**Student Sustainability Projects**

**The Sustainability team welcomes ideas from students who would like to work on any aspect of sustainability as part of a dissertation or other research project.**

The University is committed to transitioning to a more sustainable institution but to do this we need data, analysis and evidence. Therefore we are suggesting a range of projects designed to help your school – and the wider University of Kent – reach its sustainability objectives. This is a rare opportunity for undergraduate student research to directly inform policy and have an immediate sustainability impact.

There are a number of questions we are working on that may be an interesting research project. These projects cover themes which may be suitable for students from a wide range of disciplines. As well as academic supervisors within the school many of these projects may also involve working with non-academic university departments including [Kent Sustainability](https://www.kent.ac.uk/sustainability), Estates, Procurement and Commercial services

We can offer an initial discussion around the challenges we have, and can provide data where it is available or suggestions where to obtain it, then students would be expected to plan and deliver their project with support from their supervisor.

Interested students can email Sustainability@kent.ac.ukwith any initial ideas, which could be from the list below or something completely different!

***Emissions reduction***

How can we advance towards commitments to net Zero-Carbon? There are numerous possible projects which can be carried out at the school or university level, and use existing data (e.g. building gas and electricity data), or collect new data.

*Projects/topic areas may include:*

* Historic and current energy use trends at the University – Analysis by building type / usage pattern
* In hours/out of hours energy use in a building – How much energy are we using overnight or when buildings are closed?
* Analysing our current carbon footprint
* Investigating how we can reduce our emissions from our business travel (especially aviation), heating and lighting, commuting, procurement and individual behaviour.
* Exploring carbon offsetting and analysing the benefits and disadvantages of different types of offsets.

***Climate change***

Both University of Kent and the wider higher education sector will need to rapidly adapt to the changing world that climate change triggers. But what are the likely impacts on the university, and how prepared are we as an institution? How prepared is our governance, our buildings, our business model and our curriculum?

Projects/topic areas may include:

* Business risk assessments for climate change
* Corporate resilience to climate change
* Climate change adaptation planning
* Climate anxiety

***Landscape and Biodiversity***

Our Canterbury campus is a large, biodiversity-rich campus that is important for conservation and the provision of ecosystem services, particularly the wellbeing of students and staff.

There are a number of potential projects which will help us to understand the value of the campus for biodiversity and for people and understanding the value of the campus to the university brand.

Projects/topic areas may include:

* Identifying the long-term social value of greenspaces in the workplace at the University of Kent. How valuable for wildlife, wellbeing, education and the university’s ‘brand’.
* Surveying of species on campus and comparisons to historic data. What have we lost/gained and what can we learn from this?
* The University of Kent is part of the Hedgehog Friendly Campus project and would like more information about our hedgehogs on campus - populations, behavioural ecology, diet, barriers and management technique on site that are helpful or hindering.
* Opportunities for wilding. How can we work with local organisers to create an east Kent wilding network
* Creating cultural change around campus green spaces. How to ensure staff use green spaces during work hours in a post Covid-19 workplace.
* Estimating the amenity value of student, staff and community engagement with campus ponds
* Review of regional and local biodiversity strategy and what it means for the University of Kent.

***Curriculum***

The University has a goal of integrating sustainability across all our curricula, but research is required to help us do so.

Projects/topic areas may include:

* Investigating student attitudes to sustainability in the curriculum
* Mapping the curriculum against the UN Sustainable Development Goals
* Investigating/developing methods for integrating sustainability into the curriculum.

**Responsible consumption (Procurement, Waste and Recycling)**

The University is exploring the move towards a circular economy approach and as such is looking to reduce the amount we buy and to maximise reuse of waste.

Projects/topic areas may include:

* Reducing the use of single-use plastics across campus or in particular contexts (e.g. labs)
* Tackling the major issue of the high-quality, largely re-useable ‘waste’ (clothing, furniture, kitchen equipment etc) that is left behind in student accommodation every year.
* Sustainable procurement and supply chains including modern slavery
* Analysis of product labels and certification
* Business travel policy

**Food sustainability**

Potential projects include investigating university procurement and supply chains related to food such as Fairtrade produce or sustainable palm oil, and investigating how to influence consumer behaviour related to food choices. The latter may potentially involve working with food outlets at the university.

Projects/topic areas may include:

* How fair is Fairtrade? What alternative are there to Fairtrade certification. What should be the ethical minimum standard for food procurement. Could also/alternatively be based on palm oil.
* Developing a methodology and trialling testing the impact of carbon footprinting, carbon pricing and other sustainability information on point of sale purchasing choices in outlets.
* How language impacts sustainability decision making. For example comparing marketing of food as “vegan” or “plant based” and the impacts on consumer’s perceptions.

**Built Environment**

Potential projects can explore how Kent's existing building stock can be retrofitted for sustainability or explore best practice for new buildings using existing sustainability frameworks such as BREEAM.

Projects/topic areas may include:

* Low carbon building design
* The impact of climate change on Kent's built environment
* Building forensics (comparison of potential vs actual energy performance)
* Exploring the benefits of Biophilic design principles. How can these be used to make the business case for incorporating these principles at the University of Kent.

**Other**

We welcome ideas from any aspect of sustainability

Other potential project areas include:

* Water - investigating water use at Kent and the scope for reductions (buildings, efficiency of equipment, user behaviour, leakage) as well as waste water disposal
* Wellbeing - investigating how emerging issues such as climate anxiety and ecological grief affect students and staff, and what resources could be provided in support of this.
* Supporting students - What information do new students need, and when, in order for them to be fully informed to understand and make pro-environmental choices and to understand their role as individuals and in their future career? What is the ideal ‘road map’ for sustainability intervention for an undergraduate’s 3 years at Kent?