic endeavour, but to create the conditions under which students and staff are inspired and supported in order to engage with and contribute to social responsibility and sustainability across the University and beyond. Collaboration between disciplines across the University will be central to this endeavour.

A whole-institution approach to social responsibility and sustainability

We aim to develop – and make explicit as an example for the University community and others globally and locally – a whole-institution approach to social responsibility and sustainability.

Recognising that the terms are contested, 'social responsibility' and 'sustainability' refer here to our contribution to both understanding and addressing social, environmental and economic global challenges. More specific definitions may be required to enhance communication in certain circumstances, for example during the adoption of particular standards or practices.

Our approach

1. **Lead by example**, explicitly embedding our commitment to social responsibility and sustainability in our policies, strategies and procedures.
2. **Actively support best practice, innovation and leadership** with regard to social responsibility and sustainability: in learning and teaching, research and knowledge exchange, and across our services and physical infrastructure.
3. **Recognise and communicate** relevant activity by students, staff and alumni.
4. **Demonstrate and report** our main social, environmental and economic impacts.

This *Strategy* builds on and develops a longstanding commitment to social responsibility and sustainability, and brings together the University's existing policies and commitments on these and related issues².

This document is partly a blueprint; but more realistically it is an initial route map that sets out our aspirations, our direction and our first steps on the journey towards where we might be in 2020.

The detailed planning and prioritisation will come as these commitments are progressively embedded within the University's annual planning and resource allocation process and future strategic plans.

² Including: *Sustainability Policy in 2000*; *University's Strategic Plan 2008-12*; *Internationalisation Strategy 2009*; *Universitas 21 Statement on Sustainability*; the Universities & Colleges Climate Commitment for Scotland; and the 10:10 campaign to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 10 per cent in 2010.



Learning and teaching

We aim to create conditions under which students and staff will develop their knowledge, skills and experience in order to engage with and contribute effectively to tackling global challenges in Scotland and the wider world.

We aim to produce graduates fully equipped to achieve the highest personal and professional standards (p1)

Our strategies... include encouraging the themes of sustainability and social responsibility in programme and course development and delivery (p31)

Strategic Plan 2008–2012

Leadership in education for active citizenship

Our objectives

1. **Enhance our international reputation** for supporting all students to be proactive, independent, critically analytical and reflective learners and communicators who can engage with today's global challenges and recognise their significance for interdisciplinary study.
2. **Be respected as a leading international provider** of higher education, lifelong learning and continuing professional development related to understanding and engaging with global issues.
3. **Offer every student opportunities** to study the broader aspects of current global challenges, social responsibility and sustainability, and to explore in depth how their chosen subjects relate to them.
4. **Draw widely on the University's whole-institution approach** to social responsibility and sustainability as a resource for learning and teaching.
5. **Offer students a range of opportunities** to engage in volunteering, community and other activities relating to social responsibility and sustainability.



Research and knowledge exchange

We will critically evaluate policy responses and interventions to current global challenges from a perspective open to dialogue across disciplines.

We will collaborate with local and global partners in industry, civil society and academia to contribute to development of holistic solutions.

This means... taking ever more seriously our commitments as a socially responsible organisation (p2)

We aim to... equip staff to realise their full potential as direct contributors to the success of the University (p17)

... deliver efficient and timely services that are customer-focused and of world-class quality (p18)

... provide a modern, efficient and stimulating working and learning environment to sustain world-class academic and support activities (p21)

... embed equality, diversity, sustainability and social responsibility as fundamental principles, and assist all staff and students to realise their full potential (p31)

Strategic Plan 2008–2012

Realising the potential of multidisciplinary teamwork, strategic partnership and collaboration

Our objectives

1. **Establish research themes across the three Colleges** that focus on dialogue between disciplines, to address global challenges and respond to the opportunities offered by major UK and international research funders and other external bodies.
2. **Create a worldwide network of research-experienced alumni** working in academia, industry, government and civil society, who remain engaged with and contribute intellectually to the University's research, knowledge exchange and teaching on global challenges.
3. **Promote opportunities for staff** to offer their expertise in addressing global challenges, individually and in multidisciplinary teams, through engagement with civil society organisations and commercial consultancy.
4. **Establish a 'New Enlightenment' programme of engagement**, across multiple disciplines and with the local community, the city region and other partners, to discuss, understand and respond to global challenges and their implications.

In 2004 Edinburgh became the first Scottish university to gain Fairtrade accreditation.



People, services and infrastructure

Our success in benefiting from the opportunities open to us and our ability to rise to future challenges rests squarely on the high quality of our people, services and physical infrastructure.

We will develop and showcase best practice, informed by and informing the University's research and teaching missions.

We aim to... contribute to the economic, social, cultural and environmental development of Scotland and the world (p11)

... provide holistic solutions to important global challenges (p10)

... maximise the contribution of our knowledge, skills and expertise towards influencing and realising Scottish and UK government objectives while simultaneously benefiting society as a whole (p13)

Strategic Plan 2008–2012

Practising what we teach, researching our practice

The University aspires to serve as a living laboratory – practising what we teach and researching our own practice.

Our objectives

1. **Encourage and support members of the University community** to become effective agents of positive change, drawing on the University's own teaching resources, including the Global Academies.
2. **Apply our own research and expertise** to inform our policy and practice, and offer issues in need of study as dissertation topics.
3. **Manage our physical infrastructure** and the procurement of goods and services in ways that maximise efficiency and effectiveness while minimising social, environmental and other risks.
4. **Collaborate with other organisations** to share our expertise and develop best practice in addressing social responsibility and sustainability.
5. **Establish efficient and effective systems** to record, report and act on our main social and environmental impacts.



Our priorities

Our initial-stage priorities

1. **Ensure that the University's objectives set out in this Strategy are embedded** promptly and appropriately in all strategies and policies that are currently under review or in development.
2. **Support staff effectively** as they put this *Strategy* and accompanying implementation plan into place.
3. **Communicate effectively, internally and externally**, our current expertise, opportunities, activity and achievements related to social responsibility, sustainability and the global challenges – including progress in the implementation of this *Strategy* itself.

In the initial stage – until the objectives set out in this *Strategy* are firmly embedded within the University's processes – progress will be monitored by and reported annually to the Sustainability and Environmental Advisory Group and incorporated into the planning and resource process under the guidance of the Central Management Group.

Governance and monitoring progress

Implementation of this *Strategy* is to be taken forward under the aegis of the colleagues named against each action in the annual implementation plans. However, to assist with coordination and oversight, progress will be monitored and reported by the following committees:

- Sustainability and Environment Advisory Group, convened by Vice-Principal Professor Mary Bownes
- SEAG Operations Group, convened by Nigel Paul, Director of Corporate Services

As we implement and evaluate the achievement and outcomes, we shall revise and extend implementation plans for each subsequent year.



Vice-Principal's conclusion

Our journey towards 2020 and beyond will be an exciting one as we build on a wealth of existing expertise and achievement. I am constantly amazed by the number of colleagues contributing to this agenda, in all aspects of university life.

We are, however, determined to act promptly and decisively to maximise the opportunities, anticipate future developments and maintain our outstanding status in a rapidly changing world.

This *Strategy* sets out our aspirations, our direction and our goals for 2020. Annual implementation plans will expand on the specific actions to be undertaken in each year.

The *Strategy* will be reviewed as these commitments are progressively embedded within the University's planning processes and will contribute to future strategic plans.

Professor Mary Bownes

Vice-Principal, Research Training
and Community Engagement

This *Strategy*, accompanied by a *2010 Implementation Plan*, was adopted by Court on 15 February 2010. For more information on the University's SRS activities please visit www.ed.ac.uk/sustainability and www.oured.ed.ac.uk.

Edinburgh Sustainability embraces a range of activities under the University's strategic theme of promoting social responsibility and sustainability – in our teaching, research, knowledge exchange and across our operations.

- Be inspired by the work of colleagues, students and alumni from across the University.
- Find out how you can take action, gain new skills and insights, and share your expertise.
- Explore how the University measures and manages its main social, environmental and economic impacts.
- Learn about global challenges, and our commitment and approach to helping address them.

For more information, visit www.ed.ac.uk/sustainability.