

**The University of Southampton  
Bridging Strategy:  
Imagination and Flexibility for a  
Remarkable Future**

# **The University of Southampton Bridging Strategy:**

## **Imagination and Flexibility for a Remarkable Future**

### **Introduction**

The Bridging Strategy is a response to the continuing health, economic and social uncertainties of COVID-19. It reaffirms what matters most to the University in the long-term whilst recognising the pressing need for agile decisions in the short-term. Guiding principles are set out in the strategy to support us all as we move forward over the coming year.

### **Section 1: Our mission is to change the world for the better**

The University of Southampton is and will remain an exceptional place where people achieve remarkable things. As we navigate the health and economic shockwaves of COVID-19 the relevance of our mission is brought into sharp focus. Both our mission and long-term ambitions remain unchanged.

Over the next year and beyond, as a university community our ways of living and working will continue to be altered by COVID, but exactly how is unclear. In response it will be important to hold on to what matters most, draw on and draw out our community spirit, and commit to keep moving forward towards the key objectives of our vision.

This short-term strategy provides the bridge for moving the University forward by reaffirming what matters to guide our decisions and actions over the coming year. It builds on feedback from the strategy consultation at the start of 2020, where you said our mission was rightly aspirational, stressing the need to act decisively, communicating with students and staff openly. There will be some tough decisions ahead and our commitment must be to act to secure the future position of the University, with all of us understanding what is happening and why. Drawing on our collective knowledge, expertise and experience as we adapt to change will make us stronger. A university that thinks smarter and really adapts will come out ahead.

Our mission has not changed, but how we take it forward needs to be flexible and imaginative. We will continue to invest in the experience of students and their outcomes, and in our staff where possible to strengthen our educational and research excellence and its global impact, and provide an environment in which all can thrive. We will aim to play a pivotal role as a leading UK Civic University in driving the recovery of the 'greater' Southampton area. We should not view the next year as a holding position from which we then retreat to old practices, unless they remain fit for purpose and best in class. By setting out what matters this strategy will help us answer that question as we shape the 'new normal' together.

## **Section 2: The changing context for the coming year**

We remain ambitious about transforming lives. Students face anxiety and uncertainty about their future and we will support them to have an inclusive, excellent experience. We will support one another in order to continue the world-leading research and enterprise that aids economic recovery, that tackles major health, social and environmental challenges. We remain committed to developing people's talents and skills. The reach of our ambitions extends from the local community to the global. To change the world for the better we need to focus both on how to help others and one another. These features make us a world-class university: they will endure and guide us as we respond to the uncertain course of the pandemic and recession.

Pragmatism as well as ambition is needed to chart a way forward because the short-term could see unprecedented pressure on our finances. We are in a position of relative strength, but will need to act decisively and with agility. Students and staff across the entire University have demonstrated in response to COVID that together we can respond with creativity and skill to learn online and work in remote ways. It is a new way of working that accelerates our sustainability agenda and we must learn from this so that the positives are built on. As One Southampton, further changes to how we learn and work will need to be developed. We are strengthened by being a diverse community and an inclusive response is required: checking in with each other to learn from and respond together to our real-time experiences.

## **Section 3: What Matters Most**

### **The safety and wellbeing of students and staff**

The University has always cared deeply about the health, safety and wellbeing of its students and staff. The pandemic means this is now more than ever of paramount importance; it has been and will continue to be the first consideration that underpins our decisions and actions. The University is at the forefront of the testing programme designed to help us find ways to return to our daily lives as safely as possible.

With physical distancing likely to be in place for some time, we must ensure there are safe, connected and agile means of learning and working. We have acted quickly to set this up and commit to continually learn from the reflections of students, colleagues and external partners as together we adapt to the changing world. Everyone should be trusted to solve problems as we work this through.

To ensure our response remains robust we will consult you on the University's risk assessment. This will then be reviewed with you. Student and staff surveys will be conducted to capture how the transition to new safe, supported ways of learning and working are progressing. We commit to remaining vigilant about safety and supporting the wellbeing of everyone.

## **Section 4: Principles**

### **People Matter**

People matter because collectively they are the University and drive our success. Motivation, talents, and creativity are core to our endeavours to change the world for the better by achieving remarkable things through the creation of new knowledge, insights, developing people, educating others, innovations, enterprise, partnerships and collaborations, all supported by value adding systems and services.

What matters is enabling people to realise their potential. It has always been understood that this requires a fair, equitable and mutually supportive learning and working environment. It matters that we act continually to ensure the University is supportive and inclusive of everyone. A commitment to uphold and progress equality and diversity is a vital underpinning of this strategy.

To support academic excellence in education and research we need to continuously improve and modernise our people and practices. This is why the development of the flexible employment deal, striving for consistency and quality in professional services, and management development training for staff are all important features of the year ahead.

Together we need to build on the diversity of our global community to progress supportive ways of living, learning and working. Our solutions need to be mindful of the world we want to live in, with the 'new normal' informed by the whole community identifying what works and what needs to be improved. Collectively and individually we must commit to actions and behaviours that enable everyone to thrive.

It matters to us that the outcome of our work impacts positively on the health and prosperity of people beyond the University. We will therefore work increasingly in partnership with the City and local community to address its needs, whilst remaining committed to our global connectivity and reach.

Excellence will be achieved through recognising the value of every individual. We will therefore check our progress through staff and student surveys. The results will be shared openly to encourage everyone to take personal responsibility for the success of an inclusive, world-leading University.

### **Excellence of Education and the Student Experience Matters**

Uncertainty is unsettling, especially for students making life transitions at this time. It matters to us that we respond with agility to students' needs, innovating to ensure their experience is excellent, and they are supported to progress to employment or further study. This matters to us, wherever our students are studying: at one of our UK or international campuses, online or on a placement.

We remain committed to providing a breadth of high quality, research-led education and will act to ensure the curriculum and its delivery support equality and inclusion. The current context will act as a catalyst to reappraise how greater inclusivity and fairness can be driven through the curriculum.

We are confident of delivering excellent education in a new and innovative blended face-to-face and online pedagogy. As the effects of the recession materialise, we will build on our excellent track record of supporting student employability.

We will remain globally connected through our curriculum and partnerships. At the same time, we will strive to further enhance our civic role. We are proudly local and commit to developing our work with schools, employers and the local community to find education-led solutions to the most pressing social, economic and health needs.

We aim to have a blended offer for all degree programmes embedded in the next academic year. KPIs will focus on students' experience of the learning environment, with a commitment to act to deliver excellent satisfaction and success.

### **Excellence of Research and Enterprise Matters**

It matters that our research is of the highest international quality and is distinctively interdisciplinary in order to address society's greatest challenges. It matters to us that we continue to develop the next generation of research leaders and it remains important to maintain a strong enterprise ecosystem. These are all enduring factors that have and will continue to drive our strategy; COVID-19 brings into sharp focus that a strong, diverse research base is essential to our future health and that innovation will be key to stimulating the economy as it suffers the aftershocks of the pandemic.

We must act strategically to identify new opportunities and continue to trailblaze to achieve remarkable things. Maintaining our strength in tackling the global challenges of future energy needs, sustainable cities, disease prevention and treatment, security, and those UN sustainable development goals that map onto our expertise will be important, as will continuing to understand our culture and society as it responds to an evolving context. Our research will remain global in terms of its reach, impact and partnerships.

These ambitions remain true against the disruptions of not only COVID, but also the ending of the Brexit transition period. We commit to working together to manage these disruptions, nurturing both globally significant research and the talent pipeline of the next generation of researchers.

We will seek to increase industry and community collaborations to support enterprise and innovation in the city and region, using our civic role to both stimulate the economy and reduce regional inequalities exacerbated by COVID and the recession.

The key to maintaining our momentum will be a skilled, diverse and supported workforce. We trust teams at all levels to identify and share their experience of what works well and what could be improved. Together we can build a picture of how to continually improve, ensuring our research and enterprise culture enables us to achieve our aims. We will check progress through the number of research applications and awards made and papers published over the next 12 months and retain our focus on completing a successful and compelling REF submission. Research and enterprise income will act as the KPIs.

### **Sustainability Matters**

Environmental sustainability is core to our mission and it matters that we build on the momentum we have generated to support the UN sustainable development goals and the University's long-term

ambition of net zero carbon emissions by 2030. This is why a separate environmental strategy with associated KPIs will be launched later in 2020. Capturing and applying the lessons learnt from how we are adapting to digitally-supported ways of learning and working will help make the University a global leader in environmental sustainability.

Financial sustainability matters because we must be able to invest in the dual excellence of education and research in order to thrive and realise our mission. There will be unprecedented income pressures that are likely to extend beyond the next year and we must take action. Standing still to ride out the COVID storm and banking on the economy bouncing back quickly is not a responsible option. Our next steps will be made from a position of relative strength, meaning whilst there must be mitigating action to address revenue loss there will also continue to be investment in the University's future.

The financial decisions we make next will support our long-term priorities, with investment continuing to: enhance the student experience; strengthen our research capacity; support wellbeing; and the development of technology and the physical environment. The exact financial response to each of these will again need to adapt. For example, there will be heightened investment in digitally-enabled ways of learning and working, both as a response to the current environment and because it accelerates action on environmental sustainability.

You deserve candour, which is why it needs to be signalled that controlling costs whilst revenue falls is inescapable. Tough decisions will always seek to protect what makes us a world-leading university committed to excellence.

We will check progress on financial sustainability against the KPI of net cashflow in 2020/21.

## **Concluding Statement**

This strategy deliberately covers a short time period of 12-18 months. Once we are through the current period of disruption and uncertainty we will reassess the progress made to advance our common purpose and ambitions. Together we will capture the lessons from our evolving environment and ways of working, asking what further adaptation is necessary to enable everyone to thrive in a safe, supportive and inclusive University. As now, we must keep asking how we can help others and one another - that really matters.

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