

Sustainability Report to University Council

May 2025



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Executive Summary

The global challenge of climate change and environmental sustainability is the defining issue of our time, and the Higher Education (HE) sector is having to adapt quickly to the rapidly shifting changes in stakeholder expectations and landscapes of regulatory instruments and voluntary commitments.

Our first sustainability strategy published in 2021 is coming to an end and the Sustainability Steering Group have developed new strategy for 2025-2030. This new strategy builds on the progress made and seeks to address gaps in our whole-campus approach to delivering on our commitments. This report is the third annual report being presented to Council on our progress in this area.

This report provides an overview of overall achievement against the commitment to the previous strategy, progress over the last year and the focus for the next strategy. Despite the numerous challenges facing Kent, the report highlights a number of key achievements including winning a number of awards both locally and nationally, delivering effective staff engagement programmes and furthering work to improve the biodiversity of our campuses.

Findings are included from our recent external recertification audit to the ISO14001 standard for Environmental Management. Kent has held this standard since 2012 over which time there has been increasing requirement for our core teaching and research activity to be incorporated into our wider environmental sustainability targets and reporting.

Finally, the report presents both the major risks and opportunities facing the University of Kent and the wider HE sector. As the impacts of the climate and ecological emergency are more widely understood, the university will face increasing pressure to both mitigate these effects but also to adapt and to develop resilience to the impacts of climate change both locally and globally. With these challenges come opportunities to embed sustainability across our teaching, research and operations and to utilise our strengths to attract prospective students and enhance the University's reputation in the region.

Drivers and Commitments

Stakeholder expectations

Expectations of higher education institutions to take a leading role in sustainability have been growing, recognising the unique position of HE to equip vast parts of society with the knowledge and behaviours needed to transition to a more sustainable future. Evidence increasingly shows that prospective students are considering the sustainability credentials of universities when making choices and the university Is facing increased scrutiny of Its performance from the local community as well as sector and governmental bodies.

Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice

The University signed the concordat in 2024, committing to taking shared action to reduce and eliminate the negative Impacts of research and innovation practice and to transition to more sustainable practices. This involves aligning our policies, strategies, and activities with environmental sustainability principles, fostering collaboration, and ensuring continuous improvement in minimizing the environmental impact of research and innovation.

Sustainable Development Goals Education Accord

The University of Kent signed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Education Accord In 2018, committing the University to embedding the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals across all areas of the organisation including operations, teaching, leadership and engagement. We also commit to reporting on progress towards delivering the SDGs as part of sector-wide report presented annually to the UN High Level Political Forum.

ISO14001/Legal compliance

The University manages and operates an Environmental Management System certified to the international ISO14001 standard. We have maintained this standard since 2012 on a 3-year cycle and successfully achieved recertification in January 2025. This standard requires us to identify and control the environmental impact of our activities, products and services; demonstrate compliance with relevant legislation; to continuously improve our environmental performance; and, to implement a systematic approach to set and achieve environmental objectives and targets.

Climate Change and Net Zero Targets

Issues of climate change both from mitigating through reducing carbon emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change are growing rapidly in importance and the HE sector has a key role to play in responding to the global climate emergency. The University reports publicly on progress towards achieving Net Zero and taking action is increasingly being linked to eligibility to funding from research funding bodies and other charitable or governmental grant funding.

Nature Positive Universities

As signatories of the Nature Positive Universities Pledge, we commit to taking measurable actions to protect and restore biodiversity on our campuses and in our communities. This includes integrating nature-positive practices into our operations, research, and education, while setting clear targets to support the global goal of halting biodiversity loss.

Sustainability People & Governance

People

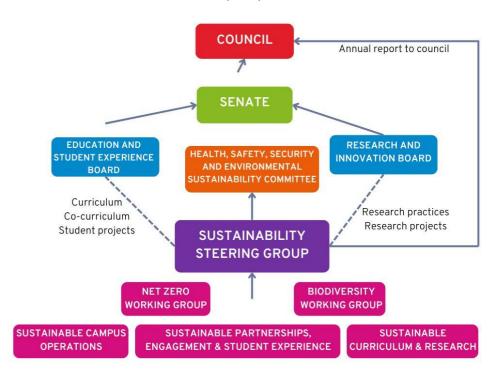
The Sustainability Team based within the Health, Safety and Environmental Sustainability Department are responsible for development and Implementation of the sustainability strategy, managing the Environmental Management System, ensuring legal compliance, student and staff engagement, managing sustainability projects, and representing the University at local, national and international sustainability focused events. This work Is supported and overseen by the Sustainability Steering Group (SSG).

Governance Structure

Our SSG is made up of the chairs of its 5 sub-group and other representatives from across the University and is chaired by Deputy Vice Chancellor, Prof Richard Reece. The steering group has responsibility for overseeing development and implementation of a university-wide Sustainability Strategy and formally reports to the Health, Safety, Security and Environment Committee through to the University Executive Group (EG) or to the relevant board(s) through the DVC Education and Student Experience. The group also has a reporting line to Council and provides an annual report on Sustainability and sustainability-related issues.

Sub-groups:

- Net Zero Working group
- Biodiversity Working Group
- Sustainable Campus Operations (SCO)
- Sustainability Partnerships, Engagement and Student Experience (SPESE)
- Sustainable Curriculum and Research (SCR)



Sustainability Successes

Each year in April, to celebrate Earth day, the Sustainability team collates an annual round-up of sustainability successes and stories from across the University. Published In the form of a web page, our sustainability successes showcase over 50 projects, initiatives and achievements from teams, students groups, individuals and university leadership.

https://www.kent.ac.uk/sustainability/sustainability2025

More information about many of these initiatives are included in more detail in this report, but below is a selection of other highlights from the last 12 months:

- We won a Green Gown Award in the benefitting society category for our work to become a Right to Food University
- We maintained our 2:1 class in the People and Planet University league table, ranking 42nd overall.
- A 6.9% reduction in carbon emissions across scopes 1, 2 and 3
- We introduced termly staff engagement campaigns and now have over 100 staff members enrolled as sustainability champions
- Food waste collections were introduced to all on campus student accommodation
- We successfully gained recertification of our Environmental Management System to ISO14001 for a further 3 years
- The Kent Community Oasis garden saw a 100% increase in engagement with wellbeing activities and supports over 100 students who have accessed the project more than once.
- Work continued to create a River of Vegetation across campus to act as a foraging trail, wildlife corridor and educational tool
- We signed the concordat for environmental sustainability in research and innovation practice to ensure our research is conducted in an environmentally sustainable way
- We introduced climate fresk workshops for staff combining creativity and a card game to develop knowledge of the science of climate change
- A total of 337 species were recorded during the 2024 bio-blitz event
- The sustainability team won Gold in the Wilder Kent awards for the work done by many across campus to support wildlife and sustainability

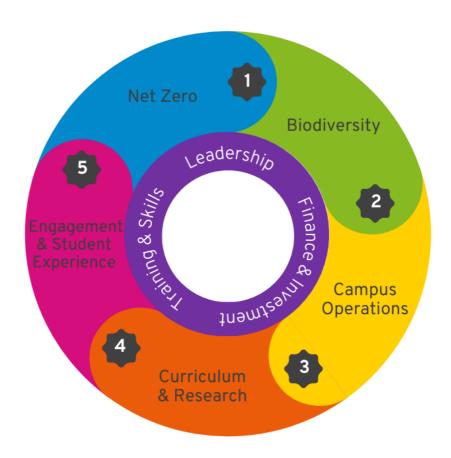




Sustainability Strategy

Our previous strategy for Climate Action and the SDGs was published in October 2021 setting out our vision for 2025. A new Net Zero and Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030 has been developed by the Sustainability Steering Group and is awaiting approval and publication.

Our new strategy has five key commitments underpinned by a number of targets and objectives. Each commitment and the associated actions will support delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Supporting the delivery these five commitments are a number of enablers which interact with the commitments.



Strategic Commitments

Each of the commitments outlined in the strategy builds upon and furthers existing work in those areas. A summary of progress to date, baseline data and proposed areas of focus is given for each.

Strategic Commitment 1 - Net Zero

"We will achieve Net Zero scope 1 and 2 emissions by 2040 and Scope 3 by 2050"







Progress against previous strategy (2021-2025)

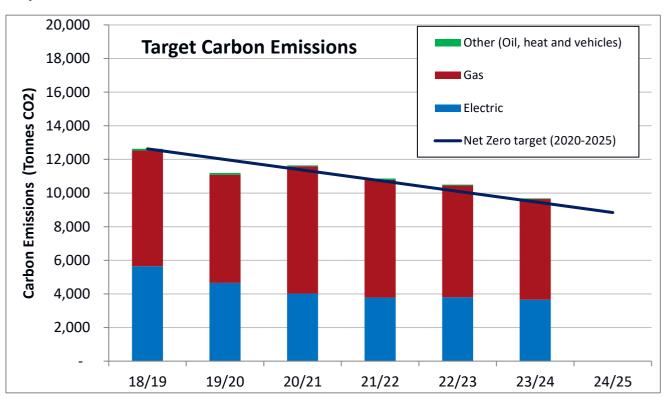
Our previous strategy objective was to reduce our scope 1 and 2 emissions by 25% compared to the 2018/19 baseline year and establish the baseline for all scope 3 emissions.

Status: Partially achieved

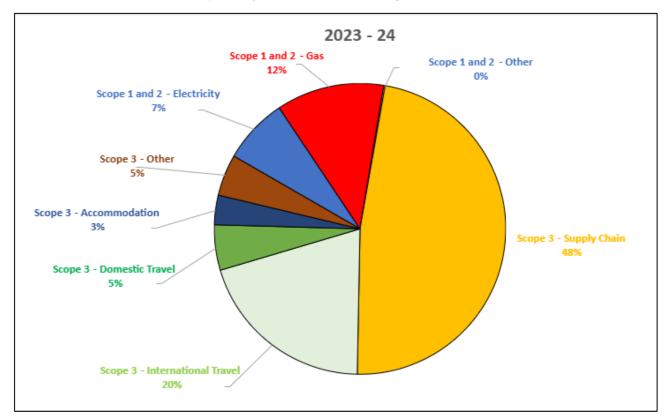
The Net Zero working group successfully established the methodology and collected data to establish our full scope 3 baseline. While reductions in scope 1 & 2 emissions were achieved, these have fallen slightly behind the target and in 2025 our emissions have reduced by 23.3% against the baseline.

The failure to meet the target reductions in scope 1 and 2 emissions was largely due to the delay in initiating work under the partnership agreement with Siemens. Now that this work is underway it is hoped that we can bring reductions back under the target line although interim data for 2024/25 shows this is unlikely for this year.

Progress over last 12 months



The full emissions footprint from the University of Kent for 2023/24 was **49,991.4 tonnes CO₂eq**. This represented a 6.87% reduction compared to 2022/23



A breakdown of this total footprint by emissions source is given in the chart below.

The Siemens partnership work Is now underway with large scale lighting upgrades to university buildings partially completed. Further work on roof top and ground based solar arrays will follow.

We have Implemented new processes in procurement to add additional sustainability questions to tender proportionate to the level of risk of the product or service. Suppliers are being asked to provide evidence of how they will support the universities sustainability commitments including providing scope 3 carbon data.

Strategic Focus (2025 - 2030)

Reducing our operational (scopes 1 & 2) emissions under the Siemens partnership and through utilising metering and software to track energy profiles for individual buildings and to use these to target improvements.

Reducing emissions from our supply chain by using data analysis to gain a better understanding of our supply chain emissions which will allow us to work directly with suppliers to reduce their emissions. We will build upon the existing process to embed sustainability into our tenders and improve training for our staff with significant procurement responsibility.

Reduce our emissions from staff and student travel by implementing our travel plans to reduce the number of staff, students and visitors commuting by car. We will also review and improve internal processes for managing business travel and work wit our staff and students to collect more robust data on travel habits to enable targeted improvements.

Strategic Commitment 2 - Biodiversity

"We will regenerate the ecology of the campuses to mitigate biodiversity loss and the decline in ecosystem services, whilst supporting the use of our natural spaces for education, engagement, and wellbeing activities"





Progress against previous strategy (2021-2025)

Our previous strategy had three main aims, firstly to deliver a number of projects and initiatives to enhance biodiversity and connection of people to our green spaces, secondly to reconnect the campus into the wider landscape and lastly that the campuses were considered as a whole, including external and natural areas when making investment, funding and strategic decisions.

Status: Partially achieved

A number of successful projects and initiatives were delivered and initiated including the inception of the River of Vegetation which will create a high amenity and pollen value trail that acts as a wildlife corridor as well as an education tool, a foraging trail, and will act as natural signposting to flagship project areas: the Kent Community Oasis Garden and Diamond Anniversary Orchard. Our Landscape and Grounds department actively manage our ancient woodlands using traditional rotational coppicing to increase the diversity of species and health of the woodland. Grasslands are managed for biodiversity reducing the amount and severity of mowing to naturally diversify these areas and are creating new areas of wildflower meadows.





Over the last couple of years, we have implemented 'No Mow May', where selected areas of the central campus that would normally be cut were left to grow throughout the month of May.

However, there has been a historical lack of

investment into our external spaces, particularly ponds and hedgerows which has led to a decline in central campus areas. The ongoing uncertainty regarding the use of peripheral campus land has also restricted progress to regenerate ecology and reconnect habitats. We have also been slow to make changes to better consider the impacts on wider campus biodiversity and ecology when making strategic and operational decisions about the campus. While some progress is being made in addressing these risks, further work is needed to ensure we are not undoing the progress we have made.

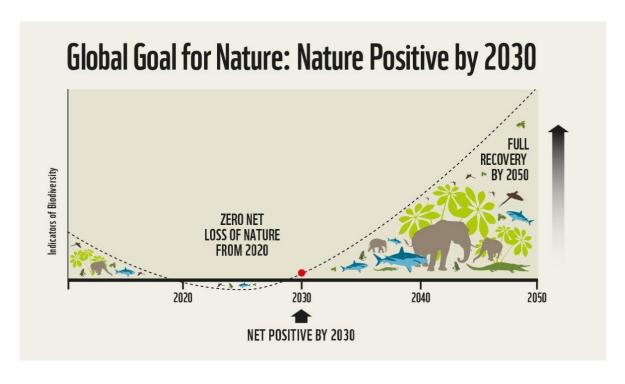
Progress over the last 12 months

Our recent focus in this area has been on the further development of the Biodiversity Working group which is bringing together key internal stakeholders to collaboratively develop projects and initiatives to connect our community with our campus and better utilise these assets for learning and teaching and wellbeing activities; in particular to ensure that our operations align with our world leading research and activities carried out by the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE) and their innovative E3 project.

Strategic Focus (2025 -2030)

Become a nature positive university. The University seeks to drastically limit its impact on local and global biodiversity by joining the Nature Positive Universities scheme, setting targets that support how we manage our campus for biodiversity, as well as reviewing our supply chains to see how the products and services we buy are impacting global biodiversity. As part of this work, we will be working with DICE to complete full mapping of our campus to set the baseline for biodiversity improvement.

Deliver further Biodiversity Improvement Projects. We will build upon existing projects such as the Kent Community Oasis garden and the River or Vegetation as well as exploring new opportunities for biodiversity enhancement. We will also continue working with the landscape and grounds team to reduce the impacts of our management on the campus habitats and species.



Strategic Commitment 3 - Campus Operations

"We will ensure that our campuses operate in a financially, socially and environmentally sustainable manner creating buildings and facilities that are flexible, resilient and fit for the future"













Progress against previous strategy (2021-2025)

Our previous strategy contained the commitment to develop, manage and operate the campuses sustainably and to adopt circular economy principles to reduce the impact of our consumption through reducing waste and increasing reuse and recycling.

Status: Not achieved

Progress in this area has been significantly impacted by a lack of resources. Maintenance and development of the campus is only being conducted reactively with no capacity for proactive improvements to be made. Reductions in staff resources in key areas such as waste management and sustainability engagement have also meant that key communication and behavior change work is not taking place. A number of key operational areas had no measurable targets or metrics and where targets existed these have not been met.

| Operational Area | Target(s) | 2023/24 Target met? |
|-------------------|--|---------------------|
| Energy | 25% reduction in scope 1 and 2 emissions by 2025 | No |
| Water | 2% annual reduction in consumption | No |
| Waste & Recycling | Reduce general waste proportion to 41% | No |
| Transport | No targets | N/A |
| Buildings and | Achieve 60% in scope criteria (all project >£100k) | N/A - No projects |
| Infrastructure | | completed |

Progress over the last 12 months

The climate change risk and adaptation plan including a risk register for climate risk within the built environment, natural environment, people and business services. Adaptation measures were identified, and these are beginning to be incorporated into Commercial Services and Estates planning. Work is ongoing to explore to see how wider climate risks can best be expressed in university risk planning and business continuity work.

The Estates facilities management team, supported by the sustainability team, have established new processes for waste management following the removal of the dedicated waste management role. These processes are now functional and some Improvements are now being made. Changes to legislation in 2024 have seen the introduction of food waste collections to university accommodation and expanding this to all kitchens will be undertaken later in the year.

Strategic Focus (2025 - 2030)

Ensure sustainability in the built environment. The threshold for projects which will complete the In-house sustainability assessment for building construction, refurbishment and infrastructure projects has been reduced from >£100k to >£50k to bring more projects into the scope. We will also explore using existing and new data on how our buildings are utilised and operated to inform future space management and estate planning.

Ensuring a resilient and sustainable campus in the future. By embedding the findings of the climate risk assessment and adaptation planning work into campus planning and strategy we will ensure that our campuses are futureproofed for climate change.

Adopting circular economy principles. Adopting our new waste strategy and finding ways to reduce the amount of waste we produce while maximising the opportunities for reuse.



Strategic Commitment 4 - Curriculum and Research

"To equip graduates with the essential skills and knowledge needed to thrive on a planet in the process of ecological collapse. We seek to draw on staff expertise throughout the university in order to develop our educational offer as one that is distinctly focused on sustainability"







Progress against previous strategy (2021-2025)

Our previous strategy set out a commitment enable all students have access to learning, teaching and research that enhances understanding of sustainability, this was underpinned by a framework approved by Education Board in late 2020 to build capacity in our academic staff to embed sustainability across the undergraduate portfolio.

Status: Not achieved

Progress to embed sustainability within the formal curriculum has been slow, and Kent remains behind the rest of the sector in its Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) work. Much of the delay is due to a lack of staff resources and the uncertainties and disruptions associated with restructures and financial constraints both within the central sustainability team and within schools.

Progress over the last 12 months

The formation of the Sustainable curriculum and research sub-group has brought about the development of a new approach for embedding sustainability into the taught curriculum using the graduate attributes to map sustainability learning and skills and enable students to articulate how this relates to their future careers.

There has also been progress within sustainable research. The university's new Research and Innovation Strategy recognises our strengths in environment and sustainability and has identified this as a priority research area for the university. As recent signatories of the concordat for the environmental sustainability of research and innovation practice, we are exploring ways to conduct all our research in a more environmentally responsible and sustainable way such as signing up to the LEAF (laboratory environmental assessment framework) scheme which a number of our labs are working towards the Bronze level of certification.



Strategic Focus (2025 - 2030)

Embed sustainability knowledge & skills into the curriculum. By ensuring that sustainability is identified as a thematic priority for education and research We will focus on Identifying opportunities for sustainability through mapping our existing provision and ensuring that sustainability links are evidenced to prospective and existing students

Promote employability and skills for sustainability. We will explore a new graduate attribute focused on sustainability to enable students to Identify the sustainability learning and skills they are developing. We will Identify and promote placements, internships and global opportunities that enable students to gain experience of sustainability and we will develop a sustainability leadership award open to all students to reward and recognise sustainability activity.

Deliver sustainability in Research and Innovation. Through delivering on the key commitments within the concordat we will support research to be conducted in a sustainable way while promoting our research which contributes to overcoming local and global challenges.



Strategic Commitment 5 - Engagement and Student Experience

"To enhance sustainability practices, promote engagement with staff, students and public through our engagement and civic mission initiatives, and foster a positive student experience within the university and local community"













Progress against previous strategy (2021-2025)

Our overall aim was 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.

Status: Achieved

This work was enhanced by the civic mission activities of the university and the development of civic missions initiatives such as the Right to Food. We continued to work across the region, participating in a number of key climate and biodiversity groups such as the Canterbury Climate Action partnership, Canterbury Biodiversity Network and Canterbury Climate Partnership Board.

The Kent Community Oasis Garden (Kent COG) is a multi-use space for students, staff and the local community run in partnership with East Kent Mind. This space has been hugely successful in developing a community centered around sustainability and wellbeing and produces food used in our central catering facilities, massively reducing the food miles and carbon footprint of these products. Over the strategy lifecycle Kent COG has expanded the number and range of opportunities for students, staff and community members to



get Involved such as the monthly 'Gear up to grow' sessions, launch of the student tool library, houseplant hospital and seasonal workshops such as Christmas wreath making.

The Sustainability team also ran a successful staff champions network with over 70 staff across the university delivering a range of training and development opportunities to empower staff to take action.

Progress over the last 12 months

The partnerships, engagement and student experience sub-group have furthered this progress by

bringing together a number of new and existing initiatives aimed at both staff and students as well as supporting the developing civic mission agenda. A significant focus has been on the implementation of the sustainable food action plan and moving to a plant-forward approach to catering reducing the footprint of our food while delivering healthy, sustainable and affordable food for all.



Strategic Focus (2025 - 2030)

Support health and wellbeing activities on campus and ensure our catering is sustainable, healthy and affordable. Through implementing our sustainable food action plan and developing health & wellbeing programmes for staff and students we can maximise the co-benefits of sustainability and wellbeing.

Engage our staff and students on sustainability. We will deliver engagement programs for staff and students living and working on our campuses and ensure a range of opportunities to get involved. We will develop and implement specific Initiatives and project such as the Hazaar reuse platform and a campaign to reduce the impact and volume of printing at the university

Fulfil our role as a civic university and to engage with the local community on sustainability. We will engage with all of our stakeholders in the University and local community on Initiatives to deliver the universities civic mission agenda. We will enhance our sustainability credentials through schemes such a green flag award for our canterbury campus and green meetings award for our conferencing and events.

Audit Findings

The external recertification audit of our Environmental Management System (EMS) to the ISO14001 standard took place in January 2025 with the outcome that we have been recommended for recertification for 3 years until January 2028.

Our auditor spent 5 days on site visiting a number of sites and conducting interviews with staff across operational and leadership areas of the University including Procurement, Uni Ops and Natural Sciences as well as various sections within CSE including catering, maintenance, energy, waste and landscape.

Previous audits had highlighted issues relating to demonstrable top leadership commitment to the EMS and prior to the audit there was concern internally that insufficient progress had been made in this area and that our recertification was at risk. The auditor reviewed this area in depth and found that the new structure and delivery model for the Sustainability Steering group was an effective foundation for leadership to engage with the EMS and that we complied sufficiently with the top leadership clause that no non-conformance was raised.

However, a number of observations were raised which relate to how leadership oversight of the EMS is applied in practice. One area highlighted related to disconnects between the EMS and the wider context of the university, in particular in the individual sub-groups' work to consider stakeholder expectations and to understand internal and external risks and opportunities. The auditor also raised an observation related to the embedding of environmental and climate related risks into relevant department risk registers and how this feeds up to central risk management.

A number of areas of good practice were identified in particular the work of the catering team in implementing sustainable catering practices alongside the Right to Food initiative and for the CSE waste team's management of compliance documentation and records.

Risks and Opportunities

Sustainability Is a growth area in HE, recognising both the risks facing the sector and the opportunities that the transition to net zero and a more sustainable future can bring. Based on our current progress and key priorities Identified by the HE sector for the future this report highlights the key risks and opportunities faced by the University of Kent that should be considered as we develop work in this area.

Risks

Resources

The Sustainability team at the University of Kent has 2 dedicated members of staff (1.8 FTE). This is significantly smaller than equivalent Universities in terms of size, peer group and league table position (example: University of Sussex, 6 staff; University of Reading, 12 staff; Canterbury Christchurch, 13 staff). Resource in this area has failed to keep pace with the HE sector as a whole and as a result is increasingly unable to keep up with the fast-moving developments in curriculum sustainability, co-curricular and employability opportunities and demonstrable commitment to sustainability as part of the staff, student and visitor experience. There is currently a vacant sustainability coordinator within the team to deliver on engagement but we are unable to recruit to this and it is unlikely we will be able to in the future.

Resource limitations within operational teams is also impacting the delivery of key strategic objectives. In particular for delivery of our carbon reduction and waste management projects. The energy team has only 1 member of staff limiting their capacity to effectively monitor consumption at a building scale or to deliver behaviour change initiatives. There Is no dedicated waste management role with responsibility for waste management being shared across the commercial services and estates department. There Is currently no capacity for waste improvement projects or initiatives.

Net Zero transition

We are falling behind against our published Net Zero Scope 1 and 2 targets. Identified actions are not sufficient to get back on track or to achieve medium- and longer-term targets, and it is unclear how the required transition will be financed. Failure to meet targets may result in reputational damage as well as a host of transition risks from failing to keep up with the sector, rapidly changing legislative requirements, increased utility costs and obsolete infrastructure.

There is also no clear pathway for reducing our scope 3 emissions from our supply chain. Large scale shifts in both how and what we buy are central to achieving our environmental, social and financial sustainability goals as almost half of our Institutional carbon footprint results from our supply chain. Many universities have procurement staff dedicated to this work. Without resource to better understand our supply chain impacts, engage with our suppliers, improve our contract management processes and analyse data we are unlikely to be able to make any progress in this area.

Curriculum

Progress to embed sustainability within the formal curriculum has been slow, and Kent remains behind the rest of the sector in its Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) work. While progress is now being made, we must act quickly to better understand and address the expectations of our students, the local community and employes in this space in order to ensure that our academic curriculum remains competitive in this area.

Reputational

As sustainability grows in importance and significance to our stakeholders the University is vulnerable to reputational risk around practices seen as going against our published commitments. The future of university landholdings is a significant area of sustainability reputational risk which must be managed but

smaller practices on our central campus can also present a risk.

Outsourcing

With the potential outsourcing of some areas of operations within commercial services and estates there Is a significant risk that this will impact our ability to deliver environmental objectives in these areas. The mechanisms for making changes to practices and processes in an outsourced model is not yet clear and contractual limitations mean we are likely to much less agile in these areas in the future. There has been limited engagement with sustainability and little to no consideration of the impact of outsourcing on sustainability, the operation of the environmental management system or the implications for delivering our sustainability strategy.

Opportunities

Curriculum and Employability

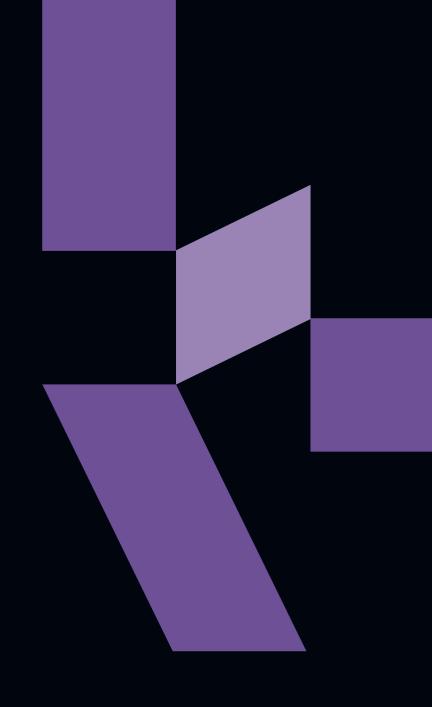
The ongoing work to reform and simplify our curriculum while enhancing the links between our taught curriculum and employability present the opportunity to strengthen the links between our academic and operational functions though the use of our campuses, buildings and departments as living labs. This will enable students to use campus spaces, access University data and work with operational staff to test research ideas and develop Interdisciplinary projects to solve real-world sustainability challenges. In particular, linking up our students in DICE with work to map and survey our campus habitats In line with new government Biodiversity net gain methodologies will provide both a valuable resource bank of data for the university but provide students with formal experience in biodiversity mapping.

Sustainability as a recruitment tool

We have the potential to use our existing sustainability projects and Initiatives as well as the development of new ones as a powerful marketing and recruitment tool. In addition, our Canterbury campus is an underused resource in recruitment. We have opportunities to strengthen the sustainability messaging in our digital and printed prospectuses, open day and visitor experiences to ensure we are reflecting the positive sustainability values of the 18-25yr old demographic.

Civic Engagement

Civic universities have enormous capability, in partnership with local authorities and other civic partners of contributing to local place-based solutions to sustainability challenges. Through the ongoing development of our civic mission, we have the opportunity to Include sustainability and net zero into civic partnership agreements and to further develop civic projects, such as the Right to Food initiative, delivering solutions for the region.



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