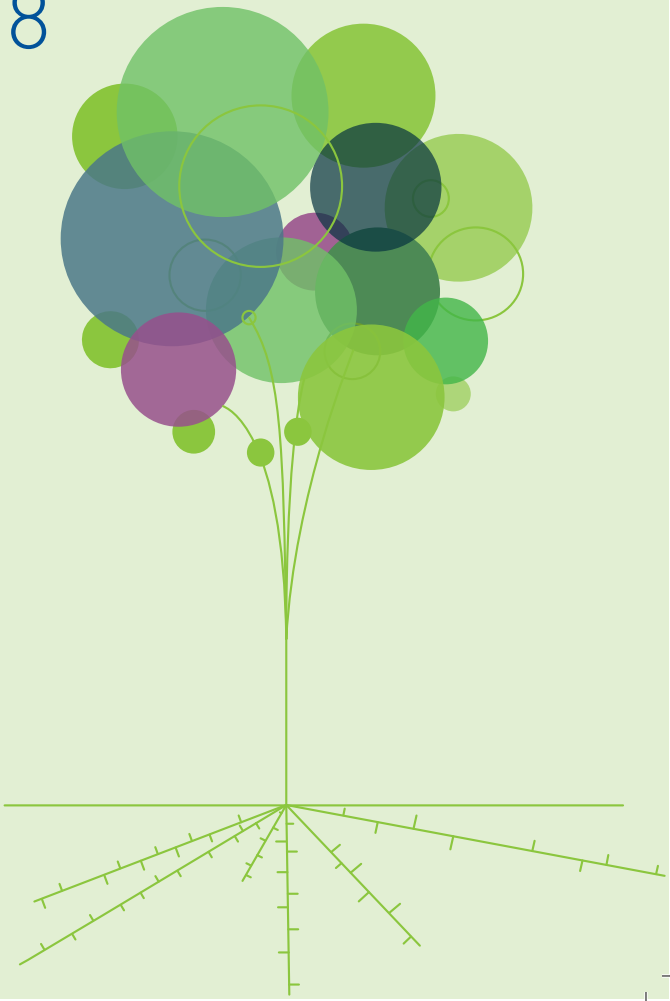
Universities UK

Strategic Plan 2013–2018



Introduction

Universities UK is the representative organisation for the UK's universities. It currently has 133 members, which collectively represent all of the universities in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Its primary role is to support its members in the achievement of their aims and objectives, and help maintain the world-leading strength of the UK university sector as a whole. It achieves this through lobbying and policy development, advocating and campaigning on behalf of the UK's universities, coordinating sector-wide engagement on major issues, and maintaining strong and proactive relationships with government, the private sector, the professions, and sector agencies.

The UK's universities are autonomous institutions, each with the freedom to determine its own priorities and mission. This is one of the sector's most important strengths, and one which UUK works to preserve. At the same time, there are areas where the coordinating role and single voice provided by UUK can enhance the strength of its individual members. UUK will identify and pursue opportunities for doing this over the next five years, as the higher education environment continues to change and evolve.

Universities are critical to economic growth, prosperity, innovation, cohesiveness, and social change, through the provision of world-class teaching and research. They are unique as institutions in combining global reach and influence with regional rootedness. A strong and flourishing university sector is essential to maintaining the UK's global economic and political influence, the creation of wealth, the promotion of social and civic goals, finding solutions to the grand challenges of the 21st century, and sustaining an open and democratic society.

Universities also generate private benefits for students and graduates. Individuals gain primarily from university provision in terms of a transformative educational experience, as well as enhanced employment opportunities and greater lifetime earnings. The high-level skills they acquire at university are essential not only for the future economy, but also for their own prosperity, wellbeing, and citizenship. Universities also act as engines of social mobility, and play a critical role in supporting equality and diversity in society.

By 2018 we want to see a thriving and diverse university sector whose teaching, scholarship and research are at the heart of the UK's economic growth, its cultural and social life, and its global reach and influence.

This strategic plan sets out UUK's aims and priorities for 2013 to 2018. It provides the overarching framework within which the organisation's annual activities will be planned, and its effectiveness monitored. While the strategic aims set out in the plan will not change over the next five years, the projects and priorities which underpin them will. UUK will therefore refresh the plan annually with a review of performance and a re-articulation of its immediate priorities.

Context and environment

The period since the development of the previous strategic plan (2010 to 2013) has witnessed substantial change for higher education across the UK. This has affected the balance between public and private funding for universities, changes to governance and regulation across all four countries, pressure on immigration and overseas activities, and the effects of the broader economic crisis being felt as income streams are squeezed. The next five years are likely to see severe continued pressure on public funding in the UK, increased social and technological change, further shifts in the global balance of power, and intensifying competition in the knowledge economy.

More locally, the General Election in 2015 will set the tone for the next phase of higher education policy in the domestic sphere, and will have a significant impact on UUK activities both up to and beyond the ballot. The current policy trajectory will continue in the meantime, with increased competition for resources, new universities and organisational forms to take account of, and a shifting pattern of regulatory architecture. The constitutional structure of the UK will evolve during the period of the plan, either in the form of further devolution or in the form of separation of the UK as currently constituted. This will require an appropriate response from UUK to adapt to new circumstances in a way which supports members' success.

At the same time there are many new opportunities for universities to extend their international reach, innovate in the design and delivery of high-quality education, develop new and sustainable sources of funding, redefine what it means to be a university, and place themselves at the centre of ever-more complex networks of institutions and agencies responsible for delivering social and public policy goals, as well as increased private benefits.

These significant changes to the external environment will increasingly require UUK to ensure that all of its work is strategic and effective, can demonstrably lead to a positive impact for its members, and that its resources are being deployed in the most efficient way.

Strategic aims 2013–2018

Universities UK's role and purpose

The primary aim of UUK is to support its member institutions in the achievement of their individual aims and objectives. The principal functions it carries out to achieve this are:

- policy development, advocacy, analysis, and research
- representing the sector, influencing, media, and political engagement
- providing information and services for members
- providing infrastructure services for the sector as a whole in specific areas

In delivering these services UUK will continue to be adaptable and flexible. It will be vocal and critical of policy where it needs to be, and will work collaboratively and constructively with government and other partners where it is in the interests of its members to do so. It will ensure the flexibility both to pursue long-term strategic projects, and to adapt to short-term policy priorities as necessary. It will be responsive to new opportunities, while preserving the strengths on which its past success and the success of its members have been built.

Over the next five years there are a number of themes which will be woven into UUK's aims and activities, and which UUK will seek to promote where possible. These are:

- the economic importance and influence of the UK's universities
- the value of a university education
- supporting university engagement with a changing global environment, including increasing engagement internationally and with Europe
- university interaction with other areas of public and civic life beyond higher education (including, for example, health and social care)
- taking a UK-wide approach, working across all four countries of the UK where relevant and appropriate

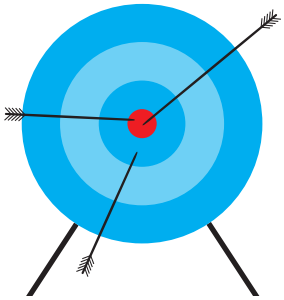
Strategic aims 2013–2018

Following consultation with members, staff, and other stakeholders, UUK has developed four strategic aims for the next five years. These are:

1. Inform and influence the future agenda for the UK university sector
2. Support universities in their primary aims of educating students, carrying out research and innovation, and strengthening civic society
3. Provide excellent services for UUK members and for the UK university sector as a whole
4. Be an effective and efficient organisation

Priorities and activities

The specific projects and activities that UUK will carry out in support of its strategic aims will be set out and updated each year in the Annual Operating Plan. These activities will change from year to year, with some areas becoming de-prioritised as new projects come on stream.



The broad priorities that will be pursued under each of the four strategic aims over the next five years are as follows:

1. Inform and influence the future agenda for the UK university sector

   Projects and activities under this aim will include long-term work on public funding and economic policy, the future of student funding, regulation, data management and transparency, the development of online learning and the impact of technology on higher education, global partnerships and collaborations, and UUK's ongoing data monitoring and analytical projects.

2. Support universities in their primary aims of educating students, carrying out research and innovation, and strengthening civic society

   Projects under this aim will include developing policy on research and innovation, short-term funding policy activity, social mobility and admissions policy, health and social care, security issues, the regulatory architecture, student and university engagement with the community, and internationalisation (including strengthening engagement with Europe). In these latter areas, UUK will continue to work closely with the UK Higher Education International Unit.

3 . Provide excellent services for UUK members and for the UK university sector as a whole

Work in this area will include development of the efficiency and modernisation projects, identifying and pursuing opportunities for delivering infrastructure services to the sector, carrying out market analysis to improve services to members, providing accurate and timely briefings and other communications to members, and delivering high-quality conferences and members' meetings.

4. Be an effective and efficient organisation

Activity under this aim underpins all others, and provides the foundation for the organisation's success. The significant changes in the external environment in which UUK operates will require the organisation itself to adapt to meet new pressures and demands, in order to demonstrate value for money and the positive impact of its work on behalf of members. UUK will ensure that it has robust financial management systems in place, that its resources are allocated and used efficiently, and that its IT systems are fit for purpose. It will also have in place effective policies for recruiting, retaining, and developing its staff, and for adapting to the workforce needs of the future. Finally, UUK will seek to promote environmental sustainability in all its activities, reduce its energy use, and maximise efficiency in the use of its physical resources.

Associated organisations

UUK is host to a number of other organisations with which it works closely. Primary among these are Universities Scotland and Higher Education Wales, both formally part of the same organisation and with broadly the same aims, but each pursuing its objectives within differing political and fiscal environments.

Where it is appropriate and there are clear opportunities to do so, UUK will seek to strengthen its UK-wide approach in all its activities. UUK will also continue to support diverse policy development in the different jurisdictions where this is the best way of serving members' interests. Further steps will also be taken to improve coordination and communication between London, Cardiff, and Edinburgh, where relevant.

UUK also has a particularly close working relationship with the UK Higher Education International Unit, which will continue to be strengthened during the life of this strategic plan. The two organisations share aims and resources in priority areas, and will work together on projects of mutual interest.

The following organisations also sit within UUK:

- The Higher Education Better Regulation Group
- The Council of Deans of Health
- The Medical Schools Council (and associated organisations)

UUK will continue to work closely with these partners in specific areas to maximise the potential for achieving shared outcomes on relevant issues, avoid duplication of activity, and improve efficiency.

Partnerships

UUK enjoys productive partnerships with a wide range of organisations. Chief amongst these are the sector agencies, with which UUK will continue work in close partnership on major issues affecting the sector. This includes ensuring effective representation of the sector through input at board level.

UUK will also work to maintain strong and positive working relationships with the sector professional bodies, the learned societies, major funders of higher education activity, and a wider range of think-tanks, agencies, and policy organisations involved in areas which are close to UUK's priorities.

Performance monitoring

UUK's performance against the strategic aims set out in this plan will be monitored on a yearly basis, reported to the UK Board, and published through an annual report. This will include updated information on changes to the projects and activities through which the aims of the plan will be achieved.

In monitoring its performance, UUK will use a variety of quantitative and qualitative measures which collectively reflect the full range of its aims and activities.

Universities UK

This publication has been produced by Universities UK, the representative organisation for the UK's universities. Founded in 1918, its mission is to be the definitive voice for all universities in the UK, providing high quality leadership and support to its members to promote a successful and diverse higher education sector. With 135 members and offices in London, Cardiff and Edinburgh, it promotes the strength and success of UK universities nationally and internationally.

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