Northeastern University London

Sustainability Strategy

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Terms of reference

The terms of reference are as follows:

1. Sustainability:

    o '[M]eeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (UN Brundtland Commission, 1987).[1]

2. Sustainable development:

    o '[A]n aspirational ongoing process of addressing social, environmental, and economic concerns to create a better world' (QAA).[2]

3. Sustainable curriculum:

    o '[T]he process of creating curriculum structures and subject-relevant content to support sustainable development' (Education for Sustainable Development, adopted by QAA and Advance HE).[3]

Context and student-facing communication

It is important to contextualise these terms of reference for faculty, professional staff, learners, and non-experts.

4. The definitions of sustainable development and sustainable curriculum were drawn from industry bodies: the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and AdvanceHE. Both bodies define sustainability in terms laid down by the UN Brundtland Commission from 1987.

5. The definitions are specific enough for Northeastern University London to realise its medium-term goals whilst allowing for greater ambition as it grows. For example, whilst issues pertaining to climate justice and injustice are implied by the definition of sustainability, we may wish to keep our terms of reference under review as we increase our institutional capacity and build relationships with local communities and stakeholders. We believe that these terms of reference are suitably ambitious and realistic for the medium term.

6. The Head of Sustainable Curriculum will develop a Sustainability Hub and oversee its URL, in which these definitions will be explained in simple, accessible English for the benefit of faculty, staff, learners, non-experts, and

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[1] Sustainability | United Nations (site last accessed 26/02/2024).
[2] Education for Sustainable Development Guidance - Executive Summary (site last accessed 26/02/2024).
[3] Education for Sustainable Development and Academic Quality: Principles and Processes for Higher Education Providers (site last accessed 26/02/2024).

the general public. Public facing communication flowing from this strategy will also take place via the Northeastern University London's sustainability URL.

Values and Objectives

Global Outlook

As part of Northeastern University's global network, we hold and value a global worldview across all of our activities. The definitions submitted for approval align with Northeastern University's commitment to sustainability.

Integrity

Our values should match our endeavours. This means committing, where appropriate and feasible, to integrate sustainability into our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

Courage

Approaching sustainability as an opportunity rather than a straightjacket, and to take decisions to ensure that we become industry leaders in this area.

Many of the values and objectives relating to sustainability also pertain to other priorities within Northeastern University London. These include:

7. A global outlook

   o As part of Northeastern University's global network, Northeastern University London holds and values a global worldview across all of our activities.

8. Integrity

   o Our values should match our endeavours. This means committing, where appropriate and feasible, to integrate sustainability into our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, teaching curricula, and research strategy.

9. Courage

   o Approaching sustainability as an opportunity to future proof the University rather than a straightjacket, and to take decisions to ensure that we become industry leaders in this area.

Furthermore, these definitions will facilitate aspects of Northeastern's 2025 academic plan, as we seek to empower the Northeastern University London community of learners, faculty, and professional staff to make meaningful interventions in rapidly evolving global and local contexts. The issue of sustainability is central to that endeavour. It will encourage learners to be **'agile across disciplinary boundaries'**, because sustainability is both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary; **'entrepreneurial and innovative'**, because learners will engage with academic, applied, and entrepreneurial solutions; and **'networked globally and locally'**, because learners will approach sustainability from both a global and local perspective.

Framework and Approach

Northeastern University London's sustainability approach is guided by the Climate Action Toolkit for the Higher Education Sector. In 2019, UK Parliament set in law a commitment to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, in response to the climate emergency. Net zero is defined as the lesser or equal to balance between the emissions we create and those we can remove from the environment.[4]

The latest progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) finds these at a critical juncture, with half a decade remaining from the reference period for the completion of the Global Goals programme to 2030. Incremental and fragmented change is insufficient to achieve the SDGs in the remaining years. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires, amongst other things, the active mobilization of science-based transformations. This must be achieved globally - leaving no country, society or person behind.[5]

Given the urgency of climate action, the Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education has set stronger targets, asking universities and colleges to reach net-zero emissions for scope 1 and 2 emissions by 2030, with significant work to understand and reduce scope 3 emissions in the same time frame. By 2050, scope 3 emissions should be net-zero.

Northeastern University London's Carbon Reduction Plan sets out targets which will enable the University to meet these obligations. Northeastern University London acknowledges that it is a dynamic institution which is undergoing a period of rapid growth and expansion. This means that its Sustainability Strategy, policies, and

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[4] Net Zero and the Different Official Measures of the UK's Greenhouse Gas Emissions - Office for National Statistics (site last accessed 12/02/2024).
[5] Times of Crisis, Times of Change – UN's Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 (site last accessed 12/02/2024).

associated plans will remain under regular review and will be updated to reflect necessary changes as they emerge following the review periods.

Global Context

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body responsible for analysing the scientific evidence for climate change. Their assessment is that human-induced activities have increased greenhouse gases (GHG are those gases which contribute to atmospheric warming) and this has, in turn, led to a global warming of more than 1ºC since 1850.[6]

The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty (adopted at COP21 in Paris in 2015) which commits signatories to limiting global warming to below 2ºC compared to pre-industrialisation levels. To achieve this, global greenhouse gas emissions ought to be significantly reduced by 2030.[7]

National, Local, and Policy Context

The UK's Climate Change Committee states that the UK has experienced a temperature rise since pre-industrial times of 1.2ºC.[8]

The City of London Climate Action Strategy (2020-27) is based on three pillars:[9]

1. Achieve net zero
2. Build climate resilience
3. Champion sustainable growth

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets is the home of Northeastern University London. Its carbon strategy commits the Council to net zero by 2025 and the Borough - by 2045 or sooner.[10]

Northeastern University London's Sustainability Strategy applies the framework of the Climate Action Toolkit for the UK Higher Education Sector. It supports faculty, staff, and learners to consider and apply sustainable ideas to drive and achieve awareness on climate action and social justice within their immediate surroundings in the first instance. The five areas of the toolkit and, thus, the University's strategy are:

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[6] IPCC, Global Warming of 1.5 ºC 2020 (site last accessed 12/02/2024).
[7] The Paris Agreement | United Nations (site last accessed 12/02/2024).
[8] Independent Assessment: The UK's Net Zero Strategy - Climate Change Committee (site last accessed 12/02/2024).
[9] Climate Action Strategy 2020-2027 | City of London (site last accessed 12/02/2024).
[10] Tower Hamlets Net Zero Carbon Plan (site last accessed 12/02/2024).

1. **Leadership and Governance:** Our ambition is to achieve a net zero carbon future by 2050.

2. **Teaching:** Our goal is to embed sustainable practices and case studies from across the Northeastern University's global network, bringing our teaching curricula to the forefront of climate action. We will equip faculty and staff with the skill to embed the SDGs into relevant programmes, courses, and/or modules, and we will engage students as both learners and institutional stakeholders as we continue to develop our growing sustainability provision.

3. **Research and Knowledge Exchange:** Our goal is to mitigate climate change impacts for community engagement and benefit. We will collaborate and share our climate change, sustainability, and social justice research expertise with stakeholders to empower our pursuit of a sustainable future.

4. **Community Engagement:** Our vision is to promote positive climate action. We will seek to develop and champion partnerships, which are locally sourced and community focused.

5. **Campus Management:** We strive to mitigate our climate impact and enhance our sustainability within our reach and ability.

Figure 1. The Climate Action Toolkit for UK Higher Education

Table 1. Northeastern University London's Sustainability Framework

Sustainability Strategic Framework
A comprehensive approach to embedding sustainability across university operations

Leadership and Governance

CONTEXT	OBJECTIVE	TARGET
Strategic Plan	1. To ensure that accountability for sustainability is embedded into the governance structures of the University	By 2024, to develop a joint-up approach to sustainability discussions and decision-making via the wide-ranging membership of Sustainability Committee
Sustainability leadership and climate action plans	2. To take a robust, evidenced-based approach to the measuring and monitoring of sustainability	To undertake a regular review of the Carbon Reduction Plan
Ethical Sourcing Policy	3. To invest the finances of the university ethically and in areas that promote sustainability	3.1. By 2025, to have a dedicated financial line in the annual budget for sustainability-related initiatives. 3.2. To audit and report on spending for sustainability-related initiatives.
	4. To communicate the success of our actions openly and transparently	To maintain a current and up to date web page which accurately and timely informs about the University's strategies, plans, projects, events, and programmes on sustainability: Sustainability Page

Teaching

CONTEXT	OBJECTIVE	TARGET
Teaching and Learning Strategy 2019-2024	5. To embed sustainable development and awareness of environmental issues in the teaching curricula	To encourage learners to: 5.1. Consider what the concept of global citizenship means in the context of their own discipline and in their future professional and personal lives. 5.2. Consider what the concept of environmental stewardship means in the context of their own discipline and in their future professional and personal lives. 5.3. Think about issues of social justice, ethics and wellbeing, and how these relate to ecological and economic factors. 5.4. Develop a future-facing outlook. 5.5. Learn to think about the consequences of actions, and how systems and societies can be adapted to ensure sustainable futures.

Research and Knowledge Exchange

CONTEXT	OBJECTIVE	TARGET
Research Strategy 2019-2024	6.1 To maintain and improve upon its research excellence in each of the academic disciplines represented in the University, now and in the future. 6.2 To embed students in the University's research activities and environment in productive and stimulating ways.	6.1 To recruit, retain, and support excellent faculty and students who can undertake such outstanding research, and who are keen to do so. 6.2 To ensure that research outputs have an impact on various stakeholders across diverse aspects of society, and that the knowledge which is prerequisite to or developed through our investigations both informs our teaching and is communicated to the broader public.

Sustainability Strategic Framework (continued)

Community Engagement

CONTEXT	OBJECTIVE	TARGET
Community, Belonging and Partnerships	7. To empower individuals and groups to promote sustainability both within and outside the institution	7. To strengthen and continuously review/innovate the University's provision for learners: UNDERGRADUATE A sustainability elective pathway (eligible courses): L4 Ideas for Impact Experiential Project - Sustainability theme L5 Sustainable Cities & Communities Creating Impact Experiential Project (interdisciplinary) - Sustainability theme L6 Sustainable Development (Politics & IR) Green Political Thought (Politics & IR) Literature, Land, and the Environment (English) Sustainability in the Business Environment (Business) POSTGRADUATE To develop integrated content if not a stand-alone programme Leadership Programme (badge): To launch in 25-26, with an approach to continuous review to cater to diverse learner needs
	8. To integrate the consideration of sustainability into induction processes and professional development for faculty, staff, and learners.	8. To provide an annual induction and where possible in-year refresher induction, which raises awareness of sustainability and the University's initiatives for faculty, staff, and learners.
Experiential Learning Opportunities	9. To provide opportunities for learners to take part in sustainability-related co-ops, impact challenges, hackathons, trecks, and other wider-world activities	9. To include and track sustainability goals in our experiential partnership development processes, so as to continually enhance and improve the proportion of our co-op and related opportunities that promote sustainability goals.

Campus Management

CONTEXT	OBJECTIVE	TARGET	
Ethical Sourcing Policy	10. To work with suppliers who have sound ethical, environmental, and sustainability policies.	10.1 To seek to purchase products or services that require minimum transportation, ongoing maintenance and consumables.	10.2 Manufacturers, suppliers and subcontractors to apply the waste hierarchy (reduce, reuse, recycle, recover, dispose) to packaging.
	11. To ensure that campus developments are evidence of our commitment to sustainability	To ensure that campus furniture (i.e. objects intended to support various human activities) are ethically and sustainably sourced.	
	12. To commit to being carbon neutral by 2050	12. To reduce GHG emissions: 12.1 Scope 1 base year (2023) is 75% of total GHG. To work with landlords to decarbonise the heating system and achieve 30% reduction of total GHG by 2050.	12.2 Scope 2 base year (2023) is 25% of total GHG. To fully decarbonise as the electricity grid is generally becoming fully green by 2050.

Leadership and Governance: We have a dedicated senior management lead, the Chief Executive Officer, on the Executive Committee, reporting to the Board of Governors, who acts as Sustainability Champion by chairing the University's Sustainability Committee. This is further strengthened via the dedicated role of the Associate Dean of Global Impact and Sustainability in liaison with the Sustainability Committee (deputy chair) and Academic Board (member), as well as the wider global network's Climate Justice and Sustainability Hub (member of SEAC).

Teaching: The University's sustainability in the teaching curricula across programmes is led by the Head of the Sustainable Curriculum (including the Sustainability Pathway). As a member of the Sustainability Committee and working under the Associate Dean of Global Impact and Sustainability, the Head of the Sustainable Curriculum can attend and table papers at the University's Teaching, Learning, and Enhancement Committee, which in turn informs the Academic Board.

Sustainability reporting is a standing item at Collegium, which meets at least once in the semester and comprises the entire academic membership.
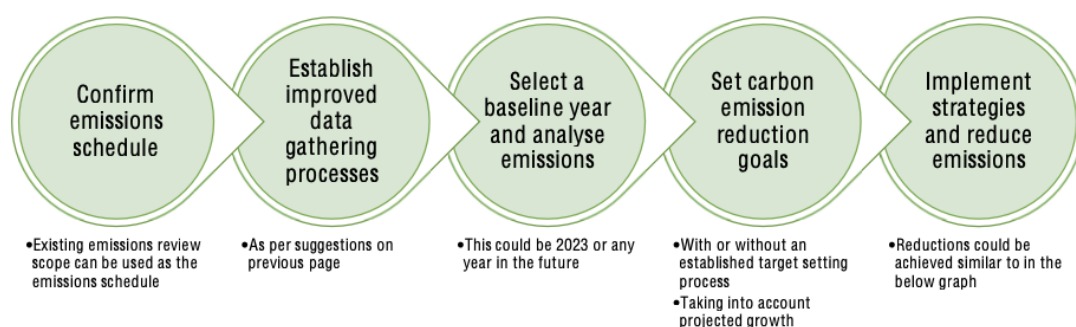
Research and Knowledge Exchange: Under the auspices of the Associate Dean of Research and Knowledge Exchange, Northeastern University London carries out research and innovation activities in a variety of research areas. Some of these are explicit homes to sustainability related research.

Community Engagement: Our Community, Belonging and Partnerships programme drives strategic objectives, which support the University's Sustainability Strategy.

Campus Management: Under the auspices of the Director of Resourcing and Operations (member of Sustainability Committee) and reporting directly to the Chief Executive Officer, the University implements its Carbon Reduction Plan across the entire campus.
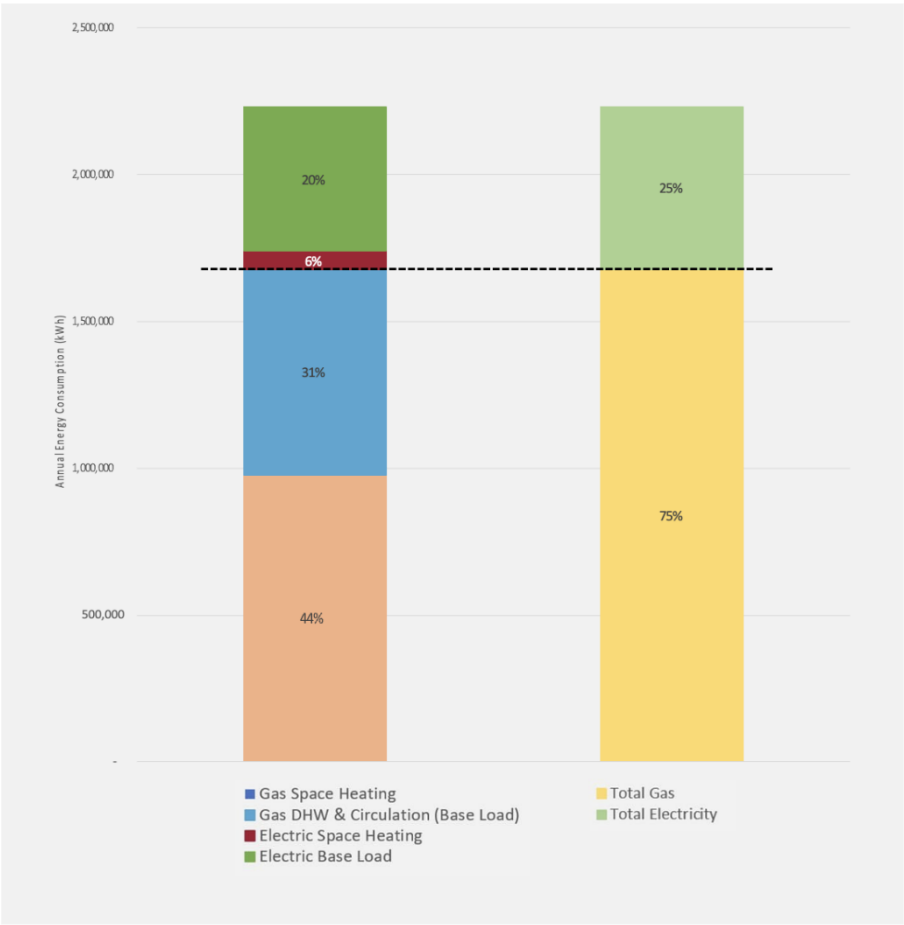
The Northeastern University London's sustainability reporting approach is developed from the Standardised Carbon Emissions Reporting Framework (SCEF) for the U.K. HE.

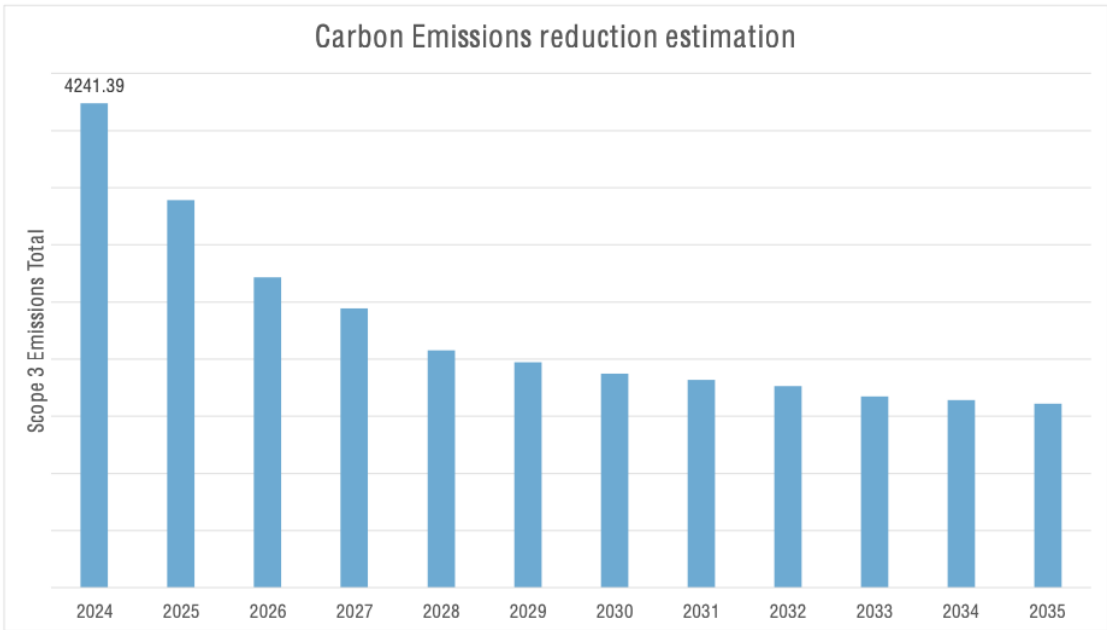**Figure 2.** Northeastern University London's Carbon Emission Reporting Approach

Source: MaxFordham for NU London, 2024

Figure 3. Northeastern University London's baseline energy consumption, 2022-23

Source: MaxFordham for NU London, 2024

Figure 4. Carbon emissions reduction estimation, 2024-2035

Source: MaxFordham for NU London, 2024
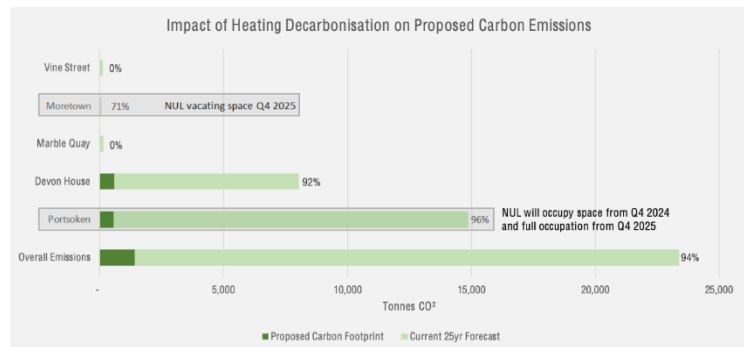
Figure 5. Carbon Emissions Action Plan

NUL plans to vacate Moretown offices in last quarter of 2024. A new lease is planned to begin on a much larger building (just over double Devon House) – Portsoken House. Portsoken House will be partially occupied from last quarter of 2024 and fully occupied from last quarter of 2025.

The impact of decarbonisation on the 25-year carbon footprint for each building is shown on the right. Moretown shown until end of this year and Portsoken projections added using Devon House current consumption apportioned to new area.

Decarbonising the heating system and hot water serving Devon House would have a 30% reduction in the 25-year carbon footprint of the overall university when Portsoken House is included.

Graph to right demonstrates the importance of selecting a new building that is decarbonised or a Net Zero (NZ) Building. If Portsoken House has a similar consumption to Devon House it will become 65% of the University carbon consumption for the next 25 years.

Marble Quay and Vine Street will be Net Zero when the electrical grid decarbonises, and fossil fuels have already been removed.

Impact of Heating Decarbonisation on Proposed Carbon Emissions

Building	
Vine Street	0%
Moretown	71% — NUL vacating space Q4 2025
Marble Quay	0%
Devon House	92%
Portsoken	96% — NUL will occupy space from Q4 2024 and full occupation from Q4 2025
Overall Emissions	94%

Tonnes CO_2 — -, 5,000, 10,000, 15,000, 20,000, 25,000

■ Proposed Carbon Footprint   ■ Current 25yr Forecast

Source: MaxFordham for NU London, 2024

Version History

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1.0				