University of Northampton Sustainability Strategy to 2030:

June 2025

Contents

This deck sets out our proposal for the contents of a Sustainability Strategy for the University of Northampton.

This is the final output of SUMS' support for Northampton's strategy development. The content can be considered final from that perspective, although following handover the University may wish to make further refinements before publication. The document includes the following sections:

- Part 1: University of Northampton Sustainability Strategy Model
- Part 2: Strategy themes, high-level objectives and supporting actions
    - Our operations
    - Our teaching and learning
    - Our research
    - Engagement for change
    - Enablers
- Part 3: Alignment with the University of Northampton Strategy
- Part 4: Strategy development process
- Part 5: Evidence based and insights on sustainability at the University

Part 1: University of Northampton Sustainability Strategy model

Sustainability strategy:
Strategy model

Our strategy model is designed so activities and energy are channelled effectively towards the overall goal.

The strategy is based around four pillar themes:

- Our operations

- Our teaching and learning

- Our research

- Engagement for change

Each is expressed through an overall goal or vision for that theme, and 3-4 high-level objectives, each of which in turn is supported by a set of actions which will contribute towards achieving the goal.

The four themes of the strategy are entwined: operations directly support the University's core business (teaching and learning, research), and engagement is critical in both achieving change across these areas and drawing the links between them.

The strategy's delivery is supported by an essential set of enablers, which define *how* the University will deliver the strategy and the mechanisms it will use.

This section sets out the overall model; while the four themes and strategy enablers are explored in detail in Part 2.

Sustainability Strategy model
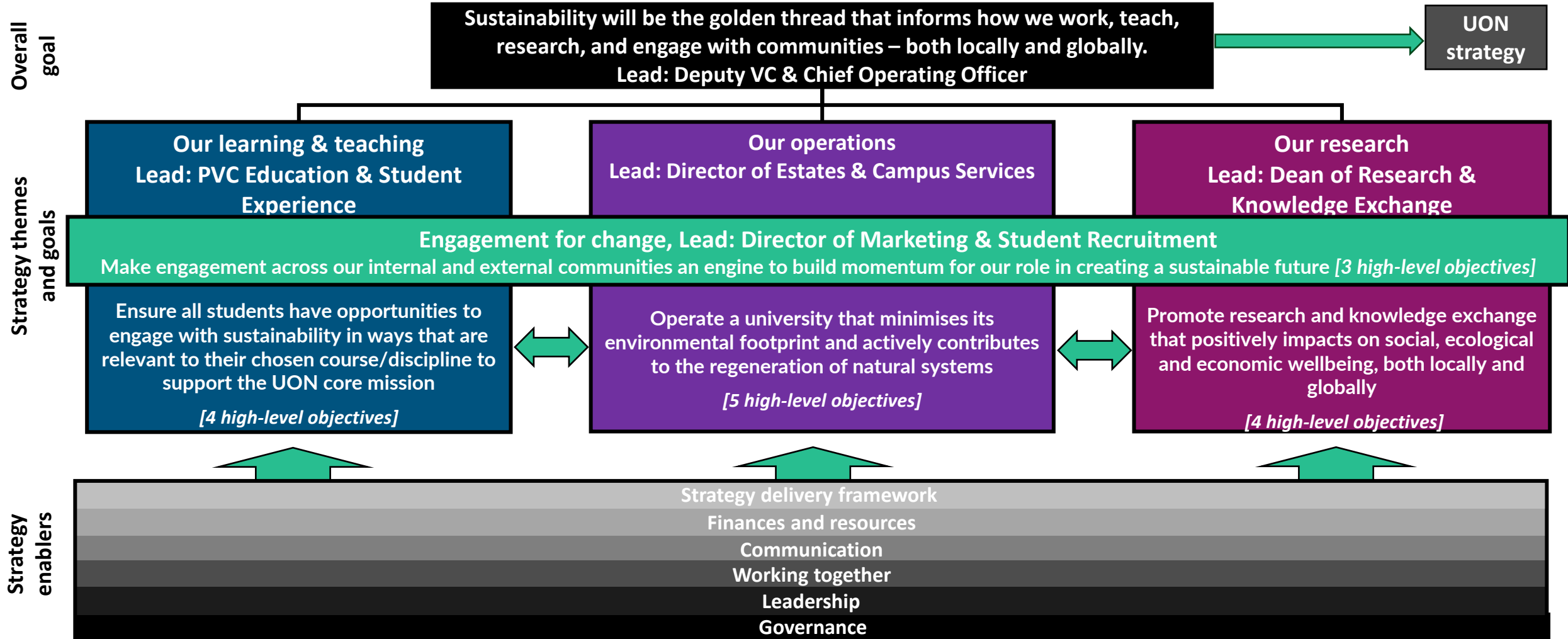
Sustainability strategy: Overall strategy text

Becky Bradshaw, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer

At the University of Northampton, sustainability is not a side project — it is a principle that shapes how we operate, how we educate, how we research, and how we serve our communities. This strategy sets out our commitment to becoming a university that lives its values: responsible, inclusive, and ambitious for the future.

We are proud to be a purpose-led institution. That means recognising that our decisions today — from the energy we use, to how we teach and support students, to how we work with partners across our region — must contribute to a thriving, equitable future for all. Our Waterside Campus already reflects low-carbon thinking by design, but we know that responding to the climate and ecological crises requires deeper change and shared ownership.

This strategy is about practical progress and collective momentum. It is rooted in who we are: a university deeply embedded in its place, unafraid to lead on the issues that matter. It is not just about reducing harm — it is about actively shaping a more just and sustainable future, together.

We invite all members of our community — staff, students, and partners — to join us in this commitment. Sustainability will be the golden thread that runs through our everyday decisions and our boldest ambitions.

> "
>
> *At the University of Northampton, sustainability means delivering our core purpose of positive societal impact while respecting the planet's ecological limits.*
>
> *As one of our strategic values, our goal is for sustainability to be the golden thread that informs how we work, teach, research, and engage with communities – both locally and globally.*
>
> "

Part 2:
Strategy themes, high-level objectives and supporting actions

Sustainability strategy: Strategy themes, high-level objectives and supporting actions

SUMS Consulting
in partnership with eauc
The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education

For each strategy theme, we set out:

- A **strategy text**, which puts the theme in context, gives an overview of why it is important in the overall agenda, and sets out aims at a high level

- **Objectives and actions**: 3 or 4 high-level objectives and the actions which together will achieve them

- The objectives and actions set out visually in a **goal map** – effectively the next level down from the overall strategy model on slide 5.

This section also sets out the strategy enablers.

Theme 1: Our operations
Strategy text

At the University of Northampton, our operations are central to delivering our mission of positive social impact—responsibly, equitably, and within planetary boundaries.

Our Waterside Campus, designed with low-carbon performance in mind, is not only a hub for learning but also aspires to be a living demonstration of sustainable practice. Our decarbonisation programme outlines a clear pathway to reduce Scope 1 and 2 emissions through commitments to decarbonising our energy systems, reducing waste, and embedding circular economy principles across our estate.

We recognise that environmental sustainability goes beyond carbon. Our campuses are part of a wider ecological network, and we are actively working to enhance our resource stewardship and protect and enhance biodiversity across our sites.

Our ambition extends beyond our direct operations and we are committed to reducing our impact on the climate and on nature throughout our value chain by rethinking how we source goods and services, how our staff and students travel, and how we manage resources across the estate.

By aligning our operational decisions with one of our core values of sustainability, we aim to create a campus that not only minimises environmental impact but also models the kind of systemic change we want to see in the world.
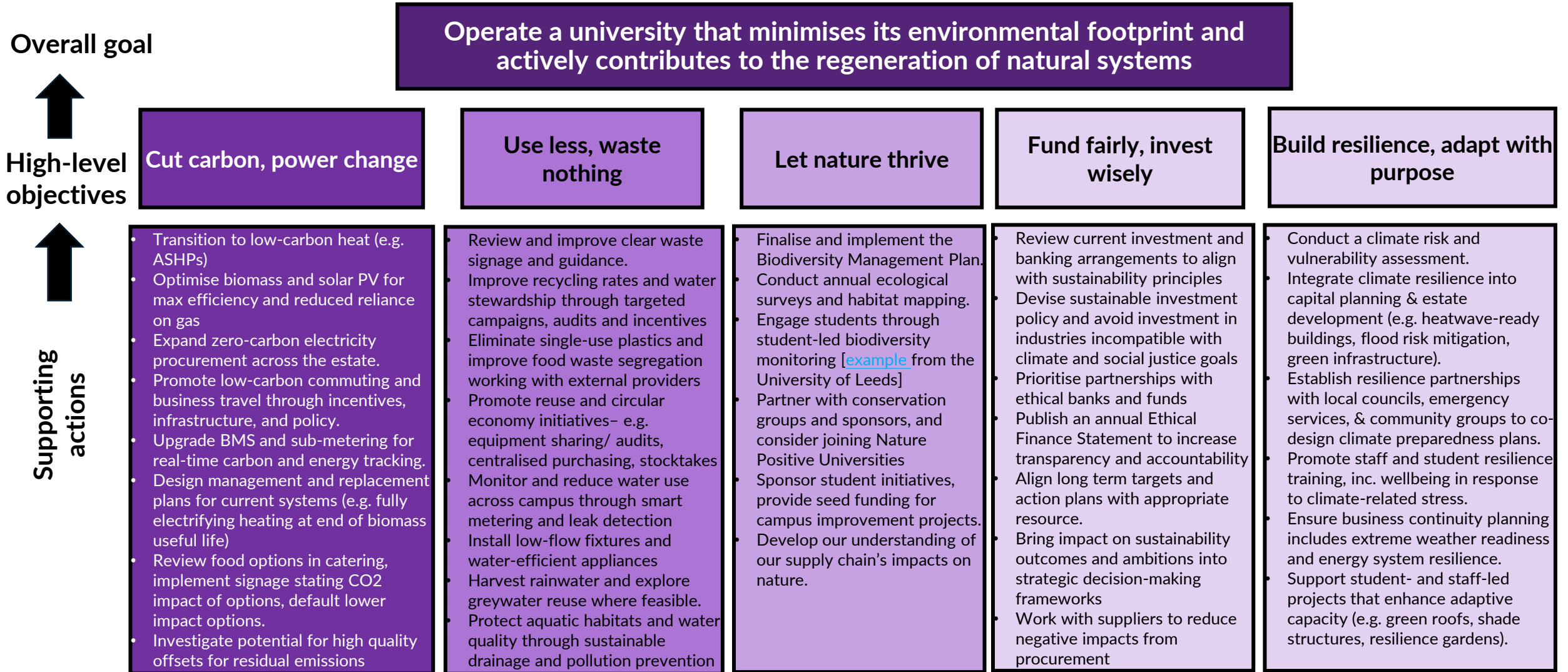
Theme 1: Our operations Objectives and actions

Operations		
High-level objectives	**Suggested measures of success**	**Critical levers for sustainable operations**
Cut carbon, power change: Committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions in our operations in line with UK national commitments, with an ambition to making the majority of emission reductions within the next decade. **Use less, waste nothing:** Cut down waste in line with the waste hierarchy and moving to a model of circularity where possible; Reduce water use and improve quality **Let nature thrive**: Embed ecological enhancement across estate. **Fund fairly, invest wisely:** Ensure our financial and investment practices reflect our sustainability values and institutional ethics. **Build resilience, adapt with purpose:** Build our resilience to climate and environmental risks and adapt operations where necessary	**Carbon Emissions (Scopes 1 & 2/ 3):** • Total tCO_2e emissions (absolute and per FTE/student/staff) • % reduction vs. 2018 baseline **Travel & Transport**: • % of staff/student commuting via sustainable modes • Business travel emissions per FTE **Energy Use**: • kWh per m² (electricity and heating) • % of energy from renewable sources **Water Use**: • Litres per m² (or per FTE) • % reduction year-on-year **Waste Management**: • % waste recycled • Total waste to landfill (tonnes) • Total waste generated per FTE **Biodiversity & Nature**: • Biodiversity Net Gain score (e.g. DEFRA metric) • Nature action plan in place **Other**: • % of contracts including sustainability clauses • % of spend with suppliers signed up to Net Zero commitments • % of investment portfolio in ESG-compliant or fossil-free funds • Capital, estate & business continuity plans including climate risk scenarios (Y/N)	• Estate buildings • Estate land • Procurement • IT • Food • Business travel • Commuting • Investments and financial decisions • Behaviour change

Theme 1: Our operations Goal map

Overall goal

Operate a university that minimises its environmental footprint and actively contributes to the regeneration of natural systems

High-level objectives

Cut carbon, power change	Use less, waste nothing	Let nature thrive	Fund fairly, invest wisely	Build resilience, adapt with purpose

Supporting actions

Cut carbon, power change	Use less, waste nothing	Let nature thrive	Fund fairly, invest wisely	Build resilience, adapt with purpose
• Transition to low-carbon heat (e.g. ASHPs) • Optimise biomass and solar PV for max efficiency and reduced reliance on gas • Expand zero-carbon electricity procurement across the estate. • Promote low-carbon commuting and business travel through incentives, infrastructure, and policy. • Upgrade BMS and sub-metering for real-time carbon and energy tracking. • Design management and replacement plans for current systems (e.g. fully electrifying heating at end of biomass useful life) • Review food options in catering, implement signage stating CO2 impact of options, default lower impact options. • Investigate potential for high quality offsets for residual emissions	• Review and improve clear waste signage and guidance. • Improve recycling rates and water stewardship through targeted campaigns, audits and incentives • Eliminate single-use plastics and improve food waste segregation working with external providers • Promote reuse and circular economy initiatives– e.g. equipment sharing/ audits, centralised purchasing, stocktakes • Monitor and reduce water use across campus through smart metering and leak detection • Install low-flow fixtures and water-efficient appliances • Harvest rainwater and explore greywater reuse where feasible. • Protect aquatic habitats and water quality through sustainable drainage and pollution prevention	• Finalise and implement the Biodiversity Management Plan. • Conduct annual ecological surveys and habitat mapping. • Engage students through student-led biodiversity monitoring [example from the University of Leeds] • Partner with conservation groups and sponsors, and consider joining Nature Positive Universities • Sponsor student initiatives, provide seed funding for campus improvement projects. • Develop our understanding of our supply chain's impacts on nature.	• Review current investment and banking arrangements to align with sustainability principles • Devise sustainable investment policy and avoid investment in industries incompatible with climate and social justice goals • Prioritise partnerships with ethical banks and funds • Publish an annual Ethical Finance Statement to increase transparency and accountability • Align long term targets and action plans with appropriate resource. • Bring impact on sustainability outcomes and ambitions into strategic decision-making frameworks • Work with suppliers to reduce negative impacts from procurement	• Conduct a climate risk and vulnerability assessment. • Integrate climate resilience into capital planning & estate development (e.g. heatwave-ready buildings, flood risk mitigation, green infrastructure). • Establish resilience partnerships with local councils, emergency services, & community groups to co-design climate preparedness plans. • Promote staff and student resilience training, inc. wellbeing in response to climate-related stress. • Ensure business continuity planning includes extreme weather readiness and energy system resilience. • Support student- and staff-led projects that enhance adaptive capacity (e.g. green roofs, shade structures, resilience gardens).

Theme 2: Our teaching and learning Strategy text

At the University of Northampton, we are committed to ensuring all students have meaningful opportunities to engage with sustainability in ways that are relevant to their course, discipline, and future aspirations. Our distinctive curriculum and teaching style foster active, blended, and community-connected learning. By embedding Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) competencies within programmes, we prepare students to address complex global challenges with creativity, responsibility, and interdisciplinary insight.

Through intentional curriculum design, capacity-building for staff, and the integration of sector-leading sustainability frameworks, we aim to build a connected learning experience that reflects our institutional mission and values. Interdisciplinary collaboration, student voice, and real-world application are central to our approach. We will harness partnerships, innovate through interdisciplinarity, and embed sustainability into all course design and review processes—ensuring that every student develops the knowledge, skills, and values to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

L&T strategy alignment 4.2 Sustainability: our learning and teaching will recognise and appropriately incorporate the Education for Sustainable Development competencies within programmes
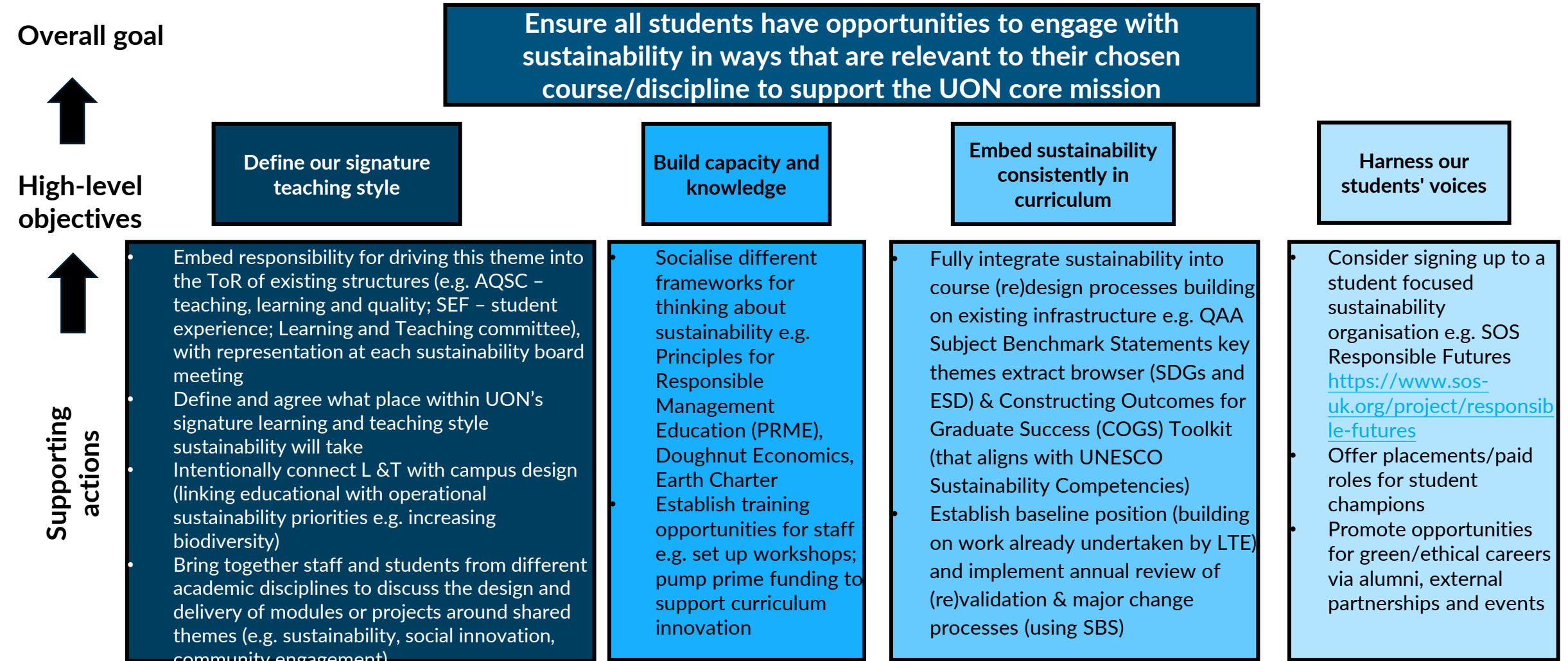
Theme 2: Our teaching and learning Objectives and actions

Learning and teaching	
High-level objectives	**Suggested measures of success**
Define and profile the signature University of Northampton curriculum and teaching style, and where sustainability fits within this	**Curriculum Integration:** • % of UG and PG programmes explicitly embedding ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) competencies [NB - first action ahead of setting target will be to establish a baseline, could review programmes that have undergone major modifications in recent years as a starting point] • % of courses with sustainability learning outcomes **Student Sustainability Literacy:** • Pre-/post-module or exit survey scores on sustainability understanding [Sulitest or similar could be used] • Number of students participating in sustainability-focused modules or co-curricular opportunities **Academic Development:** • % of academic staff completing ESD training • Number of sustainability workshops/courses/ seminars delivered to educators **Student-Led Learning:** • Number of student-led projects, dissertations, or research initiatives with sustainability focus **Graduate Attributes:** • % of students reporting confidence in applying sustainability knowledge in employment (via internal surveys)
Build capacity and knowledge about sustainability across different disciplines, courses and subject areas	
Embed and profile sustainability consistently in all courses	
Harness student voice and align with student experience and priorities	

Theme 2: Our teaching and learning Goal map

Overall goal

Ensure all students have opportunities to engage with sustainability in ways that are relevant to their chosen course/discipline to support the UON core mission

High-level objectives

Define our signature teaching style	Build capacity and knowledge	Embed sustainability consistently in curriculum	Harness our students' voices

Supporting actions

• Embed responsibility for driving this theme into the ToR of existing structures (e.g. AQSC – teaching, learning and quality; SEF – student experience; Learning and Teaching committee), with representation at each sustainability board meeting • Define and agree what place within UON's signature learning and teaching style sustainability will take • Intentionally connect L &T with campus design (linking educational with operational sustainability priorities e.g. increasing biodiversity) • Bring together staff and students from different academic disciplines to discuss the design and delivery of modules or projects around shared themes (e.g. sustainability, social innovation, community engagement)	• Socialise different frameworks for thinking about sustainability e.g. Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), Doughnut Economics, Earth Charter Establish training opportunities for staff e.g. set up workshops; pump prime funding to support curriculum innovation	• Fully integrate sustainability into course (re)design processes building on existing infrastructure e.g. QAA Subject Benchmark Statements key themes extract browser (SDGs and ESD) & Constructing Outcomes for Graduate Success (COGS) Toolkit (that aligns with UNESCO Sustainability Competencies) • Establish baseline position (building on work already undertaken by LTE) and implement annual review of (re)validation & major change processes (using SBS)	• Consider signing up to a student focused sustainability organisation e.g. SOS Responsible Futures https://www.sos-uk.org/project/responsible-futures • Offer placements/paid roles for student champions • Promote opportunities for green/ethical careers via alumni, external partnerships and events

Theme 3: Our research
Strategy text

At the University of Northampton, we are committed to advancing research and knowledge exchange that contributes to social impact and ecological wellbeing—locally and globally. We aim to make sustainability a visible and strategic driver of our research culture, positioning it both as a focus and an embedded process across disciplines and projects.

To achieve this, we will enhance the visibility of existing sustainability-related research, celebrate best practice, and support colleagues in identifying authentic connections with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sustainability will be integrated into the design of research, ensuring alignment with our values and sector frameworks, such as the Concordat for Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice.

By engaging outcome-led communication strategies, targeted training, and capacity building, we will enable our academic community to deliver impactful research that supports the University's REF ambitions and global responsibilities. We will also explore opportunities for innovation, including the development of a Research Institute for Sustainability and new areas of enquiry linked to our evolving campus. This strategic approach will ensure our research culture continues to address the complex challenges of our time with purpose, relevance, and integrity.

Theme 3: Our research
Objectives and actions

Research	
High-level objectives	**Suggested measures of success**
Sustainability as focus: Develop insights about the sustainability research that is already happening and establish clear pathways to impact.	**Sustainability Research Output:** • Number and % of research publications on PURE aligned with at least one UN SDG • Number of sustainability-related funded research projects • Total income from sustainability-linked research grants **Knowledge Exchange & Impact:** • Number of external partnerships on focused on sustainability challenges • Number of knowledge exchange events/workshops held
Sustainability as process: Ensure sustainability considerations are fully designed into research projects	**Sustainability Integration:** • % of research proposals referencing sustainability considerations or ethics • Alignment with the Concordat for Environmental Sustainability in Research & Innovation Practice • Number of labs aligned with "My Green Lab" accreditation or "LEAF" framework [choose preferred approach]
Sustainability as impact: Understand and augment the potential of sustainability research to contribute to the REF	**Recognition & Visibility:** • Case studies of high-impact sustainability research submitted to REF • Internal or external awards for sustainability research **Innovation Support:** • Establishment and output of a Sustainability Research Institute or theme • Number of interdisciplinary research bids submitted with a sustainability lens

Theme 3: Our research
Goal map

Overall goal

High-level objectives

Supporting actions

Promote research and knowledge exchange that positively impacts on social, ecological and economic wellbeing, both locally and globally

Showcase and build on existing sustainability research

Embed sustainable practice in all research processes

Unlock REF potential of sustainability-focused research

- Review how PURE is used across the university
- Analyse projects & outputs as a means of reflecting back to colleagues SDG profile & celebrating examples of good practice
- Support colleagues in diverse disciplines to identify authentic connections with the SDGs through capacity building workshops
- Develop strategic digital communication for internal and external stakeholders

- Review current policies/paperwork to ensure consistency and best practice
- Promote that UON is a Signatory of Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice
- Provide training on the implications for best practice
- Promote laboratory sustainability accreditation frameworks such as LEAF (Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework) or My Green Lab

- Scope proposal for a Research Institute for Sustainability
- Explore opportunity to grow new areas such as research about the campus growth/development
- Work with Unit of Assessment leads

Theme 4: Engagement for change
Strategy text

We understand that the journey towards sustainability is a shared one. Everyone has a role to play and we want everyone to be on board. This is why we have made Engagement for Change one of the four pillar themes of our strategy.

We aim build literacy and support for sustainability across our whole community, through clear communications, campaigns and dialogue which make sustainability real to our staff and students and provide channels to test proposals, communicate on changes and gather feedback to adjust our approach if necessary.

Some members of our community are truly passionate about building sustainability and are prepared to offer their own time and energy to help us on our journey. We intend to further develop our approaches to enable this – bringing together those who want to take part in this critical endeavour, and supporting bottom-up initiatives spearheaded by our staff and students. Storytelling around cases where we have made a difference is a powerful tool in building positive examples for change, and fostering agency and hope.

We are proud to be driven by our social purpose, and we see working with our external partners towards a sustainable future as an essential part of our sustainability agenda. We will therefore seek to build on our established links and convening role to foster and catalyse sustainability in our town and county, using our campus as a hub to bring people together.

Theme 4: Engagement for change

Engagement for change	
High-level objectives	**Suggested measures of success**
Develop, harness and channel energy from across the University community to move the dial towards sustainability goals.	**Awareness & Literacy**: • % of staff/students rating sustainability as "important" in annual survey • % increase in sustainability literacy scores over time [crossover with learning & teaching] **Participation**: • Number of staff and students actively involved in the Sustainability Network • Attendance at sustainability events, workshops, or campaigns
Develop clear and compelling engagement to build literacy, seed hope and catalyse behaviour change where it is most needed.	**Behaviour Change**: • Set specific measurable outcomes from targeted campaigns (e.g. bin usage, energy saving, transport) • % of staff/students pledging or acting on sustainability actions (e.g. travel, consumption) **Community Engagement**: • Number of joint sustainability initiatives with local partners • Attendance and participation in the annual Sustainability Summit • Volunteer hours contributed to community sustainability projects • Sustainability survey completion rate
Deepen and broaden the University's interface with external stakeholders around shared sustainability agendas, with the University's campus, place and regional role as channels for collaboration, mutual learning and impact.	**Internal Communications**: • Frequency and reach of sustainability communications (newsletters, digital engagement, storytelling) • Staff/student satisfaction with communication clarity and responsiveness **Recognition & Reward**: • Number of sustainability-related awards or recognitions issued internally (e.g. Hall Heroes, Staff Champions) • % of teams/departments recognised for contributions to sustainability

Theme 4: Engagement for change Goal map

Overall goal

Make engagement across our internal and external communities an engine to build momentum for our role in creating a sustainable future

High-level objectives

| Develop, harness and channel energy from across the University community to move the dial towards sustainability goals. | Develop clear and compelling engagement to build literacy, seed hope and catalyse behaviour change where it is most needed. | Deepen and broaden the University's interface with external stakeholders around shared sustainability agendas, with the University's campus, place and regional role as channels for collaboration, mutual learning and impact. |

Supporting actions

• Develop a Sustainability Network, bringing together Sustainability Champions, Halls Heroes, advocates and Action Groups to aggregate activity across the University and focus energy to make breakthroughs in challenging areas. • Ringfence resource to support student action through a Green Office, student-led sustainability projects, paid placements in sustainability team. • Protect time for staff to participate in initiatives, boards, working groups etc, and recognise contributions to sustainability goals. • Recognise contributions to sustainability from students and staff	• Align engagement activities for staff and students with key strands of operations, education and research, using digital channels, events, formal training and talking points throughout the year. • Use storytelling about impact, research outcomes, Sustainability Network and student projects to build momentum and demonstrate material impacts • Ensure two-way engagement with the community to support them through operational changes, changes to policy and ways of working. • Focus behaviour change campaigns around parts of the sustainability where personal choices make the biggest difference or which are emblematic to build community support.	• Increase two-way engagement with local businesses, charities, education institutions, policymakers and government to identify, scope and develop opportunities for impact through student opportunities, knowledge exchange and participation in Northampton's civic life. • Develop and upscale the annual Sustainability Summit, bringing together academics, practitioners, professionals and students to share learning, crack challenges and develop agendas together. • Invite students, staff and local communities in to share and showcase the University's estate and natural assets, building awareness of the natural world.

Enablers:
Strategy text (1)

To deliver our strategy successfully, we need to ensure that we have the right enablers in place. The key enablers of our strategy are:

Governance
We have developed a governance structure to ensure that responsibility and accountability for implementing the strategy sit in the right place and that the University's performance against sustainability goals is effectively scrutinised. Our Sustainability Board is the executive body that oversees the strategy's delivery and is chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor & Chief Operating Officer. The Sustainability Board reports to the University Leadership Team (ULT), which reports to the Board of Governors for overall oversight and scrutiny of sustainability at the University.

Leadership
Each of the strategy's four key themes has a lead from amongst the University's senior staff, who is accountable for the delivery of the relevant, reporting to the Chair of the Sustainability Board. We also emphasise the critical role of leadership at all levels of the University in making the strategy successful, and our engagement activities will include material around how to lead around sustainability in your area.

Working together
Delivering the strategy depends on collaboration across our University community, and everyone has a role to play. The Sustainability Team provides specialist support and guidance to enable the delivery of the strategy, working with colleagues across the University. The Sustainability Team also oversees the Sustainability Network (or Action Groups), bringing together staff and students to focus and move the dial challenging strands of our sustainability agenda, build momentum and catalyse behaviour change.

Communication
We believe that communication is so important that we have made Engagement for Change one of our strategy's four themes. Making sure that everyone understands our ambitions for sustainability and why they are important is critical. It is also critical that engagement is two-way, and that we work with our community to source ideas, understand challenges and develop shared solutions together.

Finance and resources

The current period is a challenging one for universities across the UK. With tight financial conditions, we will ensure prudent use of our resources to support change through the sustainability strategy. This will mean an approach to planning and business cases which is clear and robust around assessing the costs, financial and non-financial benefits of proposed initiatives. We will give due attention to the long-term nature of sustainability goals in supporting our institution's resilience, and reflect this appropriately in our decisions. We will review financial commitments towards delivering our strategy on a regular basis as appropriate.

Strategy delivery framework

We will adopt robust approaches to ensure that our strategy is delivered most effectively to achieve our sustainability goals. These include:

- **Alignment:** We will ensure that the sustainability strategy aligns appropriately with the University's other key strategy documents, most importantly the University of Northampton Strategy. We will also make sure that supporting plans, policies and procedures around specific areas of sustainability are in alignment with our overall sustainability goals.
- **Reporting and evaluation:** Our senior governance bodies will receive regular updates on the strategy's delivery and the University's sustainability performance.
- **Review:** The sustainability strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis, with mechanisms (overseen by the Sustainability Board) to adjust course if appropriate. The strategy's delivery period is for five years to 2030, and the strategy will be reviewed comprehensively as it nears its close.
- **Portfolio approach:** We will take a portfolio approach to planning the major initiatives in the strategy to ensure that we focus our resources on the most valuable initiatives, that they are delivered in a coordinated way and that the benefits are realised effectively.
- **Risk management:** Our strategy will include ongoing assessment of delivery risks and mitigate it accordingly. We will also ensure that our work in sustainability informs the University's overall approach to risk management, including the risks of doing nothing.

Part 3: Alignment with University of Northampton Strategy

What our Sustainability Strategy means for the University of Northampton strategy (1)

Sustainability is one of the four core values of our University strategy. Our Sustainability Strategy supports our University Strategy and has some specific linkages with each strand. We note these here:

Priority one: Our staff

Our sustainability strategy will touch all our staff. One part of this will be the way that our community will need to come together to make and adjust to changes to make our institution more sustainable, for which we will provide support throughout and targeted training and development if needed. We will ensure that our sustainability agenda is also founded on our other values such as inclusivity and trust. We believe that our sustainability agenda will make positive contributions to all of our wellbeing.

Priority two: Our students' experience

Many of our students are passionate about sustainability. Our approach to sustainability is based on two-way communication with our students, and we are keen to give students who want to get more deeply involved with our sustainability journey the opportunity to do so through our Sustainability Network. As with our staff, we believe that the improvements to our buildings and campus will contribute to the wellbeing of our student community and support positive student experience at the University.

Priority three: Learning and teaching

It is a key objective of our strategy that all of our students will have meaningful opportunities to engage with sustainability. This supports a key aspiration around our graduate attributes that our students will be confident and conversant with social and global challenges. Our sustainability agenda in learning and teaching will help our students to develop sustainability mindsets and will also help to mitigate feelings of anxiety and powerlessness around sustainability challenges by helping students understand their scope to act and contribute.

Priority four: Research

Our ambitions around sustainability in research are designed to support the University's overall objectives around research by supporting our research culture and practice development, fostering interdisciplinary and demand-led research focus, and maximising research impact.

What our Sustainability Strategy means for the University of Northampton strategy (2)

Our purpose: Social impact

Sustainability aligns strongly with our core purpose. We aim to transform lives, communities and businesses for the better. Making our operation sustainable, foregrounding sustainability in our education and research, and engaging with our communities around turning towards a sustainable future are powerful means by which we can achieve this.

Foundation one: Our campus, place and communities

Our campus is the most fundamental plank of our sustainability ambitions. Conceived and designed expressly as a place to bring people together, we intend to maximise this potential as a centrepiece to foster connections and shared endeavour between our internal communities of staff and students, and our external communities in our town, county and beyond. It is also critical that our campus (both infrastructure and operations) stays on the trajectory of reducing its impacts on the natural environment through decarbonisation, support for nature, and circular approaches to resource use.

Foundation two: How we work

Making our operation sustainable will bring about changes to the way that we work. Many of these changes will barely be noticeable to our colleagues, for example the energy source for our buildings, certain supplies that we buy and so on. We will do further work to understand the changes that *will* affect our staff's work, with a clear mind that these might affect different colleagues differently, for example how we travel for work, how we use some of our spaces and so on.
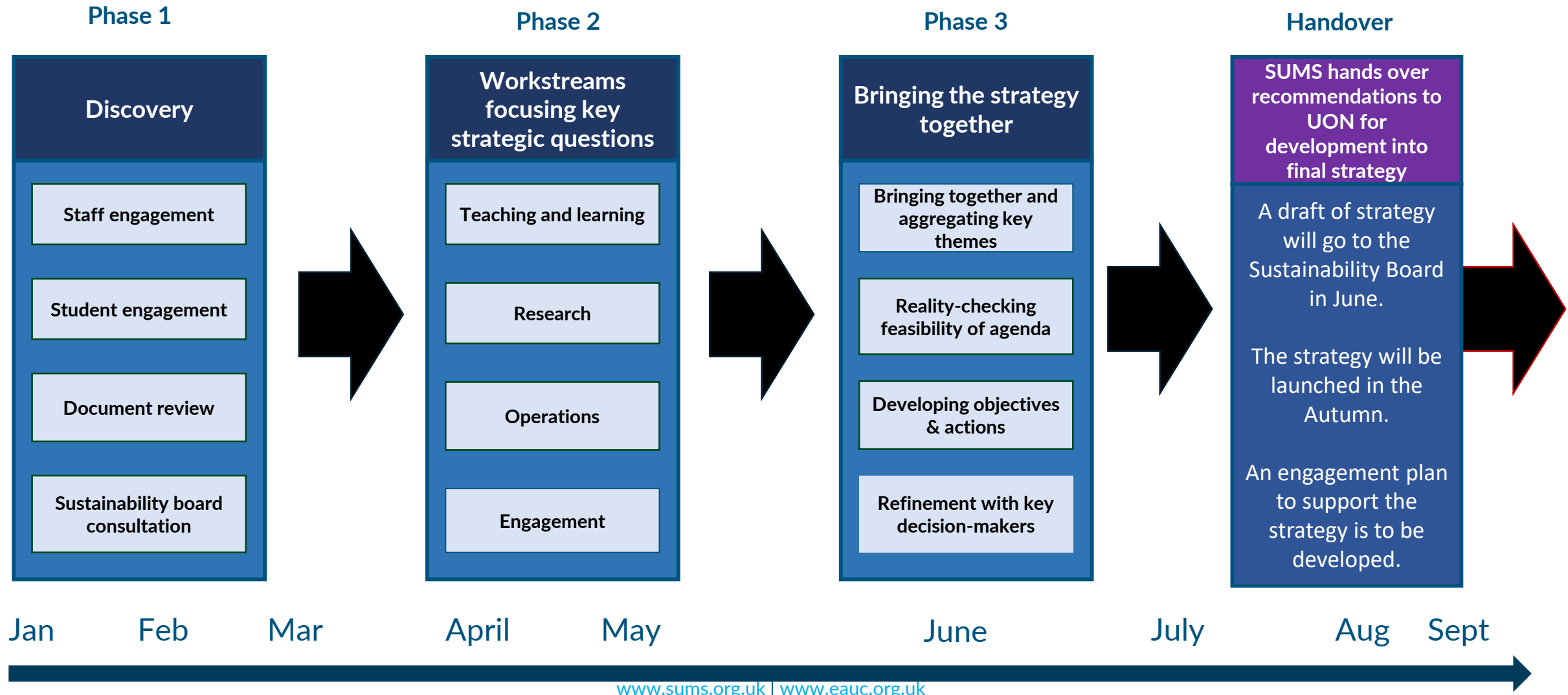
Foundation three: Funding and resourcing

Some strands of our sustainability agenda will require upfront investment, such as technical improvements to the energy efficiency of our buildings. One element of ensuring robust strategy delivery will be to ensure that we plan and budget for the changes needed. We also want to make sure that we account properly for the benefits of sustainability initiatives, which may either deliver recurrent savings once payback has been reached (e.g. energy efficiency measures) or even sooner in the case of reduced business travel, for example.

Part 4:
How we developed the strategy

How we developed the strategy

Phase 1

Discovery

- Staff engagement
- Student engagement
- Document review
- Sustainability board consultation

Phase 2

Workstreams focusing key strategic questions

- Teaching and learning
- Research
- Operations
- Engagement

Phase 3

Bringing the strategy together

- Bringing together and aggregating key themes
- Reality-checking feasibility of agenda
- Developing objectives & actions
- Refinement with key decision-makers

Handover

SUMS hands over recommendations to UON for development into final strategy

A draft of strategy will go to the Sustainability Board in June.

The strategy will be launched in the Autumn.

An engagement plan to support the strategy is to be developed.

Jan   Feb   Mar   April   May   June   July   Aug   Sept

Part 5:

Insights on sustainability at the University of Northampton (Based on interviews and engagement at staff and student workshops, Jan - April 2025)

Staff & Student open workshop
Feelings on sustainability

Staff

14 active participants total

Key themes arising from the questions

| Worried or overwhelmed | Hopeful or optimistic | Responsible and accountable |

■ Positive ■ Neutral ■ Negative

Students

8 active participants total
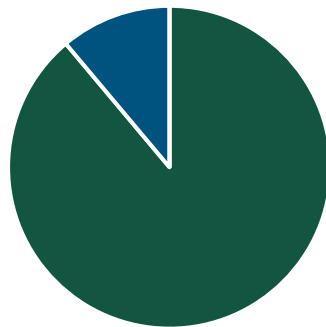
Key themes arising from the questions

| Hopeful or optimistic | Responsible and accountable |

■ Positive ■ Neutral ■ Negative

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Staff & Student open workshop
Importance vs understanding

Staff and students feel this is an important topic but less confident in their understanding of what to do

"It is important that the University of Northampton strives to be an environmentally sustainable university"

Staff average score:

4.86

Student average score:

5.00

"I feel that I understand what is important in environmental sustainability and making the University environmentally sustainable."

Staff average score:

3.64

Student average score:

4.00

Where "strongly agree" = 5 and "strongly disagree" = 0

Staff & Student open workshop
Important vs influenceable
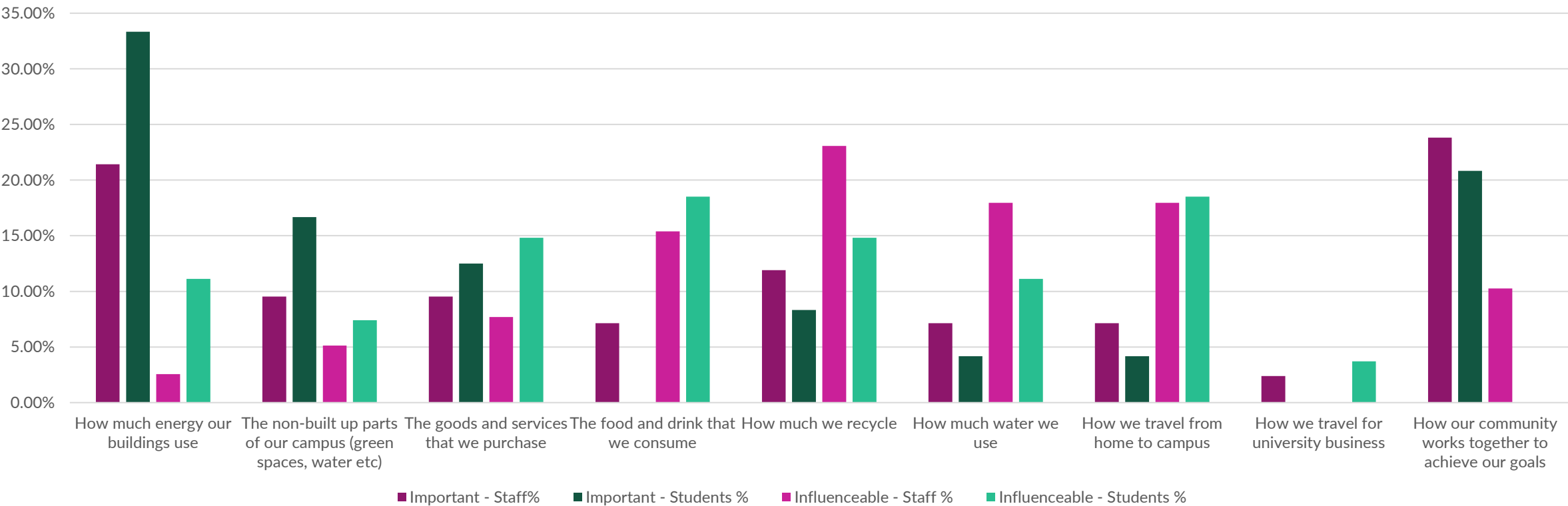
Staff & Student open workshop
Behaviour change

How strongly do you agree with the following statement? "I am prepared to make or accept changes in my daily life/work/study at the University to support environmental sustainability."

Staff average score:

4.21

Student average score:

3.78

Where "strongly agree" = 5 and "strongly disagree" = 0

Staff & Student open workshop
Open suggestions – 5 key themes

Tangible Actions

- Education around the bin usage, I didn't know we could bring in our own containers to use in the food market
- Transport links around Northamptonshire are poor.
- Make things 'normal' - e.g. using more local/seasonal suppliers, serving food which has a lower carbon footprint
- Need to develop an institutional community where this a main goal and there are clear activities which people can participate in
- Better signage on bins, more recycling options for students moving in and out of halls
- Force change by only giving one option
- Think about how we can really support sustainable transport options
- Please improve recycling information in cafés. The signs tell us what not to put in this or that bin. I stand and read them and look at what I'm holding and because I don't know what it's made of I don't know what to do with it. So guess which bin it reluctantly goes in?
- Be clearer about what specific actions would help instead of leaving it to individuals to work it out
- Is there any way of tracking travel so we could join up with people coming from the same directions car sharing
- Specific actions and accountability so we can see what everyone needs to do differently
- Looking at the new tech developments such as AI. It feels like we're being encouraged to use it quite often but I've read that it has bad environmental impacts.
- Students don't take heed because they don't pay the bills. Staff don't take heed because we have cleaners. We need to be firm in our stances on things like waste and recycling

Better communication

- Celebrate wins and achievements on message boards
- Unify for staff for new initiatives
- Show us what impact we're having on the community. The stats sound great but what does a 60% reduction in CO2 look like?
- Be proud of the things we already do and showcase them in outlets such as newsletters
- Try not to be defensive about suggestions from staff if they say something isn't working
- Create more awareness.
- Clear targets and objectives, social impact to be considered
- "Marketing"
- Bite-sized information - 'nuggets' of information/easily actionable
- Share what decisions have been made pro or against sustainability choices. Sometimes I don't know if ideas have been considered and rejected for any reason or not yet been raised.
- Educate on unsustainable habits - no matter how small - potentially smaller the better as it is easier for people to change
- making the universities sustainability aims clearer.
- Community activities that allow students/teachers see the progress and achievements of such goals and feel like a part of it
- Would be nice to hear more regularly about what the University is doing re sustainability

Education

- Incorporating sustainable education as part of induction to uni life. In timetabled classes
- Encourage sustainability within modules/courses - lots of single use purchase take place Clear statement about how education (for staff and students) will be improved
- Education and hold accountable from the top
- Education around the bin usage,
- Make things 'normal' - e.g. using more local/seasonal suppliers, serving food which has a lower carbon more engagement and education, more recycling options for students moving out

External engagement

- Work with local organisations for activities/actions
- As a University I think we have a responsibility to assist and educate the wider community and town to achieve goals
- Linking with Waterways agencies on the river - clean ups, vegetation maintenance
- Engagement - with plenty of notice/repeat outreach
- Outreach to local communities and groups

Social impact

Some members of UON may not be able to make substantial changes to their routines due to disabilities or cost. I'd welcome support from the university on this whether it be through advice or financial support. Recognition of how it can link to wellbeing Consideration of the cost to staff and students

Key Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholders consulted included:

- Faculty Academics across Business, Law, Arts, Science, Engineering, Health, and Education

- Deans (Research, Health, Education, Society)

- PVC for Education and Student Experience

- COO and Deputy VC

- Academic Registrar and Quality Leads

- Learning Designers and Teaching Strategy Leads

- Student union and Student Sabbatical Officers

- Marketing and Communications Team

- Estates and Operational Leads

- Sustainability board

- Sustainability Champions

Key themes arising from stakeholder engagement

1. Diverse Interpretations of Sustainability

- Definitions of sustainability vary widely across faculties and departments (academic freedom cited).
- No institutional framework exists, leading to inconsistency and variability.
- SDGs are used, but not systematically embedded.

2. Curriculum Integration & Education

- Sustainability is variably embedded—some programs integrate it meaningfully, others only superficially.
- Concern about "greenwashing" and the need for authenticity in teaching.
- Many support embedding sustainability across the curriculum rather than through a generic module.
- Tools like CAIRO and COGS frameworks are being used for embedding ESG competencies.

3. Student Engagement & Behaviour

- Student Union (SU) noted low engagement due to student time and financial pressures.
- Previous initiatives (e.g. ethical business grants, green ambassadors) had limited longevity once initial funding expired.
- Students need to see real, measurable impact—narratives around change, not just campaigns.

4. Operations and Institutional Practice

- Sustainability exists operationally (e.g. motion-sensor lighting, electric minivans) but lacks visibility and storytelling.
- Disconnect between good operational work and external communication.
- Estates focus is narrower than broader research and academic aspirations.

5. Research & Strategy Alignment

- Research related to sustainability is robust but not always linked to teaching or marketing.
- Call for an Institute of Sustainability to provide leadership, funding, and integration.
- Use of tools like Pure to track SDG-related research is promising but needs consistency and training.

6. Governance, Policy and Strategic Integration

- Institutional commitment is present (e.g. sustainability as a strategy strand), but execution and understanding is inconsistent.
- Strategy needs clearer accountability, objectives, and integration into quality assurance and course approvals.
- Desire to align sustainability to the "social impact" mission.

End