



University of Leeds Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023-24



**UNIVERSITY
OF LEEDS**





Sustainability is embedded in the University of Leeds ten-year strategy ‘[Universal Values, Global Change](#)’, which is rooted in our desire to make a difference in the world.

The strategy sets out our commitment to help shape a better future for humanity, working collaboratively to tackle inequalities, benefit society and drive change through delivery of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

To us sustainability means creating value for society by taking responsibility for our economic, cultural, social and environmental impacts. We use the UN SDGs to help frame and guide our activity, aiming to ensure everything we do is inclusive, fair and just, making sure everyone’s voice is heard and considered along the way.

We are currently refreshing our strategic approach to sustainability, with a new Framework for Environmental and Social Responsibility, to be published next year. In the meantime, where updated targets have not been set within our University strategy or **[Climate Plan](#)**, we continue to work across the themes and aims set out in our previous **[Sustainability Strategy \(PDF\)](#)**. We have also worked successfully to integrate many of our operational aims and targets into the Facilities Directorate **[Our Way Ahead](#)** business plan.

This annual Sustainable Development Goals report aims to demonstrate how we are supporting the UN SDGs through our research, teaching and operations. It includes key activities and achievements for the 2023-24 academic year, which have been delivered through the actions of the many teams and individuals across our University community who strive to deliver a more environmentally and socially responsible institution. The Sustainability Service extend our sincere thanks to them for their efforts in making sustainability second nature at the University of Leeds.

Further review and reports of our environmental and social responsibilities and performance can be found in the University’s integrated **[report and accounts](#)** and **[Climate Plan reporting](#)**. You can also explore our 2023-24 news and blog posts to find out more about our progress through the year.

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Welcome

I'm delighted to introduce our Sustainable Development Goals Report covering the academic year 2023-24. I am very proud of the progress we have made towards sustainability at the University over the last year. It has been a period of significant change and has brought a great deal of success and progress, as demonstrated by our ranking as 52nd in the world in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings; a league that assesses universities against the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The report highlights the continuing commitment of our University community to a collaborative approach to sustainability, and demonstrates how this is integrated from the way we manage our estate and operations, to the impact of our research and education in shaping a better future for humanity. Particular highlights in the year for me include the development of the Geothermal Living Lab, the formation of the Just Transition Taskforce and the continued growth and evolution of our now regional Student Sustainability Research Conference.

We have continued to develop our activities designed to engage, enable and empower our University community to deliver sustainability. In particular, participation in our Blueprint staff engagement and Sustainable Labs programmes have grown significantly this year. I am hugely excited for the year to come when we will be launching our new Framework for Environmental and Social Responsibility, which will provide a refreshed strategic focus on sustainability and the SDGs at the University and continue to build on our collaborative approach both internally and externally.

Thom Cooper
Head of Sustainability

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** are a framework to achieve a sustainable future for all, covering everything from reducing inequalities, responsible consumption and production, and enabling safe, sustainable cities and communities.

We are committed signatories to the **SDG Accord**. This is a global commitment for the education sector to embrace the critical role that education has in delivering the SDGs and sharing best practice and learnings, both nationally and internationally.

We are also signatories of the **United Nations Global Compact**, which encourages organisations to adopt sustainable and socially responsible policies, aligning with Ten Principles on human rights, labour, environment, and anti-corruption, with an emphasis on collaboration and innovation. We provide a biennial submission of a Communication on Engagement (COE).





No Poverty



End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

+£1,47 million

of financial support provided to students in need, both in the UK and internationally



Our people

Our **Access and Student Success Strategy** continues to address inequalities for underrepresented students: widening access for potential undergraduates from different backgrounds and supporting them while they’re studying at Leeds, working to close the awarding gap, and encouraging them to apply for postgraduate study.

Scholarships, funding and grants are available to students with lower household income, including the non-repayable **Leeds Bursary**. **Sanctuary Scholarships** support students who are forced migrants to the UK and cover the full cost of tuition fees and £10,000 a year towards study costs. The University also provides a **Financial Assistance Fund**, that aims to help students facing financial hardship to cover essential living costs, so that they can continue studying.





Beyond campus

This year, we provided academic support to 3,696 young people aged 7-18 in two **IntoUniversity** community learning centres which we fund and support in Harehills and Beeston, two of the most underprivileged areas of the city.

The Lifelong Learning Centre worked to widen access to higher education with 48 local community and voluntary organisations, a three-day adult learners summer school and two eight-week Jumpstart courses.

We conduct extensive research with partner organisations to address poverty, including the **Child of The North** group, contributing to a series of evidence-based recommendations to government to tackle child poverty. From 2022-24 we were part of the **Determinants, Dynamics and Policy Implications of Deep Poverty** project, examining the changing profile and depth of poverty in the UK.



CASE STUDY

Putting children first in policymaking

Record numbers of children are experiencing life-limiting challenges, including poverty, poor academic attainment, and declining mental health.

The Children First Government programme, led by the **N8 universities**, set out to address this crisis with a 12-report series. Produced jointly by Child of the North and the Centre for Young Lives, the ‘Child of the North’ campaign advocates for the interests of children and young people and demonstrates that improving their life chances is crucial to Britain’s future. It does so by calling on the government to prioritise children and families through practical, evidence-informed policy interventions.

Backed by rigorous research, each of the reports focus on a different area of concern. Several were issued in 2023-24, covering:

- Creating a culture of inclusive opportunity through arts and creativity
- Supporting physical activity and healthy nutrition with and through education settings
- The autism assessment and support crisis
- Poverty with and through schools
- Improving mental health and wellbeing with and through educational settings
- Connecting and coordinating support and services in and around education settings

CASE STUDY

A CHORUS of support in four Global South countries

Community-led Responsive and Effective Urban Health Systems (CHORUS) is a research consortium that brings together researchers from the Universities of Leeds and York, with universities and organisations in Ghana, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Working with communities, health professionals and city-level decision-makers, CHORUS aims to improve the health of the poorest urban residents, reduce health inequities and build lasting capacity in health systems. It supports multiple research projects which:

- Link the plurality of public, private and informal providers
- Collaborate across sectors to address the wider influences of city life on health
- Respond to the double burden of non-communicable and communicable disease
- Identify, reach and engage the urban poor

Gender and equity are vital components of the CHORUS consortium, and our work includes identifying gender, equity, and intersectionality issues in urban health systems and co-designing interventions to address these concerns. For example, across our four country case studies, we have mapped the influence of gender on health-seeking behaviour and use this information as we develop interventions.



Zero Hunger



End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

3-star

‘Food Made Good’ award



Provided effective global knowledge exchange on critical food issues through GFEI knowledge webinars



Our people

The University ensures students and staff have access to a range of healthy and affordable food options across all food outlets. We’ve been working with Leeds University Union (LUU) to offer free breakfasts and open a new cafe to meet students’ most basic needs.

Our 2024 end of year Changeover Campaign saw a pop-up food collection point at Hyde Park Picture House. Substantial donations resulted in 1,350l of dry goods distributed to **Rainbow Junktion** and the **LUU Essentials** basic needs hub, which provides emergency food assistance to students facing hardship.



CASE STUDY

Fighting food poverty

Dr. Effie Papargyropoulou, Associate Professor in Sustainable Food Networks, has significantly influenced local food poverty policy through her research with Leeds City Council, FoodWise Leeds and local food hubs. Her work on an **impact evaluation toolkit** shows how food hubs improve community food security, health and sustainability – especially in the current cost-of-living crisis. Her findings have shaped local strategies and informed national debates, through blogs, newsletters, webinars and podcasts, promoting food hubs as vital tools in addressing food insecurity and boosting resilience.

CASE STUDY

Advancing insect farming to boost sustainable food production

Insect technology company Entocycle and the University of Leeds are working together to advance research into the use of insects in circular on-farm feed systems. A walk-in, self-contained insect-raising unit, fitted with an environmental control system and WiFi data monitoring, was installed at the Centre for Innovation Excellence in Livestock’s (CIEL) National Pig Centre, situated on the University’s research farm, and officially opened in July 2024.

The unit delivers Innovate UK-funded insect projects, **DELIVER** and **InSAFE**, and enables insect bioconversion – the process of insects eating and upcycling organic matter – into higher-value products such as protein, oils and fertilizer at commercial scale.



Campus and operations

The University follows a **Sustainable Food Standard**, prioritising local and seasonal produce, ethical sourcing, animal welfare and sustainable production, and the provision of vegan and vegetarian choices in all catering outlets.

Our catering service, Great Food at Leeds (GFaL), holds a three-star **Food Made Good** award from the Sustainable Restaurant Association, recognising our efforts to monitor and reduce food waste and ensure students have access to healthy and affordable food. The University’s research farm works with academic and industry partners to address modern agricultural challenges.



Beyond campus

The University is home to the **Global Food and Environment Institute (GFEI)**, an interdisciplinary research community, which brings together members from across academia, industry and public policy. The Institute holds a range of knowledge exchange events with local farmers and food producers. From 2023, to the end of 2024, 1000 people registered for GFEI’s knowledge webinar series, where more than 550 participants engaged in 11 sessions addressing critical food system issues linked to the SDG goal.

In addition, a new Horizons Connect Fund partnership with Right to Grow Hull launched in December 2023, to help improve access to land for food production within communities.



Good Health & Wellbeing



Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.

New
Wellbeing Hub opened

204
Health and Wellbeing Champions now in post



Our people

The University actively promotes good mental health and wellbeing. Students have free access to counsellors, wellbeing practitioners and mental health advisors through the **Student Counselling and Wellbeing service** as well as regular **wellbeing groups and workshops**. Meanwhile, staff can take advantage of a **Staff Counselling and Psychological Support Service** and an **Employee Assistance Programme**. In 2023-24, 1148 staff members received one-to-one support through the staff counselling and psychological support service.



Campus and operations

The University operates a smoke-free campus and provides a range of sports and physical activity facilities. Many of these, including the Edge, Bodington playing fields and Weetwood sports park, are accessible to the local community as well as students and staff, and are regularly used by local schools,



community groups and sports clubs. In November 2023, the Edge was named Educational Facility of the Year at the National Fitness Awards.

In March 2024, the University’s Wellbeing Hub officially opened, offering a dedicated on-campus space for staff to access health, wellbeing and learning opportunities. The launch of this new centre has played a key role in boosting staff engagement and expanding the range of activities provided. Each week, a variety of scheduled health and wellbeing sessions are available, including yoga, arts and crafts, meditation and stretch, qigong and book swaps. In 2024, the Wellbeing Hub welcomed over two thousand visitors, encouraging and enabling colleagues to incorporate health and wellbeing into their working day.



Beyond campus

The University works closely with local, national and global health institutions. Ongoing **medical and health collaborations** include the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and the Leeds Academic Health Partnership (LAHP).

In 2024 the government **chose the University of Leeds** to lead the NIHR Research Delivery Network Coordinating Centre, which co-ordinates health research across England. The new coordinating centre employs more than 270 people and works with staff in all settings across England’s health and care system, to support the effective and efficient initiation and delivery of research. It is responsible for the knowledge and skill development of the whole health research and development workforce, helping address health and economic inequalities across the Leeds city region and nationally.



CASE STUDY

Collaborating on children’s health research

2024 saw the launch of the **CHORAL (Child Health Outcomes Research at Leeds) partnership**, bringing together scientists, politicians, public sector organisations and advocacy groups in a mission to boost the health and wellbeing of children, young people and families across Leeds, Yorkshire and the wider UK.

A collaboration between the University of Leeds, Leeds Children’s Hospital (part of Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust), Leeds Hospitals Charity and partners across the health, social and public sectors, the partnership takes a multidisciplinary approach with research focusing on three key areas of children’s health:

- Childhood cancer: driving evidence-based improvements in outcomes for children and young people living with and beyond cancer.
- Children’s mental health: a partnership to tackle the wider determinants of child health.
- Life-threatening illnesses: delivering a step-change in understanding through innovative data linkages.

A key aim is the provision of infrastructure to coordinate and facilitate world leading children’s health research, enabling equitable access to health and social care.

CASE STUDY

How sketching and walking can improve wellbeing

Leeds University Business School’s (LUBS) ‘Walking to Zero’ project is a creative approach to understanding how the changing landscape may affect us all, and the impact that walking can have on our behaviour and our reliance on carbon-emitting transport.

The project aims to debunk students’ negative notions of walking by combining it with sketching – recording their impressions of the landscape encountered on their walks. The LUBS sketchers felt the process profoundly affected how they saw and interacted with their environment, with important implications for their wellbeing.

Under the guidance of artist Jake Attree, the students’ sketches were turned into a ‘Walk to Zero’ exhibition held in June 2024 at LUBS, opened by author and poet, Lemn Sissay, and showcasing how walking has long-term benefits for their physical and mental wellbeing.



4

Quality Education



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

2,810

individuals engaged with Lifelong Learning Centre events

48

Jumpstart participants

300+

sustainability-related modules

100+

LUNSHE followers

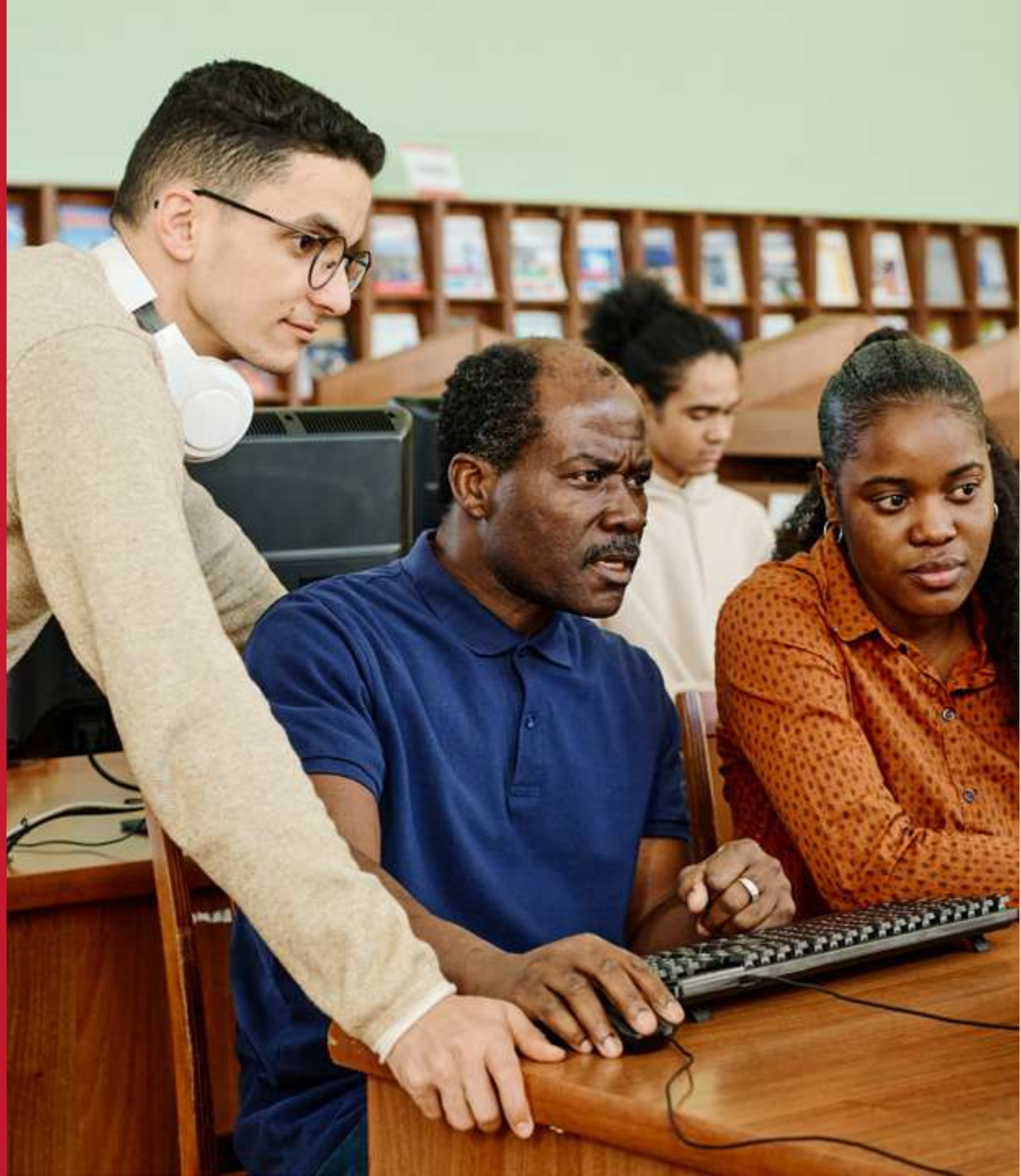


Our people

The **Lifelong Learning Centre (LLC)** is committed to supporting progression for adults from backgrounds that have traditionally been under-represented in higher education. Many of our students, without formal qualifications like A-levels or GCSEs, join us through our **alternative entry scheme**. We work with adult learners and local community partners to encourage people to think about studying at university.

The LLC's free eight-week taster course for local adults, **Jumpstart**, takes places twice yearly on campus. This pre-entry programme empowers adults from widening participation backgrounds, to overcome barriers and pursue higher education confidently. There were 48 adult learners that took part in the course in 2023-24.

The LCC also runs two apprenticeship degree programmes for people employed in the NHS, care and voluntary sectors around Leeds and West Yorkshire and in local



CASE STUDY

Community of practice established for sustainability in education

As part of our [Climate Plan](#), we commit to giving all University of Leeds students the opportunity to engage in sustainability through their course and community. To achieve this, we must ensure that our educators have the networks, community and professional development to teach and engage students in sustainability. This translated into an ambition to establish a cross and transdisciplinary education for sustainability community of practice.

The result is [Leeds University Network for Sustainability in Higher Education \(LUNSHE\)](#), which launched in 2023. The group meets monthly and has expanded to over 100 professionals, with representatives attending from multiple academic schools and professional service areas.

LUNSHE provides a supportive platform for knowledge exchange and enquiry about education for sustainable development. It is a safe space for professionals to reflect on their individual professional practice, alongside likeminded people across different career stages and levels of specialism.

The approach centres on listening to needs, building on good practice and nurturing iterative change that is relevant to varied disciplines and inspires transdisciplinary thinking and connections. The sharing of case studies, learning designs, student projects, international collaborations and frameworks has laid the foundation for pedagogical research projects and innovations from new modules to student opportunities.

businesses across the region: [Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship](#) and [Nursing Associate \(Apprenticeship\) Foundation Degree \(Level 5\)](#).

The [Learning and Teaching with SEND BA \(Hons\)](#) programme at the University of Leeds is targeted at individuals from groups that are underrepresented in higher education. The programme is part time and flexible, to enable individuals who work and have caring responsibilities to access the learning. We welcome applicants with a wide range of qualifications and have an alternative entry scheme for mature applicants.

Our [‘Introduction to Sustainability’ self-led digital learning unit](#) launched this year for all staff and students, providing foundational learning about sustainability, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The unit has been promoted to all students as part of the university’s Welcome, Induction and Transition campaign.



Beyond campus

The University library has introduced a special Academic Asylum Seekers and Refugee Access membership that grants free, year-long access to the libraries, enabling refugees and asylum-seekers to use our resources and computers to find out vital information and continue with their disrupted academic studies or research.

Our [Students into Schools](#) programme ensures students gain valuable work experience in local primary and secondary schools, whilst supporting quality education locally. Over the year, students gave more than 6,500 hours of their time to support more than 2,500 young people on activities ranging from subject-specific tutoring and mentoring, to working with pupils who have English as an additional language.

The LLC hosts on-campus and community-based events on both an ad hoc and programmed basis which are open to the public, specifically those people who have previously not had the chance to access higher education. There were 2,810 individuals that attended these events in 2023-24.

The LLC’s dedicated [outreach Communities and Partnerships team](#) develops sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships with the wider community, including local residents and forced migrants. For example, we co-created a five-week ‘Parents’ Space’ community-based course in Burley with our partner organisation, Better Leeds Communities (BLC), a project which was [presented at the national NEON conference on mature students](#) in May 2024.



Gender Equality



Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.



Our people

The University provides many women’s access schemes, including mentoring and scholarships, and gender equality is a key component of our **Access and Participation Plan**. We encourage applications to study at Leeds from women in subjects where they are underrepresented, through programmes like **Leeds Futures – STEM**.

The University careers service offers a one-to-one career mentoring scheme, delivered in collaboration with PwC. This scheme is for Plus Programme students who identify as female, linking them with a professional working at PwC. Plus Programme students can access a range of tailored resources, application and interview tips workshops, along with support from the team of employability and progression assistants and career mentoring assistants.

Our staff networks – such as the Women at Leeds Network and the Parent and Carer Peer Support Network – provide safe and informal spaces for colleagues to support one another.



Since 2021, the University has committed to support more Black women academics to become professors as part of the **100 Black Women Professors Now** leadership programme.



Campus and operations

We have several written policies and plans to support gender equality. **Our Equality and Inclusion policies** prohibit discrimination based on gender or sex, and aim to create a supportive environment, free from harassment, bullying and victimisation. The **Report + Support** platform allows students and staff to confidentially report incidents of bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and discrimination.

The University is a proud holder of an Athena SWAN bronze award, an accreditation recognising gender equality and progress in universities. We aim to improve this further by achieving a silver award in 2026. Across our faculties, we hold three bronze and three silver awards, along with four school-level awards including one gold and three silvers. Both the School of Healthcare and the School of Psychology achieved Silver this year.

The University is fully breastfeeding-friendly, with baby changing, **bottle, breastfeeding and wellbeing facilities** available across campus.



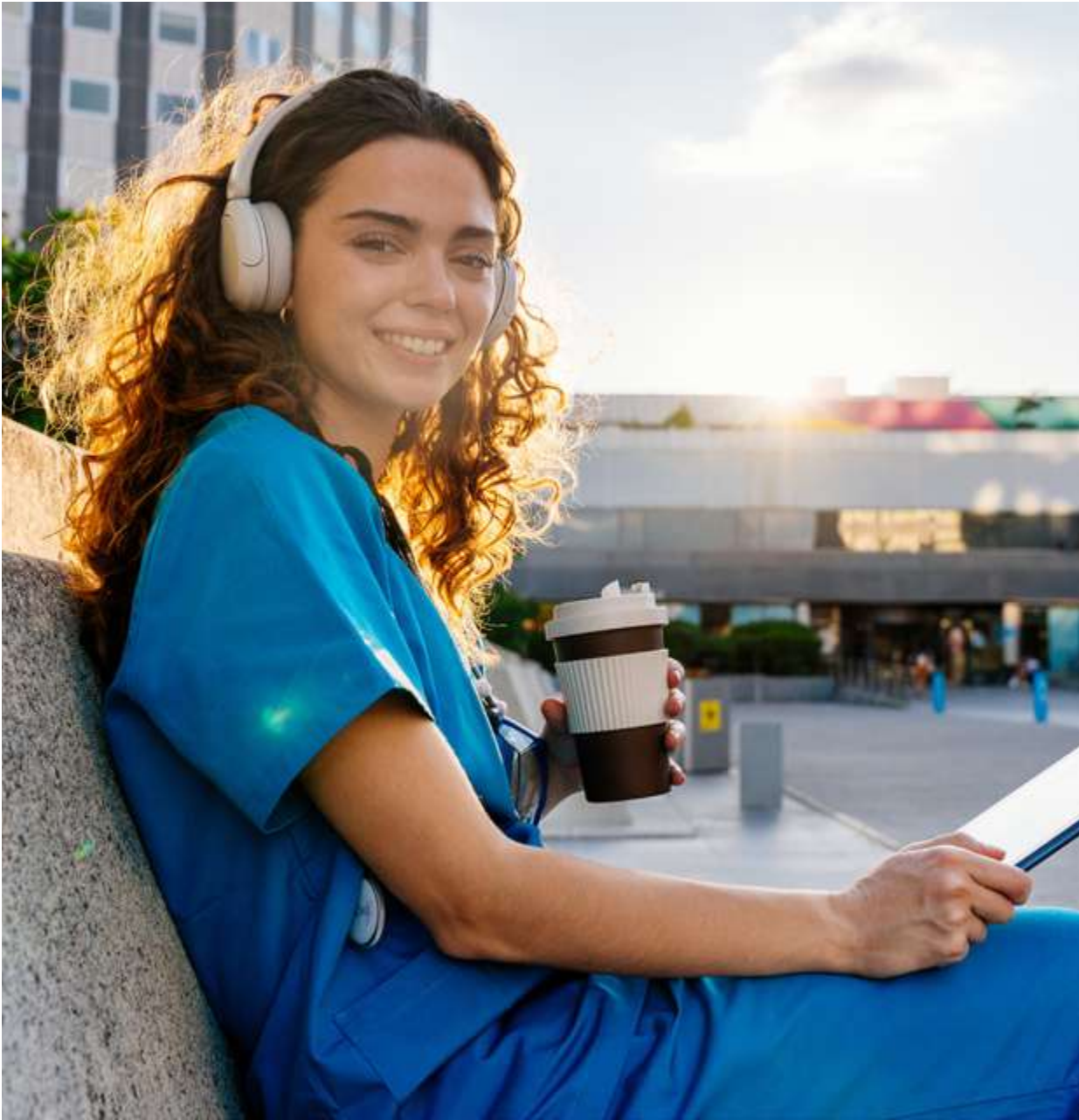
Institutional Athena SWAN bronze award



Beyond campus

The University’s **Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies (CIGS)** brings together over 170 academic staff from the arts and humanities, social sciences, medicine and healthcare studies and enjoys excellent connections with Gender and Women’s Studies departments at universities regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Research from across the University is contributing to political, economic and social equality for women. Ongoing work includes a three-year ESRC-funded research project, **L-learning: rethinking young women’s working lives** which studies young women’s earliest experiences of work, including paid work while studying, and how these experiences may contribute to gendered inequalities in later life.



CASE STUDY

Training park staff to increase women’s safety

Staff and volunteers in West Yorkshire parks are being trained to intervene when they spot cases of discrimination, harassment or bullying in public spaces.

The aim of the training is to create a community of active bystanders in West Yorkshire, who feel confident and have the knowledge to intervene safely if they see harassment taking place in a park or open space.

The initiative has been organised by Dr Anna Barker, from the University of Leeds’ School of Law, who led the original research, along with West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Keep Britain Tidy and the Suzy Lamplugh Trust – a personal safety, stalking and harassment charity.

Bystander training helps individuals recognise a potentially harmful situation or interaction and gives them the skills to safely respond in a way that could positively influence the outcome. It is one of the recommendations in the Safer Parks National Guidance, which was published in 2023, as a result of research by the University of Leeds.



Clean Water & Sanitation



Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.



Our people

The University is actively working to reduce water consumption, with a focus on water efficiency, research into water reuse, and a commitment to sustainable water practices.

Our **Sustainable Labs programme** encourages sustainable water use, such as dedicated water circulators for condenser and chiller units, which allows large scale equipment to operate with less water.

Water@leeds brings together researchers from different disciplines, backgrounds and career stages within the University of Leeds, and has a mission to **train the next generation of water experts**, to develop the knowledge, skills and interdisciplinary awareness to make a positive contribution to tackling water-related challenges. There were 80 members of water@leeds that attended the annual Confluence 2023 in October, which included 31 lightning talks covering the depth and breadth of interdisciplinary water research across the University.





Campus and operations

Our **Sustainable Construction Procedure** and associated standards mandate the environmentally friendly and efficient use of water. In a bid to reduce reliance on mains-fed water for our operations, the University has installed rainwater harvesting systems for toilet flushing at Storm Jameson Court. Local mains pressure is tested, and pressure reducing valves are fitted where possible. In addition, landscaping is designed and managed to minimise the need for watering and to retain, store and infiltrate water.

The University provides free drinking water from **over 200 water points across campus** – indoor and outdoor, at all catering facilities and in office buildings. We actively promote conscious water usage on campus, for example, providing useful tips and guidance in our **Sustainable Living Guide**.



Beyond campus

We aim to become a leader in water stewardship and research, contributing to global efforts to address water-related challenges. Water@leeds supports water conservation through community-based projects, and we lead the **NERC Freshwater Quality Champions Programme** to investigate freshwater pollution in rivers across the UK. The programme includes a series of webinars designed to help promote communication and interaction between researchers, the policy community, business and practitioners.



CASE STUDY

Reducing water consumption in Medicinal Chemistry

Dr Martin McPhillie, Dr Katie Simmons and Dr Scott Grossman have been working to implement sustainable lab practices in the Medicinal Chemistry research group, based in the School of Chemistry.

Actions taken include replacing old water aspirators with a new vacuum pump which uses less energy and is more efficient at condensing solvent, meaning fewer harmful chemicals reach the atmosphere. The new pump is installed as a closed loop system to reduce waste from rotary evaporators. A new cooling unit will recirculate water in the closed system, requiring only six litres of water to cool the condenser and saving more than 800,000 litres of water per year.

The group also replaced traditional water condensers, which used a continuous flow of water to cool heated chemical reactions, with specialist air condensers requiring no water. The traditional units use 350 litres of water in a six-hour period – meaning each specialist condenser can save nearly 1000 litres of water per overnight reflux.

The adoption of these, and other sustainable practices, contributed to the Medicinal Chemistry group's LEAF Gold accreditation in July 2024.

CASE STUDY

Improving WASH in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia

Millions of mothers, young children and infants lose their lives because of dirty water supplies and unsanitary conditions, but a new project hopes to prevent these deaths by improving water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in developing countries.

Members of the University's School of Civil Engineering, funded by the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), are part of **WASH Systems for Health**, a five-year programme unveiled by the United Nations Water Conference in 2023. Our researchers hope to provide governments in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia with more reliable and inclusive systems.

Working with IRC-WASH and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the University of Leeds team hopes to improve the lives of the most vulnerable – those living in rural areas, urban slums, disaster-prone areas, and low-income countries, as well as the youngest members of society, as WASH-related diseases are among the leading causes of death in children under five.



7

Affordable & Clean Energy



Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

Net Zero

Delivery Plan published

Electrification of the Brownlee Triathlon Centre

Geothermal Campus Living Lab launched



Our people

The University supports students and staff to improve energy efficiency, reduce consumption and avoid waste. We continued to support the winter and Easter shutdown procedure - an initiative to get all building users to shut down their workspaces during university closure periods. Over the 2023 winter shutdown period alone, we saved 1.45 million kWh of energy, equivalent to 274 Tonnes of CO₂ – a 22% reduction.

The **Sustainable Labs programme** grew throughout the year, with a staff-facing Resource Hub and awareness-raising roadshows and webinars. As of August 2024, 29 lab spaces on campus hold LEAF (Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework) certificates, including six Gold awards. Energy and resource efficiency form a key part of the criteria for achieving LEAF certification.



Campus and operations

In November 2023, we published our **Net Zero Delivery Plan**, which sets out the key projects that will deliver our ambitious net zero targets. The identified projects were the result of extensive modelling and analysis of potential interventions across campus. This identified the interventions that would be the most effective and impactful at reducing estate-based greenhouse gas emissions, and focus on a combination of reducing energy demand and switching to clean energy sources.

Work continued through the year to progress these major infrastructure projects. This included test drilling to explore the potential of geothermal energy to contribute to a new energy centre for the engineering cluster of buildings, developing plans to upgrade the ventilation system and install solar PV on the Worsley Building, and placing an order with Northern Powergrid to supply the increased electrical capacity that we will need to decarbonise campus.

We have continued to test and implement energy efficiency measures on campus including Building Energy Management System (BEMS) upgrades, smart thermostatic radiator valves (TRVs) and continual improvement to the shutdown procedure over university closure periods.



Laboratory Efficiency
Assessment Framework

29 lab spaces on campus hold LEAF certificates



Beyond campus

University-led research knowledge in renewable energy and energy is shared with local and national industry. This is through access to continued professional development courses in areas such as 'Energy from Biomass Combustion', as well as through consultancy, contract research and funded PhDs.

Energy Leeds is focussed on developing and maintaining clean, secure and affordable supplies as part of a sustainable energy future. They play a key leadership role in major UK energy centres and research projects, with a particular focus on supporting energy policy development on issues including transport, materials and products and industrial decarbonisation. Through these projects we have extensive engagement with policy makers and produce reports setting out policy recommendations.

In 2023, the **University of Leeds announced its partnership with the Energy Demand Research Centre**, one of six recipients of a £53 million UKRI fund to decarbonise the energy sector.

Geosolutions Leeds explored the potential for alternate low carbon energy resources in Leeds, to help define policy on the use and provision of energy within Leeds-based heat networks. These included geothermal energy as well as other environmental energy sources, including the River Aire and industrial waste heat and cooling needs.

In addition, Leeds researchers are working on a Policy Support Fund project to find ways of linking heat users to economically and societally viable heat sources, using Leeds as a case study of a pioneer city for implementing zoning.



CASE STUDY

Exploring geothermal solutions to future heating needs

In Spring 2024, we developed the **Geothermal Campus Living Lab** as a collaboration between the Facilities Directorate, academics from Geosolutions Leeds and engineering and drilling partners. A series of test boreholes were drilled across campus, to test the potential for geothermal energy to contribute to our future heating needs.

The results showed a strong basis for further development of ground energy as a low-grade heat resource across campus. The findings are contributing to designs for a new energy centre that will serve the Engineering cluster of buildings, as part of our Net Zero Delivery Plan.

Monitoring boreholes equipped with sensors are providing crucial data on the sub-surface, and the Living Lab has created additional research opportunities. This includes a £480k Ofgem research project which will use the data to understand how thermal energy storage could be implemented on a bigger scale.

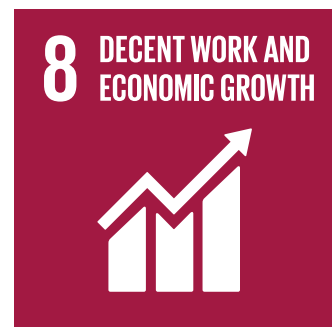
CASE STUDY

Electrifying the Brownlee Centre

The Brownlee Triathlon Centre and Bodington Football Hub provide sports facilities for the University and the local community. During summer 2024, we completed the installation of new electric powered heat pumps which replaced the previous wood pellet and oil boilers – the final steps towards electrifying the whole Bodington complex and removing the use of fossil and carbon emitting fuels on site. New electric vehicle chargers were also installed to support sustainable travel to and from the centre. The centre also hosts a natural flood management site, designed to build climate resilience and reduce the risk of flooding on the sports fields and local road network.



Decent Work & Economic Growth



Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.



Our people

The **Careers Service** at the University of Leeds helps students and graduates develop the skills and experience they need to achieve their career goals. The **Exclusive to Leeds** programme helps secure paid internships and work placements with local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), charities and multi-national organisations, as well as on-campus placements working for the University, providing valuable opportunities for students whilst supporting the local economy.

In 2023-24, the programme provided 139 individual students within paid roles; and the team piloted the Leeds Virtual Internship Programme (Leeds VIP). These fully online, 25-hour internships eliminate the need for employers to provide physical workspaces and increase accessibility for those who can't drive or afford extra travel. The micro-internship was piloted to 196 students, resulting in a 98% completion rate.

Our award-winning business advice service, SPARK, is free to all University of Leeds students and graduates, offering business advice and mentoring, financial support, business competitions and Enterprise Scholarships. In 2023/24, SPARK supported 65 new start-up businesses, generating over £2million in revenue.



Campus and operations

We have significantly reduced the use of fixed-term contracts (FTCs), reducing them by around half from 25% of contracts in 2022 to 12.7% in 2024. As well as restricting the use of FTCs in new hirings, we have been moving staff to ongoing contracts after two years’ service.

In collaboration with our trade unions, we have reviewed the pay and grading framework for all staff on grades two to nine, considering comparative benchmark data from other academic institutions and leading local and national employers. The new pay framework is being implemented over two years and aims to strengthen the University’s position as a leading employer.

We publish **pay gap reporting** for gender, disability and ethnicity. Through the delivery of our **EDI Strategy** and **EDI Implementation Plan (PDF)** we aim to tackle many of the underlying structural inequalities that produce pay gaps.



Beyond campus

The **Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network (Y-PERN)** partnered with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority to explore how ‘systems thinking’ - a holistic approach that considers complex interconnections - can improve regional economic development. This collaboration supported the design of innovative policies aimed at fostering inclusive economic growth, creating quality jobs and building a more resilient local economy.

Meanwhile, **the Yorkshire and Humber Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP)**, which began its funding period in January 2024, launched projects focused on

inclusive growth and the development of a green economy. These projects work towards generating new, sustainable employment opportunities and ensuring that economic benefits reach all parts of society, particularly as the region transitions to environmentally sustainable industries.

Funded by the Research England Policy Support Fund, **A strategic framework for delivering West Yorkshire International Trade Strategy** is a collaboration with West Yorkshire Combined Authority, to develop a policy framework to enhance the effectiveness of policy aimed at boosting exports as part of its International Trade Strategy 2022-26.

The first **Leeds Climate Finance and Sustainability (LCFS) workshop** was held in April, organised by the Accounting and Finance department and funded by the Climate Change and Environmental Research Fund (CCERF) from Leeds University Business School. The workshop was open to finance and accounting academics, economists, environmental scientists, journal editors and postgraduate researchers, and aimed to discuss the important role of finance and accounting research in addressing the climate challenge.



CASE STUDY

Report shows UK-German workforce attitudes to climate change

A report into research, led by Professor Vera Trappmann, in the Leeds University Business School (LUBS), was published in November, examining how workers in Germany and the UK view the challenges associated with the transition to net zero.

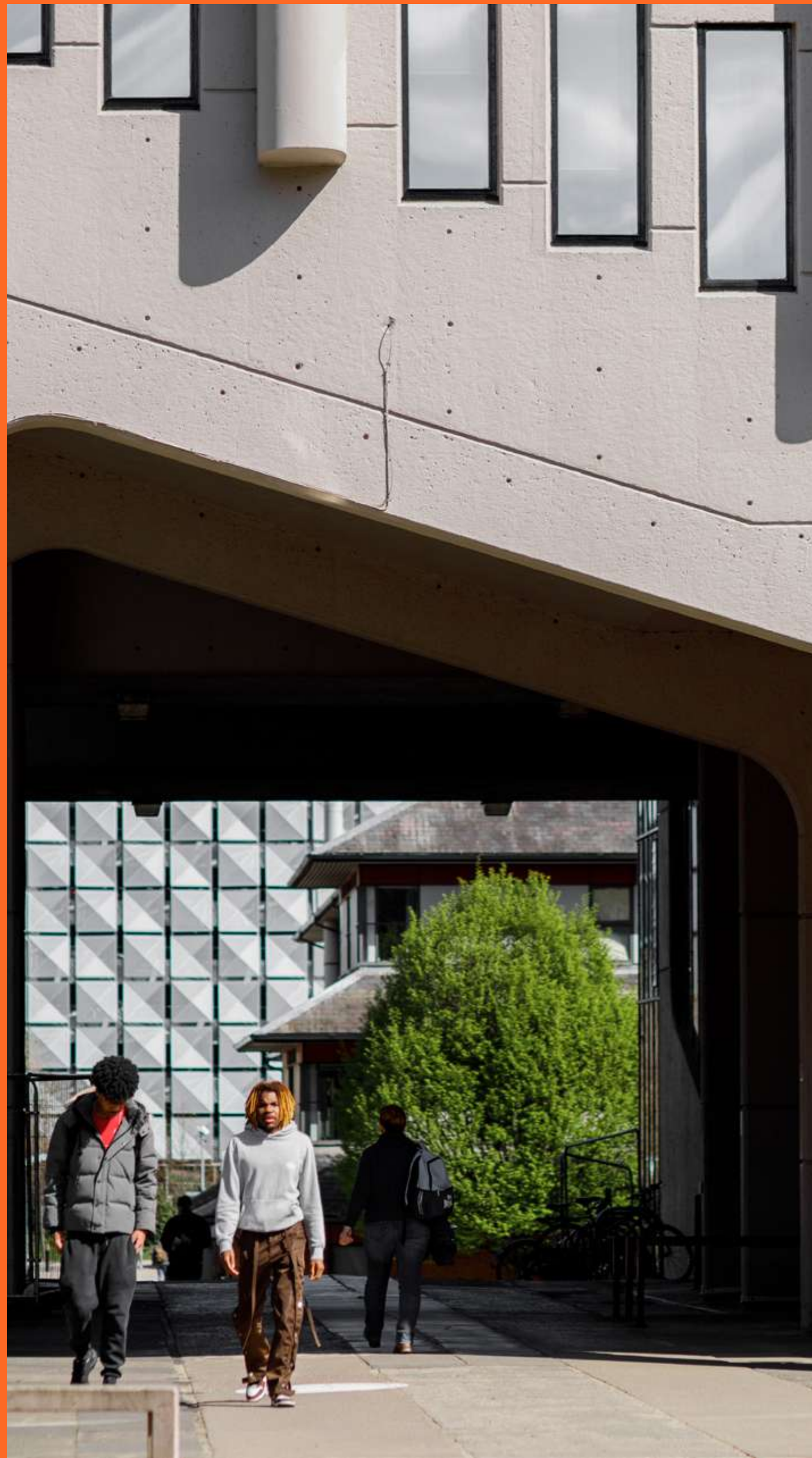
Based on a survey of over 4000 people, **Climate Change, Green Economy and Work: the perception of workers in Germany and the UK** looks at whether workers feel ready to work in a greener economy, what barriers they face, what solutions they think will be important and what policies have the most support from workers in the transition to a low carbon economy.

The report revealed few differences between the way workers in the UK and Germany respond to a range of issues around the climate crisis. In both countries, there is a sense of urgency and concern, calls for more

action from their respective governments and a clearly defined set of expectations on how a shift to a decarbonised economy should occur.

Actions taken by workers to deal with climate change are also similar, with more activity at household level, and less so at company or community level. 80% of workers talk about climate change with their families, with over 25% doing so frequently and 20% never discussing it.

Whilst German workers are more likely to support renewable energy, and UK workers are more likely to favour nuclear power, there is a huge interest in both countries in working in the green sector.



Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure



Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation.



Campus and operations

In Spring 2024, we created a new **Geothermal Campus Living Lab** as a collaboration between the Facilities Directorate, academics from Geosolutions Leeds and engineering and drilling partners. A series of test boreholes were drilled across campus to test the potential for geothermal energy to contribute to our future heating needs alongside heat pump technology.

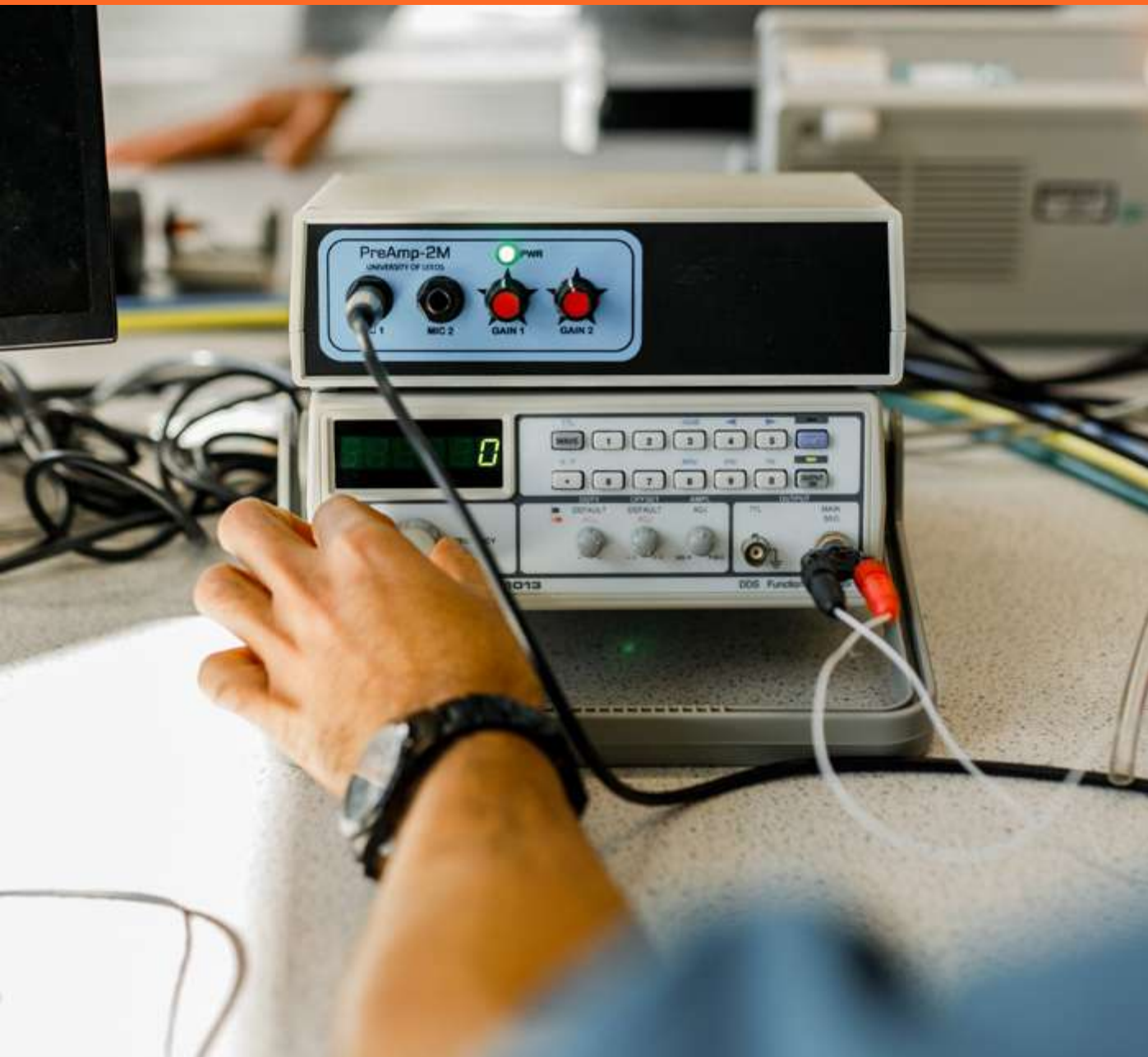
Supported by a team of leading academic experts from the University, the associate applies cutting-edge academic research to develop practical, real-world solutions. The partner organisations also gain access to the University's specialist research facilities, boosting their capacity for innovation.



Beyond campus

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) are a key route for collaboration between the University and organisations, to tackle strategically important challenges. By embedding qualified graduates or postgraduates as associates within businesses, KTPs help bring academic knowledge to bear on practical, real-world solutions, accelerating growth and innovation and supporting sustainable industrial development across the region.

We also support **Knowledge Exchange Fellowships**, which give academic staff an opportunity to work with organisations at their site, or for a non-academic partner to work on a project at the University (or a mixed approach) for up to 12 months, on either a full or part-time basis. External partners include industry, business, public sector or third sector organisations, and the initiative aims to increase mutual understanding and support the commercialisation of academic knowledge.



CASE STUDY

Leeds-Africa Hub focuses on innovation to reduce inequality

A continued drive to advance skills and education in data science across Africa has many benefits, but is particularly relevant in helping to reduce global inequality and spur economic growth.

Against this background, the **Leeds Africa Hub for Data Science and Artificial Intelligence** was established to create a forum for sharing insights across research areas that are being transformed by developments in artificial intelligence, machine learning and data science. The Hub brings together experts from the UK and across Africa to build new partnerships and collaborations, giving researchers the opportunity to share their research with new communities and discover new applications for theoretical developments in mathematical and computational methods.

The Hub builds on the strong track record of international collaboration led by the University of Leeds, including projects such as the Global Challenges Research Fund **AFRICAP** and African SWIFT projects, along with the **Development in Africa with Radio Astronomy (DARA)** initiative.

CASE STUDY

Fostering innovation and supporting sustainable growth

Nexus is the University’s £40 million innovation hub and plays a vital role in fostering a dynamic ecosystem for innovation, sustainable industrialisation and a resilient infrastructure.

Nexus provides state-of-the-art facilities, including co-working spaces and laboratories, to enable collaboration between businesses, entrepreneurs and researchers. By bridging the gap between academic expertise and industry needs, Nexus accelerates the development and application of new technologies and promotes inclusive access to innovation across multiple sectors.

Nexus supports sustainable industrial growth through strategic partnerships, such as HealthTech Leeds, a strategic part of an integrated healthtech ecosystem across the University of Leeds and Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust. HealthTech brings together academic, clinical and commercialisation expertise, exemplifying how academic-led initiatives can drive inclusive economic development and build the infrastructure necessary for a resilient and innovative future.



Reduced Inequalities



Reduce inequality within and among countries.



Our people

The **Access to Leeds** scheme aims to bridge the gap in access to higher education between the least and most privileged students, assessing academic potential through more than grades alone.

Our **Exclusive to Leeds programme**, delivered by the University's Careers Service, gives students the opportunity to connect with employers, learn about career pathways, and build professional networks. In 2023-24, the programme held seven events with partners including KPMG, Rosemont Pharmaceuticals, The Hut Group and Deloitte, targeting students from widening participation (WP) backgrounds through the Plus Programme. Over the year, more than one-third of the students attending were from a WP background.

In 2023-24, the University applied for University of Sanctuary status, recognising the breadth of work in making the University a welcoming place for

asylum seekers and refugees, through bursaries and scholarships, among other initiatives. Since 2018, more than 30 students have been able to find sanctuary at Leeds through our Sanctuary Scholarship.

Our **staff networks** provide a safe, welcoming and practical platform to members of staff who identify with a protected group, or who have specific interests, including those based on gender, accessibility, sexual orientation and gender identity, and religion. In 2024, the University launched the **Equity in Leadership programme**, aimed at global majority (minoritised ethnic) professional services and academic staff progression to senior roles.



10



Campus and operations

Our **Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)** governance structure and **policies** ensure we are creating a community that is actively supportive and opposes discrimination. In October 2023, we launched our **EDI Implementation Plan (PDF)**, outlining how we will achieve our strategic ambitions.

The University is committed to the principles of the Race Equality Charter (REC) and officially joined the charter membership in August 2023. We are actioning key areas for tackling inequalities for minoritised ethnic staff and students through this work, and we aim to achieve our first REC bronze award in 2025.



Beyond campus

We are proud to be a member of the Leeds **City of Sanctuary** Working Group.

The Welcoming Migrants initiative, led by the Library and Galleries team at Leeds, brings together sanctuary seekers from different backgrounds to forge positive and meaningful relationships. Created in consultation with community organisations, the programme utilises our collections at the Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery and Treasures of the Brotherton Gallery.

At least 20 research centres/groups across the University conduct research on inequities, and the **Inequalities Research Network** brings these together to increase momentum and profile. Much of our **research focuses on reducing inequalities**, particularly between the Global North and South, including through low-cost healthcare, STEM education and training, or access to clean and sustainable energy. Some of the University’s major ongoing project collaborations include **Community-led Responsive and Effective Urban Health Systems (CHORUS)** and **WASH Systems for Health**.

Mature students from local areas of low participation in higher education are often the best ambassadors to help recruit peers from similar backgrounds. **The Learning Champions programme**, from Leeds Lifelong Learning Centre, provides opportunities for mature students and graduates to take part in outreach activities with communities typically underrepresented in higher education. In 2023-24, we had 20 active volunteers. By volunteering, under-represented students can grow in confidence and develop key graduate skills, as well as have a significant impact on communities, encouraging others to see that university can be for them.



CASE STUDY

Opening of Leeds Mathematics School

The **Leeds Mathematics School (LMaS)**, a partnership between the University of Leeds and GORSE Academies Trust, welcomed its first intake of 69 students in September 2023.

A specialist college for 16-19 year olds, LMaS targets pupils from areas with higher levels of social disadvantage to provide equity of access to A-level provision in maths, further maths and sciences. In particular, the college is determined to reduce gaps in the participation of female students (trans-inclusive) and the attainment of students who are from widening participation backgrounds.

Students benefit from modern facilities in newly renovated accommodation in the heart of Leeds city centre. University of Leeds staff and students work with LMaS teachers and students to share their love of mathematical sciences, creating new opportunities and supporting an innovative and exciting academic, pastoral and enrichment curriculum.

The college’s core principle is that every student must achieve highly and leave with many and meaningful choices available to them: in their learning, in their career and in their life.

CASE STUDY

Boosting English language skills for potential refugee students

RefugEAP is a free online pre-university academic English skills programme for refugee-background students across the UK, developed by staff from the Universities of Leeds and Leicester.

Aimed at students who have not been able to access a formal pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme yet, RefugEAP gives people from refugee backgrounds the chance to continue the development of their academic English skills with a view to studying for a degree at university. The programme supports students in a trauma-informed way, while they are waiting for more formal opportunities to become available.

The online programme was developed by the University of Leicester’s Sanctuary Seekers Unit and the University of Leeds’ Language Centre – which hosts RefugeEAP as an official programme, giving students and tutors access to email, online platforms, Office 365, and the University library and support services.

So far, the programme has hosted students from three continents and 29 different countries.

CASE STUDY

Levelling the playing field with the Access to Leeds Module

The University of Leeds is committed to supporting underrepresented students to achieve their potential and overcome the inbuilt disadvantages that can affect their prospects, including increasing the numbers of students coming from areas with lower percentages of students progressing into higher education.

The Access to Leeds scheme works towards bridging this gap, enabling students to demonstrate academic potential through more than grades alone. The programme starts before students arrive at Leeds, with the **Access to Leeds module**, which eligible applicants follow during their Year 13 summer term at school or college.

A remote programme that is completed on our virtual learning platform, it comprises study skill workshops designed to strengthen students’ writing, referencing and critical reading abilities, putting them on a level footing with others more likely to have developed these skills at school.



11

Sustainable Cities & Communities



Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

2,424

visits to the Bike Hub
and 381 bikes hired

116

staff used the Cycle
to Work Scheme

654

cycle spaces now
on residential sites

2,272

cycle spaces now
on campus



Our people

Our students value the support offered by the University via our **Student Citizenship programme** and **Sustainable Living Guide** to help them live sustainably during their time at Leeds. This year's annual Welcome to Leeds campaign saw 17 community ambassadors visiting new students and residents in their homes, to offer advice and support about living in the city.

Throughout the year, the **Bike Hub** continued to support active commuting and cycling for students, staff and the wider community, offering bike hire along with support and guidance. In 2023-24, the Bike Hub welcomed over 2,000 visitors, hired out 381 bikes and held 12 bike maintenance sessions – delivered by our qualified mechanics and designed to help students and staff learn basic safe riding, maintenance and sustainable travel skills.



Campus and operations

Our **Sustainable Construction Standard** specifies the requirements, regulations and technical guidance to ensure buildings are safe, efficient and sustainable. The Standard aligns to the University of Leeds Climate Plan and other strategies, setting minimum performance requirements for energy efficiency, carbon reduction, biodiversity, materials, water use, and health and wellbeing. The Standard was successfully implemented throughout the construction lifecycle of the Esther Simpson, Newlyn and Bragg buildings on the main University campus.

We provide a range of **initiatives to support sustainable travel** including travel discounts, season ticket loans and a Cycle to Work scheme for staff. This year, we have expanded and upgraded electric vehicle charging facilities across campus, including two new electric bike charging points. We have also installed electric bike docking stations which we host as part of the wider Leeds City Bikes rental network, and further developed our **Sustainable Travel map** showing sustainable travel infrastructure on campus, including cycle parking, hygiene facilities, blue badge bays, car clubs, EV charging points and Leeds City Bike docks.

Around campus, our **galleries and museums**, **libraries**, **performance venues**, and **green spaces** are open to students, staff and the public.



Beyond campus

The **Cultural Institute** oversees the relationship between the University and the creative sector. This year we began an exciting new partnership with Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture, working with SAIL, the Bradford 2025 sustainability partners to explore, track and monitor the carbon emissions linked to the year-long festival, covering areas such as electricity use, transport logistics and audience travel.

A new **Cultural Engagement Strategy 2024-2029** has been developed which aims to support research development and knowledge exchange with the cultural sector, protecting our cultural and natural heritage and promoting sustainable practices.

In January 2024, the **YPIP (Yorkshire and Humber Policy Innovation Partnership)** funding period

began. This £4 million UKRI-funded project aims to enhance collaboration between university academics and policymakers in Yorkshire and the Humber, to develop evidence-based policies that benefit local communities. One of its three work packages is ‘sustainably living in a green economy’.

In addition, a four-year **community-university-council collaborative partnership** resulted in the opening this year of the new Royal Park in the Leeds Hyde Park community.



CASE STUDY

Developing a clean, low-cost geothermal energy supply for Leeds

The Leeds PIPES heat network provides low cost and lower carbon heat to thousands of council tenants, non-domestic customers and the council’s own buildings. However, the network’s heat is largely provided through combustion of non-recyclable waste at Leeds’ Renewable Energy Recovery Facility (RERF).

With a limited lifetime for the RERF and the need for even lower carbon solutions going forward, it is essential that Leeds City Council develops a strategy towards a zero-carbon trajectory in line with their climate commitments.

Geosolutions Leeds explored the potential for alternate low carbon energy resources in Leeds to help define policy on the use and provision of energy within Leeds-based heat networks. These included geothermal energy as well as other environmental energy sources including the River Aire and industrial waste heat and cooling needs. Geothermal energy may be particularly useful as a heat store as well as source of energy, helping with seasonal peaks in demand and supporting the integration of other energy sources.

We will combine our geoscience, engineering and social science expertise to explore how the Leeds PIPES network could evolve and provide pathways for Leeds City Council policy for development of future heat networks across Leeds and beyond.

CASE STUDY

Reinventing urban spaces
through community collaboration

Many urban areas feature disused or under-utilised land, often managed through traditional top-down methods that overlook the needs and wishes of local communities. Previous research had highlighted the availability of unused land and the interest of communities in accessing it, and 2023-24 saw the University working with two local Leeds communities to explore how they can gain access and work to improve it.

The project brought together a diverse team of collaborators including academics from the University of Leeds with partners from Hyde Park Source and Leeds City Council Asset Management team. The project was supported by Policy Leeds and funding provided by the Policy Support Fund.

The research team organised a workshop where people with lived experiences of the challenges associated with working with the local authority for community-led projects shared their knowledge.

The team collaborated with Dr. Mikey Tomkins and Wildlife Friendly Otley to trial a creative method for mapping land to develop community-led nature recovery. This work was led by Hyde Park Source as the Nature Transition Partner for Climate Action Leeds and involved organising a series of ‘re-imagining neighbourhood’ walks in the communities of Seacroft and Alwoodley. Community members identified under-used space and worked together to imagine how it could be transformed into thriving green spaces.

This collaborative effort highlighted the power of combining community knowledge with innovative mapping techniques, to reimagine and reclaim urban spaces for ecological and social benefits.

A guidance poster was produced to help other communities navigate local authorities and access land more easily and successfully.

CASE STUDY

The carbon footprint of
traditional food markets

This project, part of Leeds city Council’s 2023-24 Areas of Research Interest, assessed the carbon footprint of foods sold within Leeds City Markets, along with the attitudes and beliefs of the market traders around food sustainability. It’s aim was to better understand what the perceived and actual barriers are for decreasing the carbon footprint of the foods sold in the markets.

This research had two components: qualitative data collection, using surveys and interviews; and quantitative data collection, in the form of stock/ procurement lists. The researchers talked with traders who sell foods of diverse ethnic origins to explore cultural differences in purchasing habits and food provision of foods, leading to a better understanding of the cultural implications of selecting lower carbon footprint foods.

The project analysed the carbon footprint of the top ten items sold by each trader using **CDRC’s** carbon footprint calculator. The aim was to raise awareness of the footprint of everyday items; to identify if they could be swapped to more sustainable options; and where substitutions would not be possible economically or culturally, to assess whether stocklists could be limited to the most popular items.





Responsible Consumption & Production



Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

38%
waste recycled

10%
total waste mass reduction



LEAF certificates awarded in 2023-24



Our people

The University supports students and staff to practise sustainable consumption, and we have updated our **Sustainable Living Guide** to include information about waste and recycling.

We encourage initiatives that support a circular economy: for example, **reuse@leeds** is an online platform that allows students and staff to share their surplus items within the University community in a way that is more cost efficient and environmentally friendly than throwing out and buying new.

The Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF), a tool developed by University College London, helps our researchers, staff and students understand and improve the sustainability and efficiency of their laboratories, focusing on areas such as waste and recycling, equipment management, procurement and energy.

In a 2024 collaboration with Scope, the leading disability equality charity, more than 30 student, staff and community volunteers worked together to transform donated clothes into a unique sustainable fashion collection and sell them at a pop-up shop on campus.



Campus and operations

The University’s approach to responsible consumption and production is guided by relevant **environmental policies and standards** including our Sustainable Procurement Standard, Sustainable Food Standard and Reuse, Recycling and Waste Standard.

To ensure we prioritise sustainable procurement practices, sustainability has been integrated into our category strategy framework templates. New suppliers need to include sustainable action plans when tendering to demonstrate their commitment to continuous improvement.

Throughout 2024, we took part in a multi-university pilot of the NetPositive supplier tool, designed to help improve data collection for our supply chain, an essential step in being able to set meaningful targets and reduction pathways. This was supported by supplier engagement and embedding sustainability and climate into procurement processes.

In October 2023, we signed a **contract for waste management services with Mitie**, which is supporting our goals by streamlining waste streams into one centrally managed contract, helping us reduce food waste, minimise plastics and enhance recycling.



Two-star Fairtrade University award



Beyond campus

Working with Leeds Beckett University, Unipol and Leeds City Council, we have made significant progress in reducing waste and encouraging reuse among students through our summer **Changeover Campaign**. In 2024, we worked with British Heart Foundation and a new local partner, Revive Reuse, to increase the number of donation banks available at key locations.

We continue to work collaboratively with the **Leeds Anchors Network** to share learning, align best practice and drive responsible procurement practices with other large employers in the local area.



CASE STUDY

Repair Café

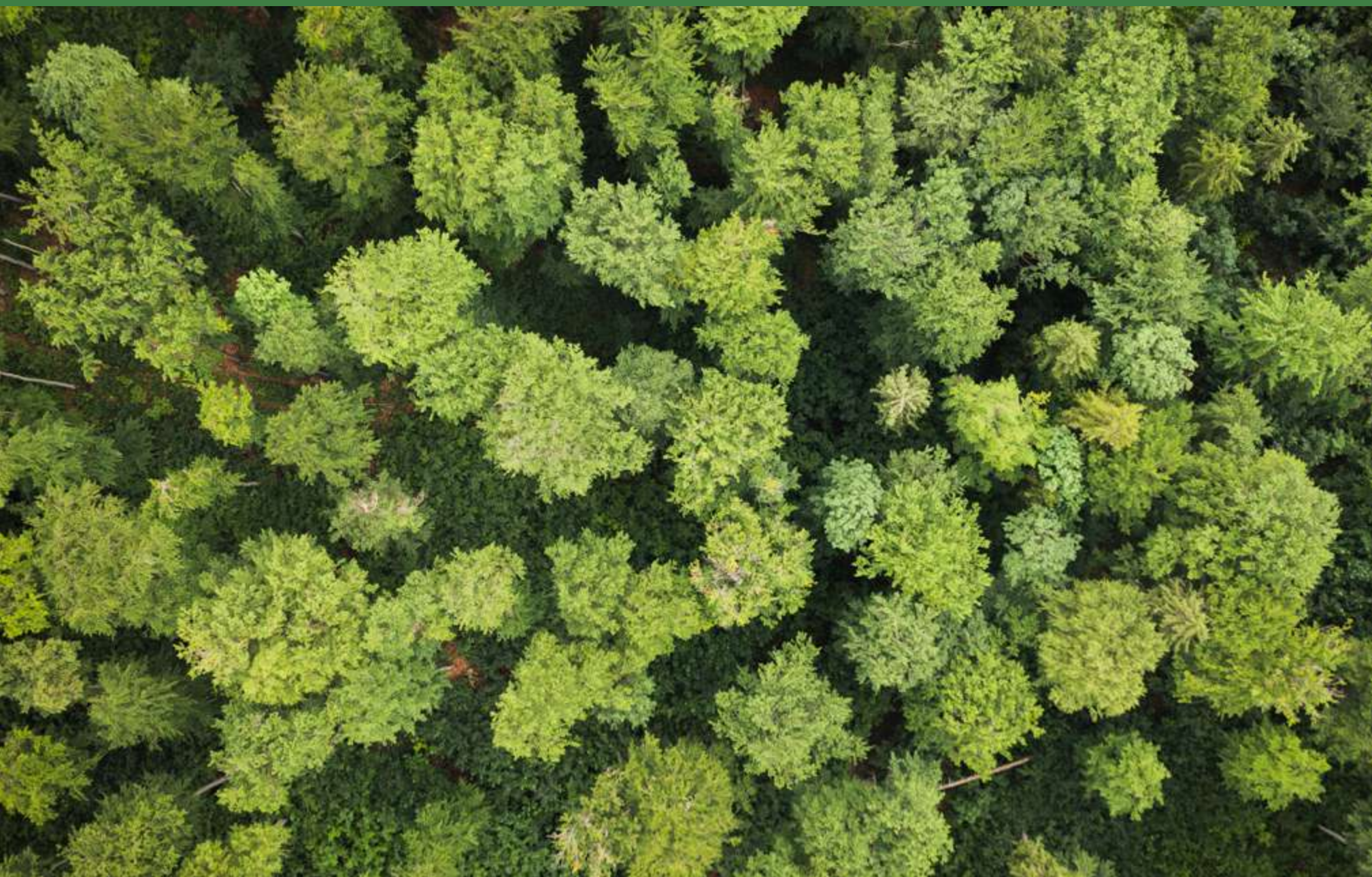
In November 2023, the Sustainability Service, in collaboration with Makerspace in the Edward Boyle Library, launched a monthly Repair Café. Staff and students can bring their broken or damaged clothes, electronics and appliances and be helped by skilled volunteers to repair them. Throughout the year, volunteers contributed 150 hours to the Repair Café on 117 fixes, helping prevent 1,205kg of CO2 emissions and 83kg of waste.

CASE STUDY

LUBS Sustainability Challenge 2024

Every year Leeds University Business School collaborates with a well-known business partner to address sustainability-focused business issues, with the aim of developing students’ understanding of ethical business practice and providing insights and recommendations for sustainable business operations.

For the 2024 Challenge, four student teams partnered with Oxfam on a brief to develop a stock sourcing and new business strategy for its Northern Logistics Hub in Batley. The winning team, ‘Renew Rationales’, presented suggestions for enhancing the Hub’s visibility and brand awareness, diversifying its products and boosting community involvement.



13



Climate Action



Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.



Our people

The University welcomed the first cohort of students to our flagship interdisciplinary MSc Climate Futures in 2023-24. Students completed a sustainability capstone project and accessed the new Gair Wood woodland research site as a Net Zero Living Lab resource.

In 2024, we formed a Just Transition Taskforce to ensure that our Net Zero ambitions are achieved in a fair, inclusive and equitable way. A key objective for the taskforce is to develop a framework and resources to support our **Climate Principles** and to help University stakeholders review and evaluate progress towards embedding justice in their areas of climate-relevant work.

The Taskforce also seeks to engage wider stakeholders with justice issues relevant to the Climate Plan and has established a Climate Justice Student Advisory Group to increase student engagement.





Campus and operations

The University is embedding climate resilience within our operations through our **Climate Plan** and **Campus Reimagined** programme. We are investing in our net zero pathway, climate-conscious campus development, nature-based solutions and cross-sector collaboration to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

In 2024, we developed our Climate Principles programme and are starting to see changes across the University, with the installation of electric powered heat pumps at the Brownlee Centre and geothermal test drilling across campus to provide a low carbon heat network. Electric vehicles (EVs) make up 35% of the University’s vehicle fleet and 7% is hybrid. We have also introduced e-bike rental stations that form part of the Leeds City bikes network.

One of our Climate Principles is Responsible Investment and we have taken meaningful steps towards embedding sustainability and ethical investment into our financial systems. This ensures that our financial decisions actively support our net zero ambitions and broader institutional values. Key achievements for 2024 include the development of a comprehensive Ethical Investment and Banking Policy, and further migration of the University’s core banking activity to Lloyds.



Beyond campus

As one of the founding partners of the **Leeds Climate Commission** and Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission, we are working with partner organisations to support a net zero city and region. Internally we have developed and expanded



our Positive Impact Partnerships and Living Lab programmes whilst the Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission launched its Climate Action Plan. We are collaborating on 25 climate-related funding bids as a named partner, successfully enabling new regional initiatives and working with educational and health partners to identify new partnership opportunities.

The **Priestley Centre for Climate Futures** is a world-leading climate centre based at the University. From local to global, we ensure that climate action is informed by the latest research, collaborating with organisations and individuals to transform our expertise into real-world impact. This was recognised with the achievement of a **Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) Impact Award** for the Finite-Amplitude Impulse Response (FaIR) Model, developed by academics from the Universities of Leeds and Oxford, which has transformed our understanding of the connection between global temperatures and the emissions we release into the atmosphere.

CASE STUDY

Co-producing ‘school living labs’ to reduce community carbon emissions

In the autumn of 2023, the **Leeds Horizons Institute** launched the Horizons Connect Fund to provide additional space and support for academics and others interested in working together, to experiment and to explore new collaborations.

One interdisciplinary project selected for funding aims to address the lack of resources expertise and support in schools to implement sustainability into their curriculums and local communities – an activity required of the education sector by the Department of Education.

Partnering with **Leeds Development Education Centre (DEC)**, an interdisciplinary research team is responding to this challenge by creating resources around reducing carbon, as well as an implementation model for schools to incorporate sustainability into their curriculum. The team is working with primary schools in under-served neighbourhoods in the community to enable positive change towards sustainability and encourage climate action.

Via a living lab methodology, the project team are hoping their approach empowers communities to address complex problems by co-creating the research questions and shaping the ways data is collected, and solutions are developed with participants.

CASE STUDY

Climate Education Hub for nurseries, schools and colleges established at University of Leeds

The University hosts one of nine regional hubs selected as part of the **Climate Ambassadors** initiative to provide nurseries, schools, colleges and universities across England with free access to local experts who volunteer to help boost climate education, promote green careers and identify ways carbon emissions can be reduced and biodiversity increased.

The Leeds hub serves Yorkshire and the Humber and is led by Professor Amanda Maycock from the **Institute for Climate and Atmospheric Science**.

Climate Ambassadors is a £2 million Department for Education programme, in partnership with the University of Reading and **EAUC** – the alliance for sustainability leadership in education, with support from **STEM Learning**.

The scheme was launched in 2023 and **expanded** in March 2024, with the aim that all 30,000 education settings across England should have a climate action plan in place by 2025.

The Leeds experts will help make a critical difference to the ability of nurseries, schools and colleges to reduce their carbon emissions, improve biodiversity and young people’s connection with nature, while also helping them adapt to climate risks and provide a world-leading education in sustainability and climate change critical for their future lives.



14

Life Below Water



Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.



Our people

The University of Leeds is one of three world-leading water, sanitation and waste management research centres to host an **EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training**, offering Water-WISER PhD programmes that emphasise practitioner training. The four-year programme focuses on developing skills to solve complex problems and address infrastructure and service delivery challenges. It includes a minimum of 6 months' industry or field work.

and a **Single Use Plastics Programme** which shows how we are reducing plastic waste across all areas.

We directly monitor the health of pond and river ecosystems around Leeds. On our main campus, the Roger Stevens Pond is used as a Living Lab and monitored for algal and invertebrate biodiversity. Sensors generate live data for an interactive 'virtual pond' which is used in our teaching and research.



Campus and operations

As part of the University's ISO 14001 accredited Environmental Management System, we have processes in place to prevent polluted water entering the water system, including our **disposal to drain procedure** that outlines what can and cannot be disposed of in drains and how to report accidents and spillages. We also have a **Single Use Plastics Management Standard**

Sustainable urban drainage systems have been installed at the Brownlee Sports Centre, supporting natural flood management. Regular water testing, underwater camera surveys and eDNA are all used to monitor the health of these aquatic ecosystems.



Beyond campus

Water@leeds is one of the largest interdisciplinary centres for water research in any university in the world. It brings together over 500 academics and postgraduate students to deliver world-leading water science, technology and policy research. Working with business, local and national governments, charities and NGOs, water@leeds hosts and supports a regular programme of events, including the annual ‘Confluence’ event which promotes conservation and sustainable use of water resources.

We monitor the hydrology, water quality and ecosystem processes of the River Aire catchment, co-locating many monitoring sites with Environment Agency measurement locations for synergy. A water temperature measurement network is currently being installed, and we have started to monitor GHG emissions from river ecosystems.

The University leads the **NERC Freshwater Quality Champions Programme** to investigate freshwater quality pollution in rivers across the UK, with a series of webinars designed to help promote communication and interaction between researchers, the policy community, business and practitioners.

CASE STUDY

Protecting native crayfish through collaborative conservation

Endangered white-clawed crayfish were rescued in June 2023 from Pudsey beck in Leeds by the Environment Agency, as part of a wider effort to protect native species after crayfish plague was detected in the River Aire catchment. The crayfish were moved into Bodington Pond at the University after temporary quarantine in tanks.

Designated as an ‘Ark’ site where native species like the white-clawed crayfish can thrive and breed, Bodington Pond was originally constructed to reduce flood risk but also enhances biodiversity and provides opportunities for students, academics and partners to collaborate on research projects as a living lab.

CASE STUDY

Transformational environmental programmes for Yorkshire

We are lead partners in the Yorkshire Integrated Catchment Solutions Programme (iCASP), which centres on local aquatic stewardship research and develops strong and sustainable regional community partnerships to drive river catchment and ecosystem management.

Between 2017 and 2024, iCASP developed over 50 collaborative projects with partner organisations. Initial NERC funding for iCASP has now ended, but it remains a sustainable regional resource for stakeholders and is seeking to deliver more ambitious outcomes.

CASE STUDY

Protecting coral reefs to benefit climate and communities

In November 2023, University of Leeds researchers joined a consortium of universities, development agencies and NGOs to deliver the **Climate REEFS project**. This aims to advance socially equitable climate change adaptation for coastal communities in Indonesia and the Philippines that depend on coral reef resources.

The project will quantify how reef structure predicts species and genetic diversity, potentially affecting the capacity of reefs to adapt to climate change. Work has already begun in both Indonesia and the Philippines, with ecological and community surveys carried out in Ambon Island and the Lease Islands with others planned in Bau-Bau, Southeast Sulawesi, Southern Leyte and Eastern Samar. In each area, the team are identifying sections of reef with the most complexity and better resilience to climate change.





15

Life On Land



Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.



Our people

The University of Leeds is committed to being an exemplar of urban biodiversity. Two of our undergraduate students took advantage of our paid **Student Sustainability Architects** programme this year to lead key biodiversity initiatives, including species monitoring and habitat action planning at residential sites.

In addition, the Sustainability Service supported two undergraduate research projects using sensor technology to monitor birds and pollinators on campus.



Campus and operations

Our **Biodiversity Standard** outlines how we protect ecosystems around the University, and

our **Sustainable Construction Procedure** and associated standards ensure that biodiversity is considered in planning and development. We monitor habitats through surveys and create site-specific biodiversity action plans. This year we completed full site surveys across the estate using the **UKHab** methodology and established biodiversity baselines using the Defra biodiversity metric, supporting evidence-based habitat management and planning.

The **Leeds Ecosystem, Atmosphere & Forest (LEAF) Centre**, along with Leeds City Council and UBoC, operates a **Forest Observatory** in Middleton Park, where students and staff from the University contribute to the collection of long-term environmental measurements and study the role of forests in the provision of ecosystem services.



Beyond campus

The University runs and hosts regular environmental and biodiversity events that are open to students, staff and the local community. In 2023-24 these included:

- Regular bat monitoring events hosted in collaboration with the West Yorkshire Bat Group, offering hands-on learning opportunities for staff, students and visitors.
- Peregrine falcon ringing and educational ‘show and tell’ events.
- A campus-based knowledge exchange workshop, bringing together community members and local partners to discuss nature recovery and accessible green space.

We contribute to wider understanding and best practice across the further and higher education sector and chair the EAUC’s Biodiversity Community of Practice meetings. We delivered a session, ‘People and Nature Sharing Space – BNG and Beyond’ at the EAUC 2024 Conference.

We work with local communities and other external organisations to directly maintain and extend ecosystems and biodiversity in the UK and abroad. Examples include the ongoing restoring Hardknott

forest project, where we are directly maintaining the ecosystem as well as delivering research; and the Gair Wood project, where we are exploring the real-time impact of tree planting as a nature-based solution to climate change, providing opportunities for research, education and volunteering.

We have enjoyed a corporate partnership with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust since 2012, and this year we delivered six Wild Work Days, generating a total of 94 volunteer days (564 hours) of work, including planting over 2500 tree whips for the Wild Ingleborough Project and marking the 50th volunteer day at Sherburn Willows Nature Reserve.

In addition, we actively contributed to the West Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Programme, supporting development through interviews and content creation; and collaborated with Hyde Park Source on community nature recovery mapping for local villages.

CASE STUDY

Adventure Lab app boosts campus biodiversity exploration

This year saw the launch of an innovative ‘Adventure Lab’ app, bringing outdoor scavenger hunts and interactive experiences to campus. Developed by Erica Di Martino, a fellow from the School of Medicine, the app encourages the exploration of campus biodiversity by searching for physical clues at five key locations. Unlike traditional geocaching, the app fosters a deeper connection with the environment, promoting physical activity and discovery. It is available to all students, staff and visitors, providing a unique way to engage with the campus.

CASE STUDY

North Hill Well Wood project

Working under the supervision of staff from Groundwork Yorkshire, students and staff volunteers continued to develop the Well Wood Project at the rear of North Hill Court – a joint project between Groundwork Yorkshire, Unite Students and the University of Leeds Residential Services. Activities included clearing the previous summer’s growth, collecting autumnal leaf cover from pathways and steps, planting extra trees and hedging whips and introducing two sandstone water features for use by birds and mammals. In May, the work received a Wildlife Gardening Award from the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and features as a case study on the Trust’s website.





16

Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions



Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.



Our people

This year the Research Partnership Committee, led by the **Priestley Centre for Climate Futures**, conducted a review of the University's **Climate Plan** and recommended the development of a Just Transition Task Force to review the role of social justice in effective design and delivery of the Climate Plan. Several staff and student champions have been appointed to the Task Force and work has continued throughout the year to develop terms of reference, including objectives, scope and deliverables.



Campus and operations

A robust and transparent **University governance** structure enables us to ensure inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making. The University Council

is our highest governing body with 23 members in 2023-24. The majority are lay members, but also include staff and students. The Council's principal committees include the Audit and Risk Committee, Strategy and Investment Committee, Nominating and Governance Committee, Remuneration Committee, Ethics and Values Committee and the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

The Senate is responsible to the Council for academic governance, especially for regulating the admission of students, the curriculum, the awarding of degrees and other qualifications, and the assessment, maintenance and enhancement of academic standards. The University Court serves as a symbol of the University's accountability to its many different stakeholder constituencies.

The University recognises Leeds University Union (LUU) as its independent students' union, and its representatives sit on the University Council. In addition, the University

recognises three trade unions: UCU, UNISON and Unite. Key Policies, Procedures and Codes of Practice, including the **Anti-Bribery Policy**, **Responsible Investment Policy**, **Freedom of Expression Protocol** and **Whistleblowing procedure**, ensure we are operating accountably and transparently at all levels. We publish full financial statements annually, and in 2023 we launched a new Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Implementation Plan, aiming to enhance our approach to EDI and achieve greater inclusivity.

Beyond campus

The University of Leeds works in partnership with the city’s other higher education institutions, the Leeds City Council Antisocial Behaviour Team and West Yorkshire Police, to prevent and address noise and antisocial behaviour issues in our local community.

Along with Leeds Beckett University, we co-fund a dedicated anti-social behaviour and noise service, run by Leeds City Council. This provides a dedicated resource for the area including intelligence-led, proactive patrols, response officers between 5pm and 4am seven nights a week, increased contact centre capacity, and a streamlined reporting and enforcement system.

Since its implementation, the service has resulted in sustained improvements by 2023, compared with the pre-service baseline (2021). Total calls to the out-of-hours service declined dramatically, from 3,899 to 2,513, average call-back time from triage officers fell from 50 minutes to just 10–15 minutes, improving residents’ experience and confidence in the system and unacceptable noise witnessed on-site dropped from 534 incidents to 301, while overall call attendance remained consistent, demonstrating increased effectiveness and deterrence.

Policy Leeds – our policy engagement hub - led key projects in 2023–24 which helped advance justice, inclusivity and accountable governance. Funded by the Research England Policy Support Fund, these projects translate research into practical impact.

We have a long history of **working together with Leeds City Council** to address pressing problems in the region, including issues raised in the Council’s Areas of Research Interest. These include the **Leeds’ Model of Community Engagement**, aimed at strengthening the inclusion of marginalised voices in local policy and planning, building trust and institutional accountability; and **The Unfolding Project**, a participatory research partnership with community organisations to foster community resilience and support volunteer well-being amid social challenges.

In June 2024 the **Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre**, an initiative jointly hosted by the Universities of Leeds and York and funded by the ESRC, released an end-of-project report on **What do the public want from police? Towards a Minimum Policing Standard**.

CASE STUDY

A network to tackle cuckooing

‘Cuckooing’ involves criminals taking over the homes of vulnerable people to prepare, store and/or sell drugs or host other illegal activities. A Policy Leeds project has established a **Cuckooing Research & Prevention Network** and is co-producing a cuckooing virtual reality headset training module for frontline police offers and practitioners working with vulnerable adults. The team also co-delivered three cuckooing prevention session to practitioners across West Yorkshire and designed a series of awareness-raising posters for professionals who engage with and/or have access to the homes of vulnerable people.

The project has been extended into 2024-25, focusing on preventing and disrupting the practice of cuckooing; and we are working to embed the Network into the ‘Knowledge Hub’ provided by the Police Digital Service to ensure its longevity.

CASE STUDY

Addressing ethnic disparities in sentencing

From 2022-24, Professor Jose Pina-Sánchez from the University’s School of Law led a Policy Leeds project to **investigate ethnic disparities in sentencing** across England and Wales.

Using advanced causal inference methods and large-scale administrative data, the research examined whether sentencing differences were due to discrimination or could be explained by legally relevant factors, like offence type and plea.

A notable finding focused on defendants with traditionally Muslim names. While initial analysis suggested longer prison sentences for this group, the disparity disappeared after controlling for case details, indicating systemic structural issues rather than direct judicial bias.

The research has helped inform policy development within the Crown Prosecution Service and supported the establishment of an independent Disproportionality Advisory Group. By offering a transparent, data-driven approach, the project promoted fairer legal processes and strengthened institutional accountability.





17

Partnership for the Goals



Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

33

Student Sustainability Architects in paid part-time roles

104

Student contributors to the 2024 Student Sustainability Research Conference



Our people

Our **Sustainable Curriculum** programme commits to providing our students with the knowledge and skills they need to have a positive impact in the world.

In 2023-24, 33 students took up part-time paid roles as Student Sustainability Architects, delivering impactful sustainability projects and Living Labs across the University’s academic Schools and professional services.

In June 2024, over 50 people took part in Place for Change, a **Social Justice Jam** in collaboration with the University of Pretoria, **Is14trust** and **Mothong African Heritage**. Delivered as an interactive hackathon, the event included online ideation workshops with participants from each university. The theme was ‘access to nature’ and, in addition to the experiential learning, the event generated **open educational resources**, a journal publication, **a student blog** and a book chapter co-written by students.

Queering Climate Change, an initiative fostering safer spaces for LGBTQ+ and marginalised voices in climate justice, held an interactive ‘Gaming for the Planet’ event in May 2024, using digital and board games to explore environmental issues through the lens of identity. The project was the brainchild of a collaboration

between the Sustainability Service, the Horizon Institute, the Cultural Institute and **LEEDS 2023**. Staff and students shared thoughts and stories and connected with peers in Harare, Zimbabwe and Leeds, UK while playing games. They explored ideas about climate change, green future spaces and how marginalised communities, such as LGBTQ+ people, can shed light on inclusive change.



Campus and operations

Residential Services have a partnership with British Heart foundation (BHF) to help reduce landfill throughout university-run accommodation. Students and staff in University of Leeds residences donated over 4,500 bags of items for resale and re-use, diverting the equivalent of 36.2 tonnes of waste away from landfill; and generating almost £68,000 of revenue from BHF shop sales in Leeds to fund coronary heart and circulatory disease research, some of which takes place in the University of Leeds.



Beyond campus

A key element of our **Climate Plan** is working collaboratively with partners in the city and region – including Leeds City Council and the Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission – towards our mutual climate and sustainability goals. 2024 saw the relaunch of the **Leeds Climate Commission**, supported by a staff team based at the University of Leeds, with a revitalised focus on nature recovery, a just transition, climate adaptation and resilience and rapid emissions reduction in Leeds.

The University chairs the Climate Subgroup of the **Leeds Anchors Network**, a collective of 14 of the city’s largest employers focusing on areas where they can make a key difference for the people of Leeds. The Climate Subgroup is focussed on Anchor collaborations addressing climate and sustainability challenges, from supply chains and Scope 3 emissions to transport and travel in Leeds.

CENTRE (the University’s Community Engagement Network for Teaching, Research, culture and society) and the University of Pretoria have initiated a reciprocal partnership which aims to co-create impactful community engagement practices, share knowledge on indigenous and local systems, and empower students and communities through inclusive, transdisciplinary approaches.

March 2024 saw the launch of **Fair Energy Futures**, an initiative designed to explore pathways towards just and sustainable energy solutions through interdisciplinary research and collaboration, and to build a network to address these issues both inside and outside the University.

The launch event attracted participants from local government, Northern Power Grid, National Energy Action, Northern Gas Networks, KPMG and Lloyds Banking group, emphasising the need for collaborative working to address the challenges of achieving equitable energy solutions.

Research and innovation from the University of Leeds contributed to important discussions and negotiations that took place before and during **COP28**. **As an official observer of the UNFCCC – the framework that underpins COP28 - the University sent a delegation to the conference in Dubai**. Members of this delegation were involved in events and activities across both the UN’s Blue Zone and the UAE’s publicly accessible Green Zone.



CASE STUDY

Yorkshire Universities collaborate for the Goals

The **Student Sustainability Research Conference 2024 (SSRC24)** was once again delivered by the University of Leeds in partnership with the **Yorkshire Universities** regional partnership membership and expanded to include an ethical careers fair for students and a new collaboration with the London Student Sustainability Conference. 104 students contributed to this event, sharing their research projects with peers from across the Yorkshire region.

We extended our collaboration with Yorkshire Universities to engage students in a Multi-University Challenge Competition and to contribute to a regional UPP Foundation Funded project. This included the generation of a **Good Practice Guide** focused on community, service learning and initiative to embed sustainability.

CASE STUDY

Making a Positive Impact

Positive Impact Partners (PIP), led by the University of Leeds Sustainability Service, is a longstanding initiative that supports equitable, co-designed partnerships between the University and local civic and community organisations.

This year, PIP was redeveloped to align with the Climate Plan’s principle of ‘Supporting a Net Zero City’. A key milestone was a community co-design workshop in November, delivered with the Priestley Centre and Horizons Institute, which brought together researchers, staff, and 12 local organisations to explore shared sustainability priorities. This led to collaborative projects with Hyde Park Source, Leeds City Council and community groups in Seacroft and Alwoodley, focusing on nature recovery through community-led land mapping and site visits.

PIP also partnered with Policy Leeds to investigate the role of community climate hubs, and supported research into embedding climate education in primary schools. The programme exemplifies how universities can build trusted, inclusive partnerships that support local climate action and advance their civic mission.



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