# Teaching and learning for sustainability

Ensuring the sustainability of our planet is the biggest challenge facing humanity in the 21st Century. Sustainability cuts across all subject areas and requires a truly interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning.

**Our commitment**

Launched in 2021, Sustainable Futures brings together the unique depth and breadth of internationally leading research at The University of Manchester and builds on the University's track record of successful interdisciplinary working, to produce integrated and truly sustainable solutions to urgent environmental challenges.

The University Academic Lead for Sustainability Teaching and Learning, Professor Jennifer O'Brien has been appointed to lead 'Skills, as part of Sustainable Futures, with the aim to underpin all of our research, teaching and operations with Education for Sustainable Development working across the University and beyond. We will empower and equip all of our staff, students and our partners in communities, industry, businesses, schools, councils, to name but a few, to affect change for a better world. Through Sustainable Futures we are mapping our teaching and research in and around sustainability across all of our Faculties to identify gaps, synergies and opportunities. We are identifying and sharing training and good practice opportunities for colleagues and partners.

Through our teaching, volunteering, programmes and projects, we are providing our students with the opportunities to gain understanding and experience to tread lightly on our planet. We will equip students with knowledge and experience to positively contribute to our world as professionals, leaders and citizens of tomorrow. We will showcase the positive impact of our research that is addressing some of the world's most fundamental sustainability challenges.

Our commitment to education for sustainability is outlined in:

- From Manchester for the World, The University's Strategy (2025)
- Our Environmental Sustainability Strategy (2023)
- Our Social Responsibility Framework (2026)

We also have a dedicated academic lead in this area, Jennifer O'Brien.

**Leader in Green Skills**

The University of Manchester has been invited to lead a pioneering global programme designed to empower education's role in the transition towards net zero. In recognition of its longstanding commitment to sustainability, the University will represent the UK as one of the founding members of the International Green Learning and Skills Accelerator, a Times Higher Education initiative set up as part of the United Nations' Green Jobs for Youth Pact.

The Pact is run by three UN agencies – the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Labour Organization and the UN Children's Fund, UNICEF - and was established to help tackle the green skills deficit and "advance the just transition to a low carbon and circular economy".

**Governance and review**
We review and report on the progress of the integration of education for sustainability through the Environmental Sustainability Committee.

**Supporting academic staff**
Support for academic staff is provided through

- Our New Academics Programme includes a section on teaching for sustainability.
- Seminars
- Guidance and engagement with staff
- Case studies
- Funding available for embedding sustainability into teaching.
- Highlighting School, Faculty and Research team projects for sustainable development through Sustainable Futures.
- Recognition through the Making a Difference Awards outstanding teaching innovation in social responsibility category.

**Trade Union representatives**
John Vass De Zomba is a trade union representative for the University and College Union (UCU). He sits on our Sustainability Action Group as well as our Environmental Sustainability Committee where education for sustainability is regularly discussed.

Lydia Meryll is a trade union representative for the University and College Union (UCU). She is an active member of the Climate Network where education for sustainability is regularly discussed.

**Opportunities for students**
We provide applied project opportunities to our students through our University Living Lab. Examples of these can be seen in our featured reports. Through the University Living Lab students have the opportunity to affect change on campus, for example through research to support our now highly successful Bee Cup, and to frame our guidance for more sustainable giveaways at events.

Students from all degree disciplines can also take credit-bearing units through our University College for Interdisciplinary Learning (UCIL). UCIL introduces students to new topics and ways of thinking, tackling the key questions facing society in the 21st century. Current courses related to sustainability include

- Creating a Sustainable World: 21st Century challenges and the Sustainable Development Goals – which is also available to postgraduate students
- Climate change and society.
- Crisis of Nature: Issues in Environmental History.

As part of the Ethical Grand Challenges Programme, all students are invited to take part in our award winning Sustainability Challenge. Students learn more about sustainability and how to make the most of opportunities while at Manchester to help build a more sustainable future.

Through our Stellify Award, students have the chance to take on a sustainability leadership role by becoming a Sustainability Champion. Our student Sustainability Champions have partnered with cross University stake holders to promote more sustainable moves from University Halls of Residence, have led activities aligned with the United Nation's priorities such as upcycling for UNEP's Zero Waste Day, and mapped biodiversity on campus and in our nearby communities with iNaturalist.

As a proud holder of a NCCPE Platinum Award for Public Engagement our students enhance and promote research led work to enhance sustainability such as at our Universally Manchester Festival and at the launch of our co-constructed community led exhibition about air quality at Manchester Museum, Silent Skies and through our designated Green Classroom that is our on campus community allotment.

Through our Civic University Agreement students have the opportunity to engage in a real world living lab alongside interdisciplinary students from all five higher education institutions across Great Manchester. In our now annual event, students address challenges set by external partners in line with GMCA's Environment Plan during Green Careers Week in November. In 2024, some of our students took their research to the Green Summit, in 2025 they presented at SOS-UK's Responsible Futures conferences, and in Summer 2025 a student will share the methodology of the approach at Advance HE's summer conference If you might be interested in this opportunity for your students, please contact Jen.

We have a number of massive online open courses (MOOCs) relating to sustainability that anyone can take for free, wherever they are in the world. All that is needed is an internet connection:

- Managing Responsibly: Practicing Sustainability, Responsibility and Ethics.
- Our Earth: Its Climate, History and Processes.
- Protecting the World: Introducing Corrosion Science and Engineering.
- Water Supply and Sanitation Policy in Developing Countries Part 1: Understanding Complex Problems
- Water Supply and Sanitation Policy in Developing Countries Part 2: Developing Effective Interventions.

**Communicating research**

The University supports and highlights research projects that contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals in a number of ways, including a dedicated website.

**Fieldwork**

Fieldwork is integral to many disciplines across the University. We are working with our students and colleagues to ensure that we undertake fieldwork in the most sustainable way. Geography within the School of Environment, Education and Development, for example, co-constructed the Royal Geographical Society Principles for Undergraduate Fieldcourses to support departments to develop their fieldwork programmes in ways which maximise the benefits of field education and minimise the disbenefits. This includes questions of inclusivity and accessibility for all and ethics as well as carbon and environmental impacts. A number of working groups across the University are considering their fieldwork. If you would like to discuss your fieldwork or join this work please contact Jen on Jennifer.obrien@manchester.ac.uk .

**Mapping and audit**

We audit and highlight research and teaching related to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Comprehensive research has been concluded looking at all of our research and teaching, mapping and aligning them to the SDGs. A report on these findings can be found on our social responsibility website.

Students and staff from The School of Medical Health Sciences have completed the Planetary Health Reportcard by mapping our curriculum, research, and policies against 50 metrics.

**Assessing student awareness of sustainability**

Since 2016 we have rolled out sustainability awareness and literacy through the carbon literacy project. Examples include:

- Carbon literacy training and awareness for staff and students in our laboratories;
- Carbon literacy training and awareness for staff in our University Museum.

In 2024 we committed to work with Sulitest on their pioneer programme to use TASK assessment across specific degree programmes; The Sulitest Awareness Tool which we are rolling out further in 2025-26.

Through the Green Skills Working Group of the Civic University Agreement: we have undertaken comprehensive mapping of our green skills provision and delivery across all programmes in conjunction with the five higher education institutions of Greater Manchester and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

**Criteria for the acceptance of funding, donations and gifts**

The University has a Gift Acceptance Policy. This states:

*"The University has an obligation to its staff, students and wider stakeholders to take reasonable steps to ensure that the funding sources for philanthropic donations, and the purposes to which those donations are applied, are consistent with the University's principles, values, mission and goals".*

With this in mind, included in our principles, values, mission and goals is: "We will be recognised globally for the excellence of our people, research, learning and innovation, and for the benefits we bring to society and the environment".

We also have Ethical Fundraising Policies for The Whitworth Art Gallery and the Manchester Museum.

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