

## **The Green Paper – senior management’s strategic plans for Sussex 2008-2015 (executive summary)**

Tuesday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, the University’s Council met for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time this year, and was this time presented with the University management’s Strategic Plan – the Green Paper. In Autumn of last year, the University management set out a timetable to create a new strategic plan for the period 2008-2015. Following discussion with the academic community and a series of questions put to us by the VC titled *Describing the Preferred Future*, a series of papers were produced by the management. Paul Layzell, Deputy VC, is the author of this series of papers which, according to the document, “set out the university’s ambition and preferred future.”

- The first part of the Green Paper deals with the feedback that was received from the academic community after the VC’s questions.
- The “Issues” part of the Paper deals with the “tension between top-down versus a bottom-up approach”, international aspirations, “excellence in all our activities”, “cross-cutting research themes”, creative students, flexible forms of teaching, “student demand”, “resource deployment and selectivity”, infrastructure, the University’s “brand and reputation” and the issue of academic structures. All these issues have informed the further drawing up of the proposals.
- The Paper then moves on to dealing with the mission statement, which is, according to the document, in need of reviewing, since a “step change in performance” must be sought. What these terms, as well as the recurring theme of “excellence” mean, remains however unclear. What emerges from the consultation process, Layzell writes, are three concepts – “innovation”, “internationalisation” and “impact”. In other words, an international student body, global engagement through teaching and research, and employable students to “make an effective contribution to society”.
- Under “Research and Scholarship”, the document explains how Sussex has to adjust to a government research funding policy “in which there is much greater selectivity”. In recent years, a lot of controversy amongst academics in Britain has arisen out of the fact that as a result of a neoliberal agenda the government is concentrated its funding in larger, more concentrated units. The idea that came out of the government’s 2004 White Paper for HE is that “Universities need to compete in the world market”, and the best way this is thought to be achieved is through the creation of a small number of super-universities, since only the best Universities can contain a “critical mass of research groups” that are able to compete globally. Down one level, in Sussex’s Green Paper, there is similar talk of the “creation of critical mass in research excellence, through the realignment of resources into areas of research strength”, in order to be able to compete more effectively for research funding – resource selectivity as a result of resource selectivity. Hand in hand with this are the emerging “cross-cutting research themes”, which will be used to align research and build “critical mass”. The “emerging” themes, as they are inventions of the management, not academics, are Heritage, Security, Mind and Brian, Global Transformations.

- The “Teaching and Learning” section will most directly affect us as students, although of course there is an interesting relationship, especially here at Sussex, between teaching and research. Here, the underlying rationale is that of the “rational student”, in the free-market sense – “students are paying customers who are offered increasing choice and flexibility”. Once again, the logic of competition becomes apparent – in order to compete with other Universities Sussex needs to shift from a “*selecting* to a *recruiting* culture”. For instance, to meet “student demand and expectations”, the curriculum needs to be revised through new programmes of business and management, creative arts, international security and biomedicine.
- The most controversial point comes under point 40. Here, it says that despite reforms, the Sussex curriculum is too complex “either because of too many electives or because programmes are determined by staff preference and expertise rather than subject/student need.” According to the document, the undergraduate curriculum needs to be simplified, where levels 1 and 2 are standard and can be taught by different members of the department, with specialisation only confined to levels 3 and 4. Also, students can in the future boost their CV with *SussexPlus*, a scheme set up to “recognise student achievement outside the immediate curriculum”.
- On a more positive note, the management recognises the outcomes of the latest National Student Survey and notes the need for increased flexibility in teaching and learning, as well as improved infrastructure – i.e. IT services and the Library. The recently introduced Library opening hours, welcomed by many students, can be seen in this light. Finally, it seems that Sussex is looking to open educational facilities abroad, for international students in their home countries.
- Under “Enterprise and Third Mission”, the University seeks to develop the profile of Sussex as an institution to the wider world, by developing ways to generate income through the sale of intellectual property, public engagement (i.e. through the media), re-development of the Gardner Arts Centre and student volunteering through *SussexPlus*.
- The “People” section deals with the way staff are treated in the future. The University wishes to “become the employer of choice for the employee of choice”. This also means selectivity in resource allocation, so that “staff development opportunities focus in areas where benefit can be derived for the University community as a whole”. The focus here tends towards training certain members of staff to become line-managers, whilst funding is retracted for staff who wish to engage in a less “effective” activity.
- An “effective performance management system” must ensure that “staff have a clear understanding of their personal goals within the context of the University’s overall mission and goals”.
- Finally, the University is keen to “embrace a *lifestyle* approach”, focusing on staff and student health and well-being, in order to improve the staff and student experience.
- The final sections of the Green Paper are respectively “Sustainability”, “Partnership” and “Governance, Leadership and Management”. Basically, the University needs to expand existing Business and Management Activity, and since the Higher Education

Funding Council for England sets the amount of home students the University can take in, the number of students from other disciplines needs to be brought into the former. Money can then afterwards be re-allocated to other disciplines, but only if “sufficient additional surplus” is generated from Business and Management. Moreover, all income-generating units must make a minimum surplus (shall we say profit) of 4% on turnover in the future. The profit principle is here readily apparent.

- In “Partnerships”, we see the need for realigning academic activity with the corporate sector and other Universities. An example that is given is the Rolls Royce University Technology Centre.
- The final section deals with governance. It is claimed that recent changes in governance at Sussex have led to “a refocusing of University activity, improved morale and a greater sense of partnership working”. Senate is to maintain the central role in academic governance, but must make effective and efficient decisions, which may very well mean cutting down. Finally, Sussex must start developing its own leaders and become a provider of leadership to other Universities, since this will have a positive impact on Sussex’s brand and reputation and will improve effective decision making.
- The *Strategic Plan* is to generate \$42m between now and 2011, the “step change” proposed by the management. The University is looking to increase the number of students with an additional 2000, of which 1000 from overseas, in order to generate further income.
- A 5 year Operational Plan will be developed to guide the implementation of the strategic plan from the top-down, which will determine how money is to be spent.