Five & Fifty
Five Year Strategic Plan
Fiftieth Year Strategic Vision
2016 – 2034
Ulster University is embarking on a new and ambitious strategic plan for the next five years with a strategic vision that will take us to our fiftieth anniversary in 2034. Given our resource and our skills we have an opportunity to transform lives; to drive innovation; to stimulate creativity and culture; and to inform and shape policy, playing our part as Northern Ireland’s civic university.”

Professor Paddy Nixon
Vice-Chancellor and President
As Northern Ireland’s civic university, Ulster University will deliver outstanding research and teaching that encourages the innovation, leadership and vision needed to help our community thrive.

Grounded in the heart of the community Ulster University will:

- transform lives, stretch minds, develop skills and raise ambitions
- deliver globally significant research with local relevance
- encourage a diverse university community
- make a lasting contribution to society as a whole.
Ulster University has always been about progress. The idea of moving forward, renewal and growth are woven into our history and will continue to shape our future.

Our roots stretch back to the 1840s when Magee was established in Derry-Londonderry and the School of Art and Design was inaugurated in Belfast. Both these founding institutions were very much civic in nature and established through the goodwill and spirit of altruism of those civic leaders of the day. The University we know today was established in 1984 and continued an ethos of higher education developing society. The legend for the coat of arms “To Build Anew”, influenced by a WB Yeats poem, was embodied in the new university. A university that was deeply grounded within the community with a strong sense of civic responsibility. Those individuals behind the institution were determined that it would make a difference.

Ulster University has done just that and delivered a legacy we can be proud of. With over 25,000 students we are one of the largest universities on these islands. Internationally, we are amongst the top 3% of universities and within the world’s top 150 young universities. Our overall student satisfaction has consistently outperformed national benchmarks. And we have established ourselves as research leaders, nationally and globally, in many of our areas of expertise.

This strategic plan has reframed those original objectives of the University and, by putting them within a modern context, sets a clear vision for the future.
Ulster University is embarking on a new and ambitious strategic plan for the next five years with a strategic vision that will take us to our fiftieth anniversary in 2034. Charting our course to our fiftieth year is critically important because, as custodians of the University, we have a responsibility to build on past successes and leave a dynamic, strong legacy.

This plan is focused on delivering a university that is sustainable and innovative with a strong international reputation. An institution that is well positioned to approach the 50 years beyond 2034 with confidence and competitive advantage. Setting challenging goals will ensure that as we reach these milestones the University remains academically excellent, continues to be relevant to our society and is true to the civic ambitions of our founders.

“In the context of a severe recession, pressure on the public finances and major societal challenges such as global warming and the ageing population, governments are quite properly asking: what are universities for?”

NESTA 2009 Report: Reinventing the Civic University
Professor Emeritus John Goddard

This is unquestionably a challenging time for higher education and Goddard’s observation about the purpose of universities is particularly relevant. Challenge also brings opportunity and I believe this is certainly true for Ulster University.

Refocusing our efforts will ensure that we are sustainable, which creates flexibility to take the types of calculated risks that are necessary within a world-class university.

Academic excellence is at the heart of all good universities; Ulster is no exception. In examining the unique essence of Ulster University, this strategic plan reasserts and defines both our purpose and our excellence.

Given our resource and our skills we have an opportunity to transform lives; to drive innovation; to stimulate creativity and culture; and to inform and shape policy, playing our part as Northern Ireland’s civic university. This is particularly relevant as Northern Ireland matures economically, politically and societally. Not only must we bring research to the attention of policy-makers, we must bring our talents to bear on Northern Ireland’s most pressing problems. Ulster University will work with partners to drive education and learning, to create and communicate new knowledge and to transform complex theory into meaningful social, cultural and economic impact.

As we focus our civic efforts there will be a natural blurring of edges between what we are traditionally seen to do and our renewed priorities. And inevitably there will be choices to make. I am looking forward to making those choices together and working with talented and committed colleagues to help deliver our Five & Fifty plan.
Structured around four priorities, this plan is focused on delivering a university that is innovative and sustainable with a strong academic and international reputation.

Civic Contribution
- Employment and Widening Access
- Social and Economic Development
- Campus Identities
- Meaningful Networks

Academic Excellence
- Teaching Excellence
- Student Experience
- Research with Impact
- Researcher Development

Global Vision
- Global Citizenship
- International Networks
- Global Challenge, Local Impact
- Diverse University Community

Operational Excellence
- People and Culture
- Reputation
- World-Class Infrastructure
- Financial Sustainability
As Northern Ireland’s civic university we will focus our efforts on global societal issues relevant to Northern Ireland. Collectively our impact will contribute towards the wellbeing and economic prosperity of our society.

Ulster University has always had a strong sense of civic responsibility. Our history, formed on a solid foundation of civic endeavour, is a source of great pride. As the only university distributed across the region, we have a tremendous opportunity to fully participate and deliver meaningful impact across the wider community. The imperative for redefining our civic contribution is also a reflection of the societal transformation that Northern Ireland is undergoing. We need to be cognisant of and fully engaged in this change. Issues such as educational attainment and access to higher education are central to our society and we must maintain our focus on widening access. More broadly, we will continue to proactively contribute to the full spectrum of intellectual, economic, social and cultural life of Northern Ireland.

We will focus our civic endeavours around themes that will act as a common narrative across the entire University, across schools, faculties, research and teaching. Capturing our civic focus in a more coherent way will help Ulster University collectively achieve greater impact. These are global challenges that have a particular significance within Northern Ireland and will influence how we approach our civic space. These themes will be embedded within each of the strategic priorities. By doing this we are positioning ourselves as a truly international university.
We will be an international exemplar of the role of a university building civic society.

**Themes**

**Social Renewal**
Peace, conflict and transition, educational attainment, social and economic leadership, communication and leadership

**Sustainability**
Urban renewal, energy and the environment, national infrastructure, food security, digital futures

**Healthy Communities**
Mental health, ageing, health innovation and policy, sport for life, history and heritage

**Creativity and Culture**
Creative economy, cultural diversity, design, media & the arts, innovation and creative entrepreneurship

**Objectives**

**Social and Economic Development**
- Engage with civic leaders from the public, private and third sectors to collaborate on areas of mutual interest and facilitate open debate, conversation and opportunity.
- Maximise the impact of academic excellence to constructively inform policy that will deliver positive outcomes for Northern Ireland.
- Provide forecasting and horizon scanning, enabling Northern Ireland to be outward looking with a global profile.

**Employment and Widening Access**
- Develop workplace readiness balanced with lifelong skills.
- Help to improve educational attainment and ambition particularly from communities that have previously been disengaged.

**Campus Identities**
- Harness the distinctive academic strengths and infrastructure at our campuses in Belfast, Coleraine and Magee.
- As a regional university, maximise the public value of the assets and distinctiveness of each campus, for the benefit of the immediate locality and beyond.
- Engage with civic leaders to promote and deepen the partnership between the University and the local community, thereby enhancing the international attractiveness, global relevance and economic, social and cultural vitality of the region.

**Meaningful Networks**
- Harness the influence and expertise of our alumni network, honorary graduates, students and visiting scholars through sectoral networks and partnerships.
- Establish a purposeful network of both internal and external civic ambassadors, recognising the mutual exchange of expertise.
Measures of Success

- Influence on social, economic and public policy
- External stakeholder and university engagement
- Campuses with distinct missions serving their location and everyone in Northern Ireland
- Increase in educational attainment within underachieving areas
- Increased capacity building, contributing to local competitiveness

Targets

Aspiration

Be a leader in the social, economic and cultural development of Northern Ireland

Priority

Civic Contribution

5 year

40% participation rate by students from less affluent family backgrounds

50th year

Double the number of students who originate from the most under-represented groups in higher education
Excellence in teaching underpinned by world-leading research is the foundation upon which every quality university is built. Ulster University has an outstanding reputation for teaching and research, in developing knowledgeable and skilled individuals who consistently reach their goals and transform our economy and society. This reputation, based on a rich historic legacy, is one that we aim to continually grow and enhance.

In terms of research power, we are currently ranked in the top 25% of UK universities with 72% of our research activity judged by an international review panel as ‘world-leading’ or ‘internationally excellent’ in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework.

The University has always been a leader and innovator in education; preparing our students to take a leading role in civil society and providing an engaging, caring and supportive learning environment. Our educational experience promotes inter-disciplinary thinking and innovative solutions to contemporary issues.

Academic excellence permeates every aspect of our endeavour. We have individual schools that are recognised as the number one in their discipline for teaching or research, we have graduates that have won Turner prizes and Emmy awards, and we have Fellows of the Academies. In short, academic excellence is the cornerstone of Ulster University.

We will continue to stretch ourselves by setting ambitious academic goals. We will confirm our position as one of the leading educational institutions as gauged by our teaching excellence and student satisfaction. We will focus on strengthening our research endeavour and will aim to double the number of staff actively engaged in research activity around a smaller number of research foci. This ambition will only be achieved by ensuring a deep link between our thematic priorities in research and our teaching mission; addressing issues of global relevance but with meaningful local impact on the social, economic and cultural life of Northern Ireland.

In order to deliver against these challenging ambitions, we must consider the broader experience that will be unique for each staff member and student; from campus life through to student placements and thematic exposure through to employability. These goals will only be achieved through genuine partnerships with our staff, students, Students’ Union, employers, government, and community stakeholders.

As a relentlessly ambitious university, Ulster is committed to developing Northern Ireland’s relevance in an increasingly global society. Where meaningful and appropriate, we strive to be aligned to the Programme for Government. Understanding the direction and priorities of the Executive ensures that we are sensitive to local issues, as an institution playing our part while preparing our students to be future leaders and global citizens.
Teaching Excellence

• Define the unique attributes of an Ulster University graduate and of our curriculum, to prepare graduates to be engaged contributors to a global and inter-connected society.
• Develop and deliver innovative curricula using contemporary methods of pedagogy that foster diversity, differentiation, and increased opportunities for access.
• Embrace the opportunities presented through emergent technologies to facilitate and complement teaching and learning practices.
• Support and develop our staff to deliver excellence in teaching and learning.

Student Experience

• Nurture vibrant, diverse student communities that take pride in Ulster University and who have a deep sense of belonging and identity.
• Create an environment that facilitates creative, independent learning and inquiry, economically-important skills, knowledge and intellectual capital.
• Provide a shared vision and understanding for all staff and students that view students as partners in our educational provision.
• Provide campuses and spaces that stimulate and encourage an engaged student and staff community.

Objectives

Excellence in teaching at Ulster University will provide students with a high-quality, challenging and rewarding learning experience that equips them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to:

- demonstrate critical intellectual enquiry
- progress in their chosen career or entrepreneurial endeavour
- adapt to change
- become responsible global citizens making meaningful contributions to professional communities and wider society.

Student engagement and success are key. The student experience will be enhanced through the provision of well-designed, flexible, inclusive, relevant programmes and curricula.

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Measures of Success

- Teaching excellence and employability
- Student experience as gauged by NSS
- Student academic success as gauged by progression rates
- Percentage of staff who are HEA-accredited
- Impact of our teaching

Targets

Aspiration

Consistently a top ten in UK for student satisfaction and 90% of academic teaching staff HEA-accredited

5 year

88%
undergraduate progression rate

50th year

95%
undergraduate progression rate
Excellence in research at Ulster envisions an internationally-engaged, research-led university, where both disciplinary excellence and impactful interdisciplinary research are undertaken across our strategic themes of social renewal, sustainability, healthy communities, and creativity and culture. The outcomes will have global relevance and contribute to the social, economic and cultural betterment of Northern Ireland and will also play a critical role in fulfilling our civic commitment and informing student learning.

Objectives

Research with Impact
- Build a culture of individual and disciplinary research excellence and provide the necessary supports to attract, retain and develop our researchers to achieve that excellence.
- Develop national and international leadership in a small number of focused multi-disciplinary areas that reflect both the excellence of our research and the needs of our society.
- Demonstrate relevance of our research through partnerships with industry and our community where we both source our research questions and demonstrate tangible impact.
- Establish an internal investment approach to research and research training that stimulates innovation, drives growth and fosters significant impact.
- Embed our researchers and their impactful research into the classroom environment, to shape and influence the teaching programmes of the University.

Researcher Development
- Deliver a distinctive research training experience considering the needs of PhD students and early career researchers including the development of both the academic and social environment needed to support a diverse student population.
- Develop a student and staff career enhancement and performance assessment strategy that is supported by the clear benchmarks of excellence.
- Provide the best environment for our researchers to flourish by supporting concentrations of research teams, provision of world-class facilities, and support for a vibrant research community.
- Ensure we have systems of governance and training that reflect best international practice and ensure our research conforms to the highest standards of ethics and integrity.
Measures of Success

- Research student satisfaction
- Progression and completion rate of PhD students
- Ratio of PhD students to research staff
- Percentage of staff returned in the Research Excellence Framework
- Numbers and quality of our industry-based research partnerships
- Number and value of nationally competitive grant income

Targets

Aspiration

Ratio of 2:1 for research students to academic research staff

5 year

50% increase in research active staff

50th year

Double the number of research active staff

| 2016 | 2021
|------|------|
Our global vision is premised on building a globally engaged and globally relevant university; one which collaborates with the leading universities in the world and that attracts the highest quality staff and students.

Because of this, Ulster University will embrace a highly multicultural community of learners, promote a strong, internationally relevant curriculum, and deliver a transformative international experience for all students. We will also grow and enhance our international standing and identity through building concentrations of research excellence around a small number of focused themes. These endeavours will be underpinned by deep partnerships with institutions that share our values and civic focus.

We will equip our students with the capacity to understand and engage meaningfully in an increasingly globalised society.

A strong, research-led university is characterised by extensive international engagement. Engagement that encompasses every aspect of our teaching, research and civic mission. This is our ambition.

Geographical boundaries are less limiting than ever and we have an opportunity to educate the next generation of global citizens. Increased collaboration with local and international partners with similar values, mutual understanding and shared objectives is key. Cultivating networks, including with our local and global alumni, will enable us to extend and enhance our research endeavour. Our curriculum will increasingly be internationalised to make Ulster University more globally relevant and attractive.

Developing a global focus has clear benefits. An international university experience can be transformational for the students who participate; a larger international community improves the overall cultural, social and economic fabric of Northern Ireland; and it enhances a wider shared understanding of cultural and economic norms and social mores. In addition, international academic exchanges have the potential to build capacity in those countries to learn from Northern Ireland’s rich and complex history.
Global Citizenship
• Equip our students, through our renewed curricula, with the capacity to recognise multiple perspectives, to collaborate across cultures and be able to effectively engage with diverse audiences. Global competence will equip our students with the capacity to understand and act on issues of global significance.
• Seek to grow the opportunities for our staff and students to engage in overseas programmes and to experience diverse cultures.
• Provide opportunities for academics to develop the skills and capacity to teach for global competence.

Diverse University Community
• Our ambition is 20% international students by 2034 and a doubling of our international students within five years.
• Seek to broaden our staff community by increasing the proportion of international academic staff and researchers.
• Prioritise the investment, infrastructure and people necessary to deliver a truly international university.

Objectives

Global Networks
• Build a global identity for Ulster University which is defined by the quality of our academic staff and students, by our focused areas of research excellence, and that is underpinned by our civic commitment.
• Build strong partnerships with a small number of international universities; partners that will contribute to achieving our strategic objectives in academic excellence, social engagement and global impact. Our selective and targeted partnerships will ensure that the value of our knowledge and skills are put to work globally.

Global Challenge, Local Impact
• Become a proactively international university. Staff will have ownership of internationalising their teaching and research.
• Respond to global challenges that have specific resonance for Northern Ireland, including in health, social renewal, sustainability and creativity, in pursuit of meaningful impacts.

Priority
Global Vision
Measures of Success

- Number and quality of in-bound international students
- Satisfaction of international students
- Number of students provided with an opportunity to have an international experience as part of their education
- Number of academic staff and researchers with an international profile
- Number of collaborative international research partnerships

Targets

Aspiration
Consistently in the top 10 for international student experience

5 year

Double the number of international students

50th year

20% of Ulster students are international

2016

2021
Establishing challenging goals around people and culture, operational effectiveness and sustainability and world-class infrastructure helps ensure those conditions are in place.

Ulster University strives to be student-centred. Providing an outstanding educational experience for our students is ultimately what we are about. Our teaching and learning is already excellent. To provide a seamless, responsive and holistic student service we need to ensure we operate collaboratively.

To continue to attract the brightest and best students we need to be flexible and agile in how we engage and support those students.

Our staff is a vibrant community of talented and skilled individuals across a mix of disciplines and professions. A strong developmental framework will build capacity and capability to ensure our University continues to thrive.

World-class infrastructure is a priority without which we cannot hope to compete. We are already investing in this space across our campuses because we recognise the need for facilities that offer our staff and students the best possible experience. Our efforts will be concentrated both on ensuring each of our campuses has the best possible facilities to deliver on its distinctive mission and that we have the necessary specialist facilities to support our researchers and their ambitions.

We will prioritise the development of a digital first approach to systems and services supported by the necessary technology and infrastructure. This focus will be essential to facilitate collaboration, support research, and deliver our learning and student support.

This is a difficult time for higher education generally. We need to create a more sustainable financial and operational model for the University, one which makes the most efficient and focused use of current financial resources whilst continuing to make the case for enhanced investment in higher education.

We recognise that delivering this Five & Fifty plan is ambitious; particularly in such a challenging economic climate and within an increasingly competitive global market. For that reason, we have prioritised operational excellence within the strategic plan, both 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.
Build a reputation for deep student engagement and services that support the student experience. Create a positive working environment that stimulates career development for staff to realise their ambitions.

Objectives

People and Culture
- Nurture a community of staff, students, alumni and partners who have a deep sense of belonging to the University and pride in their connection with it.
- Build leadership capability that sets direction and expectations of staff to embrace change as needed to deliver the ambitions of the University.
- Attract, develop and retain the best people from national and international markets, developing talent, offering career progression opportunities and rewarding achievement.
- Foster a culture based around our values and ethos, encouraging integrity, diversity and inspiring work. We will endeavour to reflect the make up of the communities and global society we serve.

Financial Sustainability
- Develop a sustainable funding model and associated budget systems which support growth in income especially from diversified sources.
- Ensure transparency and provide financial information to enable faculties and other departments to make well-informed decisions.
- Ensure that all major initiatives and funding decisions are supported by high-quality strategic and financial planning.
- Encourage more agile, risk-informed decision-making.

World-Class Infrastructure
- Create a world-class environment and support services on each campus; integrating physical and digital infrastructure so that it is flexible, user-centric and can adapt to a fast-paced changing world.
- Provide regionally distinctive, economically viable campuses that are safe, vibrant, socially engaged and accessible; that meet student and staff needs, support collaboration and contribute to environmental sustainability.

Reputation
- Ensure all our national and international partners understand what we stand for, the excellence of our teaching and research and the fantastic opportunities we can offer to prospective students, researcher corporate partners and alumni.
- Harness the creativity of our university to promote an exciting, distinctive experience for staff and students. Ensure Ulster becomes the university of choice for more students from Northern Ireland and overseas.
Measures of Success

- Growth in income, especially from diversified sources and a financially sustainable university
- Transparent and robust reward and performance management supported by training and development
- Increased pride, staff satisfaction and well-being
- A strong university brand nationally and internationally and an increase in actively engaged alumni
- Staff and student satisfaction with the infrastructure and services
- Positive environmental impact

Targets

Aspiration
Be a national exemplar of staff development and performance

5 year 50th year
Grow income to £250m Grow income to £350m+
We have set ourselves a challenging and stretching vision. As momentum builds it will be increasingly important to draw upon values that build unity and purpose. With our people as our richest asset, our values will set the standard for how we work together in delivering the vision of the University.

Our values will help Ulster University grow as a community and will set us apart. Bringing our Five & Fifty plan to fruition through respectful engagement also ensures that we stay true to our founding values as we build our future vision together.

Identifying the values that best capture the spirit and culture of Ulster University followed in-depth consultation with our staff and students. Six broad areas emerged as important and distinctive to the Ulster community and our optimum working culture. These are encapsulated within our values and articulated as:

- **integrity**, which means we are respectful
- **spirit**, which means we are inspiring
- **living knowledge**, which means we are relevant
- **unity**, which means we are collaborative
- **openness**, which means we are engaging
- **fresh-thinking**, which means we are pioneering.

As we adopt and live out these values, we will engender a culture of civility and courtesy, where diversity is embraced and relationships are built on trust and respect.

Staff will inspire students, through their own passion, to have drive and self-belief. They will ensure that students have a broad educational experience and develop invaluable life skills to build successful futures.

Cross-departmental teams will bring together skills and expertise to ensure the best results for the University through collaborative working. Our people will be empowered to deliver individually and in partnership with colleagues and external stakeholders.

Our global outlook and mindset will help create an international profile for Ulster University, with a reputation for leading in key fields of study and research.

As we deliver our strategic plan, the University will continue to evolve and grow. We will regularly review our values and vision to ensure they reflect the university we want to be.

It’s not only what we have to do and say. It’s how we do it. How we say it. This strategic plan is more than a framework for achieving our ambitions and aspirations. It is also a statement about who we are, what we stand for and how collectively we will deliver the plan.
I am particularly excited by the ambition to strengthen the University’s position as a civic university. Over the past few years I have met with a number of community and civic leaders and their desire to benefit from and be part of the University’s success is inspiring.

Dr. James Nesbitt
Chancellor, Ulster University
At heart, Ulster University is a civic university. Deeply grounded within the community with a strong sense of civic responsibility.

This strategic plan is focused around four priorities that will deliver an innovative and sustainable University with a strong international reputation for academic excellence.

As Northern Ireland's civic university we will focus our efforts on those global societal issues that are particularly relevant to our region. Through these collective efforts we will contribute towards the wellbeing and economic prosperity of our society.

We will deliver teaching and research of the highest academic standing. Our research activities and outcomes will continue to have global significance and meaningful impact. Our educational experience will transform lives, develop skills, raise ambitions and prepare future leaders.

Our global vision is premised on building an internationally engaged and globally relevant university; one which collaborates with the leading universities in the world and that attracts the highest quality students and staff.

We recognise that delivering this Five & Fifty plan is ambitious; particularly in such a challenging economic climate and within an increasingly competitive global market. For that reason, we have prioritised operational excellence within the strategic plan; both 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.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this process. This strategic plan is only the start, as the important work of delivery is ahead. It will take all of us to realise this renewed University; not just those who are in direct contact with students or stakeholders. It is all too easy to forget the many professional staff who help administer degrees, maintain financial control, provide marketing support, run the library and IT systems, clean and cook meals or maintain our buildings. To all staff without exception, across the University, I pay thanks. Your efforts are often unseen but we could not function without them.

Finally, I was attracted to this University because of the reputation for excellence that Ulster has created and its profound connection with the community. I am proud to be the Vice-Chancellor of Ulster University. I feel deeply the responsibility of my stewardship role to maintain and build on our historic foundations. This strategic plan has the potential to be transformational for the University and for Northern Ireland and I am greatly reassured to have such a strong network of colleagues to help deliver this vision.

Professor Paddy Nixon
Vice-Chancellor and President
To find out more, visit: 
ulster.ac.uk/fiveandfifty