UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

School of Social Policy and Society

**Introduction to the School and School Strategy
2023-2030**

The Birmingham School of Social Policy and Society is committed to social justice – our shared purpose is to understand the world, and to work collaboratively to change it for the better.

We enact our shared purpose via our education, research, and engagement activities, with students, professional services colleagues and academics working collaboratively. All elements of our core activities are underpinned by principles of critical thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, and engagement of stakeholders. We deliver a suite of undergraduate, postgraduate, professional, and executive education programmes to a diverse and international student population. We undertake research that matters, collaborating with our research partners from the private, public and third sectors from across the world.

A global leader

We are recognised as a leading centre of expertise in Social Policy and Social Work, ranking 8th in the 2021 UK Research Excellence Framework (REF), and in the top 100 QS University World Rankings for both Social Policy and Administration and Sociology.

Our structure

The School comprises three academic Departments and our Professional Services team, who lead on all operational aspects of the School's activity, including supporting our education programmes and our research projects.

The Department of Social Policy, Sociology and Criminology (SPSC) is a leading site of research and education across its three core disciplines. The Health Services Management Centre (HSMC) is one of the UK's foremost centres for research, evaluation, teaching and professional development for health and social care organisations, including NHS Leadership Academy programmes. The Department of Social Work and Social Care (SWSC) delivers the UK's longest-running university social work qualifying programme and a suite of post qualifying and practice education programmes.

Our education

Combining disciplinary excellence with interdisciplinary inspiration

Activate your future with a degree in the social sciences

We offer innovative, multi-disciplinary education across our core academic disciplines: social policy, sociology, and criminology. Studying in a research-intensive environment, students

are taught by those at the forefront of their disciplines. Programmes are designed both to meet disciplinary benchmarks, but also offer students the flexibility to design a programme tailored to their interests. Students can undertake joint degrees or select optional modules across the whole curriculum allowing them to enhance and deepen their understanding of the social world through interdisciplinary reflection.

We work closely with students and student societies to develop an experience which is inclusive, engaging and rewarding, and ultimately transformational. We prepare our graduates to be global citizens: intellectually curious, independent critical thinkers, who are well equipped to help shape sustainable futures for our society. We provide opportunities for international mobility, civic engagement, employability enhancement, and participation in a vibrant student community.

Activate your career in social work or health and social care
Many of our students are returning to education after working in the health and social care sector or other parts of the public sector, or preparing to embark on a career in the field. Our academic staff are world-leading experts in policy, management and practice in health, social work and social care. Programmes are designed to meet the highest professionally accredited and academic standards, including multi award winning national leadership programmes for the sector. The broad vocational values of addressing inequalities, challenging discrimination, and promoting community wellbeing form golden threads in curriculum design. Stakeholder and user involvement is a key foundation of educational delivery, including working closely with policy makers, employers, practitioners and advocacy groups. In particular, the voices of people that use health and care services are prominent in both our digital and in-person learning environments.

> *"The role of reformers is less to search for the next eye-catching idea than to build the capacity for change and innovation to occur from within."*
> *Professor Sir Chris Ham*

> *"Profoundly political in inspiration and profoundly interdisciplinary in character" Professor Stuart Hall*
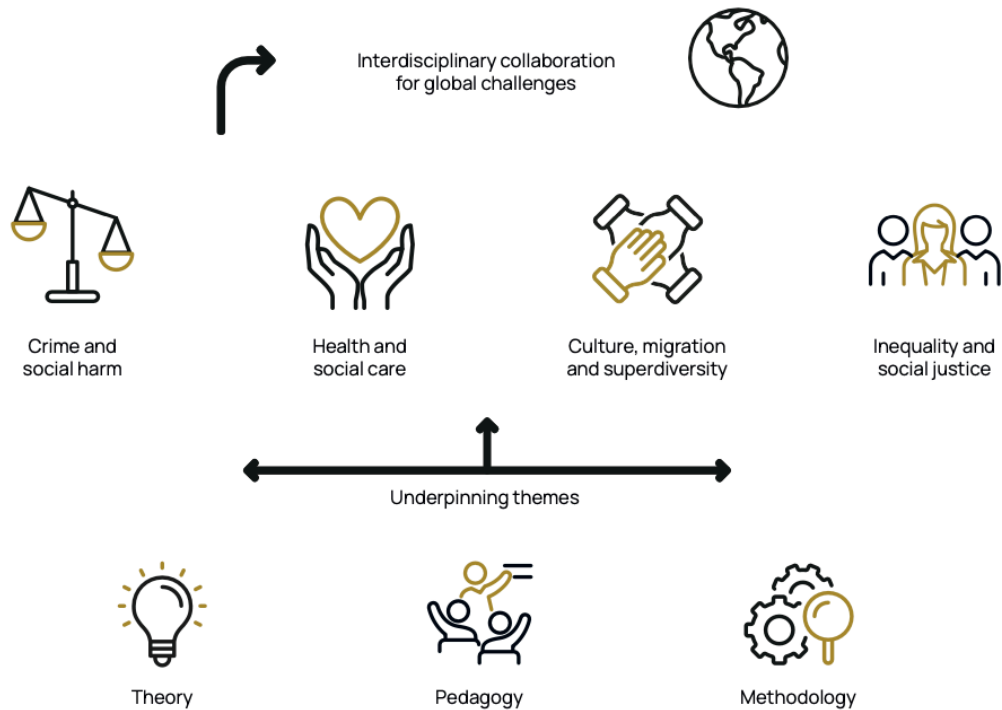
Our research
The School has an excellent research base underpinned by substantial grant capture, with an annual research income of circa £10 million. Our academics publish in top social policy and social science journals, as well as in interdisciplinary and professional journals and in outlets for wider public engagement, such as blogs and magazines. Our research coalesces around four substantive themes (inequality and social justice; culture, migration and

superdiversity, health and social care policy and practice, and crime and social harm) with three underpinning research themes (theory, methodology and pedagogy). In addition, we contribute to interdisciplinary responses to national and global challenges, with civic and global partners. We believe that research and impact can be a virtuous circle, creating new questions as well as new answers thereby feeding back positively to the communities in which we work.

Our research culture rests on curiosity about our social world and so we are open to new research ideas, including innovative or risky ones, and have a growing reputation and influence in areas including mental health; adult social care; children and family social work; global health, climate justice and sustainability; culture, race, gender and sexuality; professional practice; and technology, science and society.

A number of leading research and impact centres are hosted in the School including: The Institute for Research into International Migration and Superdiversity (IRiS), the NIHR Birmingham, RAND and Cambridge Evaluation (BRACE) Centre, and the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC).

We also partner with Birmingham Business School to lead the Centre on Household Assets and Savings Management (CHASM); we partner with the College of Life and Environmental Sciences to co-lead the Institute for Mental Health (IMH), which works closely with the NHS, government, the third sector, patients and the public, with a specific focus on mental health of children and young people; we partner with the College of Arts and Law and the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences to co-lead the Institute for STEMM in Culture and Society (ISTEMMiCS); and we partner with the College of Life and Environmental Sciences and the College of Arts and Law to lead the Stuart Hall Archive Project. In addition, we lead IMPACT (Improving Adult Care Together), the UK's centre for implementing evidence in adult social care. Working across the four nations and with co-production at its heart, IMPACT draws on insights from research, lived experience, and practice knowledge to make a difference to front-line services, and to people's lives.

Interdisciplinary collaboration
for global challenges

Crime and
social harm

Health and
social care

Culture, migration
and superdiversity

Inequality and
social justice

Underpinning themes

Theory

Pedagogy

Methodology

"Evidence alone is not enough. It's using that evidence to promote social justice that is the mark of good scholarship" *Professor Jenny Phillimore*

Our people

Our ability to deliver on our strategic goals is dependent upon our people. As a School we have highly talented and engaged academic and professional services colleagues, who are proud to work together to deliver excellent research and education that makes a positive difference to the lives of others. We build on this by working to generate a culture that is supportive and inclusive, thereby empowering colleagues to push at the boundaries of their practice or disciplines. We believe that prioritising staff wellbeing and development is not only the right thing to do; it will also consequently drive success in other areas of this Strategy. If we are to deliver on our ambitions, we need our staff to be able to be innovative, to take intelligent risks, and to learn from these experiences in a safe and collegiate environment. As a School, we have research expertise that strives to promote forms of inclusion and we believe this should inform our own practice and working environment.

"The notion of expertise and even truth itself is under widespread challenge. As academics, we have a responsibility to do much more than simply share knowledge in a one-way process. We should be working to

build trust and facilitate understanding across society – to become a trusted convenor for difficult discussions on wicked problems." Professor Nicola Gale

Our values
The culture of our School is based on our shared values:

Social Justice:
Our work seeks to make a positive difference to the lives of others. Through producing knowledge that can inform practice and policy we seek to reduce inequalities that exist within our society. We strive to be an excellent employer, expand access to education, and to place sustainability at the heart of our work.

Excellence:
The Birmingham School of Social Policy and Society has a long history and an established international reputation in many of our academic areas. We aim to produce innovative research that is relevant to our civic, national, and global stakeholders, and to run engaging and transformational educational programmes. To deliver on our ambitions, we must work between and at the boundaries of disciplines to continue to innovate and to draw on the complementary skills and strengths of our academic and professional services colleagues and our students.

Inclusion:
We welcome colleagues, collaborators, and students from across the world and from diverse communities to work and study with us. We are committed to equality of opportunity for all, so that our colleagues and students are supported to make the most of their respective talents and skills and to gain from their experience with us. We believe that people perform best when they have safe spaces to work in. We expect everyone to act with sensitivity, respect, and fairness.

Collaboration:
Many of the social issues that the School seeks to address through our research and education cannot be solved if we act alone. We enhance our research and education by pursuing creative and sustainable partnerships within and beyond the School, and with different sectors.

Our future

The School is at an exciting point in its history, as it seeks to address the many urgent problems facing society locally and globally.

The post-pandemic world is characterised by multiple social, political, economic, and environmental crises. We want to use our civic credibility and our global influence in mutually reinforcing ways to continue to grow our student population and our research activity.

As we grow, we want to make the most of the University's strategic investments, such as Institute of Global Innovation and Advanced Studies, which provides a home for interdisciplinary research; the Dubai campus, which provides a sustainable and truly international space for education and research activity; UoB Enterprise, which provides opportunities for commercialisation and social entrepreneurship; and The Exchange, based in the historic old municipal bank located in Centenary Square in Birmingham City Centre, which is a place for communities to shape ideas and solutions together with academics.

The purpose of this strategy

The Birmingham 2030 Strategy emphasises the University's core mission of world-class research and outstanding global education. Its ambition is that we become the UK's exemplary civic university, remaining passionately committed to our foundations in the highly diverse communities, people, and economy of the city of Birmingham and the West Midlands.

The Birmingham 2030 strategic framework has six pillars, which this Strategy adopts:
      Research that matters
      Education for sustainable futures
      Engagement and impact
      Civic and global
      People and culture
      Sustainability

In this School Strategy, we articulate the ways in which we contribute to this wider ambition. The purpose of our Strategy is to serve as a compass for the coming years in terms of the decisions we will need to make and challenges that we will face. It will inform our collective and individual analysis and actions. It will also inform the way we allocate our varied resources - financial, human, and other - through setting priorities and enable us to be clear on how we will monitor and judge our success.

Evaluating our progress

We seek to understand and evaluate our progress towards our goals through ongoing review of our structures (such as staff student ratios, operating times, or hybrid working) and whether they are fit for purpose, monitoring of key process measures (such as feedback turnaround times, submission of funding applications, or number of non-executive appointments) and through ongoing feedback from staff and students (such as interviews, student and staff surveys, and complaints) and assessment of key outcomes (such as REF results, QS rankings, and awarding gaps). We would also consider any 'balancing' outcomes, such as the knock-on effect of the Covid pandemic on research productivity, or political influences on progress toward our equity, diversity and belonging goals.

The Appendix to this document highlights our immediate and longer-term priorities and the measures of success that we can use.

Research that matters

Provide an inspiring environment for research, where researchers at all stages of their careers, from postgraduate to professor, feel confident and supported to take risks at the boundaries of knowledge in their pursuit of advancing understanding.

Build networks and coalitions for change to inform policy and practice across government, public sector, civil society, and international, national, and local communities.

Maintain the highest standards of research integrity and ethics and make our research data and outputs as accessible as possible.

Education for sustainable futures

Provide a transformative educational experience that empowers both our campus-based and distance-learning students to see the world differently, equipping them with the skills to challenge the status quo effectively and to act as agents of positive and sustainable social change in their post-graduation lives and careers.

Inspire students to diversify their perspectives, building on the richness that students from different global, socio-economic, and professional backgrounds bring to the learning environment.

Further embed a culture of learning and improvement for our educators and education support teams, including a rigorous and developmental approach to quality assurance in partnership with our students, which is enriching for all those involved.

Engagement and impact

Be a strong advocate of social policy that promotes social justice in the city of Birmingham and beyond, and a first point of call and trusted convenor for people and organisations that want to partner with academic institutions to achieve their ambitions around social justice.

Be great collaborators for education and research projects, whether leading or supporting others – easy to work with, respectful, and creative.

Advocate for and amplify the voices of those who have experienced historic and/or contemporary marginalisation and minoritisation.

Civic and global

Create and celebrate our vibrant international community of learners, educators, and researchers, as well as professional services colleagues.

Work with our local partners to improve policy and practice in our city and region, and with global partners to bring benefits elsewhere in the world.

Activate our students to be global citizens and leaders and to thrive in an interconnected world.

People and culture

Attract and retain talented and collegiate staff through developing a working environment where all colleagues feel valued and that they can contribute meaningfully to School's core purpose.

Support and mentor staff to continually develop their knowledge and skills and gain experience in tailored ways, recognising the link between a sense of autonomy and wellbeing.

Promote a sense of belonging and inclusion, through consistent questioning and deepening of our understanding of the operation of inequality in organisations. Enhance transparency around what success looks like in the institution to reduce inequalities.

Sustainability

Use the UN Sustainable Development Goals to enhance and develop educational materials for our programmes, and to inform our programmes of research.

Improve the sustainability of our ways of working including involving students and external partners in sustainability debates and activities, and taking consistent steps in individual and collective ways towards sustainability.

Contribute to the University's climate and sustainability agenda through cross-campus, joint working.

Appendix: Priorities and evaluation

Research that matters

Priorities

Over the next academic year we will:
Review the support provided to colleagues in writing high-quality research outputs, and implement a range of help including peer review and mentoring.
Put in place a programme of support for early- to mid-career researchers to enable them to become lead applicants on research grant applications.
Review the academic and professional services structure and support available for the School's themes and centres to ensure that all research students and staff have access to peer support and opportunities for collaboration.
Create a culture where all academic colleagues can be involved in research and scholarship activities, and that professional services colleagues are engaged in this activity.
Prepare cases for investment in key areas of emerging research strength and opportunity, to grow our capacity and research power, including internationally.
Put in place the infrastructure and monitoring arrangements for a future REF submission.

Over the next 2-3 years we will:

Increase the number of high quality home and international PGRs, and offer matched funding for collaborative PhD studentships.

Lead major interdisciplinary grant applications drawing on partnerships across the university and national and international partnerships.

Support the development of a long list of possible impact case studies for a future REF submission.

Achieve excellence in open science through repositories, training, roles, and performance against external benchmarks.

Host major international academic conferences in social policy, social work and health services management, and related disciplines.

Increase our participation in the UoB commercialisation agenda, and influence it in ways that are underpinned by our commitment to social justice.

Implement all aspects of the Researcher Concordat.

Between now and 2030 we will:

Complete an improved and enhanced REF submission (culture and environment, impact and outputs), remaining in the Top 10 UK institutions for Social Policy and Social Work.

Attract world class researchers and scholars to work for and with us.

Evaluation

Structures

e.g. offering relevant and effective training; increasing the diversity of our research staff; and academic and professional services leadership structures that are fit for purpose and align with priorities.

Processes

e.g. staff feedback on their experiences of conducting research in the School; reviewing quality of outputs; numbers of staff actively bidding for research funding; securing PhD studentships; external measures of esteem (such as membership of learned societies, research leadership roles, and international study visits); and monitoring of any inequalities in access to mentoring, study leave etc.

Outcomes

e.g. research income; diversity of funding sources; research power; number of 4* publications; rate of successful PhD completions; and citations.

Education for sustainable futures

Priorities

Continue to diversify assessment design, address assessment workload, and develop opportunities to gain employment skills.

Further embed and improve our mechanisms for student voice and feedback at module, programme, department and School level, ensuring the message that "We Listen" is visible to students and enacted by all staff.

Enhance student experience by responding to changing professional education markets and student expectations. Quality academic tutoring and programme level support as well as initiatives that reinforce a sense of community remain essential for 'building back' the teaching and learning environment post-pandemic.

Work with the University's Graduate Attributes Schemes to clarify our vision for graduates of the School, including civic competencies and ability to be a critical evaluator of contested truth claims.

Support our teaching staff in their pedagogical scholarship and research to inspire innovation in education.

Over the next 2-3 years we will:

We will prioritise efforts to ensure our educational programmes are designed in an inclusive and culturally aware way, building on a social model of inclusion, including committing additional resources where necessary to support students from disadvantaged or minoritised backgrounds.

Embed employability skills across the curriculum and provide a range of experiential learning opportunities in workplace environments, including a 'year in industry' option for our undergraduate students.

Value the prior work-based experience that our professional and executive students bring and encourage active reflection on current professional practice.

Foster research and active inquiry by encouraging students to undertake research projects and participate in research seminars and conferences.

Grow and diversify our international student cohorts to create a truly global learning environment.

Between now and 2030 we will:

Invest in the development of all colleagues that contribute to educational experience through continued professional development, constructive feedback on performance, and mentoring. We will promote a culture of staff engagement with pioneering educational design and pedagogic scholarship, including the ongoing evaluation and improvement of our programmes.

Evaluation

Structures

e.g. diversity of our student population; effectiveness of both our online/distance and face-to-face campuses; effective staff-student liaison process; effective student experience and

employability teams; build effective working relationships between academics, professional services and students; and supportive career structures for education-focused academics.

Processes
e.g. programme and module level student feedback loops; participation in the pedagogical research cross-cutting research theme; and types of assessment.

Outcomes
e.g. educational gain and attainment, including reducing awarding gaps; student experience and satisfaction (local feedback and national evaluation metrics); employment outcomes; and recruitment and retention, including reduction of inequalities in non-completion.

Engagement and impact

Priorities

Over the next academic year we will:
Review our systems to ensure that we can work effectively and efficiently with external partners, collaborators, and stakeholders, including the public and service users.
Support academic and professional services colleagues to engage stakeholders and users of research at all stages of our research – from question formulation, to study design, to data collection and analysis, and to dissemination.
Ensure that we have guidance, administrative support and infrastructure in place to collate and store evidence of impact.

Over the next 2-3 years we will:
Continue to nurture sustainable partnerships and relationships with those that share our values and commitment to social policy that promotes social justice.
Ensure all research centres and substantive clusters of research activity have clearly articulated their pathways to impact and identified exemplars.
Become more visible in debates about policy making in our city, nationally, and globally.
Creating a wide range of opportunities for our students to build networks and make a difference locally, nationally, and internationally, ultimately becoming a lifelong advocate for the University (see also the Civic and Global pillar).

Between now and 2030 we will:
Be routinely working in interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral ways to address the 'big questions' facing
our society – including inequality and exclusion, global health threats, climate change, the management and regulation of emerging technologies, and the fourth industrial revolution.

Supporting all staff, where appropriate, to routinely think about the impact, engagement, and entrepreneurial elements of their work, or to engage in voluntary civic activity.

Evaluation

Structures
e.g. facilitate external partners to engage with our administrative systems, and identify and draw on expertise in the College and University (Marketing and Communications, External Relations, Public Affairs, Public Engagement, Business Engagement, University of Birmingham Enterprise).

Processes
e.g. engagement in external activities (such as non-executive or advisory roles); engagement with alumni; appointment of honorary or visiting staff; secondments into industry, government, public or third sectors; and engagement in policy commissions or calls for evidence.

Outcomes
e.g. measures of research reach and impact (such as online interactions, citations in policy documents or professional standards); improving public understanding of social policy and society; shifting public discourse around societal problems and policies; collaborative or commercial research activities; consultancy; and CPD activity.

Civic and global

Priorities

Over the next academic year we will:
Enhance our profile and reputation with employers – focusing on the Birmingham School of Social Policy and Society brand and linking it to the QS disciplines of 'social policy and administration' and 'sociology'.
We will work closely with alumni, communications, business engagement and other parts of the university to support this.
Take steps to ensure that our fast-expanding cohort of international students in the School has a good experience of studying here, considering issues of programme design, tailored support and training, and the promotion of inclusive practice and cultural competency to staff and all students.
Review international mobility opportunities (virtual and physical) and evaluate how the School can best support learners and staff in this area.
Pilot and review the new 'Year in Civic Leadership' option for SPSC UG programmes.

Over the next 2-3 years we will:

> Increase the diversity and academic strength of the international students that we recruit, promoting our courses through partner recruitment channels and alumni.
> Promote global citizenship and cultural awareness in our students through international study and work opportunities. Opportunities need to be inclusive and varied, recognising both physical and virtual mobility.
> Identify, support, and strengthen our international collaborations across research, education, and enterprise. We should promote cultural exchange by providing opportunities for all staff and students to build and sustain international partnerships.
> Strengthen the international reach and impact of our research and be recognised by our academic peers as a world-leading place for social policy research.
> Build the membership and activities of the Birmingham Sociology Network, including inviting world-renowned external speakers and working with members to explore ways to promote the sociology discipline at Birmingham in their external engagement activities.

Between now and 2030 we will:

> Instil global citizenship and civic mindedness in our student learners.
> Become a top global destination for international students.
> Aim for a place in the QS Top 50 for social policy and administration and the QS Top 100 for sociology.

Evaluation

Structures

e.g. effective support and curriculum structures in place to facilitate international mobility (virtual and physical); administrative structures that support, facilitate and maintain collaborations with international universities, other organisations and alumni; and civic and global mission embedded in all roles, with clear direction and leadership.

Processes

e.g. recruitment and retention of international students with a strong educational or professional background; improving international student satisfaction; levels of engagement with university strategic regions (Dubai, India, China, Brazil), partnerships, and funding opportunities (e.g. Universitas 21, Birmingham International Engagement Fund); and partnerships with civic and regional organisations.

Outcomes

e.g. our position in league tables, including the QS World University Ranking; income from international funding channels or through international research collaborations; and number and quality of internationally co-authored publications.

People and culture

Priorities

Over the next academic year we will:
Implement the new academic career framework, maximising opportunities for open and honest conversations about expectations for progression.
Design a School-level induction programme (research, education and administration systems) for new staff.
Invest in professional development for our academic and professional services colleagues.
Recruit student Equity, Diversity and Belonging Ambassadors and support them to work collaboratively with colleagues.

Over the next 2-3 years we will:
Deliver the objectives of the University Equity, Diversity and Belonging strategy.
Diversify our staff cohort, with a particular focus on recruiting international and minority ethnic (global majority) colleagues.
Developing transparent processes for decision making and a culture of openness that allows staff to freely voice concerns and opinions.

Between now and 2030 we will:
Work to achieve a balanced gender profile at all levels of seniority, and an ethnic profile that more closely reflects the wider community.
Ensure staff wellbeing is at the heart of our decision making, working practices and environment, seeking to mitigate challenges in the wider institutional or national context.

Evaluation

Structures
e.g. training and development offer (% of staff accessing training); equality and diversity monitoring of staff; and engagement with performance and development review processes.

Processes
e.g. rates of career progression (movement between grades and time taken) by different demographics and roles, and compliance with mandatory training.

Outcomes

e.g. eliminate pay and workload gaps (difference gender/ethnicity/seniority), and staff survey (wellbeing, job satisfaction and pride in working at UoB).

Sustainability

Priorities

Over the next academic year we will:

Work closely with the new College Director of Sustainability to identify and implement governance structures around sustainability in the School.

Identify where good quality resources already exist to support our efforts, e.g. the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network's 'Net Zero on Campus' guide and toolkit.

Develop a set of simple reflection questions ('checklist') that people can refer to when making decisions at all levels of the School.

Implement new specialist optional modules in sustainability policy and climate justice.

Over the next 2-3 years we will:

Consider ways the School can support the University's net zero carbon goal e.g. utilising new technology and mobile applications to be able to maximise efficiency by working smarter.

Think about sustainability and the climate crisis across the whole curriculum, not just in specialist optional modules (although they are an important part of the mix in the early years while integration emerges).

Consider and incorporate sustainability in all our research projects, centres and clusters. Enabling our researchers (including Masters, Doctoral and ECRs) to have a sound understanding of the UN Sustainability Development Goals so they can reflect on the goals and how they relate to their research, referring to sustainability where appropriate in their new projects.

Identify and recruit student Sustainability Ambassadors, and support them to work critically and collaboratively with the School, including undertaking an audit of sustainability in the School.

Ensure that all research seminars are hybrid and we are set up for remote conferencing to avoid unnecessary travel.

Between now and 2030 we will:

Ensure our graduates are equipped to be global citizens, insightful leaders, and contributors to a more sustainable future in their chosen career and their lives.

Nurture a culture where the challenges and contradictions (such as pursuing internationalisation which inevitably involves air travel, having a campus in Dubai, etc.) can be openly discussed.

Evaluation

Structures
e.g. build a structure of accountability and governance for sustainability decisions, including a sustainability lead who reports to Senior Management Team, and recruit student Sustainability Ambassadors.

Processes
e.g. improve the confidence of staff to see themselves in the challenge and what they can contribute; offer sustainability training for staff; collaborate with students and staff; and implement sustainability actions checklist.

Outcomes
e.g. reduction in our carbon footprint, and contribution to achieving UN Sustainability Development Goals.