

The University of Edinburgh
Sustainability and Environmental Advisory Group (SEAG)
21 February 2013

“What is the purpose of the University?” plus Graduate Attributes Framework for a Sustainable Future

Brief description of the paper, including relevance to the University’s strategic plans

This submission to SEAG comprises the following two papers:

- 1) “What is the purpose of the University?” – report on three events held in 2012 and
- 2) Proposed Edgy Graduate Attributes which have emerged from the open fora

These papers contribute to ongoing discussions on how the University can best serve its students and how to improve the student experience – a Strategic Plan priority since 2008.

Action requested

SEAG is invited to:

- **note** the successful series of events run by a wide range of cross-University departments
- **consider** and **comment** on the proposed Edgy Graduate Attributes
- **recommend** whether a new Graduate Attribute Framework should be pursued at Edinburgh.

Resource implications: Does the paper have resource implications? **No**

This discourse is a way in which a healthy institution can improve itself and its capacity for learning

Risk assessment: Does the paper include a risk assessment? **No**

Equality and Diversity: Has there been an Equality Impact Assessment of this paper? **No**

Freedom of information

Can this paper be included in open business? **Yes**

Originators of the paper

Rev Harriet Harris, University Chaplain and
Olga Bloemen, Undergraduate Student
13 February 2013

'What's the University for?' – Précis of the Series

In January 2012, the Chaplaincy invited colleagues from the Institute for Academic Development (IAD), EUSA Global, International Office and Sustainability Office to join in an initiative to explore “the purpose of a University” – generically – and specifically the University of Edinburgh (UoE).

The intent of the first event in was:

- to bring students, academic and non-academic staff together, across sites,
- for fundamental reflection on the purpose of the UoE
- via different visions or philosophies of the university (Mediaeval / community of scholars, liberal arts, Humboldt / blue sky research, Napoleonic / functional)
... in order to ask ourselves:
 1. What sort of university we have?
 2. Why do we invest so much of our lives, time, and resources in it?
 3. What do we hope for it and from it?

The panellists and their themes were:

- Vice-Principal Sue Rigby, on University vision and funding
- Paul Parvis on John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University*
- Cecelia Clegg and Liz Bondi on care and virtue in University teaching, from the perspectives of both tutors and students
- Rector, Peter McColl on universities and the social good.

Students and staff responded by requesting follow-up events, which we have staged in world-cafe style, to enable round-table discussion in mixed groups. The meeting was live-tweeted, inspiring us to stream future events.

The planning committee now includes students involved in the Edinburgh Manifesto, students and staff from the Central Area, Moray House, KB, and Easter Bush, members of SEAG, SAR, DEI, the Research and Projects Officer for Vice-Principals, the Rector, plus a growing team from EUSA, IAD, IO and SO.

Themes covered in two subsequent events in October 2012:

- What do we want from and for our University? How can we make these things happen?
- Things I wish I'd known
- Exploring Hopes and Visions

Upcoming:

- an exploration of UoE members' values and priorities.

Some outcomes:

- A proposal for more broadly conceived graduate attributes that more clearly support character development, social and emotional intelligence, commitment to sustainability
- Demand for and development of an off-shoot initiative for Online Learners
- Perspectives to feed into training for PTs, SSOs, and class reps
- Invitations to discuss outcomes with SEAG and the Employability Strategy Group (ESG)
- Information for UoE 'Things I wish I'd Known' websites and blogs
- Development of new student-tutor initiatives in some schools
- Case-studies and examples of good practice in bridge-building
- Increased empathy between students and staff
- Links with Global Citizenship developments, through EUSA Global.

Some Prevalent themes

- Concern that the UoE serve the common good, locally and globally
- Push to say that we are here not just to get a degree but to build character and integrity
- Desire for innovative teaching and learning methods that foster collaboration
- A wish for a stronger sense of belonging or community within UoE, whilst acknowledging potentially oppressive aspects of communities
- 'Do PTs know what their role is? Students don't know'
- Appreciation from students and staff hearing from one another how things are for them
- Awareness of students' diverse reasons for being here: 'to get a job'; 'to develop oneself on every level'; 'to contribute to future global well-being'
- Appreciation of Vice-Principal input that 'anything is possible'.

Some examples of comments on feedback cards:

What do you want from your University?

- A sense that it's here for the students first and foremost.
- Tutors keen to interacting with students through lecturing, tutoring, face-to-face feedback.
- Social time for staff and students, departmental get-together and informal interaction.
- A base: a geographical building where ones subject/colleagues/friends can be found.
- Too big: Year 1 classes too big / Hard to make friends.
- To learn for learning's sake, but not just through books or lectures but also through the 'outside' world and community.
- University must be for the development of persons who can live in community.
- We want a sense of being useful for the University, for our fellow students, for the environment and for the communities as a whole.
- We want projects, interactions and less competition to be the best individuals; to harvest student's energy and discourage individualism.

How can we make these things happen?

- Let's talk more about broader Graduate Attributes
- Feedback should be a continued, contributive process – both sides contributing to our ultimate aim. The questions should be formed by both parties.
- Have clear communication on what the University expects from Students and what Students need in terms of academia and personal needs and development.
- In my previous degree experience there was face to face accountability between students and professors about exams.
- More scope for Students to share their work with one another across disciplines.
- More co-ordination of activity. There might be a lot going on but no sense of coherence and therefore not helpful ultimately.

More on all this is available at: www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/chaplaincy/event-archive

One theme emerged from the second and third events around what students might expect to have gathered while at Edinburgh. This poses slightly more stretching Graduate Attributes which might be considered for Edinburgh as it develops the "Edinburgh Edge" for the University's graduates.

1. Graduate Attributes Framework for a Sustainable Future

Building on the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) literature on sustainability literacy and on Graduate Attributes Frameworks (GAFs) at other Universities, Olga Bloemen drafted the following list of attributes during a summer student internship at the Institute for Academic Development. These are suggested additions to the current GAF of the University.

On the 25 October 2012, student and staff attending the 'What's the University For?' event in the Chaplaincy discussed the attributes and their feedback was incorporated in this list.

1. Systems thinking

The ability to see how things are connected, especially environmental, social and economic dimensions.

2. Future orientation

The ability to think into the future, to handle complexity and uncertainty and to create long-term solutions to current problems.

3. Creativity

The ability to combine ideas and to come up with out-of-the-box approaches to problems.

4. Ethical thinking

The ability to explore ethical questions and make and critically evaluate ethical decisions.

5. Self-reflection

The ability to reflect on yourself and your impact on others.

6. Academic responsibility

The ability to understand how an academic discipline impacts upon the world and to engage with the discipline in a sustainable and socially responsible way.

7. Empathy

The ability for trans-cultural understanding, respect and solidarity.

8. Bridge-building

The ability to collaborate, and bring people together, for a common cause, including the ability to mediate conflicts.

9. Change-making

The ability to enable change that supports sustainable development in personal, institutional and other social contexts.

SEAG is invited to comment on these and recommend how they might best be taken forward to inform ongoing work for improving the student experience.

Rev Harriet Harris, University Chaplain and
Olga Bloemen, Undergraduate Student, 12 Feb 2013