

University of Nottingham Strategy Development

External Factors February 2019

Background

The University is currently developing its strategy for the period beyond 2020. Reflecting on how our external context will develop is a vital part of the process. A major piece of work on the “megatrends” which will influence our context was undertaken by the University in 2017, supported by Trajectory. The original report can be viewed [here](#). Early in 2019 the original Mega trends consultation group, with some additional colleagues, re-convened to reflect on what updates, if any, are needed.

This group consisted of:

- Professor Andy Long, Deputy Vice Chancellor and Chair
- Professor Marion Walker, Professor of Stroke Rehabilitation
- Dr Richard Masterman, APVC Research & Strategy Performance
- Professor Nicola McLelland, German and History linguistics
- Professor Jonathan Garibaldi, Computer Science
- Professor Neil Crout, Environmental Modelling
- Professor Roisin Corcoran, Chair in Education
- John Quirk, Director of Global Engagement
- Haf Merrifield, Director Planning, Performance & Strategic Change
- Anne Partington, Head of Strategy Support

Which trends?

After a lively discussion, the group concluded that the list of “megatrends” identified in 2017 remained valid, although there were new developments to consider in each case. The one exception was the “Future of Food” where it was agreed that whilst this represents an important area of research and impact it doesn’t really constitute a trend in the same sense as the others and therefore whilst this is an important area of research, it wasn’t considered as an ongoing trend alongside the others noted below.

The group reflected on number of themes which had assumed greater prominence in the last couple of years, including gender identity and gender fluidity; the increasing focus on equality, diversity & inclusion within higher education; public discourse related to sexual harassment and assault; the growth in the sharing economy; and a different sensibility in relation to some sustainability issues including use of plastics and animal products. None of these was felt to constitute an additional trend in their own right, however.

Updates on the original trends

Globalisation

The trends identified in relation to this theme in 2017 have continued to play out much as anticipated, although it is surprising that two years later, clarity on the consequences of the UK’s exit from the European Union remains elusive. Looking again at the 2017 report, the group recognised that there was perhaps more scope for regional nuance in our understanding of globalisation.

Knowledge Acquisition & Identity

A significant development in the sphere of education research has been the increasing prominence of randomised controlled trials and quasi-experiments to evaluate the effectiveness of educational innovations and interventions. The group felt this offered the University an opportunity to build on its research in this area as well as to draw on this approach in its own educational innovations.

The group also felt that the 2017 work perhaps missed the significance of cultural and creative factors in a broad and balanced curriculum for the future, as part of a 2nd generation post-industrialisation context.

The focus on degree level apprenticeships & lifelong learning have strengthened.

Living in an ICT saturated world

The previous report was accurate in its expectations of how the digital world might develop. Awareness of some of the risks associated with this trend has arguably heightened during the last two years, with some particularly high profile cyber-security breaches attracting attention, and some evidence of a backlash against some uses of data by major service providers (eg evidence of “digital detox”). Awareness of the value and use / misuse of personal data is heightened. If anything the pace of change and of transition into the “Fourth Industrial Revolution”, blurring the physical, the digital and the biological realms, has been greater than anticipated.

Healthy Ageing (consider renaming to Healthy Living)

The consultation group suggested the expansion of this area of focus to cover lifelong health / healthy living to ensure consideration of a broader range of both physical and mental health. Awareness and openness about mental health and wellbeing has increased significantly even in the last two years. Of particular note is the focus on student’s mental health and wellbeing (including preventative, evidence based approaches to their academic, social and emotional learning); the expectations of owning & maximising our own health; social care rather than health care; and dealing with isolation.

Migration

The anticipated large-scale movements of people as a consequence of political and economic factors have continued with the 2017 report commentary remaining relevant. There has, sadly, been clear evidence that as feared some staff and students have experienced hostility or have felt less welcome in Nottingham, particularly since the Brexit vote. There has also been a significant national public reaction to the treatment of the Windrush generation, with the impact of this felt locally as well. The University should maintain a focus on supporting its community in a positive and proactive manner.