

OXFORD'S ACADEMIC STRATEGY: GREEN PAPER

FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE

Notes

1. The questionnaire is available in pdf or Word format. If you are completing and returning the questionnaire electronically in Word format, please type your comments in the space beneath the grey line under "Comments:".
2. The form may be used by individuals or by bodies (boards, departments, colleges, committees etc) in submitting a response to this consultation.
3. Please either email or send a hard copy, of the completed questionnaire to:

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4. The main focus of this consultation in the strategy set out is part 3 of the Green Paper. The feedback questionnaire therefore asks for comments on each of the strategic paragraphs set out in that section. There is however a general section at the end of the questionnaire to enable respondents to make general observations, or raise points which significantly affect the analysis and arguments in section 2 of the Green Paper.
5. Please return the questionnaire to the address above by no later than **Monday 14 March** (HT 9th Week).

STRATEGY PROPOSALS

Strategy I: Research

- (a) Sustain global excellence where it exists by funding and otherwise supporting excellent units to continue to perform at the highest level.

Comments:

- (b) [Re-]establish global excellence in selected departments based on their research potential and the cost of realising that potential.

Comments:

- (c) Address the issue of low productivity through selective recruitment, re-balancing workloads, and staff development.

Comments:

- (d) Review under-performing departments and faculties and re-structure them where necessary.

Comments:

- (e) Promote interdisciplinary collaborations where they are likely to enhance the University's research impact.

Comments:

We welcome this observation and see it as a high priority, as indeed are interdisciplinary collaborations which promote good teaching practice.

We believe that collaborative research is assisted by ICT, not least through the collaborative e-research activities already taking place under the banner of e-Science. The development of virtual research environments which better enable interdisciplinary and cross-institutional collaborations are increasingly essential. Access management, resource discovery, and digital repository services, for example, are key components of virtual research or learning environments.

- (f) Recruit more scholars of the highest distinction and potential.

Comments:

As we have mentioned elsewhere we feel due emphasis should be given to the requirements necessary to *retain* staff also. Provision of excellent services for the research and teaching community is clearly one major aspect.

- (g) Improve research infrastructure and the efficiency with which it is used.

Comments:

We believe that research infrastructure will be improved through, for example, the provision of integrated online systems which enable project planning, research costing, and project management; the development of managed, collaborative virtual research environments to support inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional research; and the deployment of wireless networks throughout the campus. Currently, a significant amount of the funding for developing of virtual research environments originates from external sources. This arrangement will not be sustainable should existing projects migrate to services.

Strategy II: Teaching

- (a) Stimulate the creation of new undergraduate learning environments that retain the distinctive characteristics of an Oxford education but reduce staff teaching loads.

Comments:

Innovation in teaching and learning should be encouraged, and we would like to see a promotion of blended learning (predominantly face to face, but with an element of online learning as appropriate). A common theme throughout the strategy is the reduction of work for staff, especially in administrative processes. As we have said elsewhere we feel that well-built and properly supported IT systems can greatly assist in this.

- (b) Increase flexibility in the allocation of teaching duties.

Comments:

- (c) Establish disciplinary programmes of Preparation for Academic Practice under which graduate students and contract research staff can acquire the skills to teach and are given the opportunity to do so in their departments and faculties and in their colleges (through subject families and by other means).

Comments: We welcome this but feel that emphasis should also be given to emerging skills requirements and skills profiling (through such things as Personal Development Plans). Graduates preparing for academic practice must be training for the future, not the present, and we would suggest there is a strong emphasis on e-learning and e-research here, drawing on resources throughout the University.

- (d) Ensure that graduate studies is embedded as a core activity of the Collegiate University, with colleges offering high quality academic as well as social benefits to their graduate students.

Comments:

- (e) Develop methods to evaluate changes in undergraduate and graduate learning environments and to reward successful changes at both individual and departmental level.

Comments: Any evaluation needs to be longitudinal. IT solutions that support such surveys and analysis of feedback should be made centrally available. The key here is also in rewarding good practice and allowing teaching staff time to explore innovative ways of teaching and to share good practice. We see OUCS as being a vital component here as more lecturers look to e-learning solutions. We would also suggest an annual 'teachers' conference' along the lines of the IT Support Staff or Librarians' conferences to share best practice.

- (f) Support the sharing of good practice between colleges in learning and teaching.

Comments: This objective may be facilitated by the promotion and use of central cohesive systems such as WebLearn. This presents a single point of contact for staff and students and will give an holistic view of what is available. Staff should be

encouraged to make all their teaching material available to other Oxford academics via such systems, and discouraged from creating individual environments at a personal, college, or department level. The University should promote a seamless environment for staff and students that is accessible anytime, anyplace, and anyhow. We also see this as supporting the need for an institutional learning object repository that is easy for all to use and access. See also reply to 6(b).

- (g) Review part-time and other flexible forms of provision in the context of the growing regional, national and international demand for continuing personal and professional development.

Comments:

Strategy III: Size and Shape

- (a) Return to the historical overall growth rate from the currently elevated level.

Comments:

- (b) Increase PGR numbers and numbers on PGT programmes which prepare students for doctoral or professional work, subject always to the maintenance of the highest standards of admission and provision.

Comments:

- (c) Gradually decrease undergraduate numbers over a five-year period then plateau out, so that teaching loads can be reduced whilst maintaining the quality of learning.

Comments:

- (d) Set specific targets for full-time undergraduate and graduate student numbers, on a rolling basis with annual review, to reflect academic expectations.

Comments:

- (d) Respond to opportunities to develop part-time provision, subject to the quality of that provision being consistent with Oxford's priorities.

Comments:

Strategy IV: Personnel

- (a) Adopt more active and flexible recruitment and retention practices, including new models of academic appointments (such as Graduate Teaching Assistantships).

Comments:

The Green Paper places emphasis on the ability of the University to attract and retain academic staff, particularly in sections 2.1, 3.1(c) and 3.4. We believe it is unfortunate that mention of other types of University employee (whether academic-related or otherwise) are omitted from the Green Paper. We strongly believe that the Academic Strategy should recognise the dedication and contribution of all staff, whatever their job description, as key contributors to the development of the collegiate University.

We note that the University's Human Resources Strategy, "supports the fundamental aim of the University's mission, namely to achieve and sustain excellence in all areas of its teaching and research, by focusing on the need to recruit, retain, and reward staff of the highest calibre in *all employment groups*, and to foster the motivation, morale, and continued development of such staff."(2.1, emphasis added). And further, "The strategy has been developed in recognition of the following key factors: [...] the important role played by **all** university staff in enabling the institution to achieve its mission and the need to tailor approaches to becoming an employer of choice appropriately in respect of each staff group." (3.4, original emphasis).

- (b) Apply more rigorous appointment standards and tenure criteria for new appointees.

Comments:

- (c) Introduce a mandatory system of regular, joint University-college review of individual contributions, with scope to enhance financial rewards, re-balance academic duties, and address under-performance.

Comments:

- (d) Create more time for research by reducing administrative burdens and teaching obligations, consistent with the maintenance of excellent student learning.

Comments:

IT systems offer the potential to streamline the administrative process and the flow of information. The administrative needs of academics and departments should be analysed and appropriate solutions brought in according to a strategic plan, and not developed individually on an ad hoc basis. Increasingly the emerging University IT architecture will require interoperability between enterprise systems. Conformance with appropriate open technical standards should be mandated. See further VI (c).

- (e) Take a pro-active approach to equal opportunities and career development.

Comments:

- (f) Review academic career progression and the use of titles.

Comments:

- (g) Consider ways of integrating contract research staff (CRS) more fully into the collegiate University, as part of a general initiative to improve CRS management and career development.

Comments:

We believe that the Academic Strategy should consider ways of integrating all academic-related staff more fully into the collegiate University. We also note that staff on short-term or open ended externally-funded research related contracts may be found within academic services as well as within academic departments.

Strategy V: Admissions

- (a) Improve accessibility by co-ordinating domestic access efforts across the collegiate University, setting appropriate targets for applications for under-represented groups.

Comments:

- (b) Implement a vigorous programme of international recruitment and expand domestic recruitment.

Comments:

- (c) Ensure that the best applicants are admitted, irrespective of origin, circumstances, and college choice.

Comments:

- (d) Introduce a greatly enhanced undergraduate bursary scheme and expand provision for graduate scholarships and student support.

Comments:

- (e) Establish public confidence in the access and admissions processes.

Comments:

Strategy VI: Services

- (a) Increase the responsiveness of OULS to readers' needs, with greatly expanded access to electronic resources and well located physical collections.

Comments:

- (b) Reduce the cost of delivering a high-quality library service by concentrating onto a smaller number of sites and investing in lower-cost, high-density, depository storage.

Comments:

In parallel with the creation of physical storage we would wish to re-iterate the need for the co-ordinated development of a University-wide digital repository architecture for the accessioning, curation, storage, and preservation of the University's intellectual assets in digital form.

- (c) Provide high-quality and cost-effective IT services and training that meet the needs of the University and its members.

Comments:

We welcome this statement. We note that the Academic Strategy concerns itself primarily with the research, teaching and learning aspects of the collegiate University together with the associated administrative processes. We believe that ICT infrastructure underpins research, teaching, learning and administration within the collegiate University. The development of the Academic Strategy offers the opportunity to state as a matter of principle that ICT is considered essential to the core business operations of the University.

The review of OUCS chaired by Professor Clary and completed in January 2004 agreed that OUCS was rightly the primary provider of ICT services in the University and that the expert resources available in OUCS could be even more effectively utilised by the University.

We acknowledge that the strategic ICT needs of the collegiate University should be better defined and that ICT matters should have a greater prominence in the governance structure. We believe that the Academic Strategy offers opportunities to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the development, deployment and support of ICT systems and services throughout the collegiate University.

The collegiate University would benefit from a seamless and coherent information environment which enabled communication and access to resources by staff and students when and from wherever required. Components of the Oxford digital information environment already identified in the OUCS Vision include:

- The development of an information architecture specifying the standards required for interoperability and integration of enterprise-wide systems, including for managed learning or virtual research environments;
- The deployment of a wireless network across the University and the taking advantage of pervasive broadband services to assist flexible working arrangements;
- The deployment of centralised authentication and authorisation services;
- The provision of University-wide storage infrastructure;
- Developing processes to enable the migration of projects to services.

As the primary provider of University-wide ICT infrastructure, OUCS has the potential to work even more closely with departments and colleges to develop more effective centralised support for desktop, server and local network provision.

We believe that ICT services should be encouraged to develop flexible models of operation which includes a culture of innovation and the means by which innovation might flow into new or existing services.

- (d) Foster innovation, best practice, and value for money in the use of IT in teaching, learning, and research across the University.

Comments:

We agree that all three aspects are essential to the provision of ICT services across the collegiate University. In the experience of OUCS innovation can often be driven through projects funded from external sources which, for example, pilot leading-edge technologies and/or address specific ICT strategic objectives. Best practice, within the context of ICT, often means establishing and conforming with relevant technical standards. Value for money, whilst difficult to quantify, may often be measured through the analysis and response to user requirements.

A key criterion for the success of the three aspects in total is ensuring a co-ordinated approach to ICT provision throughout the collegiate University. As mentioned elsewhere we agree the need for a co-ordinated and coherent ICT infrastructure which enables the seamless joining-up of processes associated with research, teaching, learning and administration. ICT, for example, can assist in the transfer of research outcomes into the learning process, but only if enabled by interoperable systems and repositories. A consistent level of service provision can be provided to the individual user but only if a unified and standards-based approach is taken to network, server and desktop support.

- (e) Further develop the museums and collections as a research, educational and cultural resource for the University and the wider world.

Comments:

- (f) Review service provision across the collegiate University from a student perspective with a view to enhancing the quality of student life.

Comments:

We recognise that this is a valid aim, but feel the tenor of the overall report failed to capture why this is important, or how it can be assessed or achieved. The focus of the report is primarily at an academic and institutional level. We observe that comparable universities have prioritised the development of student portals enabling seamless access to the variety of relevant online services within and beyond the institution. We believe that open and efficient access to, for example, personal data, calendar

applications, and financial aid will become increasingly important for students, together with other forms of pervasive computing (e.g. Wireless networking).

- (g) Ensure that more efficient use is made of space and other resources.

Comments:

Strategy VII: Finance

- (a) Achieve significant annual cost savings through improvements to core administrative processes and by utilising the benefits of scale.

Comments:

Integrated online systems would enable efficiency gains through the deprecation of paper-based processes. We agree that further centralisation of support for the development and maintenance of ICT infrastructure will be necessary in order to achieve this, together with appropriate standardisation.

- (b) Use the Strategic Reserve Fund for the University's highest priority strategic development initiatives, rather than as a reserve for recurrent activities.

Comments:

- (c) Release substantial sums from the balance sheet to support academic investment.

Comments:

- (d) Maximise the recovery of overheads from research contracts.

Comments:

- (e) Review investment management processes against best practice.

Comments:

- (f) Develop the collegiate University's fundraising protocols and the fundraising organisation to support a step-change in activity.

Comments:

- (g) Ensure capital projects bring with them requisite levels of external equity to relieve immediate pressures on the University's balance sheet.

Comments:

- (h) Continue to use the Capital Fund as primary security for debt drawn down to fund the University's share of priority capital projects.

Comments:

- (i) Develop the University's budget model to incorporate capital and financial planning and budgeting alongside operational planning and budgeting.

Comments:

Strategy VIII: Planning and Management

- (a) Adopt an organisational structure which strikes an appropriate balance between inclusiveness, decisiveness, responsiveness, accountability and effectiveness.

Comments:

- (b) Address the Lambert agenda so that Oxford is in a position, within the two years now left, to 'agree with the Government what further steps will be necessary for [Oxford] to sustain [its] global position'.

Comments:

- (c) Create a unified and streamlined system of management and administration and re-engineer business processes to reduce bureaucratic burdens.

Comments:

- (d) Ensure that Divisions and other University bodies construct five-year plans within the framework of the Corporate Plan, that these plans are reconciled with one another and with the needs of the colleges, and that final approval is given to agreed plans by Council.

Comments:

- (e) Review the Corporate and Divisional Plans annually and re-write them every three years.

Comments:

- (f) Redesign the EPSC and Divisional review system to mesh with the new planning cycle, such that it is structured around the delivery of the academic strategy and is minimally burdensome consistent with fitness for purpose.

Comments:

- (g) Enable colleges to extend their participation in the planning process beyond signing off on student number policy.

Comments:

- (h) Introduce a Joint Resource Allocation Method to align internal incentives behind the delivery of the academic strategy.

Comments:

- (i) Improve internal communications by publication on the intranet of discussion documents on major issues, summaries of committee business, and approved divisional plans.

Comments:

We welcome this proposal and express our desire that such documents should be as widely available across the collegiate University as possible in order to encourage transparency and the involvement of all staff in the planning processes of the University.

Strategy IX: External Relations

- (a) Communicate to external audiences Oxford's continued success, under very difficult circumstances, its determination to enhance its international standing, and its ability to do so.

Comments:

- (b) Demonstrate, in particular, that Oxford will meet the Lambert criteria.

Comments:

- (c) Ensure that high quality arrangements are in place for keeping alumni engaged in the lift of the Collegiate University.

Comments:

- (d) Promote innovation and knowledge transfer for public and private benefit through the use of departmental champions and by other means.

Comments:

- (e) Enable departments and faculties to build research and teaching collaborations nationally and internationally.

Comments:

- (f) Create an international strategy for the collegiate University to facilitate the delivery of the Corporate Plan and to defend and build its existing reputation.

Comments:

- (g) Produce component strategies for countries, regions and/or continents which integrate relevant academic interests, institutional collaborations, research and teaching partnerships, work on innovation and knowledge transfer, continuing professional development, student recruitment, and fundraising.

Comments:

Strategy X: General Observations

General Observations and Summary of Key Points

We welcome the opportunity to be able to comment on the Green paper. On the whole we think the strategy presents some very positive and encouraging points. However we feel it misses some opportunities or glosses over key areas:

1. We strongly believe that the Academic Strategy should recognise the dedication and contribution of all staff, whatever their job description, as key contributors to the development of the collegiate University. Moreover that it should consider ways of integrating **all** academic-related staff more fully into the collegiate University.
2. The Green Paper, as it stands, does not define the essence, values or ethos of the University which gives Oxford its unique identity and from which a number of principles might be developed to inform the choices and priorities identified in the Academic Strategy.
3. Although it lays down many recommendations, analyses the current position, and compares with other institutions; it does not present an overall vision for the collegiate university nor the principles behind the recommendations within the paper. For example:
 - a. In 91(b) it states we will establish global excellence in selected departments, but based on which principles?
 - b. It does not specify explicitly whether we are looking for competitive advantage;
 - c. It does not set out principles for collaboration with industry
 - d. It does not set out principles for partnerships with other Universities (e.g. Princeton)
 - e. It does not specify principles against which we can decide whether proposed benefactions are appropriate for the University
 - f. It does not set principles for determining how the needs of the collegiate university determine the services offered by the central providers, nor for determining the appropriate resources needed to do this.
4. We feel that ICT infrastructure underpins research, teaching, learning and administration within the collegiate University. The development of the Academic Strategy offers the opportunity to state as a matter of principle that ICT is considered essential to the core business operations of the University. We would like to see this made more explicit.
5. The Academic Strategy should offer an opportunity to state and thereby ensure a co-ordinated approach to the development, deployment and support of ICT systems and services throughout the collegiate University.

6. We feel that the collegiate University would benefit from a seamless and coherent information environment which enabled communication and access to resources by staff and students when and from wherever required.

7. We believe that open and efficient access to, for example, personal data, calendar applications, and financial aid will become increasingly important for students, together with other forms of pervasive computing (e.g. Wireless networking).

8. Finally, we feel that IT systems offer the potential to streamline the administrative process and the flow of information. The administrative needs of academics and departments should be analysed and appropriate solutions brought in according to a strategic plan, and not developed individually on an ad hoc basis.