

Staff and Student Sustainability Engagement Plan 2026

1. Introduction

1.1 Aim

The University declared a climate and ecological emergency in December 2020. Following this a new Sustainability Sub Strategy (SSS) 2021-2028 was created. Staff, student and stakeholder engagement is a vital component of our overall sustainability strategy.

The aim is to engage with all university students, staff, visitors and stakeholders who all contribute to our energy and resource use, to reduce our greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (scopes 1, 2 and 3) and cut waste and improve resource efficiency.

This document sets out our overarching engagement plan, allowing us to: track our progress; to enable students, staff, visitors and stakeholders to discover opportunities to engage in sustainability on campus; and to demonstrate our commitment to sustainability and social responsibility.

This document also outlines the University of Essex Sustainability Team's core activities for 2026. Please note that it may be subject to change depending on resource and changing priorities.

1.2 Objectives

Our underlying objectives for student, staff, visitor and stakeholder engagement are as follows:

- To normalise the Sustainable Essex Awards (or equivalent) and to involve every department on campus.
- To encourage students to engage with a range of opportunities to learn more about sustainability and climate change, empowering them to make environmentally-friendly choices.
- To push for improvements in integrating education for sustainable development into the curriculum.
- To integrate sustainability as a core component of student and staff inductions.
- To increase and improve engagement opportunities with the Sustainability Sub-Strategy, Carbon Management Plan, Statement of Investment Principles and other key strategy and policy documentation.
- To collaborate with the Students' Union in a joint effort to improve sustainability on campus.
- To ensure that Trades Unions are presented with opportunities to engage with sustainability management.
- To collaborate with print and digital media teams (internal and external to the University) to promote sustainability on campus using best-practice marketing techniques.
- To increase the number of engagements through our social media channels.

2. Engagement Initiatives

2.1 Accommodation engagement programme (#LittleChoicesBigChanges)

Bringing engagement with students under one campaign, #LittleChoicesBigChanges encourages students living on campus to reduce energy use, increase recycling and save water, but will also target those living off campus to adopt sustainable habits. This campaign will target key dates throughout the academic year: Welcome Week, Christmas move out, January/February heating season and the end of the year move out, in addition to promoting sustainability on an on-going basis, in collaboration with key partners such as Essex Food.

2.2 Sustainable Essex Awards

The Sustainable Essex Awards Programme continues to be a success at the University of Essex. New teams are recruited each year and the proportion achieving a Gold award has risen year-on-year since 2014. Submissions to the Programme open in October each year. Participating teams are recognised through an awards ceremony in the early summer (May/June).

The programme brings teams closer to the priority areas of the SSS, and supports them in developing their own projects that are bespoke to their areas of work.

We have also added a Platinum level, which encourages teams to develop collaborative projects with other teams internally, with external partners, and/or with students. The programme is also now open to groups of students to participate in as well.

All information about Sustainable Essex can be found on [Moodle](#).

2.3. Engagement Events

2.3.1 Sustainability awareness promotion

Throughout the Academic year we will deliver a sustainability awareness campaign which links to our 'reduce, recycle, protect' and our 'Little Choices Big Changes' initiatives utilising digital signage and social media channels.

2.3.2 Sustainability Awareness Week: 3 – 5 March 2026

Each year, the university hosts a sustainability-themed week (typically in March) where events take place to raise awareness about sustainability issues locally, nationally and globally. Past activities have included roof top tours to showcase our solar panels, guided tree walks around campus, cooking tips to avoid food waste, water saving initiatives, photo competitions and recycling information. The focus is on providing a range of information and activities to show students how they can make a difference, and the resources available both on and off campus to help them.

2.3.3 Welcome Week

Welcome Week 2026 will be from 28 September to 2 October, when we will be focusing on welcoming new and returning students to the University. The Welcome period presents a perfect opportunity to launch a marketing campaign to raise awareness about environmental issues and sustainability on campus. This will consist of stalls, informative handouts and face to face discussions involving members of the sustainability team. Activity for this will primarily be held on the Colchester campus.

3. Engagement Opportunities

3.1. University Committees

Having student representatives on our committees is a valuable way in which students can engage with strategic decision-making at the University governance level. However, it is important that we ensure that students are engaged as active participants and not simply observers. One of our aims is to ensure that student committee members have the necessary support to confidently participate.

Student representatives are primarily on Senate committees; however, there is also some representation at Council. Below is a list of all University committees involved in sustainability, ethics, estates planning, finance and strategic decision making with student representation.

Council

1. People Supporting Strategy Committee
2. Resource Committee
3. Advisory groups of the University Executive Committee
4. Joint Committee of the Council and the Senate

Senate

1. Education Committee
2. Ethics Committee
3. Research Committee

3.2 Sustainable Students Society

The Sustainability Team provides some support, if required, to the [Sustainable Students Society](#), a standalone student group. They're a student-led organisation dedicated to fighting climate change and protecting the environment through education, volunteering, and activism. This society aims to contribute towards Goal 13 Climate Action of the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Action Plan 2026

| Strategic Area | Action | Date | Owner(s) |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--|
| Campaigns | Social Media campaigns | Ongoing | Sustainability Engagement Officer/ Engagement Assistant |
| | Heating Season | January/February | Sustainability Engagement team |
| | Sustainability Awareness Week | March 2026 | Sustainability Engagement team |
| | Sustainability Priorities awareness | September/October 2026 | Sustainability Engagement team |
| | Sustainable Essex Audits | April 2026 | Sustainability Engagement team |
| | End of Year Move Out Period | May/June 2026 | Sustainability Engagement team |
| | Sustainable Essex Awards event | June 2026 | Sustainability Engagement team |
| | Welcome Week Stalls | October 2026 | Sustainability Engagement team |
| | Sustainable Essex Awards launch | October 2026 | Sustainability Engagement team |
| | Christmas Move Out | December 2026 | Sustainability Engagement team |
| Marketing | Updating the Sustainability Website | Ongoing | Sustainability Engagement Officer, Sustainability Engagement Assistant, Head of Sustainability, WEDM |
| | Sustainability Newsletter | Ongoing | Sustainability Engagement Officer |
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| | Maintain Social Media Pages | Ongoing | Sustainability Engagement Assistant |
| Transport | Dr Bike service | Ongoing | Travel and Transport Officer |
| | Cycle to Work Day | August 2026 | Travel and Transport Officer |
| Education | Climate literacy training | Ongoing | Sustainability Engagement team |

This document is subject to annual review by the University of Essex

| Signed by | Date | Next review date |
|--------------|------------|------------------|
| Rebecca Rudd | 11/12/2026 | 01/12/2026 |