

University of Leeds Climate Plan Annual Review 2024



Priestley Centre for Climate Futures

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Climate Plan

Contents

Acknowledgements

The Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee would like to thank the wide range of stakeholders who engaged with the annual review of progress towards the University of Leeds Climate Plan. This includes members of the Climate Principles Programme team who provided the base data in the reporting templates.

We would particularly like to thank those individuals working in the Climate Principles Programme teams who attended the review meeting and provided detailed information on the work of the programme.

Climate Plan Annual Review Foreword

The University of Leeds Climate Plan remains an ambitious and comprehensive commitment to address the challenges of climate change. Since 2021, our goal has been to transition to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 in a way that is just, building a carbon neutral, climate resilient institution that makes a positive impact on our staff and students, in our region and beyond to the wider world.

This is the third annual review of the Climate Plan, and we remain as committed to publicly sharing our journey as we were at its outset. Being transparent and honest about progress underpins the credibility of our programme to our staff, students and the wider community. Our successes and challenges also serve to support, inspire and provide learning for other institutions within the sector.

This latest annual review demonstrates how we have prepared the groundwork to enable delivery of the Climate Plan. We remain committed to its implementation, despite the local and global challenges that the transition to net zero faces – these include various external factors which increase the risk to the sustainability of our decarbonisation plans. Our decisive move to a sector-leading climate-focused investment strategy and the changes to our banking shows that we can move fast and effectively, while the success of the geothermal test drilling demonstrates that the Climate Plan can also create opportunities as a living lab to secure research funding and academic recognition. The review highlights that to effectively deliver our ambition on travel, civic impact and teaching, we need an even stronger institutional focus and drive – this will continue to be led by myself and the Climate Principles Programme Board.

With the University's mid-term strategy refresh, and the separate mid-term review of our pathway to net zero emissions, we have the perfect opportunity to refocus and continue to provide national leadership.

I want our University to remain a leader on climate action and stand as an exemplar of how to make positive change, even in times of significant economic and geopolitical uncertainty.

Professor Hai-Sui Yu FREng
Chair, Climate Principles Programme Board
Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Executive Summary

Launched in 2021, the Climate Plan set out an ambitious pathway for the University of Leeds to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, while embedding climate responsibility across research, education, operations, and engagement. Now, four years into implementation, the Plan continues to evolve—responding to emerging opportunities, sector developments, and global challenges.

The plan remains structured around seven principles, each overseen by a University Executive Group sponsor. Each principle has specific goals and priorities aligned with our mission of delivering positive impact for society, our city, and the planet.

Implementation requires considerable investment, and the plan was accompanied by one of the largest investments in the University's history of £174 million, with most of this budget earmarked for improving and decarbonising our University estate.

Climate Principle	Budget allocation (£m)
CP1 Delivering Net Zero	150.8
CP2 Sustainable Travel	2.3
CP3 Reorienting Research & Teaching	4.5
CP4 Sustainable Curriculum	1.8
CP5 Supporting a Net Zero City	11.4
Programme Management/Comms/Just Transition	3.2
Total	**174**

In announcing the seven Climate Principles, the University recognised that 'the climate crisis is the greatest global challenge we face, and as a world-leading university, we must act.' Whilst the global, sectoral and institutional contexts have shifted significantly since the University made these commitments, the climate has continued to change, with the global surface temperature change exceeding 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for the first time and the impacts of climate change becoming more severe. In this context, leadership through our research, education, knowledge exchange and institutional climate commitments are more important than ever.

This report – the third annual progress review - summarises the progress made in delivery of the Climate Plan to date across the seven principles and presents an independent review of progress from the Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee. This annual review is part of the University's commitment to transparency and helps the University track and review delivery of its climate commitments, connect across the principles and benefit from our research and teaching expertise.

Summary of progress

After four years, the seven Climate Principles are all established, with clear lines of responsibility to the University Executive and dedicated staff working on delivery and communication and engagement. Governance structures have been developed that allow for working across principles, identifying and connecting to relevant academic expertise, identifying risk, reviewing progress and embedding elements of the Climate Plan delivery within standard institution-wide policies.

The Climate Plan has delivered institution-wide action. In 2022, we implemented a bespoke sector-leading institutional responsible investment policy, "Tomorrow's World", committing to no longer investing in companies materially involved in thermal coal, tar sands extraction, or fossil fuel extraction, production, or refining. Instead, we are investing in companies making a positive difference. In 2024, we developed and rolled out an ethical investment and banking policy, changing our longstanding banking partner. We are also starting to see changes across the University, with installation of electric powered heat pumps at the Brownlee Centre and geothermal test drilling across campus to provide a low carbon heat network. Electric vehicles (EVs) now make up 35% of the University's vehicle fleet and 7% are hybrid. We have also introduced e-bike rental stations that form part of the Leeds City bikes network. The Climate Conscious Business Travel policy, designed to reduce emissions from business travel, is being piloted in two schools and two services. Overall, we have spent 7.2% of the budget.

Some changes are imminent: a contractor has been brought on to deliver Phase 1 of the campus infrastructure change, with work due to start in mid-2026. Phase 1 projects include the installation of a new heat recovery system to the Worsley Building and a new energy centre for the engineering cluster of buildings to decarbonise the heating systems using air source heat pumps and geothermal energy. Within the next year, we will see institution-wide roll out of the Climate Conscious Business Travel policy and a staff salary sacrifice scheme for EV leasing.

Emission trends

The University of Leeds Pathway to Net Zero Emissions by 2030 was published in December 2021 setting out our pathway to reach net zero emissions based on the scientific, technical, policy and economic context at that time and aligned with our University values. In this annual review, the term **Direct+Travel Emissions** refers to the greenhouse gas emissions targeted for reduction out to 2030. This includes all Scope 1 emissions (such as on-site fuel combustion), Scope 2 emissions (purchased electricity, heat or steam), and travel-related emissions from Scope 3 associated with both business travel and commuting[1]. These emissions form the focus of our reduction efforts in **Stage 1 (to 2030)**, as they are more readily measured and influenced through operational decisions. This phased approach allows the university to build capacity and systems for more comprehensive emissions management. In **Stage 2 (from 2030 onward)**, our focus will expand to include all remaining sources of emissions, forming what we define as our **Total Institutional Emissions** - encompassing Scope 1, Scope 2, and all categories of Scope 3 (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). This represents the full extent of the University's climate impact and guides our long-term pathway to net zero.

Our **Direct+Travel Emissions** are 7,705 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions lower than our baseline (around 11%), which is made up of scope 1 and 2 emissions from 2019/20, and scope 3 travel emissions from 2018/19 before the impact of COVID-19 (Figure 3).

This is 2,165 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions higher than the projected emissions for 2023/24 from the original net zero pathway. The original pathway assumed that the reduction of travel seen during the pandemic would be maintained, but business travel and commuting emissions have largely rebounded. The overall reduction in emissions is mostly attributable to more accurate accounting of agricultural emissions associated with the University farm.

[1] *This includes emissions from leased buildings*

Emissions from the operation of the University estate (scope 1 and 2 emissions excluding agricultural emissions) are 1,280 tonnes or 3% above the projected figure from the original net zero pathway. This has in part been driven by the inclusion of fugitive emissions (unintended emissions of gases from air conditioning units) and new buildings (Esther Simpson and Bragg) coming into operation.

Total institutional emissions are not planned to be targeted until after 2030, but we note that these are rising, driven by increased scope 3 supply chain emissions (Figure 2). This can be expected, as between 2019/20 and 2023/24 the University staff and student population has increased (by 16% and 4% respectively) and the business has grown (total income has grown from £794m to £1054m (33%) and total expenditure from £772m to £994m (29%), including the purchasing of more goods and services. For example, spending in high carbon areas including IT and labs grew from £30.4m to £43.5m and £18.5m to £26.4m respectively between 2022/23 and 2023/24. This is a 43% growth over one year in both areas. A new Net Zero+ Strategy is under development which will define how the University will address and reduce Scope 3 supply chain emissions, both pre- and post-2030.

Pathway to 2030

Future decarbonisation plans are at risk for a number of reasons, including a narrowing of net zero definitions and delivery challenges. A net zero mid-term review due in July 2025 will therefore evaluate progress, reflect on learning and assess these risks. Where necessary, the review will recommend adjustment of plans and strategies to optimise delivery and ensure a credible net zero claim. As discussed above, travel emissions are higher than expected in the original pathway to net zero. The decarbonisation of the Generating Station Complex (GSC), the gas fired power station that provides most of the University's heat is progressing more slowly than originally expected. This is due to contractual and operational discussions. One of the largest future emission reductions was planned to come from a power purchase agreement, which would enable the development of a new-to-earth renewable energy site. This was deemed the most robust way for the University to claim it was powered by renewable electricity. This power purchase agreement has fallen through as the generator withdrew due to concerns over the financial viability of the site which were exacerbated by recent changes in government policy impacting incentivisation of these agreements for energy generators. Other options, such as tariffs with a deep green energy component, are now being explored as part of the net zero mid-term review.

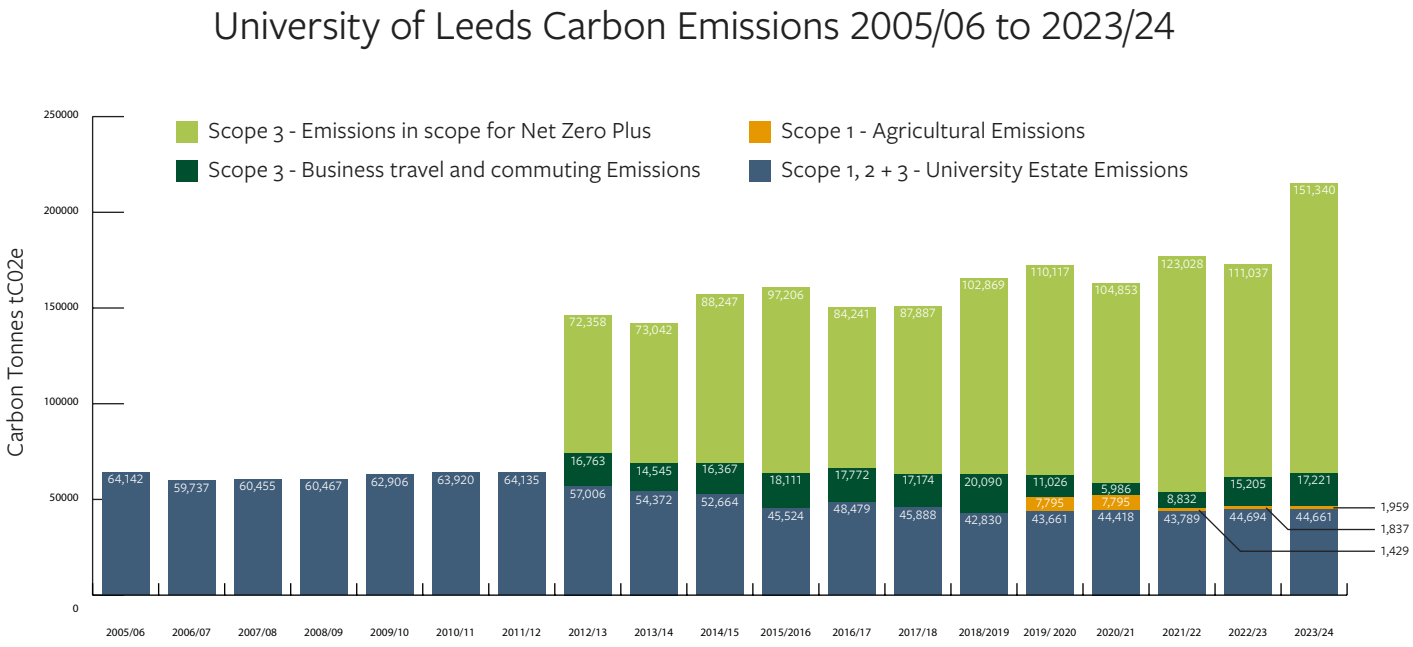


Figure 1: Chart showing emissions in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions (CO2e) by scope. Scope 1, scope 2 and scope 3 business and commuting travel make up our Direct+Travel emissions. Our total institutional emissions additionally include remaining scope 3 emissions.

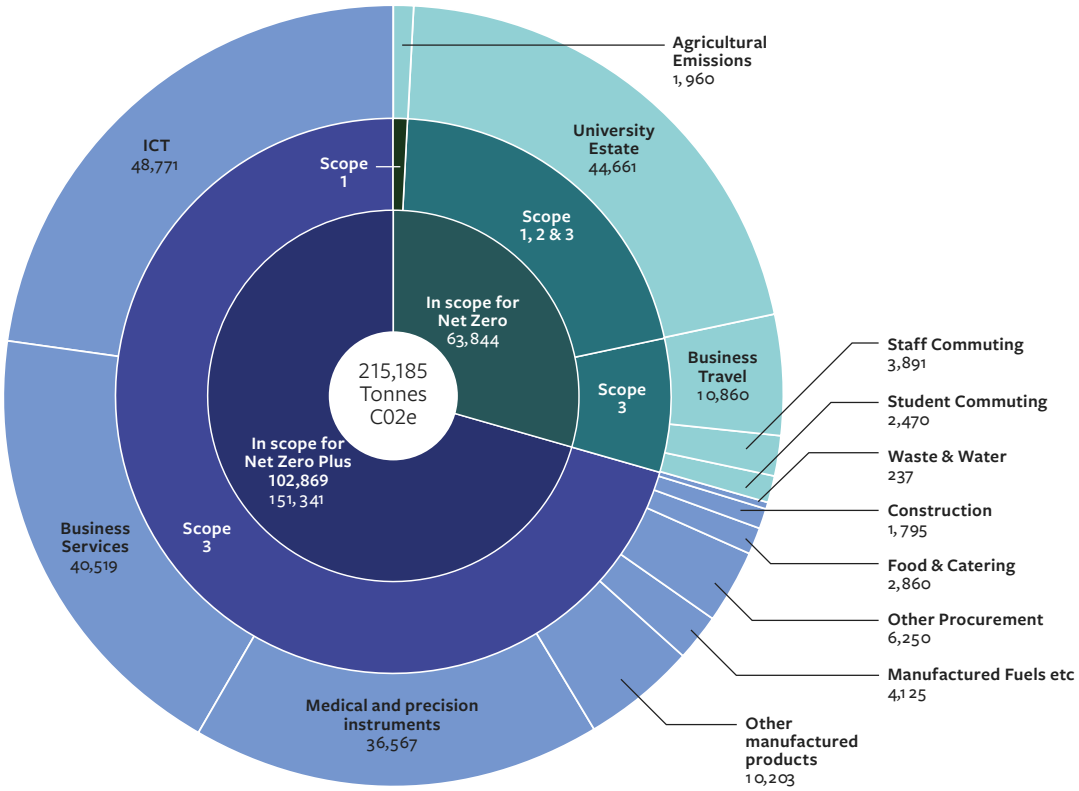
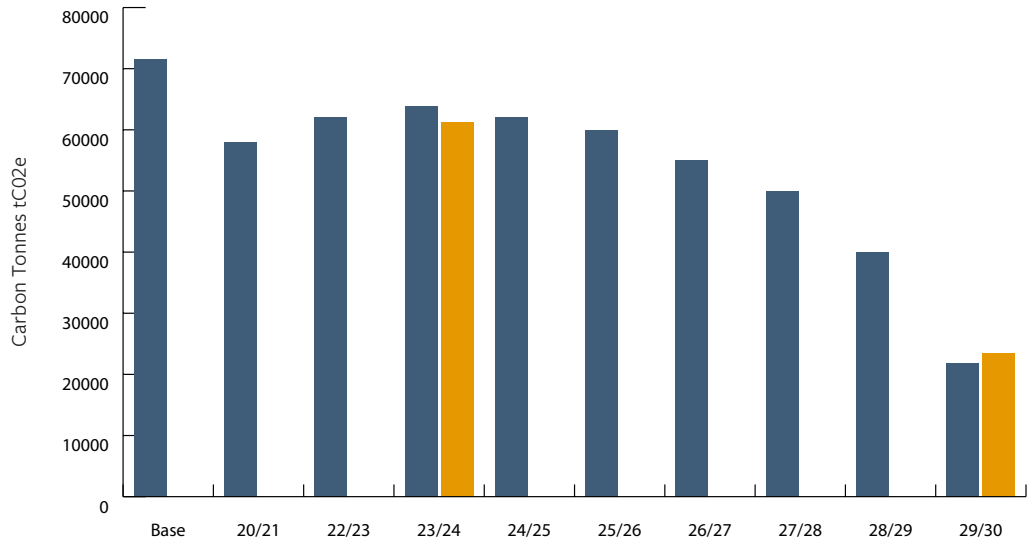


Figure 2: Breakdown of 2024 emissions by source in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions (CO2e). Scope 1, scope 2 and scope 3 business travel make up our direct+travel emissions. Our total institutional emissions additionally include the remaining scope 3 emissions. ICT = Information and Computing Technology.



All Net Zero	Base Year (2019/20)	2023/24	2029/2030 Residual Emissions
Current Pathway	71,546	63,841	21,887
Old Pathway	71,546	61,226	23,444
Variance		2,615 **4%**	-1,557 **-7%**

Figure 3: Direct and Travel emissions in tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e). Orange bars show original pathway to net zero by 2030.

The above summarises progress under the **Delivering Net Zero** Principle. In the following we provide highlights of progress made in the other six Climate Principles:

Sustainable Travel: 2024 has seen progress delivered through new initiatives, ongoing engagement activities, and the strengthening of the principle's operational delivery team. Key achievements include the launch of the Climate Conscious Business Travel Policy pilot, engagement with the Sustainable Conference living lab, continued development of the EV salary sacrifice scheme and improving the response rate of the Annual Travel Survey.

Reorienting Research and Teaching: 2024 was a year of significant progress for Geosolutions Leeds and for the University farm. Key achievements include the full establishment of Geosolutions Leeds, analysis of the geothermal energy potential on campus (including the setting up of the geothermal living lab), securing external research funding to support research on critical minerals and nuclear waste storage and the appointment of four postdoctoral research associates. On the farm, progress has been made to develop the Future Farm Strategic Plan, whilst management and delivery teams have been established to prepare for its delivery.

Sustainable Curriculum: Key achievements for this principle include running two active Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence (LITE) research fellowships to generate pedagogical insights to inform the principle's approach, successfully delivering the Student Sustainability Research Conference in partnership with Yorkshire Universities, embedding sustainable curriculum as a priority theme within the new Leeds Curriculum Framework and ensuring that sustainability skills are now included in core skills learning outcome guidance. In addition, membership has been secured on key institutional education committees, and the team has contributed to major university-wide student education events.

Supporting a Net Zero City: 2024 has seen strong progress across both strands of this principle, with notable developments at regional, city, and campus levels. Key achievements include developing and expanding Positive Impact Partnerships and Living Lab schemes, launching a new Climate Action Plan with the Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission and collaboration on 25 climate-related funding bids as a named partner, successfully enabling new regional initiatives and working with educational and health partners to identify new partnership opportunities.

Responsible Investment: This principle has made meaningful advancements in embedding sustainability and ethics into our financial systems, helping to solidify our reputation as a sector leader in responsible finance, while ensuring that our financial decisions actively support our net zero ambitions and broader institutional values. Key achievements for 2024 include the development of a comprehensive Ethical Investment and Banking Policy, further migration of the University's core banking activity to Lloyds and the continued success of our ethical investment strategy. The work of Financial Business Partners provides an exemplar of how a professional services team proactively engaging different stakeholders and ensuring net zero commitments are supported through financial planning, analysis and reporting.

Institutional Decision-Making: The initial objective set for this principle to implement the use of a sustainability assessment to account for our low carbon future and sustainability goals has been delivered and its effectiveness should be monitored.

Key recommendations

Our report makes recommendation for each Climate Principle and ones that cut across the Climate Plan delivery programme (Table 1). Within these recommendations there are reoccurring themes that highlight the need to 'reset, commit and deliver'.

Reset: A timely mid-term review of the Net Zero 2030 Principle is underway. This is welcomed by the Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee. The environment within which our institutional targets are being delivered is rapidly evolving and has been materially impacted by changes in the economic and policy setting, particularly around the price of electricity and incentivisation of power purchase agreements. As the University is also undergoing the One Leeds: Mid-term strategy review, it is also opportune for the other Climate Principles to refresh their objectives and focus.

Why a mid-term Net Zero review? The Climate Plan, and accompanying pathway to net zero, originally devised our Net Zero 2030 commitment to cover scope 1 and 2 emissions from our estate as well as our scope 3 travel emissions (our Direct+Travel emissions, see Figure 1). It is also expected that in 2030 around a third of the emission reduction would come from offsets. Since then, organisations such as the Science Based Target Initiative have added more clarity on targets, emission scopes and the use of offsets. The UK Government, on advice from the Climate Change Committee, have also set new legally binding targets and devised emission reduction pathways for the UK with possible contingency measures. Given the global, sectoral and institutional context it is vital to be clear on our priorities, institutional risk and our risk appetite. We have an opportunity to revise our own targets considering new national pathways and international context.

Commit: The University of Leeds was one of the first higher education sector institutions in the world to set an evidence-based net zero emission reduction target supported by committed investment. It is time to recommit. While maintaining this commitment to internationally sector-leading climate ambition and emission reduction, it is time to revisit and more carefully define our targets, so they are ambitious, stretching yet deliverable. This will help clarify targets and goals for the delivery teams and their reporting and inspire others in the sector and wider businesses to clarify and recommit to their own climate ambition. The Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee review recommends that revised climate targets go beyond 2030 and is comprised of a long-term target, interim targets and a planned delivery pathway. It should address all scopes and sources of emissions such as business travel. It should be accompanied by a feasible delivery plan that is costed and assessed for risk. It should include appropriate uncertainties and contingencies, and that it is explicit on the roles of both insetting nature-based solutions and external offsetting to meet targets.

The revised pathway should also embrace the opportunities for cultural change and ways of working, as well as factor in sustainability goals and wider Climate Principles.

This review process highlighted the opportunity for a broader definition of objectives for the Institutional Decision-Making Principle to address key cross-cutting issues within the Climate Plan and beyond. Our recommendations highlight an opportunity for the Climate Principles Programme Board to take ownership and oversight of institutional decision-making more broadly. The board should ensure that institutional decision-making works across the principles to pro-actively enable and accelerate delivery and drive institutional change, including changing institutional culture and day-to-day operations and processes. The governance model could also be developed to deliver on wider sustainability goals, as a way of enhancing delivery of Net Zero. The review process also highlighted the need to revisit the scope of some principles (such as Reorienting Research and Teaching) which whilst defined broadly have necessarily focused objectives within the delivery programme. Consideration of the scope of the principles would enable broader opportunities to be realised and mitigate delivery risks where there is a mismatch between objectives, deliverables and committed resources.

Deliver: We need to press on with planned delivery within each principle and across the institution, taking early opportunities to push for material emission reduction. This means we need an appetite for risk and to swiftly identify and address barriers, so we can work with agility across the University. Key to this is improving our institutional storytelling and our narrative on environmental and social sustainability more broadly to ensure we clearly communicate our strengths with long term narrative threads that highlight our commitments and our successes. If we want to be globally recognised for our work in specific areas, we need to ensure that we shine a spotlight on them and that our staff and students tell these stories.

Some barriers are external. The Climate Change Committee has identified the high price of electricity in relation to gas prices in the UK as a key barrier to delivering net zero within the UK, and recommends government urgently address this. In the UK, electricity prices are largely set by the price of gas which remains high, there are also additional levies placed onto electricity bills that are not on gas bills. These high prices disincentivise business investment in low carbon electric transport and heating. We should produce economic scenarios based on possible projections of the cost of electricity and assesses these alongside our institutional risk appetite. We should also use our convening power to join with other businesses and industry in lobbying the Government to act.

Recommendation number	Area	Recommendation	Timeline
CP1-1	CP1 Net Zero	**Revised targets need to be sector leading.** The net zero mid-term review in June 2025 should look to define feasible and stretching targets. It should explicitly consider the role of offsetting and the role of climate resilience. Both long-term targets out to 2050 and interim targets are needed, alongside a feasible delivery pathway with appropriate contingencies. Wider climate principles and sustainability goals should be considered.	June 2025
CP1-2		**Analyse and influence the impact of electricity cost:** Produce economic scenarios based on the cost of electricity to be discussed at Climate Principles Programme Board and decide on our institutional risk appetite. Alongside this, work with the Priestley Centre, our academic community and the wider sector to lobby the government on the cost of electricity.	By September 25 (i.e. before the Government's autumn statement)
CP1-3		**Assess, report and recognise climate risk:** There should be greater visibility of climate risk and resilience in reporting for the Climate Plan and recognition in University decision making. Business continuity is not only reliant on things taking place on campus and it is important to assess climate risk and strengthen resilience for our activities beyond the campus.	Ongoing
CP2-1	CP2 Sustainable Travel	**Review targets and quantify delivery pathways:** As part of the net zero mid-term review, the target for travel emissions needs to be reviewed and broken down, with the contributions of different policies/activities quantified to assess how realistic the delivery programme is. This should consider the economic case and potential cost savings to the University.	June 2025
CP2-2		**Faculty, School and service level targets:** Quantify business travel footprint at a Faculty, School and service level. Set targets at this level to incentivise and enable delivery on the Climate Conscious Business Travel policy. This work needs to ensure there is effective internal communication and engagement to bring staff and students onboard.	February 2026
CP3-1	CP3 Reorienting Research and Teaching	**Define and assign full scope of reorientation activities**: Climate Principles Programme Board should consider broader aspects of reorientation across campus, what they are and whose responsibility it is to lead and deliver on reorientation of these activities. There is significant potential to identify commercial and research opportunities that will support the University of Leeds to become leaders in green transition. This could form part of the University strategy refresh.	October 2025
CP3-2		**Join up and focus farm activities:** Ensure farm activities are joined up across agriculture and energy, that they are ambitious and related to our Climate Plan goals and our research capabilities. Focus should be on potential national learnings and impact. This should consider both climate resilience and decarbonisation. There are clear opportunities to work with Geosolutions Leeds.	October 2025
CP4-1	CP4 Sustainable Curriculum	**Define quality and success measures**: Define what quality sustainability curriculum content and activities looks like and define success.	October 2025
CP4-2		**Influence PGR and PGT programmes**: Extend the work to have more of an influence on postgraduate research and postgraduate teaching - link to recruitment and potential for impact through those students.	From 2026

Recommendation number	Area	Recommendation	Timeline
CP5-1	**CP5 Supporting a Net Zero City**	**Work together to leverage potential:** There are opportunities to leverage more impact from the knowledge, data and relationships created through the work of the Yorkshire and Humber and Leeds Climate Commissions by engaging with University researchers and the broader Climate Plan. To enable this the Climate Commission team should work with the Priestley Centre to enable academic engagement to develop new research, innovation and knowledge exchange activities.	Ongoing
CP5-2		**Extend living labs beyond campus:** Provide support to extend living lab programme beyond campus to create opportunities for staff, students and local organisations, and to drive impact. This requires a responsive pot of money which is used to leverage external funding.	February 2026
CP6-1	**CP6 Responsible Investment**	**Approve investment inclusions:** The investment policy on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) and exclusions across investment and banking needs to be approved by the University as a priority as the context in which investments are now being made is a very different context from prior years. These decisions should align with those around who we partner and work with for research and education (see recommendation CC-3).	June 2025
CP7-1	**CP7 Institutional Decision-Making**	**Consider our climate commitments in institutional decision making at all levels:** The Climate Principles Programme Board should take ownership and oversight of institutional decision-making with objectives to: a) ensure that decision making at all levels in the University accounts for our climate commitments and b) ensure institutional decision-making works across the principles to enable them to accelerate delivery and drive institutional change. Our climate commitments should influence our institutional culture and day-to-day operations and processes.	October 2025
CC-1	**Cross cutting**	**Reaffirm strategic commitment:** Sustainability is a top priority for University of Leeds and it should remain one of the key things we try to offer as an institution. The University's One Leeds: Mid-term strategy refresh should reaffirm this commitment and make climate (and environmental and social responsibility) central to the university strategy. It is also vital to ensure that everyone understands their role in delivering on our commitments.	October 2025
CC-2		**Clear and accessible narrative and communication:** Develop clear and up-to-date narrative of our ambitions and success on climate and sustainability. This should be reflected through our externally accessible web presence, as well as our recruitment and outreach. Use this to tell our story more effectively and celebrate significant achievements. Provide regular updates with indicators of progress.	October 2025
CC-3		**Implement an ethical partnerships framework:** Accelerate the pace of development and implementation of the ethical partnership framework. This is vital to support decision-making and to give our staff the support needed to take external opportunities and make effective and consistent decisions.	September 2025
CC-4		**Support other organisations:** Use our leadership and experience to support other organisations in the city and sector. This will be enabled by collaboration between the delivery working group for Supporting a Net Zero City and other principles. For example, sharing learning from the Responsible Finance Principle with the Local Anchors Network and enabling the collaboration of Geosolutions Leeds on geothermal heat networks. We should also use the outputs created through the Climate Plan, e.g. publicising the Climate Action Training programme more widely across the University and with other Leeds higher and further education institutions.	

Table 1: Recommendations from the Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee

Key findings - cross-cutting themes

Institutional Decision-Making and Governance

This Principle aims to ensure that University decisions account for our low carbon future and sustainability goals. To date, work within this principle has focused on governance and compliance with an objective to implement a sustainability assessment in University level governance papers. This objective has been delivered, and it is important to monitor its effectiveness and impact. Alongside the training and support being offered to support paper authors to complete the environmental, sustainability and social impact assessment, there is also a need to ensure that members of University governance groups have information to support them to understand the outcomes of these assessments and implications for our broader sustainability and climate commitments.

At this mid-point in the delivery of our Climate Plan, and with activities well underway within the principles, there is a timely opportunity to consider how to achieve the broader aims of this principle and ensure that decision making at all levels in the University account for our climate and wider sustainability commitments. Through the review process we asked for feedback from the various principles delivery teams on whether there are aspects of their delivery plans that should be addressed through the Institutional Decision-Making Principle. This feedback highlighted some common areas:

- The need for clarity and transparency on who we partner with, receive funding from and invest in and how decisions are made
- The need to consider implications of decision making at all levels of the institution that will impact our ability to meet our net zero and broader climate and sustainability commitments

Our recommendations highlight an opportunity for the Climate Principles Programme Board to take ownership and oversight of institutional decision-making and ensure it works across the principles to enable them to accelerate delivery and drive institutional change, including changing institutional culture and day-to-day operations and processes.

Just Transition

The Just Transition Taskforce was developed following a recommendation in the 2022 Annual Review. A key objective of the Taskforce is to develop a framework, and resources, to support the principles and University stakeholders in reviewing and evaluating progress towards embedding justice in their areas of climate-relevant work. A set of draft Just Transition principles, which will underpin this framework, have been developed by the Taskforce. Work on the evaluation framework is now underway.

The Taskforce also seeks to engage wider stakeholders with justice issues relevant to the Climate Plan. To this end it has established a Climate Justice Student Advisory Group to widen student engagement with the Taskforce, including through involvement with University initiatives such as Climate Week, and will be drawn on to support the work of the Sustainable Curriculum Principle. The Taskforce is planning University-wide just transition events in the coming months to engage voices and perspectives which are not conventionally heard in climate discussions.

Recommendations are to progress the development of the just transition strategy, evaluation framework and underpinning resources in a timely way. This will require collaboration across the Climate Principles to ensure that the framework and resources support their needs and can inform decision-making. There is an opportunity to deepen links with the Supporting a Net Zero City Principle and the Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission, who are leading on the development of their own Just Transition framework. This would support the wider reach of the Taskforce. Further, the aims and work of the Taskforce should be promoted more ambitiously, ensuring University-wide knowledge and supporting wider engagement and leadership across the sector. One good way to do this would be by communicating the draft justice principles more widely to get feedback from the University community.

Communication and Engagement

The aim of the communications and engagement workstream is primarily to raise awareness of the University's Climate Plan, as well as build internal and external engagement. The Climate Plan's communication and engagement activities aims to create a transparent, accessible narrative that supports action.

A key achievement of 2024 was the appointment of a dedicated Communications and Engagement Manager, bringing strategic oversight to all activity. Work has begun on developing a Climate Plan communications strategy, which will align with Climate Plan objectives and aims to support the visibility of individual principles and the coherence of the overall Climate Plan. There has been substantial internal and external communications and engagement activity, including coverage of the geothermal project, which featured on BBC Look North, a public-facing event, more than 100 responses to the 2024 annual Climate Plan staff survey which aims to support 2025 planning and doubling engagement with the Annual Travel Survey.

There are challenges in delivering successful communications and engagement, including student turnover and staff and students being overloaded with information and requests for engagement. The wider public discourse on climate also impacts engagement with university climate communications. This is beginning to pose an increasing challenge with policy changes at a national and international level challenging perspectives on climate action.

The improvement in internal communication and engagement activity is marked since last year and this is very positive. There is a clear need to develop the University's inward and outward facing communications on the Climate Plan to better promote our successes, share our learnings and demonstrate our sector leadership. Increasing visibility of Climate Plan activity on our external facing websites instead of just SharePoint would help to support this. The University would also benefit from greater integration of our Climate Plan ambitions and successes into our institutional narrative of environmental and social responsibility, which would serve to enhance our brand and credibility in the sector.

Concluding remarks

The Climate Plan and, within it, the goal of achieving a net zero University, are long-term commitments requiring decades of effort. Progress is not expected to follow the original plan. With institutional learning, better data, and good governance, we can stay the course. Staff and students across the University are committed to and supporting the transition. The Climate Plan was always going to be challenging to deliver. In a world of changing geopolitics, with some countries and some businesses pushing back on climate action, we need to show leadership; harnessing our teaching and research excellence, we can equip our students and staff to lead others. We need to support other organisations, giving them a sense of what is possible, where the challenges are, what we've learned and how we're adapting plans along the way.

The publication of this report will be followed by a period of consultation to get feedback on our activities from the University community. This feedback, and the results of the Net Zero mid-term review will be incorporated into a further Climate Plan update, supported by an event at the start of the autumn term. This work can also feed into the University's wider One Leeds: Mid-term strategy refresh, which should make a strong commitment to the Climate Plan and its delivery.

Appendix 1
Approach taken

The University has committed to an annual review of progress towards delivery of the Climate Plan. This process is led by the Priestley Centre for Climate Futures and delivered collaboratively between the Principles Programme, who provide an overview of Climate Plan aims and an update on progress, and the Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee, which is tasked with assessing delivery against the plan and providing constructive, evidence-based expert advice and recommendations.

Established in 2022 for the first review cycle, the Committee is made up of experts from across the University who were recruited through a competitive process and who represent expertise in behaviour change and just transitions, finance and responsible investment, technology and innovation, institutional decision-making and adaptation and resilience. It is chaired by Professor Iain Clacher, Professor of Pensions & Finance and Pro Dean for International at Leeds University Business School and includes an invited member from Leeds Beckett University to provide an external perspective.

Ahead of the Annual Review meeting, a reporting template was developed by Priestley and agreed by the Climate Principles Programme and the Committee. The Programme was responsible for reporting on their principles via this template and this was then reviewed by the Committee. Over three days, from 1 – 3 April, the Committee met to discuss the data supplied by the Climate Principles Programme and interviewed representatives of each Climate Principle to develop a clear view of the progress towards delivery of the Climate Plan, identify potential risks and barriers to delivery and make recommendations for how the Programme could address these.

The findings from that meeting are reflected in this report and form the basis of the recommendations it makes to the University. In this progress report, the Committee have placed the emphasis on summarising key findings and providing concrete recommendations for cross-cutting priorities and each Climate Principle which will form part of the review process next year.

Appendix 2
Climate Principles Key Findings

Launched in 2021, the Climate Plan set out an ambitious pathway to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, while embedding climate responsibility across research, education, operations, and engagement. Now, four years into implementation, the plan continues to evolve—responding to emerging opportunities, sector developments, and global challenges.

The Plan remains structured around seven principles, each overseen by a University Executive Group (UEG) sponsor. Each principle has specific goals and priorities aligned with our mission of delivering positive impact for society, our city, and the planet.

CP1 Delivering Net Zero

Areas of notable progress

This principle has been very active and has made some excellent progress in numerous areas. Particularly high profile has been the very positive outcome of geothermal drilling activity associated with potential ground source heat pump deployment. This will initially be used for detailed construction design for the Engineering Cluster, and subsequently more extensively around the campus.

New electric powered heat pumps have also been installed at the Brownlee Centre, replacing oil and wood pellet combustion-based heating, meaning that the complex is now fully electrified.

The Tier 1 construction partner has now been appointed and is leading detailed design and construction for Phase 1 of the capital and infrastructure projects on campus.

A number of key appointments have been made to enable delivery of the net zero programme, including collection of data for scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions, which should soon be published to a wider audience.

Information available through the website and SharePoint is now significantly improved.

Areas for improvement

Greater consideration of how data on progress in this principle is presented, showing improvements from historical levels, current status and projections based on specific activities. For instance, producing tables and figures of annual tonnes CO_2 emissions savings with context, to ensure information is presented in a more accessible, attractive manner and explains why key decisions have been made (e.g. focus on a select few buildings, priority given to removing gas to decarbonise heat etc.). Further, more regular updates and transparency on progress would be welcomed, for instance providing clear justifications and descriptions of successes and setbacks (e.g. urgent maintenance work has paused solar PV installation).

To support this, university-wide engagement and awareness of the data via existing platforms (websites and SharePoint documents) should be evaluated (e.g. number of web page visitors and timing) and a strategy to increase engagement should be developed (e.g. quarterly climate program focused emails to all staff and students, the establishment of a physical presence or focal centre accessible to all in University).

A key requirement is to proceed with the appointment of the Head of Net Zero Engineering and to develop a strategy to provide an alternative solution to the power purchase agreement which has not been able to proceed.

The experiences in this principle this year should provide useful lessons learnt to share across all the principles current and new strategies (e.g. providing viable back up plans and diversify approaches to avoid reliance on only few critical pathways which could fail), especially as we are entering even more uncertain times.

Inevitably, despite the successes there remains significant challenges to achieving the net zero principle locally (e.g. stalled photovoltaic installations and power purchase agreement) and beyond (high cost of electricity compared to gas). It is therefore timely that a reassessment is undertaken of the University's approach to what constitutes a credible net zero claim, building on the Campus Reimagined work, which should include consultation with staff and students, and provide clarity on the University's strategy regards offsetting and climate adaptation.

Looking to the future there is great potential to harness the existing momentum in the Supporting a Net Zero City Principle, within the University, for instance maximising the potential of the living labs' role in this principle, but also beyond the campus, by providing access to the expertise of Geosolutions Leeds to other organisations in the city. Additionally, the University should recognise, promote and exploit its position as a sector leader in campus decarbonisation. For instance, sharing their net zero journey with wider stakeholders, producing guidance and thought leadership on their approach to decarbonising buildings, e.g., outlining the work that has been done to investigate the economics and practicalities of campus decarbonisation and the rationale of electrification versus fabric retrofit to support decision making of others with similar challenges.

Overview

Reducing our greenhouse gas emissions is one of the important ways that the university can help tackle the climate crisis. Within the Net Zero Principle we have a target to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 for estate-based and travel emissions and achieve no direct emissions by 2050. In our pathway to achieve net zero by 2030, we have established four core commitments that guide our strategy:

1. **Net Zero Emissions by 2030:** We aim to eliminate scope 1 and scope 2 emissions, as well as selected scope 3 emissions such as business travel and commuting, by 2030.

2. **Net Zero Plus:** We are working toward measuring and reducing Scope 3 by addressing additional emission sources beyond traditional accounting boundaries.

3. **Climate Resilience:** We are embedding climate resilience across our estate, operations, teaching, and research to adapt to the evolving impacts of climate change.

4. **Just Transition:** Our transition to net zero will be fair, inclusive, and guided by our institutional values, ensuring no group is disproportionately burdened.

Progress made

Over the past year, we have made measurable progress across all four pillars of our Net Zero 2030 strategy. Through targeted initiatives, strategic investments, and collaborative efforts, we are steadily turning our commitments into action. Below is a summary of key developments aligned with each of our core focus areas.

1. Net Zero by 2030

Living Labs Ground Source Energy Project:
The project demonstrated stronger-than-expected geothermal results, with high groundwater yield and thermal conductivity. These findings have led to a £480,000 Ofgem grant awarded to Geosolutions Leeds for further exploration of large-scale thermal energy storage.

Electrification of the Brownlee Centre, Completion of new electric-powered heat pumps has replaced outdated wood pellet and oil boilers, fully electrifying the Centre and Bodington Complex and significantly reducing fossil fuel reliance.

Vinci has been appointed as our Tier 1 construction partner for Phase 1 development of our campus. We have also placed our NPG order for additional electricity to campus, **engaging with partners** to deliver critical phase 2 infrastructure upgrades.

We have continued to **implement energy efficiency measures across campus**. Continually analysing the energy consumption of university buildings to identify high consumers and anomalies, this allows us to be strategic and focus our efforts for improving our building energy management system. We have also conducted multiple trials of Smart thermostatic radiator valves, which are proving successful. Work has been done to continually improve the university shutdown procedure[2] and our level of engagement with staff and students. For the most recent shutdown we hosted a competition in residences to encourage 'good housekeeping'.

Grow Sustainable Labs programme to improve sustainability and energy efficiency in labs: A new Sustainable Labs coordinator has been appointed in the Sustainability service, alongside two Student Sustainability Architects. We have expanded our range of resources and guidance through a Staff-facing Sustainable Labs Resource Hub, also raising awareness of the initiative through roadshows and webinars. To date 38 laboratory efficiency assessment framework (LEAF) certificates have been obtained by sustainable labs on campus, including 6 Gold and 8 Silver certifications.

2. Net Zero Plus

Scope 3 Emissions reporting improvements include a trial and rollout of the NETpositive reporting tool enables improved scope 3 emissions tracking. Work continues to enhance data collection and reporting capabilities.

Sustainable Procurement Enhancements:

- A 15% sustainability weighting has been integrated into tender processes.
- Suppliers for contracts exceeding £50k/6 months must demonstrate continuous sustainability improvement.
- A Sustainable Procurement Toolkit has been published to assist Blueprint teams. The toolkit provides guidance to University staff in embedding sustainability into purchasing decisions. It explains the importance of sustainable procurement, outlines key principles and processes and provides practical tools staff can use.
- Lower-emission product trials, including potential lab bio-ethanol replacements, are underway.

3. A Resilient Net Zero

Climate Resilience Group Formation:
Led by Ann Allen, the group is identifying current data capabilities (e.g. building management system data) and exploring methods to gather weather data across the University estate. These insights will inform a comprehensive climate resilience programme.

Campus Reimagined Initiative:
Climate resilience considerations have been embedded in tender requirements to ensure adaptive infrastructure development.

4. Just Transition

Equity and Inclusion Measures:

- Representation for Net Zero has been established on the Just Transition Taskforce.
- Social value KPIs have been integrated into Tier 1 contractor roles, directly contributing to equity-focused net zero efforts.

Objectives for 2025

2025 will see the principle undertake a mid-programme strategic review. This will evaluate net zero plans and emission trajectory, considering external factors, risks, new opportunities, cost updates, and alignment with the original objectives. Alongside the review we will see key objectives achieved through:

- **Complete Detailed Design for Phase 1 Projects:** Finalise RIBA Stage 4 designs for **Worsley Building**: Reduce energy loss via upgraded ventilation and **Engineering Energy Cluster**: Design new energy centre using ground/air source heat pumps.
- **Identify Phase 3 projects to bring forward:** We will work with partners and internal colleagues to identify initiatives to optimise the energy consumption across campus to accelerate progress towards targets.
- **Agree a new strategy for purchasing green energy.** Learning from the power purchase agreement procurement and setback, bring forward new thinking to ensure that energy purchased from the grid supports our net zero ambition.
- **Commence detailed designs on phase 2 infrastructure projects**, including the extension of the primary sub-station on campus. The electrification of campus heat will require an increase of electricity beyond current availability requiring these enabling works, alongside the move towards decarbonisation of the Generating Station Complex (GSC) through the decommissioning of a gas-powered boiler to an electrode boiler
- **Scope 3 Strategy Development** - Define a **Net Zero Plus** strategy working towards achieving science-based targets.

[2] *The energy team campaign around winter / easter shutdowns*

CP2 Sustainable Travel

Areas of notable progress

The Sustainable Travel Principle focuses on enabling stakeholders across the University to help deliver emissions reductions and has made notable progress in building the associated support infrastructure.

The Climate Conscious Business Travel Policy was developed and the pilot scheme started in 2024. The evidence is now being gathered, including case studies, focus groups, surveys, and individual feedback ahead of the intended campus-wide rollout.

Although recent financial challenges resulted in limited progress, work is ongoing to electrify the University's own vehicle fleet, or, where currently impractical, explore alternative or transitional options.

The EV Salary Sacrifice scheme, developed in collaboration with stakeholders across the university, is now ready to go out to tender.

In addition, a range of activities have been undertaken to encourage staff and student engagement. These include Active Travel Breakfast Socials with the Wellbeing Hub, raising awareness for the Woodhouse Lane Gateway scheme and engaging with initiatives such as the Living Labs and Student Architects programmes. The principle also put forward staff and student commuting projects for the Leeds University Business School CPS module, resulting in multiple student groups from the module working on their projects.

Areas for improvement

While much progress has been made, it is also important to acknowledge that this remains a challenging principle. The scale of the Sustainable Travel challenge is large, but it is not clear whether the actions the principle is taking are sufficient to meet it. In light of the University's growth and the complexities of attempting to address these diverse transport activities using a single metric, it is worth revisiting the current targets. Separate targets for emissions associated with business travel and those from staff and student commuting may be more appropriate, as well as investigating options for implementing these on a 'per-student' and 'per-FTE' basis.

Although a lower target for all could be considered and may even be a more attainable option, we may need to think about identifying our more carbon-intensive activities and setting specific targets for these, perhaps focusing on incremental improvement rather than a rigid 'pass/fail' threshold, if we really want to accelerate change.

We, as an institution, should also be looking to lead by example in this process. Therefore, it is important to be open and transparent about progress and future options for our own vehicle fleet, and our plans to work across the city and region to support climate action in the wider community. In the current financial situation, we also need to be thinking about how we can more actively accelerate the electrification of our vehicle fleet and better support similar efforts by our partners providing public transport services across the region.

We also need to identify and promote the activities that will allow us to maximise the returns on what will otherwise continue to be a challenging transition.

While significant progress has been made towards launching the Climate Conscious Business Travel Policy, efforts need to accelerate to complete the analysis of data sets from various sources and incorporate these into the policy document to meet the target launch date at the start of the 2025/26 academic year. This analysis also needs to consider the impact the policy will have on staff at different career stages to ensure that PhD students and early career researchers are not disproportionately impacted, as well as assessing the impact on staff with disabilities or caring responsibilities. This could be done in collaboration with the Just Transition Taskforce.

Overview

The Sustainable Travel Principle of our Climate Plan outlines ambitious targets to reduce emissions from business travel and commuting to 50% of their 2018/19 baseline levels. These efforts are designed to support our wider net zero commitments while upholding our dedication to academic excellence.

In the baseline year, emissions from business travel, staff commuting, and student commuting collectively totalled **20,090 tonnes of CO_2 equivalent (CO_2e)**. Of this, business travel alone contributed **13,427 tonnes CO_2e**, highlighting the need for systemic change in how we approach travel across the University.

Progress made

2024 has seen solid progress delivered through new initiatives, ongoing engagement activities, and the strengthening of the principle's operational delivery team. Outlined below you can see progress made within each of the principle's objectives.

1. **Reducing business travel emissions by 50% of the 2018/19 baseline**

   - **Climate Conscious Business Travel Policy (Pilot Project)**
     Launched in October 2024, this pilot encourages sustainable travel behaviours while gathering valuable feedback from staff. The pilot is designed to explore the complexities of policy implementation in the University of Leeds context, with ongoing emissions monitoring and development of a full policy through 2024–25.

   - **Living Lab: Scenarios Forum**
     Sustainable Travel is represented in the Living Labs team for Scenarios 2025, ensuring a sustainable approach to hosting and attending the event. Insights gained will inform broader university-wide strategies on sustainable conference travel.

2. **Supporting Net Zero**

   - **Electrification of the University Fleet**
     Progress is underway to replace fossil fuel-powered vehicles with low-emission alternatives. This work is being led in collaboration with the Institute for Transport Studies.

3. Reducing Commuting Emissions by 50%

- **Electric Vehicle (EV) Salary Sacrifice Scheme**
  Continued development of this scheme supports staff in replacing traditionally fuelled commuting vehicles with electric alternatives.

- **Active Travel Breakfast Socials**
  In collaboration with The Wellbeing Hub, these events celebrate active commuters and provide space for discussion on commuting experiences and challenges.

- **Woodhouse Lane Gateway Scheme**
  The University has actively promoted this council-led initiative, gathering responses from the university community and engaging with the council to provide targeted feedback on its impacts.

- **Car Parking Review**
  The Sustainable Travel team is represented in the Car Parking Steering and Working Groups, ensuring that sustainability is central in the redesign of parking strategies.

- **Annual Travel Survey**
  Response rates improved significantly through proactive outreach and the support of a PhD student from the Institute for Transport Studies (ITS), who provided qualitative analysis. Student Sustainability Architects also contributed to boosting engagement.

- **Student Engagement Initiatives**
  Two Student Sustainability Architects undertook impactful projects:

  - One mapped sustainable travel infrastructure across campus, including bike racks, repair stations, and water refill points.

  - The second focused on improving engagement with the Annual Travel Survey, contributing to the increased response rate compared to the previous year.

4. Scope 3 Travel Data

Emissions Source	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Business Travel (tCO_2e)	13,427	6,398	410	3,278	9,635	10,860.93
Commuting – Staff (tCO_2e)	4,970	3,572	-	3,004	3,679	3,892
Commuting – Students (tCO_2e)	1,693	1,055	-	2,550	1,890	2,470
Total Commuting (tCO_2e)	6,663	4,627	-	5,554	5,569	6,362

Objectives for 2025

Sustainable Travel in 2025 aims to be significant in its delivery of key milestones within the principle. Work will continue in areas such as electrifying the university fleet as well as completing recruitment of the delivery team. Alongside this we will see delivery of some key objectives:

- Launch the Climate Conscious Business Travel Policy at the University of Leeds
- Creation of the Sustainable Travel data dashboard
- Introduction of the Electric Vehicle Salary Sacrifice Scheme
- Presentation of both the 5-year plan for Sustainable Travel and the University Travel Plan
- Specific travel engagement campaigns with stakeholder groups

CP3 Reorienting Research and Teaching

Areas of notable progress

This principle has focussed on two aspects of reorientation, our subsurface geology research, which incorporates geosciences, engineering and social sciences, and our university farm. The Geosolutions Leeds institute has had a big year and are really beginning to motor and reap the rewards from the University's investment that is attracting new sources of funding (e.g. OfGEM, Nuclear Waste Services). The geothermal living laboratory is a strong highlight that has wide engagement and is impacting decisions in other institutions nationally. With more policy-targeted work this has potential to support national conversations about the role of geothermal energy within the UK energy mix. The Farm remains a strategic opportunity and it's exciting to see where commercial interest around sustainable agriculture might take it.

Areas for improvement

Geosolutions Leeds is focussed on the subsurface and has a clear strategy. In cases such as the geothermal drilling, the project does not stop at the subsurface but ultimately requires a whole-systems approach to generate green energy. It was sometimes unclear where responsibility with such systems approaches lay and how Geosolutions Leeds integrates into them.

The Farm also has opportunities to take a more systems-wide approach to agriculture, nature and energy. Most of the other review comments for both Geosolutions Leeds and the farm related to more effective external showcasing and communication and exploring opportunities to influence national policy. Working with other principles and the Priestley Centre can help with this. The principle interviewees also noted that, whilst there is a working pragmatic solution (i.e. evaluating each case on its merits), having the Ethical Partnership Framework in place would provide valuable guidance in the pursuit of opportunities for generating external income and new partnerships.

Overview

This principle outlines how we will move our research and teaching away from the fossil fuel sector as we transition to a low carbon future.

Geosolutions Leeds

Geosolutions Leeds was the first initiative mobilised under this principle. The centre formally transitioned in October 2020 in recognition of the need to pivot towards sub-surface net-zero technologies. While opportunities in geoscience continued to grow, it became clear that dedicated leadership, coordination, and investment would be needed to position Leeds as a national leader in this emerging field.

The Subsurface NetZero project was identified as a foundational priority, with a business case addressing three initial objectives:

1. Securing academic time to contribute to the on-campus geothermal energy project.
2. Recruiting a nationally and internationally recognised Centre Director to guide interdisciplinary collaboration and support staff development.
3. Supporting a wider shift in staff focus and partnerships, enabling a new generation of industrial and research collaborations.

The objective is to establish Geosolutions Leeds as the UK's "go-to" centre for subsurface decarbonisation research – working with government, UKRI, local authorities and industry.

University Farm

In September 2023, the University Executive Group recommended the development of a Future Farm Strategic Plan, responding to concerns around fragmentation and siloing of activities across the University's agricultural estate.

The plan aims to bring together Research & Innovation, Knowledge Exchange, and Student Education portfolios, industrial and environmental ambitions for the University farm. It will frame the Farm as a Net Zero and Sustainable Farming Demonstrator, covering aspects of Digital 'Smart' Agriculture, Sustainable and Regenerative Agriculture, Agroforestry, Energy, and the Circular Economy. This will require a step change in how we think about the University Farm, both in terms of activity and land use.

Progress made

2024 was a year of significant progress for Geosolutions Leeds and for the University farm.

Geosolutions Leeds

1. Establishing the Centre

Spring 2024: Appointment of Centre Director Professor Dave Healy and full-time Communications and Administration Assistant Maria Radeva. These key hires have significantly enhanced capacity, visibility, and momentum within the Centre.

2. Enhancing Subsurface Energy Knowledge (in collaboration with the Net Zero Principle)

In Summer 2024 analysis of on-campus geothermal drill cores concluded, indicating strong potential for geothermal energy. The findings attracted regional media attention and have informed the next phase: designing an on-campus energy centre.

A **Living Lab** is now active on site, supporting applied research and engagement around city-scale geothermal energy opportunities.

In Autumn 2024 Geosolutions Leeds successfully leveraged its own (and School) funding to secure an EPSRC Capital Equipment grant to establish a new dedicated lab, with installation due for completion in early 2025.

3. Overcoming Technical and Policy Barriers

The geothermal test site is fully operational as a Living Lab, promoting experimentation and knowledge exchange with external stakeholders.

In Winter 2024 the centre secured Ofgem funding for a collaborative geothermal energy storage project with Northern Powergrid, supporting long-term decarbonisation goals.

4. Developing World-Class Expertise

A research call was launched in late 2024 for **Postdoctoral Research Associates (PDRAs)** to broaden the Centre's expertise beyond geothermal energy. Four awards were made, and the embedding of these roles is a key milestone in 2025.

External research funding has been successfully secured in priority areas:

- **Critical minerals** (May & November 2024)
- **Nuclear waste storage** (December 2024)

Industrial partnerships are progressing well, including new funding for **carbon capture and storage** and **geothermal applications**, with proposals developed for follow-on phases extending through 2028.

A reformed **External Advisory Board** met for the first time at the end of 2024. The new membership reflects a wide range of expertise across geoscience, engineering, policy, and energy transition governance.

University Farm
Significant progress has also been made in 2024 to prepare for delivery of the Future Farm Strategic Plan:

- **Team recruited** to coordinate and oversee delivery of the plan.
- Governance structures established via a dedicated **Delivery Group** and **Steering Group** to ensure strategic alignment and accountability.
- **External consultancy** delivered feasibility studies and specialist inputs, including:
    - o Solar and wind energy potential and cost models.
    - o Options for anaerobic digestion.
    - o Research funding strategy for the National Pig Centre (due February 2025).

A **draft strategic plan** has been developed and is currently under internal review. Final publication is expected by **Spring 2025**.

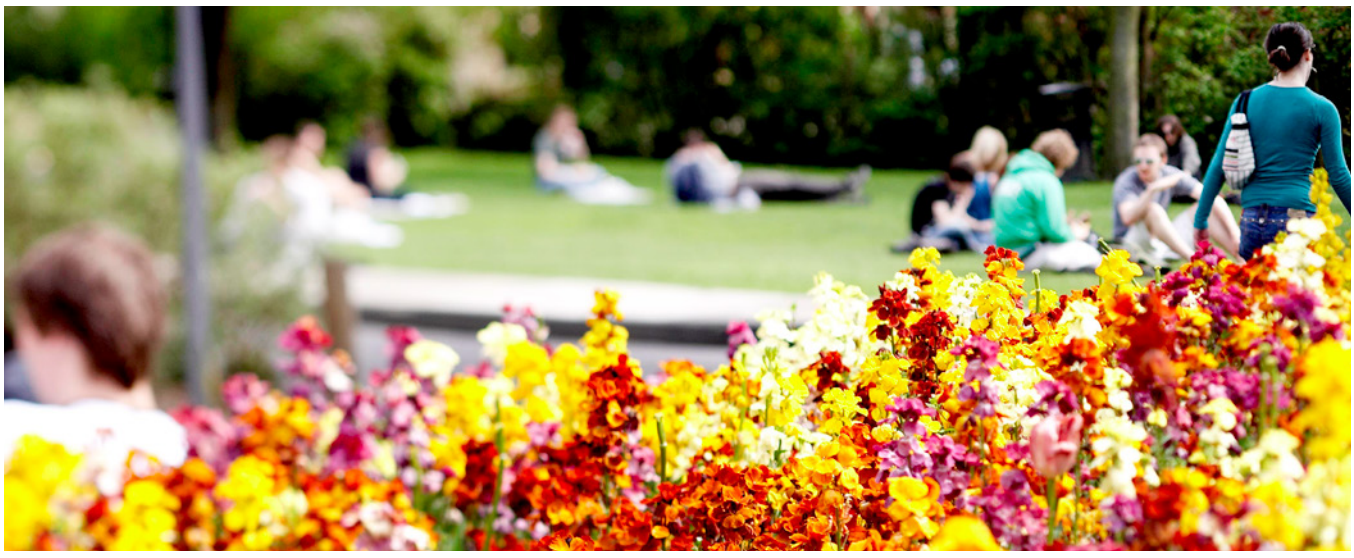
Objectives for 2025

2025 for both Geosolutions Leeds and the university farm promise to be significant in further development. Geosolutions Leeds has some clear objectives to progress and the Farm aims to finalise strategic planning. Key priorities are:

Geosolutions Leeds:

- Create and embed strategy to deliver the Centre's mission of "leading the energy transition through interdisciplinary subsurface research".
- Widen the scope and reach of Geosolutions internally funded activities, to strengthen key research themes in the centre, delivered through 4 further PDRA projects.
- Raise awareness of our contribution to the University Climate Plan objectives.
- Continue to develop and build on external funding success, including applying for/securing larger collaborative interdisciplinary grants

Farm:
The key aim for 2025 is to finalise and secure agreement to the strategic plan. Follow on activity will then be discussed with senior stakeholders to determine the best route for embedding the recommendations. Delivery of the farm strategy may take place outside of the remit of the Climate Principles Programme, however the carbon reduction activity will remain within the scope of the Net Zero Principle regardless of wider developments.



CP4 Sustainable Curriculum

Areas of notable progress

The Sustainable Curriculum Principle has made significant progress in mainstreaming sustainability across the University of Leeds' education portfolio and stands as a sector exemplar in this work. It is influencing curriculum guidance and sustainability is a priority within the new Curriculum Framework. Strategic partnerships across the University consolidate this work and further support student opportunities and resources and this principle has been highly effective in building capacity and communities of support across the University. The Sustainable Curriculum vision is ambitious but realistic, specifically that all students should have the opportunity learn about sustainability and climate issues, build knowledge and skills to make a difference now and in their future lives and careers. This offer positions the University of Leeds as a sector leader here.

Areas for improvement

The Sustainable Curriculum team recognizes a number of challenges. These include:

- The lack of sufficiency of baseline data and the labour-intensive work of tackling this; work is underway to improve baseline knowledge and enhance progress tracking.
- There is much to be gained from a clear and well understood narrative about the nature and value of the Sustainable Curriculum Principle, and a picture of its reach across diverse University activities. A stronger and more visible story would broaden staff and student awareness and buy-in, help to promote awareness of undergraduate but also of postgraduate and PhD opportunities, and enhance recruitment.
- Ensuring students are aware of /engage with opportunities could also be supported by the use and promotion of online climate and sustainability training available for all (and perhaps through staff embedding it within relevant modules). Overall more reach into (or championing within) schools and faculties could help to promote sustainability knowledge, skills and opportunities in a tailored, discipline-relevant way (this is already partly supported through LUNSHE).

There is scope for more joined up work with other Climate Principles, for example developing student opportunities across the Climate Plan, or with City partners. Additionally, there would be value in linking with Schools Outreach to engage pupils with our Climate work.

Overview

The University's Sustainable Curriculum Principle commits to give all students the opportunity to engage in sustainability through their course, community, now and into the future. The principle provides the mechanism for taking this vision forward through advocating, collaborating, facilitating and delivering significant strands of work to enable the organisational change needed. It will provide our students with the knowledge and skills they need to have a positive impact in the world and to contribute solutions in our local community, and globally in an equitable and just way. This will strengthen the University's existing national leadership in this area and provide international collaborative opportunities. The principle adopts a holistic definition of sustainability underpinned by the United Nations Strategic Development Goals encompassing the interconnected social, economic, and environmental global challenges represented within this framework. The principle is both a Climate Plan and Student Education Strategy commitment, with aspects of the programme contributing to the university's Curriculum Redefined transformation programme.

Progress made

Focus Area 1: Research, Scholarship & Professional Development

Two active LITE research fellowships are currently generating pedagogical insights to inform the principle's approach. 'Sustainability & Community' has been embedded as a priority theme within the new LITE Strategy. A Sustainable Curriculum Professional Development strategy is in development, in collaboration with the Organisational Development and Professional Learning (ODPL) team. Membership of the Leeds University Network for Sustainability in Higher Education (LUNSHE) has grown to 160, with nine meetings delivered during 2023/24.

Focus Area 2: Student Engagement & Student Experience (Curricular and Co-curricular)

The Student Sustainability Research Conference was successfully delivered in partnership with Yorkshire Universities, showcasing student-led sustainability research. Development of international student hackathon challenges was undertaken in collaboration with community organisations and partner universities. Sustainability-focused student partnerships continued through Student Sustainability Architect and Laidlaw Scholarship projects. A new role within the Global Student Opportunities team is planned to support expansion of sustainability-related work-based learning and skills development.

Focus Area 3: Curriculum Enhancement & Development

Sustainability Curriculum has been embedded as a priority theme within the new Leeds Curriculum Framework and is informing actively contributing to education enhancement work through the Curriculum Redefined programme. Sustainability skills are now included in core skills learning outcome guidance. Foundational work has commenced on sustainable curriculum mapping toolkits, including pilot projects delivered in collaboration with Students Organizing for Sustainability UK and six academic schools.

Focus Area 4: Leadership, Communications & Engagement

Membership has been secured on key institutional education committees, including the Educational Enhancement and Student Experience Committee, and the Recruitment and Portfolio Committee. The team has contributed to major university-wide student education events, including the Student Education Conference, Leeds Skills Conference, and Student Success Conference. External engagement continues through active participation in key sector networks and conferences, including the Advance HE Learning & Teaching Conference, Advance HE Sustainability Symposium, Universities Environmental Management Association (UEMA) Conference, Sustainability Symposium, and UNESCO Digital Learning Week.

Objectives for 2025

A network delivery model has been initiated to provide the influence, resource, and momentum required to deliver on the Sustainable Curriculum commitments within the Climate Plan. This includes partnership working with Sustainability Service, ODPL, the Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence (LITE), Global Student Opportunities, Careers, the Digital Education Service, the Library, academic Schools, and integration with key Curriculum Redefined projects.

We plan to make significant progress through 2025. Key objectives set out to continue to drive change include:

- Progress LITE fellowships, shape and begin to implement our Professional Development Strategy.
- Embed the Strategy & Engagement lead role to develop our strategies, network delivery model and benefits realisation approach.
- Establish a dedicated sustainability role within the Digital Education Service to support the development of toolkits, content and resources to support work across all Focus Areas.
- Embed the Work Based Learning and Partnership Officer (Sustainability) post role within the Global Student Opportunities team to enhance sustainability related student work-based learning, skills development opportunities and the Leeds Living Lab model, collaborating with employer and community partnerships. Develop and implement a dynamic mix of student co-curricular and extra-curricular sustainability opportunities.
- Contribute to the university's Education Enhancement work, under the leadership of the Associate Pro Vice Chancellor for Enhancement and Experience. This includes sharing data, developing toolkits and resources to support programmes in identifying sustainability focused enhancement and transdisciplinary opportunities.
- Integrate with core Curriculum Redefined projects, particularly those focused on enhancing the university's approach to integrating skills development and experiential learning opportunities in curricular and co-curricular models.
- Share our sustainable curriculum approach internally, nationally and internationally.

CP5 Supporting a Net Zero City

Areas of notable progress

Supporting the Net Zero City principle has the ambition of furthering the University's commitment to net zero by working with external organisations to foster their climate action. It does so by 1) partnering with City and Regional Climate Commissions and related delivery groups and by 2) developing and expanding Positive Impact Partnership and Living Lab schemes. Its overarching aim is to widen our partnerships through a collaborative approach in transitioning to a net-zero future whilst cultivating the University's impact as an anchor institution in achieving local and regional goals for net zero.

The Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission has appointed a new Chair in 2024 and launched a new Climate Action Plan for the region. The new plan introduced a more focused approach, prioritising initiatives that have greatest potential to be successfully implemented. The new initiatives also cover all four pillars of the plan, namely mitigation, adaptation, nature recovery and just transition. The commission also released Our Carbon Story report which outlines the level of change needed to reach the region's net zero target by 2028. The Leeds Climate Commission also appointed new co-Chairs. The four-prong strategy around mitigation, adaptation, nature recovery and just transitions is also a positive development. There has also been substantial effort to resource climate action initiatives with two dozen funding applications.

On campus, the Sustainability Service has appointed a Living Labs Programme Officer. Funding and processes are also now in place to support a new Living Labs call for projects in March 2025. There are currently a total of 11 Positive Impact Partnerships (PIP) and £135k funding for research partnership activities. The Leeds Anchors Network Climate subgroup has also been successfully re-energised under University of Leeds leadership and new relationships have also been built with the Leeds Teaching Hospitals, focussed on health and climate change.

Areas for improvement

This principle can play a crucial role in linking the University's campus activities with the wider city and region to enhance the positive impact of our leadership and investment as an institution. There is scope to collaborate more with other climate principles to leverage their expertise and links, as well as to support them in seeking wider impact for their agenda. There is also further scope for collaborating with other local anchor organisations. Key areas for collaboration with city partners include Sustainable Travel and resilience to the impact of climate change.

There is also scope for providing more support to extend living lab programme beyond campus to create opportunities for staff, students and local organisations, and to drive impact. This requires a responsive pot of money which is used to leverage external funding.

Overview

This principle reflects the University's commitment to contributing to climate action beyond campus by working with external organisations, operating through two delivery pathways:

1. Partnering with city and regional climate commissions and the Leeds Anchors Network

2. Expanding PIP and Living Lab schemes

Responsibility for delivery is shared between two leads: the Commissions Director, overseeing engagement with the Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission and the Leeds Climate Commission; and the Head of Sustainability Services who oversees the PIP and Living Lab initiatives. Both work collaboratively through a single Delivery Group to ensure alignment and the development of opportunities for cross-sector collaboration, focussing on three key areas: Supply Chains; Transport & Travel; and Nature's Recovery. These areas of focus provide 'golden threads' to pursue from the hyperlocal work of PIP through to the strategic, system level work of the regional climate commission.

This principle's overarching aim is that the University works with partners to create a climate ready, zero carbon city and region, supporting nature's recovery and doing all that in a way that is fair and just. The principle's objective is to harness the momentum and maximise the impact of the University's activities across scales and sectors, sharing insights, learning and best practice.

Progress made

In 2024, we have seen strong progress across both strands of this principle, with notable developments at regional, city, and campus levels.

Developing and expanding PIP and Living Lab schemes

- **Living Lab Coordination and Expansion**
  A new Living Labs Programme Officer has been appointed within the Sustainability Service, tasked with coordinating existing labs and launching new ones. Funding (provided by the Net Zero Principle whilst a business case to draw down future funds from Supporting a Net Zero City is being created) and operational frameworks are now in place for a March 2025 call for proposals.

  The geothermal living lab has also launched, in partnership with the Climate Plan Principles, Net Zero and Reorientation.

- **Expansion of PIP**
  We have a robust partnership development process in place to support community and university partners to make a full and valued contribution to their partnership projects. Building on previous and existing collaborations, the University is currently supporting 11 PIPs securing £135,000 in research partnership activity. In 2024, we hosted three knowledge exchange workshops to strengthen these networks.

- **Leeds Anchors Network**
  The climate sub-group within this network has been revitalised under University leadership, energising collaboration among major institutions in Leeds and strengthening the University's role as a key anchor institution. Two working groups have been formed to focus on collaborative impact on scope 3 emissions and procurement, and transport and travel.

Under this principle, the University has also supported Climate Action Leeds in securing a venue for Imagine Leeds, creating a civic space for sustainability innovation and dialogue.

Partnering with city and regional climate commissions and delivery groups workstream.

This workstream has seen significant progress through 2024. Specifically in supporting city and regional climate commissions, milestones include:

- **Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission (YHCC)**
  - Appointment of Asif Husain-Naviatti as Chair of the Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission
  - Published "Our Carbon Story"—an engaging report that demonstrates that achieving the region's target of Net Zero by 2038 is technically possible and cost beneficial. However, it does require mission-led leadership and considerable investment.
  - Launch of an updated Climate Action Plan, emphasising focused, implementable actions across mitigation, adaptation, nature recovery, and just transition.
  - Identified, scoped and established 9 flagship projects to enable and facilitate real progress in collaborative climate action at the regional and system scale.

- **Leeds Climate Commission**
  - Appointment of Farakh Masood and Councillor Dye as co-Chairs.
  - Scoped & established four flagship projects (including behaviour change; communicating climate action data insights; and working across the education system to integrate climate and nature) delivering tangible climate action at the city scale.

The Commissions' Team have supported multiple climate-related funding bids, several of which have been successful in enabling new regional initiatives and working with educational and health partners to identify new partnership opportunities.

All the above is in line with supporting a just transition.

Objectives for 2025

Looking ahead to 2025, the principle will review and set out refreshed objectives, all of which will contribute to supporting climate action within the region, city and University, working collaboratively with our partners. The teams enabling delivery of this principle will continue work in the following areas:

- Continue to drive forward priority projects in collaboration with the Leeds Anchors Network Climate Subgroup members, specifically focussing on the three 'golden threads' of collaboration within the principle, sustainable procurement, transport and travel, and nature's recovery.
- Launch of the pilot Living Lab funding call.
- Secure grant funding for a six-month project exploring how to embed just decision-making into regional climate action and moving forwards just transition will be better integrated into actions when delivering future milestones.
- Continue partnership with 11 PIPs whilst seeking approval to expand the number of PIP schemes through a responsive fund and a Collaborate for Change programme. The new programme will seek to address the long-standing issue that collaborations between universities and community organisations are often short-term, transactional and driven by small time-limited pots of grant funding, limiting the potential to create meaningful change. The Collaborate for Change programme will enable the University to pro-actively create local partnerships that deliver meaningful change aligned to our climate agenda through a new model for community-university partnerships—one that prioritises co-creation, equity, and sustainability.

- Continue to support the Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission, notably by successfully supporting action within its 9 flagship projects.

- Delivery of the 4 flagship projects with the Leeds Climate Commission.

- Demonstrate leadership by actively engaging with and adopting the Just Transition framework being developed by the YHCC. This includes learning from its core principles and adapting them across all workstreams to ensure they are embedded into the ways of working.

CP6 Responsible Investment

Areas of notable progress

This principle has focussed on a range of areas that fall under responsible investment with the major areas of note being banking, the responsible investment of the University's endowment, and sustainable procurement. On all three areas the University has made significant progress. The transition from Barclays to Lloyds Banking Group is a complicated process and this is now nearly complete and is a significant milestone in the University's Responsible Investment goals. Coupled with this, the move to the HSBC ESG Short-Term Liquidity Fund is another significant milestone in the Treasury Function of the University that has been made. By being part of the Cambridge RfP consortium, the University has helped to create positive change within the banking sector as these types of funds did not exist in the past.

The embedding of sustainable procurement across the University is also a significant achievement and milestone in this principle. It is also an exemplar of how Professional Services can drive institution-wide change in achieving the Net Zero and wider sustainability ambitions of the University.

Finally, the new ethical investment and banking policy is very clear in its ambitions and is again sector-leading.

Areas for improvement

The University is leading in this area and more should be done to showcase this to the university community, as well as to external stakeholders. Coupled with this, the Responsible Investment Principle should look to engage more widely with the city of Leeds through the Leeds Anchor Network[3]. This would enable other institutions in the city region to learn about the University's sector-leading work, as well as the challenges and benefits of delivery of this key principle.

The University should also continue to be as fully engaged as possible with the Cambridge RfP group as this group is creating real-world change but there still needs to be a much greater range of finance opportunities available to the university sector, such as short-term money-market funds.

Approval of the new ethical investment and banking policy is critical to enable this principle to deliver its priorities in the coming year. In particular, the provision of access to and/or links to the Ethical Investment and Banking Policy. More broadly the ambition to provide a public list of annual investments, the committee membership and appropriate disclosure of meeting minutes on updates to the investment policy and divestment/ investment status is to be supported and helps to make progress on greater promotion both internally and externally of the excellent work and progress that has been made in this principle.

Overview

The Responsible Investment Principle commits the university to ethical and responsible financial management as a key component of our Climate Plan. As a minimum, we shall invest only in companies which manage their affairs in a way which is consistent with Paris Climate Accord goals.

The University has agreed a strategy which has meant that since 2019, we have had no shareholding in any company whose primary business is the extraction of fossil fuel, or which derives significant revenue from such extraction.

Our Funds are invested in purposeful institutions which aim to solve global problems profitably, without benefiting from causing harm to the world.

Alongside this, the University is aiming to ensure that we approach our campus investment in a responsible way, ensuring sustainability is at the heart of our major capital projects and we can support our ambition to achieve net zero by 2030.

Progress made

Over the past year, we have made meaningful advancements in embedding sustainability and ethics into our financial systems. Our progress reflects both the practical implementation of responsible investment strategies and the refinement of our policy framework to align with evolving best practices. These actions have helped to solidify our reputation as a sector leader in responsible finance, while ensuring that our financial decisions actively support our net zero ambitions and broader institutional values.

1. Avoiding financing businesses involved in harmful or exploitative practices, including fossil fuel extraction.

Ethical Investment and Banking Policy: A key achievement in 2024–25 has been the development of a comprehensive Ethical Investment and Banking Policy. This draft policy provides a structured framework responsible investment within the university. It focuses on our investments but also considers activity relating to our broader financial framework including manager selection, banking and pensions.

The policy clearly sets out exclusion criteria, including:

- Fossil fuel production
- Armaments manufacturing
- Border surveillance and screening technologies
- Entities in breach of international law

It aligns with major external benchmarks, particularly the People & Planet University League, and is expected to positively influence our performance in the 2025–26 assessment cycle.

The policy is scheduled for Council consideration in March 2025, followed by a university-wide communications campaign to raise awareness of our principled financial stance.

[3] https://www.inclusivegrowthleeds.com/leeds-anchors

2. The migration of the University's core banking activity to Lloyds is nearly complete, with most transactions now processed through Lloyds instead of Barclays. Work continues in Quarter 1 2025 to assess Lloyds as a replacement for NatWest in areas such as credit and purchasing card provision.

We have broadened our responsible banking options by adding the HSBC Sterling Liquidity Fund, which applies Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) screening, increasing our capacity and deposit choices.

The University remains an active participant in the Cambridge Responsible Finance for Positive Impact (RfP) initiative, a coalition of 72 UK higher education institutions working to create a market within the financial services sector for cash products that do not contribute to the financing of fossil fuel expansion. Opportunities are currently minimal when considered alongside our rating requirements defined within our Treasury Management Policy. The scale of the RfP has however had an impact on the FS sector and we are hopeful that this is an area that will develop of the next 12 months.

3. There has been no change to our investment strategy over the last 12 months and we have seen significant returns which is encouraging. We continue to hold zero investments in fossil fuel and armaments companies. Additionally, ESG criteria has also resulted in the exclusion of certain large technology firms, including:

- **Meta** – Excluded due to concerns over content moderation, data security, AI governance, and reduced DEI efforts.
- **Amazon** – Excluded due to labour conditions, safety issues, wage practices, anti-union activities, and similar rollback of DEI initiatives.

These exclusions demonstrate our willingness to act decisively in alignment with our values, even when it means foregoing exposure to major market players.

Objectives for 2025

The University remains committed to aligning its investment and banking activity with its climate and ethical values, including its exclusion of fossil fuel investment. Objectives include:

- Ensuring competitive returns on investment portfolio whilst balancing ESG and fossil fuel exclusions, delivered by monitoring and managing returns and activity with investment managers.
- Avoiding financing businesses involved in harmful or exploitative practices, including fossil fuel extraction.
  - Finalise Ethical Investment and Banking policy.
  - Complete the transition to Lloyds as the University's main banking partner.
  - Finalise new credit card contracts with Lloyds.
  - Identify and implement new cash deposit opportunities in line with the Cambridge Responsible Finance Principles (RfP).

Finally, we will provide more visibility of activity, progress, and successes in this principle. Publishing updates on changes to the investment strategy, approved deposit counterparties, relevant policies, and any new financial framework partners.

CP7 Institutional Decision-Making

Areas of notable progress

To date, work within this principle has focused on governance and compliance with an objective of implementing an environmental and social impact assessment in University level governance papers. This objective has now been achieved. The principle worked with the Sustainability Service to develop an updated University Executive Group and Council/Committee paper template with a specific subsection to capture relevant environmental and social impact considerations. This updated paper template was rolled out in early April and training sessions were provided for paper authors.

Areas for improvement

The principle has achieved the objective of mainstreaming assessment of environmental impact at procedural executive decision-making level. There is a need to ensure that members of University governance groups have information to support them to understand the outcomes of the environmental and social impact assessments and the implications for our broader sustainability and climate commitments.

At this mid-point in the delivery of our Climate Plan, there is a timely opportunity to consider how to achieve the broader aims of this principle and ensure that decision making at all levels in the University accounts for our climate commitments. Our recommendations highlight an opportunity for the Climate Principles Programme Board to take ownership and oversight of institutional decision-making and ensure it works across the principles to enable them to accelerate delivery and drive institutional change, including changing institutional culture and day-to-day operations and processes.

We note that the delivery team suggested a clear institutional position is needed, supported by the new framework for environmental and social responsibility and captured within an ethical partnership framework (if/where possible using a balanced scorecard approach). Furthermore, communication and engagement will need to be mobilised to disseminate respective priorities and policies across the institution, to ensure climate and environmental assessment is operationalised at all levels of decision making. We further note that at this stage only the climate mitigation impact is assessed, ideally this assessment should be expanded in the near future to include climate resilience and adaptation considerations.

A mechanism is required to ensure that key institutional decisions are identified by the principles and presented to the Programme Board to take ownership and delegate responsibility for taking action.

Overview

This principle is committed to ensuring that sustainability considerations—particularly our trajectory toward a zero-carbon future—shape all major institutional decisions. Its aim is to integrate sustainability value assessments into institutional decision-making processes, on par with traditional risk assessments.

Progress made

A new Environmental Impact section has been introduced into the University Executive Group (UEG) and Council paper templates.

The Ethics and Values Committee is becoming more established as a formal committee of Council. Its remit includes reviewing institutional proposals and policies from an ethical standpoint, with climate and environmental sustainability now explicitly recognised as a core consideration. For instance, in recent months the Committee has reviewed papers on ethical partnerships and ethical policies, evaluating their alignment of the University's climate commitments.

Objectives for 2025

We have set out some key objectives to continue embedding sustainability into decision making throughout the university:

1. **Deliver Guidance Workshops.** Corporate Governance Team should continue to deliver workshops on how to complete the Environmental and Social Impact section of University Executive Group (UEG) and Council paper templates.
2. **Launch Updated Template.** Following delivery of guidance workshops, the Corporate Governance Team will formally launch the updated UEG and Council paper template—Spring 2025.
3. **Monitor the Embedding of Climate Considerations in Decision-Making:** The principle team will continue with current monitoring approach, tracking items and discussions relevant to the Climate Plan across governance forums. In addition, they will initiate further discussion on establishing a more structured monitoring framework, incorporating specific criteria and a RAG (Red-Amber-Green) rating element. As part of this work, they will need to consider the resource and capacity required to support effective and consistent monitoring.
4. **Support for Authors – Environmental and Social Impact Section:** Review the needs of the paper-writing audience and collaborate with Climate Programme Lead and Head of Sustainability to develop tailored training modules if required; as well as exploring the capacity and support necessary to deliver this effectively and at scale.

Appendix 3
Cross-cutting themes further detail

Key findings and recommendations from the Research Partnership Committee can be found in the main body of the report.

Communication and engagement

Overview

The aim of the communications and engagement workstream is primarily to raise awareness of the University's Climate Plan, as well as build internal and external engagement with the overall plan and the individual principles. We strive to create a transparent, accessible narrative that supports action. The strategy supports both the visibility of individual principles and the coherence of the overall Climate Plan.

Challenges

The programme continues to face challenges in communications and engagement within the university, as programmes like the Climate Plan can be quite complex and evolve in an ever-changing university environment.

The nature of working in a university environment means that the student audience is continually changing. New intakes each year, with varying course lengths, mean it can be challenging to build on previous communications activity.

Visibility of the Climate Plan amongst diverse stakeholder groups, with different levels of interest, communication preferences and levels of engagement means that a one size fits all approach does not work. Identifying relevant and engaging topics for each audience is important, however the formal communications channels across the University do not generally support more personalised and targeted communication.

Staff and students are constantly overloaded with information, this can result in messages being deprioritised or overlooked. Email is frequently cited as a way to reach our audiences, but feedback suggests that both staff and students receive too many emails and generally engage only with those that demand action from them.

Furthermore, engagement fatigue remains a persistent issue. Staff and students are frequently asked to participate in a range of activities, leading to disengagement. Climate fatigue — a growing sense of overwhelm and helplessness — adds to the challenge. Shifting public discourse and evolving national and international climate policy further influence perceptions and engagement, complicating communication efforts.

Finally, the plan has limited visibility for external audiences. Without a strong external web presence it can be difficult to share information relevant to those audiences.

Progress made

2024 achievements include:

- The appointment of a dedicated Communications and Engagement Manager, bringing strategic oversight to all activity.
- Beginning to develop a clear communications strategy that is aligned with the plan priorities.
- Raising staff awareness through a range of internal communications articles highlighting progress across individual principles including:
    - Updates from the Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission, including the launch of a new website and Our Carbon Story for SNZC.
    - Sharing updates from Reorientating Research, including Geosolutions Leeds drilling work on campus.
    - Information from Sustainable Travel Principle on the pilot of the Climate Conscious Business Travel policy.
- Achieving successful external coverage of the geothermal project, including BBC Look North features and a public-facing event.
- Delivering the 2024 annual Climate Plan staff survey, receiving over 100 responses to support 2025 planning.
- Supporting the Sustainable Curriculum awareness month featuring the Student Sustainability Research Conference.
- Supporting the 2024 Sustainable Travel survey, with over 2,000 responses from staff and students, more than double 2023 engagement levels.

Objectives for 2025

The aims for the year ahead are to strengthen visibility, deepen engagement, and build momentum across internal and external audiences, ensuring the Climate Plan is seen, understood, and acted upon at all levels.

At a principle level, engagement will continue to grow, with planned opportunities for each principle mapped out across the year. This will involve a combination of communications and engagement activities, including attendance at events with specific principle messages and regular principle specific updates through central and partner channels. All activity will be coordinated and part of a Climate Plan Communications and Engagement plan to ensure a strategic approach.

At the overall Climate Plan level, the workstream will continue to improve communication and engagement activities through climate wide events and awareness raising communications to boost visibility. There will be a focus on enhancing external presence by:

- Launching a dedicated Climate Plan website to improve accessibility, transparency, and outreach.
- Increasing visibility across the University's main website and online platforms to better reach prospective students, external partners, and the wider public.

The workstream also aims to strengthen on-campus presence through the development of a dedicated Climate Plan space.

This space will act as a focal point for climate-related activity—hosting events, exhibitions, and collaborative sessions—and providing a hub for stakeholders to engage meaningfully with the plan and each otheract as a focal point for climate-related activity—hosting events, exhibitions, and collaborative sessions—and providing a hub for stakeholders to engage meaningfully with the plan and each other.

Just Transition

Overview

The Just Transition Taskforce was developed following a recommendation in the 2022 Annual Review. Its objectives are to:

- Develop a just transition strategy and embed just transition thinking across the Climate Plan delivery
- Engage a diverse community of staff, students and key stakeholders in just transition-related discussions and activities.
- Develop and share good practice and learning with other higher education institutions, regional and international partners.

The taskforce will deliver a comprehensive Just Transition Strategy for the University, which can be integrated within the University's overarching Climate Plan delivery programme and develop an evaluative framework and success metrics aimed at assessing the integration and promotion of justice aspects throughout the Climate Plan and related initiatives and programmes.

Progress made

The Taskforce has now been in place since October 2024. Approved at the end of 2023, it ran a scoping event for all interested University members in March 2024, identifying justice issues across the Climate Plan to inform its remit and work. Taskforce members were recruited through an open process and include five Justice Champions, staff and student (undergraduate and postgraduate) representatives and some key University stakeholders. Its five Justice Champions are now embedded within the Climate Principles Teams, usually at Delivery Group level, offering advice, informing decisions (e.g. embedding justice criteria within Living Lab and Positive Impact Partnership funding calls and evaluation) and acting as a bridge between the principles and the Taskforce. The latter, in turn, offers deliberation and input into justice and ethical questions which arise in the work of the principles.

Objectives for 2025

Recruitment of an interim co-chair to cover maternity leave.

Conduct a consultation on the draft justice principles with wider university community.

Development and testing of the evaluative framework.

Improving university-wide awareness of and engagement with justice issues within the Climate Plan.

Appendix 4
Additional figures

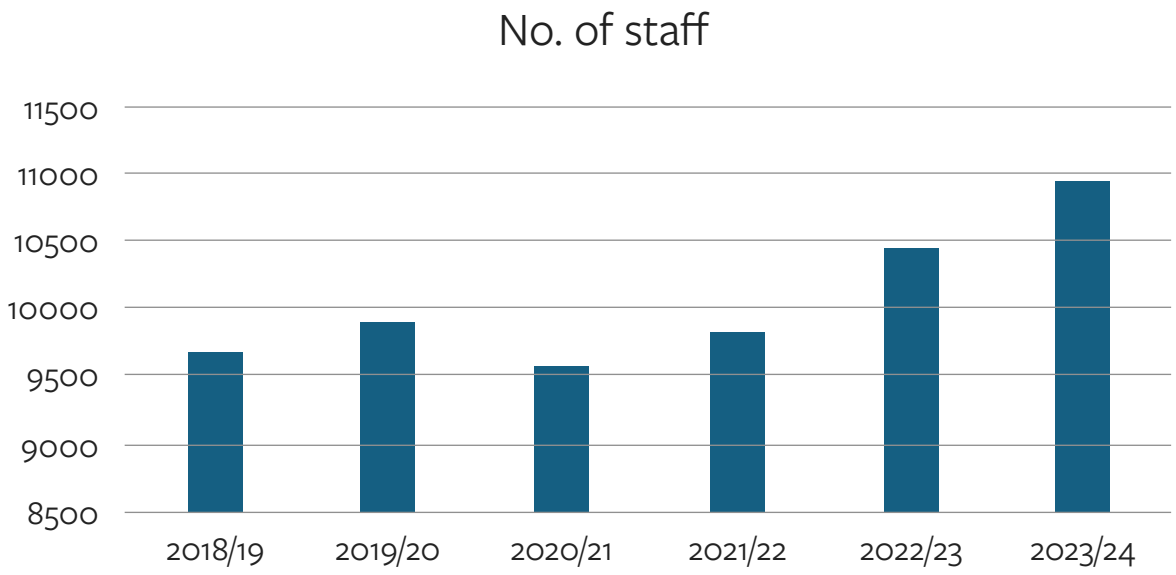


Figure 4: chart showing number of staff at the University of Leeds. Data taken from HESA https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/working-in-he

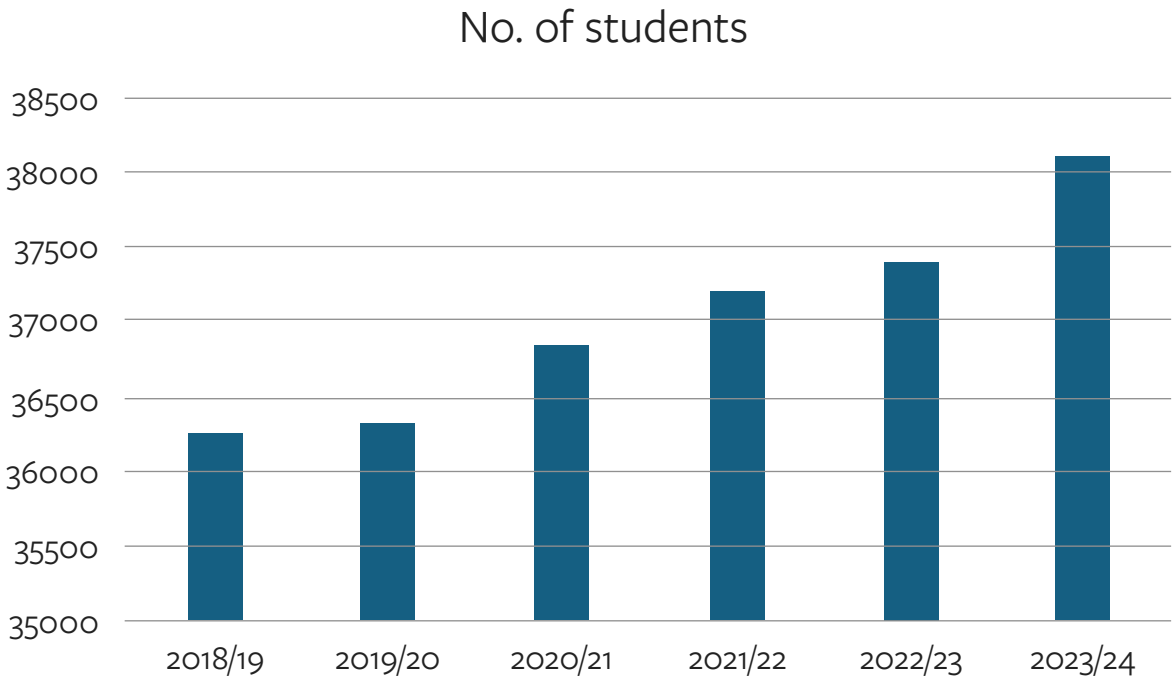
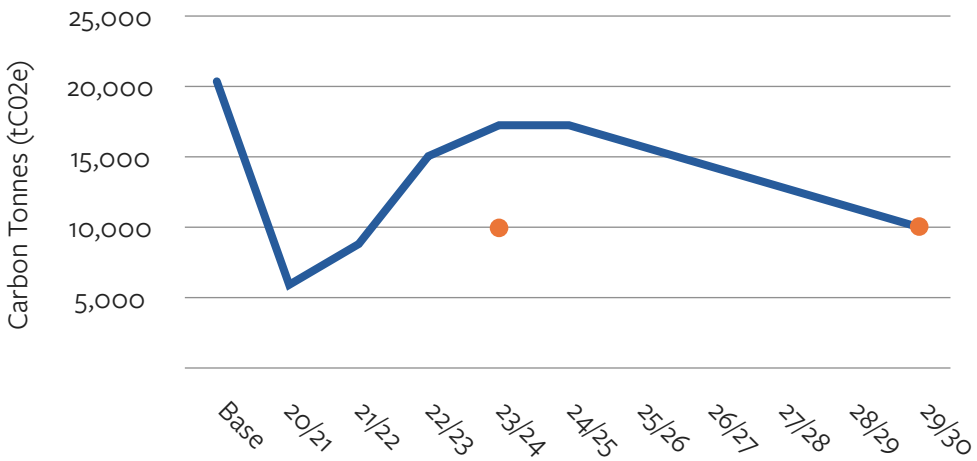


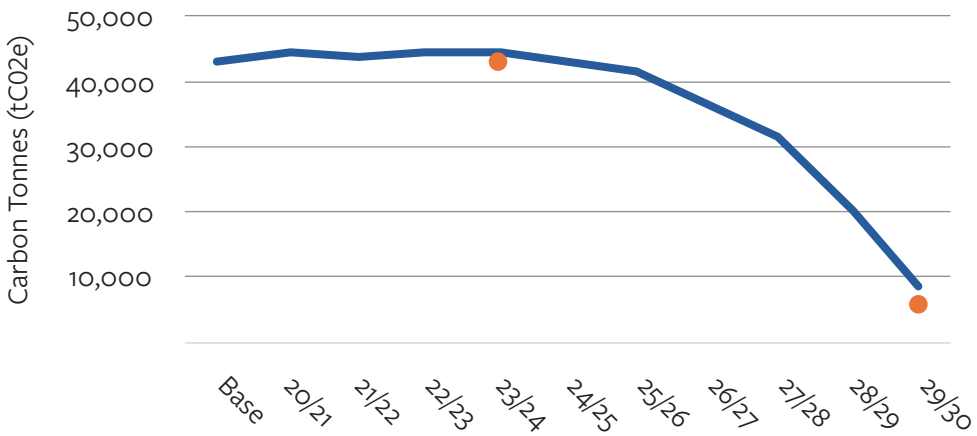
Figure 46: chart showing number of students at the University of Leeds. Data taken from HESA https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-1

The below figures 4-6 show the breakdown of business travel and commuting, university estate and agricultural emissions that make up the Direct+Travel Emissions in the original pathway to net zero by 2030.



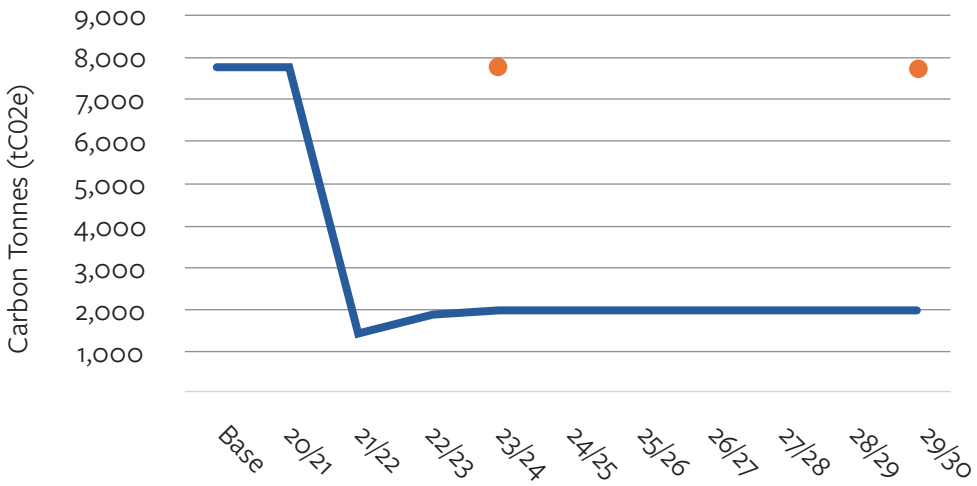
Business Travel & Commuting	Base Year (2019/20)	2023/24	2029/2030 Residual Emissions
Current Pathway	20,090	17,221	10,050
Old Pathway	20,090	10,050	10,050
Variance		7,171 **71%**	0 **0%**

Figure 4: Business and commuting travel emissions in tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent emissions. Orange dots show original pathway to net zero by 2030



All Net Zero	Base Year (2019/20)	2023/24	2029/2030 Residual Emissions
Current Pathway	43,661	44,661	9,468
Old Pathway	43,661	43,381	6,152
Variance		1,280 **3%**	3,316 **54%**

Figure 5: Estate based emissions in tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent emissions. Orange dots show original pathway to net zero by 2030.



Agriculture Emissions Only	Base Year (2019/20)	2023/24	2029/2030 Residual Emissions
Current Pathway	7,795	1,959	1,959
Old Pathway	7,795	7,795	7,795
Variance		-5,836 **-75%**	-5,836 **-75%**

Figure 6: Agricultural-based emissions in tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent emissions. Orange dots show original pathway to net zero by 2030.

Appendix 5 Recommendations from 2023 review[4]

[4] *Note that the Climate Principle numbers have changed since the last review.*

Area	Number	Recommendation	Progress towards recommendation
Cross-cutting	CC1	Increase transparency by making information on programme structures and membership of governance and working groups more easily available to staff and students.	Climate Plan Sharepoint Hub (accessible to both staff and students) now includes details on governance groups for the Net Zero principle, including group remit and membership. Key governance groups are also highlighted on the Delivering Net Zero page of the external facing Sustainability Service website. This is in the process of being updated to the newly approved updated governance structure.
Cross-cutting	CC2	Publish objectives, goals, key success indicators and interim milestones with timelines for each principle. Developing a staged/theory of change approach for each principle could benefit intermediate steps.	Published Net Zero Delivery Plan includes the key milestones for each project area, including expected timeframes and links to progress made. News and progress are also published on the Climate Plan Sharepoint Hub, Sustainability Service website and Estates website as appropriate. Work is underway to improve visibility of this content across the University web estate.
Cross-cutting	CC3	Establish clearer leadership and responsibility structures with dedicated time for business leads in some principles. Business leads and committee structures should have whole-principle responsibility.	Programme RACIs are now agreed and are helping to outline responsibilities. A new programme and reporting structure is currently being implemented to bring the whole principle into scope / delivered as a cohesive programme as the capital and non-capital delivery elements have been fragmented to date.
Cross-cutting	CC4	Devolve decisions to as local a level as possible to empower staff and improve agility. Expedite decisions where needed so that progress is not stalled by bureaucratic obstacles.	The financial and change control processes are under review, devolved decision-making to oversight groups to be implemented where possible and within agreed tolerances (aligned to UoL scheme of delegation)
Cross-cutting	CC5	Continue to improve touchpoints and coordination across the Climate Principles to increase understanding of areas of mutual interest, opportunities for collaboration, shared risks, good practice and integration of cross-cutting priorities.	Introduced a collaboration meeting that includes principle project managers and business leads. Providing dedicated time for principles to meet to share risk, opportunities and collaborate.
Cross-cutting	CC6	Enhance coordination, communication and engagement to benefit all principles.	A Net Zero Strategy and Engagement Lead was successfully recruited this year and is working with the new Climate Principles Comms and Engagement Manager to bring together plans for coordinated opportunities.
Net Zero 2030 (CP1)	CP1-1	Present data more effectively within reporting (and wider communications) and contextualise more clearly by articulating the phased approach, including challenges, timescales and planned spending.	Net Zero Delivery Plan incorporates clear communication of key milestones, timings and updates. Quarterly reporting, including quarterly emissions data, has been expanded to the Climate Plan Sharepoint Hub to improve visibility whilst maintaining digital accessibility standards. Significant work has been undertaken to develop our data strategy and within this a data dashboard is being explored.
Net Zero 2030 (CP1) + Institutional Decision-Making (CP4)	CP1-2	This principle has the right structure and reach to prepare the groundwork for Net Zero Plus[5]. Thinking about the next stage should happen now, especially regarding offsetting.	In progress - Balancing Emissions Coordinator recruited with a plan to reconstitute the carbon offsetting group in 2024 ahead of the development of a University Balancing Emissions Strategy in 2025.

[5] *The definition of Net Zero Plus provided in the University of Leeds Pathway to Net Zero Emissions by 2030 covers scope 3 emissions (excluding business travel and staff/student commuting, which are included in Net Zero 2030), such as waste and recycling; water use and treatment; supply chain; travel linked to supply chain; student travel (linked to University activity); student travel (home to University); and home working.*

Area	Number	Recommendation	Progress towards recommendation
Net Zero 2030 (CP1) + Supporting a Net Zero City (CP3)	CP1-3 + CP3-1	Leverage additional impact from our own net zero journey by sharing learning, resources and infrastructure with others within the city.	A number of opportunities to share the learning from our pathway to net zero have been sought and taken up, including presentations at the Leeds City Council Climate Emergency Committee, University Design Forum and HE net zero estates conference. The Geothermal Living Lab has offered significant opportunities to share valuable learning both internally and externally, collaborating across the Net Zero, Net Zero City, Sustainable Curriculum and Research & Teaching principles. These have included presentations at the UK Geothermal Symposium, British Sedimentological Research Group Annual General Meeting, Tectonic Studies Group Annual Meeting and the Energy Leeds conference, knowledge sharing with Wrexham University and West Yorkshire Combined Authority, student field trips and the development of geothermal modules for Leeds International Summer School and Discovery. SNZC Presented our pathway to NZ to Leeds Anchors Climate subgroup and framed discussion on learning and collaboration opportunities. Presented our pathway to NZ to Climate Emergency Action Committee to share with wider regional leaders and frame discussion on opportunities for collective action. Geothermal living lab is being set up to support engagement and knowledge transfer opportunities to civic partners (including Leeds Climate Commissioners), businesses in Leeds, and local schools / education providers. **Shared learning between Leeds and Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commissions:** Lessons learned since their initiation in 2017 and 2021 have allowed for a re-structuring of governance and delivery models, ensuring both commissions are optimised for greater impact in their next phase of work. **Knowledge Sharing & Best Practice Exchange** – The alignment of LCC and YHCC enables a two-way flow of learning—innovations from the city inform regional strategies, while regional insights are applied locally to enhance Leeds' climate action.
Sustainable Travel (CP2)	CP2-1	Most travel emissions are from business travel. There is a need to improve the resolution of evidence but also, perhaps more critically, to be more actively looking to take leadership on adaptive actions across Schools and Services.	Climate Conscious Business Travel Pilot project underway - engaging with schools on the specific barriers and opportunities within Business Travel. [pilot schools include Geography, Earth and Environment, International Office, and Facilities Directorate]. The Business Travel sponsor has been very proactive and championed this work at a senior level multiple time. Data Analyst from Data Services hired in November 2024 working on the creation of a Sustainable Travel data dashboard, which will contain all travel data. They are concurrently analysing the Climate Conscious Business Travel pilot data gathered so far. Additional work planned to utilise the Blueprint programme (Sustainability Service) to investigate main drivers for Business Travel emissions. Without the Subject Matter Expert specifically on Business Travel, we are still limited on resource and capacity, so work on this has been limited. Scope of projects has had to be trimmed down massively.
Sustainable Travel (CP2)	CP2-2	Understand and openly communicate the impact of all student and staff travel on our travel-related emissions.	Through the Climate Conscious Business Travel Policy project, we will be able to better share and help staff understand the impact certain actions have on business travel emissions (e.g. booking through Key Travel or not, filling out travel expenses). We now have a Communications Manager on the Climate Plan as well as People and Change Partners to help us communicate all the complexity around how we collect and estimate travel emissions. Through our Data Dashboard work we aim to create visualisations that breakdown all travel activities to help empower Schools and Services to take some individual responsibility in reducing their emissions in a way that best serves their needs.
Supporting a Net Zero City (CP3)	CP3-2	Identify and act as a vehicle for action on one or two key, high impact challenges.	2024 saw the re-energising of key elements of the partnership infrastructure, including Leeds Climate Commission and the Climate sub-group of the Anchors Network. Through the Delivery Working Group, SNZC has identified three key themes (transport, natures recovery, supply chains / procurement) to demonstrate partnership impact through 2025.

Area	Number	Recommendation	Progress towards recommendation
Institutional Decision-Making (CP4)	CP4-1	Restructure the Institutional Decision-Making Principle so it becomes a cross-cutting priority with a clearer scope and measures of success. The just transition cross-cutting priority and this annual review could become part of this principle as both are around how we make effective decisions and keep our Climate Plan on track.	Drawdown request for dedicated resource wasn't supported at Climate Principles Programme Board. Trying to incorporate into BAU activity as outlined in the highlights over the last 12 months.
Institutional Decision-Making (CP4)	CP4-2	Mainstream and embed climate considerations into University decision-making at all levels so that the principles cascade down to local levels e.g. Schools and Services.	Specific section and guidance added to the committee paper template. Plan in development to introduce the new template to relevant staff across the University and monitor implementation. Ongoing monitoring of environmental discussions within UEG. This will be fed back to Ben Ellis and Thom Cooper at the end of the academic year 24 – 25. Pilot underway for Emissions Impact Assessment process within the Transformation Office.
Responsible Investment (CP5)	CP5-1	Ensure more visibility and transparency of activity in this principle. This is a success story – let's celebrate it!	Aim to publish article following agreement of new policy – March 2025
Responsible Investment (CP5)	CP5-2	Develop a better articulation of this principle, as it relates to the wider Climate Plan programme. Financial expenditure aspects are very important for the Climate Plan, so other principles might benefit from connecting to this principle on wider finance aspects more generally. This would give the University's finance leads a greater role in the Climate Plan.	**Policy** The new policy aims to demonstrate leadership in ethical and sustainable financial management by: 1) **Prioritising Investments** that create positive social and environmental impact, with increased transparency and accountability. 2) Partnering with **banks** who can contribute positively to society and the environment, prioritising investments in sustainable industries. An example of this is the move to Lloyds Bank and introduction of the new HSBC ESG Sterling Liquidity Fund. 3) Encouraging responsible investment decisions in our **pension providers** acknowledging limited influence over some. 4) Demonstrating our commitment to **transparency and accountability**. **Engagement** Finance Business Partners play a key role in supporting the University to achieve its Climate Plan Programme, ensuring net zero commitments are supported through financial reporting, analysis, planning and engagement. This aids decision making and is instrumental in aligning funding decisions with our sustainability goals including; supporting funding for energy efficient projects, investments in renewable energy, developing sustainable endowment and investment strategies, financial disclosure compliance regarding climate related risks and engagement with People & Planet University league criteria to improve our sustainability ranking. **Purchasing** The Climate Plan and Sustainability Strategy is embedded in our approach to procurement. Social, environmental and economic impacts are considered when buying goods & services and awarding contracts.
Reorienting Research and Teaching (CP6)	CP6-1	Conduct a review of the current structure and scope of activities and ensure that opportunities outside of the remit of Geosolutions Leeds are included.	Assessment of risk being undertaken following internal introductions and meetings with Schools external to School of Earth and Environment with the new Geosolutions team. Next step – to finalise delivery approach and appoint lead.
Reorienting Research and Teaching (CP6) + Institutional Decision-Making (CP4)	CP6-2 + CP4-3	Ensure clear decision-making structures and guidance to ensure alignment of our research and teaching activities with the principles and reduce reputational risk.	Ethical partnership framework has been drafted and is progressing through University governance, update expected by April 2025.

Area	Number	Recommendation	Progress towards recommendation
Sustainable Curriculum (CP7)	CP7-1	Develop clearer objectives, timelines and measures of success. These would benefit from baseline data. We are supportive of further work to embed into curriculum management/quality assurance processes.	Extensive planning work completed including the generation of Theory of Change summaries for each Focus Area and a high-level milestone plan. All approved by the Steering Group and milestone plan approved by CP Board. Baseline data remains a challenge due to the lack of institutional systems and processes to capture this data. We have adopted manual, labour intensive approach to reviewing the curriculum. We are also exploring how AI may enhance this approach. We have also commissioned some collaborative Curriculum Mapping projects with SOS-UK and engaged 6 Schools to participate in these pilots.
Sustainable Curriculum (CP7)	CP7-2	Help to mobilise opportunities for student engagement and opportunities across all principles.	Programme Sponsor, Steering Group and Leadership Team have cautioned that if the principle takes on responsibility for student engagement across all principles this is likely to take resource/focus away from the core objectives and reduce potential to realise the intended benefits sought from the principle. Collaborative opportunities will be explored e.g. how the other principles may be able to contribute student project ideas, data for the planned data repository and extending student Living Lab opportunities.
Review Process	RP1	Merge the annual report and review to produce a single co-produced report focused on reporting on concrete deliverables via a template that includes the integration of cross-cutting priorities for each principle (e.g. just transitions, communications, institutional decision-making) and progress towards the previous year's recommendations.	
Review Process	RP2	Invite representatives from cross-cutting priorities to future review meetings.	

Appendix 6
Contributors to the report

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