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Welcome and introduction

In this, our Sustainability Strategy - Year 1, we will set out the principles for sustainability at the University of Sheffield.

Sustainable development is not a destination; it is an ongoing process that requires us to continually review our practices and reassess our assumptions. As such, this document is not intended to be set in stone, but is a snapshot of where we are as a University in 2018 and what work needs to be done in the next year to prepare to publish a full sustainability strategy. It is based on an audit and report carried out by PhD students from our Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures. The student voice is firmly at the centre of our strategy.

We have based our strategy around five of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. These five, out of a total of seventeen, are the areas in which we do not currently have a strategy to direct our work and in which we as a research-led university can have the greatest impact. They were also identified in the report produced by our Grantham research students as being the most important goals the University could focus on.

1. Quality Education
2. Responsible Consumption and Production
3. Climate Action
4. Clean and Affordable Energy
5. Sustainable Cities and Communities

We want to use our power as a research-led university, with a significant corporate structure, to tackle the interlinked social, environmental and economic challenges each of these areas present. Although our strategy deals with each of these areas separately, the governance we have established recognises that sustainable development cannot be adequately addressed by a single individual or team working in isolation. A holistic approach which considers the institution as a whole and sustainability in a broader sense, is fundamental. Therefore, we will use the powers of the Sustainability Steering Group and Delivery Group to draw in additional resources at senior, junior and middle management level when necessary and relevant.

We will explore ways of unlocking research funding to deliver our sustainability strategy and broadcast the lessons learnt to a wider audience, through a “living labs” approach to our campus.

Over the next year we want the whole University community to get involved in helping to shape our strategy. We will be giving opportunities for this throughout the year, including through consultations, workshops and expert evidence sessions.

But harnessing the wide range of inputs required to tackle specific sustainability challenges across campus will also rest upon a firm foundation of clear process and action planning. We will draw on the expertise of colleagues both in process and in specific sustainability issues to coordinate the development of a detailed action plan to drive forward the ambitious programme of activity outlined in this strategy.
In this way, our strategy will be embedded across the University, rather than be the responsibility of one team to enact. Backed by the authority of the Sustainability Steering and Delivery Groups, it will be led by representatives from professional services, academic departments and students; a three-pillared structure designed to recognise the importance of all parts of our University community in addressing sustainability challenges.

This *Year 1* strategy document is not the culmination of our work, but the beginning. Our ambition is for the University of Sheffield to be one of the most sustainable universities in the country. We can only do this with your help and support.

**Professor Duncan Cameron**  
Academic Lead for Sustainability

**Tracy Wray**  
Professional Services Lead for Sustainability

**Mel Kee**  
Student Lead for Sustainability

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What we will do this year

This Year 1 document does not contain detailed metrics or metric-specific goals. The actions and commitments found throughout this document ensure that we are measuring required data and have the appropriate plans and processes in place to support our full strategy early in the 2019/20 academic year.

More details on these commitments can be found throughout this document.

Quality Education

- We will consult on and produce an institutional working definition and vision of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), embedding this into the next round of Graduate Attributes
- We will introduce a staff sustainability training module and invest in regular talks and videos to help our staff understand sustainability issues
- We will continue to invest in and expand our Green Impact network

Responsible Consumption and Production

- We will introduce a set of guidelines to sustainable procurement and consult on a process to ensure that following these guidelines is implemented and incentivised
- We will continue to explore other accreditations which will improve the ethics of its supply chains
- We will explore how to ensure the materials we use contain recycled content
- We will redouble our efforts to ensure we are recycling as much of our waste as possible and engage the whole University in this collective responsibility
- We will set up a cross-University scheme to reuse furniture to ensure we are not wasting usable items

Climate Action and Clean and Affordable Energy

- We will commission research into what the University’s total carbon budget to 2030 should be
- We will consider the viability of switching the University’s electricity consumption to an ultra-low carbon energy provider
- We will begin to collect data on the emissions relating to our business travel, building materials and procurement
- We will establish metrics which measure positive climate action

Sustainable Cities and Communities

- We will continue to carry out and publish life-cycle analyses to assess the environmental and socioeconomic impacts of our development work
- We will 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 provide regular updates on our engagement with these bodies
Quality Education

Whilst the UN’s own targets relating Quality Education are largely concerned with primary level education, many of the same values inform the mission of a University. These values include empowering people to affect positive change and promoting lifelong learning. Given that sustainable development relies on both of these values, universities are uniquely placed to help to bring about a more sustainable future. It is crucial that we continue to work towards solutions to the multifaceted challenges associated with sustainable development. The University has the opportunity to make an enormous contribution to finding these solutions, through its own research and through the far-reaching impacts of the actions of its graduates.

A university’s greatest impact on the world is exercised through its alumni. In the academic year 2017/18, the University of Sheffield hosted 28,849 students from 125 countries. These students will go on to work in the widest possible range of fields in across the globe and the impact they have will partly stem from the education they received at the University of Sheffield. This illustrates the extraordinary opportunity the University of Sheffield has to help to shape societies for generations to come.

When considering how it can best provide a quality education in the context of sustainable development, The University of Sheffield faces two major challenges: provision and access. How can we provide high quality Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) whilst ensuring that prospective students do not encounter arbitrary barriers to accessing this education?

Our strategy in this area is based around three themes. These cover the questions of provision and access, whilst also investigating the new sustainability-related ideas that the University is contributing through its research:

- Education for Sustainable Development
- Staff sustainability
- Sustainability research

Education for Sustainable Development

The University of Sheffield will ensure that its students have opportunities to acquire awareness, knowledge and skills relating to sustainability in order to effect positive change and influence. We will do this as part of our work on implementing our Learning and Teaching Strategy through a Programme Level Approach (PLA) and aligning our programmes with the Sheffield Graduate Attributes (SGA).

We considered it imperative that ESD (and other curricula priorities emerging from the student engagement strand of PLA, such as Liberate the curriculum) are not seen as separate, additional projects, but rather are tackled through the lens of the student engagement strand of PLA and
mapping against the SGA, in order to ensure a truly embedded approach. We will establish clear links between our education and sustainability governance. We will consult on and produce an institutional working definition and vision of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). This definition and vision will be mapped against the Graduate Attributes, spelling out clearly where the current Graduate Attributes fulfil our sustainability ambitions, and where further work may be needed in order to embed sustainability into the next round of Graduate Attributes.

**Staff sustainability**

We want to empower our staff to work sustainably by giving them the knowledge to make ethical decisions at work and home. We will introduce a sustainability training module and invest in regular talks and videos to help our staff understand sustainability issues.

We will continue to invest in and expand our Green Impact network, giving staff the tools and resource they need to make a difference in their workplace. Our new Green Impact projects system will allow staff to run their own sustainability projects on a small scale, which we will look to expand across the University where successful.

**Sustainability research**

As a research-led institution we will further integrate our research into corporate and professional services practices.

Using our campus and the city as a living lab, we will produce an action plan on how to use our research expertise to improve our corporate practices and provide evidence to other organisations in the city and beyond to help them become more sustainable.
Climate change is a global emergency. Its impacts are already being felt, and over the coming decades the existing effects will be exacerbated and new ones will emerge. Climate scientists are united that we must limit global temperature rise to $<2^\circ C$. If we fail to do so, the consequences will be even more profound and the implications for humanity and all other life forms will be severe.

The University sits in the global north and benefits from the relative prosperity of the UK, however prosperity has been coupled with high greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. GHG emissions cause climate change, which disproportionately affects the global south. Thus, a recent policy brief produced by Sheffield academics acknowledges that “the UK has a moral obligation” to mitigate climate change. The 2008 Climate Change Act and the 2015 Paris Accord on Climate Change bind the UK to reduce its emissions significantly, but the Committee on Climate Change states unequivocally that UK action on climate change is currently insufficient.

If the University is truly an institution rooted in the ‘local and the global’, we must act decisively and lead the way in tackling climate change. As an institution, we currently produce a large amount of emissions. We have the wealth, knowledge, and resources to radically reduce them. Importantly, such action would have powerful symbolic importance in the context of the UK. This is an opportunity for the University to demonstrate its capacity for innovation and leadership. Furthermore, as an institution striving to be student-led, there is a consensus within the student body that the University should take strong action to tackle climate change. In 2017, action on climate change was afforded the highest priority by student participants in a Student’s Union consultation about sustainability issues.

Because taking strong action to decarbonise our energy usage is vital to reducing our impact on the climate, we have combined two SDGs for this section: Climate Action and Affordable and Clean Energy. However, it is crucial to recognise that a large proportion of the University’s emissions are ‘embedded’ in the services and products consumed by the University, and our proposed strategies reflect this.

We will be focussing on four themes in this strand of the strategy:

- Overarching metrics
- Scope 1 & 2 emissions
- Scope 3 emissions
- Positive climate action
Overarching metrics
Two classes of targets are useful for measuring the reductions in each scope of carbon emissions:

- Relative targets - E.g. Carbon footprint per student/staff member, carbon footprint per square metre of University property, carbon footprint per £1 million total university income. Other useful targets may emerge through consultation.
- Absolute targets - Total per year carbon emissions attributable to the University, as part of a long-term carbon budget.

Relative targets are useful for measuring the carbon efficiency of our systems, maintaining a proportionally steady carbon footprint during periods of University growth and expansion, and comparing our level of sustainability against other universities; all of which are necessary if we aim to become the most sustainable university in the UK. However, it is net reductions, represented by absolute targets, which are ultimately important for acting on climate change.

We will commission research into what the University’s total carbon budget to 2030 should be. This budget would represent the total cumulative emissions which the University can emit over the next decade. This will enable us to set a per annum absolute target for emissions reduction which is truly equitable and based in the most up to date science. We will update our Energy Strategy if required to reflect these findings.

Scope 1 & 2 emissions
The University of Sheffield Scope 1 emissions include: gas, vehicles, oil and research-associated emissions. Scope 2 emissions includes energy usage, primarily from electricity and district heating. Scope 1 & 2 emissions are already measured by the University and total ~33,000 tonnes of carbon emissions annually.

A large proportion of this is from electricity generation - a substantial recent fall in emissions was due to the increased efficiency of Sheffield’s district heating system. The quickest way to decarbonise the University’s electricity consumption is to switch to an ultra-low carbon energy provider. We will consider the viability of this over the next year.

Scope 3 emissions
Our Scope 3 emissions primarily come from: business travel (including flights), building materials, and procurement. We do not currently measure these areas, but will put in place mechanisms to collect this data.

Positive climate action
The achievement of reduction in scope 1, 2 and particularly 3 will require a great investment of time, financial resources, and institutional capacity. Therefore, alongside metrics for measuring carbon emission reductions, we will establish metrics which measure positive climate action. Some of these may include:

- Successful emission reduction schemes undertaken. Innovative schemes to reduce all scopes of emissions will be measured.
- Funds made available for climate action. The total amount of money dedicated to reducing carbon emissions will be measured. We will also explore options for making additional funding available for energy-saving ideas suggested by members of the University community.
- **Scope 3 emission data gathered.** The gathering of scope 3 emissions data will require technical expertise, for which University of Sheffield researchers will be encouraged to investigate.

- **Reduction in consumption of goods.** Strategies to reduce total consumption of goods, and increase the proportion of sustainably produced goods will be produced, as a necessary step to reduce scope 3 emissions associated with procurement.

- **Emissions saved through carbon offsetting.** It may be that carbon offsets are required to reach zero emissions. However, we must agree a process to ensure that we are certain that any projects engaged with are genuine (e.g. additionality is assured), and are deployed in socially just manners.

- **Divestment from fossil fuels.** The university has already committed to divest from fossil fuels, this should be maintained.

- **Research funding accepted from fossil fuel companies.** The University will debate and invite expert opinion on whether it is acceptable to receive funding from fossil fuel companies, when to do so is potentially making the institution further complicit in driving climate change.

- **Total aviation emissions reduction.** Flying is currently integral to the modern academic model. But global aviation emissions must be drastically reduced and it is extremely unlikely that this sector will be decarbonised in the short to medium term. The University will hold a debate on the feasibility of reducing the volume of flights made on University business.
Sustainable Cities and Communities

The UN sees vast potential for development, cooperation, social integration, innovation and shared culture in cities. The rapid rise of urban populations worldwide has given us multiple examples that demonstrate these qualities. Equally, the challenges that the changing nature of cities have presented are significant. Meeting the needs of expanding urban populations whilst avoiding practices that cause environmental degradation is a problem to which no silver bullet solution has been discovered. Equally, promoting cohesion and cooperation within urban communities remains a challenge.

The University of Sheffield prides itself on being an institution rooted in a local and a global community. These values are ideal for approaching the difficulties in being a responsible and effective organisation with close ties to a city and a massive international reach. However, they also require a thorough, holistic approach and an understanding of the interactions between the University, the city and the wider world.

Our strategy in this area is based around three themes:

- Infrastructure and Urban Planning
- Environmental Stewardship
- Partnerships & Engagement

**Infrastructure and Urban Planning**

We have a responsibility to develop our estate sustainably. For all new development, the University performs life-cycle analyses to assess the environmental and socioeconomic impacts to local surroundings and local economy. To maintain transparency, these benefits will continue to be published as part of the planning process.

**Environmental Stewardship**

We will continue to ensure our green space is open for public use and look to introduce more trees, green ground, and green architecture where possible and practical.

**Partnerships & Engagement**

The University works closely with a number of city- and region-wide bodies to promote economic growth, inclusivity and cultural vibrancy.

Over the next year, we will use these bodies to provide a framework and governance structure for our engagement with other city organisations. They will encourage, facilitate, and help to expand academic and non-academic collaboration with the city and city-region. We will provide regular updates on our engagement with these bodies.
- The Local Economic Partnership Board will continue to govern our involvement in economic impact for the city region.
- The Sheffield Partnership Board will determine how we are involved in sustainable and inclusive economic development in the city. We will play an active role in developing the new Framework for an Inclusive and Sustainable Economy.
- The Sheffield Cultural Consortium will continue to be how we engage with cultural projects in Sheffield.
- Joined Up Heritage Sheffield allows us to link with other city heritage groups relating to the 40 listed structures we manage. We will publish a new overview of our listed buildings to ensure our heritage buildings are properly recognised.
- The Green City Strategy will help us to engage with partners to ensure Sheffield is resilient to climate change and is working towards being a clean, low carbon economy. We will become active members of this strategy.
Responsible consumption and production is based on collaboration between many disparate groups of actors who, through collective efforts and ethical economic practices, can help to meet the needs of people across the globe whilst reducing resource use, pollution and environmental degradation. This goal is, therefore, not solely about decreasing consumption and waste, but also centres around treating people with respect and dignity within supply chains.

Supply chains are complex in nature and global in reach and encompass the three strands of economic, social and environmental sustainable development. Identifying the stages and understanding the practices used in a single supply chain is exceptionally difficult. However, large organisations must investigate the source of the goods they buy, how they are constructed, who works on each stage in the production line and how they can be responsibly disposed of, in order to fulfil their corporate social responsibility.

The University of Sheffield had an income of £623.6 million in the 2016-17 academic year. It hosts over 37,000 students and professional members of staff members. This makes the University a huge consumer of resources and a significant producer of waste. As a “values-led University with a global purpose”, ethical, efficient and sustainable procurement and waste practices are essential to our mission and guiding principles.

Our strategy in this area is based around three themes:

- Procurement
- Consumption
- Waste

**Procurement**

An organisation the size of the University should set an example by ensuring its procurement decisions are held to high ethical standards and have minimal environmental impact. In addition, the huge purchasing power of the University can be used to influence its suppliers to become more sustainable themselves, thus propagating positive changes in the supply chain.

We will introduce a set of guidelines to sustainable procurement and consult on a process to ensure that following these guidelines is implemented and incentivised. This will help both central procurement teams and staff with purchasing responsibilities to make informed buying decisions.

The University and Students’ Union has recently signed up to Electronics Watch and will continue to explore other accreditations which will improve the ethics of its supply chains.
Consumption
Our building and development plans are governed by the strategic needs of the University and we only build what we need. We will explore how to ensure the materials we use contain recycled content.

Waste
The University’s recycling rates have stagnated at around 30% in recent years, despite roughly 60% of our general waste being recyclable. We will redouble our efforts to ensure we are recycling as much of our waste as possible and engage the whole University in this collective responsibility.

The waste we generate from construction and development activities each and every year is significantly more than the waste we generate from our day to day activities. We will develop management plans for all site waste to ensure this is being disposed of responsibly.

We will set up a cross-University scheme to reuse furniture to ensure we are not wasting usable items.

We currently collect waste food from sites that produce the most, including the residences, University House and other commercial locations such as Halifax Hall. We will explore opportunities to collect waste food from other locations such as cafes, however, the logistical arrangements needed to do this at all in all University buildings may not be worth the relatively small amount of food likely to be collected.