Report of the Environmental Sub Committee

This note sets out the areas in which the Bursars Environmental Sub Committee proposes to examine and make recommendations for Colleges on the main matters within its remit. It has been drafted as a discussion paper for the Committee, but it might also form a briefing note (amended as the Committee wishes) to go to the Bursars Committee next term by way of report.

The potential breadth of the field is enormous. This is borne out by the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (“SDGs”) which cover a range of social and economic development issues including energy, poverty, education, global warming, environment, social justice, gender equality. Colleges will certainly have an interest in many of these and will be able to contribute in such ways as they feel appropriate, most obviously through contributions to education and research.

College communities are also seeking on a local and operational level to act sustainably. There is much grassroots engagement led and coordinated by environmental and green committees. These are at their most effective where there are day-to-day actions which can be easily communicated and adopted by College members, for example in the area of recycling. Further, existing College collaborations are delivering sustainability improvements, for example in relation to clean energy purchasing (our Scope 1 & Scope 2 emissions), and the sourcing food and other supplies from local and/or sustainable suppliers.

The Committee has identified that its core activity should be to assist Colleges to collaborate where sustainability can only be, or will be best achieved, at scale, and that this work should focus on addressing the major climate change challenge of decarbonisation of our direct (Scope 1) emissions. In the main these relate the heating of Colleges’ buildings, where the options for decarbonising are complicated by technical solutions which are constantly evolving, by high capital costs, by the obligations in relation to historic buildings and sensitive sites, and by the need for Colleges largely to operate year round without interruption.

Two key assumptions are that gas will need to be substantially removed, and that offsetting of emissions will only be considered as a last resort.

While each College will need to develop plans for its particular circumstances and estate, the Committee proposes to establish a framework or toolkit to assist and guide such planning. This will consist of the following components:

1. A methodology to support Colleges in setting Science Based Targets (“SBTs”). This process will cover gathering baseline data, determining efficiency improvements, student engagement, fostering behavioural change, monitoring, and setting and measuring against targets;

2. A standardized approach to reporting and publishing data

3. A template of a College Energy Strategy, addressing the sourcing, storing & distributing electricity, and its efficient use, with guidance on the necessary financial analyses of measures proposed – costs, savings, and payback;
4. The establishment of a **collaboration forum** in which groups of Colleges might explore collective approaches to decarbonising, and to encourage consideration of joint solutions (for example networks of ground source heat pumps);

5. A **database** of case studies and exemplars, and of known and tested professional or technical advisers and suppliers, for Colleges to draw on;

6. The development a **single collegiate sustainability/decarbonisation statement** and of **communication materials** to align, educate and inform our communities, and in particular to show where College members need to support initiatives through behavioural change, and in contrast where College need to accept the need for infrastructure investment.

The University is well advanced in relation to SBT’s and its Energy Strategy, with detailed studies being undertaken of gas use and of energy and carbon reduction opportunities. The Committee will stay linked in with the University’s sustainability programmes and explore where University/Colleges collaboration will be advantageous.

Transport represents the other area of material College Scope 1 emissions.Whilst priority will be given to the estate-related decarbonising the Committee will look to establish a similar framework/tool kit to support colleges on the decarbonising of their vehicle fleets.

The scale of the decarbonising challenge is daunting and, with the timescale required for achieving it, the need for ambition, good data and planning, investment, and stamina, is self-evident. To achieve the desirable collaboration we might usefully ask ourselves what we would do if all or groups of Colleges (and particularly our buildings) were under single control, and then work to ensure that the outcomes we do achieve through collaboration are no less successful or more expensive than if this were the case.

JTD

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