Sent: 30 September 2019 12:50
To: Haf Merrifield
Cc: Daniel Tilley; Emily Bateman
Subject: University Strategy

Dear Haf

Let me introduce myself. I am an alum (Civil Engineering 1976) and, among other activities with the university, chair the Sports Board and sit on the V-C's Campaign Transition Group.

I am keen to respond to the strategy consultation but get an error message telling me that I have to use a business email address. A little tricky as I no longer work in business!

The main comment(s) that I want to make relate to the importance of enhancing the student experience in terms of access to sport, the arts and other extra curricula activities. These will be in the context of both the Health & Wellbeing agenda and Employability.

Regards

Sent: 29 September 2019 21:13
To: BR-scu
Cc: Haf Merrifield; Andrew Long
Subject: White Paper Consultation

Dear Strategic Change Unit

I tried to send my feedback online, but I think the comments box has a limit to the word count, therefore I've attached a word file with my thoughts.

Thank you for the chance to comment.

Please come back to me if you wish to discuss any of this further.

Feedback on the University Strategy White Paper

Vision & Mission

- I believe that one of our core purposes is to help develop our students at a vital transition point in their life, and ultimately help them to achieve their potential, become the best version of themselves they can and prepare them for the future. I think we could be more explicit about this in the vision statement. We make reference to 'empowering people to achieve their potential' in the enablers section. I would move it in to our Vision and Mission. For example the second point **'we empower and support talented people – students and staff – to collaborate in learning, scholarship and discovery across the full breadth of human experience, solving problems, improving lives',** would benefit from adding 'and achieving their own potential' at the end.

- The statement 'where ambitious people enable us to thrive' almost sounds a bit self-indulgent and exploitative of our students / staff. Surely it would be better to talk about creating an environment / culture that enables our students / staff to thrive, and equally to talk about the impact we will have on the wider community (like Imperial below).

- Personally I get little sense from the Vision & Mission of where we are looking to position the university in the broader landscape, and how we know if we have achieved success. When I read other University strategies they talk more about being world-class establishments, about excellence, for example

   o Warwick: 'By 2030, Warwick will be one of the world's exceptional universities, helping to transform our region, country and world for the collective good'
   o Imperial College London's mission is to achieve enduring excellence in research and education in science, engineering, medicine and business for the benefit of society.
   o UCL: Our distinctive approach to research, education and innovation will further inspire our community of staff, students and partners to transform how the world is understood, how knowledge is created and shared and the way that global problems are solved.
   o Manchester: Our vision is for The University of Manchester to be one of the leading universities in the world by 2020.

- Bristol: 'Our vision is to sustain and improve upon our world-leading reputation for research, and embrace educational innovation that will nurture skilled, adaptable and resilient graduates.'
- Edinburgh's purpose: As a world-leading research-intensive University, we are here to address tomorrow's greatest challenges. Between now and 2030 we will do that with a values-led approach to teaching, research and innovation, and through the strength of our relationships, both locally and globally.

I am not sure I get a sense of that here. The values and how we want to behave comes through very clearly, but I am not sure I am clear where we want this to take the University.

Values

- **'Inclusivity'** comes through strongly throughout, which is good.

- It is good to see the word **'Ambition'** in here, noting some of my other comments.

- Noting the national crises in mental health and obesity, it is good to see **'Health & Wellbeing'** as a value. However I do feel the definition that follows is a little woolly. Terms such as caring, supportive and safe do not necessarily steer people towards and active and healthy lifestyle, which is something we ought to be promoting to act as a prevention as well as a cure for some of the aforementioned national crises. We are also one of the leading University's in the country for sport and physical activity, and I genuinely believe some of the benefits from this such as attainment, graduation prospects, inclusion, retention, alumni affinity all stem from this. The recent investment in the David Ross Sports Village has clearly demonstrated our intent in this space. Therefore I feel we ought to be more explicit about sport and physical activity if we are to be serious about promoting Health & Wellbeing, noting that it also delivers a number of tangential benefits.

- **'Quality in all we do'** – this seems to dial back on 'excellence in all we do', which has featured in previous strategies. I am unsure why we are diluting this, and I feel 'excellence in all we do' is a better more ambitious statement of intent.

Goals

- I like the phrase '**nurture potential by recruiting and supporting individuals with the highest potential to succeed as students and staff'.** However I think the **'as students and staff'** could be removed to give the sentence more meaning and latitude. I don't think we are developing them solely as students, we might be helping them to succeed as 'future leaders, good citizens, entrepreneurs…' Therefore it would read

'nurture potential by recruiting and supporting individuals with the highest potential to succeed'.

- I also wonder if the two goals – 'nurture potential' and 'future-proof our students', could be merged as they are similar. This may allow for another more explicit goal around the health and wellbeing of our community or the student experience, in the same way we are explicit about environmental sustainability.

- The 'future-proof our students' is a good goal, and I am pleased to see the mention of alumni in here. However I think the word 'learning' could be removed from here to again increase the latitude of this goal and make it more powerful and encompassing, as our partnerships often extend beyond those of just learning partnerships. Therefore it would read 'Future-proof our students to excel in the working world and contribute to society – building a lifelong partnership with our students, our alumni and with employers'.

Enablers

- **'People – students and staff – an inclusive environment which supports wellbeing'** – I wonder if we can come up with a stronger verb than **'supports',** for example 'promotes' or 'embeds', and I also wonder if we need to stress **'exercise and wellbeing',** so we are more explicit about our aim to make people more active. If we truly value people and see them as our most valuable resource, we need to be clearer about how we are investing in them and supporting their health. One of Warwick University's aims is for them to become the most active campus in the UK, which is to be applauded.

- **'an inclusive environment which….empowers people to achieve their potential' –** I wonder if the use of the word **'empowers'** truly reflects the role we play in supporting and pushing people to achieve their potential and instead suggests a more hands-off approach with too much onus on the individual. Would **'helps'** or **'helps drive'** reflect the role we play in supporting people?

    Therefore, this could read **'People – students and staff – an inclusive environment which embeds exercise and wellbeing, and helps people to achieve their potential'**

- **'Infrastucture – use and develop our assets… in ways that enhance…. the student experience'** – I think this is the first mention of the student experience, however I think it is a huge part of what we do. As I outlined in my opening paragraph, I think we support and develop students as a key crossroads in their lives. It is no coincidence so many talk about University being the best days of their lives, and a large part of that is down to the overall student experience. I believe we should be ambitious and should be talking about 'delivering the best possible student experience that we can'.

General reflections on themes that are coming through

I thought it might be useful to reflect back the strands that come through strongly to me from reading the Vision / Mission, Values, Goals and Enablers sections, to give a sense of whether the emphasis and balance of these strands are correct.

Collaboration & Partnership

- 'to collaborate in learning....' (Vision & Mission)
- 'Collaboration' (Values)
- 'partnership with our students, alumni and employers' (Goals)
- 'pursue our mission through collaboration and partnership' (Goals)
- 'acting as a force for international understanding and collaboration' (Goals)
- 'creative collaboration' (Enablers)
- 'partnership working to promote continuous improvement' (Enablers)

International –

- 'global outlook' (Vision & Mission),
- 'University without borders' (Vision & Mission)
- 'an international mind-set' (Values)
- 'global challenges' (Goals)
- 'international mind-set...global experience...' (Goals)

Creativity & Entrepreneurialism –

- 'solving problems' (Vision & Mission)
- 'entrepreneurial tradition of creativity & innovation' (Vision & Mission)
- 'creative culture' (Vision & Mission)
- 'Ambition, creativity, innovation entrepreneurialism...' (Values)
- 'Solve problems' (Goals)

Inclusivity –

- 'Collaboration, inclusivity' (Values)
- 'Fairness, transparency, integrity' (Values)
- 'inclusive environment' (Enablers)

Health & Safety

- 'health and safety paramount' (Enablers)
- 'Risk management ... keeping our community safe' (Enablers)

Health & Wellbeing

- 'health & wellbeing' (Values)
- 'An inclusive environment that supports wellbeing' (Enablers)

Environmental (although only mentioned once, it is a very explicit mention and a clear goal)

- 'Prioritise environmental sustainability' (Goals)

In case you are looking for additional examples or ideas, I thought I would provide some suggestions:

Examples: What are we already doing which supports these goals ?

Nurture potential by recruiting and supporting individuals with the highest potential to succeed:

- Offering a comprehensive athlete support programme that allows students to follow a dual career of both their academic studies and sport.
- Proactively recruiting talented student athletes [note: talented student athletes are proven to secure better than average degree outcomes, help raise the University's profile and provide inspiration to fellow students]

Future-proof our students to excel in the working world and contribute to society – building a lifelong partnership with our students, our alumni and with employers:

- Providing a broad and enriching student experience that offers opportunities to develop life-skills and build institutional affinity [note: this assumes that the student experience is not made an explicit goal. If you speak to CARO sport is one of the strongest ties for alumni back to the University]
- Invest in the Health & Wellbeing of our community to help them be the best that they can [note: this assumes that health and wellbeing is not made an explicit goal].

What ideas have been suggested during the consultation in line with these goals ?

Future-proof our students to excel in the working world and contribute to society – building a lifelong partnership with our students, our alumni and with employers:

- Offer every student a free sports membership to remove barriers to activity, promote inclusion and integration, and to encourage a healthy and active lifestyle.
- Introduce the capacity for distance learning to all our programmes.
- Remove all teaching on Wednesday afternoons to allow all students the chance to engage in the broader student experience / enrichment projects.

In conclusion

I don't feel the **student experience** comes through strongly enough. I believe one of our key strengths as an institution is the overall student experience and how we develop and invest in our students, and we shouldn't underestimate the impact this has in terms of peer recruitment / recommendations.

We are facing a crisis in terms of mental health and obesity, and we have a duty to take stronger action in promoting **health and physical activity**, in the same way we are being clear about our responsibilities to environmental sustainability. Therefore we should be more explicit about this, and I believe it will be reassuring for parents and prospective applicants alike who are bombarded with media around student mental health, loneliness, student integration etc….

I was surprised that we don't mention investing in **our estate** very clearly. Our beautiful campus and the resources we have are a key USP for us, and something we need to maintain and keep investing in.

Apart from the mention of communities in one of the goals, I didn't feel **the civic agenda** comes through strongly. I had been led to believe this was a priority for the University moving forwards.

Finally I do feel the Vision and Mission lacks a little ambition and I would have expected more mention of terms like **excellence** and **world-class** in the strategy.

I am passionate about the University of Nottingham and am always looking to help it become the best version of itself and to support both the University community and deliver our wider civic responsibilities. Therefore I hope my comments are useful in helping us achieve this.

I would be delighted to discuss any of my points in more detail if they need greater explanation.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Regards

Hi Haf

The more I look at the strategy, the better it feels as I can see direct lineage between this and potential / planned developments.

I wanted to test some questions that I have against the strategy and I got these results which I thought were good ones and suggested the strategy works

- Should we reduce the curriculum we offer in a major way? Probably No - because the mission says "discovery across the full breadth of human experience" and the goals say we will "Pursue our mission through collaboration and partnership – between academic subjects and disciplines"
- Should we do digital engagement? Probably if we "Recruit all UK undergraduate students via contextualised offers" (why not all prospect students by the way?)
- Should we deliver NGO? Probably – "without borders" and – "building a lifelong learning partnership with our students, our alumni and with employers"
- Should we have a lifelong view of our relationships (CRM across business, alumni and students)? Yes - building a lifelong learning partnership with our students, our alumni and with employers
- Please note that the impact of the lifelong learning strategy is likely to result in some interesting changes to CS

A couple of other considerations:

- If we are pioneering I honestly think we should be carbon positive, not neutral. i.e. practice what we are about to preach! ☺
- Values – all work for me and reflect the University that I know and love. "Efficient", or similar, is not one of them but it is covered in the Financial responsibility enabler and the Decision Making enablers. The other one, dear to my heart… is there anywhere to squeeze in "Engaging"? Maybe in the People enabler? Whether that is the ability to engage others in research, students in teaching, staff in their activities, this is one of the key people parts of success (and something that "digital" supports). It is also significant because it moves the assumption to a position that we need to reach others rather than expecting queues at our door.

Anyway, I hope this is helpful. It is good for me to properly get into this so thanks for the prompt to do so.

Best wishes