Our Sustainable Future

2030 and beyond

Putting sustainability at the heart of what we do

Contents

Foreword

Welcome to our Birmingham City University (BCU) sustainability strategy, Our Sustainable Future. Just as Birmingham has transformed from its industrial past to a forward-thinking creative city, we too are evolving, embedding sustainability into our core mission as a university.

We are experiencing climate and ecological crises. Addressing these crises is essential not only to protect the environment but to ensure a stable, healthy and equitable world for future generations.

We begin from a strong position. Through our previous Environmental Plan, BCU has already delivered a range of initiatives to reduce our environmental impacts, such as achieving a 45% reduction in our Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions from 2005-06 levels, but there is more to be done.

With Birmingham's industrial heritage and our vision to be an exemplar anchor institution, we will support the green revolution locally and regionally, reducing our impacts and equipping our students with the skills to tackle future sustainability challenges, combined with a global outlook through our research and partnerships.

Our Sustainable Future strongly aligns to our Strategy 2030 vision. We are championing Education for Sustainable Development to support the talent of tomorrow, creating knowledge for good through our sustainability focused research, and powering prosperity through our sustainable behaviours and driving innovation.

We all must take an active role in supporting the delivery of this strategy. By committing to create a just, sustainable future, we are investing in our students and communities, supporting the planet and helping to make positive change at a regional and global scale.

Professor David Mba,
Vice Chancellor

Professor Ian Blair,
Pro-Vice Chancellor
Academic and Sustainability

Our Sustainable Future Vision

We will build a sustainable future for our institution and the communities we serve within Birmingham and beyond.

Mission statement:

- We are committed to embedding sustainability in everything we do – from our teaching and research to our campus operations and community partnerships.
- We will advance knowledge, innovation and practical solutions that support environmental, social, and economic sustainability.
- We will empower our students, staff, and local communities to drive positive change across Birmingham and beyond.
- We will work hand in hand with our communities to create a fairer, greener, and more resilient future.

Global context

Humankind is facing its greatest threat, through the climate and ecological crises, with the destruction of the life support systems we depend upon. With increases in extreme weather and pollution levels, the world is already feeling the impacts through crop failures, severe health impacts and new threats, eco-anxiety, and widespread loss of life.

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report (2024), highlighted that 2024 was the warmest year on record, with global average temperatures reaching approximately 1.5-1.6°C above pre-industrial levels. This marks the first sustained crossing of the Paris Agreements 1.5°C threshold.

Approximately 3.3 billion people now face high or very high climate risk, particularly in the global south where food and water insecurity, disease, and ecosystem degradation are escalating.

Climate justice recognises that climate change is not just an environmental issue, but also a social, ethical, and political one. This thinking needs to be adopted to address inequality, fair distribution, inclusive decision making, and a connection with human rights.

Near-term ambition is needed to tackle these challenges. **We need to play our part in finding the solutions and taking action.**

What it means to us

We recognise our responsibility to be a part of the solution. As a large institution embedded at the heart of Birmingham, we are uniquely positioned to lead by example.

A dedicated sustainability strategy is essential for us to embed this responsibility into every aspect of our work. For our students, staff, and partners across Birmingham and beyond, the climate crisis demands urgent, inclusive, and meaningful action.

Our sustainability strategy provides a clear roadmap to reduce our environmental impact, improve resilience, and empower our community to engage with sustainability in teaching, research, campus life, and beyond, supporting our Strategy 2030 vision.

Our focus on interdisciplinary STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and humanities, and mathematics) approaches will support our students to be ready to challenge norms and tackle these complex issues.

Our approach

Our sustainability strategy was developed to ensure the needs and aspirations of our students and staff are the foundation of our future at BCU.

The strategy has been informed through

- Consultation with students and staff to understand their priorities and expectations with 780 responses received.
- Using information from global sources, such as the IPCC, and national resources, such as the Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges (EAUC).
- Reviewing national policy and sector best practice.
- Using our own data and knowledge to inform and develop challenging targets.
- Reviewing the approach of partners such as Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Combined Authority, Transport for West Midlands, Sustainability West Midlands, and the Canal and River Trust to ensure a unified approach to tackling sustainability in the region.

Contribution to BCU's Strategic Pillars

Our Sustainable Future aligns to all three of the 2030 strategic pillars as outlined below.

Develop Talent for Tomorrow:

By embedding Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into our curriculum, we are equipping and empowering tomorrow's workforce with essential skills and knowledge to apply in their future careers and lives. ESD curriculum content and competencies strongly align to our employability framework and STEAM approach and attributes.

Our sustainability strategy supports the provision of a quality sustainable campus and facilities for example through enhancing the internal conditions and lighting of our buildings, to sustainable transport provision and increasing nature on our sites.

Create Knowledge for Good:

We are committed to advancing impactful, sustainable research through global and interdisciplinary collaborations and alignment with the UN SDGs.

We will continue to develop and enhance this, contributing to regional and global sustainability through high quality research.

Power Prosperity:

Our Sustainable Future contributes to local and regional sustainability. We will transform people through embedding sustainability values and competencies through routes such as our STEAM agenda, transform places through contributing to a sustainable resilient urban space with our campuses and research, and transform businesses by fostering innovation, collaboration and skills that support the green transition.

Our Sustainable Future aligns to the Strategy 2030 'set up to succeed' criteria in the following ways:

Through People and Culture:

Our Sustainable Future has a focus on creating a positive, healthy, inclusive environment for our students and staff. Training, communications, and engagement form essential elements of our sustainability strategy, with mental health and wellbeing initiatives being supported through initiatives such as active travel and increasing biodiversity across our sites. Equality, diversity and inclusion are key to the strategy, and links to supporting the delivery of the UN SDGs such as 'No Poverty' and 'Reduced Inequalities'.

Environmental Sustainability:

This strategy is the main driving force to achieve this core enabler, in particular through delivery of the first workstream 'Creating a Sustainable Campus'.

Infrastructure:

Sustainable buildings and technology are key to delivering outstanding facilities. We have been embedding environmental and net zero carbon technology to achieve this such as air source heat pumps, solar panels and building management system improvements to maximise the sustainable operations of our estate. In 2025 we conducted a climate change risk assessment of our estate to identify how we can mitigate and adapt to climate change, increasing our resilience, the findings of which will be integrated into our planning to improve resilience and adaptability.

Size and Shape:

By incorporating sustainability into the curriculum, research, and partnerships, we are ensuring we are relevant and responding to global challenges and needs, enhancing our offer to students. Sustainability provides an opportunity to strengthen existing and create new partnerships.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

| 1 NO POVERTY	2 ZERO HUNGER	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
4 QUALITY EDUCATION	5 GENDER EQUALITY	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION
7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES	11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES	12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
13 CLIMATE ACTION	14 LIFE BELOW WATER	15 LIFE ON LAND
16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Our approach has been shaped around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

The UN SDGs are an urgent call for action by all countries in global partnership to address the world's most pressing challenges, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. The 17 SDGs, adopted by all UN member states in 2015, provides a framework for countries, businesses, and communities to create a more equitable and sustainable future.

We have committed to align our activities to the UN SDGs, recognising the unique position the education sector has in delivering the goals. Our Sustainable Future has been mapped against the UN SDGs to show how we are working towards this global agenda.

UN SDG three key elements: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection
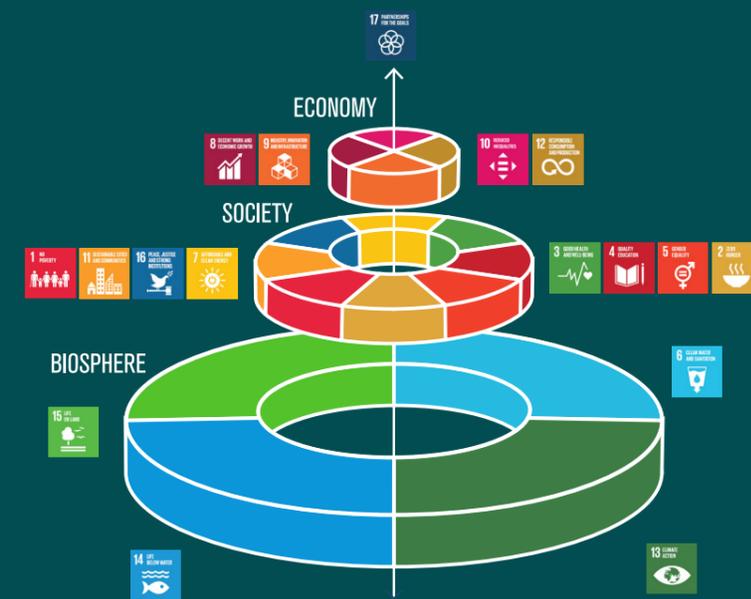
Guiding principles

When evaluating initiatives or making decisions, the following guiding principles are critical to inform, shape and successfully deliver Our Sustainable Future strategy.

1. Whole-institution approach:

Sustainability will be embedded across all areas of university life. From Estates and Facilities, Procurement and IT, to the curriculum, research and the culture of BCU. Everyone has a role to play. Sustainability will inform how we make decisions, invest resources, and plan for the future.

2. Environmental responsibility:

We are committed to reducing our environmental impact through ambitious action on carbon emissions, resource use, biodiversity, and pollution, ensuring our campuses contribute to the health of our local and global environment.

3. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD):

We will embed sustainability into our curriculum, research, and professional practice, equipping our students, staff, and graduates with the knowledge, skills, and values to respond to challenges such as climate change, ecological loss, and social inequality.

4. Fairness, inclusion, and climate justice:

We will champion equity in all aspects of our sustainability journey, recognising that our actions must support just transitions, inclusivity, and social fairness – locally in Birmingham and globally through our international partnerships.

5. Student and staff empowerment:

We will empower and support our students and staff to take action, share ideas, and shape our sustainability journey. Through collaboration and support for grassroots initiatives, we will build a culture of sustainability that reflects the creativity and diversity of our university community.

6. Partnership

We will work collaboratively with Birmingham's communities, public bodies, businesses, and regional networks to support shared sustainability goals. We are committed to place-based innovation and community-led solutions to sustainability challenges.

7. Innovation

We will drive change through research, innovation, and the STEAM agenda, learning from our progress and raising our ambitions. Sustainability will be viewed as a living process, responding to new knowledge, technologies, and evolving needs of stakeholders.

8. Continuous improvement

We will strive for continuous improvement by reviewing our processes and results, identifying where we can improve our approach to seek further sustainability gains.

Strategy overview

We have identified three main workstreams to achieve Our Sustainable Future:

Creating a sustainable campus

Creating a sustainable legacy

Creating sustainable communities

Each workstream of the strategy has specific KPIs to demonstrate progress and where further resource and efforts may be required. This approach will be linked through the UN SDGs, which will provide a framework for us to assess where we are working towards the global sustainability agenda.

Appendix 1 details Our Sustainable Future's targets and key performance indicators (KPIs).

Workstream 1:

Creating a sustainable campus

Aim: We reduce the negative environmental impacts of our operations creating positive change and a sustainable place to study and work.

Creating a sustainable campus is essential not only for reducing our environmental impact but also for preparing students to be responsible global citizens. It strengthens our resilience to future challenges such as climate change and resource scarcity.

Within Birmingham, some of our sites experience challenges through access to green space and a variety of public transport, however we are working with partners such as Birmingham City Council and Transport for West Midlands to overcome these.

A sustainable campus enhances the student experience by fostering a healthy, engaging, and forward-thinking environment.

From energy-efficient buildings and increasing biodiversity to sustainable transport and waste reduction, integrating sustainability across the University's infrastructure supports both environmental stewardship and long-term cost savings. For example, we have installed air-source heat pumps at our Seacole and Pavilion sites to decarbonise heat, installed LED lighting, and increased the number of solar panels on site.

Embedding climate adaptation is vital for us to create a resilient campus, safeguarding our education, research, and communities against increasing climate risks. We have conducted a climate risk assessment of our estate and will embed actions to reduce business risk.

We will continue existing and implement new initiatives to reduce our environmental impacts, through strategic plans and projects such as our net zero carbon targets, our sustainable travel plan and improving the biodiversity of our sites.

Our key priorities and measures of success are:

- Maintaining our ISO 14001: 2015 Environmental Management System (EMS) certification.
- Meeting our net zero carbon ambitions in scopes 1 and 2 emissions by 2035/36 and scope 3 emissions by 2042/43.
- Reducing our energy and water consumption.
- Meeting the targets of our Travel Plan by increasing active travel and public transport use and reducing carbon emissions from our business travel.
- Achieving an increase in biodiversity through delivery of our Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).
- Achieving 'Silver' and targeting 'Gold' Soil Association Food for Life through delivery of our Sustainable Catering Plan and targets.
- Achieving a reduction in waste generated and an increase in recycling rates.
- Achieving environmental compliance across our estate.
- Embedding and delivering sustainability and net zero requirements in new build and refurbishment projects.
- Identifying and addressing climate change risk mitigation and adaptation projects where feasible.

Working towards UN SDGs:

Workstream 2:

Creating a sustainable legacy

Aim: We embed sustainability at the core of our operations, education, research, and partnerships creating a lasting positive legacy locally and globally.

We have a responsibility to ensure our students leave BCU equipped with the knowledge and skills to tackle sustainability challenges. Through a sustainability-informed curriculum we empower graduates to succeed in a rapidly changing world and to become agents of positive change in their careers.

There is a green skills gap, and all sectors are increasingly demanding sustainability skills. ESD supports the development of student skills, from critical thinking and creativity to problem-solving, thus improving the employability of our graduates in an increasingly competitive recruitment marketplace. The UN SDGs and UNESCO Key Competencies for Sustainability are example frameworks to help us achieve this.

We will support and grow research that advances sustainability locally and globally. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration through our STEAM agenda and through our curriculum and research we will achieve real-world impact.

We will ensure sustainability is further embedded in our decision-making and key processes and functions such as project planning and procurement.

Our key priorities and measures of success are:

- Demonstrating leadership in sustainability, with sustainability considerations embedded in our decision-making and business case processes.
- ESD is embedded throughout the curriculum.
- Fully integrate sustainability into the STEAM agenda through our student attributes and curriculum delivery.
- Provide CPD training for all academic staff on ESD.
- Provide training for all level 4 students on sustainability to ensure a baseline level of knowledge.
- Green skills and careers are embedded in our employability framework and strategy.
- Increase research, publications, and partnerships addressing sustainability challenges.
- Delivery of and compliance with our Ethical Investment policy.
- Sustainability requirements embedded in every procurement over £75,000.

Working towards UN SDGs:

Workstream 3:
Creating sustainable communities

Aim: To empower students, staff, and local partners to co-create inclusive, resilient, and environmentally conscious communities in and around Birmingham.

Further to the formal curriculum, we will embed sustainability themes into daily student life, through engagement, innovation, and social impact, working in partnership with colleagues and partners such as the Students' Union to maximise engagement and opportunities for students, such as through student volunteering opportunities in the community.

Carbon literacy training will be delivered to students, which includes the social dimension of climate action. We will address staff development, launching a new mandatory Environmental Awareness module, and identify other opportunities to engage and empower staff, for example through schemes like Green Impact.

Affordable catering is provided with healthy options for students that meets cultural and religious needs. Mental health and wellbeing services are provided to support students and an inclusive campus design created to welcome students, staff and visitors with different needs.

We will strengthen partnerships with local communities, councils, and organisations to develop sustainable solutions. For example, with partners such as the Canal and River Trust, where we will look to use our knowledge and skills to help solve the sustainability challenges they face.

Our partnerships will support the local community, such as schools and colleges, with student and staff volunteering schemes to support local charities or sustainability projects.

We address social value through our procurement process and supply chain through our Modern Slavery commitments and embedding social sustainability requirements.

Across all of this we will promote inclusive practices that support student wellbeing, reduce inequalities, empower underrepresented groups, and ensure equitable access to sustainability initiatives and outcomes, while strengthening our community ties.

This will contribute to regional sustainability, making a safe, healthy, and vibrant place to study and work.

Our key priorities and measures of success are:

- Enrich the student experience through sustainability initiatives such as volunteering.
- Student and staff engagement through schemes such as Green Impact, events, and communication.
- Delivering sustainability training for students and staff.
- Development of community partnerships.
- Linking community organisations with the curriculum.
- Delivery of the Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy against its five core themes.
- Being an accredited Living Wage Employer.

Working towards UN SDGs:

| 1 NO POVERTY | 2 ZERO HUNGER | 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | 4 QUALITY EDUCATION | 5 GENDER EQUALITY | 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE |
| 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES | 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES | 13 CLIMATE ACTION | 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS | 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS | |

How do we make it happen?

Monitoring and measuring:

The **Sustainability Team** will have ownership and day-to-day oversight of the strategy.

We will monitor and communicate progress against the strategy and workstreams through:

- Our EMS and associated auditing.
- An annual report, which will be presented to top management and the Board of Governors and published on our web pages.
- Associated plans and strategies that support the sustainability agenda.
- The Sustainability Committee, who are responsible for monitoring progress towards our sustainability targets.
- Our Sustainability Communications and Engagement Plan.

Governance:

Leadership and governance are essential to ensure the successful delivery of Our Sustainable Future. Environmental sustainability has been integrated as a core enabler in Strategy 2030 and Beyond, including four sustainability KPIs for which progress will be reported on to the Board of Governors and the University Executive Team, which are focused on:

- Net zero carbon emissions.
- Biodiversity improvement on campus.
- Contributing to sustainability in Birmingham.
- Contributing to delivery of the UN SDGs.

Our Sustainability Committee is chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor Academic and Sustainability and comprised of senior leadership from across the university. The Committee are responsible for setting the strategic direction of the sustainability agenda, providing oversight, accountability, and resourcing review to ensure progress is made and we are delivering against our targets.

Associated Strategies and Policies:

- **Strategy 2030 and Beyond**
- **Environmental Policy**
- **Ethical Investment Policy**
- Education and Student Experience Strategy
- **Research Strategy**
- Estates and Facilities Business Plan
- **EDI Strategy**
- **Travel Plan**
- **Sustainable Catering Plan**
- Biodiversity Action Plan
- Net Zero Carbon Plan
- Procurement Strategy

Interested in finding out more?

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Appendix 1:
Our Sustainable Vision Targets and KPIs

Workstream 1: Creating a sustainable campus

Measure	Baseline	2030 target	UN SDGs supported
Water consumption reduction	2023/24: 85,906 m³	80,879 m³ 1% annual reduction	6
Water consumption reduction (FTE students and staff)	2023/24: Xm³ year per FTE	KPI reported on annually based on the annual student and staff figures	6
Waste generation reduction (Academic buildings)	2023/24: 539.9 tonnes	508.3 tonnes 1% reduction per year	12
Waste generation reduction (Accommodation)	2023/24: 82.4 tonnes	77.6 tonnes 1% reduction per year	12
Waste generation reduction – academic buildings (FTE students and staff)	2023/24: X tonnes per FTE	KPI reported on annually based on the annual student and staff figures	12
Waste recycling proportion (Academic buildings)	2023/24: 45% waste recycled	57% waste recycled 2% increase per year	12
Waste recycling proportion (Accommodation)	2023/24: 14% waste recycled	26% waste recycled 2% increase per year	12
ISO 14001 – major non-conformities	2023/24: 0 major non-conformities	Maintain 0 major non-conformities	13
Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions	2022/23: 6,308 tCO₂e	3,250.9 tCO₂e 48.5% reduction from baseline	13
Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions (FTE students and staff)	2022/23: 0.18 tCO₂e per FTE	KPI reported on annually based on the annual student and staff figures	13
Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions (m2)	2022/23: 0.04 tCO₂e per m²	KPI reported on annually based on the annual student and staff figures	13
Scope 3 carbon emissions	2023/24: 63,473 tCO₂e	43,479 tCO₂e 31.5% reduction from baseline	12, 13
Scope 3 carbon emissions: Proportion of actual supplier emissions reported through contracts awarded via the Procurement Team (%)	2023/24 - 32.8%	60%	12, 13
Climate resilience	2024/25: no climate risk assessment conducted	Climate risk assessment complete with actions in place to reduce risk	13
Catering	2024/25: Bronze Soil Association Food for Life certification	Achieve Silver Soil Association Food for Life certification aiming for Gold certification	1, 2, 3, 12, 14, 15
Biodiversity Units	2023/24: 62.65 biodiversity units	69.13 biodiversity units	3, 14, 15
Staff and student commuting carbon emissions	2024: 9,805 tCO₂e	2030: 5,981 tCO₂e 39% reduction target by 2030	3, 11
Business travel – air and rail carbon emissions	2023/24: 879 tCO₂e	543.5 tCO₂e 7.7% annual reduction	3, 13
Staff completion of Environmental Awareness training	2025/26: Establish participation rate	Achieve 90% completion rate	4, 12, 13

Workstream 2: Creating a sustainable legacy

Measure	Baseline	2030 target	UN SDGs supported
ESD is embedded into all taught programmes by 2030. • Embed ESD in assessments. • Embed ESD in compulsory modules, not just optional ones. • Embed ESD at all levels of a course.	2024/25: Sustainability considerations built into the course approval process and periodic review but not necessarily recorded on a course/module level.	ESD embedded into all taught programmes.	4, 12, 13
Review, measure, and reduce the environmental impacts of research projects	2024/25: No formal process in place	A formal process is in place, and all research projects are reviewed and actions implemented to reduce environmental impacts	4, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13
Sustainability training/e-learning package for all Level 4 students	2024/25: Draft training package developed for students.	Sustainability training/e-learning package mandatory for all Level 4 students to ensure a baseline level of knowledge.	4, 11, 13
ESD CPD training for academic staff	2024/25: ESD introductory session included in the Academic Professional Apprenticeship	ESD CPD training available to all academic staff.	4, 13
Ethical Investment Policy	Policy in place and achieved through third party compliance	Policy in place and achieved through third party compliance.	7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16
Project pipeline	2024/25: Sustainability requirement built into the Business Case process	Sustainability considerations and requirements addressed and monitored through business case and project management process.	9, 12, 13
Sustainability embedded in our main corporate governance decision-making	Sustainability is integrated in the business case progress but not embedded in the main governance decision-making process.	Sustainability embedded in our main corporate governance decision-making	All
People & Planet league position	2024/25: 2:1 category, 40th place	Maintain a position in the top 25 First category, achieving a top 10 position within the timeframe of the strategy.	All
Times Higher Education Impact Ranking (THE IR)	2024/25: No participation in the THE IR	Rank in the top 100 worldwide for two or more UN SDGs.	17. other SDGs to be identified once submission completed

Appendix 1:
Our Sustainable Vision
Targets and KPIs continued

Workstream 3: Creating sustainable communities

Measure	Baseline	2030 target	UN SDGs supported
Number of student volunteers per year (extra-curricular and curriculum-based)	2024/25: Extra-curricular: 1,538 Curriculum-based: Not currently recorded	2,000 student volunteers	11, 13
Number of students and staff engaged through Sustainability Team events	2024/25: 2,200	2,700	11, 13, 17
Number of staff Green Impact Teams	2024/25: 21 Green Impact teams	50 Green Impact teams, with one or more in each School	11, 13, 17
Progress report published online	2024/25: Annual Environmental Report developed	Annual sustainability report focused on progress against the UN SDGs	16, 17
Living Wage Employer accreditation	2024/25: Accredited Living Wage Employer	Maintain Living Wage Employer accreditation	1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10