

STRATEGY FOR CLIMATE ACTION AND THE SDGs

2021-2025



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Since the creation of the University of Kent in 1965, we have been outward looking, embracing change and willing to do things differently and see things differently. In recent years we have been working hard to reduce the negative impact of our work on the climate and to the environment. However, we are now in a period of unprecedented pressure on the stability of the climate and ecosystems, and it is time for the university to step up a gear in our level of ambition and action, to strive towards a more socially and environmentally sustainable world.



VISION

A beacon of social and environmental sustainability

By 2025, even before visiting us, people will be aware that the university is a key actor in addressing the climate and ecological emergency and is demonstrating dramatic reductions in CO₂ emissions.

Through our campuses and online presence, our staff, students and the local community will experience the obvious actions and activities that show how seriously the University of Kent takes climate action and social and environmental responsibility.

By 2025, every building on our campuses will show signs of having moved to more sustainable power. Our transport systems will be much less fossil-fuel based, and our shops, cafes and restaurants will focus on more sustainable produce. Our green spaces will demonstrate our connection to the natural environment, making spaces for people to enjoy that protect, enhance and allow biodiversity to flourish.

More than all this, our education will be steeped in a culture of continuous improvement to ensure that all our students in all subjects are learning the skills and knowledge needed for a sustainable future.



Community

A regular update from the University of Kent for local residents and businesses | Issue 10



OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE CHANGE EMERGENCY

The University of Kent has backed Canterbury City Council's recent commitment to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero by 2030, while also building on its own work to develop a comprehensive plan that responds to the climate and ecological crisis.

These will be implemented within its operations and teaching with the focus now moving to a phase of intense planning and action to address the climate and ecological emergency.

Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Karen Cox said: 'We fully acknowledge the climate and ecological crisis facing our planet. As an institution that teaches about the environment and global environmental issues, we are strongly aware of our role and have a commitment to addressing this crisis. We are delighted to be working with the city to address the climate and ecological emergency.'

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CONTEXT

The University of Kent acknowledges the climate and ecological emergency. The University undertakes to enable radical societal changes necessary to mitigate the causes of global heating and ecological breakdown through the education, research, operation and influence of the University.

Sustainability is defined by the United Nations as: *meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*. Sustainability is achieved through the balance of species and the resources within their environment. To maintain this equilibrium, available resources must not be depleted faster than resources are naturally generated.

The University of Kent is firmly committed to working towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. As an institution, we, along with our students, staff and the local community recognise our role as advocate and exemplar for sustainability.

This strategy is for the first four years of our ambition to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero, regenerate our ecosystems, and educate a generation of citizens for a sustainable future.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

While we are working across the University to achieve all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals, this strategy places priority on six of the Goals that relate specifically to the Climate and Ecological Emergency and the role of our University.

Our Strategic Priorities are to:



Achieve net zero scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions by 2040 and scope 3 by 2050¹



Regenerate the ecology of the campuses to mitigate biodiversity loss and decline in ecosystem services



To ensure all students have access to learning, teaching and research that enhances understanding of sustainability



Develop, manage and operate the campuses sustainably



Promote and ensure responsible procurement and reduce the impact of consumption



Work collaboratively with others to achieve local, regional and international impact on sustainability

Carbon Action

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report (Oct 2018) sets out that we now need unprecedented rapid action to reduce global carbon emissions, with catastrophic consequences if we do not act to keep global temperature rise below 1.5°C. In short, we need to reduce carbon emissions by at least 50% by 2030 and achieve net zero by 2050 globally to halt runaway climate change.

As a forward-thinking institution, we will act decisively and lead the way in tackling climate change. We acknowledge that we are currently high emissions producers, and that we have the means, knowledge, will and resources to reduce them drastically. This is an opportunity for the University to demonstrate its capacity for innovation and leadership. Furthermore, as a student-led institution, we act in consensus with our student body that the University should take strong action to tackle climate change.

Ecological Regeneration

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, May 2019) sets out how the erosion of nature at unprecedented rates is undermining our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life.

We have two key campuses – Canterbury which is semi-rural and Medway which is urban. Each has an important and distinct role to play in our sustainability strategy as we recognise the role that ecological regeneration must play in the fight against climate change.

¹ Scope 1: Emissions that arise directly from sources that are owned or controlled by the University (Gas boilers, University fleet)

Scope 2: Emissions generated by purchased electricity, and heat, consumed by the University

Scope 3: Emissions that arise as a consequence of the activities of the University but occur from sources not owned or controlled by the organisation. This includes emissions associated with business travel, procurement, commuting, water and waste.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES (CONT)

The Canterbury campus is one of the University's most significant assets and is pivotal in attracting students to the University. Historically however, the development of the campus has tended to focus on the built environment with little consideration of the impacts on the wider ecology and connectivity of habitats. Landscape and Biodiversity form one of the four key strategies underpinning the University Masterplan which sets out a vision to reconnect the campus into the wider landscape and to reinstate former features such as orchards and hedgerows. It is vital that the University implements this approach going forward to mitigate against biodiversity loss and to continue to regenerate the campus ecology.

In recent years, the links between nature and green spaces to wellbeing and mental health have become even more apparent and as such the University must ensure that the importance of its green spaces is recognised as key to the holistic student experience.

The Medway campus is a historic multi-institution urban environment providing unique opportunities for urban ecological regeneration and enhancement. The complex multi-stakeholder setting is important in demonstrating the value of collaboration and partnerships in achieving ecological sustainability. It is important that we support and protect the pockets of green space that exist allowing for connections between people and nature in this urban environment.

Education for Sustainability

A recent study from the NUS² showed that 91% of students agree that Sustainable Development is something that Universities should actively incorporate into their teaching and other activities. Increasingly young people are becoming aware that this is the defining issue of their lives and are looking to their universities meet the challenge.

Our graduates, regardless of their field of study, once in the workplace will face very different conditions than those of a generation ago, and will need competence to cope with conditions of uncertainty, complexity and rapid change, as well as to contribute positively to a more sustainable, safe and secure future.

The world our graduates are entering is characterised by what has been termed the 'triple crunch' of three interrelated major global trends: climate change, the end of cheap energy coinciding with diminishing or hard-to-access fossil fuel resources, and economic instability. Moreover, such trends are systemically linked, so that key issues cannot be considered or addressed separately. These are huge and contentious issues that require multiple and interdisciplinary perspectives, innovation and enterprise to address – a challenge HE is uniquely placed to address.

Sustainable Campuses

We have a responsibility to develop, manage and operate our estate sustainably and to consider the impacts of our activities on the environment as well as our staff, students and the local community. Our vision of a sustainable campus is one that not only reduces our impact on the environment but also builds a live learning environment for staff, students and the community. This incorporates everything that we come into contact with from the food in our outlets to the IT in our library and the way we travel to and from the campuses.

It also recognises that our campuses are not just 'nice' spaces to be in but that they provide a wealth of opportunities for our students to apply their learning and research in real-world situations, enhancing their skills, improving connections between people and providing opportunities to contribute positively to society.

² SOS Sustainability Skills Survey 2019-21
https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/6008334066c47be740656954/602faaf925b36340571eb467_20201005_SOS-UK%20Sustainability%20Skills%202019-20_HE_FINAL.pdf

Responsible Consumption and Procurement

The University of Kent had an income of over £250 million in the 2019-20 academic year and our contribution to the local economy of the South East is in the region of £0.9bn per year. It hosts over 25,000 students and professional members of staff. This makes the University a huge consumer of resources and a significant producer of waste. As a university committed to sustainable practices, ethical, efficient and sustainable procurement and waste practices are essential to our mission and guiding principles.

Increasingly a circular economy (cradle to grave) approach to procurement and waste is being adopted. There is no doubt that HE plays a vital role in the global transition to a circular economy. From teaching and learning, through research and into student action there is growing momentum from the sector to move into the circular economy space. How higher education institutions choose to use their purchasing power can have significant effects on making campus activities and supply chains more circular. More circular procurement decisions can significantly help to shift the economy and support universities in their net zero carbon ambitions.

Our procurement team is committed to responsible, ethical and sustainable procurement activity, both directly and through its suppliers. Through working closely with the Estates department, projects and processes can be designed with circular economy principles in mind. Where waste is generated, schemes such as the waste team's Warp-it furniture reuse scheme can maximise the reuse potential and minimise the impacts on the environment.

Partnerships

The ambitious aims of this strategy cannot be achieved without developing partnerships with external stakeholders. These include the government and councils, other local HE providers, our suppliers and users of our education, research & innovation and campus services, and the local communities in the areas where we operate. We have a wide reach and impact through our world-leading research and we will further encourage those endeavours which make a significant contribution to global sustainability.

We also acknowledge the important role that internal partnerships will play, bringing together academic and professional staff with students to empower everyone to act to achieve these strategic aims.

Delivery

This strategy sets the framework to deliver the aims around four streams of activity:

- Leadership and Governance
- Campus Operations
- Society, Partnerships and Engagement
- Learning, Teaching, Research & Innovation

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Aim

To improve leadership and accountability for Sustainability through clear and communicated action plans to develop lasting culture change.

The University will:

- Develop governance and accountability structures and resources that drive sustainability and carbon reduction and place it at the heart of our institution.
- Embed these sustainability objectives into the wider policies and strategies of the University.
- Consider the campuses as a whole, including external and natural areas when making investment, funding and strategic decisions.
- Conduct a climate risk assessment on all capital spend projects with a value greater than £100k commensurate to the degree of risk.
- Ensure climate and sustainability related risks are fully considered as part of the University's risk register and build resilience through development of a climate change adaptation plan.
- Equip all our staff with sustainability skills and knowledge through a range of opportunities including training, staff development, events and participation in sustainability activities.
- Work with Divisions and Professional Service Departments to develop accountability within roles for leading on sustainability across the organisation.
- Ensure a consistent and ethically informed approach to investment, and work with the Finance and Resources Committee to achieve this.
- Develop a communications and engagement strategy to be delivered alongside this strategy.
- Report on our performance, consult and communicate regularly with our students, staff and other stakeholders on issues related to sustainability.

CAMPUS OPERATIONS

Aim

Ensuring that our campuses operate in a financially, socially and environmentally sustainable manner and are developed in line with this strategy creating buildings and landscapes that are flexible, resilient and fit for the future.

The University will:

- Continually improve our environmental performance and implement a systematic approach to setting and achieving environmental targets and objectives.
- Collaboratively produce a new Carbon Management Plan setting out how the University can achieve its targets by reducing our energy demand, using energy more efficiently and reducing our dependency on fossil fuels.
- Actively investigate, and develop opportunities for decarbonising heat. At the same time, we will seek to increase our installed capacity of onsite renewables, with consequent increased production of renewable energy.
- Improve the information available to enable effective decision making including real-time emission data, transport statistics, procurement and consumption data.
- Ensure our new Commercial and Facilities Strategy reflects this strategy and that new buildings, refurbishments and other developments embed sustainable construction, landscaping and design principles including Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).
- Actively regenerate the ecology of the campus and promote biodiversity.
- Continue to implement our waste strategy and achieve our aims of reducing overall waste by focusing on prevention and reuse.
- Renew our focus on campus spaces to enhance student and staff wellbeing, recognising that people are at the heart of everything we do.
- Develop and implement ambitious travel plans and policies to enable our staff, students and visitors to contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions resulting from these activities.
- Develop and implement a progressive Sustainable Food Strategy.

SOCIETY, PARTNERSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT

Aim

To use our influence in a local, regional and national context to act as leaders in sustainability. To develop partnerships with internal and external stakeholders to drive sustainability and enhance social value through our engagement and civic mission initiatives and to facilitate our staff and students to act as agents for change in their local communities.

The University will:

- Support, empower and encourage our staff and students to be responsible global and local citizens, live low carbon lifestyles and become an active part of the community wherever they live, work or study.
- Through the Futureproof programme, enable staff to enact positive culture change from the bottom up.
- Continue existing and explore new opportunities for local community engagement in sustainability activities at the University.
- Continue to implement and develop our procurement strategy, to reduce our consumption, and to minimise the impact of our procurement, enhance social value and contribute positively to the local economy.
- Seek out sustainability opportunities for research, innovation, and knowledge exchange with a range of partners including government and educational organisations, business and industry.
- Proactively foster and track international impact aligned to the sustainable development goals.
- Use our membership of city- and region-wide bodies to provide a framework and governance structure for our engagement with the city region. We will also provide regular updates on our engagement with these bodies.
- Develop and expand the successful Kent Community Oasis Garden (COG) project to enhance its value as a space for wellbeing and engagement.
- Act to make sure that our climate and sustainability objectives are a clear part of all visitor experiences, including our open days, conferencing and hospitality activities.

LEARNING, TEACHING AND RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Aim

To enable all students to graduate equipped with the skills and knowledge to work in addressing the climate and ecological emergency. The University will ensure that the taught curriculum demonstrably enhances understanding of sustainability and ensures development of the attributes to become global citizens.

The University will:

- Work with staff and students through the Education for Sustainability (EfS) working group to reform the curriculum so that all students graduating from 2025 at the latest can actively participate in working towards a resilient future.
- Provide opportunity for academics to identify opportunities to embed sustainability into their teaching and research & innovation activity and to incentivise this through recognition in the academic career map.
- Enable students to choose essay topics, complete assignments and conduct dissertation projects which address real-life sustainability questions and problems at the University of Kent using the campus as a Living Lab.
- Develop and promote placements and internships both internally and externally that provide opportunities for students to gain real-life experience of sustainability in employment.
- Engage students in the development of University policy and strategy related to sustainability, the campuses and their grounds as part of the formal curriculum and through informal co-curricular activity.
- Work with the research and innovation community to identify opportunities for collaboration between operational and research-led activity to further our understanding and commitment to sustainability.
- Identify and promote sustainability related research & innovation activity through existing signature research themes and institutes and through development of new focuses for research and innovation. Identify and promote funding opportunities such as Eastern ARC and GCRF to further our impact in this area.
- Identify and communicate current education and research & innovation activity that makes an impact on global challenges.
- Identify and support opportunities to use our campuses and operations – such as our buildings, land and transport systems – as test beds for our research into social and environmental sustainability.
- Continually work on reducing the carbon footprint of our teaching and research & innovation activity including sustainable research practices, efficient lab operations and consideration of offsetting of flights.



WHAT NEXT?

This strategy sets out our vision, strategic priorities and aims. We will use this to formulate a plan of action to start as soon as possible.






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