

## **Response to the Mayor's Draft London Environment Strategy**

from the London Universities Environment Group

The Mayor's Environment Strategy is welcomed by the members of London Universities Environment Group (LUEG). We are a body representative of sustainability professionals working within the Higher Education sector in London where our members collaborate to share best practice and advocate for sustainability in the sector.

Our following response to the consultation on the Mayor's Draft London Environment Strategy seeks to support its development, to help build a more sustainable, pleasant and resilient London.

The sector has a huge influence on the capital's environment. There are 40 higher education institutions teaching over 400,000 students, employing tens of thousands of staff including research active academics. The annual expenditure of these institutions runs into billions of pounds meaning the purchasing power and influence can be used to significantly influence suppliers and service provision towards a more sustainable outcome. Our estates cover significant areas from central London to its rural fringes. The future development and growth of this sector will have important implications for the strategy and the delivery of solutions to it.

This document provides the LUEG collective response to the Draft Strategy consultation request. We believe the sector can take a significant role in helping deliver and exceed many of the objectives and targets. The sector can be harnessed and engaged to become fully integrated in using its strengths in, for example, its research capacities, its reach to students, staff and other stakeholders, its activity to reduce impacts such as resource use and wastage or air pollution and other harmful emissions. As such it would be valuable in including the potential of the sector within this Draft Strategy as this would provide universities in London with the recognition of their role and highlight their potential in collaborating and delivering solutions identified in the document and ones that will see the sector innovate in the future.

### **Comments on direction of travel of the Draft Strategy**

We commend the GLA for its ambitious and clear vision to improve sustainability in London. It's very promising to see the Mayor demonstrating a strong and visible public commitment in this area, and taking a leadership role at city-wide, national and international levels.

The Draft Strategy broadly addresses the right issues, and has good high-level aims whilst also showing a good grip on the complexity of the challenges we face.

It also does a good job of taking final accountability for targets, whilst recognising and building on existing work already delivered by a range of organisations.

### **Suggestions on cross-cutting themes**

The Strategy could be strengthened by explicitly addressing the strategic role of the following cross-cutting themes, which we believe underpin delivery of the Strategy's principles and programmes:

- **Education and skills:** The Strategy should aim to boost public understanding of sustainability and support the development of skills for the circular economy, making every job a 'green job'.

- **Engagement:** The Mayor should facilitate public dialogue on how Londoners can play an active role in shaping a more sustainable city, empowering people to make more sustainable decisions in their own lives.
- **Research and innovation:** The Strategy mentions a number of university research partnerships. However, there's a wider opportunity to set out a strategic vision for the role of the university sector in research and innovation, building knowledge and expertise for better policy and action (see below).
- **Partnerships:** The Strategy refers extensively to partnerships delivering various initiatives. This approach could be more strategic and joined-up in order to build connectivity and capacity between local government, businesses, communities, and others.
- **Best-practice sharing:** The Strategy could create frameworks to support best-practice sharing and scalability of initiatives. (The Mayor's Re:Fit programme has already been successful at this, boosting collective knowledge of what works to deliver effective carbon reduction.)

### **General Comments from LUEG**

- The HE sector in London has potential to influence hundreds of thousands of stakeholders - students, staff and others (including suppliers, visitors) to help achieve outcomes of the Draft Strategy
- The HE sector has potential to apply the research capabilities in many disciplines to the environmental challenges faced by London and its communities
- Staff and students and the universities themselves have a global reach enabling collaborations and sharing best practice
- Utilising teaching aligned with the objectives set out in the Draft Strategy can help create graduates capable of looking for solutions to current and future sustainability challenges
- The sector has massive spending power and therefore influence on the supply chain - this can be harnessed to enable change to happen at scale
- Representative groups such as Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges, LUEG and others can help support and communicate key themes and help enable solutions to develop and spread out
- The size and use of the sector's physical estate is significant and can be used or adapted to help meet key objectives over time (for example designing for nature, installing green roofs/ living walls etc enabling public access)

### **How the HE sector can assist:**

#### **Research, Analysis & Solutions:**

The sector is already providing significant input in support of the Draft Strategy, undertaking research, analysis and recommendations in areas such as Air Pollution (e.g. King's College), Climate Change Mitigation & Energy (Imperial, UCL, LSE), Adapting to Climate Change (Imperial, Kings), Green Cities (LSE), Green Infrastructure (Univ. Greenwich), Transition to a low carbon circular economy (Univ Greenwich, UCL), Sustainable Built Environment (UCL), Climate Change and Health (UCL) amongst many others. In some cases many of the research applications can be developed into commercially viable solutions that will encourage London to have a central role in delivering the Green Economy. The rigorous academic insight the sector can provide should also be utilised through invitation and engagement in the development of policies capitalising on the breadth of issues and considerations the sector can contribute to (environmental, social and economic perspectives).

### **HE Sector Operational Opportunities**

The operational activities of universities in London all have a potentially significant effect on London's environment. Impacts relating to the transport needs of staff, students and goods to and from our campuses is significant and there are opportunities we can help create. For example, closer collaboration with transport providers to encourage modal shift, the reduction in demand for transport needs (such as better scheduling of deliveries) or the movement to zero emission vehicle fleets are all possible with the right encouragement, incentive or potential penalty. The energy use within the large university estates can be influenced – encouragement of low or zero emission heating and cooling systems (for example utilisation of ground/air source heating and cooling where appropriate) rather than gas fired boilers would significantly reduce NOX and CO2 emissions and noise. More effective thinking around resource use could help meet waste reduction commitments, improve the potential of the circular economy and boost better employment opportunities or help contribute to better community support and collaboration.

### **HE Estate Opportunities**

London's HE estate covers a significant footprint across London and it is an area undergoing significant investment and development. Ensuring the sector's estates are of high environmental standards, capable of responding to meeting short to long term ambitious carbon reduction targets, is essential. The ability to integrate design that enables an easier adaptation to a changing climate or the ability to help reduce the impact of climate change should be central to future planning and encouragement of the HE sector and others. The potential also to ensure that green infrastructure expectations are effectively integrated is also possible through the integration into individual projects, campuses, buildings or overall master plans. Good design can and should also enable improvements to air quality, reductions in ambient noise, improvements to managing resources and waste and encouraging modal shift through for example the provision of safe walking and cycling routes, secure parking, shower facilities etc. The sector already has examples of best practice in many of the areas set out above and as such these can be promoted and encouraged through the strategy across this sector and beyond.

### **HE Sector Engaging its Stakeholders**

The HE sector's role as an educator can be utilised harnessing its reputation focused on learning and critical analysis balanced with its reach to its wide range of stakeholders. With over 400,000 students studying at any one time, tens of thousands of staff, and large numbers of others daily visiting our campuses, the sector can influence these stakeholders through their studies, activities and wider engagement. The application of 'Education for Sustainable Development' provides a useful platform for communicating to students key challenges faced globally or locally. The demands of leading businesses for a sustainability literate workforce means students are becoming more aware of the knowledge and skill sets they need for their careers - this can be applied in their studies, research and beyond. The Mayor's Entrepreneurs Prize is a welcome and valuable tool to highlight and capitalise on the ideas and potential of our students to help develop key solutions to many of the capital's environmental challenges. Such initiatives should be further developed and expanded utilising the research capabilities of more of our students and also our research active staff. The more that such opportunities and experiences are made available and communicated, the more readily our stakeholders will help contribute actions to meet or help deliver solutions to the challenges and objectives the Draft Strategy identifies. Importantly, the engagement and support of HE senior leadership teams in the achievement of the Draft Strategy could prove valuable in helping highlight the potential for stakeholders themselves to help contribute in many ways to the objectives set out.

### **Opportunities to Enable Change**

- The Mayor's Office and the GLA family should explore collaboratively how they can support and deliver the objectives and targets of the Draft Strategy
- Communication materials/programmes should be developed and made available for use by universities to enable improvement in many of the areas set out in the Draft Strategy
- The Mayor's Office explore ways to gain their the engagement or commitment to act to help with the delivery of the Draft Strategy
- Academic and other sector based expert support should be sought in the development of policies and recommendations supporting the ongoing delivery of the Strategy
- Close engagement with core decision-makers should be undertaken to ensure, for example, estates strategies are encouraged to align with the objectives of the Draft Strategy
- Support to enable more effective collaboration with local bodies who could provide innovative solutions to some of the environmental challenges could be developed. For example, the Warp-IT model or similar could be made more available to HEI's and local bodies to maximise the potential of the circular economy. Other potential opportunities for collaboration in many of the key areas identified in the Draft Strategy are ready for similar delivery solutions
- Helping the sector visualise what its contribution is to the Strategy could be undertaken (similarly to the Sustainable Development Goals its goals and targets) the Draft Strategy could set out commitments that each HEI or other institution could sign up to.
- The Mayor's Environment Strategy provides an opportunity to demonstrate the capital's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and London's role in an international context
- The considerable size of HEIs Estates in London provides an opportunity to provide a catalyst for smart-grid infrastructure within their areas - providing the correct incentives and legal protections are put in place
- The historic nature of many of the HEI's estates presents an opportunity to consider how historic buildings can be brought up to modern sustainability standards without compromising architectural heritage.

## **Conclusions**

LUEG supports the Mayor's positive vision for a more sustainable London, and hope our comments above contribute to developing and realising this vision. The contribution from our sector is significant, however, this potential can only fully be realised through a closer engagement between the sector and the GLA family. This would provide many wins and ensure that London is seen as, and remains, a city priding itself on its world leading academic impact and one that can be aligned to help support London as the global, sustainable city.

**Signed by the London Universities Environment Group on behalf of its members.**

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