

Environmental Sustainability Staff & Student Engagement Plan 2023 - 2028

1. Introduction

The University launched its Climate Strategy in 2020 and subsequently set a Net Zero target of 2040, although more specific KPIs The Environmental Sustainability guiding principle is described in the University Strategy as: *“We care about the environment and are committed to minimising the impact of our operations on the natural world for future generations.”*

The Environmental Sustainability Masterplan outlines staff and student engagement as a key route to achieving its objectives. This Environmental Sustainability Staff and Student Engagement Delivery Plan outlines how we will engage with our internal audience to inform, empower and inspire them to be more environmentally positive.

2. Scope

This Plan focuses on the internal University audience, mainly staff and students but also has an impact on visitors to our sites who will see physical communications.

A separate internal communications plan covers our external engagement, such as social media activity.

3. Key Priorities/ Underlying Principles

Environmental Sustainability is everyone’s responsibility, but we recognise that it is a complex area, so we have several initiatives to enable stakeholders to identify opportunities to reduce their negative impact and increase positive impacts. The key objectives for this plan are:

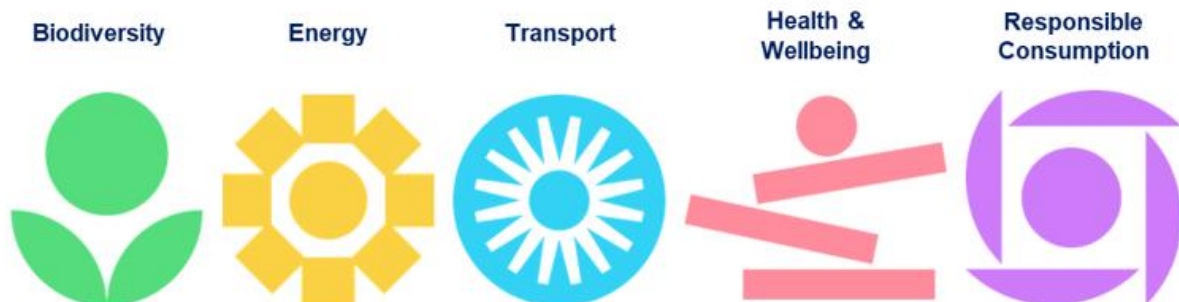
- I. To demystify the topic of environmental sustainability through a clear, tailored communication strategy including training, media assets, web and other accessible content
- II. To provide the physical infrastructure and cultural environment to inform and inspire our stakeholders to innovate for environmental sustainability

4. Approach

In 2023, the University commissioned a project to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of University of Leicester staff and students about environmental sustainability and to subsequently design a brand identity and messaging framework.

Brand identity

Five themes have been identified as key to delivering our messaging clearly and effectively:





Messaging

Sustainability must be woven through everything we do at University of Leicester, guided by the Sustainability Team and central comms. It's essential that we communicate our values in sustainability to all stakeholders - from students to staff, partners and suppliers.

The environmental sustainability brand guidelines, based on extensive internal research, act as a blueprint for developing copy around sustainability, both for internal and external comms. Extracts are appended.

5. Staff Engagement

The University's approach to engaging all staff in the environmental sustainability agenda is to educate and empower them to determine the most effective way for them to reduce their own, and their department/school's negative impact as well as increasing their positive impact (handprint).

This is achieved using a number of measures:

Environmental Sustainability online training

A 20-minute online module is included on Blackboard for staff to complete either at induction or as part of their CPD training. It is recommended to be completed every three years and reminders will be given through the Personal Development Plan portal.

Carbon Literacy Training

Carbon Literacy training for Senior Leaders will be carried out with the University's Senior Leadership Team (n=50) once it is made available.

Basic Carbon Literacy training is offered to staff and students in the following priority order:

Staff:

- Environmental Sustainability Steering and Delivery Group members
- Environmental Action Coordinators
- General staff population

Students:

- Sabbatical Officers
- Green Bubble members
- Course representatives
- SEPP module students (inter-curricular)
- Careers & Employability programme participants
- General student population

Environmental Action Coordinators

To support the delivery of Environmental Sustainability as a University Strategy Guiding Principle, Environmental Action Coordinators are recruited and trained (Carbon Literacy Training plus workshops on each Environmental Sustainability theme) to promote awareness of environmental sustainability and coordinate efforts to embed environmental sustainability within their department, in conjunction with the Sustainability Team.

The main objectives of the role are:

- Promote awareness of environmental sustainability
- Coordinate efforts to embed environmental sustainability within our department
- Indicative time commitment of 1 day per month
- Network of other Coordinators to share knowledge and best practice

Local Environment Action Plans

With environmental sustainability being a guiding principle of the University Strategy, we are seeking to embed environmental sustainability into decision-making and activities across all functions of the University. Creating an environmental action plan for each School or Division is an important step in this process.

We acknowledge that environmental impacts and opportunities to make a positive contribution to environmental sustainability will vary by School/Division, depending on the nature of the activities undertaken. Developing a Local Environmental Action Plan (LEAP) enables each School/Division to consider its effect on the environment and identify impactful actions that are within their control and relevant to their specific context. Each LEAP spans three to five years (from 23/24) but sets annual priorities.

The action plan is an opportunity to:

- Explore what each School/Division can do to help achieve our University's commitment to [reducing carbon emissions](#)
- Consider how we can use our University's programmes to equip students with sustainability skills
- Amplify research that makes a positive contribution to sustainability challenges
- Make sustainability part of our everyday culture and influence positive change, both within our University and beyond
- Receive recognition for existing good practice
- Identify relevant expertise and projects within each School/Division, or policies and processes owned by that School/Division, that can have impact across the whole University

Support and resources

A bespoke [web-based tool](#) has been developed to support Schools and Divisions to build a LEAP for their area, providing a common framework and reducing the resources required to establish impactful actions. The LEAP tool suggests areas of policy and practice to explore – across operations, teaching, research and advocacy – but also enables each School/Division to adapt the suggestions and add their own specific actions that reflect their activities and ambitions.

Further resources are available on an internal [Environmental Action Resource Hub](#). One-to-one support is available from the Sustainability Team and a forum where Environmental Action Coordinators can share experiences and good practice meet regularly.

Departmental workshops

The Sustainability Team run bespoke workshops by request for each school/division to help them to identify their environmental impacts and opportunities and to develop their LEAP.

6. Student Engagement

Students increasingly report that they believe their education should involve sustainable development, regardless of their chosen subject. In the NUS Survey (2022), **87%** agreed that 'Universities should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development'.

At the University of Leicester, the internal Students' Union survey found that in 21/22 – 58% Leicester respondents agreed 'My place of study takes action to limit the negative impact it has on the environment and society'. In 22/23 this had risen to 76% due to significant student engagement through a number of initiatives:

Green Bubble

The Sustainability Team supports the SU's Green Bubble. This group takes action on student ideas to help the University become a more sustainable place. This group is chaired by the Students' Union Activities Officer and feeds into the University's Environmental Sustainability Delivery Group, providing the University with the student voice on social and environmental sustainability at the University.

Student representatives

Two student representatives are invited to join each Environmental Sustainability Working Group.



Halls of Residence

Incoming students receive information about sustainability activities and opportunities in Halls through the student Handbook, welcome address and training.

VC's welcome address

Each Welcome week, the Vice Chancellor gives a welcome address to the students. From 2023/24 an environmental sustainability induction video is included in this talk that outlines the University's commitment to sustainability and some of the ways they can get involved and learn more.

Intranet

All student-related information and opportunities are available on the student SharePoint pages and are promoted via social media and the SU webpages.

SEED Projects

The SEED Fund (Sustainable Enterprise and Environmental Development) is a joint University and Students' Union (SU) concept to support student project ideas. The Sustainability Team provide £2000 to fund projects relating to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Each project can apply for up to £500 and can be within the University or wider community.

This is a rare opportunity for funding and offers students the chance to gain essential employability skills. With guidance from the Sustainability Team and SU, applicants complete a project proposal and present their idea to the student Green Bubble group who distribute the SEED fund.

Inter-curricular Projects

The Sustainability Team offer a large number of student projects annually. We have won two [Green Gowns Awards](#) for Research with Impact – Students.

Events

Go Green Week

Every February we run a student-led Go Green Week to raise awareness of the importance of sustainability and encourage positive change among students and staff at the University.

Make a Difference / Volunteering

The Sustainability and Volunteering teams offer a number of opportunities throughout the academic year, such as [Make a Difference Days](#).

7. Links to University Strategy

As well as those in the Environmental Sustainability Strategic governance, this plan helps to deliver activities from the following University Strategic Aims:

UoL Strategic Aims

[Our Citizens](#) Aim 4 “Maximising our impact as socially responsible Citizens of Change to tackle the pressing challenges and opportunities facing humanity and the natural world using the UN Sustainable Development Goals as the framework to address these.

[Education](#) Aim 4 “Empower our students with the expertise and skills they need to realise their ambitions to become positive Citizens of Change”.

8. Governance

Environmental Sustainability Delivery Plans are overseen by the Environmental Sustainability Delivery Group, which reports to the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Board (ExB Chair).

9. Implementation

A Sustainability Engagement Working Group will oversee progress and interventions for the priorities listed above and new priorities as they arise.



Implementing this strategic delivery plan will largely be dependent on each priority initiative securing its own funding and resource-base by articulating its value-add to the plans of existing business units, as well as to the strategic priorities of other areas.

10. Outcomes and Key Performance Indicators

Items in italics = baseline

	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Target	Timescale
General			
1	Carbon Literacy for Educators Accreditation	TBC	2024
Staff			
2	Increase in staff survey respondents agreeing “the University is taking the right steps towards reducing its negative impact on the environment”	53% 65%	2022 2025
3	Environmental Action Coordinators recruited & trained	48 over 29 schools/divisions 80 over 50 schools/divisions	22/23 24/25
4	Local Environmental Action Plans developed	50	2025
5	College / Professional Services Action Plans developed & included in CLT reporting	6	2025
Students			
6	SU Survey responses to ‘My place of study takes action to limit the negative impact it has on the environment and society’	22/23 – 76% agreed 24/25 – 80%	
7	SEED Projects	4 per year	Annual
8	Student Carbon Literacy trainers trained	5 each year	From 2025

11. Risk Management

A key part of the University’s pathway to Net Zero by 2040, is reliant on successful staff and student engagement to encourage behaviour change, particularly with regards to energy demand reduction and required policy changes such as on international travel.

The University’s utility and carbon cost forecast is set to double between 2022 – 2024 (to £20.9M). Approximately 75% of the University’s carbon footprint is from activities that individuals can influence (e.g. procurement and travel decisions), therefore engagement is essential if we are to stabilise the cost of our utility bills and achieve our net zero ambitions.

The complex nature of environmental sustainability and the absence of a ‘one size fits all’ solution means that a collaborative approach to achieving the significant changes required is essential but resource heavy. However, a successful engagement plan should save at least 5% of our utility bill (approx. £75K in 23/24) and will increase annually.

Successful implementation will require:

- Complete senior support for the LEAP Process and other governance arrangements
- Adequate resourcing of the Sustainability Team for communications, training and engagement
- Cross-University support, such as promotion of training programmes, communications and marketing expertise and infrastructure and support for Environmental Action Coordinators within Schools and Divisions.

Appendix. Sustainability Brand Guidelines examples

Benefits and motivations

Students

Students are more likely to care about things that directly impact their life now, in the present moment. Motivations to consider:

- Education: grades
- Career: pathway, progression, job
- Mental and physical health
- Social: fitting in, being a good person (empathy, kindness, citizenship)
- Social justice

Focus on benefits and call to action that is relevant to the stakeholder at that particular time in their life i.e. 1st year students are likely to care more about passing a module than their future career, whereas 3rd year students are likely to be more interested in gaining a placement year, starting an internship or locating where to live after university

Staff, Partners and Suppliers

Although most understand the importance of sustainability, many feel as though they don't have time to engage in more sustainable practices. Motivations to consider:

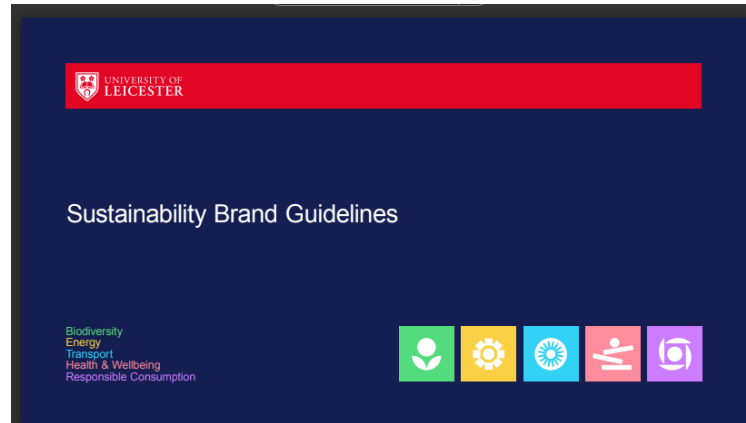
- Career progression
- Recognition and reputation
- Mental and physical health
- Social: societal values, how certain behaviours are in our DNA
- Social justice

Focus on benefits and call to action that is relevant to the stakeholder at that particular time in their life i.e. academic staff may be more influenced by their potential impact on students and recognition among peers, whereas partners or suppliers may engage more with communications around business and their place (and reputation) within the industry

Language and tone

Active and collaborative language so use words like we and us

- Inclusive messaging for all ages, genders, cultures, abilities etc.
- A mix of hard-hitting and fun and playful:
 - For smaller actions and behaviour change we can be fun, playful and silly. Create humour for memorable moments.
 - Serious and thought-provoking for big matters i.e. loss and damage, long term implications or repercussions of climate change.
- All language should be hopeful and optimistic. No doom and gloom.



Example copy

Students

Don't get left behind

The world is moving towards sustainability. Industries will adapt and those that can't will cease to exist. Let's be part of a better, sustainable future.

Sustainable = employable

Learning how to live sustainably requires creativity, problem solving and an understanding of something much bigger than yourself. It's an asset to employers.

Slow down

From fast food to fast fashion, we're on a fast-track to climate breakdown. Have less, think more, slow it down.

Climate anxiety?

Our generation has the power to redefine societal norms and values. Let your eco-anxiety fuel your determination to learn, educate, and advocate for a more sustainable future.

Staff, Partners and Suppliers

Sustainability's a team game

We can't rely on others to drive change, we're all part of the picture. Collaboration is key.

Academic influence extends beyond the classroom

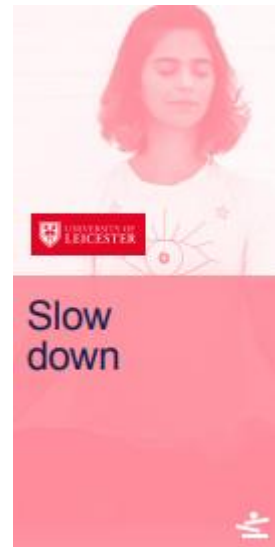
Champion sustainability and nurture a generation of environmentally conscious thinkers and leaders.

Green is the new black

Innovation and progressive thinking sets us apart. By prioritising sustainability, we show ourselves to be credible and trustworthy leaders.

Small footprints, big steps

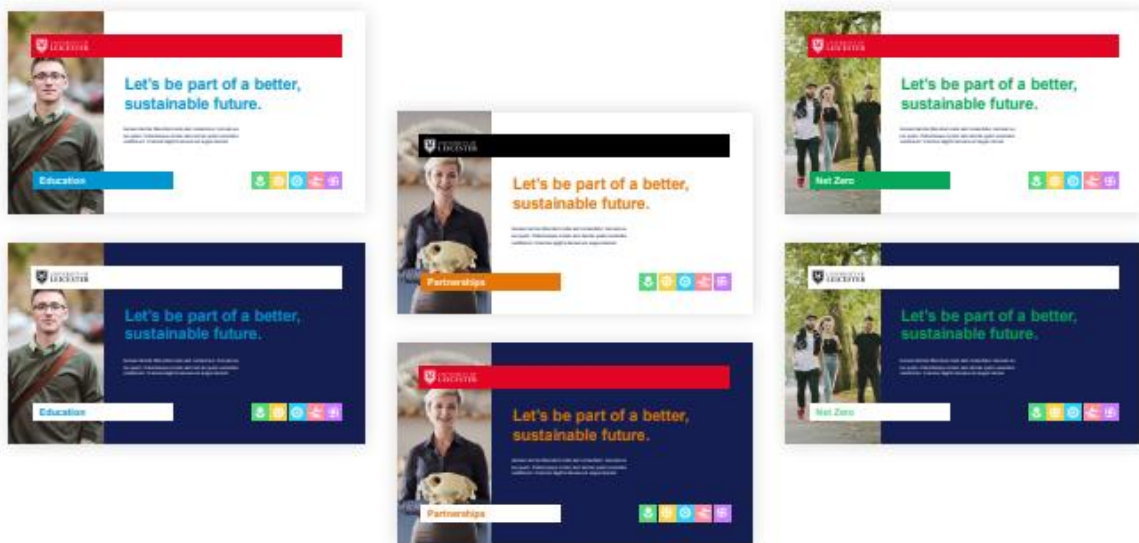
We inherit the carbon footprint of every link in our supply chain. Remove or repair the weak links to take a collective step towards net zero.



Concept - Poster layout single



Concept - When alongside other areas



Concept

