

# Sustainability Team Communication And Engagement Strategy 2022 - 2025



**OUR CARBON TARGETS** ↓ **100%**  
Net Zero by 2030

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## INTRODUCTION

The University has committed to reaching carbon net zero by 2030, recognising that environmental sustainability and climate change are probably the greatest issues facing humankind in the twenty-first century: they are a major focus of Exeter's research and teaching activities and a key responsibility for the staff, students and governors of the University. The Environment & Climate Emergency Policy Statement recognises that all employees have a responsibility to ensure that the aims and objectives of the policy are met.

The commitment to the environment and sustainability is also expressed in our University of Exeter Strategy purpose 'To use the power of our education and research to create a sustainable, healthy & socially just future', and vision 'Lead meaningful action against the climate emergency and ecological crisis'.

Despite the University of Exeter declaring a climate emergency in 2019, engagement levels across the University remain relatively low. This Communication and Engagement Strategy sets out how, over the next three years, the Communications and Engagement Lead, working with the Sustainability Team and cross University partners will work to improve this. It identifies ways to promote the objectives listed in the University's Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Statement, and outlines how student, staff and wider stakeholder support, will be encouraged through a range of events, projects and promotional activities, with the ultimate aim of driving change on an individual and systemic level required to achieve carbon net zero by 2030. This document gives a brief overview of existing communication channels and engagement activity, and looks at how these can be accessed, developed and improved through a two-year plan of proposed activity (with assessment in the third) and how success can be measured.

It should be read alongside Strategy 2030, the Arts and Culture Strategy, the University's Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Statement (2022) and the Environment and Climate Emergency Working Group White Paper (2019), which was written in response to the recognition that urgent action was needed, and an environment and climate emergency declared.

*'Climate change needs to be brought into the mainstream awareness and normalised as an undeniable part of our everyday life. Climate change needs to be incorporated into everyday narratives which people can engage with.'* Climate Communication Project 2018

## Key Message

*Everyone can make a difference in reducing the impact of climate change. Help us to achieve carbon net zero by 2030 and make the University of Exeter a more sustainable and beautiful environment to live, work and study in.*

Behavioural and cultural change amongst our stakeholders is vital to achieving our carbon reduction targets. Stakeholder engagement is a critical part of transformational behavioural change, and effective communication plays a vital role in boosting engagement. By implementing the following strategy, we can continue to meet our carbon reduction targets collectively.

## CONTEXT

The Environment and Climate Emergency Team, now the Sustainability Team, evolved from a working group which was formed after a climate emergency was declared in 2019, their remit, to tackle the issues raised in the University's Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Statement. The original target of reaching carbon net zero by 2050 was brought forward to 2030, in response to significant pressure from staff and students to tackle the climate crisis, and the University's aim to lead the higher education sector in the drive to net-zero. This new target means structural, organisational and behavioural change need to be implemented quickly, and communicating plans, targets and achievements will play a crucial part in this process.

Following the University restructuring in the 2022/23 academic year, the Sustainability Team now sits within FICS (Finance, Infrastructure and Commercial Services). The Sustainability Team have posts dedicated to waste, travel, energy, data analytics, carbon emissions, project management, procurement, benchmarking and communications and engagement. The new Faculty of Environment, Science and Economy (ESE) will lead on sustainability for academics, and the ability to work closely with this faculty and others will be required to drive change.

As stated above the Sustainability Team does not exist in isolation – sustainability has risen to the top of the University's agenda and the Sustainability Team will collaborate with colleagues across the board, to find solutions, with the aim that sustainability becomes embedded in all thinking and processes. Specialists within the team will offer guidance and act in an advisory and supportive role to help achieve this.

In writing this strategy, the Sustainability Team at Penryn, staff, students and external partners e.g. Devon County Council have been consulted.

## **COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

The following are the sustainability communication and engagement objectives, for the coming three years, Sept 2022 - Sept 2025.

### **Awareness**

- that all staff, students and other stakeholders, have growing awareness of the impact of climate change and the ecological and environmental challenges we face, and how this can be mitigated on an individual, organisational and systemic level
- that all staff and students are aware of the activities, guidance and support the Sustainability Team offer
- that the work of the Sustainability Team is promoted more widely, raising our profile within the University but also locally, nationally and internationally

### **Engagement**

- to work with partners e.g. The Guild and SU to increase engagement with activities exploring the issues around climate change through initiatives such as Go Green Week, Green Rewards, workshops, conferences and events on key topics
- to embrace a culture of collaboration – where staff and students work together to achieve the best possible outcomes
- to look at engaging in different ways and across genres to reach new audiences
- to embed engagement in educational, organisational and professional development processes

### **Behavioural Change**

- to drive behavioural change on an individual, organisational and systemic level
- to inspire confidence that individuals can make a difference
- to combat climate fatigue with a positive approach and good news stories

## Challenges

There are multiple challenges in raising awareness and encouraging action and behavioural change, when working with so many people from diverse backgrounds in a large and complex organisation.

Organisational challenges include:

- Lack of resources in the Sustainability Team and at University level
- Timetable of the academic year with the long summer break and exams
- Transient University community with new student cohorts each academic year
- Size and location of campuses
- Lost in other messaging (centralised social media and press team)
- Changing situation – up-to-date information e.g. change in date to reach carbon net zero
- Poor visual identity – logo does not say who we are reflecting confusing branding across the University – this will change with the 2022/23 rebranding.
- Sporadic activity in different departments with a lack of joined up thinking

## Individual Challenges

- Competing priorities
- Exams
- Holidays
- Workload
- Eco-anxiety
- Climate fatigue
- Unrealistic expectations

## Additional Challenges

- Complex or dry information presented in a way that people cannot relate to and don't understand.

- Unrealistic expectations – believing change can happen quickly

## **TARGET AUDIENCES**

To reach our target of carbon net zero by 2030 we need to engage as many people as possible across the University and beyond.

We need to identify key audiences in each area of the University, to not only raise awareness of and promote our activities, but also to develop and grow the network of individuals who will lead on and encourage sustainable changes in departments/faculties.

Our target audience includes:

### **Student**

- The Guild and SU
- Student Societies
- Be The Change Society
- AU (Athletics' Union)
- Students on sustainability courses
- Current and new students
- PhD students
- Prospective students
- Offer holders
- International students
- Alumni

### **Staff (as of Sep 2022)**

All staff with emphasis on the following areas:

- Student Access, Recruitment and Admissions

- Student Communications
- Residential Services
- Student Employability and Academic Success/ Exeter Awards/Green Consultants
- Internal Communications
- Environment and Sustainability
- Faculty Professional Services Leadership
- Executive Support
- Communication Leads across the new Faculties
- Financial Operations and Procurement
- Press Team
- Green Futures
- Labs
- Advocate Climate Taskforce
- Planetary Health
- Tutors (to directly reach students)
- Thematic Forums
- Arts and Culture
- IIB

**Other stakeholders**

- Exeter (local community)
- Partners (e.g. City Council, Met Office and National Trust)
- Schools/colleges
- Visitors

- League Tables (e.g. THE Impact)
- Press (regional, national and specialist)
- Funders
- Prospective parents of new students
- Press (external)
- Researchers
- Suppliers

## **COMMUNICATION**

### **Overview**

At present our main communication channels are the sustainability website, a SharePoint site, a team newsletter, staff and student newsletters, a centralised press and social media team and internal cross departmental meetings, and, in terms of environmental management, ISO14001 Environmental Management System. Pre-lockdown we had a regular in-person presence in the forum, and events on different themes each term. The Sustainability Team has not had the capacity to make the most of these channels and activity has been sporadic. We need to carry out a survey (incentivised) about how exactly students and staff want to hear from us (possibly through Green Consultants) and what they want to hear about. An existing survey by the Student Communication Team, suggested the preferred methods of communication for students were email and social media. Sustainability Team interns have advised that sending information to tutors to forward is also effective, as personal emails are always read. Communication between the Guild and the Sustainability Team needs to be improved as part of a communication drive to develop a network of key figures within the University to help raise awareness and promote activities. Other methods of communication (student radio, posters, digital screens, regular pop-up stalls) should be included as part of a comprehensive plan to increase awareness.

We need to celebrate our positive stories within the University and also via the press – sending out articles to local, regional, national and specialist publications. Between March 2021 and April 2022

around 23 stories went out about sustainability, most of which were to local or regional outlets. We should be aiming to reach a national and international audience. To achieve this we need to establish what is newsworthy, the correct channel for each story and most importantly, work closely with the Press Team.

Success can be as simple as improving communication channels internally as a team, and creating a flow of information to the Communications Lead, to ensure our good news stories are promoted. With the lack of a dedicated communication role over the last six months, staff have grown used to doing this themselves.

## **REVIEW OF CURRENT COMMUNICATION CHANNELS**

### **Sustainability Website**

This site is text heavy with too much information, (much of which is old news or projects), navigation is not straight forward, images are poor quality, and although it is a good resource for information, it is not widely used and the format does not translate to mobile phones. Google Analytics shows the most frequently visited pages are travel and waste. Many pages have only been visited once. The challenge is creating a new contemporary fresh-looking website where the relevant information is available to the different audiences that use it – e.g. visitors, students (prospective, new and existing), league tables, staff (new and existing). A danger is that some of the information (data) is too dry – and complex e.g. around carbon counting and targets, and needs to be presented in an accessible and engaging way.

The key users of the website are the 6,000 staff and 30,000 students who form our university – information needs to be presented to and for them, while not neglecting the importance of other stakeholders, who will be looking for specific information from the website (e.g. visitors)

The new website should:

- be informative and present complex information that is valuable to the intended audience, including key targets, in an accessible way
- include FAQs
- draw people in and encourage them to navigate between pages
- be updated regularly with new content to stay fresh

- have an informal element – such as a blog or podcast
- be visually attractive
- celebrate our successes while encouraging people to do more
- make effective use of SEO (Search Engine Optimisation)

### Update

A new more accessible, contemporary and user-friendly sustainability website will be launched in the 2022/23 academic year. New areas added will potentially include an energy-used dashboard, a calendar of events and a social media feed from a new sustainability social media site.

Success will be measured through monitoring traffic with Google Analytics.

### Sustainability Public SharePoint

Up until this academic year anyone could access this site for information about projects/data that the Sustainability Team were involved in – but it was barely used. Internally the most frequent users were individuals who sit on the Thematic forums (groups of staff and students focusing on different areas in the University – energy, hospitality etc. looking at ways to improve sustainability). The site was useful in that academics and professional support staff could work collaboratively by sharing documents. It needed to be formalised, so was made access by request.

### Newsletters

**Sustainability Team e-Newsletter** – third Thursday of each month – sign up details not clearly visible (near bottom of webpage)

Subscribers (as at Sep 2022)	Open rate	Click rate (i.e. open links in newsletter to further information)	New subscribers per month
550	35.6%	7%	12

### Student Newsletter

Weekly term time newsletter

Average open rate: 55%

2 versions: Devon and Cornwall

### **International Newsletter to Students**

Once a month – details unknown

### **Staff Newsletter (Weekly Bulletin)**

Weekly bulletin sent out on a Monday. Details unknown.

### **Social Media**

The Sustainability Team does not currently have its own social media platform. The main University accounts are popular but are restricted in what they post due to covering all of the University.

Main University of Exeter social media account (July 2022)

FB	103,104 Likes /109,766 Followers
Twitter	75,000 Followers
Instagram	48,400 Followers

### **Branding**

Our logo at present, although attractive, doesn't identify who we are nor effectively communicate our aims. The University is undergoing a rebrand (2022/23) and the sustainability logo needs to align with that style. We need to ask ourselves whether:

- we need a logo at all
- or if University wide activity linked to sustainability should carry the same logo i.e. the logo should not be limited to just the Sustainability Team

The Design Team are keen that faculties/departments do not have individual logos, as at present it looks messy with too many different designs. They would prefer everyone to use the main University logo to make the University's work as a whole, easily identifiable.

### **Tone**

The messaging in all communications should be focussed – *we can all make a difference*, but the tone should adapt depending on the format (e.g. social media) or which audience we are talking to

(e.g. students or academics etc.). All communication should be jargon-free and accessible, using we/they (see University of Exeter's style guide), connecting with an audience's interests and nurturing a sense of optimism (in response to climate fatigue or anxiety) and crucially, communicating facts as clearly as possible.

In 2018 [The Climate Communication Project](#) commissioned research by [Climate Outreach](#), (a team of social scientists and communication specialists, working to widen and deepen public engagement with climate change), to look at ways to engage the public with climate change. They concluded:

*'Hold people's attention, be concise, get to the crux of the communication quickly and make it interesting. Practitioners recommended using visuals, stories, narrative, humour and other creative forms of engagement to build a sense of optimism about tackling climate change. Two-way dialogue is crucial: learn together, avoid preachy, 'didactic' communication, and don't persuade forcefully.'*

As the above states, we should focus on dialogue and participation rather than listing facts which people stop listening to, and concentrate on the positive impact we can have as individuals, rather than a gloomy prognosis. No student has to listen to us – the aim is making them want to.

#### **Recommendations:**

- That the existing communication channels (newsletters and social media) continue to be used, with articles sent to the student and staff newsletters on a planned and regular basis, tying in with University activity and national and international days such as World Conservation Day and No Plastic Week
- That all communication channels be fully reviewed, considering reach and new ones explored e.g. the channels used by Residential Services who have a direct link to students.
- That students and staff are asked through an incentivised survey and our regular drop-in sessions how they want to be contacted and what they want to hear about
- That key individuals are identified within the Faculties and Professional Services to help promote activities

- That the individuals who update University of Exeter website pages and social media are identified, and encouraged to add a link to our website when adding news or updates around sustainability
- That sustainability committees are set up in each faculty to embed sustainability in all activities and procedures.
- That a comprehensive communication plan for the year is developed to incorporate a more diverse range of channels, with an emphasis on digital communication (screens, films, email, social media, podcasts) – but not excluding posters, due to the proliferation of notice boards around the University and lack of screens
- That we work closely with Green Futures and the Press Team on getting good news stories out to regional, local, national and specialist publications
- That our own social media channel is introduced. Sustainability accounts have proved popular at other universities e.g. UCL has over 3000 followers. Instagram and TikTok are the platforms most used by students. A student would be employed for a few days a month (see student campus partnerships) to create and schedule posts, which would then be automatically updated to platforms at regular intervals. Posts again should tie-in with national days such as National Earth Day. Hashtags should be simple and universal but also niche to reach different audiences e.g. #gogreen #plasticfree #nature. #nature is the 14<sup>th</sup> most popular hashtag on Instagram, whereas #bees would be more specific and reach a targeted audience. We would bring audiences to our social media sites through promotion via our regular news channels, competitions to encourage sharing, and regular updates.
- That the Sustainability Team establish a better flow of information to the Communications and Engagement Lead to ensure activities and successes are identified e.g. a mechanism (monthly one-to-one meetings etc.) be introduced to ensure opportunities aren't missed

### **Key Performance Indicators**

- Sustainability Team newsletters – increase in number of new subscribers
- More articles in regular newsletters/social media posts
- More traffic to the sustainability website

- More articles in regional, national and specialist press
- More relevant information (energy used, carbon saved) made available online in an accessible way
- More questions received via our sustainability email about areas covered by the Sustainability Team due to increased engagement
- New social media accounts – number of Likes/Followers and comments grow
- Overall – increased engagement with activities

## **ENGAGEMENT**

### **Engagement (Students)**

The University of Exeter scores 42nd (Global Top 50 and UK Top 10) in the latest (2022) Times Higher Education Impact World University Rankings. THE state that THE Impact is the only global performance league tables that assess universities against the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, The UCAS website refers to THE Impact under the heading '10 ways to choose a UK University'. No reference could be found on the UCAS website to any other sustainability league table. THE Impact is the only league table that we submit to that is optional. It can therefore be assumed that those taking part actively do so and submit their 'best evidence', therefore providing an excellent comparator of our performance.

In addition, Exeter holds 6th (1st class status) in The People & Planet League (2022/23), an annual ranking of UK Universities based on environmental and ethical performance.

Although impressive, this has not been reflected in student engagement which historically has been low (as indicated through Green Rewards sign-ups and attendance at Go Green Week), the passion and enthusiasm demonstrated by a small but committed number of students, perhaps misleading.

Lack of engagement over the last few years is largely due to Covid and lockdown, and it will take some time to readjust, but we also need to continue to use and develop online channels of engagement that took off during this period. Hybrid (online and in-person) events have the advantage of being accessible, cost effective and sustainable and are a great way of reaching an

audience from a wider field. Students tend to respond better to peer influence, so we will be looking at increasing peer to peer promotional events.

### **Overview of Current Engagement Tools**

**Welcome Week** – at present the first point of contact at present with students. Two days of activity for new students on St Luke's and Streatham Campus and a Welcome Fair at Penryn.

**Digital Engagement Platform - Green Rewards** – incentivised app/website that encourages people to make small changes to live more sustainably, open to all University of Exeter staff and students. As of July 2022, this has 1198 members: 762 staff and 429 students. Not surprisingly it is students studying subjects related to the environment who are signing up in greater numbers. A review of activity and how staff and students engage with this platform, is being carried out in September 2022 by Green Consultants. A new University wide app is being developed to improve the student experience and this will be looked at to see whether it could include a similar program to Green Rewards.

**Green Consultants** – facilitated learning and practical hands-on experience for those interested in pursuing a career with an environmental or sustainability focus. About ten students a year undertake projects. There are plans to grow this scheme with a new post in place by mid-2023 to manage it and a target of 100 students participating each year.

**Green Futures Student Solutions** (introduced in 2022) – student-led innovative projects (funded by the University) that demonstrate environmental protection and carbon reduction for initiatives that are seen as a high priority for students. In 2022, 5 students took part in projects e.g. a comprehensive whole-life carbon calculation model for our supply chain.

**Grand Challenges** – Grand Challenges is a weeklong summer programme in which Exeter undergraduates work together in interdisciplinary research groups, alongside some of our top academics, to tackle some of the greatest challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Working with people from different disciplinary backgrounds, students carry out creative and scientific projects to address key themes of climate and environmental change. In 2022 about 160 students participated in environmental challenges.

**Societies Sustainability Alliance** – the SSA was a group of around 26 University of Exeter societies that worked with the University Sustainability Team to respond to the global climate emergency.

Engagement has been low over the last year. As of November 2022, the SSA has been disbanded and the Sustainability Team are in dialogue with Be The Change about how best to support societies be more sustainable.

**Go Green Week** – Joint staff and student weeklong activity focusing on sustainability, jointly organised through the Students' Guild and the Sustainability Team (tying in with the SDG Teach In). Engagement in 2022 both in person and online was low. This is possibly linked to not enough lead in time to promote it properly, reflecting the time pressure on staff.

**Thematic Forums** – a mixture of academics, support staff and students who come up with projects around sustainability, such as the biodiversity forum which looks at improving biodiversity across the campuses. These were disbanded as of Feb 2023 and a new structure will replace it, details to be confirmed.

**Volunteering** – there are volunteering opportunities for students and staff, with links to the relevant organisations listed on the sustainability website – although there is at present no way of knowing about take-up. Volunteering can be linked to the Exeter Award (an extra and co-curricular employability achievement award for current undergraduate and taught postgraduate students) and also captured as an activity within Green Rewards.

### **Recommendations**

The challenge is engaging the broad body of students who have other priorities, are overloaded with information from different sources, and with so much happening on campus, are time short. We need to consider the most effective way of reaching them. Other barriers are staff workload, organisational time and lack of urgency, which means at present, events are often planned without a long enough lead-in time for effective promotion. Hybrid working could also be a factor with more time spent at home than on campus, so less engagement with what is going on. A comprehensive review of current activity and its reach needs to be undertaken, the results of which will feed into more targeted events and activities in the future.

- A cohesive plan of events and activity, developed with key partners, should be programmed with a long lead-in time, and the activity promoted to students and staff via a calendar of events and activity on the website, with further promotion through social media, newsletters and other university channels (see above). Events should be regular and themed

to tie-in with national and international days – all events should be hybrid (in person & on-line)

- More events should encompass Penryn and be promoted across all campuses
- Alternative ways of engaging students (and staff) need to be explored such as cross genre activity to reach a new audience – e.g. through the arts and through student publications such as *Exeposé*
- Promotion of activities should include a ‘feelgood factor’ – combatting eco-anxiety and fatigue over issues that seem out of people’s control
- Students should promote to other students – on the basis that peer influence is more effective
- We need to work more closely with student societies (activities and sustainability within each society)
- In working on the above, it is crucial that we consider the Sustainability Team’s capacity in terms of organising, developing and promoting activities on this scale, while also carrying out routine day-to-day tasks

### **The Student Journey**

In 2022 The Communications and Engagement Lead worked with three committed and enthusiastic interns, looking at student engagement and considering the student journey.

It became clear that there is regular University communication with students which we could tap into, and we are missing opportunities to introduce issues around sustainability early on. Also it became clear that students get a lot of their information from two main sources. Their tutors and social media (Instagram and TikTok)

### **Recommendations**

The strategy is to map out the student journey (starting while they are considering taking up a place), identifying the regular communication they receive from the University at each stage (emails, prospectus etc.) and ensuring the sustainability message is included, where at all relevant, with the aim that it becomes standardised and students grow used to seeing it.

This includes:

- UCAS fairs – the first contact we have with prospective students. Stalls should include information about sustainability, and talks to students should emphasise what we are doing on campus and the many opportunities there are to get involved e.g. Green Consultants
- University prospectus - at present we have one mention in the prospectus for winning the Guardian Sustainability Award in 2020. We need to negotiate an agreement to use the prospectus to introduce key points around sustainability and climate change, what is happening on campus and how it relates to students. This issue is becoming increasingly important to students. According to a THE (Times Higher Education) report (May 2022 – based on 3,151 International prospective students) 87% of students agreed that universities have an important role to play in enhancing the ethics of sustainable citizenship in their students and 32% viewed climate action as the highest priority. 71% were aware of the UN's (United Nation's) SDGs. Therefore, including more info about climate change and the actions the University is taking, could be seen as a good marketing tool for student recruitment
- Alternative Prospectus – there is a new prospectus being developed which will have student led content
- Send an intro and a link to the sustainability website to students who have accepted a place at Exeter University, with key information around waste and travel and the many ways they can get involved
- Working closely with Residential Services – who's strategic aim is to work with the Sustainability Team in supporting the University's emergency climate goals and to improve communication to users of the buildings (staff and students) on sustainable methods. Their communication channels include:
  - i. Accommodation website
  - ii. Accommodation blog
  - iii. Accommodation Facebook page
  - iv. Direct emails to students living in residences
  - v. Plasma screens in residences

vi. Partner apps and communications channels (UPP)

vii. Residence Life Team social channels

- To be included in the welcome student pack with practical information regarding waste/recycling and travel, with a summary about the carbon net zero target and the plans in place to achieve it
- The Sustainability Team to give a presentation as part of Welcome week on what the University has achieved so far. Looking at the Welcome timetable last year, there were many talks that were not academic related (sports and arts and culture) and it seems odd, that with sustainability considered so important across the board, we are not included in this programme. The Sustainability Team's involvement could be as part of a conference (engaging both students and staff) with key notes speakers (scientist, staff within different faculties as well as the team) working with organisations like Agile Rabbit (Exeter University based) who make events informal and engaging
- Look at working with students through student campus partnerships, so employed students can promote activities to fellow students, either with pop-up stalls, talks or through social media
- Consider each stage of the student year, and programme events accordingly to reach the most people
- Consider in terms of national and international promotion - engagement with Exeter alumni
- Develop a closer relationship with The Guild, SU and student societies.

## Education

To have a real impact and encourage behavioural changes, sustainability needs to be embedded in our curriculum across all subjects. Participating in [Responsible Futures](#) would begin to make that happen. It is a whole-institution supported change programme with accreditation which embeds sustainability across all aspects of student learning.

The accreditation mark is externally assessed and audited by students. Partnerships between student unions and institutions are encouraged and facilitated through a structured framework of

criteria to encourage action on embedding sustainability, inclusive of climate justice, into formal and informal learning.

Partnerships are helped to realise institutional changes needed to develop a learning experience, which supports graduates to develop the knowledge and understanding, skills and attributes, to actively contribute to a socially just response to the climate crisis.

## **Update**

The budget to implement this scheme was approved in October 2022.

## **Resources**

**Climate Companion Pack** – a good educational resource for students, although the film needs to be updated (targets are out of date – due to be edited for Welcome Week 2023/24) and it would benefit from increased promotion.

## **ENGAGEMENT (STAFF)**

There are over 500 researchers and professionals working across climate change and the environment at the University, including some of the world's leading scientists. The Green Futures campaign and website pulls much of this research together into one place, and looks at how the University is collaborating with businesses, influencing national and international policies, and working with people and communities, who are being affected by environment and climate change to co-create solutions. Peter Lefort, Impact and Partnership Development Officer for IIB has just published (July 2022) information about the Green Futures Networks, which looks at how Green Futures can help with engagement and events.

## **Advocate Climate Taskforce**

Academic leaders work with the Provost, Registrar and Director of Sustainability, in the role of advocates for the environment and climate emergency. Advocates represent their College/Campus or a particular theme, mobilise their College/Campus Climate and Environment Action Plans, and attend regular Advocate Climate Taskforce (ACT) meetings led by the Provost and Senior Academics, where they progress challenging and transformational change agenda items for the

University. There are plans to expand this into Professional Services areas, following the University restructure in September 2022.

### **Digital Engagement Platform (Green Rewards)**

(See above) 755 staff are signed up. Again we need to work out how to reach staff in an engaging way, and to encourage and promote activity which is effective. Participation at Penryn is particularly low. We also need to work with Green Rewards and look at activities that include a mechanism to better capture data, while making it as simple for participants to take part as possible. At present, we have no other way of capturing individual activity. We are looking at expanding the programme, so AU teams can compete against each other on the number of Green Points earned. Aligning activities and improving data from this platform can help to support benchmark assessment (i.e. League Tables).

### **SDG Accord/ Teach In**

The University of Exeter signed the [Sustainable Development Goals Accord](#) in 2019, committing to reporting on the SDGs on an annual basis and beginning the process of embedding the SDGs in the curriculum, research and wider activities at the university. In addition, we also participate in the annual [SDG Teach In](#) a national campaign with an aim to put the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the heart of education. The campaign calls upon educators to pledge to include the SDGs within their teaching across these weeks. 2022 was their most successful year yet with regards to general participation in the Teach In.

Exeter held 1st place position in 2021 and achieved 2nd place in Educators Pledged and 5th place in Students Reached in 2022. The SDG Teach In has historically taken place during one week in spring. The 2023 Teach In will span the entire month of March.

Individual students, researchers, academics and operational staff can sign up to make a personal and professional commitment to playing their part in advancing sector performance.

### **Green Gown (external organisation)**

The Green Gown Awards recognise the exceptional sustainability initiatives being undertaken by universities and colleges across the world. University staff are encouraged to enter and in July 2022

the University was shortlisted for the Student Engagement Award with Green Futures - Students Solutions. This is a great way of promoting what we do on an international platform.

**Green Week** – see above under students

### **Recommendations**

- That existing activity be reviewed, analysing scope and reach, and how these activities can be improved and developed to engage more people and capture outcomes
- That a communication plan is drawn up for each strand
- That new hybrid events be devised to engage staff and students – on a regular basis – e.g. a series of talks, an annual conference, events pop-up stalls, mini-one day festivals (sustainable food etc.), cross genre activity (see arts festival) across all campuses and further afield
- That we work more with the community – stressing climate change is not a localised issue

### **Key Performances Indicators**

- An increase in staff who sign up to activities such as Green Rewards and SDG Teach-In
- More staff signing up to the sustainability newsletter
- Increased attendance at regular sustainability events
- Increased activity in the community e.g. schools, local networking events e.g. The Exeter Sustainability Awards
- Increased awareness of the SDGs (shown through visitor numbers to the website, and engagement with Pledges/SDG Teach In
- Increase in sustainable commuting and recycling, reductions in waste etc.
- Reduction in carbon footprint, tCO<sub>2</sub>e/head as staff become more environmentally aware

### **Long term plans for Engagement (University, local, regional, national, international)**

There are cross departmental individuals in academia and professional services who are working with external partners (Exeter City of Literature, the City Council, etc.) to increase awareness of the issues around climate change through cross genre activity; creating work (poetry, art, storytelling) which has been showcased at COP 26 (Glasgow) and COP 27 (Egypt). Instead of duplicating this

activity, the aim is to build and expand on previous activity and create a festival in 2023 to run alongside COP 28 (United Arab Emirates) making it city-wide (including Penryn), and a hybrid festival, so it is fully accessible and allows work to be showcased on an international basis and speakers/ participants to come from a wider field.

Update as of March 2023: Due to staff capacity this is on hold.

### **Professional Development (Staff)**

Sustainability and climate change education should be included as a mandatory part of the induction process for all staff. Whether we use existing resources (see below) or develop a new shorter resource, depends on budget and time constraints and also University policy on what can be included as a mandatory induction. Any training resource should also be made available to students.

### **Sustainability Induction**

The Sustainability Team have developed an online LearnUpon course, available to all staff and mandatory for those departments within the scope of the Environmental Management System (ISO14001). The course contains two modules, the first providing an overview of the University's response to the climate emergency and the second focussed on key themes, such as energy, waste & water.

### **Climate Literacy Training**

A programme is being developed by Marshalls E-Learning but at present it is too long (8 hours) – we are looking at ways this can be condensed into shorter sessions. There are also questions about whether this is voluntary and the complexity of making it mandatory.

As of 2023 this is being looked at by Professional Development with a view of adapting it. Although this would be a useful tool in educating staff about climate change if incorporated into PFD, we also need to look at encouraging behaviour change using inventive and alternative methods such as cross genre activity, events and positive messaging around campus etc.

### **Look and Feel Campaign**

At present, despite sustainability rising to the top of the agenda at the University, there is little on campus to inform students, staff and visitors what is going on. This is partly due to Covid and a lack of a dedicated communication's role in the team until May 2022, and partly due to the increased use of social media, which is a cheap and effective way of promoting activity direct to people's phones. As a result, there is not enough visibility of the University's activities and projects linked to sustainability around campus, and little information about what people can do to reduce their own carbon footprint.

We need increased visibility across the campuses so that students, staff and visitors are aware of University activities and what we are doing to reach our target of carbon net zero by 2030, but also include motivational information that inspires and encourages behavioural change.

The challenge is the contradiction in creating a greater visual presence where resources have to be produced, and our aim of creating and using less. We need to consider what any promotional materials are made of, where they are sourced, how long they will last and how they are used – and whether the messaging on them is long term, as well as their potential to engage. The Communication and Engagement Lead will consult with relevant stakeholders including students, Internal Comms and the Grounds Team on creating a striking and constant visual presence on all campuses.

Update: A Look and Feel campaign was approved for funding in March 2023 and will be delivered over the next to academic years.

## **PLAN**

The section below outlines a two-year plan of communication and engagement and how it will be assessed – with a full evaluation in the third year which will feed into future developments – it sits alongside a more detailed Communications and Engagement [Calendar of Activity](#) which is a live document of all activity, and tracks communication channels, reach, key messages and audiences.

## **Delivery**

The following plan includes a timeframe for delivery, but the scope of the project is too large for one role. Various options should be considered depending on budget:

- Reduce the scope of the plan
- Look at increasing staff levels with an emphasis on engagement
- Look at increasing student involvement in terms of campus partnerships and projects such as Green Consultants
- Look at more partnership work e.g. with the Sustainability Festival acting in an advisory role while the project is led by students and the Guild e.g. the new Arts Development Manager

## **YEAR 1 2022 - 23**

### **Actions**

#### **Communication**

- Communication channels fully reviewed considering reach and regularity
- Communication network within the University researched and developed
- Clear communication mechanism within the Sustainability Team implemented
- Incentivised student/staff survey (how they want to hear from us and what they want to know)
- Website redeveloped
- Student journey comprehensively mapped out with key communication points identified
- Clear and regular communication with the Guild, SU and Student Societies
- Rebranding considered in line with University rebranding
- Sustainability website redesigned to include calendar and user friendly tools
- Social Media introduced
- Communication digital channels developed (screens/film etc.)
- Resources updated (e.g. Climate Companion Pack)
- Liaison with Press Office/Green Futures about regional/national stories

- Look and Feel Campaign drawn up after consultation with stakeholders and implementation started in 2022/23 academic year

### **Key Performance Indicators**

- Website visited more frequently (Google Analytics)
- Introduction of Social Media platforms – steady increase in number of Followers/Likes
- Improved flow of information between team/ departments/ faculties/Guild
- Increase of communication outlets (digital screens, social media, prospectus etc.)
- An increase in internal and external articles about sustainability
- Greater visual presence on campuses (screens etc.)

### **YEAR 1 2022 – 23**

#### **Actions**

#### **Engagement**

- Regular themed hybrid activity, programmed with partners in line with national and international sustainability days (e.g. World Earth Day) taking place on all campuses– a calendar of events regularly updated for the new website
- Existing activity and projects (Go Green Week/Green Rewards) assessed and reviewed
- Data captured on reach
- Education (Responsible Futures) integrated into curriculum
- Climate Literacy training modules/course developed for students and staff
- More talks/workshops by team/students on sustainability for staff and students
- Student campus partnerships explored with view to students running stalls/social media

### **Key Performance Indicators**

- Increased engagement by students and staff with growing numbers attending events
- More students and staff signing up to apps and newsletters

- Robust sustainability activity evidence in place and publicly available to allow League Table assessment
- Climate literacy training in place for staff and students

## **YEAR 2 2023 – 24**

### **Actions**

#### **Communication**

- Rebranding carried across all promotional tools
- Sustainability message included in regular University communication with students
- More interactive copy created (stories on Instagram) and more video content and podcasts introduced, to encourage engagement and sharing and build up a following across all social media sites
- Increased regular visual presence on campuses (digital screens/posters)
- Network of key individual across faculties and departments etc. established
- Offer feedback loop for students to comment on sustainable action they'd like to see

#### **Key Performance Indicators**

- Branding instantly recognisable as the Sustainability Team
- Higher visual presence on campuses
- Social Media followers growing
- Increased traffic to website
- Growing sign up to newsletters

## **YEAR 2 – 2023 – 24**

### **Actions**

#### **Engagement**

- Assess and develop 2022 events and activities

- Green Rewards or equivalent app refined and improved in terms of capturing data and increased activity
- Green Consultants – growing number of students participating
- Regular pop-up stalls in forum etc. run by students
- Cross campus/Exeter Sustainability Arts festival to time with COP 28
- Growing regular timetable of in-person and online events
- More activity going out into the community with external partners

### **Key Performance Indicators**

- Growing numbers of staff, students and the wider community attending events online and in-person
- Regular presence in the Forum
- Increased number of people signing up to Green Rewards or equivalent app/website

### **YEAR 3 – 2024 – 25**

Assessment of communication and engagement activities, the results of which will inform the ongoing programme.