



Sustainability Progress Report

Outcome requested:	Council is asked to consider the Sustainability Progress Report.
Executive Summary:	This paper serves to provide key strategic updates to Council on sustainability actions taken over the last academic year to date. Council is asked to note progress for sustainability in two key areas: Operations, and Education, as well as supporting engagement and research activity. Work is ongoing to surface Queen Mary activity aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within a public-facing SDG report to be released in September, supporting our submission to the Times Higher Education Impact rankings, which will be shared with Council when available. In particular, research activity, aligned with sustainability, will be surfaced and showcased. Our SDG microsite, also supporting the submission, will act as a front door to activity across the SDGs.
QMUL Strategy: strategic aim reference and sub-strategies [e.g., SA1.1]	Responds to the Strategy 2030 mid-point review ambition to drive a whole university approach to sustainability.
Internal/External regulatory/statutory reference points:	Queen Mary Sustainability Action Statement Queen Mary Sustainability Development Goal Microsite
Strategic Risks:	Strategic objective 15. Failure to understand and respond to the risks and opportunities associated with climate change; failure to transition the university's activities, responding to changing requirements and societal expectations; failure to ensure our research and education meet future sustainability needs.
Equality Impact Assessment:	N/A
Subject to prior and onward consideration by:	Progress review by Queen Mary Sustainability Committee, as well as reporting from and consultation with teams responsible for activity within the three pillars: Education, Research and Innovation and Operations.
Confidential paper under FOIA/DPA	Unrestricted
Timing:	September 2025 – August 2028
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Date:	02/07/2026

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Sustainability Progress Report July 2025/26

Overview

The refresh of Strategy 2030 presented an opportunity to affirm Queen Mary's commitment to combating climate risks and set out an approach on climate action consistent with Strategy 2030 and authentically Queen Mary. This report presents a high-level summary of progress in setting this direction and summarises our performance against key environmental objectives and commitments outlined in our Sustainability Action Statement. Prioritisation of actions was defined by the Sustainability Committee following approval of the Sustainability Action Statement and has been reviewed as needed. Progress updates are requested and provided to the committee on a quarterly basis as a minimum, with operational KPIs monitored on a regular basis dependent on metric. After the end of the financial year, priorities will be reviewed and adjusted where needed, in line with the Sustainability Action Statement review process.

This report will focus on operations and education progress. A holistic update spanning work across all pillars, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), will be delivered in a public facing SDG report, to be shared with Council when available; this will support our Times Higher Education Impact Ranking submission in November.

A summary of the key points included are below:

Pillar	Headlines
Research and Innovation	• LEAF updates
Education	• Sustainability and curriculum 2030 • Researching Sustainably Module • Foundations in SustainAbility short course
Operations	• Carbon footprint and carbon net zero commitment and Sustainable Travel Policy • Waste management • Energy and Carbon Reduction Plan and energy saving updates • Water consumption • Responsible investment policy
Engagement	• The 2026 Climate Action Week was the biggest sustainability-focused week that the University has run, with support from Queen Mary Students' Union, with over 20 different events.

KPMG audit

In September 2023, an audit carried out by KPMG identified key areas for improvement, which have now been addressed and exceeded through the development of the Sustainability Action Statement, detailed below, and supporting work. In summary:

- **Strategy and Action Statement** - Sustainability Action Statement has now been in place for a year, with the status of an enabling plan – it has three core pillars: Operations, Research and Education (with engagement as a facilitating function.)
- **Sustainability KPIs** - Queen Mary has 13 KPIs associated with Strategy 2030 and supported by a Strategic Risk Register. Sustainability does not have a distinct KPI, however, it is included within the Strategic Risk Register. The Action Plan that has been approved includes high-level objectives across the three pillars, with workstream leads due to develop distinct KPIs to facilitate, direct and measure progress beneath each pillar.
- **Sustainability Governance, Committee** –The Sustainability Committee continues to operate, reporting directly to SET.

Research and Innovation

Headline objective: “Promote adoption of sustainable research practices when undertaking research.”

Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF)

Participation in the LEAF programme has continued to increase over the past year. At the time of writing, there are 127 (over 50% increase from last year) labs across all three Faculties signed up to LEAF, with 76 having already received LEAF certification (160% increase from last year) - 5 Gold awards (including the university's first 2 for research labs), 24 Silver, and 47 Bronze awards. This year, we also introduced peer-to-peer auditing for lab members who have achieved at least LEAF Silver award and attended LEAF auditor training.

LEAF is one of only two internationally recognised lab sustainability frameworks (alongside [My Green Lab](#)). Developed with researchers, it is user-friendly, adaptable to various lab settings, and promotes peer learning. It integrates sustainability into all aspects of research, from purchasing to waste management and research quality.

Education

Headline Objective: “As a graduate attribute, we will embed sustainability into the formal curriculum, delivered as part of the education student experience enabling plan and principles of program design.”

Embedding sustainability

Embedding sustainability into our education offering and training will be central to becoming a leader within sustainability, being seen as an innovator and resource for addressing the [Green Skills gap](#). The Sustainability Curriculum Action Network (SCAN), led by Queen Mary Academy and the Sustainability Strategic Engagement Lead, is currently being refreshed, focusing on creating a central hub for best-practice sharing. In June 2026, Senate approved a refreshed list of four graduate attributes for all Queen Mary undergraduates. ‘Leaders of tomorrow’ focuses on global responsibility, adaptability, technological and AI capability, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and wider sustainability. These will be applicable to all students.

Headline objective: “Ensure that students and staff have access to training and opportunities to learn about sustainability.”

ISEP training

The University has retained the [Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals \(ISEP\)](#) Training Centre certification after the first year's re-assessment to deliver the following courses as CPD for staff:

Introduction to Net Zero, Environmental Sustainability Skills for the Workforce, and Environmental Sustainability Skills for Managers. Two “Introduction to Net Zero” courses have been delivered this financial year, with 21 attendees in total.

Being an approved ISEP training centre affords us the unique opportunity to upskill staff across the university in-house, with the potential to expand professional development opportunities to meet the growing need for green skills across all sectors, if/when budget allows.

Researching Sustainably module - Responsible Research and Innovation course

The interactive Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) training course has been designed to equip PGR students, Early Career Researchers, and interested staff with practical skills and critical thinking tools to engage with Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) principles in real-world contexts. The course was launched in March this year by the Joint Research Management Office (JRMO) as a collaboration between various teams, with a module on Researching Sustainably delivered by the Sustainability team. The module blends theoretical sustainability concepts relevant to research with live, online, discussion-based tasks to foster engagement, learning, and ethical reflection. We are planning to deliver another session next year, as participants found this year’s workshops useful.

Foundations in SustainAbility

Grounded in the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals, the “Foundations in SustainAbility” short course was co-designed by staff and students across the university. It aims to deliver an introduction to sustainability, applicable to all students and staff and won an award for Educational Excellence at the Queen Mary Education Awards.

In September 2025, the Foundations in SustainAbility content was introduced to the BSc Accountancy Flying Start Year 1 cohort (52 students) as part of the BUS168 Academic and Professional Awareness module. The module evaluation results were very positive. All students who completed the survey rated the module highly, with an overall score of 3.4 out of 4.

In today’s rapidly evolving business environment, sustainability is no longer a “nice-to-have” but a critical driver of long-term organisational success. For our Flying Start students, who are our future Associated Chartered Accountant (ACA) qualified accountants, this shift presents significant opportunities. Whether they pursue careers in professional practice or within organisations, sustainability and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations are becoming integral to their roles.

To reflect this, the Foundations in SustainAbility content has also been embedded within the BUS4025F Law, Sustainability and Ethics module. This is designed to equip students, as the next generation of professionals, with the strategic insight and technical expertise required to lead sustainability and ESG initiatives effectively.

The Foundations in SustainAbility programme comprises a self-directed learning series offering up to 100 hours of high-quality learning resources, enabling students to develop both foundational knowledge and practical skills.

Participation and feedback:

- Total number of students enrolled: 52
- Number of students participating in evaluation: 51
- Overall module evaluation score: 3.4/ 4

Headline objective: Continue to enhance the employability of our students in the environmental sustainability sector.

ISEP employability benefits

As an [Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals \(ISEP\)](#) partner, we can also better maximise the benefits for students by getting eligible degree programmes approved by ISEP, providing students with networking opportunities, additional learning resources, and events/webinars to better understand key sustainability challenges in today's world. Once students have completed their ISEP approved degree, they are eligible to become a professional member using the suffix GradISEP and fast-track to Practitioner Membership. We currently have two courses approved: BSc Environmental Science and BSc Environmental Science with Business Management.

Student hackathons

Working with the Queen Mary Careers team, we are aligning hackathons delivered to Queen Mary Students with the UN Sustainability Development Goals. After a successful hackathon in Climate Action Week, in partnership with IBM, our next hackathon focused on sustainable transport solutions. Partnered with Campaign for Better Transport, it was delivered in June.

Operations

Headline objective: Support the government to achieve Net Zero Carbon by 2050

Carbon emissions and management

Data available for our carbon emissions currently covers up to the 2024/25 academic year and is summarised below. Carbon footprint data for the 2025/26 academic year will be reported on in early autumn, and we expect to see a decrease in scope 1 and 2 emissions.

Queen Mary has carbon footprint data for Scope 1 (direct emissions, from on-site gas and fuel use and campus fleet) and 2 emissions (indirect emissions, from purchased electricity) going back to 2018/19, which is our initial baseline year.

Since the baseline year, we have gone through various operational changes, including the addition of new buildings to our portfolio (e.g. Department W, Empire House, 11-13 Charterhouse Square, Institute of Technology). It is also important to note that many of our buildings are relatively old and in varying states of condition, which results in poorer energy efficiency compared to modern facilities and can constrain the scope of potential energy-related improvements. Despite these additional pressures and the inherent challenges of our estate, we have continued to achieve reductions in energy consumption (see more detail below) and the associated carbon emissions through optimisations and targeted interventions to improve the energy efficiency of our estate. On the other hand, we have also benefited from the ongoing decarbonisation of the UK electricity grid and natural gas supply, which has contributed to the reduction in the carbon intensity of our energy consumption.

In 2024/25, the University achieved a 24 per cent reduction in Scope 1 and 2 emissions compared with the 2018/19 baseline (see table below). This progress reflects improvements across both direct and indirect

emissions: Scope 2 emissions have fallen by 31 per cent, while Scope 1 emissions have reduced by a further 11 per cent. Together, these results demonstrate sustained, measurable progress towards reducing the university's carbon footprint. This overall reduction of 3,661 tonnes of CO₂e is equivalent to removing 1870 average petrol cars from the road in the UK (at an average annual mileage of ~11,900 km).

Table 1. Carbon footprint year on year for scope 1 and 2 (UK campuses) and business travel.

	tCO ₂ e 2018/19	tCO ₂ e 2019/20	tCO ₂ e 2020/21	tCO ₂ e 2021/22	tCO ₂ e 2022/23	tCO ₂ e 2023/24	tCO ₂ e 2024/25	% reduction against 2018/19 baseline
Scope 1: Natural gas	5,420	5,048	5,220	5,278	4,842	4,696	4,829	11%
Scope 1: Other fuels	28	33	41	34	15	22	22	19%
Scope 1: Campus vehicles	6	5	9	12	11	10	8	-35%
Total Scope 1	5,454	5,280	5,478	5,545	4,868	4,728	4,860	11%
Scope 2: Electricity	10,015	7,733	6,726	6,606	6,255	6,809	6,948	31%
Total Scope 1 & 2	15,469	13,013	12,204	12,151	11,123	11,538	11,808	24%
Scope 3: Business travel	6799	3320	636	1000	4134	9982	10366	-52%

Note: excludes fugitive emissions from refrigerants, fuel used in stand-by & temporary generators and scope 1 and 2 emissions from campuses outside the UK.

Table 2 compares our carbon footprint with that of other Russel Group universities. Scope 1 and 2 emissions data have been collected from the institutions' annual reports available online as the Higher Education Statistics Agency Estates Management Record (HESA EMR) returns for 2024/25 are not yet available, whereas GIA figures are taken from last year's EMR submission. Queen Mary performed relatively well compared to our peers, with lower emissions per GIA than for instance Kings' College London, Imperial, or the University of Manchester, but higher emissions than the Universities of Reading and Bristol. It should be noted that universities may be reporting slightly different carbon sources and therefore the comparison should be treated as indicative only.

Table 2. Scope 1 and 2 emissions benchmarked against other Russel Group universities.

	tCO ₂ e 2024/25	GIA (m ²) 2023/24	tCO ₂ e/m ² 2024/25
Queen Mary	11,808	267,829	0.044
King's College London	239,000	445,352	0.537
University of Liverpool	35,933	515,464	0.070
University of Manchester	47,400	873,719	0.054
University of Reading	8,247	198,915	0.041
Imperial College	45,670	596,683	0.077
University of Bristol	22,155	540,463	0.041

Business travel emissions have shown an opposite trend, partly because of an increase in travel associated with Transnational Education (TNE). A new Sustainable Travel Policy is currently going through the governance process, expected to go to SET for final approval on 07/07 and to be effective from September. The Policy focuses on reducing the environmental impact of university-related travel, striving to strike a balance between promoting climate conscious travel choices among staff, students, and visitors and our activities as an academic institution.

Energy consumption

A three-year Energy and Carbon Reduction Plan was developed in 2025 through collaboration between Engineering & Estates, Sustainability, and our Building Management System (BMS) contractor Carbon

Numbers. The plan was approved for delivery at the end of 2025, with an Invest to Save budget of circa £5m secured within the Capital Plan and includes a range of initiatives designed to reduce the University's energy consumption and carbon emissions while improving campus-wide control and operational efficiency. The ambition is to achieve an overall energy reduction of 12,755,493 kWh per annum after all projects have been delivered, which could deliver circa £2.2m in annual savings (subject to any future changes in energy prices). The programme includes BMS upgrades, new connections and installations, optimisation and control improvements, and LED lighting upgrades across the estate.

Following approval by the Energy and Carbon Reduction Plan Board, we commenced delivery of a number of BMS optimisation and control projects alongside BMS controller upgrade works. These initiatives have contributed to reductions in overall energy consumption, and performance will continue to be monitored as further projects are delivered.

It should be noted that the savings reported this year are not solely attributable to projects delivered under the Energy and Carbon Reduction Plan. Savings have also arisen from projects completed in previous years, including the Joseph Priestley SRiFF Room Heat Recovery Project, which continues to provide ongoing natural gas reduction benefits.

Table 3 below shows year-to-date energy consumption compared with the same period in the previous year alongside the savings achieved this year.

Table 3. Energy consumption and savings year to date compared to the same period in the previous year.

	Electricity (kWh)	Gas (kWh)
08/2024 – 04/2025	25,385,428	21,292,189
08/2025 - 04/2026	25,139,397	18,845,570
Savings	246,031	2,446,619
% Saving	1%	11.5%

Overall, the University has achieved reductions in both electricity and natural gas consumption compared with the same period last year. The gas saving of 2,446,619 kWh achieved so far is equivalent to the annual gas consumption of 213 average medium UK households, while the electricity reduction of 246,031 is equivalent to the annual electricity consumption of 91 average medium UK households.

However, there have also been areas where energy consumption has increased as a result of operational changes and strategic investments. Electricity baseload consumption has increased significantly within the Joseph Priestley Building due to the continued expansion of server activity associated with the SRiFF Room. Compared with the same period in the previous year (year to date), electricity consumption at the Joseph Priestley Building increased by 536,754 kWh because of the higher server load. While this has increased electricity demand, the recovered waste heat generated by the servers has displaced a significant proportion of gas consumption used for heating. For example, the Joseph Priestley Building used 868,775 kWh less gas than during the same period in the previous year (year to date).

Additional savings achieved so far during 2025/2026 are attributable to projects delivered under the Energy and Carbon Reduction Plan, including:

- Wingate building optimisations
- Maths building optimisations
- Francis Bancroft building optimisations
- Mile End Library optimisations
- Engineering building optimisations
- Student Union Hub optimisations

- Arts 2 optimisations
- Blizzard & Abernathy IQ5 upgrades

We will continue to deliver the projects outlined in the Energy and Carbon Reduction Plan and will undertake ongoing monitoring and verification activities to ensure that energy and carbon savings are accurately measured and reported.

Headline objective: Improve infrastructure, monitoring and awareness of water supply use to deliver an overall reduction and improve efficiency.

Water

Building on the efforts of last financial year, where an extensive meter upgrade programme resulted in 98% of water meters providing live automatic meter readings (AMR), we are now in a favourable position with up-to-date cost and consumption data. This means that 2025/26 will be the first full year of accurate data, allowing us to explore appropriate strategies for reduction.

This financial year to April we have consumed 321,254 m³ of water, costing £721,930.

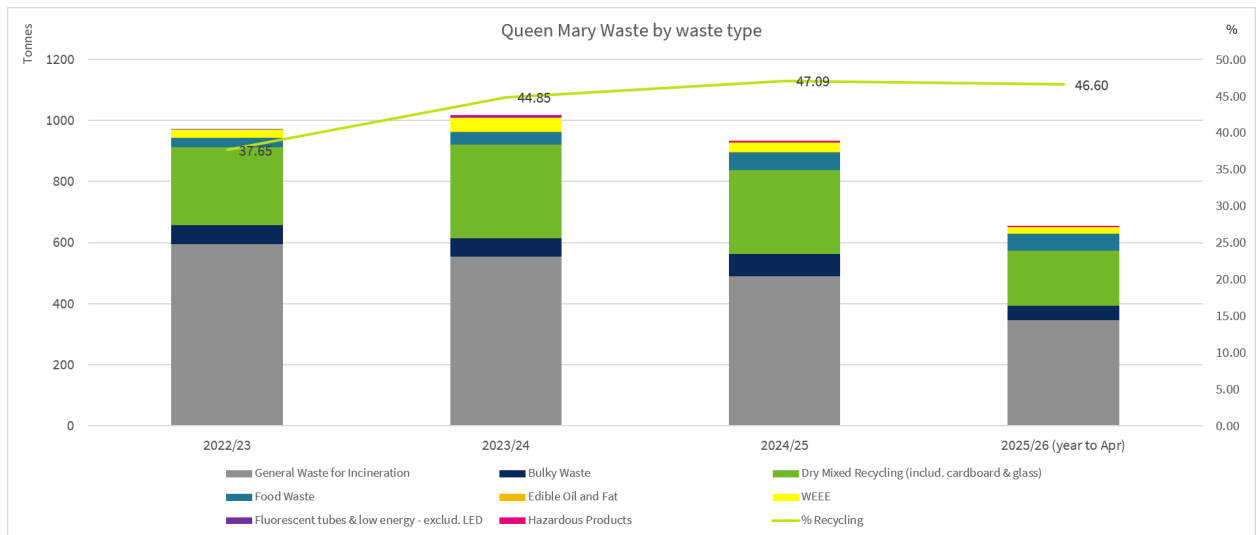
Because previously we have had to rely heavily on estimates and assumptions to calculate water consumption, we are not able to credibly compare this consumption with past years, but we should be able to do so going forward. The availability of AMR data allows us to not only accurately measure our water consumption but also be notified about unexpected peaks in consumption, which can be investigated and rectified if necessary. These can typically result from water leaks, broken taps or toilet flushes, or taps inadvertently left open.

Headline objective: Reduce overall annual volume of waste generated, maximise recycling rates and promote a circular economy approach

Waste and recycling

In 2024/25, our waste recycling rate was considerably higher than in previous years. The total waste generated by Queen Mary reduced by 8.9% compared to the previous year, while our recycling rate increased to 47.08%, the highest level recorded since our 2018/19 baseline. We introduced food waste collections from academic buildings in March 2025 and extending to halls of residence from September 2025, in line with the new Simpler Recycling legislation. This financial year, we are continuing to see a recycling rate close to 47% and lower amounts of waste produced so far than in previous years, as shown in the graph below.

We have continued to maintain a zero waste to landfill policy across our operations.



Graph 1. Quantity of waste generated by waste stream and annual recycling rates

Note: 2025/26 shows August 2025 to April 2026

Headline objective: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into all aspects of our operations.

Environmental Performance: ISO1 4001:2015 EMS Certification

Queen Mary has an internationally recognised, ISO 14001-certified Environmental Management System (EMS), which provides a structured framework to enhance environmental performance, meet compliance obligations, and achieve environmental objectives.

The EMS covers all QM activities, including those by external contractors, and is subject to regular internal audits by the Sustainability Team, annual external audits, and a more in-depth, full recertification audit every three years. We have retained our certification after a successful audit in May 2026. We will continue to be audited against the ISO 14001:2015 standard for another year, with a transition to the new 2026 standard, published this year, expected at the next re-certification audit in May 2028.

Headline objective: Continue to review the university investment portfolio and banking to align with ethical investment.

Ethical Investment

The Ethical and Sustainable Investment Forum, set up last year by the Students' Union, supported by senior leadership within the university, has provided valuable feedback accounted for in the revised investment policy. Following consultation, the policy now excludes investments in companies materially involved in* alcohol and predatory lending in addition to the already excluded tobacco, fossil fuels, nuclear weapons, controversial weapons, conventional weapons and civilian firearms, gambling, adult entertainment. The revised [Investment Policy](#) was approved in November 2025, and will be reviewed every three years, unless otherwise determined.

Headline objective: Have a renewed, approved and functional governance structure for sustainability at Queen Mary.

Governance

The Sustainability committee continues to act as the governing body, ensuring progress against our Sustainability Action Statement. Engagement, necessary for visibility and reporting, is now permanently represented by the Head of Corporate Comms on the committee.

CIVIC Community Involvement and Engagement

Re-Use Fair

The Re-Use Fair continues to be supported by a task group, led by the Sustainability Strategic Engagement Lead, with stakeholders across estates and the Students' Union. A key social sustainability project, it sets up students for the year for a fraction of the cost, whilst delivering significant cost savings on waste processing, cleaning and disposal of items at the end of the academic year. No winter Reuse was offered this year due to capacity constraints, however over 400 students engaged with the summer project, with over 1 tonne of items being diverted from the summer fair alone.

Sustainability Communications

Approved in February this year, new communications guidance for both internal and external comms, was created by the Head of Corporate Communications. This sets a clear outline of communications with internal audiences, our internal and external narratives, annual milestones and evaluation mechanisms. Ensuring a cohesive approach to our sustainability comms is vital to create a joined-up, university-wide sustainability narrative. As part of this, new assets were developed for Climate Action Week, giving it a distinct Queen Mary look and feel.

Headline objective: Increased awareness and visibility of Queen Mary's Sustainability activities for both internal and external audiences, building on reputation.

Climate Action Week

Climate Action Week's main purpose is to inspire confidence, deepen understanding, and strengthen collective action across the university as we work towards meaningful, long-lasting change. In 2026 Climate Action Week was the biggest sustainability-focused week the University has run, supported by the Students' Union. It successfully brought together colleagues across 10 different teams to deliver over 20 different events, with over 450 attendees across events, achieving its goal of collaboration for climate and sustainability awareness. Another notable achievement was buy-in and backing from senior leaders and schools, including DVP for science and engineering, Richard Pickersgill, and VP for Research, Professor Andrew Livingston, who delivered closing remarks one of the week's biggest events "Bridging the Gap Between Science & Politics: A Spotlight on Renewable Energy & Net Zero". The week acted as a key vehicle for students, staff, industry professional and the wider community to discuss and feel empowered to take climate action.

It is acknowledged that there is room for the week to better connect to wider university action and delivery of fewer, more focused events to catalyse impact. After evaluation and consultation with stakeholders surfaced concerns around resource, attendance, and timing, a refreshed approach to the week has been agreed. This is with the aim of increasing impact, streamlining resources and aligning the week with wider strategic activities including research milestones, e.g. COP31 (Conference of the Parties), and welcome week. As such, the week will take place in S1 this year, with planning due to commence shortly and a new set of focused aims and objectives to be outlined.

Times Higher Education Impact Rankings

The Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings offer global benchmarking and insight into our sustainability progress and how this translates to wider impact. After a university-wide data gathering exercise, in November we submitted our first submission, covering four of the 17 United Nation Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We are in the top 25% of universities across the world, with a top 66 result for SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), giving us a strong foundation to build from. A significant factor impacting our result was a lack of an SDG report.

Recognised as necessary for effective communication and visibility of our achievements in sustainability, efforts are underway to pull together the required data for this year's THE Impact Rankings submission, covering all 17 of the UN SDGs, to be submitted in November. To support our submission, an SDG report will be released at the beginning of the new academic year, showcasing notable efforts across research, education, operations & EDI and engagement.

QS Sustainability rankings

The QS Sustainability ranking contributes 5% to the overall score of the QS World Ranking. We submitted our QS Sustainability Rankings 2027 data in April and are expecting results to be available in November 2026. In the QS Sustainability Rankings 2026, published in December 2025, we improved our global position to 121, up from 143 in the previous year.

Conclusion

We will continue to work on and demonstrate how the University contributes to achieving the UN SDGs, using them as a universal language for change, and to be committed to supporting the UK Government's overall ambition of reaching net zero, as stated in our [Strategy 2030 midpoint review](#). This includes commitment to annual reporting to Council on sustainability progress, monitoring through the Sustainability Committee and escalating to SET where necessary.