

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY GROUP

Minute of the meeting held on Monday 27 January 2025
from 1.30-3.30 pm in room 5B16 Sighthill Campus
and online via MS Teams

PRESENT:	G Hutchison (Convenor and Dean of School/Campus Principal); G Barkess (Head of Research Environment & Services, Research & Innovation); A Bonthron (Head of Asset Management, Property & Facilities); I Dencer-Brown (Lecturer, DLTE); E Eghan (ENSA President); E Hunter (Director of Property & Facilities); B Kidd (Head of Development, Marketing & External Communications); A McGoff (Finance & Operations Director); K Murray (Head of Procurement); A Ogilvie (Executive Manager, Strategy, Strategy Hub, Principal's Office); J Pearson (Environmental Sustainability Manager, Property & Facilities); I Russell (Head of Infrastructure, Information Services); N Scrimgeour (Senior Student Communications Officer); M Weaver (Associate Professor, The Business School)
IN ATTENDANCE:	S Burnett (PA to School Leadership, Clerk)
APOLOGIES:	A Kermack (Talent, Acquisition & Development Manager – People Team)

1. OPENING REMARKS, WELCOME & APOLOGIES

- 1.1 Members welcomed to the meeting and apologies noted.
- 1.2 Barbara Kidd (Head of Development) will replace Clive Gee on this group.

2. MINUTE OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 28 OCTOBER 2024 ESSG(24/25)02

- 2.1 Following some minor amendments the minute was approved as an accurate record of the meeting.
- 2.2 Follow Up Actions

Item 3.1 (Overview of PwC Recommendations)

It was noted the infographic had been completed. As more information becomes available, we can extend the period this covers.

The Environmental Sustainability Manager (ESM) had arranged for a document to be taken to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meeting.

In terms of the continued review and development of the strategy – need to decide if we want a 2-year or 3-year extension. Continues to be a work in progress. There was discussion about the strategy vs the implementation plan and KPIs, recognising the Scottish Government has moved to 2045 target, yet the City of Edinburgh is still aiming for 2030. This will need to be addressed, and recommendations of possible action presented to ULT and Court.

Item 5.1: The Impact Rankings, November 2024 Submission

A meeting had been scheduled by the Executive Manager, Strategy (EMS).

Item 7.2: Staff Intranet Update

The external website will be the core focus (Document Centre) and when it comes to the staff intranet this will focus on more practical applications. The Senior Student Communications Officer (SSCO) and colleagues have been working on this.

Item 9.3: SLT Reporting

Members had provided comment on the report prior to submission. It was noted a report had also been prepared for the Finance & Property Committee. If there are any additions, these can be discussed at the work stream leads meeting.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY GROUP

3.1 Work Stream Terms of Reference

Paperwork had been taken to both ULT and SLT around the Terms of Reference (ToR) which would be changing. This was all part of the PwC audit, providing more clarity over the working groups and how these differ from the ESSG.

The main change was to convert the current ESSG into an oversight board (the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Board of Governance – ESSBG for short). The Board will be chaired by the current Convenor and the Director of Finance & Operations will remain as sponsor.

The working groups will have clear ToR and will work independently, the Convenor will not attend these meetings in future. The ESSBG will continue to meet quarterly and will report into ULT. The Board will compile a risk register as part of their activity and will continue to link into key workstreams and a number of university strategies. The Board will report back to Finance & Property Committee and to ULT/SLT.

It was noted that a Deputy Convenor was required, and members were happy to agree that the Executive Manager (Strategy) (EMS) should undertake this role.

Lay advisor – we need to think about who this person could be. We could consider someone on Court or go externally. This person can change over time too.

In terms of membership, it was agreed someone from DLTE should be a permanent member, not co-opted. It was agreed that the ToR needed to be adjusted following conversation. The Convenor took this action and would submit the final version to PWC by 31 January.

We will still require to identify: a LEAF rep/a rep from the Staff Sustainability Network/a rep from the Student Sustainability Society.

Action: members to think about who could be a lay advisor and names should be sent direct to the Clerk.

Action: Convenor to send information to PwC by 31 January.

Work Stream Leads

It was noted the four groups would be:

- Net Zero: Projects, Planning & Audit (Lead: Jamie Pearson)
- Curriculum & Skills (Lead: I Dencer-Brown)
- Engagement, Collaboration & Impact (Lead: A Ogilvie)
- Research, Innovation & Knowledge Exchange (Lead: G Barkess)

There would be preferred membership to each of the working groups, but we need to keep under review what everyone can contribute considering the ebb and flow of resource. The Convenor reminded everyone that these groups do not create additional activities. These formalise the current workstreams that meet monthly to discuss progress against the annual milestones. These ToR provide clarity of governance and focus. Most notable change is the formal separation of L&T and R&KE.

Some alignment required from the Development Office in terms of the Engagement, Collaboration & Impact work stream. It was recognised that numerous departments have external facing responsibilities, and we need to maximise this across the institution.

School's research and knowledge exchange activities should be included and there is a need to align with KEIF and other workstreams across the institution.

The ESSBG noted there are critical roles that are needed to ensure we can deliver the strategy. It was noted a risk of over-burdening the ESM.

Need to be quite clear in our planning what we are able to do within capacity.

Action: the various Terms of Reference were agreed by members following some minor amendments. The amended Terms of Reference will be placed on Sharepoint and also circulated to members.

3.2 PwC Recommendations & Response

A paper had been posted to Sharepoint. All documentation has been gathered and updated as required. It is much clearer in the strategy document about our carbon overview/forecasting. We now have greater clarity over alignment with Project Vision and the Key Milestones to 2030.

There were a couple of items outstanding with regard to membership with societies and we are making progress with this. Will be marketed again as part of Sustainability Week in March.

In relation to Procurement looking to post some further information on the intranet to assist staff. Potential FAQs, standards etc.

Responses are going back to PwC, and they will have time to audit our responses in time for the Audit & Risk Committee.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

4.1 Strategy (V21 & V22)

The strategy document contains a copy of the carbon forecasting. There are two documents as there was discussion over whether there should be a 3-year strategy (V21) or a 2-year strategy (V22). This ties into wider conversations about carbon targets. We will use offset for international travel, which has been agreed and published. Our current 2030 target is embedded in our university strategy. We will struggle to reach a 2030 target without the offset.

There was discussion about targets and milestone in the strategy document and the possible need to consider a one, two or three year outlook. Members felt this was more of an operational plan. It was recognised that with a new Principal the University may review its strategy, acknowledging ESS may change.

Members felt PwC were asking for an annual plan against milestones, and that this should be separate from the strategy document. The Convenor drew attention to the 2021 strategy, including the net zero carbon reduction target. This strategy has not changed and for the time being we continue to use this as the university strategy for environmental sustainability across all our activities.

It was agreed we should continue to have our strategy which would provide the direction of travel, but the parts which indicate what we are going to do, milestones and monitoring over the next couple of years will be included in an operational plan, with milestones and activities, supported by the risk register. This will be reviewed by the ESSBG, but will not be included in the actual strategy document. We may require to review our strategy in due course, and commit to continue that review on an annual basis as per launch of the ESSG.

We need to make a substantial change in the way we operate to deliver our targets. We now need to invest and fundamentally change the way some of the

campuses are operating. Needs to be a list of substantial interventions to get us to our target. This requires to be discussed in the context of everything else.

Action: the ESM and EMS working with the Convenor will take out the points which can be placed in a separate appendix to form part of an annual plan, and the strategy can be left to sit separately alongside this.

4.2 Carbon Forecasting

This has been plotted through to 2029/30. We were asked for this mapping by PwC and what our interventions will be to achieve this. Annual monitoring will indicate the trajectory and activity required to reduce net carbon. This can also be included in the annual plan.

There are some technological advances which are not yet available, therefore the ESSBG may need to adapt and consider these solutions and possible impact on timescales for delivery of our carbon reduction plans.

Action: the Convenor can have a further conversation with PwC to ensure we are “on the same page” in terms of what is required.

5. CARBON KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

5.1 Updated Gross and Net Terminology

No further discussion required. Moving to reporting both gross and net. Some offset used for travel in terms of our KPIs.

6. AUDIT & REPORTING

6.1 PBCCD

This report was submitted to the Scottish Government for 23/24 in November. Members noted the paper and the Convenor thanked the ESM for compiling the report.

6.2 University League

The results were issued on 20 December. This was a substantial piece of work, and we have sustained at 2:1 classification and are therefore third ranked university in Scotland. There are a number of opportunities to make improvements based on the information provided in this external audit. It was noted Catering have signed up to a sustainable scheme which should enhance sustainability and improve our position amongst our peers.

In terms of appeals, some points were upheld. There are some things we could do to ensure that our scores are more positive. The scope of questions do, however, change each year. We need to ensure everything is held in the Document Centre for reviewers to access. Visibility of policy and information is key to allow full review.

6.3 Finance & Property Committee

The Convenor and ESM had been asked a variety of questions and it was interesting to hear different perspectives. Court members thanked the ESSG for responding to their ask around data presentation. There was a recognition of the large volume of work that has been undertaken. The sub-committee were keen to understand the investment need to achieve the strategy and the timescales considering the ever-changing landscape.

It was noted HESA reporting will be undertaken by the end of April.

7. SOCIETAL IMPACT WORK STREAM

7.1 THE Impact Rankings November 2024 Submission

Times Higher Impact Ranking submission –submitted 11 November. Submitted under the same categories as last year with an additional 5 categories this year. Lots of similar actions as People & Planet. Looking at links to intranet and placing information on the intranet. There had been a workshop with the RIE team about SDGs to help them liaise with academics around what the SDGs signify and alignment with their work. ESM and work stream lead for Societal Impact had spoken with RIE team members.

Students attended the last work stream leads meeting. They looked at a number of SDGs and offered five “take aways” on what we could do as an institution that would make us more comparable with other organisations reviewed that were higher up the rankings. The ESSBG were provided with the student slides and the meeting focussed on three things: Firstly a need for a policy refresh (food, smoking and procurement), secondly having information available (when we moved things, need to ensure links work and pages are still available) and thirdly points about capacity building and who is making sure we are undertaking work and what are the outcomes. It was agreed that the work presented aligned with the University League and we need to focus on quick achievable change whilst working on capacity building and more accurate alignment of our academic work and its impact. All these points align with REF and KEIF metrics.

8. ACADEMIC WORK STREAM

8.1 Overview of Academic & Research Activity

DLTE working on developing a mechanism to share a visualisation of programmes that are using Enhance, showcasing sustainability/inclusion etc. DLTE are supporting PLs and Head of Subjects when preparing for ILRs and the enhance sustainability work will go some way to ensure our curriculum evolves to address UNSDG and green skills development. Externally projects in relation to SDG4 and EDI work.

Workshop held with RIE staff for an introduction to SDGs. Now seeing more data being tagged in Worktribe. Starting to see increased use of SDGs in terms of research work and looking at mapping of outputs and how data sets can be joined

together. Joined the Scotland Beyond Net Zero Network which has now expanded to all Scottish universities. Plan to have a whole day with the Network and Scottish Funding Council at the Parliament in May 2025. Also launching another round of seed funding opportunities.

Knowledge exchange part of KEIF also important in terms of visibility of what we do and directly connects to some of the SDGs. Stakeholder mapping work would also be quite useful.

9. COMMUNICATION WORK STREAM

9.1 Overview of Communication Activity

The Sustainability Fair is being held in March (Tuesday 11th, Wednesday 12th and Thursday 13th March). Already have quite a few stalls and organisations confirmed. Student Sustainability Society will also be there. We have a company who will have Scalextric powered by bikes. Still in contact with some others to see if we can have a good mix of different people there on campus across the three days. Climate café – looking to see if there are any volunteers to re-launch the Staff Network. Will be popping information on social media. Will share more details of this closer to the time once it is all finalised.

Visualisation of sustainability data across campuses – once we receive the next set of data this can be loaded as the templates are now available.

10. OPERATIONS/NET ZERO WORK STREAM

10.1 Overview of Operations/Carbon Net Zero Activity

Asset management team progressing with calorifiers in May 2025. Will be monitored closely. We will be the first university to do this.

- Looking at new LED projects and solar opportunities too.
- Space – Space Manager looking at accommodation usage to reduce energy consumption.
- Transport – bicycle shelter, don't need planning permission but need to go through council.
- New waste management – will be looking at this in the near future.

Student accommodation – unwanted items collected last year raised over £8K. Entirely led by student accommodation.

11. ENSA

Project Management Challenge – event on 31 January. The challenge was primarily on sustainability. Noted the Convenor would be attending the afternoon event.

12. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Monday 28 April 2025 from 1.30-3.30 pm.