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Introduction

The scale of the global sustainability challenge is becoming ever more apparent and creative practice has a role to uplift, inspire and create a positive vision for what the world could be like. The importance of equity and justice in determining actions are key to this and our approach to sustainability covers everything we do, from our research and our curriculum through to the way we manage our facilities and support services.

This year’s Sustainability Report covers a period where practices returned and communities were reinvigorated, the challenge now is ensuring emissions do not rise with this. Our activity is collaborative, and I would like to thank the staff, students and external partners who contribute to sustainability at Leeds Arts University. This Report highlights some of the key achievements and activities during 2021/22, which we will be building on to improve the sustainability performance of our University.

Professor Simone Wonnacott
Vice-Chancellor
Materiality

Material sustainability issues are those that are most important and significant to the University and our stakeholders.

When we developed our Sustainability Framework back in 2015, materiality was a key consideration, and we now report against our Sustainability Framework on an annual basis.

As we progress our Sustainability Framework, we continually engage with our stakeholders to understand what is important to them, identify new risks and opportunities, and ensure our priorities reflect any changes.

Stakeholder Engagement

Everyone has a part to play in sustainability at Leeds Arts University and there are initiatives, projects, research, and commitments right across the institution.

In compiling this report, we engaged across the University to get a full picture of sustainability at Leeds Arts University and we have provided a representation of projects taking place across our whole university community.

Our Sustainability Framework

To guide and support our activities our Sustainability Framework operates within three top-level headings of People, Place and Process which naturally interlink and overlap. This report is structured under these three headings and each section contains key case studies showcasing progress across the themes.

Oversight

Our Sustainability Committee plans, supports, and monitors the University’s sustainability activity and how it adheres to the University’s Sustainability Framework. The Committee is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and includes representation from students, academic and business support staff.
UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The UN SDGs are a collection of 17 interlinked Global Goals that are designed to be a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. They are an urgent call for action by all countries in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth, all while tackling the climate and biodiversity crises.

The SDGs guide our activity as a University, and we are committed to contributing to all of the SDGs. Throughout this report, we have aligned the activities we share with the top three most relevant SDGs, however, most align with many more.

The University is a signatory of the UN SDG Accord. The SDG Accord aims to inspire, celebrate, and advance the critical role that education has in delivering the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the value it brings to governments, business, and wider society.
Employability Week
During Employability Week we invited not-for-profit organisation Sustainable Arts in Leeds (SAIL) to deliver a series of events to over 700 Level 5 students.

SAIL hosted a panel session and Q&A in which local industry experts including ‘Climate Canopy’ artist Alison Smith, Phil Holdgate from ITV and Holly Kragiopoulos from North Star Coffee were invited to speak about their experiences of embedding sustainable best practices within their professional work. They discussed the opportunities and boundaries associated with considering the sustainability impact of their work, providing insight into the skills and knowledge required to work sustainably in students’ current practice and future careers.

SAIL also delivered Carbon Literacy Taster sessions focused on reducing the carbon footprint of creative practice to Fine Art and Animation students, giving attendees an understanding of the basic science behind climate change, discussing what we’re doing on a national and local level to tackle climate action as well as looking at ways in which we can embed sustainable best practice as creative individuals and within the wider creative and cultural sector.

Expanding Communities of Sustainable Practice Symposium
Our third Sustainability Symposium took place in October 2021 to continue the dialogue on how to expand communities of sustainable practice.

The event sought to make connections between thinkers, practitioners, educators, and students in order to develop and expand those communities that value sustainability.

We were delighted to hear from keynote speakers, Maxwell Ayamba, co-founder of 100 Black Men Walk for Health, and Dr Max Liboiron, who reflected on Artists in Residence in the Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR), an interdisciplinary plastic pollution laboratory based at the Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Image: Keynote speaker Maxwell Ayamba - journalist, academic and founder of the Sheffield Environmental Movement, which promotes access to nature for BAME and refugee communities.

Students
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Staff
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Emergency Designer Network Exhibition
An exhibition, Bethany Williams: Alternative Systems, opened in February 2022 at the Design Museum in London, showcasing work made during the coronavirus pandemic by Leeds Arts University BA (Hons) Fashion Design staff and students.

In March 2020 staff and students responded to a call out for people with sewing skills from The Emergency Designer Network. The Emergency Designer Network was set up by London-based designers Holly Fulton, Bethany Williams, and Phoebe English. This volunteer-led enterprise galvanised local production to support hospital stocks of key garments such as scrubs in the fight against COVID-19.

The Artist's Window
The community initiative, The Artist's Window, was set up by MEPC working with Leeds Arts University to help support the creative talent in Leeds, showcasing art installations on the ground floor of 4 Wellington Place. A competitive brief was set, giving the students complete creative licence to transform the window using any medium, from paintings to photo series and even sculptures.

Four winning designs were chosen from over 30 entries and the successful artists will have their pieces on display on a rotational basis.

One of the winning artists, BA (Hons) Visual Communication graduate, Precious Seronga said:
“Being African in the western world, I have experienced the distinct lack of education about my continent. To be chosen on the cultural significance of the art was a true honour — not only to myself as an artist — but also to other Africans in Leeds. I believe opportunities like the Artist’s Window are great for young artists to have a dedicated space to showcase their work in order to help them make their way up in such a competitive industry.”

This year our staff and students have continued to collaborate and establish new and existing partnerships with local, national, and global organisations and initiatives on sustainability.
Tale of Two Cities

‘Tale of Two Cities’ is a collaborative community project between the Leeds Arts University Progression Team, students and DAMASQ, a non-profit organisation that works to support refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and minority communities through a range of projects and programmes in education, enterprise, and employment generation.

The project supported young female Syrian refugees to develop creative skills in storytelling whilst providing engagement and support with student ambassadors from the University, aiming to increase a sense of belonging in a university setting as well as increasing the number of underrepresented students considering the pursuit of creative subjects.

Participants in the project had the opportunity to tell their stories with their narratives, accounts and images collated into a film that will be shared with the wider community, aiming to promote tolerance and understanding.

As refugees are also likely to have experienced traumatic experiences in their transition to the UK, the project preparation and delivery included providing access to Solace, a charity providing therapeutic service exclusively for refugees and asylum seekers, as well as internal support for University students and staff involved with the project.

Brigantia

Through funding awarded by Research England, Leeds Arts University Research team has been working with charity and Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation, Brigantia, on a knowledge exchange project taking place through the Creative Scene People and Places Consortium in Kirklees. The Creative Scene project employs artists and producers to work with local communities to increase cultural participation and we have created opportunities for people from the area to develop as creative practitioners. The project developed emerging talent from the local area to become confident in planning, delivering, and evaluating creative projects which have people and places at their heart.

Reimagining Leeds

As a part of a Leeds2023 schools project BA (Hons) Illustration graduates Megan Dobbyn, Callum Noble and Bergrún Adda Pálsdóttir, and BA (Hons) Visual Communication graduate Tanya Shanduka, created posters based on Leeds school children’s re-imaginings of their city.

School children were asked to imagine Leeds afresh – a city for the future. If they could design and build Leeds in any way, what would it be like? Children used poems, drawings, photos, and models to illustrate their ideas with 300 concepts received from nursery through to year 11. Ideas ranged from rooftop orchards and woodlands, solar-powered houses, a swimming pool full of strawberry jelly and a giant helter-skelter around the town hall.

You can spot their four poster designs displayed at bus stops near the participating schools and around the city centre.
We are committed to developing and enhancing our Estate by identifying opportunities to reduce our carbon footprint and optimise our waste management, building systems, fabric, and infrastructure to be more energy efficient.

A relaxing of national Covid restrictions during 2021/22 resulted in an increase in campus activity, which has been reflected in our waste and utilities data. As activities and the occupancy of our buildings increase our energy consumption has risen, however, a new Estates sustainability plan is being developed and this will help us to continue to target opportunities to further reduce the energy we use and keep this to a minimum.

We continue to collaborate with experts to develop a road map to help the University achieve net zero by 2035 on Scope 1, 2 and selected Scope 3 emissions. We have continued improvements to our existing building fabric and infrastructure including low energy lighting and window upgrades. Our current carbon emissions are reported on in the University's Annual Financial Statements.

\*Waste figures exclude the Church due to lack of available data.
All teaching and learning at the University ensures that students acquire the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding to enable them to progress into employment within the creative industries. This includes sustainability to ensure students are prepared for a complex and changing world that they can positively contribute to.

Each of our courses engages with sustainability, whether through live briefs, Industry Speakers, working with communities, field trips, or exploring sustainable materials and techniques.

Extended Diploma’s ‘Conscious Creatives’ Pop-Up Exhibition

Extended Diploma students held a pop-up exhibition and art market at Leeds Kirkgate Market, one of the largest indoor markets in Europe. Students sold their work in an art market, giving visitors a chance to buy some amazing work from talented artists and designers at the start of their careers. Items included sustainable 3D design solutions and ethically minded fashion and textiles designs. The exhibition forms part of the Extended Diploma’s ‘Conscious Creatives’ program, which involves students from Graphic Communication, Fashion and Textiles, 3D Design and Fine Art exploring how they can use their creativity to create a more sustainable world.

Reshaping Surplus: Embedding a micro-circular culture within the BA (Hons) Fashion Design studios

Although deconstruction is a commonly used method within fashion design practice, it can also be wasteful, creating surplus as garments are cut up, without the appropriate skill set or techniques to rework into viable garments. Providing students with techniques that they can use to reconstruct impaired garments in a refined manner is key to avoiding adding to textile waste. ‘Pre-Loved Kilo’ is the UK’s biggest vintage kilo sale. A significant number of garments received at their sorting warehouse are destined for landfill because they have imperfections or are damaged. A large box of donated damaged garments were reconstructed by students to create new designs using a particular drape technique. The final garments were photographed in the photography studio, and on location, as part of a level 4 Fashion Photography and Fashion Design collaboration to demonstrate how impaired garments, destined for landfill, can be transformed into innovative contemporary fashion items. The outcomes of this work were presented at the Leeds Student Sustainability Research Conference 2022.

BA (Hons) Visual Communication students collaborate with Women’s Health Matters

Students from BA (Hons) Visual Communication collaborated with Women’s Health Matters, a Leeds-based organisation that provides specialist support to women and girls, on an international campaign to give a voice to survivors of domestic abuse. The social media campaign, ‘16 Days of Action’ is a collaboration between one of the organisation’s support groups, Breathe Free, and students from the University. Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, Breathe Free supports women through a six-month course that looks at various aspects of emotional wellbeing, with a focus on building healthy relationships. Participants are then invited to share their knowledge as a Breathe Free volunteer.
The Structures that Stand

Level 6 Fine Art Student Isa Walker created artworks concerned with the interconnectivity of nature and humanity in relation to the destructive causes of the mass climate change our species has brought about. Isa aims toward an art practice that exemplifies responsible consumption and production, which is defined by using found, sustainable and low-cost materials. The work acknowledges the work of land artists in transitioning art from gallery to outdoors, and the work relies on the earth for context. Isa hopes that onlookers might question, learn about, or simply consider the societal structures we’ve built that have combined and amounted to the point of environmental crises.

The Scruffy Speaker: Critical Sustainable Design in consumer electronics

Attributes from Emotionally Durable Design, Circular Design, Aesthetic Sustainability and Speculative Critical Design theories were combined and applied by Robert Silkstone in the design of a speaker, resulting in a new design definition: Critical Sustainable Design (CSD). CSD incorporates many strands of thought together in a unified theory of function and form. From a functional perspective, the speaker is user-repairable and only uses two types of standard screws, challenging planned obsolescence and the production of e-waste. The form of the speaker is simple and minimal yet is instantly recognisable as a speaker and communicating affordance of use. This familiarity with simple and minimal pleasing forms comes from Aesthetic Sustainability. Designing for attachment and trust is the highest level of ‘product integrity’ according to Bakker et al. (2019). This has been attempted in the concept of the speaker by incorporating the user’s own waste plastic from preloved items that have personal meaning. In this type of recycled ‘precious plastic’ chunks of the original items are still visible creating a unique, customised and personal electronic device. It is this distinctive look to the speaker that also draws attention to provoke debate around what are appropriate materials for use in electronics. Other materials used in the speaker also consider sustainability and lower embodied carbon emissions.

DIGIT: Custom Dynamic Sportswear Avatars

Cat Doyle (MA Digital Fashion) spent time working in design and development within the sportswear industry and found several of the traditional development processes to be very wasteful, with the garment fitting process involving the production of up to twelve physical samples per style. Cat aimed to research the benefits and hurdles associated with a transition to a digital process with the aim of creating a more sustainable digital fitting methodology for sportswear. During the physical fitting process, the garments are fitted on a model, with models expected to hold dynamic sports poses to gauge the effectiveness of the garment fit. Cat created a range of customisable dynamic digital avatars to be used for digital sportswear fittings to help mirror this process, reducing the need to produce physical samples.
We continue to promote our sustainability practices and achievements to our internal and external audiences through University communication platforms, internal and external conferences, events, papers, and guidance.

This year we have contributed to the Department for Education’s consultation on their new Draft Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy and have worked with the EAUC (Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges), GuildHE, and other external partners to disseminate examples of good practice taking place across the University.

We have also developed our website to highlight more of the great work and opportunities already taking place. Additionally, we continue to create internal repositories of regularly updated sustainability information for staff and students, to build upon staff and student inductions and curricular work, including a new SharePoint site for staff, to support with embedding sustainability across everything we do. Going forward we intend to continue to engage with our students and staff to build upon these resources and to ensure relevant and up-to-date information is available for all.

Sustainability Week

We are committed to actively encouraging and supporting student engagement with sustainability initiatives. As part of this, Leeds Arts Union worked closely with the Student Conscious Creatives society to arrange Sustainability Week, an annual focus week for sustainable action and eco-awareness where students can run and get involved with events both at the University and externally. This year, the Student Union reached out to more external partners than ever before, organising a week of visits, clean-ups and planting sessions with external partners including Meanwood Valley Urban Farm, Kirkstall Valley Nature Reserve, Nunroyd Park, and Hyde Park Source’s Rosebank Community Garden. These events involved meeting and networking with on-site staff, giving students the opportunity to explore sustainability-focused careers and volunteer opportunities, and strengthening relationships with the wider climate-conscious community of Leeds.

Green Impact

In both 2021 and 2022, our Students’ Union was successful in achieving an accreditation of ‘Excellent’ in the NUS Green Impact scheme. The aim this year is to maintain this achievement. Green Impact is a United Nations award-winning programme designed to support environmentally and socially sustainable practice within organisations.
The Sustainability Award is open to all current students studying at Leeds Arts University. The award recognises innovative and outstanding work that addresses environmental, social and ethical issues with sustainability running clearly through the thinking and approach. To be considered for the award students were asked to submit a piece of work or details of a project they have undertaken, either curricular or extracurricular, based on their interpretation of “sustainability”, and that reflects the aims identified in the University Sustainability Framework. Students were asked to consider and address a specific sustainability issue and consider why this was important, how their work would influence new thinking and how their work addressed the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in arriving at their solution.

Amina Jeng
Extended Diploma

“Ethics is commonly discussed in my work as I like to create art linked to my Black culture. I sewed a pattern of mine onto an oversized white t-shirt and was inspired to do so as it is a big part of Black hip-hop culture. The white t-shirt was my grandad’s, and he was going to throw it out and I offered to take it instead. I took a male top and have worn it as a woman to show that clothing should be for anyone regardless of gender. I then wanted to do some photo shoots for my top. I put it into three different aesthetics/styles; a nineties hip-hop style, a skater style and an African style. I decided on nineties hip-hop as oversized white t-shirts were popularised by rappers at the time. I chose to do an African photo shoot as I wanted to create something linked to my Gambian culture. I chose to continue with my theme of oversized streetwear, and I added African prints and fabrics that were produced and bought in The Gambia. I feel as if Africa is often surrounded with negative stereotypes about it being a poor continent. I decided to go against these stereotypes by creating a look rich in colour, accessories and pattern. I wanted to show that this could be worn by everyone and could be styled into different aesthetics meaning that it could be worn multiple times and look different each time. I kept my leftover material and used some of it in my nineties photo shoot as a bandana. Even the false hair used in the photo shoots was leftover hair from previous hairstyles of mine.”
Throughout March and May, Midge facilitated creative writing and storytelling workshops with a group of male refugees aged 18-35 who live in South Shields. Midge was invited to design and run these eight sessions in partnership with an organisation called CREST (Compact for Race Equality in South Tyneside) and the Customs House, an arts centre and theatre situated on the south bank of the River Tyne. The workshops culminated in the co-production of a podcast episode titled Journey from the Sun to the Sea: Finding Light through Storytelling, which features poetry and talking points generated through the sessions. The group will be working together with BBC Newcastle and ITV to promote the podcast. The proportion of the global population who are refugees has more than doubled since 2010. These sessions provided a valuable space for recreation and development whilst this group of refugees navigated the bureaucracy and emotional upheaval of settling in the UK. This project will influence new thinking as the podcast episode will expose the general public to the stories of refugees and asylum seekers. Moreover, because the importance of playing games and creating a fun space within which all participants could safely engage was emphasised, much of the content created also paints a more intimate and complete picture of the individuals involved. As such, Midge hopes that this will work toward sustainably reducing inequality by challenging assumptions about these groups that are made within society.

Celeste Zanatta
BA (Hons) Comic and Concept Art

With this comic, Celeste wanted to show a side of sustainability that people might forget, which impacts those who wish to be involved with activism.

“Online platforms are well known for being volatile and fast-paced. Because of that, many activism and news outlets decide to use an aggressive approach, with dramatic headlines and calls to action directly targeting the viewer so that it will grab their attention. This approach, paired with social media algorithms that analyse users’ post interactions, leads to something that can be referred to as “doom scrolling”. The more a user interacts with news and activism, the more the app will show them those topics, making them go down a rabbit hole of calls to action and upsetting news.

Along with this kind of language seems to be the solutions: reposting, engaging, donating, signing petitions, and actively protesting. Unfortunately, most of these actions get drowned out by the sheer number of other issues trying to grab everyone’s attention and don’t seem to amount to anything.

What is the real solution, then? Is there no way to play a part in making the world a better place? I find that a way to avoid burnout is to narrow down how we engage with social media. Instead of trying to answer every single call to action, we should look around us and try to engage with our community more. Concentrating on issues tied to our well-being and those close to us helps us make a tangible change, which leads to healthier boundaries and reachable goals. With a healthy mind, we can accomplish so much more.”
We are committed to ensuring our Policies and Procedures support sustainability. This year we have started to develop Sustainability Plans for each Business Support Area and are working closely with Academic staff through the Staff Conscious Creatives network to ensure that sustainability is considered in every decision we make.

To support with establishing the University as a sustainability leader, sustainability is now included in the job descriptions of all permanent vacancies recruited directly by the university.

Business Travel guidance has also been reviewed to encourage staff to consider alternatives to travel, making use of technology to attend meetings and events online, as well as encouraging sustainable and active travel options where travel is considered necessary.

Our annual Travel Survey was carried out in January 2022 to obtain representative results following coronavirus restriction. Of those who completed the survey, 92% of students and 66% of staff were travelling to the University sustainably.

Going forward, we will continue to develop and review policies and procedures across the University to identify opportunities to further embed sustainability.

Who Is Afraid of Ideology?
The Galleries team has successfully started to implement their Area Sustainability Plan with the focus of the recent exhibition ‘Who Is Afraid of Ideology?’, which brings together Marwa Arsanios’ complete film quadrilogy alongside a tapestry piece. Arsanios’ work results from a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to research and filmmaking that involves engagement with eco-feminist communities in conflict zones and archival materials.

Arsanios confronts long-established political and socioeconomic systems of oppression and exploitation by portraying alternative ways of living in harmony with nature. Women’s lived experiences and anti-colonial struggles marked by collectivism, care and self-defence become an example for wider social and political change.

We are committed to providing support to ensure all staff understand the principles of sustainability and how they relate to their role within the University.

Sustainability is now included in staff inductions and training has been offered to all staff, both as Carbon Literacy training through SAIL and as CPD role-specific training. Individual and area-specific training has also been delivered by the Sustainability team and other staff across the University with discipline specific sustainability knowledge.

**Sustainability within Filmmaking**

BAFTA organisation albert supports the global Film and TV industry to reduce the environmental impacts of production and create content that supports a vision for a sustainable future. BA (Hons) Filmmaking Senior Lecturer Tom Chimiak undertook albert’s sustainability training scheme which Tom then embedded within the BA Filmmaking course. All Level 6 students are now assessed on sustainability, researching and developing sustainability manifestos which they then embed in their shoots. Tom is now supporting other visual disciplines, such as Comic and Concept Art, to embed the scheme within their programme, supporting more of our students to become BAFTA albert graduates. As a member of the University’s Sustainability Research Group, Tom will also continue to carry out research focusing on the use of colour and space while exploring disability art and sustainability within filmmaking.

Image: Andrea Shearer (BA (Hons) Filmmaking), Green is the New Black
Get Involved
Everyone has a part to play in establishing the highest possible standards of sustainability across all our core activities at Leeds Arts University. Find out more and get involved.

www.leeds-art.ac.uk/about-us/sustainability