Achieving Excellence Together

People and Culture Strategy 2019-2022
The working environment at Ulster, which encourages achievement and progression, has enabled me to advance my career through a succession of posts and secondments to my current role as Project Manager.
Foreword

The Five & Fifty Strategy sets out an ambitious plan for Ulster University up to 2021, providing vision and direction into the institution’s 50th anniversary year in 2034. Recognising that “…creating the right conditions to let people flourish and ensuring that every member of this University is recognised as playing a central role in achieving our ambitions” is essential to its success, Ulster University has created its first People and Culture Strategy.

In 2018, a new People and Culture Directorate was created bringing together colleagues from previously separate teams including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Staff Development; Health, Safety and Wellbeing; and Human Resources.

It is the intention that the visions and aspirations set out within this Strategy apply to all colleagues across our four campuses. An enabler for the delivery of many elements of the wider strategic aims of Civic Contribution, and Global Vision, as well as the delivery of Academic and Operational Excellence, we recognise that this Strategy does not exist in a vacuum. At Ulster University we put our students at the heart of everything we do, and this Strategy recognises that a focus on the student experience requires a focus on the employee experience – the former cannot exist to its fullest potential without achieving excellence in the latter.

In the coming months, the People and Culture Directorate will share and action a series of plans which will enable the Strategy to be brought to life between 2019 and 2022. These plans will set out outcomes that colleagues should expect to see through the delivery of this People and Culture Strategy in the years ahead. Achieving these ambitions and focusing on the employee experience is not something owned exclusively by the Directorate, it is something all of us can play a role in achieving. We need everyone in the organisation to take ownership of the Strategy with the assurance that the People and Culture Directorate will provide support.

As with any strategy and plan for delivery, we acknowledge that there will be challenges and setbacks, but we passionately believe that working through these and focusing on the employee experience in a more coordinated way will enable our university to create those conditions where we can all flourish and achieve.

The People and Culture Team
People and Culture

We want to create an environment where we achieve excellence by working together and help make Ulster University an Employer of Choice.

The People and Culture Strategy aspires to be the difference that makes the difference; creating the conditions, frameworks and approaches to enable our people to achieve and exceed both their own career aspirations and the University’s ambitions.

How we will achieve it: By building a culture in which we can all flourish, and where brave thinking and values-led behaviour is encouraged and modelled by leaders and colleagues alike.

A university fit for the future and in which we are all proud to work and study.
Vision

Fit for the future.
A Values-Led Approach

Each of us will have our own personal and professional values – guiding principles and beliefs that shape the way we are.

As part of the engagement exercise in creating this document, colleagues provided their perspective and insight into the University’s Values. In 2019, an engagement exercise will be undertaken across the University to understand in more detail colleague perceptions in respect to the Values, with a view to finding opportunities to improve them as required.

This strategy recognises that there is work that we will need to do together to strive to achieve this, taking the very best elements of our long and successful culture, and looking for ways to evolve, innovate and improve.
These priorities will help create and sustain a culture that differentiates us as a place of learning and achievement, where we are all proud to work and study.
To achieve the Strategic People Priorities, key themes have been identified for 2019-2022.

- We will have a modern, open and flexible approach to recruitment which will contribute to our ability to attract the best people from national and international markets.

- We will develop people’s personal and professional skills and knowledge, recognise potential and provide clear structured paths to fulfil aspirations and progress careers.

- We will celebrate and recognise people fairly based on their achievements and contribution.
Strengthen Engagement

• We will promote an environment where people feel fulfilled by their work, engaged with the wider University, and valued for their contribution.

• We will actively engage and empower people within a collaborative culture which enables innovation and creativity and encourages brave thinking and action.

• We will work to strengthen a sense of community and belonging for our staff and students across the University.

Supporting Performance

• We will encourage and promote University wide ownership in the focus on performance, enhancing processes and practices to grow our talent, reach our potential, and build our futures.

• We will create a culture which supports high performance of individuals, teams, and the institution as a whole. This focus will be enabled by clarity of expectations, ongoing feedback, and support to enable us individually and collectively to achieve our goals.

• We will continuously develop and improve our people-related systems, processes and approaches to ensure that the University is agile and open to the benefits of well-planned and delivered change.
Develop People

• We will pioneer approaches to develop and support our staff to achieve their own career ambitions and the strategic goals of the University.

• We will build leadership and management capability across the University, focused on those in positions of leadership and management, and those that aspire to achieve those roles.

• We will work in partnership with leaders to design programmes of work that better enable the institution and its people to achieve the right culture, behaviours, skills and engagement, anticipating the requirements of tomorrow’s world.

Promote Wellbeing

• We will provide a healthy, happy and purposeful environment that promotes the physical and mental wellbeing of all our staff.

• We will create a workplace where individuals can be supported to develop their own ideal work life balance.

• We will promote an environment where staff wellbeing is integrated into day-to-day practices – it is at the heart of what we do, rather than a separate process and approach.

A focus on these priorities will develop and maintain a culture in which we can all flourish, ensuring that every member of this University is recognised as playing a central role in achieving our ambitions.
Positive Employee Relations

• We will grow a positive industrial relations climate with our trade unions within a progressive framework.

• We will create an open and transparent arena where mutual respect, collaboration and innovations shape outcomes to the benefit of all.

• We will work with individuals and leaders to ensure adherence to organisational values and behaviours in everyday practice.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

• We will encourage and engage the most diverse perspectives.

• We will deliver fair access, equality of opportunity and enhance participation.

• We will nurture/cultivate an enriched environment where any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported and valued.
In each of the three years of the strategy, plans of work will be developed, communicated and delivered for each of the seven strategic priorities. The People and Culture Directorate will produce an annual report setting out progress made in the delivery of these plans, and the wider progress made towards achieving the strategy overall.

In advance of the detailed plans of work being developed, the key areas of focus for the themes in 2019 are outlined here.

A new dedicated resourcing team will be established in People and Culture. In the past, colleagues in the former HR directorate have worked on recruitment alongside other responsibilities in their roles. This new team allows the opportunity to take a fresh look at what we do well in recruitment and make adjustments based on external best practice to create an enhanced approach for the benefit of candidates from outside the University and colleagues within the University who are looking at their next career move.
Strengthen Engagement

The People and Culture Directorate will undertake an engagement exercise with colleagues to look at the University’s stated Values. Being clear and proud about what sets our culture apart will act as a key enabler to the Institution’s ability to achieve the aim of strengthening engagement.

Enhance Performance

For some colleagues, the current Development Appraisal Review (DAR) process works well. For many others, the feedback received is that DAR does not represent a productive and valuable use of time. In 2019, the People and Culture Directorate will take the time to lead on a full review of DAR, consulting colleagues across the University, and looking for opportunities to improve the way we as an organisation approach performance and development conversations.
The People and Culture Directorate will establish a new Employee Wellbeing team focused on creating and delivering to a calendar of events which enhance wellbeing in the workplace. Through close collaboration with colleagues in Student Wellbeing and other key stakeholders, a joint focus on enhancing Wellbeing for both employees and students can be achieved.

The newly established People Development and Organisation Design teams within People and Culture will be tasked with creating frameworks and approaches around colleague development. Work already underway and due to complete in the first half of 2019 is the definition of a Leadership Framework – which will provide clarity around what it is to be an ‘Ulster Leader’ for those in Leadership roles now, and those who aspire to be Leaders in our institution at some point in their career.

"At Ulster University I feel trusted in the work that I do, I have autonomy over the professional work I deliver, and I am encouraged to challenge and question existing practices.

Keelin McGrogan
UUBS Administrative Officer
Belfast campus"
Positive Employee Relations

A new team focused on Employee Relations will be established who will have lead responsibility for managing, developing and improving the relationship with employee representatives. The University views the unions as key strategic partners and their involvement is critical to the success of the People and Culture strategy.

Resolving disputes between employees can be challenging for all employers. In its commitment to ensuring a positive work experience, this team will provide specialist expertise in dispute resolution aimed at ensuring disputes are resolved promptly and effectively.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team will continue to provide leadership and guidance for the University in ensuring that we meet our statutory requirements and deliver to a series of action plans focusing on matters such as disability, gender balance and race. In addition, the team will include the institution’s focus on Athena Swan, building on successes to date and maintaining and enhancing our awards.
The People and Culture Directorate Structure

The People and Culture Strategy applies to all colleagues across the University – its achievement will require all of us to contribute.

The People and Culture Directorate will play a key role in facilitating the delivery of the Strategy.
...an embedded ethos of collaborative working has brought about significant positive benefits for both myself, my peers and my team, affording us the opportunities to enhance both our personal and professional development.

Willie White,
ICT Campus Officer
Coleraine campus
1) Employee Experience

PURPOSE:

• To provide a connected focus on the experience that our people have from the moment they seek to join us to the day they decide to move on.

• To better enable the University to focus on the development, growth, health and wellbeing of its people.

• To ensure that a focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is at the heart of the institution’s ethos.
Within Employee Experience the following sections are established:

- **Health, Safety, and Wellbeing** - focuses on both health and safety in the traditional sense, and on the promotion of health - not just physical health, but mental, social and emotional wellbeing.

- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)** - ensures compliance and regulatory requirements are achieved, takes the lead on the delivery of our EDI Strategy, and ensures that EDI is part of Ulster University’s foundation and ethos.

- **Organisation Design, Development and Change** – a new team working with colleagues across the University to design programmes of work to better enable the institution and its people to achieve the right culture, behaviours, skills and engagement, providing insight and direction around the effective management of people-related change.

- **People Development** - develops and oversees a People Development Strategy and approach which will provide the framework to develop and support our staff to achieve their career ambitions and the strategic goals of the University.
2) Partnerships and Services

PURPOSE:

• To provide direct people-related support for leaders and their teams, by building effective partnerships and providing a broad range of people-related services which are effective, modern and agile.

• To build effective relationships with the trade unions, which are based on mutual respect and trust, and to champion effective consultation and employee engagement on all aspects of University life.

• To ensure an effective and customer-focused service in relation to: resourcing, the experience of applicants, promotion, how we manage and use employee data, contractual matters, how we deal with conflict between employees, terms and conditions of employment and a range of other people-related services.

Within Partnerships and Services the following sections are established:

• People Partnering - embedded and integrated into the faculties/departments and providing specialist people related advice and support to the leadership team in the faculties/departments.

• Resourcing - This section will work closely with client faculties/departments to ensure that the strategic resourcing needs are identified and delivered. A specialist team of resourcing experts will bring forward innovative, agile, modern and flexible selection tools, techniques and methodologies.

• System Analytics and Reward - This section aims to develop a sound platform of systems and workforce information. The focus will be on producing information as an evidence base for action and improvement.

• Employee Relations - In addition to managing the formal industrial relations frameworks, this section will also be responsible for initiatives to promote genuine partnerships and meaningful consultation.
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Ulster University