

Sustainable development is a priority for the University of York.

This leaflet describes some of the actions we are already taking so that the University develops in an environmentally sustainable way. It outlines our plans for future development and how we will make sure these, too, are sustainable. Finally, it also contains some tips about the contribution you can make to protecting our future.

What is 'sustainable development'?

At its heart, sustainable development is about meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future.

In the past, this has not always been the case. Until recently, human society has developed without paying proper attention to the impact of this development on the environment. As a result, we now have greenhouse gases, climate change, and entire ecosystems under threat.

In recent years, governments and organisations around the world have recognised that we need to act urgently to protect our world for our children and grandchildren.

Today, the University of York has ambitious development plans. We are already one of the best universities in the UK, and we need to grow in order to maintain our position. We also need to make sure that we offer the best possible facilities to our staff and students for research, learning and teaching.

But we are equally determined to make sure that this development happens in a sustainable way. We want to balance our commitment to improving ourselves today – socially, economically and environmentally – with our responsibility to create a better world for future generations to enjoy.

What steps have we taken?

The University has already put in place many measures to ensure that the way we work today is environmentally sustainable. For example:

- Working with the Carbon Trust, we have developed a plan to reduce our carbon emissions and we are putting this into action across the University.
- Our sustainable travel plan for staff and visitors encourages cycling and walking. We subsidise bus fares, we encourage car-sharing, and we charge for parking. This has already proved successful in reducing the number of one-person car trips to and from the University.
- Our staff and students are closely involved in our local communities. We have one of the highest participation rates in community schemes of any university in the UK.
- Our most recently built student accommodation has been assessed for its environmental impact and has been awarded a BREEAM 'very good' rating.

- The entire University is Fair Trade accredited.
- Sustainable development is a key part of our teaching curriculum in many departments, as well as a key topic of research across the University.

Students set the pace

York students are very active in the area of sustainable development, setting an example for the whole University.

Students are involved with many different initiatives, including:

- volunteering schemes across campus and in the wider community;
- campaigning for sustainable transport and for conserving energy;
- organising an annual Think Week, with events focusing on responsible tourism and climate change.

On top of this, each college has its own student 'eco-rep' to co-ordinate recycling and other environmental schemes.

Our Students Union has been nationally recognised for its work: in 2007 it received a both a Green Gown award and a Sound Impact Silver Award, being ranked fifth out of 51 participating Students Unions for its environmental best practice.

What more can we do?

The University is committed to doing even more to make sure that we develop in a sustainable way in the future.

In 2004, we asked an external organisation to assess how well we were putting this policy into practice. The results of this assessment were very encouraging. It showed that we were already acting sustainably in many areas. It also suggested things we could do to improve our sustainability even further.

We have drawn up a formal policy on Sustainable Development. Under this policy, we are committed to developing in a way which balances our three key principles:

- making sure that the University continues to be financially viable in the future;
- providing genuine environmental benefits (and if a situation arises where environmental damage is unavoidable, minimising this as much as possible);
- recognising our responsibilities to all our stakeholders, including ... [I think it would be useful to give nice examples here – e.g. 'the local community', 'our present and future students', whatever – or else this sounds a bit hard-headed and businessy]

[In the source text there is a cryptic little box saying "Put SD Policy in a box to the side". Actually I don't think this will be necessary unless it adds a lot to what's already written here.]

To put these principles into action, we are focusing on five strategies.

Strategy 1: Reducing our carbon footprint

In 2005, the University was responsible for just under 30,000 tonnes of CO₂ being released into the atmosphere: 40% from heating, 30% from electricity, and 24% from staff and student transport. We are determined to reduce this, and have set ourselves an ambitious first target of a 10% reduction by 2010.

We have set aside £ 70,000 per year to pay for physical improvements. With the help of departmental energy champions (and a relatively mild winter), we reduced our heating emissions by 12% in 2006–7.

To further reduce carbon emissions and heating costs, all our new buildings will aim for a BREEAM environmental impact rating of 'excellent'. We have a policy of avoiding the need for air-conditioning by providing ... [I couldn't understand the original here clearly enough to rephrase it, sorry!]

Cars are a major source of carbon emissions. To reduce peak-hour car arrivals on campus by 5% every year, we support cycling and walking as well as offering subsidised bus fares. The proportion of our staff who travel to work by car is already relatively low (52%), and if all these drivers shared their journeys or used another means of transport for just one day per week, we would already meet our target.

Strategy 2: Using physical resources efficiently

The University's campus-wide recycling scheme is led by Campus Services and the Students Union. It is proving very effective, already exceeding Government targets for 2010 by recycling nearly 40% of our waste in the nine months to March 2007. It is not just the University that benefits, but all York residents: the more we recycle, the less the city pays in landfill tax.

Strategy 3: Enhancing biodiversity on campus

Forty years ago, the University campus was a damp, swampy place. Last year, a survey of biodiversity revealed a huge variety [this is a bit woolly – don't we have any figures?] of flora and fauna, with many diverse species of birds and mammals:

- Greylag, Canada, Snow and Barnacle Geese
- Kingfisher
- Heron
- Mute and Black Swans
- Ruddy Shelduck, Mallard and Tufted Ducks
- Moles
- Rabbits
- Hedgehogs
- Squirrels
- Bats

Our policy of encouraging plant life and wildlife will continue with the new campus extension planned for Heslington. We plan to create new habitats by including woodland, hedgerows and wetlands.

Strategy 4: Ensuring economic viability

Like all universities, we have a responsibility to use our finances in a way that maximises their value.

As a major investor in the local economy, we are committed to acting responsibly when we choose suppliers and make purchasing decisions. We buy from local suppliers whenever we can. Furthermore, since we are an ethically responsible organisation, we only approve suppliers who can demonstrate that they too have sound environmental policies and are committed to acting in a socially responsible way towards their employees and the community.

For major investments, we have also adopted a policy of Whole-Life Costing. This means that we make an effort to calculate the value offered by a purchase over its entire lifespan, not just the up-front purchase price. For instance, when choosing a new piece of computer equipment, it may be better to choose a more expensive product initially if the equipment will save us money in the long run by being more energy efficient, less likely to break down, or cheaper and easier to recycle at the end of its useful life. The same principle can be applied to many other products, buildings and services.

We also consider carefully where we invest our finances. We already refuse to invest in companies involved in the tobacco industry, and we are in the process of drawing up a more detailed set of criteria that our future investments should meet.

Strategy 5: Social responsibility

One of our highest-level objectives is to make sure that the work we do benefits everyone, and that we contribute to economic and social well-being.

We seek to act in a socially responsible way, creating an environment where our staff and students are considerate and responsible towards each other. Internally, one way of doing this is through 'participative governance', where everyone at the University has a part to play in deciding how the University is run.

Externally, we seek to be a good neighbour. We meet regularly with local residents, and we work closely with community groups and our own Students Union to make sure everyone is aware of the impact student activities can have on those who live nearby.

[There are two more headings in the original – 'Growth of Fair Trade products' and 'Sustainable development in the curriculum' – which probably want sideboxes or little paragraphs of their own. But there's no text under these headings, so I didn't have anything to go on! Let me know if some content is decided for these and I'll weave it into the main text above.]