



**bucks**  
new university

# Strategic Plan 2006-07 to 2010-11

August 2006

Revised July 2008 to reflect the new University name

## Foreword

This new Strategic Plan 2006-07 to 2010-11 sets out a clear vision for the future of Buckinghamshire New University (Bucks) and our place as the 'new generation' university in south Buckinghamshire. In pursuit of this aspiration, we face numerous challenges, some of which arise from our particular position while others are familiar to all modern higher education institutions and, increasingly, to the sector as a whole. This plan describes how Bucks will address these challenges with determination by detailing certain priorities over the next five years .

We are in the midst of considerable change at Bucks. We have already made changes to our internal organisation. Our academic structure will be based on three faculties each sub-divided into three or four schools. The senior management team has been restructured. The principles underpinning the changes are a commitment to an open management style with an emphasis on inclusivity, trust and devolution of responsibility, balanced by accountability. The pervading culture is one of growing optimism as Bucks seeks to build on its strengths and progress in those areas where the need for improvement is acknowledged. The development of the Strategic Plan 2006-07 to 2010-11 finds the institution in a state of dynamic change and with an invigorated sense of purpose. We aim to manage the process of change so that the outcomes are beneficial to students and staff.

The changes taking place within the organisation and the way in which they are being embraced are indicative of an institution which feels confident about its role within the higher education sector and has a clear view of its strategic direction. It has exciting plans for its portfolio of courses. Its internal organisational and management structures are changing significantly so that it mirrors the external markets which Bucks faces and wishes to engage with further. In keeping with this, Bucks has ambitious plans to develop its estate.

To achieve the necessary focus in the new Strategic Plan discussions have taken place with different groups of staff in the University to determine our priorities over the next five years. These priorities have been agreed bearing in mind our overall strategic aims, and also the current internal context based on a SWOT analysis and the external drivers relevant to the planning period. We support all of the strategic aims and the University will continue to operate in support of these aims. However, we will be concentrating our management of change during the next five years on certain focal points as represented by the strategic priorities, rather than a more diffuse approach. The Strategic Plan therefore represents the next stage in the evolution of Bucks and is indicative of how we propose to meet the challenges in the immediate future.

Underpinning the Strategic Plan will be a range of strategies which map to operational and functional areas as well as faculty and departmental plans. The annual business cycle will be underpinned by an annual corporate plan and annual operating statements for faculties and departments. Key performance indicators (KPIs) against which we will monitor performance will be developed for each strategic priority. These are the KPIs which will be reported to the Council. As part of routine business the Senior Management Team and Senate will monitor a wider range of performance indicators from which the KPIs are selected.

Dr Ruth Farwell  
Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive  
June 2006

## Our vision

Buckinghamshire New University will be a university making a significant social and economic contribution to its region, with a growing national reputation for its work and achieving international recognition for its specialist areas of expertise.

## Our mission

Bucks is proud to provide quality, inclusive and relevant higher education to develop and build the potential of individuals and organisations. Our activities are underpinned by appropriate scholarship, focussed research and professional practice, and are delivered within a caring and supportive environment.

## Our ethos

Bucks aims to provide a learning community where all our staff and students are treated fairly and with respect and their talents are nurtured. Staff and students will be given support and recognition to enable them to maximise their individual potential and their contribution to the institution, its vision and goals.

The outcome of a survey among Bucks staff in September 2004 indicated that we believe that our activities are characterised by:

- putting students first
- inclusivity
- enthusiasm
- customer focus and professionalism
- commitment to partnership working
- active participation in the cultural, economic and social life of our region
- authenticity.

Building on this work, and during the early stages of the planning period, we intend to consult widely on our core values, which underpin all that we do and our way of working.

## Educational character

We will be a new generation university, one which is externally facing and forward looking.

Bucks is committed to being a teaching-led university with a portfolio which has academic currency, and a vocational and practical focus. The courses we offer are intended to prepare our graduates for the employment markets they are likely to face, as well as enhancing the career opportunities for those already in employment, recognising that the pattern of employment is no longer a 'job for life'. This means that we will provide courses that are designed to meet the changing needs of employers as well as the changing nature of the employment markets. We will go out of our way to attract participants to our programmes who have the potential to benefit from our offer, but who may not be traditional participants in higher education. These participants may be from under-represented groups, those looking for second opportunities, those already in work, those who are of a more mature age looking to develop themselves later in life or wishing to study for pleasure. We will award taught undergraduate degrees and diplomas, foundation degrees and postgraduate degrees. Given the employment focus of our courses, our foundation degrees will be developed in conjunction with employers and with the relevant Sector Skills Councils; they will be strongly work based and directed towards those already in employment wishing to develop their professional skills. We will retain elements of further education where it is directly supportive of our strategy, for example, foundation courses in art and design.

We will continue with a solid base of long-lasting subject areas. However, using this as a foundation, we will develop provision in innovative and niche areas of strength, working across traditional subject boundaries to develop inter-disciplinary provision, for example, exploiting synergies between creative and technological expertise and, where possible, also incorporating a perspective on management, leadership and entrepreneurship. It is the innovative and creative mix across our spectrum of expertise to create unique provision, which will be our hallmark.

Our ability to sustain this position will depend on our contribution to the development of our areas of expertise through scholarship and research. Our research will be in focussed areas of strength, and will be applied. In the majority of cases it will be about knowledge exchange and the development of the subject as professional practice or in the business context. 'Blue skies' research is unlikely to be part of our portfolio. Our applied research and knowledge transfer activities will inform our curriculum, enable notable outputs and develop the opportunity for employer engagement. Our research degree programmes, although relatively small, are significant and will expand. We will be applying for research degree awarding powers.

Our organisational structure will mirror the external markets which we face and will facilitate working across internal organisational boundaries. We will develop an institutional culture which enables these boundaries to be treated as permeable for the purposes of course development and curriculum enhancement. Externally, partnerships with employers and other educational providers, particularly our strategic partner further education colleges, are fundamental to the delivery of our strategy.

## Strategic aims

1. To have high quality teaching, student support and student experience which are held in high regard.
2. To provide a caring environment for students which enables them to develop personally and professionally.
3. To maintain high academic standards and to enhance students' achievement.
4. To have aspects of the academic portfolio which are market leaders and some niche provision, and provide courses leading to employment and career advancement.
5. To promote widening participation and access to higher education by offering the widest opportunities for study and employment including in partnership with other selected providers.
6. To enhance our learning and teaching, research, scholarship and knowledge exchange activities which are in keeping with our mission and policies.
7. To value our staff and provide opportunities for their professional development and career progression.
8. To provide an appropriate and well resourced physical environment for students and staff.
9. To add value in terms of capacity building and knowledge transfer.
10. To enhance our reputation and visibility, consistent with our acknowledged qualities and strengths.
11. To maintain a plurality of funding streams e.g. HEFCE, NHS, LSC, as well as engaging with employers and with our community to develop additional funding streams from a range of business and community activities.
12. To work constructively with educational partners to enhance our reach, our range of provision and our capacity.

## External drivers in the period 2006-07 to 2010-11

The main external driver facing Buckinghamshire New University during the planning period 2006-07 to 2010-11 is the challenge of the new marketplace starting in 2006. Student expectations are going to be much higher. For undergraduate students, higher education is likely to be the second highest investment in their life, second only to investing in their own home. This will herald very important changes in the fabric of higher education. There will be potentially more complex relationships with students who will have much more awareness of what they are investing in. Higher education will need to be sharper and smarter, giving students more of what they want, while recognising that students also have responsibilities as part of their contractual relationship with institutions. Towards the end of the planning period, it is predicted that numbers of 18-20 year olds will start a gradual decline although the decline will affect those social groups who participate least in higher education. Current performance indicators for Bucks show that our participation rate from these groups is consistent with our benchmark but there are other institutions significantly below benchmark. Thus we may be affected more than other institutions by the demographic changes. For a variety of reasons, we recognise that potentially we will have to work harder to retain our market share.

The higher education market is likely to be much more volatile, and there will be increased unpredictability as we get towards the end of the planning period. The next Comprehensive Spending Review in 2007 is unlikely to deliver any increase in funding to the higher education sector. In addition there will be a continuing squeeze on research and enterprise funding from HEFCE and their methodology for funding teaching will also change. Also the former Strategic Health Authority (SHA) which contracted with Bucks for nurse education has now merged with four other SHAs into a pan-London SHA, and will introduce a new standard contract and benchmark price. Ensuring a growing income from enterprise activities will therefore be important as will the ability to be flexible, open-minded and responsive to changing opportunities for Bucks. The likely immediate outcome of the Research Assessment Exercise in 2008 and its rapid replacement by metric driven funding will mean that our opportunities for public funding for research activities will be linked exclusively with our developing third stream activities or alternatively by going into partnership with other higher education institutions.

It is not only UK and EU student choice which could be radically different. The overseas market is always massively sensitive to change. The rapid pace of change in emerging international economies such as China and India gives rise to the need to collaborate with strategic partners in these countries to secure an adequate supply of paying learners to the UK in the short term and to provide international exchange and co-operation with our staff and students. In the longer term, strategic alliances would give opportunities for our staff and students to keep pace with intensive global economic integration by working and studying there.

The recently published South-East Plan sets out a vision for the future of the South East region to 2026. This is echoed in the priorities drafted by HEFCE for the region. Opportunities are presented for Bucks in the Plan because of our strengths in the creative and cultural industries, which are recognised as regionally important subjects, as well as in our strong employer focus so that potentially we might benefit from the expanding educational opportunities derived from the target to up-skill in professional areas such as construction, middle management and associate professionals. The emphasis on town centres with High Wycombe identified as a primary town centre as a regional hub, i.e. a focus for provision of higher order economic, social and cultural activities, is welcomed in the context of our becoming a university in the town. Likewise targeting Aylesbury Vale as one of the sub-regions where the majority of development will be concentrated will be significant to Bucks, especially since one of the major challenges in the area will be to ensure that economic growth and employment increase in line with the population.

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## Focus for the Strategic Plan in the period 2006-07 to 2010-11

**Sustainability** – in the sense of maintaining our market share or equivalent to ensure financial stability; this is also about nurturing our students and applicants during the period of campus consolidation; given the uncertainties around variable fees it may require us to diversify into different markets and provision, so we are not too dependent on full-time undergraduate recruitment.

**Growth** – in the sense of developing our reputation and visibility in addition to new income streams; this is also about enhancing staff professionalism e.g. in teaching, scholarship and research, and in providing a service culture.

**Action** – in the sense of gaining university title; being responsive and developing new provision; improving our operational practices and effectiveness so that our funding has maximum positive impact on the learning environment.

Our approach will be to retain a base of long-lasting subject areas as well as our strong specialist areas where we have niche provision, or strong external engagement including research and knowledge transfer. We will develop new markets by exploiting market gaps and potential synergies between areas. Income sources will be expanded and diversified. We will enhance our visibility.

Our strategic priorities during the period will thus be:

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|---------------------------|---|
| Strategic Priority One:   | To be responsive to changes in the market through an openness to diversification of income streams and provision. |
| Strategic Priority Two:   | To invest in campus redevelopment and improvements to infrastructure and facilities.                              |
| Strategic Priority Three: | To maintain and enhance the total student experience during the period of campus consolidation.                   |
| Strategic Priority Four:  | To develop our people.  |
| Strategic Priority Five:  | To improve operational practices and enhance processes.   |
| Strategic Priority Six:   | To ensure financial stability.  |
| Strategic Priority Seven: | To enhance our reputation and visibility.   |

## Strategic Priority One

### **To be responsive to changes in the market through an openness to diversification of income streams and provision.**

The higher education sector generally is about to face what is likely to be a rapidly changing marketplace. Within the UK sector the introduction of variable tuition fees for full-time undergraduate students is unprecedented. Therefore any modelling of the short to medium term effect is difficult at present. However, the current applications data suggest that Bucks will have to work hard to meet its existing HEFCE contract. Meeting the contract is a priority and we will continue work already commenced to improve the conversion rate of applicants to accepted offers and to enrolments, as well as building further relationships with schools and FE College partners to build progression routes into Bucks. Current analysis has indicated that a significant proportion of our full-time undergraduate students come from local FE Colleges.

Being responsive to changes will not depend solely on developing different undergraduate products for the home market. It is also about looking to other markets and therefore the diversification of the existing mix of students and levels of provision. We anticipate that the outcome will be changes in the balance between different groups of students – undergraduate/postgraduate; full and part-time; home/overseas/EU. We expect to have brought about modest increases to student FTE numbers by the end of the planning period although we would not necessarily assume any HEFCE funding for growth.

We intend also to develop other income streams by working closely with employers and affiliated bodies to offer short courses for continuing professional development (CPD) and to identify opportunities for knowledge transfer and research-based consultancy. The ageing population could afford opportunities for expanding continuing education provision as well as CPD and work based learning.

### Objectives

- 1.1 To develop enhanced market intelligence including customer perceptions, market share, benchmarking against competitors and longitudinal data.
- 1.2 To manage more strategically the existing course portfolio and to discontinue unviable provision with low student recruitment.
- 1.3 To develop a range of new undergraduate courses, and where appropriate, expand postgraduate courses in accordance with the educational character of the institution.
- 1.4 To expand, where appropriate, the delivery methods for our programmes (including work-based and e-learning) and patterns of attendance for our students to be more responsive to student and employer needs, particularly for part-time provision.
- 1.5 To expand our range of short course and CPD provision in relevant areas.
- 1.6 To maintain excellent working relationships with employers and sponsors, and with FE College partners.
- 1.7 To expand our work with schools and FE College partners to open up progression to Bucks either into top-up awards or into the first stage of undergraduate awards.
- 1.8 To clarify the purpose of the Combined Studies programme and, if appropriate, develop a plan to expand this provision, and extend the approach into other appropriate areas.
- 1.9 In the first instance to maintain at least existing overseas student numbers, with a view to developing a strategy for expansion from 2008/09 onwards.

- 1.10 To coordinate activities overseas across the three faculties and central departments, and to develop appropriate mechanisms to support overseas students from application through to enrolment and successful completion with a view to these being in place from 2008-s09 onwards.
- 1.11 To establish a coherent institution-wide programme of events of external companies and not-for-profit organisations with a view to enhancing applied research related income streams, coordinated centrally within Bucks.
- 1.12 To establish a central resource to support staff in faculties to make it as simple as possible for them to bid for funds, to offer consultancy, short courses and CPD provision and to develop knowledge transfer activities.

## **Strategic Priority Two**

### **To invest in campus redevelopment and improvements to infrastructure and facilities.**

Ambitious plans for the development of our estate are in the process of being implemented. This will continue during the planning period. It is expected that during the planning period Phase One of the campus redevelopment project will be complete and Phase Two will be in the process of implementation.

General improvements in the main campus at Queen Alexandra Road are of fundamental importance to our internal community as well as to the District Council's plans for the development of High Wycombe and the potential use of our facilities by the community. The environmental look and feel of the campus are integral to our other strategic priorities, and, in particular, to the student and staff experience.

While the other campuses at Wellesbourne and Chalfont continue in use, modest investment will also be made in their maintenance.

### **Objectives**

- 2.1 To complete Phase One of the campus redevelopment project including significant refurbishment of the existing buildings.
- 2.2 To invest in ICT infrastructure commensurate with the changed ways of working facilitated by the changes to the estate.
- 2.3 To have specified and commenced the implementation of Phase Two of the campus redevelopment project.
- 2.4 To maintain the Chalfont and Wellesbourne campuses so as not to detract from the student and staff experience while recognising that high levels of investment are not possible
- 2.5 To identify a suitable building and location for nurse education provision and to transfer the provision there, in addition to providing a base on the main campus at Queen Alexandra Road.
- 2.6 To open up facilities on the campuses for suitable community use during periods of low demand.
- 2.7 To ensure that the facilities are open during hours which are commensurate with changes to delivery patterns to meet student and employer demands.

## Strategic Priority Three

### To maintain and enhance the total student experience during the period of campus consolidation.

We are mindful that during the period of campus consolidation there is the potential for considerable upheaval and disruption to current students. Students at the Queen Alexandra Road site will be studying in an environment where substantial building works will be underway and the impact on their studies of this must be minimised. Likewise the facilities for students on the other campuses must not be run down as the time to vacate the campuses approaches. We recognise also that from the 2007-08 cohort students joining courses on one campus may be transferring to, and therefore completing their course, on another campus. Communication well in advance about changes and their impact on students is essential. Consideration will also be given in advance to the likelihood of students claiming their studies had been negatively affected and hence how this might be dealt with as a mitigating circumstance. The objective would be to avoid the claim being made by putting in place actions to limit the impact caused by either the building work or the relocation.

#### Objectives

- 3.1 To front end as much as possible the refurbishment aspects of the campus redevelopment project in order to offset the potential disruption caused by the new building works with tangible benefits for students in terms of enhanced teaching accommodation.
- 3.2 To contain the building works to isolated parts of the campus during term-time, and to undertake refurbishment works and moves outside term-time as much as possible.
- 3.3 To involve students where possible in design briefs for enhancements to the physical environment.
- 3.4 To prioritise investment in the student experience, including in the Students' Union facilities and services, when making budgetary decisions.
- 3.5 To develop mechanisms for briefing students and keeping them well informed about progress and the steps we are taking to minimise the likely impact on their studies at all stages of their engagement with Bucks.
- 3.6 To ensure the existing close liaison between the management and the Students Union is enhanced during the period of campus consolidation.
- 3.7 To ensure the delivery of additional student residential accommodation during Phase 1 of the campus redevelopment project, ideally by summer 2008.
- 3.8 To enhance the service for helping students find residential accommodation appropriate to their needs, and to introduce more flexibility in the residential services for those students with special requirements e.g. all year round tenancy or unusual start times.
- 3.9 In support of our commitment to recruiting students from diverse backgrounds and hence with diverse needs, to extend existing successful work in the areas of pre-induction, induction, skills development and other work underpinning the progressive achievement of generic skills.

## Strategic Priority Four

### To develop our people.

Bucks is committed to developing all its staff to enhance individuals' career progression, to enhance retention of staff and to contribute to succession planning. In addition, development of staff is essential to the achievement of our other strategic priorities. All managers at Bucks will be key in the implementation of initiatives and activities designed to achieve the development of our people, and will play their part in achieving devolution of responsibility coupled with accountability. Enhancements to our operations will be achieved by individuals taking responsibility for themselves, their behaviour and their work.

Campus consolidation will impact on the staff resources as services no longer have to offer a distributed service. Care will be taken to plan well in advance for this, and manage any changed staffing requirements sensitively, and providing appropriate advice and guidance.

During the early stages of the planning period, we intend to consult widely on our core values, which underpin all that we do and our way of working. It is intended that, once identified, these core values will inform our code of professional conduct.

### Objectives

- 4.1 To implement appropriate professional development and training programmes for all staff in support of the approach of devolution of responsibility with accountability.
- 4.2 To enhance the customer service culture across the University's functional areas.
- 4.3 To devise appropriate management development and support programmes for Heads of Department and School, cascading some aspects to deputies, Principal Lecturers, Course Leaders and others, as appropriate.
- 4.4 To enhance the use of the scholarly activity and research aspect of the academic staff contract for maintaining up-to-date subject knowledge and experience of professional specialist areas, and for engaging in developments relating to learning and teaching; to encourage publication and dissemination of the outputs.
- 4.5 To provide opportunities for development and career progression for those identified as having the potential to progress their career and with succession planning in mind.
- 4.6 To link individual and group development activities to personal career plans and Bucks corporate objectives.
- 4.7 To develop a strategic approach to rewarding and incentivising staff, which meets our objectives and recognises the contribution of staff.
- 4.8 To be mindful of changing resource requirements resulting from campus consolidation and to provide affected staff with appropriate advice and guidance.
- 4.9 To review the various human resource procedures to ensure that they are fit for purpose.
- 4.10 To confirm Investors in People status on reassessment under the new standards.
- 4.11 To establish a forum for those engaged in personal research to network within the institution.

## Strategic Priority Five

### To improve operational practices and enhance processes.

Already Bucks has a reputation for providing a friendly and supportive services to our stakeholders. Our external stakeholders include: individual students, business and employers, communities, contract providers and Government public sector agencies. Also for many of our services there are internal stakeholders. Faculties rely on central services to enable them to conduct their transactions with a customer focus in mind, and vice versa. However, expectations of all those who engage with UK higher education are increasing, and accordingly our approach needs to be more professional and better. All our activities, be they in learning and teaching, administration, operations or services, will be delivered to higher standards, commensurate, where appropriate, with professional standards. There will be investment in staff development to ensure that these standards are met.

#### Objectives

- 5.1 To implement the new faculty and school structure, facilitating staff engagement and opportunities for inter-faculty working.
- 5.2 Building on the recent business process reviews, to review and refine existing business processes considering the balance of activities between faculties and departments, and bearing in mind internal servicing, responsibility and accountability.
- 5.3 To document business processes and systems to ensure that they work with the end user in mind and are not overly bureaucratic.
- 5.4 To reduce overheads by removing duplication and by not having multiple approaches, releasing effort to be directed towards strategic priorities.
- 5.5 To incorporate continuing professional development into formal processes of appraisal and career progression to encourage and support staff to maintain their professional updating.
- 5.6 To develop performance measures for agreed relevant areas of our operations.
- 5.7 To use performance indicators to evaluate performance and successes, and to use them to establish a 'learning loop' to enhance practice and quality.
- 5.8 To continue to monitor governance arrangements in keeping with the commitment to best practice governance.
- 5.9 To implement the recently agreed common academic framework across all faculties.

## **Strategic Priority Six**

### **To ensure financial stability.**

A stable financial environment is essential to ensure the sustainability of Bucks and demonstrate value for money. However, at the same time flexibility is needed to enable emphasis to be given to the strategic priorities including the significant investment needed for the campus redevelopment project. The budget allocation process will be reviewed during the period to bring about increased ownership and transparency in parallel with accountability.

There will be additional income from tuition fees from 2006-07. However, there is uncertainty in student recruitment which may impact on income. Costs are forecast to rise with the implementation of the Framework Agreement as well as future pay claims, and with changes taking place to the pension schemes. A higher education institution has some core costs irrespective of size. Nevertheless the balance of the expenditure on central costs compared with those in the faculties has to be kept under review. Bearing in mind the uncertainty about the market and also the changing HEFCE funding methodology, additional income streams will be a priority.

### **Objectives**

- To keep in balance in-year income and expenditure, and to strive to make operational surpluses for investment in priorities.
- To grow and diversify income.
- To implement economies and efficiencies to release sufficient funds for investment in the strategic priorities.
- To support faculties and departments to manage more effectively their financial performance and thus deliver economies and efficiencies.

## Strategic Priority Seven

### To enhance our reputation and visibility.

We are aware that while we generally have a good reputation with the employers that work with us, with our collaborative partners and in certain external networks where we have made an impact, Bucks is not well known. We have poor visibility among the HE sector, nationally and even locally. Our marketing function has recently been enhanced and is beginning to make an impact. However more needs to be done to raise our profile externally as we have much to offer and significant strengths to broadcast.

Some of the objectives listed in the other priorities will enhance our visibility e.g. third stream activities and professional engagement. In addition we will consider how a changed approach to branding and sub-branding could make us more visible to a wider audience. The acquisition of University title, assuming we are successful, is an ideal opportunity to exploit this. In the meantime an opportunity is afforded by the naming of our new faculties and schools.

We believe that presenting a more coherent external face to organisations and the markets which we face will also enhance our reputation.

### Objectives

- 7.1 To gain University title and, assuming success, to use it as an opportunity to rebrand the institution commensurate with the vision set out for the institution in this Strategic Plan.
- 7.2 To coordinate our approaches to external markets and the interface with business eg by consolidating contact databases across the institution and by defining clearly contact points within the institution with which external bodies interact.
- 7.3 During the later stages of the planning period, to apply for research degree awarding powers.

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