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Sustainability Policy & Engagement Plan



Purpose

York st John University (YSJ) aims to be world leading, and as part of that strategy we are embedding ecological and social justice, building around the UN Sustainable Development Goals, into our curricula and practice of learning, teaching, and campus life wherever possible.

We recognise that the university impacts on all levels of scope and scale and it is up to us to minimise our negative impacts and amplify the exceptional, pushing for environmental excellence wherever possible. To do this means uniting students, staff, and our communities at every site of our university, embodying a whole-university approach.

Review Process

Our Sustainability Policy and Sustainable Engagement Plan is reviewed annually by the Director of Estates Management and Development, and then communicated via YSJ Today internally and updated on our public website.

Scope

This plan applies to all aspects of YSJ's operations, including but not limited to:

- Academic curricula and teaching methods
- Campus infrastructure and facilities management
- Procurement and supply chain practices
- Waste management and disposal
- Transportation and travel
- Community engagement and outreach
- Biodiversity and environmental conservation efforts

Policy

Through regular target setting and reviewing periods it is our policy to -

- Comply with all relevant environmental legislation and regulation
- Protect the environment, through the minimisation of pollution.
- Have all construction developments focused on sustainable construction principles.
- Reuse and repurpose furniture and other goods wherever possible and dispose of things consciously when not. Priority is in descending order - for reuse on site as is, refurbishment, given to the local community, recycled, disposed of in the correct waste stream.
- Encourage the use of sustainable forms of transport by students, staff, and visitors, and to only facilitate flights when all other options have been exhausted or disability requires so.
- Proactively encourage wide participation in environmental activities, encouraging staff, students, and stakeholders joining. Hosting of dedicated events for staff outside of term time and integrating sustainability through academics for students.
- Increase the Biodiversity of the University's campuses, accommodation sites, and surrounding areas.
- Maintain the universities zero waste to landfill since 2016 commitment.
- Encourage sustainable procurement through our procurement strategy and practices, while proactively engaging with our suppliers to encourage sustainability in our supply chain
- Use water more efficiently and reduce the volumes of water used at our sites.

Targets

Our sustainability targets for reducing environmental impact have been split into ten categories, with the following being YSJ's targets for the 2024 to 2030 period:

- Construction & Refurbishment- To achieve SKA certification for the Design Centre project, which will be unveiled in early 2026, and pursue the same certification for all future developments of a similar size, in line with our Sustainable Construction Criteria, which is used to benchmark all new project designs.
- Emissions & Discharge – A 70% reduction, from the 2005 baseline, in Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions by 2025, and a 80% reduction by 2030 through considered procurement, management of our heating systems, and de-gasification of the University estate.
- Community involvement – A commitment to host at least two sustainability sessions each year, alongside a variety of other events that are informed by our policy. In addition, we are to maintain our Silver National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement Watermark
- Biodiversity- inclusion of a new pond and swale for the Design Centre, and a commitment for future developments with outdoor space to ensure a variety of habitats, prioritising those that are in high need i.e. vernal pools and linking habitats.
- Waste management – A carbon reduction of 80% by 2030 from a baseline year of 2019-20, alongside a concerted effort to reduce waste at the source through careful procurement.
- Travel and Transport – A carbon reduction of 20% by 2030 for business travel from a baseline of 2018-19, and a 10% reduction in carbon emissions from a baseline of 2024-25 in staff and student commuting.

- Sustainable procurement – Focus on whole life costing techniques to measure environmental and social impacts, achieved by the incorporating of formal commitments to the protection of equality and diversity standards within all supplier contracts, and have every evaluation post 2024 include specific sustainability KPI's.
- Water – Reduce the tonnage of CO₂e of both our water supply and wastewater carbon emissions by 10% to 6.15 and 6.56 respectively by 2030 from the baseline year of 2022-23. Also, transition to 75% of grounds water maintenance needs to harvested rainwater by 2030.
- Energy – 50% of electricity direct from low-carbon sources by 2028, as specified in the University's 2026 Strategic Plan
- Carbon – To meet a 90% emissions reduction by 2030 and Net Zero by 2030. These targets are measured against our 2005 baseline. More can be read in the YSJ Carbon Reduction Plan.

These targets are based on the university audits around Biodiversity, Carbon, Travel and Transport, Waste management, and Sustainable procurement.

Objectives

YSJ's Engagement Strategy for Sustainable Development is in place to support Sustainability as a core aspect of our community, reinforcing our University for Social Impact Strategy stated aim of meeting 'future challenges by guiding the innovation and energy of our University community'. To do this, both staff (professional and academic) and students need to be engaged with this process, forming our objectives: Engage, Collaborate, and Support.

Engage – YSJ will involve our community with both on campus and off campus with sustainability efforts by clearly conveying our goals, how we are approaching challenges, and celebrating our successes on all scales. This will be achieved through partnerships with the student union and other bodies, through our courses, and through information dissemination such as our YSJ today newsletter. Examples of such efforts can be seen by the 160 bikes serviced through our free bike doctor appointments in 2025/2026.

Collaborate – We will foster an environment of collaboration that focuses on bringing disparate groups together through initiatives such as the Living Lab. We recognise that individuals and teams have unique insights that when shared facilitate new opportunities for our community. Examples include the Bioscience curriculum mapping and work on calculating moth numbers on campus.

Support – Through the allocation of resources YSJ will help foster environmental sustainability projects, by sharing time, specialist knowledge, and money such as the £400 allocated to the Friendly Living Fund. The Sustainability staff within the Estates team will be available to facilitate the push to engage, collaborate, and will provide a nucleus of continual support for all.

Progress on these goals can be judged partially on tangible metrics, examples of which include:

- National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement Watermark

- Maintaining our Silver certification.
- Food for Life
 - Maintaining our Silver certification.
- Mapping scope 1,2, and 3 carbon emissions
 - As seen in the Carbon Management Plan
- Spending within the dedicated un-allocated Sustainability budget
 - 2026/2027 budget is £6500
- Joining and progressing through SOS UK's Responsible futures framework
 - Sign up to be before 2027/2028 academic year and certification to be achieved by 2035 across the university.
- Achieving sustainable accreditation
 - LEAF bronze by 2027 and Silver by 2030
- Ensuring that for every five events only for students, staff receive a dedicated event
 - Continuing the three student and one staff bike doctor events yearly
- Evaluation through a dedicated Living lab session of the actions taken by the university to promote environmental sustainability
 - Supported by the Sustainability conversation space within Fountains Library and the annual published Sustainability Report to be first published in 2026/2027

Our Sustainability Sessions facilitate a time and space for conversation and reporting on progress. By holding them throughout the year we democratise the work that the sustainability team does, allowing our community to help shape priorities and input on how budget gets spent. Through the opening up these reporting sessions, we go beyond simply reporting to the executive and allow the whole university to engage, along with this itself acting as a mechanism for tracking progress and engagement.