# HSU Sustainability Strategy

**Introduction**

**Why do we need a Sustainability Strategy?**

When writing the 2020-2025 strategy, Hallam Students’ Union (HSU) undertook research with students. 82% said HSU should play a significant role in reducing ecological impact. From this, it was clear that students wanted the Students’ Union to be doing work around sustainability. In addition, having a strategy which focused specifically on sustainability seemed the right thing to do, and reacted to what was happening in the world. As a result, the strategy promised to do more for sustainable practices… but failed.

Martha Mitchell, HSU President 2024/25 (formerly Social Sciences and Arts College Officer 2023/24), passed the Sustainability and Net Zero Policy at HSU after undertaking research into the day-to-day practices of the Union and looking at student feedback. After passing this policy, it was decided that a separate Sustainability Strategy would be written to ensure everyday HSU practices are completed with sustainability at the forefront of decision making.

This strategy aims to ensure HSU carries out sustainability related work in a non-performative manner, continuously reflecting on previous years’ learning and using this as a framework for work going forward. This work should not be tokenistic or greenwash.

This strategy will refer to HSU as an organisation, HSU staff, and Hallam students.

This strategy has been the project of the Sustainability Working Group which has met since January 2024. It will outline our vision and mission, our aims, and how we will deliver these.

**Vision**

Make it easy for Hallam students to be environmentally sustainable whilst at university, through the work of the Students' Union.

**Mission**

In response to the climate crisis, HSU endeavours to become a climate positive organisation. We will empower our students and staff to make environmentally sustainable choices by educating, enabling, and providing both existing and emerging resources, events, and opportunities for development.

**Aims**

**Education**

We will empower our students to make environmentally sustainable choices by providing educational resources and training opportunities across all areas of HSU. By doing so, we will give students the tools they need to contribute to a more environmentally sustainable environment.

**Lobbying**

We will work with our students to lobby the University and external stakeholders to make changes that will positively impact the environment and contribute to a climate-positive community.

**Actions**

We will adjust the way we work to ensure our strategic and operational activity is sustainable throughout the organisation.

**Accountability**

We will put in place measures to hold ourselves accountable to our aims, objectives, and operational goals, including adhering to predetermined standards. In the interest of transparency, we’ll communicate regular progress updates to Hallam students and HSU staff.

**How we will achieve our aims**

**Governance and leadership**

We will embed an ambitious and transparent governance and leadership structure for sustainability to ensure internal and external accountability.

HSU commits to:

* Embed sustainability into our organisational strategy as one of our key deliverables, incorporating KPIs and accountability mechanisms for both short and long-term goals.
* Ensure our direction is in line with the voice of our students.
* Review the job descriptions of elected Officers to substantively embed sustainability ahead of the 2025 Officer Election.
* Regularly reviewing Union sustainability policies to ensure they reflect current best practice.
* Include ‘Sustainability’ as an agenda item in regular senior meetings to ensure continuous communication and embed sustainability in the culture of the organisation.
* Hold an annual induction session for our new Officer team, specifically focusing on the Union’s approach to sustainability, and support them with efforts to influence the University to take an even stronger approach to sustainability.
* Assign permanent staff members with monitoring and promoting sustainability in the Students’ Union, alongside the Sustainability Steering Group, the President, and other students.

**Procurement**

We will ensure our procurement procedures and purchasing activity align with our sustainable goals and put us in a position to carry out our day-to-day operational activity in a way that’s environmentally sustainable.

HSU Commits to:

* Continuously review our procurement policy and procedures to ensure current and future purchasing is done ethically and sustainably.
* Review our investments to ensure they are ethical and, moving forward, invest only with ethical companies.
* Audit current suppliers for sustainability credentials and build this into our new suppliers’ form, including buying local where possible.
* Make the sustainable procurement policy simple and easy for HSU staff to follow and provide accessible training on sustainable purchasing procedures.
* Promote sustainable procurement to student groups and educate them on sustainable purchasing.
* Regularly audit the organisation’s existing stock and only make additional purchases where necessary.
* Review our banking, pensions, and investment arrangements to ensure our funds are held in banks which have strong environmental credentials.

**Partnerships**

We will identify and seek to build partnerships with organisations with good levels of environmental sustainability, including but not limited to the University, suppliers, charitable allies, and business partners.

HSU commits to:

* Negotiate and renew partnerships and contracts with sustainability in mind, continuing to prioritise local partnerships and suppliers.
* Introduce a preferred suppliers, partners, and advertisers list with environmental and ethical criteria to meet, including but not limited to staffing, logistics, and materials used.
* Create and define a log of current interested parties and key partners who contribute to our sustainability progress and identify new partners that can add value to our work.
* Respond to and engage with environmental-based consultations in the local area and work to lobby and influence Sheffield City Council.

**Student engagement**

We will engage with our students in a way that minimises our environmental impact across all areas of activity, including but not limited to our student groups, volunteering, representation, and student campaigns.

HSU commits to:

* Create opportunities for sustainability engagement within existing student roles and groups, including but not limited to societies, reps, and volunteers, and maintain existing low-level engagement opportunities for unengaged students.
* Plan and deliver at least one key sustainability drive per academic year, choosing key periods throughout the academic year in line with the student journey.
* Create a student sustainability fund to promote student innovation and encourage climate positive activity.
* Mobilise and empower our students to play an active part in sustainability across all areas of their university experience.
* Create an online ‘Sustainability Hub’ which will include a package of training resources and materials for our students.
* Actively promote when opportunities are climate positive.
* Acknowledge that sustainable choices often have a higher user cost and provide a range of balanced choices for our students to be sustainable which aren’t limited to purchases.
* Ensure all student groups and societies are educated on opportunities to reduce their environmental impact, and, wherever possible, assist them in becoming more sustainable, including but not limited to equipment, travel, and food.

**Energy, water, and facilities management**

We will ensure our energy and water management aligns with our sustainability goals, embedding good practice into the daily running of the building and encouraging staff and students to think about their energy and water consumption.

HSU commits to:

* Encourage responsible energy use by utilising capacity management to condense workspace where appropriate, including out of use/hours areas.
* Explore our use of and assess the ecological impact of AI, cloud storage, and other online facilities, seeking out minimisation and suitable alternatives where possible.
* Ensure electrical equipment is switched off when not in use through technological solutions and increased staff awareness, including but not limited to fans, laptop chargers, and lighting.
* Have measures in place to limit water and energy usage and regularly publish our consumption data to raise awareness of our work and hold ourselves accountable.
* Work with the University to arrange appropriate sub-metering for all SU spaces, providing us with accurate data on energy and water usage.
* Ensure cleaning materials used on our premises are environmentally friendly, where possible.

**Waste and recycling management**

We will ensure our waste and recycling management aligns with our sustainability goals, embedding good practice into the daily running of the building and encouraging staff and students to think about their waste and recycling output.

HSU commits to:

* Build and maintain existing partnerships with local charities for recycling and repurposing of materials we need to dispose of.
* Work with our external waste management stakeholders, including Sheffield City Council and Veolia, to support our education of students on how/when/what to recycle.
* Regularly audit and publish our waste and recycling activity to be transparent, hold ourselves accountable, and celebrate wins.
* Work closely in partnership and positive competition with the University to achieve our aims around waste and recycling management.
* Minimise purchases of disposable items, including those requiring disposal in the foreseeable future, exploring alternative options wherever possible.
* Incorporate stretching but achievable waste and recycling targets which are renewed or extended annually.
* Lobby the University to introduce a reusable cup and Tupperware scheme to provide a convenient alternative to single-use disposables in Hallam cafes.
* Make all internal event catering disposables-free where possible, including but not limited to cutlery, crockery, and glassware.

**Offsetting and insetting**

We will explore ways to offset our carbon emissions through initiatives external to HSU’s operations, and work to pursue climate positive activity internally to the organisation.

HSU commits to:

* Ensure our offsetting activity works with organisations that have strong sustainability credentials.
* Take a proactive approach to insetting and offsetting, with the emphasis being on reducing our carbon emissions internally rather than relying heavily on offsetting.
* Create and promote opportunities for students to offset their carbon emissions through their usual SU activity, including but not limited to optional nominal charges on ticket purchases.
* Where possible, carry out offsetting activity within the local community rather than relying on third party organisations to deliver on our behalf.

**Travel**

We will ensure where possible that staff and students can choose the most sustainable transport mode whilst engaging with SU activities and encourage staff and students to review their own personal travel to align this with our Sustainability Strategy.

HSU commits to:

* Work towards securing more affordable public transport for our students.
* Take a holistic approach to encouragement of cycling for HSU staff and students, including education, promotion, and working towards better facilities.
* Incentivise sustainable travel by exploring the use of a pence per mile scheme for HSU staff walking or cycling to and from work.
* Maintain our commitment to keeping our events-related travel as environmentally friendly as possible.
* Conduct an annual all-staff commuting survey, develop an action plan to reduce emissions from staff commuting, and enable all staff the option to offset their emissions.

**Achievements and standards**

We will explore accreditation schemes and ways to document our achievements throughout the implementation of the strategy, ensuring our sustainability work aligns with other organisations and is achieved to a high standard.

HSU commits to:

* Create opportunities for student sustainability recognition, including society awards and accreditation.
* Ensure any accreditation we work towards is for the benefit of making positive change and avoid box ticking or purely performative exercises.
* Define our timeline for achieving net-zero carbon.
* Publish our carbon footprint report annually, including a breakdown of our carbon footprint, progress towards milestones, and comparison to our baseline year.
* Work with the University towards becoming a ‘1st Class University’ in the People and Planet University League tables and monitor performance in these.
* Embed sustainability awareness into all new staff inductions, with senior leadership and other relevant HSU staff to be Carbon Literacy trained within 6 months of beginning their role.