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Global Environmental Sustainability Policy

April 2025

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Responsible Office:	Sustainability Unit

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since its foundation in 1821, Heriot-Watt University has built a reputation for pioneering education and impactful research. Our global reach and strength in addressing societal and sustainability challenges are matched by our commitment to climate action.

This Policy aims to ensure delivery of our Global Environmental Sustainability Strategy (*Appendix 1*), embed strong supporting governance and ensure all university actions consider sustainability, to make a significant, sustainable and socially responsible contribution in our local regions and across the world.

The Ten Institutional Commitments (*Section 2*), approved as part of our sustainability strategy, already outline our dedication to working together to become sustainability advocates while everyone takes responsibility for reducing their own impact on the environment.

The Climate Action Framework (*Appendix 1*), co-created with our staff, students, alumni and external community groups, outlines the University-wide approach to reducing Heriot-Watt University's emissions footprint. It also aims to embed a cultural change across the organization, encouraging everyone to learn more about what steps they can take to make a difference. The framework empowers the entire University community—across five campuses and online—to advocate for, support, and implement actions and initiatives that promote a more sustainable future.

2. PURPOSE

The overall objective of the Environmental Sustainability Policy is:

- We aim to consider, embed and integrate environmental sustainability in all our activities and operations across our global campuses, and we will co-create and participate in collaborative initiatives for a sustainable future.

This Policy sets out the University's position with regard to sustainability through its strategy, principles and commitments which will be delivered through themed pathways for our actions.

The Policy outlines the guidance to ensure the requirements of the University are met, along with the University's external legislative and regulatory obligations, including annual reporting (e.g. the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties reporting for our Scotland campuses).

This Policy contains the principles, practices, and conduct that all University staff and students must adopt. It builds on, and brings together, the Global Environmental Sustainability Strategy (including our Ten Institutional Commitments) and the Climate Action Framework.

The Ten Institutional Commitments

Our Global Environmental Sustainability Strategy is based on our heritage, our expertise, our relevance, and our global presence. Our obligations are outlined in our Ten Institutional Commitments which are driving actions for positive change. Our commitments can only be successfully achieved through collaboration and co-development from across our global community.

Leadership Through Action:

- 1) Inform, empower and support our global community in taking personal and collective action to assist in delivering the SDGs.
- 2) Commit to achieving Net Zero carbon emissions by 2035.
- 3) Support our signing of the Sustainable Development Goal Accord at an institutional level.

Thought Leadership and Foresighting:

- 4) Promote discussion and debate to encourage fresh thinking on how to achieve the SDGs.
- 5) Challenge ourselves, industry and national governments to achieve progress towards the SDGs.
- 6) Adopt a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process.

World Leading Research, Teaching and Enterprise:

- 7) Map and align our global presence in educational excellence and world-leading research with the UN SDGs.
- 8) Create a Global Research Institute in NetZero Carbon aligned with an international Skills Academy for “green jobs”.
- 9) Demonstrate and quantify the potential global impact of the University’s radical innovations in research and policy.
- 10) Develop an enterprise accelerator programme to support start-up companies with radical approaches to carbon innovation.

3. DELIVERY & OPERATION

The Climate Action Framework (*Appendix 1*) outlines our planned people-centred approach focused on a series of key delivery themes and how we are building our capacity to act. It addresses the recommendations set by the Royal Anniversary Trust to consider how universities utilise their role in education, research, civic engagement and influencing national and global leadership to accelerate progress towards net zero.

as outlined in our Climate Action Framework a series of principles guide activities and provide a foundation for decision-making.

Our Principles:

Environment:

- Create place and space to promote sustainable futures through low-carbon footprint.
- Take feasible steps to adopt new energy approaches and efficiently utilise resources.

Social:

- Integrate sustainability into training and teaching.
- Inspire collaboration and co-creation between and within our global and local communities.

Economic:

- Lead by example as a driver for change for sustainability.
- Position sustainability at the core of decisions making.

Our commitments will be delivered under eight **core themes**:

1. Leadership and Governance:
2. Estate and Energy
3. Biodiversity
4. Digital Sustainability
5. Research and Innovation
6. Sustainable Procurement and Supply Chain
7. Travel and Transport
8. Learning and Teaching

Each theme will be enabled and driven by four **cross cutting themes**: Community Engagement, Internal Skills and Resources, Partnerships and Finance and Investment.

Responsibilities

Deputy Principal (DP) for Global Sustainability

Responsible for leading the delivery of the University's sustainability strategy and goals, that form the basis through which we will demonstrate our global leadership to our community and international stakeholders. The DP collaborates with our students, staff and alumni communities to co-deliver our commitments to a global just transition and meeting the UN sustainable development goals.

Global Head of Sustainability

Responsible for enacting the sustainability strategy and overseeing the co-development and delivery of projects and initiatives to meet our environmental commitments. Provides strategic direction for sustainability activities including internal and external stakeholder engagement, partnership development and communication of sustainability initiatives, ensuring the adoption and sharing of best practices.

The Sustainability Unit

Core sustainability staff from across the university who are primarily responsible for implementing and delivering key elements of the strategy, from educational initiatives and compliance with environmental regulations to regularly engaging with staff and students on core projects, fostering a culture of sustainability and integration of sustainable practices into university operations.

Staff and students

The University's staff and students are actively encouraged to engage in driving our progress towards sustainability.

4. GOVERNANCE

Our Global Environmental Sustainability Strategy is community-based, data-led and influenced by science-based targets as we seek to reduce our environmental impact, enhance our climate mitigation and contribute to sector-wide efforts. We intend to continue to monitor risk and opportunities in response to the evolving global landscape, as part of the annual policy review.

Specific actions arising from the commitments are the responsibility of the designated groups, who will collaborate with members of the University community. Reporting will be carried out quarterly to the UCGES and included in the regular reports to Court and Senate, as well as relevant University Committees. The UCGES are accountable to the Heriot-Watt University Executive for their performance.

University Committee for Global Environmental Sustainability (UCGES):

University Committee for Global Environmental Sustainability (UCGES) has the primary purpose of providing leadership and oversight of the delivery and further development of the Global Environmental Sustainability Strategy. The Committee is chaired by the DP for Sustainability and is responsible for reporting to the University Executive on delivery of the ten commitments approved by the Court and the sustainability objectives set across the whole University. Student representation is present on the committee and provides regular reports on behalf of the global student community and the Student Sustainability Forum.

Student Sustainability Forum:

The forum is designed as a space for students that is accessible, flexible, informal and as welcoming as possible, so that every student feels comfortable joining the sustainability conversation. Students come together to share their interests and knowledge around sustainability and some of the multi-faceted solutions needed to address the climate crisis.

Other committees:

Sustainability has been embedded into the Terms of Reference for all relevant Court committees

Global Campus environmental sustainability committees are established, or being established, at our Scotland, Malaysia and Dubai Campuses and will provide regular quarterly reports to UCGES. Data will be submitted annually to align with the timing of the Scotland Campus submission to the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties report and all data will be included in the annual Heriot-Watt University Annual Report and Financial Statement document.

Policy implementation:

This document will be reviewed regularly by Court. Implementation of this Policy will be reviewed annually by the UCGES and reported to the University Executive.

Current regulatory and reporting requirements consist of (*Appendix 2*):

- Public Bodies Climate Change Duties (PBCCD) reporting (*Scotland only*)
- Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reporting (*Scotland only*)
- Heriot-Watt University Annual Report and Financial Statement (*Global Campuses*)

5. REVIEW OF POLICY

This Policy shall be reviewed by the University Committee for Global Environmental Sustainability on an annual basis or more frequently, should need arise.

FURTHER HELP AND ADVICE

Further help and advice can be sought from the Sustainability Unit: SustainableHWU@hw.ac.uk

POLICY VERSION AND HISTORY

This Policy builds on the Global Environmental Sustainability Strategy (2021) and the Climate Action Framework (2024).

Appendix 1 – Related Policies and Guidance

(insert any local legislation links for Dubai and Malaysia)

	Policy/Procedure/ Guidance/Act	Description	Link
Climate Action Framework (CAF)	Guidance	Climate Action Framework underscores our commitment to mobilising collective efforts towards a sustainable future, outlining the approaches we can take to meet our target.	https://www.hw.ac.uk/documents/climate-action-framework.pdf
Digital Strategy	Guidance	To be a digital-first University. Our University activities and the services that support them are digitally-enabled, effective, equitable and secure with staff and students who are digitally capable, prepared and equipped for the future. Ensuring that the digital infrastructure we deploy within the University is performant, reliable, resilient, secure and environmentally sustainable.	Roadmap: https://heriotwatt.sharepoint.com/sites/digitalstrategy/SitePages/4-Roadmap-and-future-state.aspx <i>(internal access only)</i>
Ethical Business	Policy	Act as a guideline for all Staff, Students, or members of the Court to represent themselves when conducting University business. Help promote moral conduct, and transparency and build a good reputation.	https://heriotwatt.sharepoint.com/sites/EthicalBusinessPolicies/SitePages/Types-of-Ethical-Business-Policies.aspx <i>(internal access only)</i>
Equality and Diversity Policy	Policy	Commitment to embedding and promotion of equality and diversity.	https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/hr/policies/EDPolicy.pdf
Global Environmental Sustainability Strategy <i>Includes The 10 Institutional Sustainability Commitments</i>	Guidance	10 institutional commitments that form the basis through which we will demonstrate global leadership in sustainability to community and international stakeholders	https://www.hw.ac.uk/documents/global-environmental-sustainability-strategy.pdf
Procurement Strategy	Policy	Sets out the University's strategic approach to Procurement.	https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/ProcurementStrategy.pdf
Heriot Watt University Risk Appetite Statement	Guidance	The statement is designed to support the University in making appropriate risk-based decisions to underpin the implementation of its strategy.	https://heriotwatt.sharepoint.com/sites/gals-assuranceservices/SitePages/Risk-Management.aspx <i>(internal access only)</i>
University Travel & Expenses Policy	Policy	Guidance and policy for travelling on University business including expenses and hospitality.	https://www.hw.ac.uk/documents/travel-expenses-policy.pdf

Appendix 2 – Regulatory reporting

	Description	Link
Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)	HESA is part of Jisc. They are the experts in UK higher education data and analysis, and have been collecting, processing, and publishing data about higher education (HE) in the UK since the 1994/95 academic year.	https://www.hesa.ac.uk/
Public Bodies Climate Change Duties (PBCCD) Reporting	We report the emissions performance, for our Scotland campuses, annually under the national Public Bodies Climate Change Duties (PBCCD) reporting process.	https://sustainableScotlandNetwork.org/reports/heriot-watt-university
Heriot-Watt University Annual Report and Financial Statement	The annual report of the university	https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/about/profile/publications.htm