



A statement of intent on sustainable development by university and college leaders

‘ ... it is pre-eminently in the universities that we should be thinking hardest about the implications of the whole world-system for our common life and its future, and bringing the best of our available intelligence to bear on the necessary changes. If not there, where? If that’s not the business of universities in the early twenty-first century, what on earth are they for?’

John Foster, 2007

Achieving sustainable development¹ is one of the major challenges facing the world today. Economic growth and development is necessary but has an impact on the environment and this impact is increasing rapidly. This is evident in the effects of global warming and the urgent need to improve global carbon management as highlighted in the *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change* and the Kyoto Protocol. Universities already make a significant contribution to the UK's sustainable development strategy and have played an important role in researching the challenges, in developing new approaches to those challenges and also in improving organisational operations as highlighted in *Greening spires*.² We welcome the opportunity to demonstrate leadership for the university sector in relation to sustainable development.

As a university leader³ I intend to ensure my university responds to and meets the challenges of sustainable development through:

- I. Demonstrating strong and visible senior management leadership for sustainability
- II. Committing to the embedding of sustainable development into my institution's strategies
- III. Developing active links with partner organisations, external networks, businesses and international organisations to share ideas and new approaches to sustainable development
- IV. Identifying clearly defined and institutionally appropriate sustainable development objectives and targets that are linked to sector and national targets
- V. Publishing an institutional carbon management plan including a target for carbon reduction from energy consumption (scope 1 and 2 emissions) against a 2005 baseline. By doing so my institution will contribute to achieving the sector target of reductions in scope 1 and 2 emissions of 34% by 2020 and 80% by 2050 against a 1990 baseline.⁴
- VI. Engaging staff and students to provide their ideas on how universities can help meet the challenges of sustainable development.

Signed by: _____

On behalf of institution: _____

Notes

¹ Using the IPCC definition 'Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

² *Greening spires: universities and the green agenda*, Universities UK 2008
<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Pages/Publication-280.aspx>.

³ The term university is used to refer to all generalist and specialist higher education institutions in the UK.

⁴ The 1990 baseline was set by the Climate Change Act 2008. The Act sets the world's first legally binding targets for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions for all organisations of at least 34 per cent by 2020 and at least 80 per cent by 2050 against a 1990 baseline.

The role of universities in sustainable development

Universities are in a unique position to support society in addressing the challenges of sustainable development through their missions of innovation, transferring knowledge through research, scholarship, teaching and learning as well as through organisational activities as campus managers and employers and as key bodies in local communities.

The world leading research activity conducted in the UK's universities across all disciplines and in both pure and applied spheres is critical in developing the understanding and capacity to deliver sustainable development. Researchers can help society find social and technical solutions to these challenges and drive forward innovation and new technologies and university campuses can lead by becoming more sustainable and efficient. Universities provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to address these critical challenges and enable them to benefit from the economic opportunities that will arise from technologies and approaches to sustainable development.

A key strength of the sector is the diversity of approaches that universities can offer to sustainability. There is no 'one size fits all' solution to the challenges faced and each institution will develop ways of working that resonate with their own ethos, mission and context but together universities can work towards the goal of a sustainable society.

The global challenges faced today cannot be solved in isolation and to ensure a sustainable future the sector must share good practice and collaborate within and across institutions, work with staff and students, student unions and with external partners such as schools, further education, businesses, national Governments, local authorities, the NHS and across country boundaries.