
Sustainability Strategic Framework: 2017 – 2021

Bringing Otago's sustainability commitment to life

Introduction

Research-led universities like the University of Otago are uniquely qualified to take a leadership role and advance sustainability. Given our motto – Sapere Aude, Dare to be Wise – we do not take this responsibility, or the opportunities it presents, lightly.

The University's strategic plan communicates a desire to strengthen our efforts towards sustainability, becoming genuinely world class in how we respond as a tertiary institution. While sustainability has come a long way at the University in recent years, we recognise the need to coordinate and scale up our efforts.

We will be bold, integrating sustainability principles and practices across all our campuses and throughout all our activities: administration and governance, operations, research, teaching & learning, community engagement and outreach activities.

The University of Otago [Strategic Direction to 2020](#) sets out the vision, mission, core values and strategic imperatives that guide activities at the University. This Sustainability Strategic Framework: 2017–2021 (SSF) does not seek to replicate or usurp these. Instead, it clarifies our commitment to enable a consistent, productive focus on sustainability, and to better communicate our efforts at all levels of the organisation.

The framework articulates twenty-two strategies and a wide range of activities, within six interdependent themes (Figure 1). It reflects our commitment to see sustainability embedded as part of the core ethos at the University of Otago, and builds on groundwork and activities underway across the organisation.

Achieving institution-wide cultural change towards sustainability is dependent on leadership across all levels of the University. We must work together, celebrate progress where staff and students are already leading the way, and challenge others to consider how sustainability connects to their work, can enhance their practices, and how they can contribute personally to our sustainability transition.

The SSF is an evolving document, accompanied by an annual plan to ensure we not only achieve quick wins, but are taking critical steps necessary to respond to our most significant sustainability challenges, not least of which is how effectively we respond to climate change. The Office of Sustainability will provide an annual update on the University's progress towards sustainability.

Effective implementation of the SSF will enable substantive progress at the University of Otago within a relatively short timeframe. Please join us as we work together to advance sustainability. There is no time to waste.



Sustainability Strategic Framework

Apply a whole systems approach

- Catalyse & support transformational change
- Embed sustainability into the institutional core
- Build credibility through transparency & accountability

Lead by example through our operations

- Actively pursue a low carbon future
- Promote sustainability in the built environment
- Encourage sustainable procurement
- Become a zero waste institution
- Encourage sustainable transport
- Minimise water consumption
- Support sustainable food systems

Nurture a culture of sustainability

- Raise awareness of our sustainability transition
- Encourage institutional learning & inquiry
- Create opportunities for staff & students to engage

Enhance sustainability research

- Support excellence in sustainability-related research
- Encourage sustainable research practices
- Support the University as a living laboratory

Support education for sustainability

- Encourage the development of subjects & courses
- Integrate sustainability into teaching & learning practices
- Increase sustainability literacy among students

Collaborate and be a catalyst for change

- Encourage inter-institutional collaboration
- Strengthen community-university partnerships
- Advocate for sustainability & celebrate achievements

1. Apply a Whole Systems Approach

The University of Otago will demonstrate leadership by integrating sustainability throughout all activities, including administration and governance, operations, research, teaching and learning, community engagement and outreach activities. Recognising the University as a complex system, and the interconnected nature of systems, we are not content with tinkering around the edges, limiting our response to symptoms or behaviours associated with unsustainable practices. Instead, we will impact the systems, structures and processes that drive change and underpin University activities.

Taking a joined up approach will enable us to catalyse the systemic change necessary to transition towards sustainability. Integrating relevant principles into the institutional core is a key part of ensuring that sustainability comes embedded into everyday practices for long-term benefit. We will build and maintain credibility for our sustainability transition by being clear about what the University is trying to achieve and being transparent about progress towards specific goals.

Strategy 1:

Catalyse and support transformational change towards sustainability

Activities

- a) Demonstrate visible and proactive commitment from the Vice-Chancellor, executive group and senior leadership
- b) Incorporate Māori and Pasifika knowledge and perspectives into the University's approaches to its sustainability transition
- c) Establish clear objectives to drive continual improvement in the University's sustainability performance
- d) Ensure key messages are incorporated in the University's planning and action
- e) Meet, and wherever possible, exceed legislative requirements, standards and agreements
- f) Collaborate with divisions across the University (academic and service, across all campuses) to ensure the effective implementation of the Sustainability Strategic Framework
- g) Identify synergies with, and opportunities, to enhance existing programmes
- h) Provide sufficient organisational and financial support for the University's sustainability programme

Strategy 2:

Embed sustainability into the institutional core

Activities

- a) Embed sustainability within University policies, strategies, procedures and practices as they come up for review
- b) Revise the University's operational planning to incorporate major initiatives resulting from the Sustainability Strategic Framework implementation
- c) Promote and incorporate sustainability into recruitment, induction and professional development activities
- d) Expand the University's approach to risk management to incorporate relevant aspects of sustainability risks and opportunities
- e) Advocate for the creation of a socially responsible investment option within UniSaver New Zealand (the employer-sponsored registered superannuation scheme)

Strategy 3:

Build credibility through transparency and accountability

Activities

- a) Establish baseline data for key areas of action
- b) Establish and deliver against SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) targets, using key performance indicators to monitor, evaluate and report progress
- c) Develop and improve monitoring and reporting procedures, employing independent verification and quality assurance as appropriate (e.g. voluntary greenhouse gas reporting)
- d) Monitor and evaluate implementation of the Sustainability Strategic Framework annually
- e) Report annually to the University Council on progress of the sustainability programme to ensure that approved annual priority actions are achieved and the Sustainability Strategic Framework reflects best practice
- f) Report annually to staff, students and the wider University community on the University's sustainability performance, including progress towards achieving SMART targets and implementation of the Sustainability Strategic Framework

2. Lead by Example through our Operations

Acknowledging the finite limits of our planet, the University is working to reorient all operational activities carried out by or on behalf of the University to maximise their contribution to resilient, just and thriving social and ecological systems. This is a responsibility shared across all members of the University community, and we will work together to improve our sustainability performance.

With a focus on continual improvement and achieving best practice, we strive to lift the standard and lead the way, so that the University of Otago is increasingly used as an example of what to do. Our sustainability transition will be evidence based – advanced through research, analysis and experience over time – and will ensure we make substantive gains tackling our most challenging operational sustainability issues. We will continue to learn lessons, innovate and refine our practices to make the University of Otago more sustainable and set an example for other organisations locally, regionally and internationally.

Strategy 1:

Actively pursue a low carbon future

Activities

- a) Minimise greenhouse gas emissions associated with the operation of University campuses and related infrastructure to support a progression to zero carbon campuses
- b) Establish a target timeframe to achieve a progression to zero carbon campuses
- c) Increase the use of renewable energy, and proactively reduce the use of non-renewable energy sources like coal to heat our campuses
- d) Reduce energy consumption through implementing energy efficiency and conservation measures
- e) Reduce transport-related greenhouse gas emissions

Strategy 2:

Promote sustainability in the built environment

Activities

- a) Develop, renovate and maintain University buildings to reflect best practice, cost-effective environmentally sustainable design
- b) Maximise the effective use of existing and new space and facilities
- c) Establish policies and procedures that promote sustainability in the development and operational activities of the built environment
- d) Develop strategies to ensure adequate budgets for investing in new, and maintaining existing, assets based on life cycle cost analysis
- e) Operate and maintain University buildings in accordance with sustainable operations and maintenance guidelines
- f) Model sustainable building and activities in a way that is visible to the university community and campus visitors, and use this as a means to share knowledge about best practice
- g) Minimise negative environmental consequences of information communication technologies used by the University (infrastructure and management)
- h) Maintain University grounds in an environmentally sensitive way, having regard to the enhancement of local ecosystems and the use of low-impact and low-carbon tools and techniques
- i) Enhance conservation and biodiversity outcomes through the management of our campuses and engagement with the wider community
- j) Manage and minimise the output of solid wastes, discharges of liquid wastes and airborne contaminants

Strategy 3:

Encourage sustainability in the procurement of goods, services and the supply chain

Activities

- a) Establish policies, procedures and guidelines that promote sustainable procurement
- b) Embed the principles of sustainability within procurement activities to ensure the selection of products and services that provide value for money on a whole life cycle basis and achieve wider economic, social and environmental benefits
- c) Give balanced consideration to social, ethical, environmental and economic impacts throughout the procurement process
- d) Adopt an institution-wide preference to purchase environmentally preferable products where appropriate
- e) Ensure that employees, contractors and suppliers act in accordance with the University's commitment to sustainability

Strategy 4:

Become a zero waste institution

Activities

- a) Minimise waste generated from University activities and going to landfill by adhering to the 'waste hierarchy': reduce, reuse, recycle, recover, treat and dispose
- b) Provide waste minimisation facilities and guidance on campus and in departments
- c) Maximise the use of recycled content materials and the use of materials and equipment that is energy efficient, have minimal maintenance requirements, and a long expected useful life
- d) Minimise the harmful effects of waste

Strategy 5:

Encourage sustainable transport

Activities

- a) Promote and encourage sustainable forms of travel, transport and communication by staff and students
- b) Establish policies and/or programmes that explicitly seek and achieve a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from business-related air travel
- c) Transition University-owned vehicles to a low-carbon vehicle fleet and provide charging infrastructure for electric vehicles
- d) Encourage a reduction in the number of single occupancy vehicle trips taken by staff and students to and from campus
- e) Ensure that high-quality video conferencing is readily available across each campus

Strategy 6:

Minimise water consumption

Activities

- a) Minimise water consumption through conservation and efficiency measures, water reuse and recycling

Strategy 7:

Support sustainable food systems

Activities

- a) Enhance efforts to interest the University community in sustainably produced foods
- b) Increase the availability of locally sourced and sustainably produced foods
- c) Develop and support an organic waste composting programme

3. Nurture a Culture of Sustainability

Our progress in driving towards sustainability at an institutional level depends on the active involvement of individual members of our university community. We will nurture a culture of sustainability amongst staff and students at the University, and facilitate the integration of sustainability principles and practices as the new norm.

Through a coordinated set of programmes, the University will maximise opportunities for staff and students to engage with the sustainability programme. Staff and students will increasingly be asked to 'be the change' and engage in collaborative action for sustainability. Fostering such levels of formal and informal engagement will mean that our staff and students are not only aware of the University's sustainability transition, they are clear about their own role in making it a reality. This is vital as every person has a critical part to play in helping ensure the University operates in a way that is environmentally sound, socially responsible and economically viable.

Strategy 1:

Raise awareness of the University's sustainability transition

Activities

- a) Implement a coordinated communication strategy
- b) Revise the University's sustainability website to provide a comprehensive resource for staff and students
- c) Produce a range of resources that provide up-to-date information about sustainability issues
- d) Use social media as a communication platform
- e) Ensure sustainability issues feature in University-wide and divisional forums, communication and marketing
- f) Include sustainability in student orientation activities
- g) Profile the University's commitment to sustainability in staff appointments and advertisements
- h) Feature sustainability in the induction process for new staff

Strategy 2:

Encourage institutional learning and inquiry throughout the University community

Activities

- a) Support networks of engaged students and staff focused on sustainability
- b) Identify sustainability advocates in each division, department and/or building to lead sustainability initiatives in their area
- c) Provide sustainability advocates with training, support, facilitation and resources to identify and implement initiatives
- d) Develop tools and resources that provide staff and students with guidance on how to take sustainability principles into account in their daily practices
- e) Develop and support staff (academic and general) training and professional development opportunities in sustainability
- f) Administer and support staff engagement in an ongoing peer-to-peer learning programme
- g) Encourage sharing of knowledge and experience amongst the University community
- h) Develop an internal awards scheme to reward and share good practice

Strategy 3:

Create opportunities for staff and students to engage in sustainability-related initiatives and activities

Activities

- a) Involve staff and students in achieving collective challenges, working closely with OUSA and other student bodies (e.g. a University-wide drive to meet specific sustainability targets)
- b) Develop and support programmes that engage students to serve as educators in sustainability outreach activities
- c) Hold sustainability focused events, including lectures, themed film screenings, conferences, competitions

4. Enhance Sustainability Research

Research-led universities like Otago are uniquely placed to address complex challenges associated with sustainability. Meeting global and local challenges will require us to harness the strength, breadth and depth of our research expertise and engage effectively to ensure it is applied. This depends on the ability of staff to maintain and strengthen the excellence of research within individual disciplines, as well as collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines. The University will further take steps to support researchers to embed sustainability principles and practices in how they conduct their research.

We will increase the use of our university as a living laboratory of sustainable practice, research and teaching. In this way, operational activities will become more closely connected with research, teaching and learning activities in a mutually beneficial system.

Strategy 1:

Support excellence in sustainability-related research

Activities

- a) Conduct regular University-wide stocktakes of research related to sustainability
- b) Build the scale, quality and impact of the University's research on sustainability issues
- c) Encourage researchers from multiple disciplines to enhance global and regional sustainability, including on issues that are important to Māori and Pacific communities
- d) Cultivate internal and external collaborations to advance interdisciplinary research on sustainability
- e) Build research capacity and networking opportunities in sustainability-related research, particularly for early career researchers

Strategy 2:

Encourage sustainable research practices

Activities

- a) Analyse current processes and practices to understand the level to which researchers incorporate sustainable research practices into their projects
- b) Remove barriers to encourage the application of sustainable research practices
- c) Incorporate sustainability considerations into formal processes governing how research is designed and undertaken at the University
- d) Provide guidance and share practical resources about sustainable research practices
- e) Encourage sharing effective sustainable research practices across the University
- f) Build the capacity of staff to integrate sustainability into their research practices through specific professional development programmes
- g) Recognise and reward examples of research practices that support the sustainability programme at the University

Strategy 3:

Support the use of the University as a living laboratory

Activities

- a) Increase the use of University sustainability issues, initiatives and facilities as a resource for academic inquiry (research, teaching and learning)
- b) Provide guidance on integrating operations, research, teaching and learning activities
- c) Increase campus-based sustainability educational programmes
- d) Develop a competitive sustainability summer studentship

5. Support Education for Sustainability

The University of Otago will continue to strengthen sustainability within formal teaching and learning programmes and practices, while inviting students to connect with sustainability as part of their broader experience at Otago. We will ensure all students have the opportunity to develop a sense of citizenship and engage with sustainability issues regardless of their formal programme of study. This increases the likelihood that our graduates emerge equipped with the skills, knowledge and experiences that will enable them to make a positive contribution to sustainability throughout their lives.

Strategy 1:

Encourage and support the development of sustainability-related subjects and courses

Activities

- a) Conduct regular University-wide stocktakes of sustainability-focused and sustainability-related curriculum activity at the University
- b) Offer a range of undergraduate sustainability-related courses and programmes
- c) Offer a range of postgraduate sustainability-related courses and programmes
- d) Increase the variety, availability of, and enrolment in, sustainability-related courses and programmes
- e) Provide support to Heads of Department on how sustainability can be linked to learning outcomes and the broader student experience
- f) Encourage curriculum innovation by facilitating collaboration and interdisciplinarity

Strategy 2:

Develop ways to integrate sustainability into teaching and learning practices

Activities

- a) Incorporate sustainability in the administrative processes of formal course development including validation, review and quality advancement
- b) Develop and share practical resources about sustainable teaching practices
- c) Encourage sharing of effective sustainable teaching practices across the University
- d) Build the capacity of staff to integrate sustainability into their teaching practices through specific professional development programme
- e) Recognise and reward examples of teaching practice and pedagogy that support the University's sustainability programme

Strategy 3:

Increase sustainability literacy among students

Activities

- a) Create opportunities for students to engage with sustainability regardless of their course or specialty, for example through involvement in campus activities, working groups and other volunteer projects
- b) Produce resources that enhance learning about sustainability outside the formal curriculum
- c) Evaluate changes in sustainability literacy of students over time

6. Collaborate and Be a Catalyst for Change

An effective transition towards sustainability at the University of Otago will only be possible through collaboration and wider engagement. By encouraging participation and strengthening relationships beyond our internal community of staff and students, we can advocate for sustainability and serve as a catalyst for change in our cities, regions and beyond. This will, in part, enable sustainable development beyond our organisational boundaries and demonstrate social responsibility in action.

The University of Otago will communicate about our sustainability transition, progress and achievements to internal and external audiences. This will improve transparency and enable greater recognition for our efforts. Such open communication will increase the visibility of the University's sustainability transition to prospective students and staff, and encourage partnership with the wider university community with an interest in sustainability.

Strategy 1:

Encourage inter-institutional collaboration

Activities

- a) Actively collaborate, share information, experiences and expertise to help build sustainability amongst tertiary institutions
- b) Create complementary pathways for sustainability and internationalisation at the University
- c) Explore opportunities for student and staff sustainability-focused exchanges and collaboration with similarly disposed institutions overseas
- d) Regularly review best practice models from other tertiary education organisations to inform and strengthen the University's sustainability programme

Strategy 2:

Strengthen community-university partnerships

Activities

- a) Develop and actively maintain partnerships locally and regionally to advance sustainability (including OUSA, City Councils, Regional Councils, Otago Polytechnic, District Health Boards, Ngāi Tahu)
- b) Create and participate in community-University groups to identify possible areas for joint activity
- c) Work with Development & Alumni Relations Office to develop and support networks with an interest in sustainability
- d) Demonstrate linkages between employability and sustainability skills, via Career Development Services
- e) Investigate the development of a 'sustainability leaders' mentoring and/or internship programme that connects students with professionals in the community
- f) Expand volunteer programmes for staff and students
- g) Offer continuing education courses and programmes to the wider university community that are focused on or related to sustainability

Strategy 3:

Advocate for sustainability and celebrate achievements

Activities

- a) Maintain positive and proactive communications about University sustainability activities and performance
- b) Report publicly on the sustainability performance of the University on an annual basis
- c) Develop and promote sustainability-related publications and events for audiences on and off campus
- d) Profile sustainability-related activities by staff and students in local and national media
- e) Engage with relevant Government bodies on sustainability-related initiatives and strategies
- f) Advocate for national and local public policies that support sustainability in universities or otherwise advance sustainability

