

## UN Sustainable Development Goals - Highlight Report 2023

As a University that exists for Public good, York has a tradition of creative engagement across disciplinary boundaries to bring together the different components – ethical, scientific, technological, behavioural, regulatory – of a comprehensive response to the sustainability challenge.

Our [Sustainability Plan](#) has specific targets across five Sustainable Development Goals, but our overall impact is much greater.

Although not exhaustive, this report contains a selection of examples of sustainability activities undertaken at the University of York during the 2022/23 academic year that relate to the UN SDGs.



### SDG 1 - No Poverty

Accredited as a real Living Wage employer, we are committed to ensuring that everyone working at the University of York, and our subsidiary companies, receives the real Living Wage. On 1 January 2023, we applied a new minimum hourly rate above the national standard with an earlier effective date than required.

York was nominated for University of the Year in the Times Higher Education Awards 2023, thanks to our impactful work and research on the cost of living. The York Policy Engine has been aiding the York Cost of Living Research Group in their efforts to improve lives, showcasing the university's collaborative expertise.



### SDG 2 - Zero Hunger

FixOur Food in Schools, anchored at the University of York, aims to support Yorkshire primary schools in delivering on the difficult task of providing healthy school meals to all children, which are created from fresh, sustainable and locally sourced produce.



### SDG 3 - Good Health and Wellbeing

The Biology Art Trail at the University of York celebrates art, science, and education in the Biosciences. Created by the Department of Biology with the Biology Research Workshops and the University Estates Team, the trail features decorated duck silhouettes highlighting themes of Better Health, Green Futures, and Empowering Education.

Men's Health @ York offers a regular 5-6km run around campus. Sessions are open to all staff and visitors.



### SDG 4 - Quality Education

York Interdisciplinary Modules (YIMS) offer 4 modules, Future of Food, Climate Crisis Action Lab, Sustainability and Policy, and the Sustainability Clinic, that offer students the opportunity to develop key skills and competencies in working across disciplines on contemporary challenges.

The Environmental Sustainability Academy at York (ESAY) has launched the York Living Labs to unite the University community in tackling sustainability issues on campus, using it as a testing ground for broader solutions. Focus areas include biodiversity, food and travel. The initiative features action days or weeks to engage the community, offering valuable learning experiences for students and empowering everyone on campus to drive sustainability efforts.



### SDG 5 - Gender Equality

The University of York's [Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap Report 2023](#) is a testament to York's commitment to transparency, accountability, and the ongoing pursuit of an inclusive workplace where everyone is treated fairly and equitably. The salary changes associated with the Real Living with the 10.1% increase to the Real

Living Wage have contributed positively to reducing our gender pay gap and we have increased the percentage of females in professorial bands.



### **SDG 6 - Clean Water and Sanitation**

Equitable Technology: Sensors for Clean Water - This interdisciplinary project addresses the global issue of diarrhoeal diseases, which cause around 1.8 million deaths annually due to lack of clean water. The team at the University of York collaborates with affected communities to co-design, test, and validate water monitoring technology tailored to local needs and environments.

The project aims to create community-appropriate technology to ensure water safety, improving health and well-being in marginalised communities. It also seeks to develop a participatory technology development process.



### **SDG 7 - Affordable and Clean Energy**

Institute for Safe Autonomy - Net Zero Project. The solar array will not only help to diversify our on-site energy production, but will form a 'living lab' where researchers can develop and test new robotic and AI technologies designed to inspect and maintain solar arrays.

Funded through the UK Research Partnership Investment Fund (UKRPIF), the project will enhance the Institute's research capabilities to develop and use AI and robotic systems in renewable energy. The 113 kWp solar farm will create a 'living lab' to give insight to landowners and operators of solar farms on how best to integrate robotic technology in the field.



### **SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth**

The Environment, Development & Society module introduces undergraduates to sustainability concepts, theories and strategies including:

- the relationship between the environment and the economy
- key sustainable development indicators including social dimensions of sustainable development
- sustainability within the global economy

The School of Business and Society has undertaken joint projects with North Yorkshire County Council to explore the challenges and opportunities for North Yorkshire in the post-pandemic social, economic and environmental climate. Projects include work on reducing energy consumption, low carbon strategies, AI, affordable and sustainable housing and support needs of small businesses in the region.



### **SDG 9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure**

Enterprise Works is an ambitious initiative aimed at creating a diverse and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem that deeply engages with the community. It leverages the University's research and teaching expertise, combined with a global network, to drive action, research, and policy, challenging the status quo and envisioning a better future.



### **SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities**

The report "Sticking Plasters and Systemic Solutions: Cost of Living Responses in the UK" by the University of York's Cost of Living Research Group highlights the severe impact of rising household costs, energy prices, and inadequate social security on low-income households. The report notes significant differences in how support is delivered by Local Authorities, affecting who receives help and the nature of that assistance.



### **SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities**

The University of York has continued its membership and support for York Cares, a partnership of the city's leading employers committed to making York a better place through employee-volunteering. This year's Big Community Challenge focused on the maintenance and restoration of river and wetland areas in York with the aim of preserving and improving biodiversity across the city.

In 2023, York Festival of Ideas hosted 38,500 global and local audience members in 241 in-person and online events. 16,780 out of the 38,500 were local attendees. Some events focused on local and global food security, sustainability, climate change and biodiversity.





### **SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production**

The Global Environmental Impacts of Consumption (GEIC) indicator, developed by the Stockholm Environment Institute at York and partners, is a powerful tool aimed at gauging biodiversity loss, water stress, deforestation, and an array of other environmental impacts entwined with consumption practices across the world. In late 2022, the indicator was adopted by COP15 in Montreal.



### **SDG 13 - Climate Action**

In summer 2022, the York Living Labs (YLL) biodiversity pilot had five student interns conduct a baseline ecological survey of the campus. This survey, linked to the University Sustainability Plan, provided data to guide future biodiversity improvements. Students from various disciplines gained interdisciplinary knowledge and skills, benefiting greatly from the experience.

The University has introduced two new undergraduate modules, Conserving Biodiversity in the Anthropocene, and Ecological Solutions. The first module focuses on understanding ecological and environmental processes to address global challenges. It introduces ecological theories related to individuals, species, and communities, aiming to find sustainable solutions for issues like global food security and biodiversity conservation. The second explores ecological processes to address global challenges, focusing on sustainable solutions for food security and biodiversity conservation.



### **SDG 14 Life Below Water**

In November 2022, an international team of scientists produced new recommendations to help ensure a more sustainable future for UK fisheries in the post-Brexit era. A research team, including the Universities of York, Southampton, Lincoln, Exeter, Dalhousie, and the New Economics Foundation, provided international perspectives in natural resource management, fisheries, marine conservation, law and economics, and made a series of recommendations to the Government for more sustainable management of marine fisheries.



### **SDG 15 Life on Land**

Work on sustainable palm oil conducted by Professor Jane Hill at the University of York has been selected as a Green Gown Awards UK and Ireland Finalist for the Research with Impact - Institution category. Prof Hill's work looks to improve the environmental sustainability of palm oil cultivation and has demonstrated that connected areas of high-quality forest running through oil palm plantations could help support increased levels

of biodiversity.

The research shows that converting forests to oil palm plantations halves rainforest species and disrupts ecosystems. However, RSPO-certified plantations with large forest patches (around 200 hectares) preserve 60-70% of forest biodiversity, increase carbon stocks by 20%, and enhance biodiversity and connectivity in surrounding agricultural areas.

Our campus has been awarded Platinum status for being a suitable and safe place for hedgehogs to thrive. We're one of only two universities in the UK with Platinum accreditation.



### **SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**

The Baroness Hale Legal Clinic at the York Law School is a free legal service for the public that opened its doors in 2011.

In 2022/23, 76 undergraduate and 10 postgraduate students were involved with the Clinic as part of their studies. All work done is supervised by professionally qualified lawyers who ensure that the work carried out meets the high standards of service expected

of a solicitors' practice. The Clinic provides much needed help for clients, whilst also supporting students to put their learning into practice and preparing them for their next steps in their legal careers.



## **SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals**

During 22-23 the [York Environmental Sustainability Institute](#) (YESI) ran 10 interdisciplinary projects with external local, UK and international partners (including NGOs and charities) in the areas of: Environment and Health, Resilient Ecosystems and Food and Water and Waste.

Environmental Sustainability at York (ESAY) connects our environmental sustainability activities with internal and external partners to deliver new joined-up benefits through collaborative projects. [See ESAY Highlights 22-23](#).

The University of York joined more than 40 Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) UK members and stakeholders to build momentum for the contribution of UK higher education institutions to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).