

**Environmental Sustainability Strategic Planning Group (ESSPG)
Minutes**

19th November 2024

Present: Phil Marsh (PM - Chair), Ian Armstrong (IA), Rachel Bickerdike (RB), Beccy Blackwood (BB), Tom Bray (TB), Kelly Brown (KB), Jenny Brownlow (JB), Michael Corner (MC), Yvonne Flynn (YF), Michael Harkness (MH), Darren Hatfield (DH), John Hirst (JH), Olivia Hong (OH), , Jason Scotney (JSc), Emma Short (ES), Jane Simmons (JSi)

Minutes: Oscar Waldram

Minute Reference	Action									
ESSPG 24/25/1	<p>Welcome, introductions and apologies</p> <p>PM (Chair) welcomed all attendees to the meeting.</p> <p>PM recognised issues around Sustainability Governance and oversight. PM will be setting out governance structure for Sustainability by the end of the year to connect effectively with wider University Governance.</p>									
ESSPG 24/25/2	<p>Minutes of the previous meeting – 29th May 2024</p> <p>The minutes of the previous meeting were approved, with no amendments.</p>									
ESSPG 24/25/3	<p>Matters Arising from Minutes (not already included on the agenda)</p> <p>There were no matters arising discussed.</p> <p>Existing action log to be closed at this meeting.</p>									
ESSPG 24/25/4	<p>Update on Key Performance Indicators</p> <p>TB presented an update on University Emissions for 23/24. Scope 1 and 2 emissions have been reduced by 1.5% year-on-year (around 324 tonnes). However, to meet the University’s emissions target by 2035, the reduction would need to be circa 13% year-on-year. Gas usage has decreased by 3% year-on-year, but electricity usage has increased by 2%.</p> <table><tr><td></td><td>Total Reduction since baselines</td><td>2034/35 Target</td></tr><tr><td>Gas</td><td>7%</td><td>67%</td></tr><tr><td>Electricity</td><td>20%</td><td>100%</td></tr></table>		Total Reduction since baselines	2034/35 Target	Gas	7%	67%	Electricity	20%	100%
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Scope 3 emissions has significantly increased as a result of an increase in travel (long and short-haul flights). This could be attributed to operations recovering post-Covid.

Action – TB to develop some analysis on sector wide peer group on where other institutions are up to in terms of investment and decarbonisation.

Waste and Recycling

During academic year 2023/24, the overall recycling rate was 47% (residential: 43% and non-residential: 51%). The recycling target is 70% of all waste by 2042. Currently, there is a general downward trend in overall waste figures.

A summary of how the 70% target could be met was given. Target will not be met by recycling alone. How the university procures goods will need to be carefully considered if the target is to be met.

A review of the Sustainable Procurement Policy is planned next year, which will support the reduction in overall waste figures.

Currently, the energy generated from waste is included in the figure, but this will not always be the case. Once removed this will make the target further away than currently indicated.

Action – TB / JS - review of sector wide peers on sustainability professionals within procurement.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity Net Gain target by 2032 – this will be a challenge to meet. We use biodiversity metric 4.0 to analyse this.

We have smart targets through our nature pledge and are developing tools to monitor those against our biodiversity action plan.

We do not currently have a good mechanism on tracking progress on BNG and do not have interim targets. This is down to lack of resource.

It was noted that the Team recently received the Highly Commended Award at the International Green Gown Awards in the 'Nature Positive Campus' category.

Potential to build capacity in the team through potential funding streams being considered by Biodiversity Delivery Group including bid to national lottery.

A hectare of species-rich grassland has recently been created at Maiden Castle, but budget and resource constraints are impacting the ability to deliver more biodiversity projects.

An update was given on a joint application to the National lottery. This application is for £5,000,000 which would be shared between 6 institutions. If successful, the funding will assist in progressing the Biodiversity Strategy. Biosciences have had success in a £5,000,000 doctoral focal award bid in collaboration with St Andrew's university and 2 other Scottish universities. This funding will train up to 50 PhD students.

Community engagement is key to delivering biodiversity projects and the Group discussed the involvement of students in future projects, being mindful that this would need to be appropriately facilitated.

Noted that there could be potential for income through biodiversity projects through BNG units and Countryside Stewardship funding.

Action – IA supported by TB/JS and Dave Profit to bring proposal for Countryside Stewardship work to Estates and Facilities SLT.

ESSPG
24/25/5

Proposals for ESSPG Going Forward

TB - Existing structure of ESSPG does not have a level of strategic oversight on sustainability across the University.

Sustainability was included in the University Strategy refresh as a transversal theme. As such, actions on sustainability need to be developed strategically across the breadth of university activities. As the strategic group governing sustainability at the university, it is suggested that a review on membership is required to elevate the group strategically across departments and faculties. This should include a new chair for the next meeting.

Suggested way forward on ESSPG and Governance to be linked into the Estate Capital Planning Sub Committee.

It is anticipated that the ESSPG will have a greater focus on strategy in the future, rather than direct actions.

A draft governance structure was shared with the group for review and comment. This outlined what groups would feed into the ESSPG.

ESSPG
24/25/6

ECO CAMPUS

Eco-Campus is how we govern our environmental management system and is designed to provide structure to improve and mitigate any environmental risks the University presents. Work is underway to align Eco-campus audits with the end of the academic year, moving the external audit from December to July.

A management review of the environmental management system will be reported to the Senior Leadership Team one month before the external audit (late May/early June).

Action - DH will consider membership of a separate meeting to consider the management review.

As the external audit has been moved back to July, there will be additional internal audits completed. To facilitate this, the training for internal audits will be refreshed for the Energy and Sustainability Team, and the Environment Champions Network. Additional volunteers are being encouraged to join the Environment Champions Network.

Following a query on the nature and consistency of issues being raised through the audits, DH explained that issues raised relate to not refilling a spill kit or reviewing a document, etc., rather than more serious issues.

ESSPG
24/25/7

Environmental Sustainability Action Plan and Indicators

The Environmental Sustainability Action Plan links into the 81 KPIs monitored by the ESSPG and is currently being refreshed, to increase the productivity of the ESSPG and mitigate environmental risks.

The existing KPIs sit under four broad themes (community and engagement, state operations, leadership and governance, and teaching and research). However, it is felt that moving away from these themes will help narrow the focus and enable the ESSPG to be more productive.

Moving forward there will three strategic objectives, each with two KPIs:

- Energy (net zero):
 - Total kWh of gas
 - Total kWh of electricity
- Waste (recycling):
 - general waste produced per FTE
 - TBC
- Biodiversity (net gain):
 - TBC
 - TBC

It was agreed that narrowing the focus of the ESSPG will support increased productivity/delivery.

It was suggested that risk should be included as a standard agenda item for the group. Understanding the risks associated with the KPIs and SPIs will form an integral part of the group's strategic oversight.

The International Sustainability Standards Board has published a new, comprehensive guide designed to help organisation identify and disclose information about sustainability-related risks.

Action - JH will share the guidance with the Group.

ESSPG
24/25/8

My Greenspace Movement

KB has been liaising with colleges and had a stall at the Freshers' Fair, to encourage student engagement with the Greenspace movement.

While it was acknowledged that measuring student engagement is difficult, one way of achieving this is through social media engagement. The number of followers on the Greenspace Instagram account has grown from 171 (April 2024), to 1,067.

It is hoped that the Greenspace App will incentivise people to rethink how they interact with the environment in a positive way, such as the increased requests for support from students for their own events.

A comprehensive review of the number and breadth of engagement events was presented to the group.

The meeting noted the importance of student engagement relating to the COP events, in terms of increasing interest and supporting academics who are directly involved in the event.

The GSEG network will be relaunched, to regularly engage with student reps and share the University Strategy.

Fairtrade accreditation was raised with the group. It was noted that, to qualify for accreditation, the Fairtrade Fortnight event would need academic engagement.

Action- KB to consider promoting a Fairtrade competition as part of the event.

ESSPG
24/25/9**Any Other Business**

An energy-use cost cutting project is underway and **all attendees were asked to share the message with their teams to support this initiative, such as turning off lights, closing doors, etc.** The Group welcomed the news that the VC and UEC were encouraging sustainable practices to support cost cutting.

Sustainability rankings will be released shortly, and it is expected that the University will gain point in some areas, but lose in others, so it is not possible to estimate the University's placing. It was noted that the general standard across higher education had increased.

A review of the University's Business Travel Policy is underway and should be implemented as part of the travel management contract retender. The North East Combined Authority in partnership with Mobility Wares who oversee Lift Share, have been awarded funding to look at improvements to bus services in the North East. They would assist the university to conduct travel surveys with staff to assess if there are gaps in services causing a barrier to using public transport. It would be free to take part in this and legal are reviewing the proposal. It is hoped that improvements will encourage more staff to use public transport.

ESSPG
24/25/10**Date and Time of Next Meeting**

Date to be confirmed for Epiphany Term.