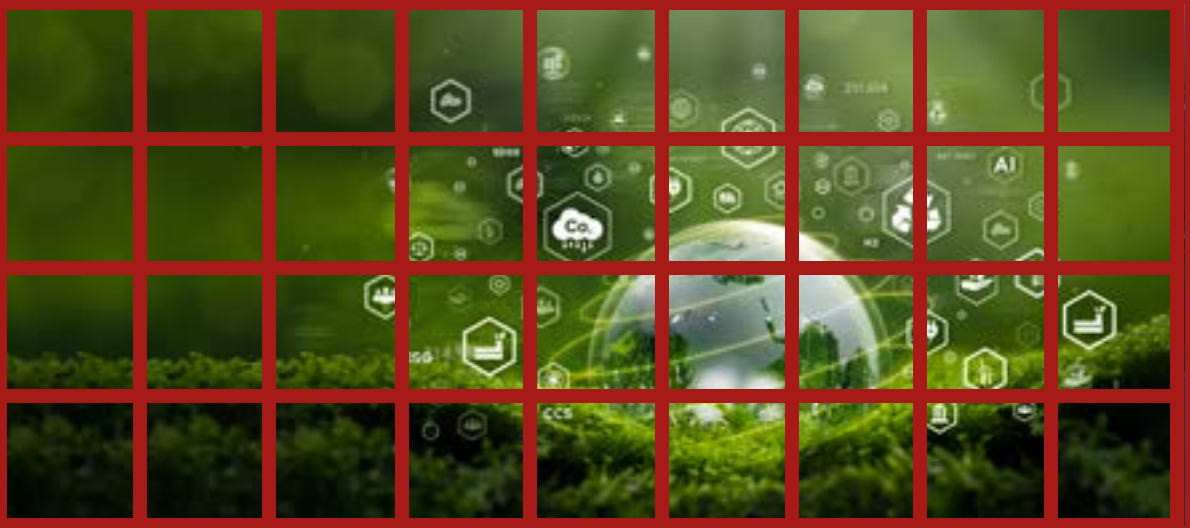
Abingdon & Witney College

Sustainability Strategy

2025-2030



Be You. Be Extraordinary.

Contents

1. Mission and Vision

1.1 Abingdon & Witney College Mission Statement and Vision

Be You. Be Extraordinary.

The Abingdon & Witney College Strategic Plan 2022 - 2027 sets out an ambitious mission:

By nurturing and empowering individual students and staff to be the best they can be, we improve lives, communities and the economy through education. Together we achieve the extraordinary.

Our vision is to be a college where everyone achieves more than they believe possible. We are ambitious for our students, staff, community and partner organisations. We are passionate about creating a sustainable College that support everyone to achieve their goals, whatever their starting point.

- Our students enjoy an extraordinary experience
- Our staff are empowered to achieve extraordinary things
- Our community and partners benefit from our commitment to the extraordinary

This strategy outlines the critical role that digital technologies will play in achieving our ambitions.
The college will act decisively and proactively in relation to the climate emergency. We will reduce our carbon footprint and waste output, to achieve net zero by 2050. We will actively pursue opportunities to collaborate with stakeholders, partners, and suppliers to share in our commitment. Through our work, we will ensure that all our students understand the principles of sustainability and leave us prepared and confident to play an active role in resolving the climate emergency.

2. Strategic Objectives and Outcomes

In response to the climate emergency and the urgent need for sustainable transformation, this strategy sets out our commitment to safeguarding the future for our students, staff, communities, and the planet. It outlines the actions we will take to reduce our environmental impact, embed sustainability into education, and build resilience across our campuses. At its heart is a simple but powerful message:

The future is A GIFT and to safeguard it, we must:

A **Achieve Net Zero by 2050**

G **Grow sustainability knowledge and action**

I **Impact positively for the planet**

F **Future-proof our infrastructure and utilities**

T **Travel sustainably**

2.1 Achieve Net Zero by 2050

Scopes 1 and 2 Carbon emissions are halved by 2035: We will have taken bold and measurable steps to reduce our carbon footprint to reach net zero by 2050.

Scope 3 emissions are mapped fully by 2030: We will have gained a greater understanding of and ability to measure our Scope 3 emissions and created effective plans to reduce our carbon emissions.

Better data is used for better decisions: Data about the college's environmental impact is collected, audited, and published, with a focus on continual improvement of data accuracy. This is centred on the following key areas of activity: energy use, water management, waste management, procurement, sustainable construction and refurbishment, food, and catering, and finally business travel and commuting.

2.2 Grow sustainability knowledge and action

Sustainability is embedded throughout the college: Environmental sustainability is part of all relevant study programmes to prepare students to live and work well in the future.

Staff and Students are equipped to deal with eco-anxiety: We will have helped people within our community to understand climate disasters, and the responses by those in power, in a way that brings action and control back to the individual.

Our Net Zero Skills Hub is a nationally recognised provider of education for emerging green careers: We will have built on our existing courses to offer more in areas such as renewable technologies and environmental sustainability, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and carbon accounting.

2.3 Impact positively for the planet

No waste to landfill: No waste is sent to landfill, and each department of the college has reviewed their waste and it's after life treatment.

Suppliers are mapped out across tiers: Frequently purchased items have been reviewed to understand quantity and sourcing patterns and a supplier plan created with circular economy principles to minimise environmental harm.

Biodiverse Campuses: The level of biodiversity on each campus is measured, and we will have identified and implemented opportunities to increase the levels of biodiversity by 20% across all campuses.

Local communities are engaged with us: Local communities in all our campus locations are involved with, and benefit from, biodiversity improvement projects, and able to access short courses relating to sustainability.

Increased global impact: We will have explored options to build our global reach through initiatives like "toilet twinning" and connecting with schools and colleges in developing nations to share best practice and knowledge.

2.4 Futureproof our utilities and infrastructure

All campuses use 90-100% renewable energy: We will have switched to fully renewable source tariffs across all campuses, with REGO certificates.

On site solar power accounts for 5% of all energy use each year: We will have invested in more onsite renewable energy across all campuses wherever possible, ideally in locations where energy use is higher to reduce the amount taken from the grid.

Future-ready water management: We will have reviewed our water usage to reduced demand, and smart reuse technologies to ensure long-term sustainability are implemented wherever possible.

Net-zero-ready buildings and systems: Both our physical and digital infrastructures are resilient to future climate challenges, with a focus on sustainable design, maintenance, and operation.

2.5 Travel sustainably

EV charging capacity is maximised: EV charging capacity is increased on all campuses, having taken a proportional approach to put more chargers when and where they are most needed.

Carbon emissions relating to business mileage are decreased by 25% by 2030: We will have implemented a sustainable travel policy, which encourages sustainable travel choices such as carpooling and use of public transport and encourage less travel between campuses for short meetings.

Students attend college using the most sustainable methods available to them: We will have kept track of changes to provisions, such as e-bikes and e-scooters availability across the local areas of Abingdon, Witney, and Bicester and worked with the local councils to ensure plans consider the needs of the college.

Digital first culture is widespread across the college: Following the objectives of our Digital Strategy, we will have made greater use of online meeting tools such as Microsoft Teams, reducing the need for face-to-face meetings, and incorporate hybrid functions into in-person meetings, and into lessons as well.

3. Current Sustainability Landscape

3.1 Key concepts shaping our strategy

3.1.1 The Triple Bottom Line

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) is a way of thinking about sustainability that looks at success through three lenses: people, planet, and prosperity. Instead of focusing only on financial results, the TBL guides us to also consider how our actions affect the environment and the wider community. By following this approach, we aim to make choices that are not only financially responsible but also socially fair and environmentally sustainable—creating benefits for everyone, now and in the future.

3.1.2 Ecosystem services

Ecosystem services are the many benefits we receive from nature, such as clean air and water, fertile soil, pollination, and climate regulation. These natural systems support our everyday lives and make it possible for us to live, work, and learn in a healthy environment. By recognizing the value of ecosystem services, we can make more informed choices about how we manage our campus and its surroundings – protecting and restoring the natural systems that, in turn, support our community's well-being and future sustainability.

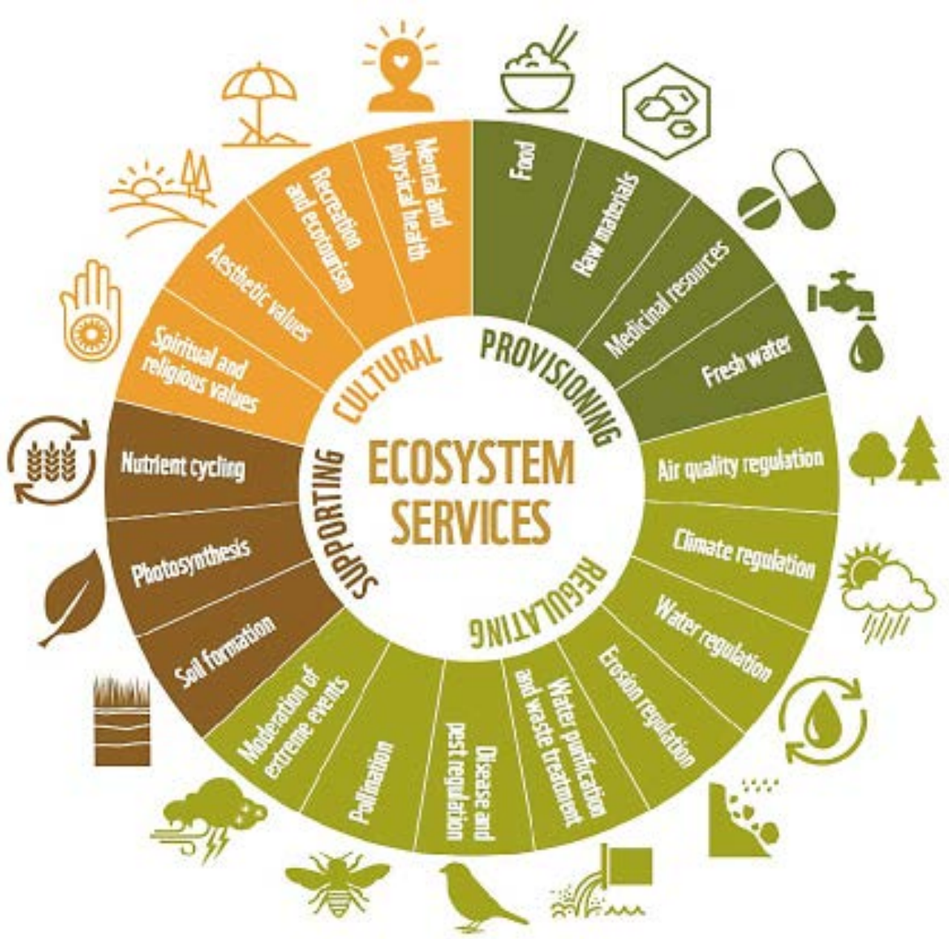


Figure 1 Stakeholder perspectives on the role of the street verge in delivering ecosystem services. A study from the Perth metropolitan region - Scientific Figure on ResearchGate. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Illustration-of-categories-of-ecosystem-services-Reproduced-from-WWF-2016-C-WWF-2016_fig2_360484101

3.1.3 ISO 14001

At Abingdon and Witney College, we have maintained our ISO 14001 accreditation, demonstrating our dedication to effective environmental management and continual improvement. ISO 14001 is an internationally recognized standard that provides a framework for organisations to identify, manage, and reduce their environmental impacts in a systematic way. It encourages sustainable practices, ensures compliance with environmental legislation, and promotes a culture of environmental responsibility across all areas of operation. By upholding this standard, we have worked to minimise our ecological footprint, enhance resource efficiency, and contribute positively to the broader goal of environmental sustainability.

3.1.4 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a shared global framework for creating a more sustainable, fair, and inclusive world by 2030. Among the seventeen goals, several are especially important to our work as a college—such as Quality Education (SDG 4), Gender Equality (SDG 5), and Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), however all are critical. These goals encourage us to ensure that everyone has access to learning opportunities, to champion equality and diversity across our community, and to create an environment where all people can thrive. By aligning our actions with the SDGs, we connect our local initiatives to a global movement for positive change and a more sustainable future for all.

3.1.5 EAUC Climate Action Roadmap for Colleges

We are using the EAUC Climate Action Roadmap for Colleges as a framework to guide our response to the climate emergency. This roadmap helps us plan and deliver meaningful action across all areas of our college—from leadership and curriculum to our buildings and partnerships. It supports us in setting clear goals, reducing our carbon impact, and embedding climate responsibility into our everyday decisions, ensuring that we play our part in building a more sustainable future.

3.1.6 Eco-anxiety

Eco-anxiety refers to feelings of worry, fear, or helplessness that people may experience in response to environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and the social and economic changes they bring. These emotions are a natural and understandable reaction to global issues that can feel overwhelming. At Abingdon and Witney College, we recognise that students and staff may experience these concerns in different ways. For some, this may include anxiety about the planet's future; for others, it may be the pressure of making sustainable choices while managing financial or personal challenges. Environmental and economic issues are closely linked. For example, rising energy and food costs can be driven by climate impacts, which in turn affect people's ability to live and learn comfortably.

Our aim is to create a supportive environment where everyone can take part in practical, affordable, and meaningful action. By working together on positive, solutions-focused initiatives, such as reducing waste, improving energy efficiency, and making sustainability more accessible, we can turn concern into empowerment, build resilience, and strengthen our community wellbeing.

3.2 Innovation

Over the next decade, we will actively monitor and respond to developments and innovations across the wider region that could influence sustainable mobility and working practices. This includes tracking initiatives such as local Active Travel plans, e-scooter trials, and emerging trends in remote or flexible working across the economy. By keeping abreast of these changes, we aim to identify opportunities to align our operations and infrastructure with evolving sustainable transport options, support healthier and low-carbon commuting choices, and adapt our practices to reflect broader shifts in how people travel and work.

3.3 Faculty and departmental impacts

One of the initiatives we have already begun involves an initial assessment of each department and faculty in terms of its overall impact potential. This process helps us understand both the positive and negative sustainability impacts associated with each curriculum area – from the physical materials and resources used in delivery, to the environmental and social footprint of the industries our courses prepare students to enter.

For example, business courses may have a relatively low direct impact in terms of raw materials, energy, or water use, yet the wider business sector has a significant influence on sustainability outcomes. This gives our business courses a high impact potential, as they provide valuable opportunities to educate future professionals about key sustainability challenges and practices within their field.

To capture this more fully, we multiply each course's impact potential score by the number of students enrolled in the previous academic year. This approach highlights which departments not only have the greatest material impact, but also the greatest capacity to shape sustainable knowledge, values, and behaviours among students.

In the first two years, we will focus our work with the curriculum and business support teams that have the greatest potential to make a difference. As the strategy progresses, we will build on this foundation by involving areas with a smaller but still important impact, ensuring everyone across the college plays a role in driving sustainability forward.

3.4 Sustainability Course Offer

The college offers several courses within the scope of our Net Zero Skills Hub, which cover topics such as renewable energy systems, energy efficiency, and carbon management. Our instructors are experts in their fields and provide hands-on training and practical experience to ensure that our students are fully equipped to succeed in this growing industry.

Current courses available through Net Zero Skills Hub include:

Training for Plumbers:

- WRAS Water Regulations
- Heat Pump Systems Installation (MCS Recognised)
- Domestic Ventilation Systems
- Low Temperature Hot Water Heating Systems
- Unvented Hot Water Initial and Reassessment

Training for Electricians:

- Domestic Ventilation Systems
- Domestic Solar Photovoltaic Systems
- Electrical Energy Storage Systems
- Domestic, Commercial and Industrial EV Charging Equipment Installation
- Initial and Periodic Inspection and Testing of Electrical Installations
- Electrotechnical Experienced Worker Route Qualification
- 18th Edition Wiring Regulations

Retrofit Training:

- Certificate in Retrofit
- Airtightness and Weather Sealing Workshop

Sustainability Training:

- Carbon Literacy Training
- Environmental Awareness
- Introduction to Air Source Heat Pumps, Solar PV, and Solar Thermal

4. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Strengths:

1. **Engagement:** Staff and students are keen to engage with matters relating to sustainability
2. **Buildings:** The college estate is in good order and lends itself to efficient methods of heating in many areas
3. **Action:** Various initiatives have been started through the estates team, the green team and by students
4. **Modernity:** A modern IT infrastructure enables working from home for many roles
5. **Relevance:** The current climate emergency and cost of living crisis have ensured that sustainability is a critical issue for many people
6. **Commitment:** Many of our students are committed to a sustainable future and are keen to make a difference

Weaknesses:

1. **Funding:** Lack of ring-fenced funds to support investment in sustainability
2. **Data:** Too little data/ information is available about current performance, or not accurate enough to be robust
3. **Curriculum:** Embedding sustainability issues within curriculum teaching is underdeveloped
4. **Locations:** A broad geographical reach across a rural county presents a challenge for green travel, relying heavily on local government to make investments

Opportunities:

1. **Starting point:** “Quick wins” could enable us to make a positive impact, and improve data accuracy
2. **Grant funding:** Our public sector status should enable us to access grants in support of sustainability, and focus on creating our own ring-fenced fund
3. **Land based projects:** Our farm campus provides opportunities to deliver biodiversity projects on site
4. **On-site offsets:** Estate capacity could also present opportunities to offset some of our carbon footprint
5. **Digital first culture:** Hybrid learning and meetings could be utilised to reduce travel
6. **Training:** Delivering renewable technology training, as well as sustainability training for staff

Threats:

1. **Government Funding:** Investment is required to make a significant impact, and the current economic climate may lead to a reduction in the availability of grants and loans for investment
2. **Cost of products and services:** Sustainability is a key concern for many organisations, thereby potentially increasing the cost of specialist advice and availability/ lead-time of products
3. **Time:** The time it takes to embed into all areas of the college may result in some students missing out on engagement with sustainability while they are at the college
4. **Relevance:** Key concerns of different economic and social backgrounds will be different, and thereby relevance to some students may be limited

5. Two Year Operational Plan to July 2027

	Strategic Focus	Activity	Owner/Lead	Target Date
1.	**Achieve Net Zero by 2050 Scopes 1 and 2 Carbon emissions are halved by 2035** **Scope 3 emissions are mapped fully by 2030** **Better data is used for better decisions**	Measure our carbon footprint each year to monitor changes in footprint, relevant to the baseline year	ESA	Each Year
		Monitor EV minibus/van market ahead of 2029 lease renewals	Estates and Capital Development Director (ECDD)	July 2027
		Conduct Scope 3 mapping of all Scope 3 categories against all college areas and departments	ESA	July 2026
		Produce a carbon reduction action plan for key scope 3 categories which are contributing the greatest amount of emissions	ESA	July 2026
		Review current data accuracy and create plan for improvement on key data areas	ESA	July 2026
2.	**Grow sustainability knowledge and action Sustainability is embedded throughout the college** **Staff and Students are equipped to deal with eco-anxiety** **Our Net Zero Skills Hub is a nationally recognised provider of education for emerging green careers**	Build environmental sustainability into all relevant courses to prepare students to live and work well in the future	ESA, VP Curriculum	July 2027
		Use enrichment and core tutorial programmes to give full-time students the knowledge and skills needed to engage positively with sustainability and deal with eco-anxiety effectively	ESA, Head of Student Services	July 2027
		Introduce new courses in areas such as renewable technologies, environmental sustainability, CSR, and Carbon Accounting to help communities gain skills for emerging green careers	Principal, VP Curriculum	Ongoing
		Provide training opportunities for staff to learn more about sustainability and what it means for AWC and its students through Wednesday Learning Sessions	SA, VP People & Culture	Ongoing
		Explore opportunities for students to gain more real-world experience in sustainability, such as through student internships for example with those involved in the strategy, or with a carbon accountancy firm	VPs Curriculum (16-19) and (Adults and Apprenticeships)	July 2027
		Keep track of expansions to T and V -Level courses, where sustainability may be a key concept, with an aim to introduce to the curriculum soon after introduction to the Government portfolio	ESA, Principal	Ongoing

5. Two Year Operational Plan to July 2027 (continued)

	Strategic Focus	Activity	Owner/Lead	Target Date
3.	**Positive impact for the planet** **No waste to landfill** **Suppliers are mapped out across tiers** **Biodiverse Campuses** **Local communities are engaged with us** **Increased global impact**	Create a Waste Management Action Plan, covering all campuses which considers all internal reuse options and when not possible, through external links and partnerships	ESA, ECDD	July 2026
		Ensure all raw material procurement for high-waste departments considers waste treatment and end-of-life disposal, prioritising reusable, and recyclable materials. Where no alternative exists, use materials economically and order only what is necessary	ESA, Principal, VPs Curriculum (16-19) and (Adults & Apprenticeships)	Ongoing
		Review commonly purchased materials to understand what is being bought, how much, and the environmental impact. Use the findings to create a new buying/procurement policy to source and use materials more sustainably.	ESA, FD	July 2026
		Review the resources and skills required to deliver this work effectively, exploring options such as staff training, shared responsibilities, or revised procurement processes, before determining if additional support or roles may be needed.	FD, Principal	July 2027
		Review and evaluate the diversity of wildlife on all our campuses and identify opportunities to increase the levels of biodiversity within them	ESA	July 2027
		Engage the local community and students in biodiversity improvement projects on campus and in surrounding areas – Abingdon town and Witney town	ESA, DP Student Engagement, Head of Student Services, Principal	July 2027
		Evaluate catering provision, and explore options to reduce the carbon footprint associated with food and drink provided by the college, including expanding vegetarian and vegan options	ESA, Catering Manager	July 2026
		Consider twinning every toilet across AWC with one in a developing nation to create a wider planetary impact	ESA	December 2026
		Consider switching to Ecosia as our default search engines instead of Google to increase tree planting	ESA, IT Services Director	July 2026
4.	**Futureproof our utilities and infrastructure** **All campuses use 90% renewable energy** **On-site solar power accounts for 5% of all energy use each year**	Audit current energy mix and identify gaps, and engage with suppliers early about renewable tariffs	ESA, ECDD	July 2026
		Develop a solar implementation roadmap and pilot further projects across campuses wherever feasible	ECDD	July 2027
		Conduct water risk assessment and pilot water-saving technologies wherever feasible	ESA, ECDD	July 2026

5. Two Year Operational Plan to July 2027 (continued)

	Strategic Focus	Activity	Owner/Lead	Target Date
4.	**Futureproof our utilities and infrastructure** **Future-ready water management** **Net-zero-ready buildings and systems**	Maintain building standards by integrating net-zero principles into refurbishment and new-build specifications, and ensure all new projects meet minimum sustainability criteria	ECDD	July 2027
		Begin migration of IT infrastructure to energy-efficient servers and cloud solutions	IT Services Director	July 2027
5.	**Travel sustainably** **EV charging capacity is maximised** **Carbon emissions relating to business mileage are decreased by 25% by 2030** **Students attend college using the most sustainable methods available to them** **Digital first culture is widespread across the college**	Monitor EV charging capacity on all campuses and track changes to future vehicle market to ensure the college is prepared to meet future demand for charging points	FD, ECDD	Ongoing
		Reinforce the sustainable travel policy, potentially introducing rewards/incentives for sustainable travel choices such as carpooling and public transport	ESA, VP People and Culture	July 2026
		Encourage students to attend college using the most sustainable methods available to them, keeping track of changes to provisions, such as e-bikes and e-scooters availability across the local areas of Abingdon, Witney, and Bicester	ESA, Principal	Ongoing
		Survey students to understand the way they commute to college and the reasons for their choices	ESA, Head of Student Services	Ongoing, termly survey
		Review domestic and international trips; prioritise public transport and coach hire over flights, including allowing for extra travel days where needed	ESA, VP Curriculum	July 2026
		Review overlaps between digital and sustainability strategies and identify common areas and goals. These can then be championed or actioned jointly through both strategies	ESA, Principal, Digital Transformation Manager	Ongoing

6. Key Performance Indicators

Strategic Objective: Achieve Net Zero by 2050	End July 2027	End July 2028	End July 2030
Scopes 1 and 2 Carbon emissions are halved by 2030	25% achieved Energy contracts renewal in March 2027	50% achieved	100% achieved Gas contracts renewal in March 2029
Scope 3 emissions are mapped fully by 2030	Categories 5, 6 and 7 mapped	Categories 8 and 15 mapped	Categories 1 and 2 mapped
Strategic Objective: Achieve Net Zero by 2050	**End July 2027**	**End July 2028**	**End July 2030**
Sustainability is embedded throughout the college	100% of courses assessed with self-assessment to understand level of integration	75% of “core” teaching provision embeds sustainability topics	75% of study programmes clearly show sustainability in annual learning plans
Net Zero Skills hub enrolments	Over 650 enrolments	Over 850 enrolments	Over 1100 enrolments
% of staff and students reporting lower eco-anxiety or higher empowerment and understanding	40%	50%	60%

6. Key Performance Indicators (continued)

Strategic Objective: Impact positively for the planet	End July 2027	End July 2028	End July 2030
Suppliers are mapped out across tiers and evaluated against procurement policy	Top 80% (by value) mapped	Top 90% (by value) mapped	100% suppliers mapped
Biodiverse Campuses	Baseline biodiversity score established	10% increase in biodiversity score across campuses	25% increase in biodiversity score across campuses
Strategic Objective: Futureproof our utilities and infrastructure	**End July 2027**	**End July 2028**	**End July 2030**
All campuses use 90-100% renewable energy	25% achieved	50% achieved	100% achieved
On site Solar power accounts for 5% of all energy use each year	3% from solar	4% from solar	5% from solar
Strategic Objective: Travel sustainably	**End July 2027**	**End July 2028**	**End July 2030**
Carbon emissions relating to business mileage are decreased by 25% by 2030	5% reduction	15% reduction	25% reduction
FE Students who mostly travel as sustainably as possible during the school year (Bus, Walk and/or Bike)	80%	85%	90%

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

Regular monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of this strategy will take place using the following methods:

- Carbon footprint is measured yearly and published on our website
- Self-assessment and review of courses at the end of an academic year to determine level of sustainability incorporation
- Annual review of progress towards KPIs
- Regular surveys and focus groups with students and staff
- Annual reporting to the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the Board
- Formal mid-strategy reviews will take place between January and April in 2028.

8. Risk and mitigation

The main risks associated with the implementation of this strategy are as follows:

Risk	Mitigating factors
Insufficient funding for sustainability projects	Seek external grants or funding streams, create ring-fenced sustainability fund, and prioritise “quick wins” to demonstrate impact.
Failure to meet Net Zero targets (Scopes 1, 2, and 3)	Implement annual carbon footprint measurement, switch to renewable energy tariffs, invest in onsite solar, and map Scope 3 emissions by 2030.
Climate adaptation risks (extreme weather, water scarcity)	Future-proof estates with sustainable building design, rainwater harvesting, and grey water reuse systems.
Travel-related emissions remain high	Implement sustainable travel policy, expand EV charging, promote carpooling/public transport, and encourage digital-first culture.
Lack of accurate data for decision-making	Develop a data improvement plan, engage suppliers for Scope 3 data, and publish audited environmental data annually.
Slow integration of sustainability into curriculum	Embed sustainability in all relevant courses, follow Responsible Futures Framework, and provide staff CPD on green skills.
Supply chain risks and high costs for sustainable products	Develop a procurement policy based on circular economy principles, review resource needed to evaluate and centralise major purchases.
Eco-anxiety among staff and students	Offer enrichment sessions, tutorials, and wellbeing support focused on climate resilience and positive action.
Limited engagement from stakeholders	Run awareness campaigns, involve students in projects, and build partnerships with local councils and communities.

www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk