

Sustainability Engagement Plan 2025-2027

Introduction

The University of Kent recognises that communication and engagement are key to achieving the objectives set out in our Sustainability Strategy and that individual action and behaviour change needs to play a key role in the transition of the university and wider society to net zero.

It is important that we show our students, staff, and the wider community the progress we are making towards becoming more sustainable, as well as encouraging others to get involved to help combat Climate Change. Having a visible sustainability presence, as well as ensuring that sustainability is reflected in everything we do, can also help attract new students to Kent, improve our reputation as a civic university and boost organisational culture.

This document sets out who our stakeholders are and how we engage with them and identifies the audiences and mechanisms for communication. Detailed assessment of stakeholder needs and expectations has been undertaken as part of the University's Environmental Management System, certified to ISO14001, and this document serves as a high-level summary of that analysis.

Engagement and communication form a key part of many of our activities and specific targets and objectives are included within the sustainability strategy and its supporting strategies.

Stakeholder groups

Intrinsically universities are large organisations, with significant and broad influence across multiple stakeholder groups. We have identified the 5 main groups with whom we aim to communicate and engage in our sustainability activity, but we recognise that this list is not exhaustive and will on occasion seek to engage with other stakeholder groups.

University Staff – Academic, professional service and temporary staff working at the University who may be engaged directly through projects, initiatives or in the delivery of sustainability strategy, or indirectly through general communication, engagement and university events.

Current Students – Undergraduate, Postgraduate, exchange and visiting students studying at the University, or groups of students such as societies or Kent Students' Union who may be engaged directly through projects, initiatives, society activities, or indirectly through general communication, engagement and student events.

Prospective/Future students – Potential students at every stage of the recruitment process who may be engaged through online information, outreach activity, course prospectus, targeted email communications, open/applicant days and social media.

Local Community – Individuals, local residents, community groups, local organisations and businesses who will be engaged in specific projects, initiatives and events or through general and targeted communication on the University's sustainability activity.

Partners and Suppliers – Organisations working directly with, or supplying goods and services to, the University to deliver projects or outsourced services who will be engaged with directly on the delivery of sustainability strategy.

Funders, Alumni and Prospective Donors – Individuals, funding bodies, organisations or businesses to whom we may apply for funding or who may be engaged on specific projects to generate donations or benefactions.

Our Engagement Activities

The sustainability team engage across multiple pathways depending on the stakeholder group and intended outcomes of the engagement. Current engagement programmes and opportunities include:

<i>Internal Initiatives and Campaigns</i> - Staff Sustainability Champions Network - Kent Community Oasis Garden - Sustainability Steering Group and Sub-Groups - Right to Food - Civic Engagement - 60th Anniversary	<i>External Initiatives and Campaigns</i> - Canterbury Climate Action Network - Canterbury District Biodiversity Network - National and International awareness days e.g. Earth Day
<i>Events and Face-to-Face engagement</i> - Staff Induction Events - Open days - Applicant Days - Staff Conference - Bioblitz - bOing! Festival - Sustainability Forum	<i>Training</i> - Staff induction training (Introduction to HSES Moodle Module) - Carbon Literacy Training - Climate Fresk Workshops
<i>Digital</i> - Sustainability Web Pages - Sustainability Instagram - Central Comms (see Comms Plan)	<i>Reporting</i> - Annual sustainability round-up report - People and Planet University League - Mandatory Reporting (e.g. HESA, SDG Accord) - Annual Biodiversity round-up for the Nature Positive Universities Pledge

Our Engagement focuses

Across all areas of sustainability, engagement is crucial for achieving our targets and objectives and as such engagement and communications feature in many of the supporting strategies and action plans for sustainability. This document therefore acts as an umbrella for sustainability engagement. Specific areas of focus for engagement in sustainability over the next 2 years incorporate:

Sustainable Food - Working in partnership with our catering provider Chartwells on developing a new sustainable food action plan and on delivering the Right to Food initiative. Sustainable Food / Right to Food.

Biodiversity – Engaging staff, students and the local community in biodiversity through targeted campaigns such as ‘My campus and other animals’, through the annual Bioblitz event and as part of our work as a Nature Positive University.

Net Zero – Working with our energy partners Siemens on communicating our progress towards net zero, engaging people with reducing energy use and highlighting renewable energy on campus.

Waste – Focusing on developing a visual identity for waste to engage staff, students and visitors in the new waste segregation arrangements and promoting reuse across the campus.

Research – Raising awareness for Kent’s research within our Sustainability, Environment and Natural Resources theme and engaging research staff in the concordat for sustainability in research and innovation practice through initiatives such as the Laboratories Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF).

Achievements, awards and milestones – Celebrating our successes and showcasing best practice across the University to engage the University community.

Community and Civic – Highlighting the work being done across the University working in partnership with internal stakeholders and the community on projects and initiatives which include sustainability and span other areas, such as wellbeing and civic mission.

Sustainability - Communications Plan

The University’s central communication team supports the sustainability team in delivering communication both internally and externally via the following channels. Marketing and recruitment also promote sustainability activity as part of recruitment activity.

Audience	Channel	Mechanism
Staff	Staff Newsletter	Weekly (Wednesdays). Managed by Sophie Connor/Rhys Higgins
	Staff Community News	Staff Community SharePoint Site
	Blogs/Staff news	Staff News SharePoint Site
Students	Student news blog/webpage	Ad-hoc
	Email newsletter – All taught students	Weekly (Wednesdays). Managed by Allie Burnett/Helen Kirk/Miriam Sandiford
	Email newsletter – PGR Students	Weekly (Wednesdays), managed by the Graduate Researcher College.
	Digital Screens	Managed centrally by Communications (mainly Miriam Sandiford/Alice Allwright). School and Department also manage at local level (their screens also show the central content)
	My Kent sustainability webpage	Updated by sustainability team.
	Social media (Facebook/Twitter/Instagram/TikTok)	Ad-hoc, managed by James Mercer
Prospective Students	Prospective student webpages	Managed by the Web Content Team
	Recruitment emails	Managed by the Web Content Team
External businesses	Email newsletter	Quarterly (April, July, October, January), managed by Emily Selling
	LinkedIn	Business and Partnerships managed by Emily Selling

Alumni and prospective donors	Alumni newsletter	Monthly, managed by Hannah Collins
	Sustainability website	Ad-hoc Managed by HSES
	Research Round-Up	Quarterly. Managed by Emily Selling
	News Centre	Daily. Managed by press office
	Press releases/exclusives/feature pitches	Ad-hoc. Managed by the press office
Local Community	Gulbenkian Director's Circle Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce	Managed by Emily Selling

Types of Communication

To effectively engage and communicate on sustainability across the university, a variety of different communication types will be used to convey information and to create a culture of sustainability.

Direct - clear, intentional messaging focused on sustainability and specific to the intended stakeholder group. This includes emails, newsletters, sustainability reports, social media posts, and formal statements.

Ad Hoc - Reactive or one-off messages in response to specific events or issues such as campaigns, changes to operational arrangements and to promote sustainability activities on campus.

Cyclical - Scheduled, recurring communications that align with the academic or operational calendar. Examples include annual sustainability reports, termly updates, or environmental awareness days.

Subliminal - Indirect messaging where sustainability values are embedded in other communications or experiences. This might include imagery on campus promotional material or sustainable design in physical spaces.

Collaborative - For some collaborative projects, comms may be either co-created or created by other teams. This can include joint campaigns, student-led initiatives and civic events.

Key Dates

Month	Key Dates 2026/27
September	
October	Sustainability Forum
November	
December	Sustainability Forum, Sustainable Christmas
January	Sustainability Forum
February	

March	Sustainability Forum
April	Earth Day (Thursday 22 nd 2027)
May	Sustainability Forum, Bioblitz, No Mow May
June	KentCOG Summer event, Show your stripes day (Monday 21 st 2027)
July	Earth overshoot day (dates published in spring)
August	Sustainability Champions meetup/forum

Transparency, Language and Greenwashing

There is increasing pressure from staff, students and the local community for the University to act sustainably and as such there has been a significant rise in internal and external communications. In order to protect and build upon Kent's reputation for sustainability we must ensure that we are communicating authentically and consistently and avoiding greenwashing. We will ensure this through considering the following when communicating on sustainability:

Clear and concise language - It is important that we use the correct terminology, avoid vague or misleading terms and clearly define key terms to avoid misinterpretation

Verifying information - We must ensure that claims about the sustainability of our practices or of products we use are verifiable. For our own activities this means keeping it simple and sticking to the facts by being as data-orientated as possible.

Providing a balance of content - Sustainability is a broad area of activity encompassing a wide range of issues such as climate, biodiversity and natural resources, as well as social issues such as inequality, peace and justice.

Our content should reflect this broad range in the context of the University, including how we manage for sustainability; our research to support solutions; and the actions, activities and projects of our students, staff and partners.

Transparency – being honest about the limitations and challenges we are facing and acknowledging where we have more progress to be made

Reputation and Green-Hushing - Some institutional decisions, such as those related to the development of the Northern Landholdings, have significant impacts on our sustainability reputation. When actions are perceived to conflict with other published environmental sustainability commitments, it can result in criticism and accusations of greenwashing, even where these actions are unrelated to these decisions. In such cases, there is a risk of '*green hushing*' – the deliberate downplaying or avoidance of external sustainability communication to escape scrutiny.

While our external communications should be mindful of the context of the whole University, we will not refrain from celebrating our achievements and communicating externally about our successes.