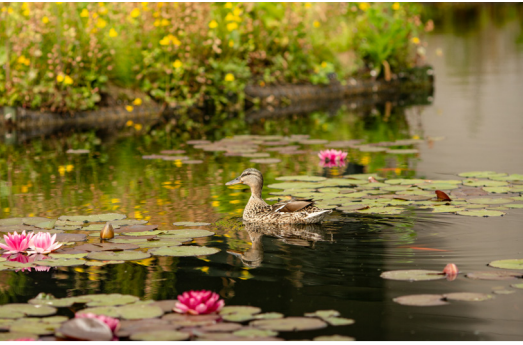




UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Priestley Centre
for Climate Futures



Climate Plan Annual Progress Review 2022-2023

May 2024

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Foreword	4
The Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee	5
The Secretariat	6
Approach taken	7
Summary of progress made	8
Key findings	9
Institutional decision-making and governance	9
Just transition	9
Communication and engagement	10
Key recommendations	11
Concluding remarks	15
Appendix 1 – Climate principle key findings	16
CP1 Net Zero 2030	17
CP2 Sustainable Travel	18
CP3 Supporting a Net Zero City	19
CP4 Institutional Decision-Making	20
CP5 Responsible Investment	21
CP6 Reorienting Research and Teaching	22
CP7 Sustainable Curriculum	23

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 those individuals who submitted responses to the public consultation and members of the Climate Principles Programme team who prepared the Climate Plan Annual Progress Report 2023.

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.



Foreword

When I was asked to help review progress of the University of Leeds Climate Plan, I was intrigued to learn how another academic institution was going to achieve what many others, including my own, have promised; to be net zero in the coming decade.

As an outsider looking in, the first thing that struck me was that the University of Leeds has gone several steps further on the net zero journey than most others, having allocated funds and put processes in place to deliver it. I was also impressed by the broad scope of the Climate Plan, which includes wide-ranging ambitions such as reshaping its investment strategy, embedding sustainability across the curricula and reorienting research and teaching away from fossil fuels.

This is the second annual review of the Climate Plan I have been involved in, and it is clear to me that progress is being made. In the first annual review, we heard about ambitions and plans that the University has. This year, we heard how many of these ambitions have turned into activities, and the plans turned into specific proposals.

I believe one of the reasons for the successes is the seriousness with which the University takes the Climate Plan. This was made evident to me by senior management

responsible for delivering each of the Climate Principles (somewhat!) willingly submitting themselves to a grilling each year by the Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee to justify their progress, to hear consultation responses from the broader University community, and discuss how more could be achieved.

Of course, in the review, we have identified several areas for improvement and many of these are outlined in this report. Some have clear pathways to success, though there are still some challenges that need more consideration to be overcome. It is essential that teams delivering the Climate Principles work together and not in silos, to maximise opportunities. However, in the context of a funding crisis in academia in the UK, the ringfencing by the University of the promised £174m to achieve its climate commitments is perhaps the greatest achievement.

Professor David Glew

External Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee member

Director of the Leeds Sustainability Institute and Head of Energy Efficiency and Policy at Leeds Beckett University



“University of Leeds has gone several steps further on the net zero journey than most others”

The Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee



Professor Piers Forster, Chair

Piers Forster is Director of the Priestley Centre for Climate Futures and Professor of Physical Climate Change. He is interim chair of the UK Climate Change Committee and a Coordinating Lead Author for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.



Dr Ruth Bookbinder

Ruth Bookbinder is a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the School of Sociology and Social Policy. She has previously conducted research into the decision-making processes regarding the University's Climate Principles.



Professor Iain Clacher

Iain Clacher is Pro Dean International and Professor of Pensions and Finance in Leeds University Business School. He is a lead researcher in the UK Centre for Greening Finance and Investment and contributes expertise in international investment.



Professor David Glew

David Glew is Director of the Leeds Sustainability Institute and Head of Energy efficiency and policy at Leeds Beckett University.



Professor Chris Rayner

Chris Rayner is Professor of Organic Chemistry in the School of Chemistry, Founder Director of C-Capture Ltd, and Co-Founder of Keracol Ltd. He has considerable expertise in the commercial deployment of new technologies, and the associated opportunities and challenges.



Dr Clare Richardson-Barlow

Clare Richardson-Barlow is Lecturer, Asia-Pacific Studies, in the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies. Her work focuses on justice in climate and energy transitions, both internationally and within the UK.



Dr Karl Ropkins

Karl Ropkins is Senior Research Fellow in the Institute for Transport Studies. He is currently working on air quality, emissions measurement and clean vehicle technology evaluation.



Professor Sarah Irwin

Sarah Irwin is Professor of Sociology in the School of Sociology and Social Policy. Her recent work focuses on lay perceptions of climate change, social inequalities and public engagement.



Dr Shona Smith

Shona Smith is the Head of the Priestley Centre for Climate Futures. She co-leads the Net Zero Universities work stream of the UK Universities Climate Network and has been awarded an Honorary Fellowship by the Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education (EAUC).

The Secretariat



Julie Mair

Julie Mair is the Climate Plan Research Engagement Officer in the Priestley Centre for Climate Futures. She works across the Climate Principles programme to facilitate links within the Climate Plan, create opportunities for research and learning and ensure that the Climate Plan is underpinned by the most up to date research.



Dr Clare Martynski

Clare Martynski is the Communication and Engagement Manager in the Priestley Centre for Climate Futures. She has worked in climate change and sustainability for over ten years and has a PhD in climate change and interactive art.

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 by 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 chaired by the Director of the Priestley Centre and 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 also includes an invited member from Leeds Beckett University to provide an external perspective.

The [Climate Plan Annual Progress Report 2023](#) was published by the Climate Principles Programme on the 19 March 2024 and highlights progress made since the last review. A public consultation to gather broader feedback was launched at the same time and ran for three weeks. The consultation received 27 responses from University of Leeds academic and professional services staff, covering 9 Schools/Institutes and 5 Faculties. We received no responses from students, which highlights the need for greater efforts to engage the student community in this process.

Over three days, from 15-17 April, the Committee met to review the Climate Plan Annual Progress Report and the consultation feedback, and interviewed representatives of each Climate Principle to develop a clear view of the progress towards delivery of the Climate Plan, potential risks, barriers to delivery and ways that 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.



Summary of progress made

Last time we reviewed progress of the Climate Plan, many of the Principles were still in the planning and development stage. This has now begun to transform into action. For full details, please see the Climate Plan Annual Progress Report 2023. A few highlights include:

Net Zero 2030: the University has switched over all its residences to low energy LED lighting, completed the Gair Wood tree planting and started to improve the electricity infrastructure to support the increased demand created by campus decarbonisation. It has also completed a climate risk and resilience review for the campus and residences to identify areas of climate risk.

Sustainable Travel: work has taken place to upgrade and increase the Electric Vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure on campus, as well as developing the EV salary sacrifice scheme and bringing Leeds City Bikes onto campus.

Supporting a Net Zero City: relationships have continued to be developed between the University of Leeds, the regional Climate Commissions and other private, public and third sector bodies in the city and region to strategically address the need for coordination and institutionally joined up actions on decarbonisation and resilience.

Governance and institutional decision-making: recent appointments of people with responsibility for this Principle should help to develop some momentum in the coming year.

Responsible Investment: the University has adopted a more ethical investment strategy. It has also moved its banking from Barclays to Lloyds, who have the lowest fossil fuel investments of all the major UK banks.

Reorienting Research and Teaching: Geosolutions Leeds has been established as a centre and is collaborating with internal and external partners to assess the viability of ground source heat pumps as a low carbon replacement for the existing steam network on campus, whilst creating new research and teaching opportunities.

Sustainable Curriculum: the Student Sustainability Architect scheme and the Student Sustainability Research Conference have both been expanded in terms of scope and ambition, giving students valuable experience and supporting career development.

Image: Ben Craven, University of Leeds



Key findings

Through this review process the Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee has been privileged to have access to a broad range of information and engage with a variety of stakeholders to assess progress towards the Climate Plan. This process has allowed the Committee to take a bird’s eye view of the Climate Principles Programme’s progress, leading to observations and recommendations that cut across the programme and others that are specific to individual Principles. Findings of the review process are provided for each individual Principle in Appendix 1. The key cross-cutting findings are as follows:

Institutional Decision-Making and Governance

The Climate Principles Programme is in the process of transition from scoping and planning to delivering activities. To support this there is an ongoing and substantial increase in staffing across the Programme, particularly around programme management, leading to a positive impact on momentum and delivery. As this transition continues it is important to ensure responsibilities are appropriately devolved and driven across different parts of the institution which have the levers to drive and influence change. For example, Heads of School and Research and Innovation Services (RIS) can enable interventions to support reducing emissions from business travel.

The Climate Plan is complex, and although it is now well resourced there is a danger that delivery groups may get caught up in the detail. Strong governance structures, with clear roles, strategies and deliverables, as exemplified by the Net Zero 2030 Principle, will help to build effective, motivated teams with clear responsibilities and lines of communication across sponsors, business leads, delivery groups and stakeholders. An external member of University Council could be co-opted onto the Climate Principles Programme Board in order to give greater accountability to Council for the delivery of the Climate Plan. The Programme management team need to rapidly acclimatise, understand the Principles, and develop strong working relationships with business leads and sponsors. This Principle also needs to effectively handle the interface of the Climate Plan with related University strategies, such as Sustainability, and wider institutional aims.

Just Transition

In the [Climate Plan Annual Progress Review 2022](#), just transitions were highlighted as a critical, cross-cutting issue that intersects with every Principle, guiding the University’s approach to sustainability and climate action. The subsequent establishment of a Just Transition Task Force marks a proactive step towards integrating social justice. Just transitions would benefit from being embedded across all Climate Principles, enabled by the task force. Effective integration would support equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and institutional decision-making processes and help ensure that issues such as transparency, equity of access, and social justice are not peripheral but central to each climate action initiative. Embedding justice considerations into the delivery plan of each Principle will ensure that the University’s commitment to sustainability is both effective and inclusive. This could become part of the Institutional Decision-Making Principle.





Communication and Engagement

A key recommendation from the last Annual Progress Review was to “assign clear ownership and leads for communication and engagement and just transition with adequate resources to develop and deliver a communication and engagement strategy for the Climate Plan”. There is now increased support from senior leadership and recruitment is ongoing for additional communications support within Principles and at Programme level. We can expect communication and engagement to be an ongoing issue for all Climate Principles. The Programme should develop a forward-looking plan of action for communication and engagement that includes all Principles and allows it to identify opportunities to engage with staff and students and raise awareness of the Climate Plan, especially as activity moves from planning into implementation. This will be particularly important for activity around Sustainable Travel, which is of high interest to the University community overall.

There are also significant opportunities to share learning and good practice across Principles which has begun through the recently formed Climate Plan Community of Practice for the Programme delivery teams. These efforts should continue and be used to identify additional opportunities to proactively share learning and collaboration across Principles and celebrate success. We should also provide the delivery teams with the space, time and support to share learning from our institutional journey with partners in the city and across the higher education sector to leverage maximum impact from our efforts and to identify opportunities to learn from and collaborate with external partners.

Key recommendations

We have taken a constructive and forward-looking approach to this review, focusing on highlighting positive and actionable steps that the University can take to improve the delivery of the Climate Plan. This approach also recognises that the Climate Plan is being delivered in a changing environment and must be adaptable and responsive to changes in strategy and the wider national and higher education environment, meaning that recommendations made in 2022 may not remain applicable in 2024.

Table 1: Recommendations for cross-cutting priorities and each Climate Principle with assigned priority status, timeline for delivery, suggested ownership and additional information

Area	Recommendation number	Recommendation	Priority Status	Timeline	Ownership	Additional information
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.	High	3 months	Programme management and Communications and Engagement	Information and activities that would support this include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organograms • Key points-of-contact • Sharing minutes and actions from meetings
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.	High	12 months	Sponsors and business leads	This will build momentum and help to reduce the risk of disruption due to staff turnover and changes in leadership by providing clear direction. A staged approach using something like a theory of change model could help Principles such as Sustainable Travel with a lot to do.
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.	High	12 months	Programme managers and Climate Principles Programme Board	The Net Zero Principle was seen to be working well. Although this Principle has significant differences from other Principles, we felt there were also learnings to be had: 1) Business lead has dedicated time (~50% FTE) and are responsible for the whole Principle, not just part of it; 2) Committee structure is built around the whole Principle and has been redesigned to make it work more effectively; 3) Sponsor and business lead have a strong working relationship, meeting regularly to plan and pre-empt issues; 4) Clear KPIs, objectives, timelines and risk registers help to align delivery teams.
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.	Ongoing	12 months	Programme managers and Climate Principles Programme Board	It is important to ensure that responsibilities are appropriately devolved and driven across different parts of the institution which have the levers to drive and influence change. This will require guidance on delegated authority to enable decision-making at pace and clear escalation routes. Clarity on roles and responsibilities will help to support, rather than cut across, line management responsibilities and accountabilities.

Area	Recommendation number	Recommendation	Priority Status	Timeline	Ownership	Additional information
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.	Ongoing	12 months	Programme managers and communication and engagement teams	<p>This will support improved coordination where there are interdependencies across Principles and minimise the risk of activities stalling as the sequencing of activities is out of line.</p> <p>This could be supported through sharing topical foci e.g. travel working across the Sustainable Travel, Net Zero 2030 and Supporting a Net Zero City Principles to enable collaborative approaches to delivering Climate Plan objectives.</p> <p>Just Transitions priorities should be integrated into all Climate Principles.</p>
Cross-cutting	CC6	Enhance coordination, communication and engagement to benefit all Principles.	Ongoing	6 months	Programme managers and communication and engagement teams	To effectively mobilise additional incoming resources, develop a forward-looking plan of action for communication and engagement that includes all Principles and identifies opportunities to engage with staff and students to raise awareness of the Climate Plan.
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.	High	12 months	Programme teams, Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee, communication and engagement teams	This would enhance the credibility of this Principle by demonstrating that the seemingly slow progress on emissions and spend are within the current plan.
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 ¹ . Thinking about the next stage should happen now, especially regarding offsetting.	High	12 months	Sponsor, Business lead and team	The role of scope 3 emissions and procurement should be formalised to prepare early for the next phase. Carbon offsetting should also be planned early and the offsetting group should be reconstituted. This Principle should assess embodied carbon as part of its decision-making process and could take the lead on building climate resilience into decision-making, working with Institutional Decision-making.
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.	Ongoing		Project teams	Use our links into the city to share learning and discuss opportunities for collaboration, shared resources and infrastructure.
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.	High	3 months	Climate Principles Programme Board, sponsor	<p>It is critical to understand what activity and actors are driving emissions related to business travel in order to target interventions by considering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is doing the travelling? • Are particular parts of the University driving the majority of emissions? • What interventions are viable options and how could leadership of the Principle be structured to better support this?

¹ 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	Recommendation number	Recommendation	Priority Status	Timeline	Ownership	Additional information
Sustainable Travel (CP2)	CP2-2	Understand and openly communicate the impact of all student and staff travel on our travel-related emissions.	High	12 months	Climate Principles Programme Board, sponsor and team	Response rate to travel survey should be improved. Leadership should help drive uptake.
Supporting a Net Zero City (CP3)	CP3-2	Identify and act as a vehicle for action on one or two key, high impact challenges.	Medium	12 months	Business lead and steering committee	The Climate Plan should consider how it can get the most out of the partnership infrastructure it is enabling across the city (and region) by focusing on a small number of golden threads e.g. travel or procurement, or building retrofit, or adaptation to climate impacts. This should include setting clear outcomes for the established partnerships to work towards collaboratively.
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.	High	12 months	Climate Principles Programme Board	We think this Principle could consider having a remit of both general Climate Plan governance and University wide decision-making. There are opportunities to harmonise approaches and governance across the Climate Plan to make more effective timely decisions. Likewise, decisions made across the University from the annual integrated planning exercise to day-to-day decisions within Schools and services could potentially affect Climate Plan delivery. These interactions need to be considered within this Principle. A staged approach might help with the enormity of this challenge – e.g. piloting with the Facilities Directorate.
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.	High	12 months	Climate Principles Programme Board and programme leads	The Climate Principles should be integrated within general decision-making processes and engagement across the University, e.g. on teaching, research and procurement. Good examples of this are the way that EDI or H&S are considered in decisions where Heads of Schools and Services have clear responsibility.
Responsible Investment (CP5)	CP5-1	Ensure more visibility and transparency of activity in this Principle. This is a success story – let's celebrate it!	High	12 months	Sponsor, business lead and communication and engagement teams	Examples of positive change include:: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switching the University banking provider to Lloyds Banking Group • Moving the University endowment to the Tomorrow's World investment strategy • Ongoing work with the local University Pension & Assurance Scheme and the reorientation of the pension assets to more sustainable investments

Area	Recommendation number	Recommendation	Priority Status	Timeline	Ownership	Additional information
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.	Medium	12 months	Business leads and communication and engagement teams	Finance aspects can be more visible, including how it is supporting other aspects of the plan e.g., sustainable procurement and general expenditure across the Climate Plan.
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.	High	6 months	Steering committee, programme lead	Geosolutions Leeds' research and teaching remit are within the Earth's subsurface and this was the focus of the business case and resources for its work. Addressing reorientation of other areas of research and teaching is also critical to delivery of this Principle.
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.	High	3 months	Steering committee, sponsor	Decisions are being taken locally that conflict with our climate commitments. Slow and unclear decision-making processes are at risk of impacting development and delivery of research and teaching activities and relationships with stakeholders.
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.	High	12 months	Steering committee, sponsor	We like the integrated offering approach, but it would be good to develop clear objectives and timelines around this. We are not as worried about bolt-on options. The Business School action training has been a success and in the short-term it could be offered to others. The perfect does not need to be the enemy of the good in this case.
Sustainable Curriculum (CP7)	CP7-2	Help to mobilise opportunities for student engagement and opportunities across all Principles	High	12 months	Project teams	Sustainable Curriculum could provide leadership and support to enable student engagement across the Climate Plan. Living labs are good opportunities through which to plan engagement activities.
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.	High	12 months	Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee, Climate Principles Programme Board	A public consultation on the combined report should take place over a longer period followed by a synthesis of consultation feedback and a response from the Principles and Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee.
Review Process	RP2	Invite representatives from cross-cutting priorities to future review meetings	High	12 months	Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee	

Concluding remarks

We thank the team involved in preparing the progress report and those who took part in the review meeting interviews for the effort and time that went into producing the report and their accessibility and openness to questions. Their attitude to constructive communication and engagement is welcome and crucial to the success of the Climate Plan. Considerable progress has been made since last year. Across the Principles, most of the personnel are in place and the Principle teams are communicating much better with each other and understand where they fit within the overall Climate Plan.

All Climate Principles have excellent dedicated staff that are working hard, though changes in leadership and illness have caused some setbacks. This highlights the important roles of sponsors and leaders working closely together, setting clear scope, goals, timelines and interim targets for each Principle to ensure continued progress. Progress needs to be sustained to 2030 and beyond, which will require a central role for institutional decision-making. We have therefore recommended that this Principle becomes cross-cutting and includes objectives that ensure Climate Plan considerations are embedded in decision-making and governance across the institution.

We also reflected on our role as the Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee and felt that the annual review could be improved. Firstly, we could give more guidance to the delivery teams by providing a template for reporting on progress. We think the initial published progress report is unnecessary. Rather, we would use the completed templates and interviews to co-write a single report. Consultation would happen annually after publication and a separate response to consultation feedback published later in the year. Moreover, incorporating an independent external chair, a Leeds City Council representative or a business representative into the Committee could substantially broaden the Climate Plan's knowledge base, enhancing its implementation. Such inclusion would also support the integration of cross-cutting Principles, particularly in Institutional Decision-Making, thereby amplifying our regional impact.

Lastly, it is clear that we are leaders across the national and international higher education sector, but still have a lot to learn and do. We should use our convening power in proactive ways to support the sector and ourselves.

Professor Piers Forster


Climate Plan Research Partnership Committee Chair
Director of the Priestley Centre for Climate Futures



“it is clear that **we are leaders** across the national and international higher education sector”

Appendix 1

Review of findings for the Climate Principles



CP1 Net Zero 2030

Overview:

The University has a target to achieve net zero by 2030, with this Principle focusing on emissions associated with the energy we use across the estate (scope 1 and 2 emissions). There is also a wider objective to include supply chain emissions (scope 3) as part of the longer-term plan of zero direct emissions by 2050.

Progress made:

This Principle is progressing well, the delivery team are well engaged, and leadership is strong and experienced. It is the longest established Principle and it is an excellent model that can have major influence on how some other Principles are managed. We encourage the leaders to proactively share good practice and lead cross-Principle collaboration with other less well-developed Principles.

Areas for improvement:

It is recognised that the Net Zero Principle needs to improve visibility. Opportunities are now developing for this as projects move from assessment and planning stage to deployment. Communication needs to be at an appropriate level for the intended audience, and be clear and balanced, explaining reasoning for key activities and issues, when they will impact and by how much. A focus on improving the presentation and articulation of data in reporting and wider communications would support this. This should help to contextualise the seeming lack of progress on specific carbon reductions and spending, and clearly articulate challenges and timescales. The new communications role in the team is in process of being established to facilitate this. To avoid accusations of greenwashing, how information is presented to its audience is of particular importance – are impacts really as significant as we think (e.g. Gair Wood) and are terms used appropriate (e.g. geothermal vs. ground source heat pump)?

Financial spend is still relatively low and activity is back ended, leading to increased risk/exposure to overspend and time overrun, especially regarding inflation and other potential geopolitical issues. The group needs to keep a close track of this and ensure focus is on meeting net zero goals and not budget spend.

The University undertook a climate risk and resilience review in 2023, which identified key areas of climate risk on campus and in University residences. This work now needs to be translated into concrete actions and included in the Net Zero programme of work.

The report could be more explicit about the causes of Scope 1 emission increases and develop a set of indicators of change beyond emissions. The Committee were unclear as to whether embodied emissions (e.g. for buildings, equipment such as air source heat pumps) are included in assessments – they should be part of the decision-making process and ideally rolled out more widely across procurement practices. There could also be better articulation and assessment of the co-benefits of actions in this Principle, e.g. including changes to levels of damp, thermal comfort and maintenance requirements because of retrofit.

Clarity is needed on impacts of the farm, and creative thinking on how it can be decarbonised. There are limited opportunities but, for example, anaerobic digestion/biogas is a potential opportunity, and how agricultural vehicles are treated (potential for biogas as fuel) or other possible waste to energy approaches could be considered. This could interface with sustainable travel on farm machinery although it may be challenging to integrate these approaches.

Offsets are an issue, and this needs ongoing consideration as opportunities evolve. They need to be transparent, credible, and with clear additionality. Reconstitution of the Rebalancing Emissions group is important and appointing new resource should facilitate this significantly. This Principle could prepare for Net Zero Plus. It could take on the responsibility for supply chain/scope 3, alongside interfacing with sustainable travel, and opportunities to address some aspects of Sustainable Travel (e.g. electric vehicle incentives, improved cycle infrastructure (storage, showers) and electric bike charging).

Summary of consultation feedback:

Responses to Net Zero action was largely positive, though many felt that the University's plans should be faster and more ambitious. Some responses flagged up missed opportunities, such as the potential for better water management to support mitigation and adaptation or fixing movement activated lighting systems to reduce energy consumption. Others flagged gaps in reporting, including queries about how we account for the carbon cost of new buildings. There was a desire for more transparency on targets, delivery and personnel, as well as for opportunities to get involved with the Climate Plan. There is support for off-site renewables but care must be taken to ensure these are genuinely additional and credible schemes to avoid the perception of greenwashing.

CP2 Sustainable Travel

Overview:

The Sustainable Travel Climate Principle focuses on the delivery of emissions reductions associated with business travel, and staff and student commuting. As this accounts for approximately 14% (10,045 of 71,546 CO₂e tonnes) of proposed emissions reductions for our pathway to net zero, it is a critical component of the plan. It is also a scope 3 contribution which will require significant changes in travel behaviour within this decade, and impact both working practices and cost of living for most, if not all, of us at the University. We therefore need to acknowledge that the effective and just delivery of this Principle is particularly challenging and requires us all (students, staff and leadership) to engage responsibly in this process.

Progress made:

The leadership of this Principle has undergone several changes, resulting in challenges for the delivery team. Nevertheless, progress is clearly being made. Last year this included the first phase of e-bike infrastructure installations (Beryl docking stations) as part of the Leeds City Bikes Scheme. There has been an increase in the capacity and amount of EV charging points provided in University car parks, and progress has been made towards the replacement of the University's fleet with electric and hybrid vehicles. Plans for the introduction of an electric vehicle salary sacrifice scheme are also understood to be at the proposal stage. The University Bike Hub has been supported and expanded, helping students and staff in their efforts to transition to cycling.

Areas for improvement:

While the decoupling of Sustainable Transport and Net Zero Principles is understandable because it allowed leads on Net Zero to focus on scope 1 and 2 work, this has left those working on Sustainable Travel under-resourced. We all need to support efforts to grow the group that is actively working on Sustainable Travel and support those working with them wherever we can. In particular, there should be a high-level push to dramatically increase the travel survey response rate.

There needs to be greater clarity regarding the methods used to calculate travel-related emissions. Activity levels are extracted from a range of sources, and there is a demonstrable understanding of the reliability (and limitations) of this data for both business travel and commuting. However, there is little detail regarding the breakdown of travel behaviour across the University. For example, the relatively high emissions associated with business travel are likely to be from high-impact international research and teaching, but without more detail on destinations, frequencies, travel options and the academic outcomes for different schools, it is unclear how interventions could be targeted fairly. Similarly, emission factors applied to these are not as clearly defined and emissions inventory methods need to be explained in greater detail and possibly improved. This most likely requires more staff time both on data gathering and method development but this is necessary if we want a more transparent and therefore justifiable and defensible measure of our performance on this Principle.

Alongside better performance measures of transport emissions, we need to be focusing a more significant proportion of staff time on rapidly developing and implementing transport-related interventions. Here, there are perhaps lessons to be learnt from other more established core Principles, but we should also be looking at what has worked well elsewhere and for strong leadership from this Principle on what would be a good fit for Leeds.

Both in consultation and review, concerns were raised about international travel. Firstly, international business travel is a significant component of emissions, and any attempt to manage these could impact both research and teaching excellence, but a lack of action to reduce these emissions is jeopardising the likelihood of us meeting our target of net zero by 2030. This is obviously a challenge for all universities with significant international activities and we should ensure clear top-down guidance to retain (and ideally improve) our standing as world leaders in climate and transport-related research and teaching. Secondly, some felt that the University's Climate Plan does not fully address international student travel. The current definition of the student commute focuses on term-time travel between local residence and University, but there is also associated non-local travel between Leeds and a student's non-term-time home. While this is a question that is currently out of scope, it would be responsible to have some idea of emissions associated with student movements between Leeds and their non-term-time homes. This would need to be both for international students, who travel longer distances but maybe only once or twice per academic year, and domestic students, who travel shorter distances but potentially much more frequently, if our aim is to provide a balanced and fair measure of additional contributions. It would also be responsible to consider what guidance we could provide students regarding associated emissions, and what support we could provide in efforts to address them. For communication across the University and externally, it would be beneficial to address student travel scope 3 emissions explicitly and report them in a transparent manner. This will likely show that all student travel, not just international flights, is important, and help to contextualise them within the entire scope of our emissions.

Summary of consultation feedback:

This Principle received the most feedback in the consultation, which is probably reflective of the fact that this is the Principle with the most direct impact on the day-to-day working lives of staff and students and the one which involves difficult trade-offs and decisions. Overall, there was a strong desire for more activity from this Principle – whether by action on campus infrastructure (more showers and secure bike storage to encourage cycle commuting, more EV charging points) or by the University using its role as an anchor institute and a major employer in the city to influence local decisions (e.g. on public transport or safe cycle routes). There is a clear desire for more guidance on business travel but also for more support to allow people to take lower carbon transport, which is often prohibitive in terms of cost or additional time and may conflict with our duty to provide value for money when using public funds. Responses also highlighted areas of conflicting priorities – between the institutional goal of academic excellence with the Climate Plan goal of reducing business travel emissions, between policies to encourage more campus-based working with our goal of reducing commuting emissions and between the benefits of international student recruitment and travel emissions associated with international travel, which are not considered within scope but open the University up to accusations of our actions not matching our words.

CP3 Supporting a Net Zero City

Overview:

This Principle encompasses the Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission, Leeds Climate Commission and Sustainability Services and their linked partnerships and activities. These connect multiple organisations in novel ways enabling strategic partnerships and new kinds of opportunity and resource. Leeds Climate Commission is resetting its strategy for its Phase 2 stage where it will centre on evaluating Leeds climate action and working towards effecting change across city partners. University of Leeds' chairing of the Leeds Anchors Network Climate Subgroup further consolidates our leadership in seeking to coordinate organisational practices towards decarbonisation objectives.

Progress made:

An extensive number of University of Leeds/Climate Commission led strategic partnerships are working to measure progress (e.g. Leeds city dashboard to track climate action), support carbon reduction (e.g. through organisational pledges), support climate change adaptation (e.g. via local partnership adaptation toolkits) and deliver public engagement events. Plans are in train to leverage systemic changes through developing evidence, informing and influencing political decision-making, community engagement and furthering collaborations. Staff and student engagement with Leeds city have been boosted (e.g. through the Positive Impact Partnership programme which has increased its Project Officer support, and the development of school living labs with Leeds Development Education Centre).

Areas for improvement:

It would be helpful to see specific and concrete examples of (current or planned) mitigation and adaptation outcomes of the work which is being undertaken. Additionally, these may provide further learnings for others.

It would be valuable to more precisely articulate the scope for effecting low carbon infrastructural changes through partnership working (e.g. with West Yorkshire Combined Authority, local authority, higher education institutions, further education institutions, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trusts) in relation to: (i) off-site renewable development and supply (where this could be scaled up and support wider institutional transitions), (ii) public transport and active travel infrastructure and (iii) supply chains and procurement practices.

There are important points of connection with other parts of the Climate Plan, notably with Net Zero 2030, Net Zero Plus, Sustainable Travel and Sustainable Curriculum which might be further exploited to embed and support progress on specific project-based objectives. The Leeds Anchors network could be involved in some of the net zero infrastructure build opportunities and living laboratories.

Summary of consultation feedback:

The main theme of consultation responses here was that the University should be using its position to interact with and influence local decision-making in support of climate goals. The University should work with local partners to create teaching, learning and placement opportunities for students, as well as supporting those partners through access to researchers. This Principle should also aim for more community engagement (internal and external) and bottom-up approaches to be most effective.

CP4 Institutional Decision-Making

Overview:

This Principle aims to embed environmental, social and governance considerations in decision-making across all activities in the University. This Principle is consequently a cross-cutting priority that is essential to implementing the Climate Plan.

Progress made:

There have been improvements in governance structures since the last review. The recent appointments of people with responsibility for implementing and embedding this Principle across the other workstreams should help with further progress. However, this has taken some time and there has been some turnover of people in leadership roles.

Areas for improvement:

Institutional decision-making processes could be clarified and adapted to implement the Climate Plan, with practices embedded across the different Principles and different areas of the University. Problems with misaligned objectives between different bodies within the University (such as schools, research centres and services) were raised several times during the review process and reflected the need for shared responsibility for implementing the Climate Plan across the University.

Several participants in the review also cited the need for more agile decision-making processes. This could be addressed by empowering and trusting leaders at different levels of the University to make decisions that are aligned with the Climate Plan, creating a sense of shared ownership and accountability. Empowering decision-makers can contribute to a sense of momentum in implementing the Climate

Plan, provided that actors progress with a set of short, medium and long-term goals. It can give a sense of continuity of action, even if the people in leadership positions change, and ensure that progress is not dependent on individuals. Considering the climate in decisions could be treated like equality, diversity and inclusion or health and safety considerations and treated as a routine part of institutional decision-making. This could involve training to understand the wider implications of decisions for environmental, social and governance issues, a scorecard to rank potential suppliers etc.

Similarly, improving the transparency of decision-making will help build trust in these processes, including making it clear who is responsible for different decisions and how decisions are made. It is also important to share a rationale when decisions are made to change course or rethink actions; we recognise the difficulties in implementing the Climate Plan and that the steps to reach the University's targets may need to shift. Creating spaces for critical reflection and responsive decision-making will help to improve the transparency of decision-making processes and could provide opportunities for the wider University population to participate in these decisions. Spaces could include consultative workshops or feedback sessions to explain progress and determine potential next steps. It would also be beneficial to hold separate consultations on different policies instead of a single consultation over the Climate Plan to make it easier for people to engage with specific issues.

Summary of consultation feedback:

There was an appetite for extending Institutional Decision-Making beyond its current narrow focus on Environmental Value Assessments and mainstreaming it into University business as usual practice at school and faculty level, whilst also including considerations of power structures and diverse voices in decision-making.

CP5 Responsible Investment

Overview:

The Climate Plan includes a commitment to invest responsibly with a minimum ambition to invest only in companies that manage and mitigate their impacts on the climate, which is consistent with the goals of the Paris Climate Accord. In trying to achieve this goal, the University has agreed a Climate Active investment strategy, meaning that since 2019 the University's direct investments have not had any shareholding in any company whose primary business is the extraction of fossil fuel, or which derives significant revenue from oil and gas extraction.

Progress made:

Good progress has been made on enabling responsible investment. There has been positive change in areas of responsible investment that are important to the staff and students at the University. These are areas in which the University can and has made positive changes and this should be communicated to staff and students as well as externally.

Areas for improvement:

There is an easy win in being more visible internally and externally about progress made to date in a way that is positive about both former and future business relationships. There is a need to be clearer about both the positive actions the University has taken and the challenges in implementation. For example, whilst there are commercial sensitivities in tendering, once a change has been made, some high-level articulation of the process may be valuable to contextualise the pace of change. The processes undertaken to make changes to the University's investment portfolio are often not appreciated or visible to those who do not work in finance and so

explaining some of this may also help to show the efforts that have been undertaken to achieve the progress that has been made.

As well as the areas highlighted above, the University is taking a leading role in the Responsible Investment Network for Universities and is collaborating with other institutions to push for fossil fuel free money market funds. The collaboration on fossil fuel free money market funds is a critical next step in the responsible investment plans of the University. Asking the asset management industry for a wholesale change in the types of products that are available in the market is much more likely to occur through sector-wide collaboration. Taking a leadership role within this initiative is key.

One final aspect that should be made more explicit is the ways in which finance supports the other areas of the Climate Plan e.g., Net Zero by 2030 or responsible procurement. While these areas were acknowledged in discussions as being very much a part of what is going on day-to-day, the actual University KPI in the 2030 strategy or the Climate Plan is rather vague on this. A better articulation of how finance is enabling responsible investment and responsible expenditure is needed and some more granular KPIs on these aspects would be beneficial for meeting the Climate Plan objectives.

Summary of consultation feedback:

This Principle is important to our staff and students and there is a clear desire for the University to take a structured approach to moving away from investing in anything considered to have a negative social or environmental impact, as well as for the institution to support the campaign to persuade USS to do the same. There was concern that the current strategy still allows investment in fossil fuel companies – this is an area where more transparency around risks and trade-offs should be communicated clearly.

CP6 Reorienting Research and Teaching

Overview:

Reorienting teaching and research at the University of Leeds involves a strategic shift away from the extractive fossil fuel industry to focus on sustainable and renewable energy solutions, aligning with the broader climate objectives of transitioning to a low carbon future. This Principle encourages a multidisciplinary approach to integrating climate and sustainability concepts across all disciplines. Initiatives such as Geosolutions Leeds, focused on research and teaching related to the Earth's subsurface, aim to establish the University as a leader in low carbon and renewable energy research, focusing on exploring geothermal technologies, and overcoming barriers to their adoption. Concurrently, the Curriculum Redefined program is reshaping student education by phasing out traditional programmes like the MEng and BEng in Petroleum Engineering and introducing new modules in Carbon Capture Storage and Geothermal technologies. These changes are designed to foster innovation in sustainable technologies and solutions, equipping future leaders with the necessary knowledge and skills to drive environmental and social progress, thereby enhancing the University's relevance and resilience in a rapidly changing world.

Progress made:

Last year's recommendations called for sustained investment in initiatives like Geosolutions Leeds and recommended improved transparency and communication to better synchronise these reorientations with broader University activities. Even though the appointment of key positions was delayed, momentum has been sustained and Geosolutions Leeds is working well, for example delivering the geothermal energy living laboratory.

Areas for improvement:

Funding opportunities have seen limited uptake by early career researchers, though there are opportunities to strengthen and support early career researchers through mentoring. The Principle would benefit from a wider remit to examine broader teaching changes and ensure cross-cutting collaborations with other Climate Principles like Net Zero or Sustainable Curriculum are strengthened. Currently activities for this Principle are driven by Geosolutions Leeds, which specifically focuses on subsurface solutions. This Principle therefore does not fully capture wider activities where research, teaching and collaborations are focused from the Earth's surface upwards. This Principle, while making a lot of headway, illustrates a critical need for more robust institutional support, clearer guidelines on ethical engagements, and a comprehensive strategy that includes all faculties and encompasses both underground and aboveground research and teaching activities to genuinely fulfil the University's commitment to reorient research and teaching in tandem with our climate transition goals.

Summary of consultation feedback:

There was limited feedback on this Principle but the responses indicate an appetite for this work to extend beyond its current scope to encompass broader climate solutions work, and other extractive industries.

CP7 Sustainable Curriculum

Overview:

This Principle promotes the opportunity for all students to engage with sustainability and climate change as part of their degree and beyond, supporting sustainable curriculum development, student led projects and co-curricular volunteering opportunities and growing strategic networks. This Principle is delivering new activity (for example through the Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence fellowship research, the Leeds University Network for Sustainability in Higher Education (LUNSHE), new living lab projects and by growing the annual Student Sustainability Research Conference). It also works to support and embed change through wider University of Leeds curriculum development and educational engagement activities.

Progress made:

Sustainable Curriculum is successfully embedding sustainability and climate relevant teaching and experiential learning across the student education offer at Leeds and modelling good practice, additionally building wider partnership working. The Principle has secured additional personnel enabling it to extend its reach and effectiveness. It is becoming more integral to University of Leeds student education priorities and has made good progress across its diverse areas of focus.

Areas for improvement:

In order to measure progress against objectives, it would be valuable to see a more precise articulation of the ambitions of the Sustainable Curriculum Principle area and clarity over its focus, scope, objectives, timeline and measures of success, along with a summary of the baseline data required in support of this. There are several points of connection with different Principle areas (e.g. Supporting a Net Zero

City, Reorienting Research and Teaching). Sustainable Curriculum has mapped these touchpoints to ensure joined up working. It would be valuable to more clearly articulate this to show how Sustainable Curriculum works to identify, embed and support linked projects at these crossover points.

Sustainable Curriculum is seeking to develop closer ties and to provide appropriate forms of support across all faculties and this will consolidate impact and forms of engagement across the student body. Sustainable Curriculum is also seeking to ensure there is a student sustainability architect linked to each Climate Principle. There may also be opportunities to grow student engagement across each Principle area and, potentially, on cross-cutting project areas.

Tensions can arise where institutional priorities pull against sustainability priorities and climate commitments and these issues link to institutional decision-making issues highlighted throughout this report. There is limited coverage of Sustainable Curriculum in University of Leeds marketing materials so it is important to press for joined-up strategies here.

A programme of professional development is to be developed with the University's Organisational Development & Professional Learning team; this could be integral to ensuring more significant promotion and delivery of climate action training across both staff and students.

Summary of consultation feedback:

We received limited feedback on this Principle. There were comments that this needs to progress faster from planning to implementation and that it was not radical enough, although there was generally support from most about the aims and goals. It was also suggested that we should be working more with other institutions.



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