

Sustainability plan

2025 – 2027

Introduction

The University of Sydney Union (USU) has developed a new **Sustainability Plan** to guide how we reduce our impact on the planet, support our community, and operate responsibly. This plan is built on **ESG principles (Environmental, Social, and Governance)** – but in simple terms, it's about making our campus more sustainable, inclusive, and future-focused. From cutting waste to creating safer, fairer spaces, we're committed to taking action that matters to students today and tomorrow.

Vision

To strengthen USU through sustainability leadership.

Purpose

We enrich student and campus experience at the University of Sydney.



Headline commitments

- ① Reduce permanent landfill waste by 90% by 2030 through improved recycling, composting and circular waste initiatives.
- ② Deliver ESG training to 90% of USU staff and student leaders by end of 2026, embedding sustainability knowledge across all teams and programs.
- ③ Embed sustainability principles into key events, programs, and student experiences by the end of 2026, aiming to reflect our values across all major touchpoints.
- ④ Achieve 75% staff satisfaction in workplace inclusion, wellbeing and purpose by 2027, creating a workplace where people thrive.
- ⑤ Source 100% of major procurement contracts and retail stock from ethical and sustainable suppliers by 2028.
- ⑥ Establish an annual USU Sustainability Report by end of 2027, to share progress, highlight initiatives, and create meaningful dialogue with the University, our Members and campus community.

Key objectives

Recycling and waste management

We will champion efficient and innovative waste solutions to minimise campus impact.

Sustainability and waste education

We will empower students and staff with knowledge to drive sustainable practices.

Student experience

We will integrate sustainability into every aspect of student life.

Employee experience

We will foster an inclusive, supportive workplace where staff thrive and grow.

Ethical and sustainable procurement and partnerships

We will lead with integrity to build sustainable, impactful collaborations.

Collaboration and communication with USYD and campus community

We will strengthen partnerships and dialogue to unite the university, campus community and union in driving sustainability on campus.

Environment

Recycling and waste management

We will champion efficient and innovative waste solutions to minimise campus impact.

Actions	Target date
Define and implement USU-wide recycling and waste targets, aligned with best-practice campus sustainability standards.	2026
Launch a bin signage and education campaign across all USU managed outlets to reduce contamination and improve recycling rates.	Launch in 2026
Work with partners and sponsors on joint waste reduction initiatives.	Ongoing
Develop a waste reduction roadmap for all USU run events.	2026
Undertake a packaging audit to determine which single use plastic packaging can be phased out and review all products from a circular economy perspective.	End of 2026
Scope out and introduce a reusable cup scheme across USU outlets.	Pilot 2026
Transition catering outlets to crockery and cutlery for 'eat in' customers.	2026
Eliminate disposable items from HostCo catered events, where possible.	2026
Implement a digital dashboard to track and communicate waste reduction progress.	2026
Add waste reduction performance indicators into contracts for USU vendors and partners.	New contracts from 2026
Align all relevant waste practices with NSW government's Food Organics and Garden Organics (FOGO) mandates.	2027
Eliminate single-use plastics from Food and Beverage outlets to strive for a 'single use plastics free' campus.	2027

Environment

Sustainability and waste education

We will empower students and staff with knowledge to drive sustainable practices.

Actions	Target date
Deliver tailored sustainability education and training programs for USU staff, student leaders, and members.	Ongoing
Engage and empower members through regular consultation, clear communication, and co-designed initiatives.	Ongoing
Monitor and report on energy and water use across USU venues and implement targeted reduction initiatives.	Baseline collection 2025
Introduce a student sustainability ambassador program via the Student Board Portfolio holder position.	Annually
Collaborate with USYD on joint campaigns and sustainability events e.g. inclusion in Welcome Fests etc.	Ongoing
Co-design preferred reusable or sustainable food container solutions with students to ensure uptake and convenience.	2026
Review and standardise waste infrastructure and signage across all USU-managed spaces.	2026
Implement a process for measuring waste volumes by waste stream across all venues.	2026
Develop a student-facing sustainability induction (e.g. online module or during Welcome Week).	Pilot 2026
Incorporate sustainability into all volunteer and staff onboarding.	2026

Social

Student experience

We will integrate sustainability into every aspect of student life.

Actions	Target date
Develop ESG guidance for Clubs & Societies (e.g. ESG Handbook, planning templates).	2025
Collaborate with Members and clubs to design practical pathways for involvement in ESG initiatives.	Ongoing
Maintain safe, inclusive and supportive USU venues and programs with wellbeing as a core focus.	Ongoing
Develop a framework to measure and communicate USU's social and sustainability impact.	2026
Integrate sustainability volunteering into the annual program of events.	2026
Launch a sustainability communications plan, embedded into regular Member updates.	2026
Create a sustainability Hub on the USU website, integrated into the main navigation.	2026
Embed practical sustainability guidance into relevant student leader and volunteer training programs.	2026
Implement regular consultation with students via the Members Advisory Group (MAG) on sustainability behaviours and expectations	2026
Embed sustainability leadership and skills development into student leader development programs.	2026
Coordinate year-round sustainability awareness campaigns including a new initiative (e.g. USU's 28 days of Sustainability) and an annual flagship event for students (subject to SSAF funding).	2026
Expand the FoodHub offering to include second hand clothes, books and/or appliances.	2026
Investigate sustainability grants for Clubs led initiatives (subject to SSAF funding).	2027
Pilot a 'Green Clubs' accreditation system with tiered recognition or incentives.	Launch in 2027
Conduct in-depth research into student sustainability awareness, behaviours, and barriers (subject to SSAF funding).	2027
Establish a Clubs & Societies Resource Hub with rentable reusable equipment for events.	2027

Social

Employee experience

We will foster an inclusive, supportive workplace where staff thrive and grow.

Actions	Target date
Proactively build a diverse and inclusive workforce through inclusive hiring and staff support systems.	Ongoing
Strengthen USU's position as an employer and partner of choice through leading practices in compliance, engagement, and wellbeing.	Ongoing
Deliver and report on DIAP and RAP progress across stakeholders.	Annually
Conduct annual staff engagement surveys including ESG questions.	Annually
Review and update HR policies to reflect ESG values and commitments.	2026
Develop and implement a Green Workplace Policy.	2026
Embed ESG responsibilities into relevant employee position descriptions.	2026
Include ESG induction modules and pathways for staff to contribute to USU's ESG goals.	2026
Recognise and reward staff contributions to ESG goals.	2026
Offer ESG-focused professional development for staff (e.g. webinars, lunch-and-learns).	2027
Audit HR-related suppliers and services to ensure ESG alignment.	2027

Governance

Ethical and sustainable procurement and partnerships

We will lead with integrity to build sustainable, impactful collaborations.

Actions	Target date
Prioritise procurement of locally sourced goods and services to support local/regional economies and reduce transport emissions.	Ongoing
Develop an ethical and sustainable procurement and partnerships policy outlining minimum standards or criteria. (e.g. low carbon footprint, recyclable/compostable materials, minimal packaging, fair labour, organic where appropriate).	2026
Embed ESG criteria into tender and supplier selection processes.	2026
Conduct a full supplier audit to streamline and assess alignment with sustainability standards.	2026
Ensure all cleaning materials used in USU managed premises meet eco-certification and low emission standards.	2026
Evaluate current procurement and partnerships against the new ESG policy to identify gaps and improvement opportunities.	2027
Require all priority suppliers to annually report on ESG and GHG emissions reduction activities.	2027
Undertake a modern slavery risk assessment of USU's supply chain and adopt a Modern Slavery Policy endorsed by partners and suppliers.	2026
Review banking and investment practices to ensure alignment with environmentally financial institutions.	2027
Provide ESG training or onboarding guidelines for contractors, vendors and strategic partners.	2027

Governance

Collaboration and communication with USYD and campus community

We will strengthen partnerships and dialogue to unite the university, campus community and union in driving sustainability on campus.

Actions	Target date
Create an internal cross-functional ESG Working Group with student and staff representatives to strengthen input and shared ownership.	2025
Leverage USYD sustainability training, tools and resources to build USU staff's ESG knowledge and capability.	Ongoing
Contribute to USYD's sustainability strategy and ensure alignment of the USU's ESG plan with broader institutional priorities, where appropriate.	Ongoing
Report annually to the Board and USYD stakeholders on ESG progress, challenges and areas for shared focus.	From 2026
Embed ESG themes into campus-facing communications to raise visibility and drive student and community engagement.	2026
Establish formal mechanisms for ongoing collaboration with USYD and campus partners to co-develop and track ESG goals, initiatives and targets.	2026
Build partnerships with local communities, student organisations and impact driven groups to foster collaboration and local impact.	2027



A place for you.