University of Reading

Environmental Sustainability Report

2025/26



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1. Introduction

Each year, this report looks back at our progress in embedding environmental sustainability across our operations, research and teaching, and looks forward to the coming 12 months and beyond.

Higher education is changing rapidly, and in 2026, the University's centenary year, we are developing a new Strategic Plan to ensure the University remains fit for the opportunities and challenges of the future. Environmental sustainability will be a key theme throughout that new Plan, ensuring that the delivery plans that underpin it demonstrate how they will contribute to delivering on the University's strategic environmental sustainability ambitions.

The University of Reading was named University of the Year for Scholarships and Bursaries 2026 in The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2026, following the launch of its innovative Global Sustainability Leaders Scholarships scheme, which offers up to 400 scholarships per year to high-achieving students. The University is also shortlisted for Sustainable Institution of the Year in the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC's) prestigious Green Gown Awards.

The University retained its top four placing in the People & Planet University League for a fourth consecutive year, while internationally, it reached 30th in the QS Sustainability Rankings 2026.

We actively contribute towards all 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are in the world's top 100 universities in the Times Higher Education (THE) Sustainability Impact Ratings 2026.

We appointed our first Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education and Sustainability to oversee the universal embedding of sustainability across the taught curriculum and wider student experience, with a Student Panel convened to help shape that agenda. We also launched a new Advocating for a Better Planet short course for all University of Reading students, guiding students to research and take action to help address a sustainability issue of their choice.

In our research, the University became a signatory to the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice and has continued expanding the Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF), helping our laboratories to improve their environmental performance.

Operationally, the University has met its interim 70% carbon reduction target for 2027 a year early, reaching 71% reduction against its 2008/09 baseline emissions for its 2030 Net Zero Carbon scope of emissions. Our leading waste management practices continue to deliver, with recycling levels now at 64%, and water consumption is 26% below our 2011/12 baseline, though still not as low as had been targeted in our Water Management Plan.

> "Environmental sustainability leadership will be core to our new University Strategic Plan. The need for action to reduce global climate change is ever more pressing, and the University is well-placed to lead by example in continuing to reduce the impact of our own operations, in complement to our leadership in sustainability research. Our Global Sustainability Leaders Scholarships scheme is central to ambitions to develop the next generation of sustainability leaders, which will be ever more important in the years ahead to contribute to a future that is genuinely sustainable."
>
> Dan Fernbank,
> Energy & Sustainability Director

Our sustainability highlights 2025/26

The University of Reading is a leader in environmental sustainability. Our achievements so far:



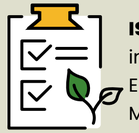
4th in the People & Planet league 2025/26

91st in the Times Higher Education (THE) Sustainability Impact Ratings 2026

Joint 30th in the QS Sustainability Rankings 2026



Top 100 in the world for our work in six of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (Times Higher Education (THE) Sustainability Impact Ratings 2026) – SDG2, SDG10, SDG12, SDG13, SDG15, SDG17



ISO14001/ISO50001 integrated and certified Energy and Environmental Management System.

5th in the BioBlitz challenge 2026



Winner of 16 consecutive Green Flag awards for Whiteknights campus.

Awarded Fairtrade university **three-star status**



First University to be independently assessed and certified as an **Energy Conscious Organisation (EnCO) with Evidenced Status**.

Zero direct or indirect investments in fossil fuels

71.9% **carbon emissions** reduction on 2008/09 baseline

64% **waste** sent for recycling in 2025/26



Green Gown Awards Finalist for Sustainability Institution of the Year

2. Environmental Strategic Action Plan and Rankings

Our Strategic Plan

The University's Strategic Plan (2020–26) embedded our commitment to play our part in tackling climate change and to be recognised as a university that leads on global environmental sustainability.

Since launching this strategy, we have made significant progress thanks to excellent collaboration across our community, and this has been recognised through improved performance in key external sustainability ranking schemes and sector awards during this time period.

- Top 5 position in UK **People & Planet University Green League** for the past four years, including 1st place in 2023–24.
- **The Times and The Sunday Times** Sustainable University of the Year 2025.
- **THE Awards 2023** – Winner of Outstanding Contribution to Environmental Leadership.
- **London Higher Awards 2024** – Winner of Outstanding Contribution to Sustainability Leadership.
- **Energy Managers Association Awards 2024** – Decarbonisation Project of the Year.
- **Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services Awards 2025** – Green Careers Award.
- **Green Flag Award** Winner each year for the last 16 years.

The new University Strategy 2026–40 will launch later in 2026 and set out our future institutional ambitions, including our ongoing commitment to global environmental sustainability.

Our current Environmental Sustainability Strategic Action Plan defined our ambitions for the next five-year period across three themes:

Education and engagement

The University can influence societal changes by engaging, enabling, and equipping all members of its community – staff, students and alumni – as leaders, decision makers, consumers, parents, and citizens. We must support all our students to develop an understanding of the challenges ahead and the skills, knowledge and resilience to help address them through their future careers and in their day-to-day lives, and help nurture the global sustainability leaders of the future

Research and influence

At the University of Reading, sustainability is at the core of our research mission. As a globally recognised leader in climate science, biodiversity, sustainable agriculture and energy systems, our work informs policy, transforms industry practice and builds a more resilient future.

Our Research & Innovation Strategy sets out how, by 2030, we will be the go-to institution for bold, interdisciplinary solutions to the planet's most urgent environmental and societal challenges. Our research will fuel breakthrough innovations and actively drive societal and economic transformation, moving beyond influence to direct action and ensuring real, lasting change where it is needed most.

A green University

We have made sector-leading progress in reducing our carbon emissions and minimising our waste, and we are increasingly applying our own research expertise to how we manage our operations. How the University manages operations and business activities, conducts teaching and research, and works with partners around the globe will all help to ensure our community continues working together to deliver a better future.

Read the Environmental Sustainability Strategic Action Plan 2025–30 here.

The new University Strategy will further build on these ambitions and set out our longer-term commitments for the University.

Rankings

Rankings and recognition

People & Planet's University League is an independent league table of UK universities ranked by environmental and ethical performance, compiled annually by the UK's largest student campaigning network, People & Planet. We were proud to have been ranked 4th out of 147 UK universities in the 2025/26 League, retaining a top five position for the fourth year running. Reaching a top five position by 2026 was a key target identified in the University's Strategic Plan.

QS Sustainability Rankings 2026 – the University of Reading was joint 30th in the world for sustainability, according to the QS Sustainability Rankings 2026. We have risen in the international league table for a fourth consecutive year, up from joint 41st in the world last year. The 2026 ranking featured 2,002 institutions, an increase of more than 250 from the previous year.

University of the Year for Scholarships and Bursaries 2026 – the University of Reading was named University of the Year for Scholarships and Bursaries 2026 in The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2026, after the launch of the Global Sustainability Leaders Scholarships (GSLS). We offer up to 400 scholarships for high-achieving students, worth £6,000 a year across every year of study for undergraduates starting in 2026. The Times and Sunday Times guide highlighted the growing number of students seeking scholarships and bursaries and praised Reading's "generous" sustainability scholarships scheme – which it said was an emerging area of funding among UK universities.

Supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The SDGs provide a framework for ensuring a more sustainable future for people and planet, spanning society, economy, and the natural world. The Goals set the agenda for sustainable development to 2030.

The University of Reading actively contributes towards all 17 SDGs. We also feature in the Times Higher Education (THE) Sustainability Impact Ratings 2026, which score higher education institutions on their work towards each goal.

In 2026, the University of Reading placed among the world's top 100 universities for its contribution to sustainable global development for the fourth consecutive year, ranking 91st globally and within the top 6% of institutions worldwide.

Reading's position was supported by strong performances across a range of individual goals, including:

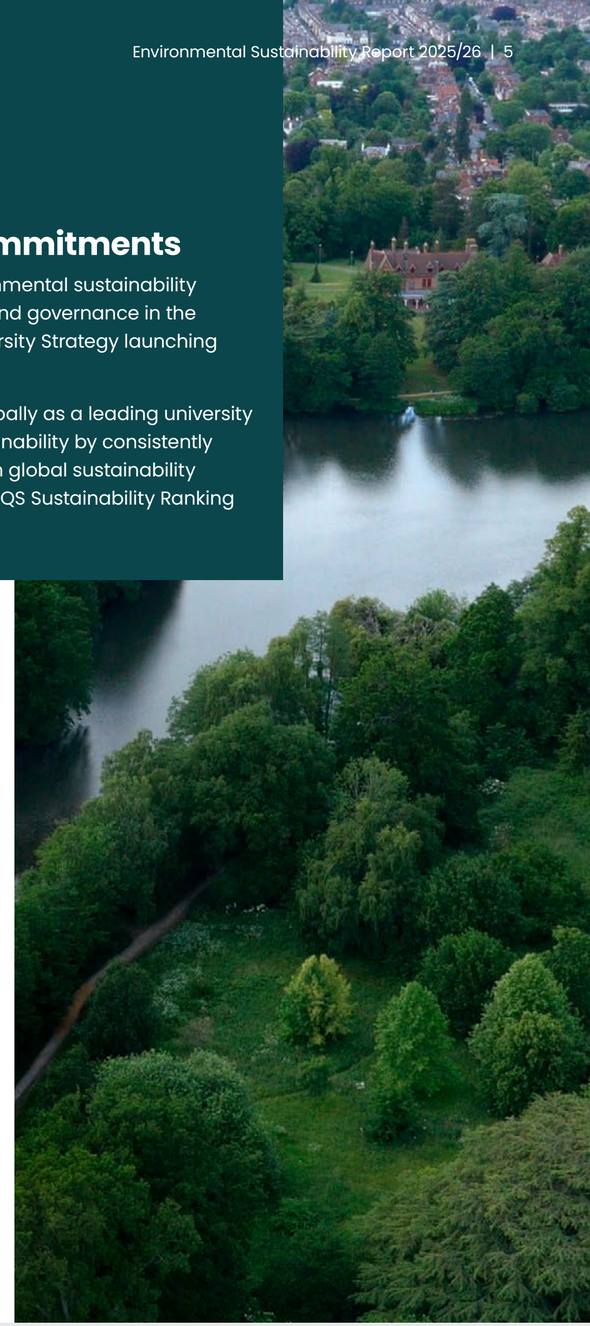
- **27 out of 758 institutions in SDG 12** – Responsible production and consumption. This position reflected the University's sustainability reporting practices, waste tracking and recycling operations, and policies to minimise single-use plastics and extend responsible sourcing across its supply chain.
- **Joint 55 out of 932 institutions in SDG 10** – Reduced inequalities. Evidence included Reading's disability support services, support for students from developing countries, non-discriminatory admissions policies and active measures against discrimination across campus.
- **60 out of 731 institutions in SDG 2** – Zero hunger. The result reflected the University's work on student food security, campus food waste reduction and access to sustainable and affordable food on campus.
- **Joint 69 out of 826 institutions in SDG 13** – Climate Action. This highlights Reading's work to reduce energy use on campus, along with other significant environmental activities, with a strong research base for meteorology and climate change.
- **Joint 72 out of 658 institutions in SDG 15** – Life on land. The position reflected the University's biodiversity education programmes, sustainable land management policies and work to conserve and restore ecosystems on and beyond campus.

View the Sustainability Impact Ratings 2026 – University Sustainability Rankings.



Our future commitments

- To update our environmental sustainability strategic ambitions and governance in the light of the new University Strategy launching in late 2026.
- To be recognised globally as a leading university for climate and sustainability by consistently improving positions in global sustainability rankings, such as the QS Sustainability Ranking (top 25).



3. Compliance and management systems

The Energy and Environmental Management System (EEMS) is a robust, strategic framework that underpins the University's approach to environmental sustainability and statutory compliance. By embedding sustainability into core operations, the EEMS enables continual improvement, effective risk management, and adaptation to climate challenges, while identifying opportunities for lasting positive impact.

Tracking our progress

- In February 2026, an external recertification audit of the EEMS took place. The assessor recommended that the University maintain its certification to both the ISO14001 and ISO50001 standards. The auditors commended the strong commitment and engagement of staff across all campuses, who demonstrated active contributions towards achieving sustainability objectives.
- Considerable work has been undertaken to expand the scope of the EEMS to additional areas of the University estate.
- A new internal audit programme was delivered during 25/26, utilising more internal resources. This has been positive as it allowed for the identification of more strategic opportunities for improvement across schools and directorates.
- The 2025/26 EEMS Management Review confirmed the system's effectiveness in embedding sustainability into daily operations and strategic decision-making. It continues to serve as a valuable framework to enable the University to minimise its environmental impact.

Our future commitments

- The University remains dedicated to maintaining the internationally recognised ISO certification, with the next surveillance audit taking place in March 2027.
- The expansion of the EEMS will ensure it continues to evolve, remains relevant, and supports the University's long-term sustainability ambitions.
- The University will undertake work to move towards adaptation of the newly published ISO14001:2026. This standard aims to strengthen climate action, organisational resilience and greater integration of lifecycle perspectives.



4. Education for sustainable development (ESD)

As we celebrate our centenary in 2026, we are not only reflecting on our past but looking towards the future. Ours is a global, shared future in which we equip our students with the skills and knowledge they need to help build a sustainable future for all.

The University Strategy sets out our ambition to embed environmental sustainability across both our curriculum and staff training programmes.

Our vision for developing ESD currently highlights the importance of four key aspects.

- Becoming a world-leading institution for sustainability learning and teaching, informed by research.
- Embedding ESD into the subject curriculum, encouraging the application of subject knowledge and practices to develop an explicit understanding of the challenges facing the wider world.
- Empowering our students with the knowledge, skills, and attributes to contribute solutions to global challenges in an equitable and just way. ESD also presents a clear opportunity to engage students in ways that are meaningful to them; using subject knowledge to address challenges that are of interest to the students' academic, personal, and professional lives.
- Ensuring that ESD is the business of all subjects at the University experienced in a way that is authentic to the discipline.

Tracking our progress

- This Project Advisory Group oversees two workstreams to ensure that all students at the University have a meaningful encounter with environmental sustainability within each year of their studies.
  - Staff Development
  - Curriculum Development
- We appointed an Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education and Sustainability. A new role to oversee the universal embedding of sustainability across the taught curriculum and wider student experience.
- We re-established the ESD Community of Practice, with 60 members drawn from across the University, to inform and provide feedback on ESD strategy, provide a forum for developing and sharing innovative practice, and support inter-disciplinary working and interconnectivity with other University initiatives.
- We convened a Student Panel, collaborating with students across levels of study and disciplines, to inform next steps for the ESD curriculum and student experience work at the University.
- We funded and received an ESD Theory of Change report, consulting with over 300 members of staff through a survey and focus group discussions, to identify ESD priorities, barriers and enablers to curricular integration.
- We reviewed the Graduate Attributes, incorporating being "sustainability-minded" and ensuring that sustainability is considered both within the discipline and its application for all students.

This work will also inform our approach and future ambitions for sustainability education in the new University of Reading Strategy, due to be published in autumn 2026.

Advocating for a Better Planet

Advocating for a Better Planet, the new flagship online short course exclusively for all University of Reading students, launched at the start of the academic year 2025/26.

The short course (approximately 6 to 9 hours of learning) explores the concept of advocacy, drawing on contributions from staff, students and alumni across the University. It guides students through using a life-centred design toolkit to research and plan an action to help address a sustainability or climate emergency issue of their choice.

The course features a case study that showcases how the University's catering and dining services team have approached the challenge of reducing food waste per meal whilst "providing nutritious, sustainable, exciting and inclusive dining experiences that promote the well-being of our campus community and support local and ethical food systems, that are financially sustainable."

Over 370 students enrolled on the course in its first year and reported finishing the course feeling more informed, empowered to make a difference, and able to evidence the transferable skills they've developed to future employers.



Global Sustainability Leaders Scholars

This academic year, 230 undergraduate students joined as our first cohort of Global Sustainability Leaders Scholars. Open to high-performing students across all disciplines who are committed to becoming future sustainability leaders, the scheme offers funding and a comprehensive programme of sustainability-focused learning and development opportunities.

During this first year, scholars were able to access a programme of additional lectures, online short courses and talks, networking events and volunteering opportunities. The programme will now offer 400 scholarships each year, representing a significant commitment and investment from the University. We were named the Times and the Sunday Times University of the Year for Scholarships and Bursaries 2026.

New Learning Garden

In June, the University of Reading launched its new Learning Garden, a living laboratory designed to support climate and environmental education for school pupils, University students and the wider community.

The launch was a central part of the University's centenary celebrations in 2026, reflecting its long-standing commitment to environment and climate education, and its ambition to inspire the next century of learning, research and community engagement. The garden will benefit our own students as well as visiting groups from local schools and colleges, ensuring learners of all ages can access nature-based learning at the University.

RED Sustainable Action Award

The University continued to widely promote the RED Sustainable Action Award, which is dedicated to encouraging learning, action and advocacy for sustainability. The award is open to all students and offers an expanded portfolio of projects in which to participate.

Our Careers and Employability team led the redesign of the Sustainable Action Award, moving to a points-based system that allows students more flexibility to shape the award according to their own interests and career aspirations, and align some goals with the GSLS programme. Student sign-ups for this award in 2025/26 reached 517, an increase of 217% from the previous year.

Sustainable Action and Global Engagement Conference

Careers held the second Sustainable Action and Global Engagement Conference, aimed at students working towards these awards, and featured guest speakers from a range of environmental organisations.

The overall positivity score for Environmental Sustainability measures on the NSS (2026) rose by 14.8ppts from 2025 to 2026 to 76.4%. In terms of students reporting that their course had encouraged them to think about environmental sustainability, across the 13 schools of the University, 8 increased their positivity measure, with any reductions either marginal (under 1 ppt) or in schools where this measure was already extremely high (above 90%).

Our future commitments

- Embed sustainability throughout our curriculum by publishing updated commitments and targets as part of the new University of Reading Strategy (autumn 2026).
- Establish a systematic programme of staff development across the University, including opportunities for all staff, staff-student collaboration, and a prestigious training programme to develop system leadership for environmental sustainability in the curriculum. Develop the programme during 2026/27.
- Promote the Advocating for a Better Planet online course exclusively to University of Reading students, with a target of 500 new students joining the course during 2026/27.
- Award the Global Sustainability Leaders scholarship to up to 400 new scholars starting in 2026/27, and design and deliver the next phase of their learning and development programme.
- Highlight and maximise the outdoor teaching opportunities for students offered in the new Learning Garden, setting a participation baseline to inform future usage and resourcing.
- Promote the RED Sustainable Action Award, with a target of 125 students completing the award in 2026/27.
- Enhance student opportunities to thrive in a green economy by strengthening our support for future green skills and jobs, and connecting our programmes, careers support, student awards, work experience and volunteering opportunities.



5. Sustainability & Research

Research plays a vital role in addressing global environmental challenges, and the University of Reading is committed to ensuring that its own research activities are conducted in a more sustainable way. During 2025/26, we continued to embed environmental sustainability within research culture, infrastructure and operations, supporting our researchers to reduce environmental impacts while maintaining excellence in research and innovation.

Key highlights

A key area of progress has been the continued expansion of the Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF), which helps laboratories improve their environmental performance through practical actions focused on energy, waste and resource use. More than 104 laboratories across the University have now registered interest with LEAF, with three achieving Silver certification and three achieving Bronze certification this year, although not as many as last year, labs from both Hopkins and Health and Life Science Building are now certified which increases the number of buildings with LEAF certified labs on campus. Through the scheme, research teams have introduced a range of improvements, including optimising freezer temperatures, reducing the energy use of fume cupboards, improving waste management practices and reducing reliance on single-use materials.

Technical Services colleagues have continued to play a central role in supporting sustainable laboratory practices across the University. Through the administration of LEAF, engagement with laboratory teams and the sharing of good practice, they have helped drive behavioural and operational changes that contribute to lower environmental impacts and more efficient use of resources.

During 2025/26, the University became a signatory to the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice and has made progress in embedding the principles of the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice. The Concordat provides a shared framework for the UK research sector to reduce the environmental impacts associated with research and innovation and focuses on areas including leadership, infrastructure, procurement, travel and environmental reporting.

Progress has been made in improving the sustainability of research infrastructure. Alongside laboratory behavioural change programmes, the University continues to invest in infrastructure efficiency measures, including laboratory equipment upgrades, fume cupboard modernisation, water efficiency improvements. The University's Digital Strategy commits to reduce digital carbon emissions, improve efficiency through data and minimise digital waste, recognising that digital infrastructure forms an important part of the research environment.

The University continues to embed Sustainable Travel Principles within its travel policy. Researchers are encouraged to consider lower-carbon travel options wherever practical and to make use of virtual and hybrid collaboration methods where appropriate.

Alongside this work, the Our Future First Sustainability Champions have established a dedicated network of colleagues focused on the sustainability challenges faced within laboratory environments. The network provides a supportive space for colleagues to explore challenges, identify and share good practice. Insights from the group are helping to inform a University-wide action plan to improve sustainability standards within laboratories and strengthen collaboration across the research community.

Supporting researchers to respond to growing funder expectations has also been an important area of activity. During the year, the University engaged with new and developing UK Research and Innovation's SPARKHub (Sustainable Practice and Research Knowledge Hub), a sector-wide initiative designed to support more environmentally sustainable research practices. SPARKHub provides practical guidance, tools and examples that help researchers identify opportunities to reduce environmental impacts and strengthen funding applications where sustainability requirements are becoming increasingly important. This work is helping to ensure our researchers are well positioned to meet emerging expectations from funders while sharing and adopting best practice from across the sector.



Tracking our progress

- More than 104 laboratories engaged with LEAF.
- 3 labs have been awarded Bronze and 3 Silver this year.
- 13 Silver LEAF certificates have been awarded since Jun 2022.
- 43 Bronze LEAF certificates have been awarded since June 2022.
- Continued expansion of sustainable laboratory practices across multiple departments.
- Progressing the dedicated Our Future First Sustainability Champions network focused on laboratory sustainability challenges and solutions.
- Progress towards embedding the principles of the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice across research governance and operations.

Our future commitments

- Continue expanding sustainable laboratory practice across the University, with the ambition that all laboratories achieve at least Bronze LEAF accreditation by 2030.
- Further embed the commitments of the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice within research governance, policies and decision-making processes.
- Strengthen approaches to sustainable procurement, equipment sharing and resource reuse to reduce the environmental impacts associated with research activities.
- Improve understanding and management of the environmental impacts of research infrastructure, including laboratories, digital infrastructure and externally hosted research facilities.
- Enhance environmental reporting and monitoring to support Concordat commitments and evolving funder requirements.
- Continue supporting researchers to meet sustainability expectations in funding bids through engagement with SPARKHub and the provision of practical guidance, tools and resources.
- Ensure sustainability becomes an integral consideration in how research is planned, delivered and supported, contributing to both the University's environmental sustainability ambitions and wider sector efforts to reduce the impacts of research and innovation.



6. Energy & carbon

Carbon reduction progress

Our in-scope carbon emissions are now 71.9% below our 2008/9 baseline, an additional 8.2% progress from last year, meaning we have now delivered cumulative savings of 356,126 tCO_2 and £59.3 million. A full breakdown of our emissions scope and reductions is provided in Appendix 2.

The University's 2025 Net Zero Plan sought to align with the principles of SBTi[1] where possible. Progress aligned with those principles is also set out further in Appendix 2.

Energy consumption

We continue to procure 100% certified renewable electricity to meet our remaining grid electricity demand. When using market-based carbon accounting, our overall emission reductions stand at 79.0% below our baseline.

We use primary energy consumption per m^2, compared to the average of the previous two years, as a key metric in our ISO50001-certified energy management system. This year, we have seen a 3.8% increase in this metric.

Analysis of our Display Energy Certificates shows that 91% of our buildings performed better than average [for the third year in a row].

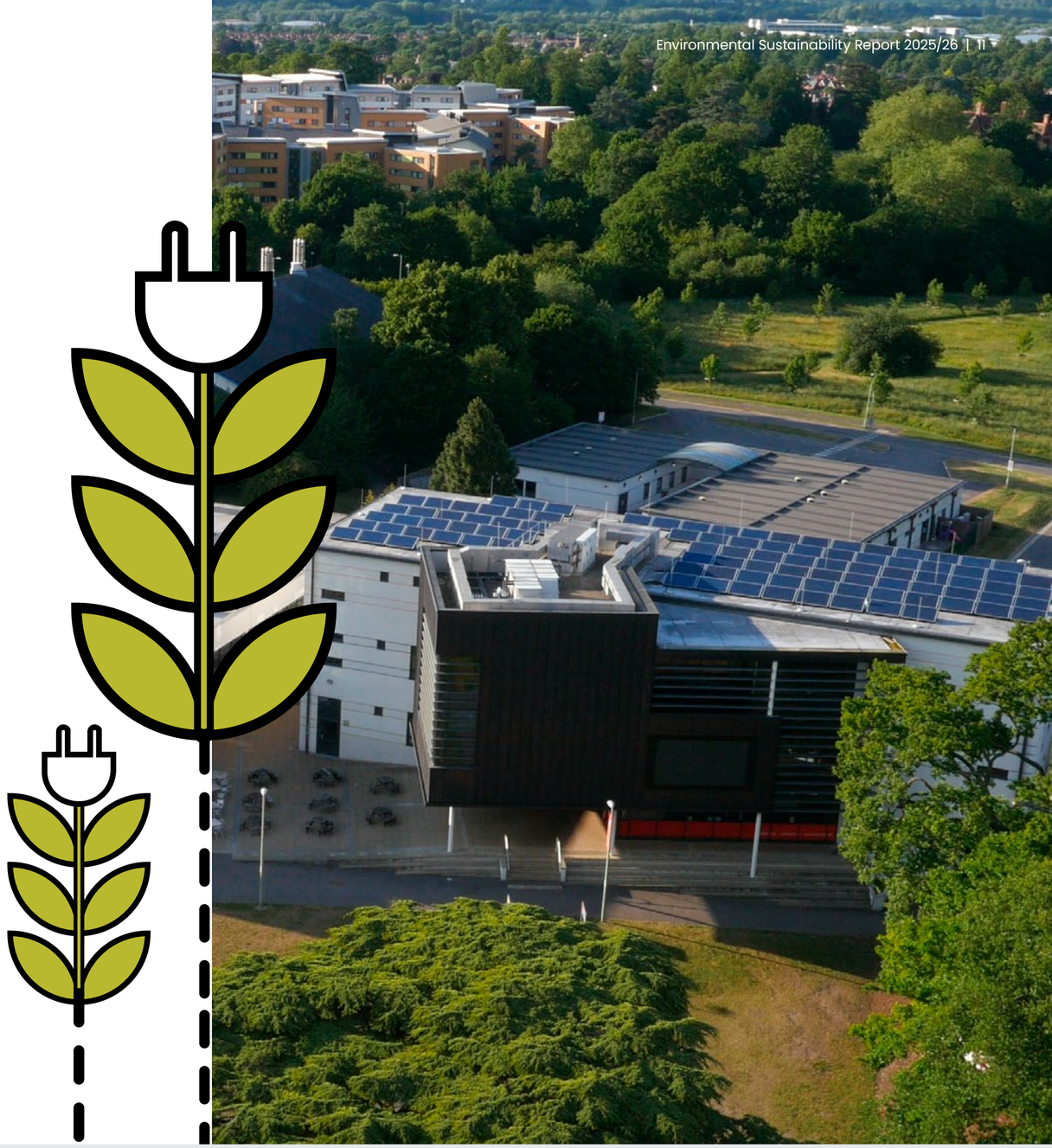
Completed projects

In July 2026, we expanded our onsite renewable energy generation by completing a major solar PV installation across five buildings on the Whiteknights campus. The installation is expected to generate around 400,000 kWh of electricity each year and deliver approximately £100,000 in annual cost savings. By generating more electricity on-site, we are reducing our reliance on grid-supplied power, lowering carbon emissions and increasing the amount of clean energy used across the University. This project forms Phase 1 of a two-phase programme, with the remaining installations due to be completed in 2027.

We also retrofitted intelligent boiler load controls in three buildings. These low-cost devices improve boiler efficiency by reducing dry cycling and unnecessary energy use. While our long-term strategy is to phase out gas-fired boilers, these controls provide an effective short-term measure to reduce gas consumption and associated emissions. Across the three buildings, they have delivered average gas savings of 22%, equivalent to approximately 115,000 kWh per year.

A significant step in our carbon reduction journey this year has been to permanently shut down our CHP (combined heat and power) engine, saving an estimated 580 tCO_2/year. When the engine was installed in 2015, it was saving us around 1,000 tCO_2/year, but the rapid decarbonisation of grid electricity now means it is more carbon-intensive to produce our electricity through the CHP than to buy it from the grid.

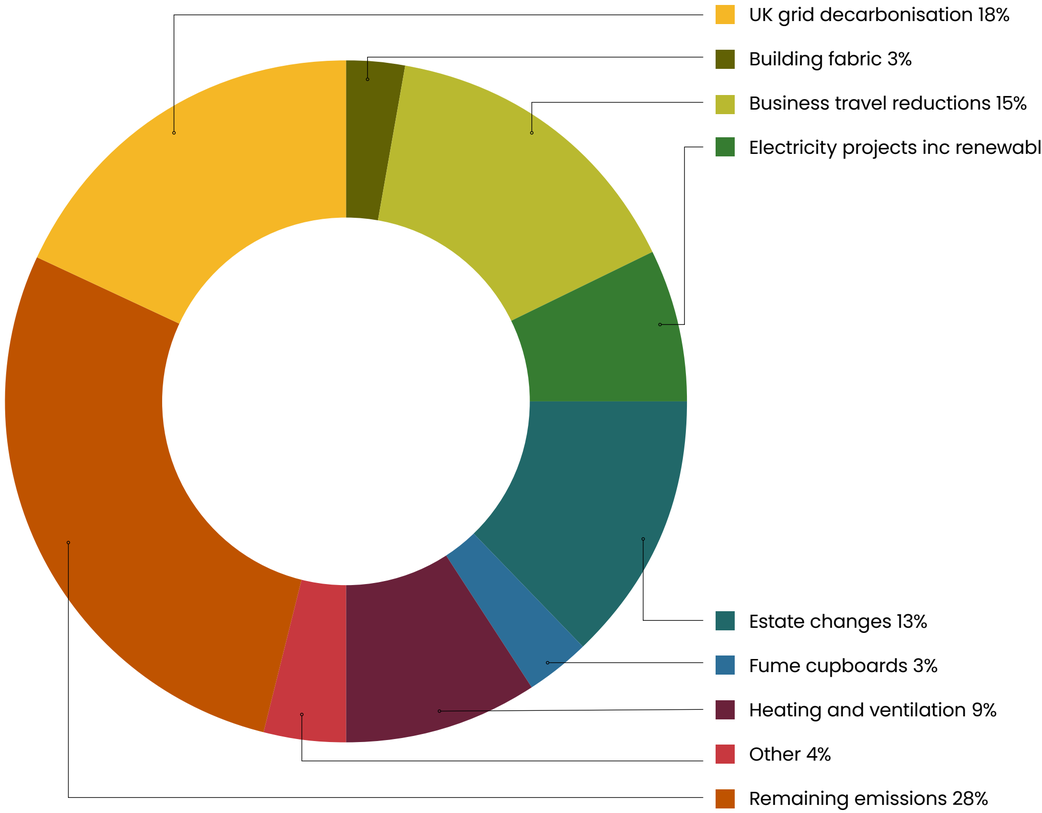
[1] Science Based Targets Initiative - https://sciencebasedtargets.org/



Other projects completed during the year included a further rollout of loft insulation to improve the thermal performance of buildings, helping to keep them warmer in winter, cooler in summer and less costly to operate. We also invested in LED lighting upgrades, replacing older fluorescent fittings and improving lighting controls. Areas where controls were not operating effectively were identified by OFF Champions and student volunteers, enabling us to target improvements where they would have the greatest impact. This was a strong example of collaboration and engagement across our University community.

Appendix 1 (Table 1) provides the full list of energy projects completed during 2025/26. Appendix 1 (Table 2) sets out the planned energy and carbon reduction projects for 2026/27.

Breakdown of CO_2 savings delivered against baseline



Our future commitments

- Phase 2 of our solar expansion programme will be completed during 2026/27 and will include rooftop solar installations on approximately seven additional buildings, potentially together with two solar carport installations. Once both phases are complete, on-site solar generation will have almost tripled, with around 12% of the University's electricity demand met by on-campus solar power. Total annual generation is expected to reach approximately 2.8 GWh. In addition to delivering further carbon and financial savings, these projects will strengthen our resilience to energy market volatility and rising energy costs.
- We are also planning a further rollout of intelligent boiler load controls, alongside improvements to our metering infrastructure and energy data collection. These investments will help identify further opportunities to improve efficiency and optimise energy performance.
- We have exciting plans in the pipeline to significantly decarbonise Whiteknights' heating through a large, centralised heat pump project, including extending our district heating network to additional buildings. We are also looking at options for off-campus renewable energy generation, potentially linked directly back to the campus, and will seek to appoint a delivery partner for this work in the coming year.

7. Sustainable food

Sustainable food that students choose

At the University of Reading, sustainable food is about much more than reducing environmental impact. It means providing affordable, nutritious food that students choose to eat while reducing waste, supporting responsible procurement and creating financially sustainable catering services.

As a self-funded operation, Dining Services must balance environmental responsibility with commercial performance. This creates a strong incentive to reduce waste, improve efficiency and invest in initiatives that deliver lasting environmental, social and financial benefits.

What makes Reading distinctive is the close integration of farms, research, teaching and Dining Services. Our combination of academic expertise and operational experience enables campus dining to act as a Living Lab where world-leading research is translated into practical solutions that benefit students and contribute to more sustainable food systems.

Highlights from 2025/26

The University's Clever Cuisine Meal Plan continues to transform student dining. Meal Plans now account for well over half of all meals served, with participation increasing fivefold over the past five years. Planning meals in advance allows production to be matched closely to demand, reducing food waste and unnecessary energy use while ensuring students enjoy freshly prepared, nutritious meals. Higher participation also creates economies of scale, helping keep meals affordable despite rising food costs.

During the year, Dining Services continued reshaping the catering estate by concentrating services into fewer, busier locations. Operating fuller kitchens improves efficiency, reduces waste from underused facilities and enables a greater proportion of food to be prepared fresh on campus.

Research continues to play a central role in the University's sustainable food programme. Dining halls increasingly operate as Living Labs, where researchers, students and catering professionals collaborate to develop and evaluate more sustainable approaches to food provision.

This approach is supported by Dr Charlotte Mills , who co-chairs the Education Working Group of the Menus of Change University Research Collaborative (MCURC). Through MCURC's Collective Impact initiative, leading universities are working together to reduce food-related greenhouse gas emissions by 30% by 2030. Evidence from the collaboration demonstrates that lower-carbon menus can also reduce food purchasing costs, showing that sustainable food can be both environmentally responsible and more affordable.

Reading's contribution extends beyond campus. Matt Tebbit, Director of Dining Services, serves as Chair of the Sustainability Group and as a Non-Executive Director of TUCO , the UK's largest member-owned food procurement organisation, helping to share best practice in sustainable catering across universities, colleges, schools and the NHS.

Technology also continues to improve sustainability. The University's Digital Dining platform provides live menus, nutritional information, allergen and ingredient details while improving production forecasting and stock management, helping reduce avoidable food waste.

The University's overall food purchasing carbon intensity during 2025/26 was 2.53 kg CO_2e per kilogram of food purchased . Wilderness Café also became the University's first disposable-free café , eliminating single-use food packaging while serving an entirely home-made menu.

Tracking our progress

- Meal Plans now account for well over 50% of all meals served.
- Clever Cuisine participation has increased fivefold over the past five years.
- Food purchasing carbon intensity of 2.53 kg CO_2e per kilogram of food purchased.
- Wilderness Café became the University's first disposable-free café.
- Digital Dining supports smarter forecasting and production planning.
- Continued consolidation of catering facilities to improve efficiency and reduce waste.
- Expansion of research partnerships using campus dining as Living Labs for sustainable food innovation.

Our future commitments

- During 2026/27, Clever Cuisine will continue expanding into additional cafés and retail outlets, while Campus Cash will encourage more students and staff to purchase food on campus through discounted digital payments.
- Dining Services will continue enhancing Digital Dining, reducing food waste through improved forecasting and production planning, and strengthening student engagement through the new Student Dining Advisory Board.
- Looking further ahead, the University is progressing plans to establish one of the UK's first university dining facilities that operate without the 14 major allergens. By combining world-leading research with operational expertise, the University of Reading will continue to demonstrate that healthier, lower-carbon food can also be more affordable, supporting healthier people, stronger communities and a more sustainable future.



8. Estate development and maintenance

The University's Estates Strategy sets out its development plans for the coming years, centred around the concept of being "The University in a Park". It seeks to bring the relationship between our buildings and beautiful parkland landscapes to life, setting out four key drivers, to which environmental sustainability is integral.

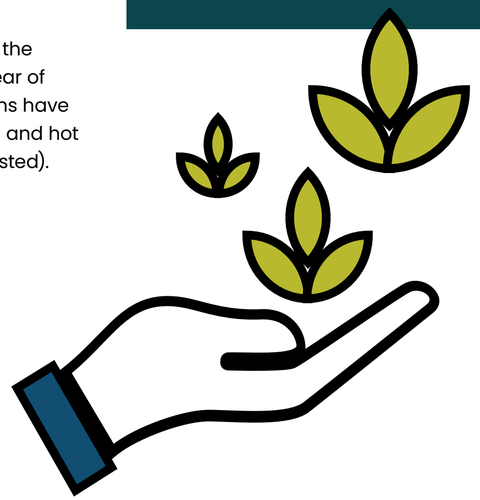
- **Maximising assets** – improved space utilisation is crucial for a more economically and environmentally sustainable estate.
- **Growth** – future developments will ensure they are compliant with our net zero carbon and wider environmentally sustainable ambitions.
- **Risk and compliance** – our ISO14001 and ISO50001 certifications underpin strong environmental management. Delivering a net zero estate, minimising pollution and waste, encouraging reuse and sustainable travel are integral.
- **Optimising operations** – reducing waste and utilities costs are crucial to cutting estate operational costs. Infrastructure improvements will support active travel, reliable public transport links and electric vehicle charging.

Tracking our progress

- The major new, environmentally conscious headquarters of the European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (ECMWF) is set to open at Earley Gate in the coming year. The University is proud to welcome ECMWF to its campus, with whom our Department of Meteorology has had a longstanding relationship.
- The complex refurbishment of the heritage-listed URS building has now commenced, taking a fabric-first approach to improving energy efficiency and targeting a "very good" BREEAM rating.
- Work has been commissioned to optimise the energy performance of the Health and Life Sciences building and the School of Art building, two major developments which have now been operating for a little while.
- Air source heat pumps were retrofitted to the SportsPark in 2024/25 and in its first full year of operation, 68% carbon emission reductions have been measured for the building's heating and hot water, equating to 80 tCO_2 (weather-adjusted).

Our future commitments

- The URS project will be the major focus of capital investment over the next couple of years, bringing back into use the second largest academic building on our estate with vastly upgraded facilities.
- Significant background work has been underway to better align building usage with occupation. This includes trials of smart occupancy sensors to help inform a future plan to deliver significant energy efficiencies as well as wider cost reductions.
- The planned maintenance programme includes rolling upgrades for systems such as lighting and air conditioning and will factor in utility savings in future prioritisation of work to maximise impact.



9. Water

Tracking our progress

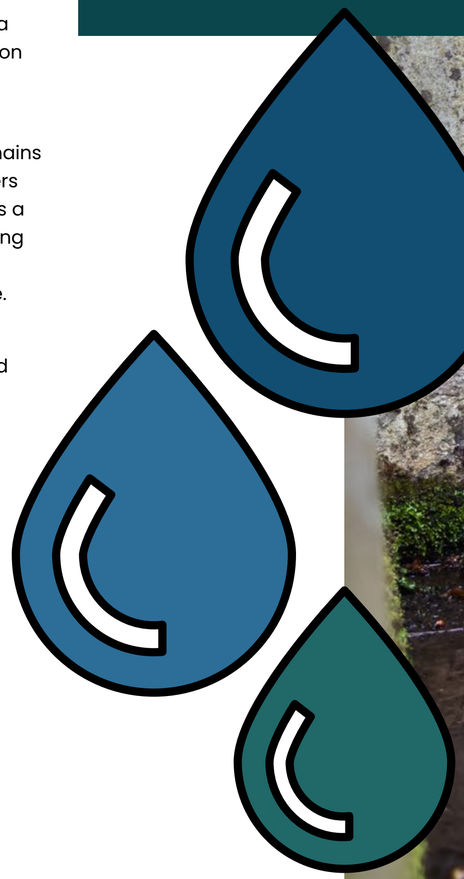
Water consumption has reduced again year-on-year and now stands at 26% below the 2011/12 baseline. Whilst this is encouraging, it remains higher than in 2021, when the University's current Water Management Plan was written – and we remain well short of our aspirational target of achieving a 45% reduction in our academic water consumption against baseline.

Water metering is key to tracking progress and identifying potential issues. The majority of our mains water supplies now have Automatic Meter Readers (AMRs), but metering individual buildings remains a work in progress, with protracted delays in ensuring that the University's main buildings each have individual, half hourly water meter data available.

There has recently been work undertaken to pinpoint a suspected longstanding underground leak on Whiteknights, with evidence that some water running to the lake is potable water and therefore originates from a mains supply. Planning can now commence on how to tackle that leak, and hopefully a good reduction in consumption will be measurable as a result.

Our future commitments

- With the current Water Management Plan running until 2026, in the coming months, a new plan will be published for the next 5 years.





10. Waste and resource use

We are dedicated to embedding the concept of Waste Hierarchy into our day-to-day operations, so we work proactively to reduce, reuse, recycle and recover items and materials. Sending materials to landfill is the last resort. We work closely with our main waste management contractor, Select Environmental Services, a Reading-based company, to roll out new innovations and undertake new initiatives.

Strategy & Targets

The University's Waste and Resource Use Strategy 2021 to 2030 focuses on responsible resource use and sustainable waste management. Our targets for 2024 to 2027 are based on the Waste Hierarchy, with an aim to:

- continue to reduce total operational waste produced per person from the 2022/23 level of 43.1 kg
- increase the amount of items sent for re-use and repair from the 2022/23 level of 22.1 tonnes
- increase the University's annual recycling rate for operational waste to a minimum of 65% by weight
- continue to send less than 1% by weight of operational waste to landfill
- develop our procurement practices to enable further circular economy approaches to be implemented.

Tracking our progress

We've made further progress towards our targets over the last year, which include the following highlights:

- **2.5kg reduction per person** in total operational waste produced compared to 2022/23 (40.6kg vs. 43.1kg)
- **34.4% reduction per person** in total waste produced compared to 2015/16 baseline (40.6kg vs. 61.9kg)
- **25.5 tonnes** of furniture and other items reused or repaired
- **64%** of operational waste sent for recycling
- **less than 1%** by weight of operational waste sent to landfill.

Definitions

Per person means full-time equivalent UK-based student and staff members, excluding Thames Valley Science Park (TVSP), Campus Jobs staff, and writing up and visiting students.

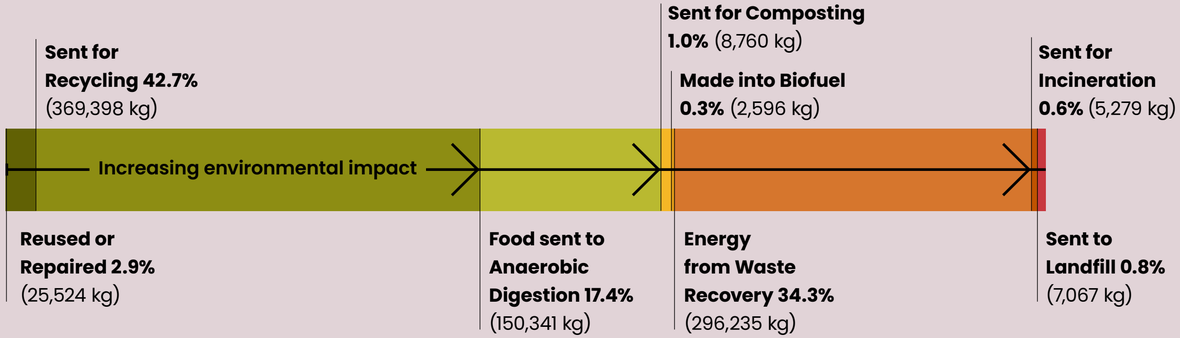
Recycling includes items sent for repair, reuse, recycling, anaerobic digestion and composting.

Operational waste means waste generated during the day-to-day activities of the University in the UK, including clinical waste, hazardous waste and farm waste, but excluding TVSP, UPP-operated halls of residence, and other rented-out buildings.

2025/26 Analysis

The graphic below shows the amount of operational waste generated across the University for each element of the Waste Hierarchy for 2025/26.

Operational Waste Weights 2025/26: Total waste = 865,200kg

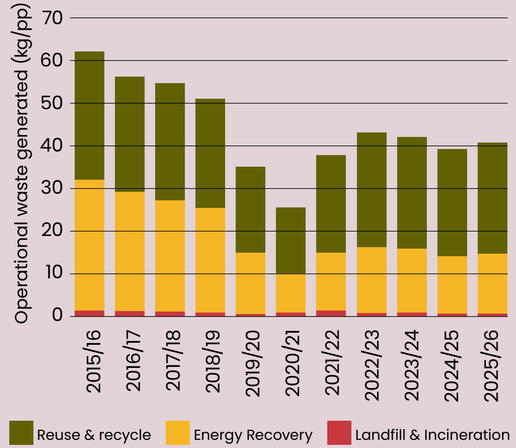


The graph to the right shows the amount of operational waste generated per person across the University over the last eleven years, with each annual bar split into three sections: Reuse & Recycling, Energy Recovery, and Landfill & Incineration.

Reducing total waste generated is the most important element of the Waste Hierarchy, as shown by the decrease in the height of the individual annual bars, from 61.9kg per person in 2015/16 to 40.6kg in 2025/26.

Moving materials away from landfill, incineration and energy recovery towards recycling and re-use is a key part of our Strategy, as shown by the red and orange sections getting relatively smaller over the years. We have more than halved the weight of items per person sent for energy recovery over the last 11 years (14kg per person in 2025/26 compared to 30.5kg in 2015/16), whilst the overall rate for reuse and recycling has improved from 48% of total waste produced to 64% over the same timeframe.

Day-to-day operational waste produced per person per year (kg/person)



Detailed Analysis

Reduce

- Total operational waste produced in 2025/26 academic year was 40.6kg per person, compared to our 2015/16 baseline of 61.9kg per person, representing a 34.4% reduction. This equates to a total generation in 2025/26 of 865 tonnes of waste by around 21,280 students and staff (full-time equivalent).
- The amount of waste generated per person was slightly higher than in the previous year (39.5kg per person in 2024/25), but lower than in 2022/23 and 2023/24, and over 10kg per person lower than before the COVID-19 pandemic (50.9kg per person in 2018/19).
- The University's centenary celebrations in 2026 saw many additional events take place, which increased the amount of waste produced between February and July 2026. In fact, the first half of the academic year saw a significant reduction in waste produced from 19.4kg per person in 2024/25 to 17.6kg in 2025/26, whilst the second half saw an increase from 20.1kg per person to 23.0kg in 2025/26.

Reuse and Repair

- 6.5 tonnes of furniture and other items were re-used across the year via our online WarpIt reuse platform. With a further 19 tonnes of additional items repaired, re-manufactured or re-used via other routes, equating to a total of 25.5 tonnes in 2025/26.
- These figures include IT equipment that has been re-used within the University as part of the Reuse & Recycle Service overseen by the Digital Technology Services team.

Recycle

- Our annual recycling rate for operational waste in 2025/26 was 64.0% by weight (including repair, reuse, anaerobic digestion and composting). This is a slight increase from 63.9% in the previous year.

Recover

- For our waste which cannot be reused, repaired or recycled in some way, the vast majority of this is sent to an Energy from Waste recovery plant, where the waste is burned and the resulting steam powers a turbine which generates electricity.

Landfill

- The University has again met our annual target to send less than 1% by weight of operational waste to landfill, with 0.8% sent in 2025/26.

Food Waste Management

- The University's Dining Services are serving more meals than ever, with Clever Cuisine participation by students increasing fivefold over the past five years, and a greater proportion being prepared fresh on campus. Initiatives to reduce food waste are regularly trialled and rolled out.
- All catering locations have segregated food waste collection points for front-of-house use and in kitchen and preparation areas, with food waste recycling bins installed in academic and administrative areas across our sites during 2025.
- This has led to more food waste being collected and separated out of the General Waste stream, which is then sent to an Anaerobic Digestion facility, where it is treated to generate electricity and digestate fertiliser.

Construction Waste

- Due to the variability in quantities and types of construction waste from year to year in line with major project schedules, information is collated and classified independently from the University's operational waste. In 2025/26, the University's contractors generated approximately 675 tonnes of construction waste, of which 85% was sent for reuse, recycling or composting. The majority of this construction waste was generated from minor projects and building refurbishments.



Recycling of ceramics and heat-proof glass

A collection scheme for ceramics and heat-proof glass, which cannot be recycled with standard glass bottles, has been rolled out to more locations in 2026, enabling items from science laboratories and catering locations to be sent for recycling.

Heat-proof (borosilicate) glass cannot be recycled with bottle glass; indeed it is a serious contaminant if mixed together. Therefore, in order to be recycled, it has to be segregated and collected separately.

The heat-proof glass and ceramics collected at the University is turned into aggregate for construction!

11. Responsible procurement

Tracking our progress

- Procurement embeds sustainability into our tenders, contracts, supplier management and management information and analysis. In 2025/26, we have continued to monitor our supply chain emissions (Scope 3) via the Net Positive Futures tool where engagement by our suppliers has increased to 25%. We will be urging more of our suppliers to use the tool in the coming year. UniGreen, Warpit, and the Device Lifecycle initiatives continued in 25/26, and attention is now turning to bottle schemes, gas suppliers, and other lab products, such as lab coats, which may be eligible for take-back schemes offered by our lab suppliers.
- Members of Procurement continue to attend the Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium (SUPC) Responsible Procurement and Supplier Management groups, the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC) Circular Economy & Waste Reduction Responsible Procurement Group and the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice Discussion Group. We are collaborating with other higher education institutions to reduce duplication of effort and put pressure on suppliers to reduce waste, offer alternative, more sustainable products and develop guidance for sustainable procurement in grant writing. This year we incorporated green flags into our purchasing marketplace to promote more sustainable products to internal buyers.

Our future commitments

- In 2026/27, we will work with the Sustainability team to review and improve our sustainability tender questions, evaluation criteria and supplier reviews to ensure they are relevant, measurable and in line with University objectives. We will also be evaluated in 2027 for the Fairtrade University and Colleges Award and hope to maintain the three stars achieved in 2026.



12. Environmental protection and pollution prevention

The University of Reading's commitment to reducing its environmental impact remains unwavering. This is demonstrated by achieving successful reaccreditation for ISO14001 during 2025/26, which the University has held since 2014. One of the key ways the University shows its commitment is through controlling emissions, meeting our regulatory commitments, and ensuring that our emergency response procedures are appropriate to reduce the impact of any pollution incidents.

We have committed to reducing environmental incidents to no more than three from University activities, on a rolling three-year average. In 2025/26 there was one environmental incident reported which originated from University activities. This incident was dealt with effectively by staff, with corrective measures identified and implemented promptly to prevent environmental damage. This identified a recurring issue, which will now be managed more effectively through a planned preventative maintenance task.

Environmental auditing

During 2025/26, the Sustainability team conducted a comprehensive programme of internal audits to ensure that procedures are effective, and environmental compliance is maintained across a range of departments and schools. This year's internal audit schedule utilised more internal expertise from both the sustainability and energy teams, which helped identify opportunities that can deliver benefits across the University.

Emergency response

Further work has been completed around emergency response, building on the progress achieved during 2024/25. Estates' processes around spill procedures and kit have been improved, which means that the most appropriate type of spill kit will now be taken on tasks. A larger spill kit has been moved close to vulnerable receptors to enable fast deployment. Spill kit equipment is now held in central locations and has been placed on preventative maintenance, so it is checked regularly.

Clean Air Day supporter

The University of Reading is a committed Clean Air Day supporter. The University hosted several On Your Bike days during 2025/26. These events encouraged people to try out cycling, provided free bike maintenance, and offered recycled second-hand bikes for sale. There was also a clean air support day held during Green Festival 2025, which encouraged participants to use more sustainable travel modes. Furthermore, a Transport and Environment Conservation Café was held during Green Festival, giving participants the opportunity to discuss these topics.

Our future commitments

- We seek to maintain our target of no more than three emissions/discharges incidents from University activities on a rolling three-year average. We will report on our progress against this target annually.
- We will continue to promote clean air through a range of different events highlighting sustainable travel modes, working with local stakeholders and the community.



13. Sustainable travel

The University's Sustainable Travel programme is guided by the Travel Plan, which provides a long-term framework for reducing the environmental impact of travel to, from and between University campuses, while supporting healthier, more affordable and accessible travel choices. The Travel Plan covers commuter, business, fleet and operational, and visitor and delivery travel, with progress supported by improvements to infrastructure, public transport provision, travel benefits and behaviour-change initiatives.

Tracking our progress

2025/26 was an important year for reviewing progress against the Travel Plan and using staff and student feedback to shape future priorities. The December 2025 Travel Survey received 1,757 responses, including 1,233 staff and 524 students, providing the first opportunity to measure changes in travel behaviour since the current Travel Plan was introduced.

The results demonstrate both the strengths of the University's existing sustainable travel provision and the scale of the challenge ahead. Sustainable modes continue to account for most journeys made by staff and students, but the University is not currently on track to meet its Travel Plan targets. Staff single-occupancy vehicle use increased from 33.5% in January 2024 to 34.8% in December 2025, against a 2029 target of 27%. Student single-occupancy vehicle use also increased, from 10.6% to 11.3%, compared with a target of 9.5%. Sustainable mode share consequently fell from 66.5% to 65.2% for staff and from 89.4% to 88.7% for students.

The survey also provided valuable insight into the barriers and improvements that could influence travel choices. Cost and reliability were key concerns for public transport users. Further improvements to walking and cycling routes, safety and priority were among the changes most frequently identified as likely to encourage greater use of active travel. Encouragingly, the proportion of respondents who said nothing would encourage them to change their travel behaviour has decreased since the previous survey, suggesting an opportunity to build on existing willingness to consider more sustainable options.

Key highlights

During 2025/26, several significant infrastructure programmes that began in the previous year were completed. The rollout of new public and fleet electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure was completed, improving charging provision across the University's campuses and supporting the transition towards lower-carbon vehicle use. Following the install programme, this academic year saw the highest EV charge session count to date. In 2025/26, there were 3,223 sessions completed, an increase from 1,909 in 2024/25 and 1,807 the previous year.

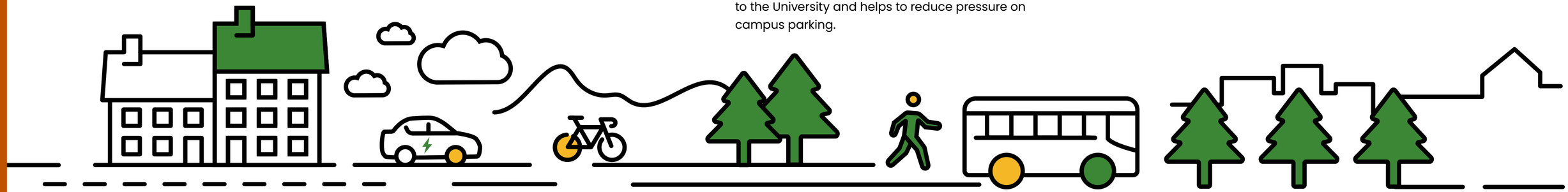
The four-phase programme to install new cycle store facilities was also completed, increasing the availability of genuinely secure provision for staff and students. This forms part of a wider approach to improving the quality and security of cycle provision across the estate, particularly in response to user feedback and large-scale concerns about cycle thefts.

Public transport accessibility was strengthened through the addition of Thames Valley Park as a further location from which staff and students can access free Park & Ride services to campus. This provides an additional alternative to driving directly to the University and helps to reduce pressure on campus parking.

Usage of the University's principal bus services (19, 20 and 21) showed mixed trends during the year: use of the 19 services increased by 4% compared with 2024/25, while the White Knight 20 increased by 5% during its first full year of operation. Usage of the 21 decreased by 6%, following a 14% decrease in the previous year, reflecting changes to the network and service frequency.

The University also continued to respond directly to feedback about walking and cycling routes. This included widening access to the Wilderness from Wilderness Road in Summer 2026, improving the route for walkers and cyclists and demonstrating how feedback from staff and students can translate into practical improvements to the campus environment.

Other sustainable travel initiatives continued to provide alternatives to private car use. Co-Wheels recorded its highest number of bookings since 2022/23, with the introduction of an electric vehicle at London Road Campus providing an additional low-emission option for University-related journeys. Meanwhile, take-up of the University's staff travel benefits remained broadly stable, although participation in Cycle to Work and Bus to Work decreased slightly compared with 2024/25.



The Travel Survey findings have provided a clear direction for the next phase of Travel Plan delivery. While the University has continued to invest in infrastructure and transport options, the increase in single-occupancy car use demonstrates that further action is required to meet the Travel Plan targets. The focus for 2026/27 is therefore on building on feedback provided by staff and students, addressing identified barriers, and exploring new approaches to sustainable travel and how it is presented to staff and students at Reading.

This will include further improvements to cycle security and the quality of cycle parking, alongside exploring the feasibility of initiatives that could support more sustainable and responsible travel choices. The University will also continue to work with transport operators, local authorities and other partners to identify opportunities to improve public transport connectivity and affordability, while strengthening communications and engagement around sustainable travel.

The Travel Plan has also been extended to 2030, bringing its timescale closer to the University's Net Zero 2030 ambition and the biennial travel survey cycle. This provides a longer-term framework for monitoring progress, responding to changes in travel behaviour and ensuring future investment is targeted to the areas where it can have the greatest impact.

Our future commitments

- Enhance active travel infrastructure and safety – improve key walking and cycling routes, install further secure cycle shelters, review cycle parking provision, and assess showers, lockers and changing facilities.
- Strengthen public transport provision and incentives – work with transport operators to improve reliability, frequency and coverage, enhance bus incentives, and improve bus stop facilities and awareness of existing services.
- Influence responsible car use – review parking and permit management, promote considerate parking, and encourage car sharing, car clubs and Park & Ride.
- Support the transition to low-emission vehicles – consolidate EV charging provision, improve awareness of EV charging facilities, and explore the feasibility of an EV salary sacrifice scheme.
- Deliver incentives and behaviour-change initiatives – explore opportunities for a cycle hire scheme and sustainable travel hub, strengthen engagement and communications, and continue cycling support initiatives.
- Improve data, monitoring and engagement – refine travel survey data collection, increase student participation, monitor progress against Travel Plan targets, and strengthen collaboration with internal and external partners. For more information, see the Travel Plan Annual Report 2025–26.



14. Engagement, awareness and behaviour change

Our vision is to create a culture of sustainability within the University, where there is shared responsibility and action across our community of staff and students. We actively encourage a collaborative approach in which experiences, lessons learned, problem-solving, and successes are shared. Creating this culture requires strong engagement, sustainability education, leading by example, and challenging the norm. We strive to do this through all our communications, campaigns, events, projects, and through our work with Sustainability Champions across the University.

Tracking our progress

- Energy Conscious Organisation (EnCO): We became the first University to achieve EnCO certification, demonstrating our commitment by embedding behaviour-based solutions in the way we manage energy.
- Green Festival: Our annual flagship Green Festival had a packed and varied agenda, allowing us to engage widely across our community. Key highlights included a Rethinking Food Waste Recipe competition; a talk by internationally celebrated climate activist and author George Monbiot; sustainability nursery activities for our little ones on campus, including a nature trail; a Transport and the Environment conversation café, a visit to campus by Envision Racing to raise awareness of careers in green technology; and an interactive display by the Waste Not Hub giving people an understanding of waste systems and practical solutions they can implement immediately.
- Student Energy Advice Service: We launched our Student Energy Advice Service in September 2025, in collaboration with Reading Student Union (RSU) and supported and funded by London South Bank University (LSBU) and University Partnerships Programme (UPP). Throughout the year, we have undertaken activities to raise awareness of how students can take action to reduce energy use and save money in their private accommodation. We also attended the LSBU Energy Advice Service conference, where we shared our experience of delivering student-focused advice to help others learn from our approach.
- Digital sustainability guidance: We launched a new guide on digital sustainability along with associated communications to staff and students. The guide includes actions individuals can take to reduce their environmental impact when engaging with and using digital technologies, such as reducing their digital footprint, mindful use of emails, switching off equipment when not in use, reducing waste and responsible use of AI.

Our Future First

Our sustainable behaviours engagement programme, Our Future First, created a network of sustainability champions across all schools and directorates in 2023. This network of champions is instrumental in helping us to work towards our vision of embedding sustainability across the organisation, and empowering local responsibility and action.

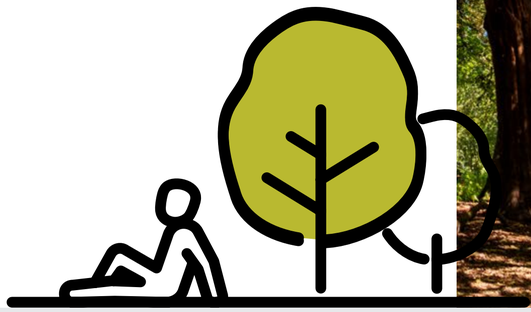
Key activities for the programme over the last year include:

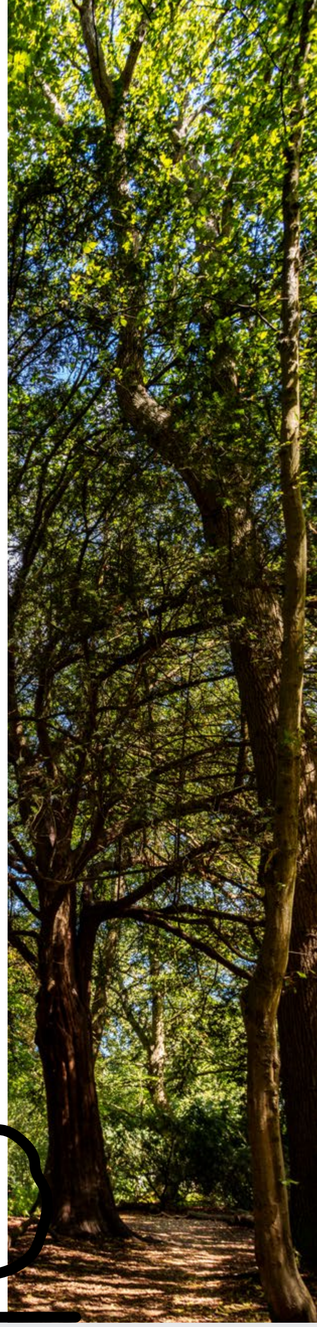
- quarterly network meetings to share ideas, discuss challenges and update on progress
- a sustainable events workshop which led to updates to our Sustainable Events Guide and the creation of a simple sustainable events checklist
- establishment of a Sustainable Labs Working Group bringing together champions from our science schools to create a more consistent approach to embedding sustainability into laboratories
- a Learn with Sustainability session on digital sustainability, highlighting what the University is doing to improve sustainability in this area, and the actions individuals can take
- a campaign to encourage more staff to complete our online Sustainability Training
- a Lights Out campaign to reduce energy waste from lighting.

Upcoming plans for 2025/26 include:

- hold a workshop to further explore how we can extend the programme to include student sustainability champions in the future
- develop Sustainability in Research training for PhD students in collaboration with sustainability champions in our Research, Engagement and Innovation Office
- progress work to embed sustainability in labs through the Sustainable Labs Working Group
- Explore the potential for a champions campaign on local heating/cooling controls.

OUR FUTURE FIRST





Case study: Achieving EnCO

The Energy Conscious Organisation (EnCO) Foundation is a Charitable Community Benefit Society, dedicated to advocating and supporting people-based energy solutions. EnCO sets out a framework of five pillars for embedding people-focused solutions into energy management. The development and implementation of the Our Future First programme has provided a forum through which we can implement the five pillars.

The framework of five pillars

- **Engagement:** This was achieved through one-to-one meetings with all heads of departments, an all-staff sustainability talk led by the Vice Chancellor, and the development of a network of sustainability champions who delivered more targeted engagement within their departments.
- **Alertness:** Through workshops, we explored how energy management integrated with and impacted other key drivers for the University, both positively and negatively. This helped us better understand how projects and initiatives needed to be adapted to be viable within that contextual landscape.
- **Skills:** Alongside our online staff sustainability training course, this was achieved through engagement activities with champions, including initial induction training, specific topical training sessions and workshops.
- **Recognition:** Sustainability and energy management efforts were given much recognition within our community through news updates, marketing displays across campus, and the leadership committee established to oversee environmental sustainability.
- **Adaptation:** Our established network of sustainability champions enabled us to quickly form a working group during the Energy Crisis, which designed and implemented a major energy savings programme. Working together, we identified viable projects to implement within the year.

We now have over 60 sustainability champions, with representation across every School and Directorate within the University. Champions engage in our campaigns, report back on areas of energy waste and undertake local activities within their departments.

By applying a whole facility approach and adjusting for significant factors (as detailed in the full case study), it is estimated that we made a 12.9% energy saving associated with behaviour change over the course of the two years following our 2022/23 baseline, equating to a kWh saving of 7,767,174 and a carbon saving of 1,421 tCO_2e.

CERTIFIED EnCO EVIDENCED

Student projects to showcase marine conservation support

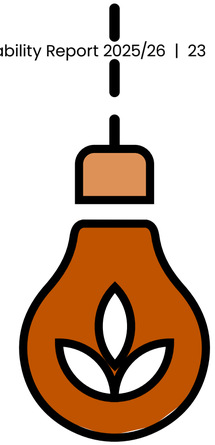
Students studying in the School of Biological Sciences were tasked with producing four-minute films on marine conservation. The videos examine the systemic and often overlooked pressures shaping marine ecosystems – from nutrient pollution and fisheries management to climate-driven change.

The films raised awareness of this important topic across our community in an engaging way. They also encouraged individuals to go beyond the usual, arguably limited, advice. The project demonstrates how research and learning taking place within the University can be used to raise awareness and create behaviour change in the real world.

> “We spend a lot of time teaching students how to understand science. This assignment challenged them to communicate it instead—and the results speak for themselves.”
>
> Glyn Barrett, Lecturer – Ecology and Evolutionary Biology

Read: Marine conservation needs fewer slogans and better priorities

Our Future First – Lights Out Campaign



Our Lights Out campaign aimed to both improve our understanding of why lights are often left on – so we could try to find longer-term solutions – and to directly reduce energy waste during the campaign itself. Our campaign activities included communications to staff and students; requests for feedback on areas of repeated energy waste, or on issues or barriers that make turning the lights off problematic; and out-of-hours lighting audits and switch-offs conducted by teams of students. These activities resulted in the following actions:

- roll out of Switch Off stickers in bookable rooms across the University
- engagement with sustainability champions on specific issues, enabling them to undertake local engagement with users of the space
- implementation of projects to improve lighting controls in areas where issues were identified.



15. Conservation and biodiversity

The University is committed to protecting and enhancing the biodiversity of our campuses and land and engaging students, staff and the local community in order to educate and communicate the importance of biodiversity.

Tracking our progress

- The University is in the process of creating and reviewing a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), to focus initially on our main UK campuses. The BAP will detail the opportunities, goals and targets to improve biodiversity on our UK campuses for the years ahead.
- We were proud to be awarded our 16th consecutive Green Flag award, recognising our Whiteknights campus as one of Britain's top green spaces. Set in 120 hectares of beautiful parkland, the Whiteknights campus features woodlands, meadows, a lake and a botanical garden. It is home to around 2,000 species of plants and animals. It offers spaces for scenic walks and outdoor sports and activities, and welcomes thousands of visitors each year, including schools and other community groups as well as the general public.

  This achievement reflects the consistent work of the University's grounds team, whose day-to-day efforts keep the campus looking its best for staff, students and visitors to enjoy. The award also recognises the work by volunteers who help in the Harris Garden each week.
- The University's detailed Habitat Management Plan is guiding current activity to enhance biodiversity in key areas on our main Whiteknights campus.

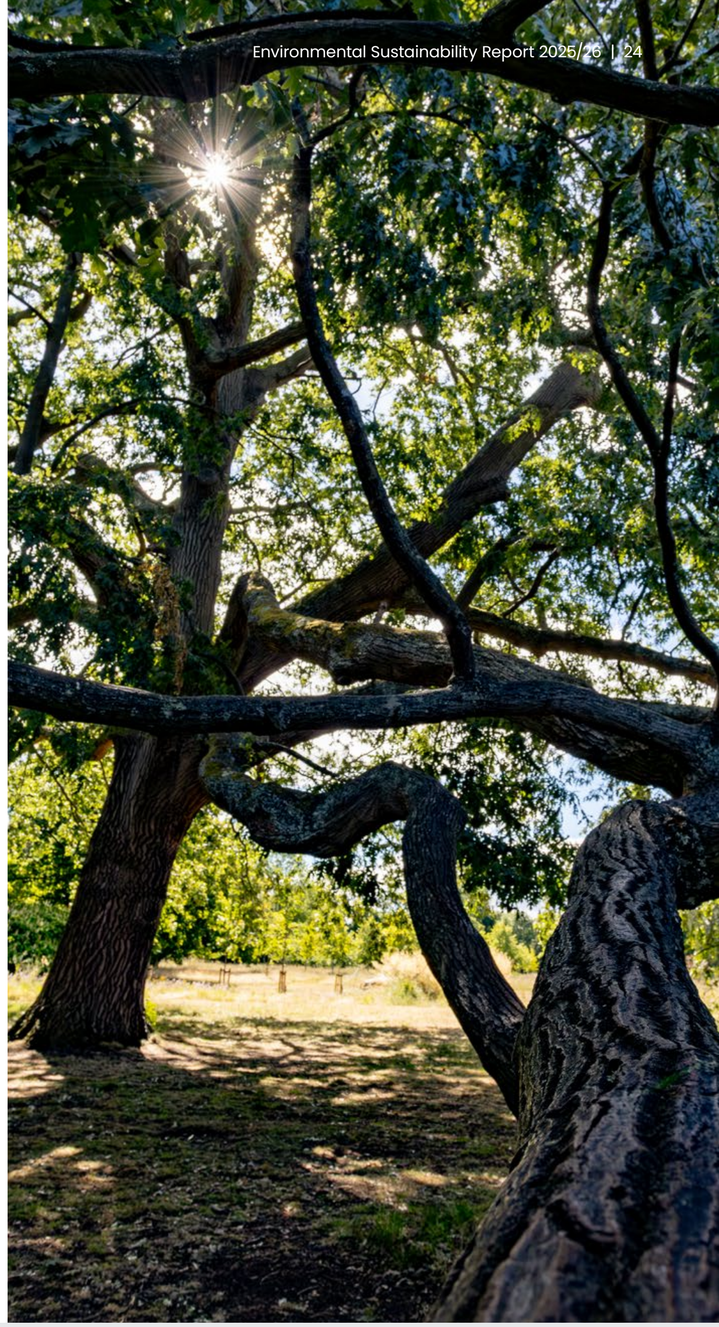
  During the 2025/26 academic year, a number of planned enhancements were made, including the planting of approximately 3,500 native trees and shrubs over the winter. Other actions completed include:

  - repurposing a derelict basketball court which was backfilled with green waste compost produced on site and sown with a wildflower mixture
  - extending the ghost ponds within the Wilderness Woodland, removing invasive species, and significant planting of native trees and shrubs
  - planting of approximately 250m² of native trees and shrubs at Windsor Hall
  - removing invasive species (Laurel, Rhododendron) around Foxhill Drive and lakeside areas, creating new planting opportunities.
- During early 2026, the University joined campuses from across Europe to compete in the ICA Biodiversity Challenge. The challenge invited universities to actively monitor biodiversity on their campuses, through a BioBlitz, and to record as many species as possible. The University of Reading placed 5th in the challenge, recording 1,141 species, from over 4,000 observations.

  A 24-hour BioBlitz was run as part of our annual Community Festival, and engaged staff, students and our local community through a programme of talks and activities that resulted in over 800 species being observed and recorded. This Bioblitz was run as part of our Centenary celebrations and was supported by our Centenary Fund.
- In June 2026, building on our legacy of outdoor, climate and sustainability education, we formally launched the University of Reading Nature Park programme, following a year-long pilot period.

  The University Nature Park enables local schools, nurseries and colleges to engage with free nature-based learning experiences across our campuses. Activities primarily take place on our Whiteknights campus, and pupils can visit habitats including the Harris Garden, the Wilderness and meadows. They can also use our dedicated Learning Garden, which offers themed outdoor learning activities.

  We are pleased to work with the Natural History Museum and Royal Horticultural Society supporting the National Education Nature Park programme as a pilot Nature Park delivery affiliate.



- A new dedicated Learning Garden, launched as part of our centenary celebrations, is a new living laboratory designed to support environmental education for school pupils, students and the wider community. Located within the historic walled garden in the Harris Garden on the University's Whiteknights campus, the Learning Garden explores five themed zones.
  - Climate change. Explore drivers and impacts of climate change. Learn what our local flora could look like in future based on increased temperature predictions.
  - Value of nature. Showcases the biodiversity of ecosystems found in Britain and the threats they face.
  - Food production and security. Consider sustainable and unsustainable farming practices and the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss on food systems.
  - Changing hydrology. Explore the variable water conditions driven by climate change including water cycles and issues such as flooding and drought.
  - Taking action. Designed to demonstrate actions visitors can take within their education or residential settings to increase biodiversity and climate resilience.

The Learning Garden has been designed for students of all ages, primarily for visiting groups of schoolchildren from Early Years to Further Education, University of Reading student and staff groups and local community groups.

- Work began on a major biodiversity project near the Eastern Relief Road in Shinfield, designed to enhance local green spaces and improve public access to nature. Led by the University, the £1m project is part of the wider Shinfield Studios development, located at the University-owned Thames Valley Science Park.

  The initiative will benefit the local community by providing new walking and cycling pathways, enabling better access to green spaces. Wildlife will also benefit, with the restoration and creation of valuable habitats along the River Loddon Corridor, including grasslands, woodlands, reedbeds and meadows, encouraging the fauna typically found in natural environments of this kind.

- A ground-breaking ceremony took place in September 2025 to celebrate construction commencing of the Natural History Museum's new state-of-the-art collections, research and digitisation centre based at the University of Reading-owned Thames Valley Science Park.

  This new centre will house purpose-built storage for 28 million specimens, around a third of the Museum's vast collection. A major scientific research hub, it will provide innovative digital, analytical, and genomic technologies and facilities for the scientific community.

  The museum's collections of mammals, non-insect invertebrates (such as corals, crustaceans, molluscs, and worms), fossilised mammals and invertebrates, molecular collections, and micropalaeontology will be housed at the new centre in bespoke storage.

  From microscopic water bears that can survive in outer space, to the fossil remains of majestic whales, these specimens span millions of years of Earth's history and represent every continent, ocean, and ecosystem. Transporting these immense collections to Shinfield will be the largest move of natural history specimens globally.

- A purpose-built herbarium at Thames Valley Science Park will become home to around eight and a half million items owned by Kew Gardens. This site will provide research, education and collaboration facilities that will allow Kew to continue its critical work to address the biodiversity and climate crises.

Our future commitments

- Launch Biodiversity Action Plan (phase 1) setting enhancement opportunities across UK campuses and community engagement in biodiversity.
- Develop an improved online hub showcasing biodiversity activities at the University of Reading and opportunities for our community to visit or get involved.
- Maximise local school participation in the UoR Nature Park scheme, develop educational opportunities for all key stages on sustainability, and pilot an activity to support trainee teachers in delivering nature-based education.
- Ensure the new Learning Garden provides outdoor learning opportunities for our own students and local schools and colleges, showcasing education around climate change and environmental sustainability.
- Develop a plan to anticipate and mitigate future risks to business continuity and business activities from evolving climate change impacts, including extreme weather events.



16. Community and community involvement

We are committed to creating a University for Reading by working together with local partners to benefit the lives of our local community in Reading, Wokingham and the Thames Valley. The University is working to engage our whole community, locally and globally, to empower and inspire greater commitment and action to address climate change, working towards a more sustainable future for us all.

Tracking our progress

- As a lead partner in the Reading Climate Change Partnership, we helped to engage stakeholder groups across the local community to help inform and shape the climate priorities for a new Reading Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan. Launched in autumn 2025, and formally adopted by Reading Borough Council, the new strategy details the vision, ambitions and actions for the next five years to lead Reading towards being a net zero, climate-friendly and climate-resilient town.
- The University also engaged with Wokingham Borough Council and other local authorities across Berkshire, working to support their strategies towards net zero, climate adaptation and engaging their resident communities in climate action. We also participated in discussions about the devolution agenda and potential future scenarios for driving climate action across the region.
- The University played a lead role in delivering the Reading Climate Festival in June 2026, which featured two weeks of events and opportunities to involve thousands of local residents with the challenges of climate change and Reading's new climate strategy. Key events led by the University included a public lecture and panel on the power of imagination to shape a positive climate future, the opening of our sustainability-focused Learning Garden with several days of school visits, events on how residents can green their homes and lifestyles to be climate-friendly and a screening of an inspiring new film showcasing green projects across the Reading community. Numerous other events were also supported, including a Re-Imagine Reading Community Lunch.
- The University was a co-sponsor of the National Emergency Briefing for policymakers in November, which has since been turned into a film showing the urgency of the climate crisis, which has been widely promoted through community screenings across the country. University academics have attended several local screenings to help contribute to community discussions about the film.
- We ran the Community Fair for students during Welcome Week, which enabled them to connect, engage and volunteer with local organisations that have a focus on environmental sustainability. Our annual Celebration of Volunteering event honours volunteers in the University community, from students and staff to alumni. This year's Reading Students' Union Activist of the Year was recognised for his dedication and contribution to conservation and sustainability.



- Our annual Community Festival in May welcomed thousands of visitors to campus to celebrate our Centenary and enjoy a range of activities showcasing our research and activities. This included sharing research projects with a sustainability focus, a large community bioblitz and public tours of the Learning Garden.
- Show Your Stripes Day (SYS) on 20 June is our annual global campaign to raise awareness of the urgency for climate change action, represented by the climate warming stripes developed by Professor Ed Hawkins MBE. SYS Day was championed by organisations including the Formula E racing team Envision, E1 Series powerboat racers Team Alula, the National Trust, and London Climate Action Week. The stripes were projected onto landmarks, including the tower at Glastonbury Tor.
- Thousands of people shared the stripes to show their concern about the changing climate, and they were featured in numerous broadcasts and news stories.
- The Climate Ambassadors programme, created by the University of Reading and funded by the government, links experts working on climate and sustainability with education professionals to provide them with free advice on making and taking action on a Climate Action Plan. In December 2025, the programme celebrated having recruited 1,100 Climate Ambassadors who had already engaged with more than 2,500 education settings in England. The Department for Education announced continued funding for the scheme.
- The University welcomed a number of local schools to participate in outdoor learning activities through our University of Reading Nature Park pilot project, aligned with the DfE's National Education Nature Park. Following the pilot, the scheme officially launched in June 2026, as well as the centrepiece Learning Garden on our Whiteknights Campus, which provides sustainability-themed outdoor learning opportunities for our students, local schools and local community groups.
- We celebrated National Meadows Day in July at Langley Mead, owned and managed by the University of Reading. Local community members were able to learn about the restoration of Langley Mead, participate in a guided walk, and learn more about the wide range of plants and wildlife found on the nature reserve, together with Ecological Planning & Research (EPR).

Our future commitments

- Engage people across the University community to empower and inspire understanding and action on climate change and environmental sustainability.
- Work closely with partners to engage residents and the wider community around our campuses in local climate initiatives and individual behaviour change.
- Facilitate opportunities for University expertise and learning to inform and shape local strategies for addressing the climate and nature crises.
- Continue our lead role in supporting schools nationally to improve climate education, climate action planning and enhancing biodiversity.
- Pilot activities with local community groups in our new Learning Garden, establishing how the dedicated space can support them in their work.



17. Ethical investment and banking

The University remains committed to ethical banking and investment. Since 2023, the University has banked with Lloyds, which has consistently been the greenest major UK bank. An annual update on Lloyds' performance in environmental sustainability is presented to the Scrutiny and Finance Committee.

Tracking our progress

- While no major changes have been made to policies, the University has continued to consider developments relating to environmental sustainability. Student representation on the Investments and Development Committee ensures that the student voice forms part of all these discussions.
- The University has approximately £100m of directly held investments managed by Cazenove Capital. Cazenove Capital actively manage the portfolio to be fossil-fuel-free, and we hold significant shares in wind power and other green alternative energy sources.
- Pressure exerted by Cazenove Capital and other large investors has forced big tech firms such as Alphabet (Google), Microsoft, Amazon, and Nvidia to respond to concerns in areas such as water and energy use, job quality, and security. Our Investments and Development Committee question Cazenove Capital quarterly on these topics.
- The University's investments have 84% lower carbon emissions than the benchmark (the industry standard MSCI All Countries World Index). Cazenove Capital has committed to be net zero by 2050 across all the investments it chooses. They also track the implied temperature rise from emissions associated with our investments: this is 1.8 degrees Celsius, compared to 2.8 degrees for the benchmark.

Our future commitments

- The University remains committed to reviewing its policies annually. The University is a founding signatory of the Cambridge Banking Engagement Forum, which works with the banking sector to create greener cash deposit products. In the coming years, the University aims to move its surplus cash into such products as they become more readily available.

18. Ethical careers and recruitment

We are committed to ensuring that our students and graduates are prepared for, and empowered to pursue, their chosen future careers. This must be balanced with our ethical and sustainability commitments and is an ongoing area of work for the University.

Tracking our progress

- Increasing awareness of and engagement with green careers by aligning the Built Environment Careers Fair with University of Reading Green Festival, collecting information from exhibiting employers on their environmental sustainability commitments and sharing this with students. We have also increased the number of green/sustainable-career-themed posts on our blogs and social media and created a mobile green jobs board to showcase a variety of live opportunities at careers fairs and outreach stands.
- Since February 2026, 1,060 students have participated in professional-level Responsible AI training, delivered by Earth 51, in partnership with the Careers team. Negotiated by Danielle Park, Business and Employability Manager, Green Careers, the initial pilot was scaled up in response to exceptional student demand, with the value of training donated exceeding £300,000. Over 638 students attended in person across three sessions (the remainder engaged online), and 632 CPD-accredited certificates were issued to students across a range of subject areas and levels of study. Evaluation data shows a strong impact, with over 85% reporting increased confidence in using AI responsibly and over 90% improved understanding of AI and sustainability. Students are already leveraging the certification in CVs, LinkedIn, and funding applications, demonstrating significant employability benefits.

Our future commitments

- Building on this year's success of collaborations with Earth51, Envision Racing (Formula E), and Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, we're working to increase the number and breadth of opportunities for our students to explore environmental sustainability in a range of workplace contexts. One of our careers consultants became the first UK-based green guidance ambassador, and we're planning to continue embedding this approach in our service delivery.

19. Appendices

Appendix 1: Completed and planned energy, carbon and water projects 2025/26

Appendix 2: Emissions + energy + water breakdown vs baseline and last year

Appendix 3: Additional emissions 2035 + 2040 scope

Appendix 4: Avoided emissions through renewable generation

Appendix 5: Annual Travel Report 2025/2026

Environmental Sustainability Report

2025/26

For more information, please contact:

Sustainability Services
sustainability@reading.ac.uk

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uor_sustainability

reading.ac.uk/sustainability

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