Staff Sustainability Survey 2020

Summary Report

Executive Summary

This reports presents the findings of the Staff Sustainability Survey conducted in March 2020 at the University of Surrey. A final sample of 372 members of staff was achieved, with responses being collected online and through direct engagement.

The results show that the vast majority of respondents care about the environment and actively try to reduce their energy consumption and waste at the workplace. However, about half of respondents think that this does not apply to other people in their school or department.

When asked about local problems and global issues, most responses revolve around climate change and local impacts of extreme weather events, such as flooding and storms, but also around overcrowding and problems when getting to work due to increasing traffic congestion.

Photo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash

Executive Summary

Over 90% of respondents think that sustainability should be a key consideration for universities, and over 80% think that good sustainability credentials make a university a better place to work.

Finally, a good number of respondents acknowledge the sustainability achievements made by the university over the last year, particularly in reducing plastic waste. However, there is still a large number of respondents who do not have a clear picture of the University's sustainability performance, and there is the general perception that Surrey is lagging behind other universities in terms of sustainability and needs to do more to make progress.
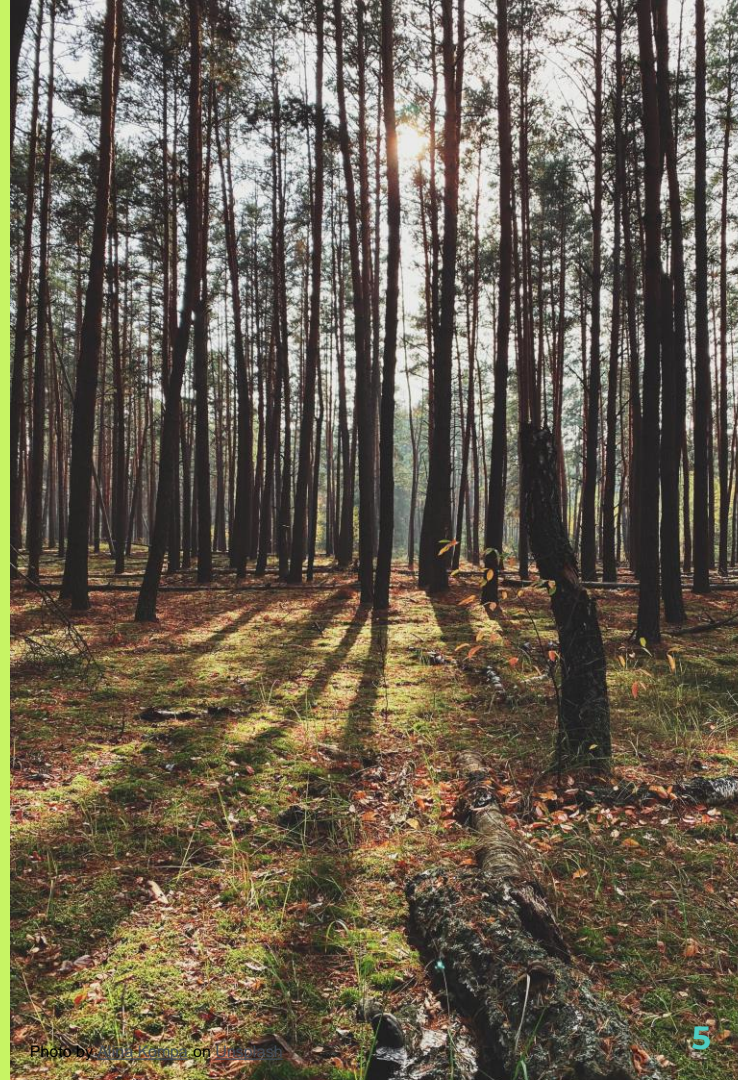
Photo by Bruno Soares on Unsplash

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1.

Introduction

1.1 Staff Sustainability Survey 2020

In 2017, Surrey established a vision for sustainability across operational, curricular and research areas, and 2018 marked the start of a new effort to turn this into a coherent strategy.

Embedding sustainability into organisational culture was set as one of the major goals for the upcoming years. In order to achieve this, a better understanding of staff and students' behaviour on campus, their perceptions of Surrey's environmental performance and their concerns regarding global and local environmental issues was needed.

Therefore, all staff and students at Surrey were invited to take the Sustainability Survey in May 2019. In order to measure progress the staff survey was repeated in March 2020. The student survey was cancelled due to the covid19 outbreak in the UK and resulting university closure.

2.

Data Collection

2.1 Sampling and Recruitment

An email invitation was sent out to all faculty staff and the survey was promoted through other channels such as University Newsletters, Intranet, and screens on campus. to boost response numbers and mitigate self-selection bias, staff were engaged on campus and asked to fill in the survey on tablet computers.

A total of 454 responses (369 online and 85 through direct engagement) were submitted, and from those, 372 responses (12.4% of staff population) were used for analysis.


Photo by William Iven on Unsplash

2.2 Impact of Covid-19 on the Survey

While covid-19 undoubtedly had an impact on response rates and data quality, the majority of data were collected before the outbreak in the UK.

By March 13, there were still less than 1,000 cases in the UK, the university functioned as normal and the UK government had not urged the public to practice social distancing.

Figure 1: Survey responses by date
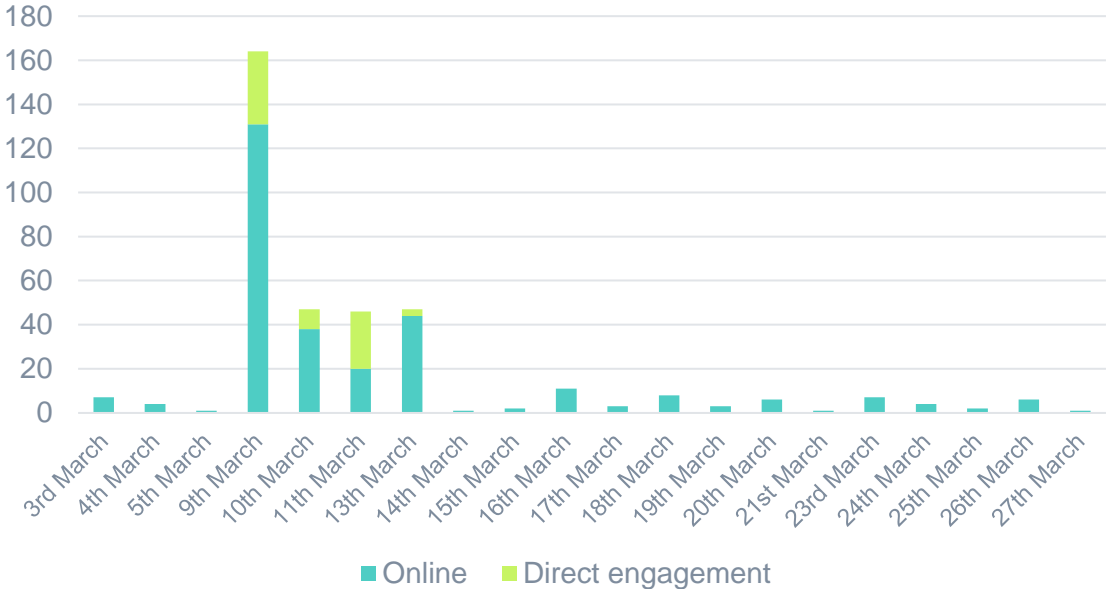
3.

Demographics
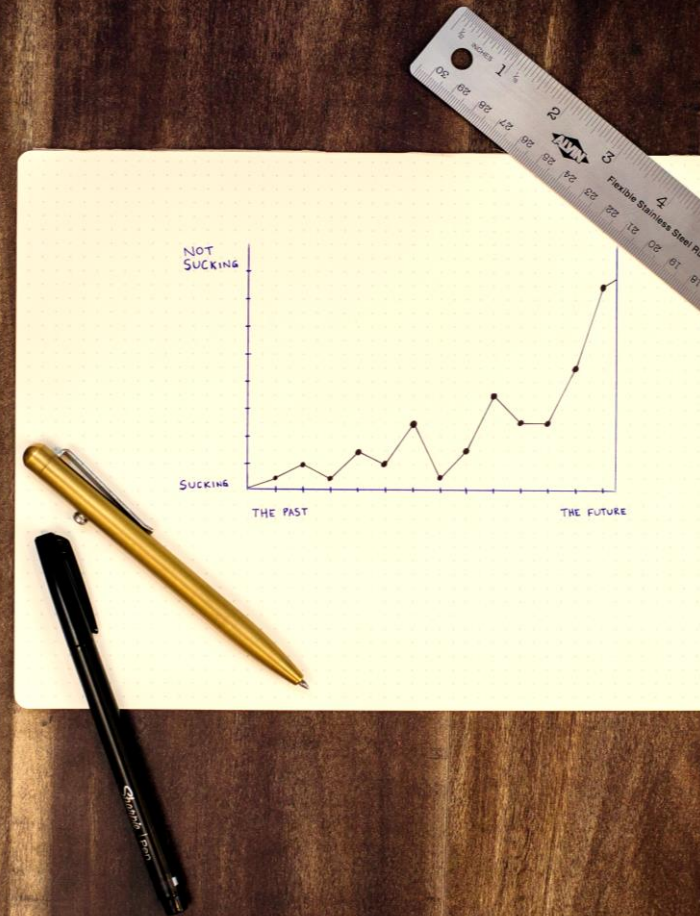
3.1 Demographics

The respondents' average age is 43 years[1], and the average time working at the university 7 years[2].

About a third of respondents[3] said that they took the Sustainability Survey last year in May 2019.

Most respondents are female, and the majority of respondents live in Surrey. About two thirds of responses come from professional staff. There is a good balance of responses from all three faculties.
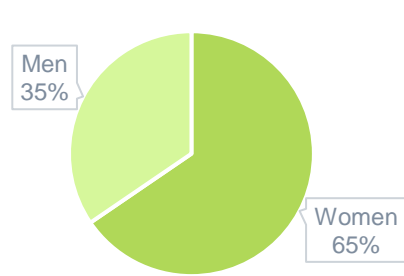
Figure 2: Respondents by gender

Men 35%
Women 65%

Figure 3: Respondents by county

London 6%
Other 11%
Hampshire 14%
Surrey 69%
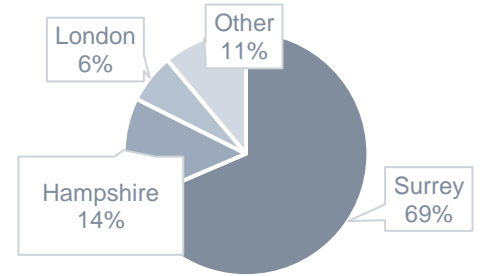
Figure 4: Respondents by occupation

Academic 35%
Professional 65%
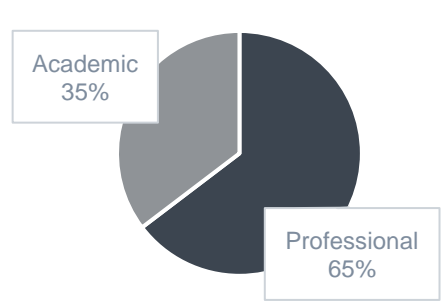
Figure 5: Academic staff by faculty

FEPS 32%
FHMS 36%
FASS 32%
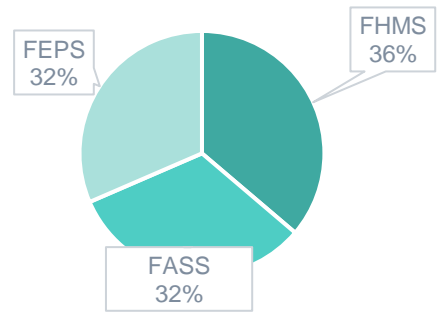
[1] based on 358 responses [2]362 responses [3]368 responses
Figure 2: 362 responses (women response rate: 13.7% men: 8.1%)
Figure 3: 369 responses
Figure 4: 365 responses (professional staff response rate: 16% academic staff: 7.9%)
Figure 5: 129 responses (FHMS response rate: 8.9% FASS: 8.3% FEPS: 6.4%)

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4.

Energy and Waste at the Workplace

4.1 Attitudes and Behaviours at the Workplace (A)

The vast majority of respondents thought that pro-environmental behaviour at the workplace is extremely or very important.

In the same way, most respondents stated that they engage in pro-environmental behaviours at the workplace.

Figure 6: To what extent do you believe it is important to…
(responses in percentage)

	Extremely/very important
switch off lights	90
turn off your computer	85
turn down the radiator	82
only print when necessary	87
dispose food waste	87
use a reusable cup	78

Legend:
- Extremely/very important
- Moderately important
- Slightly/not important
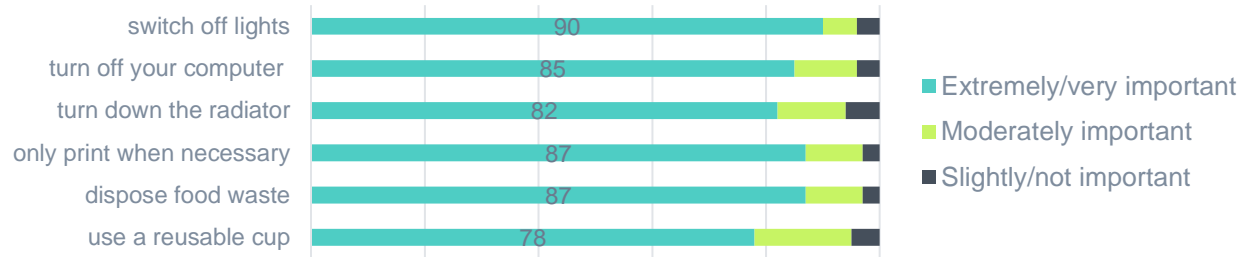
Figure 7: To what extent do you agree with the following statements:
(responses in percentage)

	Strongly agree/agree
I switch off lights	79
I turn off my computer	87
I turn down the radiator	56
I print when necessary	87
I dispose food waste	87
I use a reusable cup	72

Legend:
- Strongly agree/agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Strongly disagree/disagree
- Not applicable
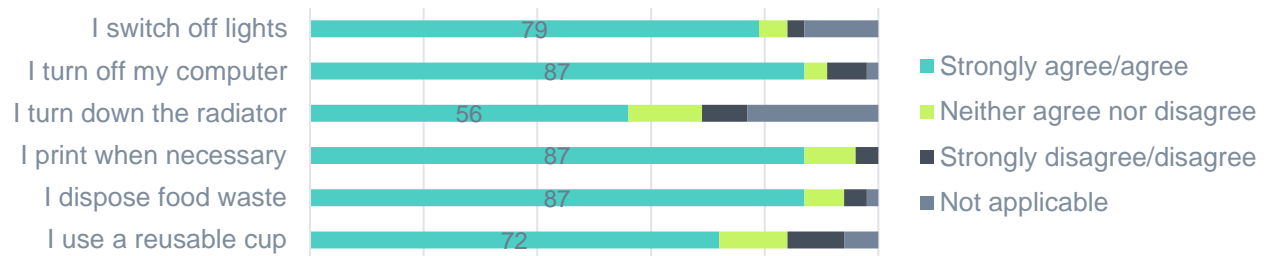
4.1 Attitudes and Behaviours at the Workplace (B)

However, less than half of respondents thought that colleagues or co-workers believed that pro-environmental behaviour is important.

Similarly. less than half thought that other people in their school or department would behave in a environmentally friendly way.

Figure 8: To what extent do you believe other people in your school/department think it is important to… (responses in percentage)

	Extremely/very important	Moderately important	Slightly/not important	Not applicable
switch off lights	43	33	13	
turn off their computer	41	29	24	
turn down the radiator	28	28	26	
print when necessary	39	33	24	
dispose food waste	40	33	22	
use a reusable cup	42	34	19	

Figure 9: To what extent do you believe other people in your school/dept… (responses in percentage)

	Most/a lot of people	A fair number	A small number/nobody
switch off lights	41	23	20
turn off their computer	51	22	21
turn down radiator	21	21	34
print when necessary	38	38	21
dispose food waste	39	34	23
use reusable cup	45	30	22

Figure 8: average of 359 responses
Figure 9: average of 363 responses

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4.1 Attitudes and Behaviours at the Workplace (C)

Apart from heating, which is often centrally controlled, over 70% of respondents stated that is was extremely easy or easy to behave in an environmentally friendly way at work.

Figure 10: To what extent do you believe it is difficult or easy for you to…
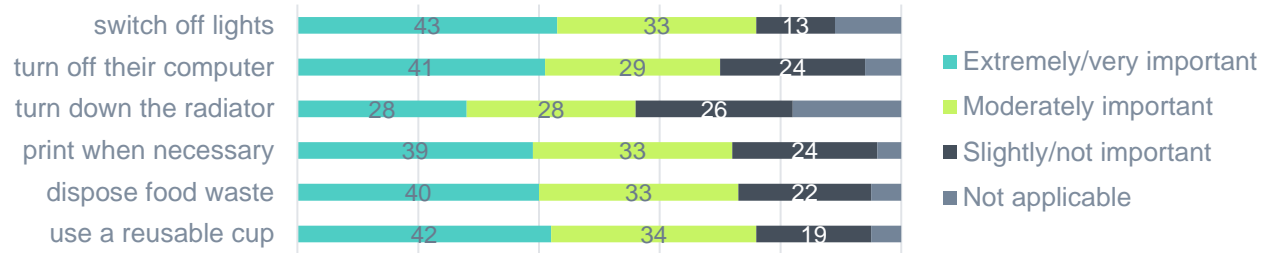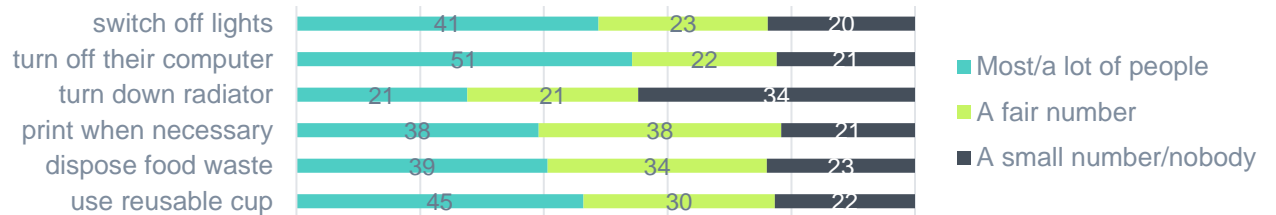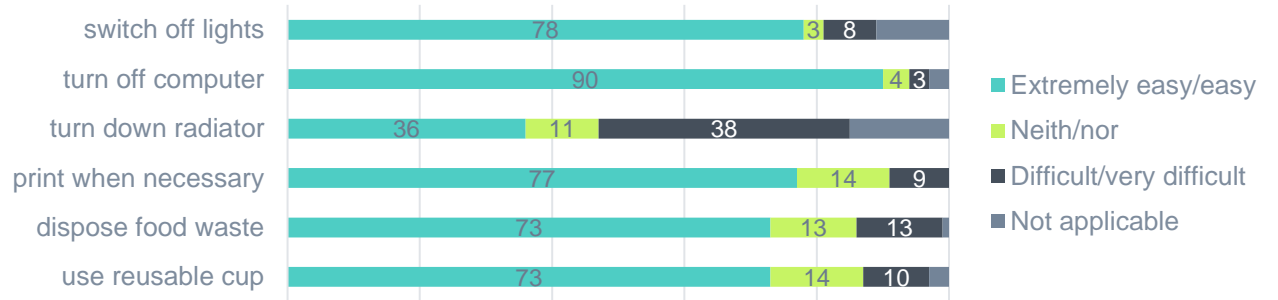(responses in percentage)

* Full-length survey questions for figure 6-10

1) Switch off lights when leaving the office

2) Turn off the computer before leaving

3) Turn down the radiator rather than open a window when it is too warm

4) Only print when necessary

5) Dispose food waste in designated bins

6) Use a reusable/china cup when buying coffee/tea on campus

4.2 Energy and Waste at the Workplace

Around 80% of respondents feel responsible for energy and waste at the workplace, and over 90% said that they try to save energy and reduce waste. Similarly, over 70% feel guilty when they waste energy or produce waste.

While around 80% feel in control over the waste they are producing, less than half say the same about their energy use.

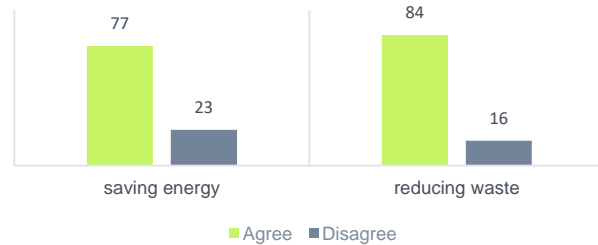### Figure 11: At my workplace, I feel responsible for...
(responses in percentage)

	saving energy	reducing waste
Agree	77	84
Disagree	23	16

■ Agree ■ Disagree

Figure 12: At my workplace, I try to...
(responses in percentage)

	save energy	reduce waste
Agree	92	92
Disagree	8	8

■ Agree ■ Disagree
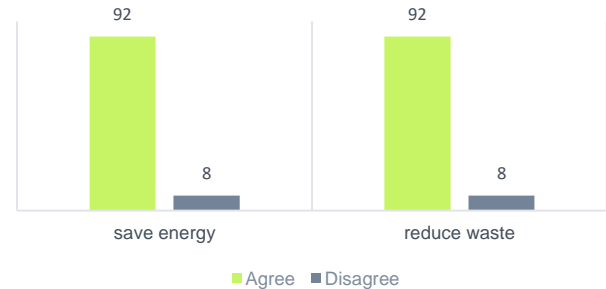
Figure 13: At my workplace, I feel guilty when I…
(responses in percentage)

	waste energy	produce waste
Agree	76	76
Disagree	24	24

■ Agree ■ Disagree
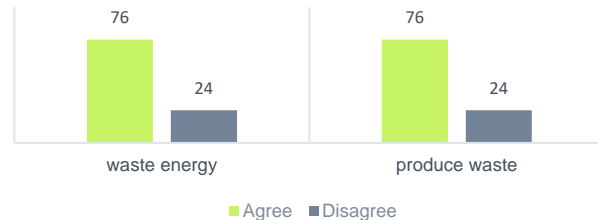
Figure 14: At my workplace, I feel in control over…
(responses in percentage)

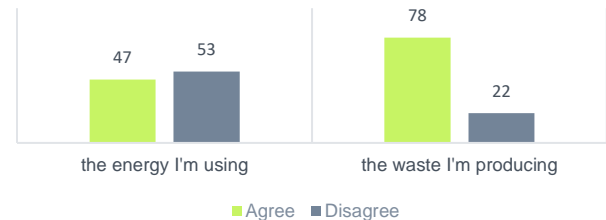|	the energy I'm using	the waste I'm producing
Agree	47	78
Disagree	53	22

■ Agree ■ Disagree

Figure 11: average of 282 responses; Figure 12: average of 309 responses
Figure 13: average of 278 responses; Figure 14: average of 293 responses

4.3 Energy and Waste at Home

Over 90% of respondents feel responsible for and try to save energy and reduce waste at home.

Similarly, over 90% feel guilty when they waste energy or produce waste at home., and over 90% feel in control over their energy use and waste.

Figure 15: When I'm at home, I feel responsible for...
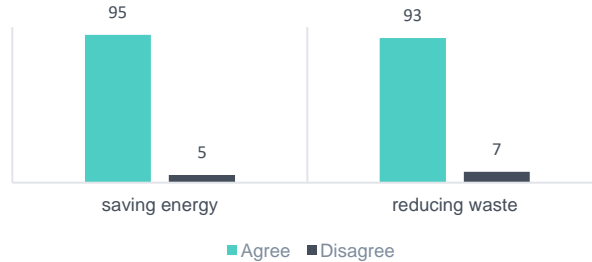(responses in percentage)

	saving energy	reducing waste
Agree	95	93
Disagree	5	7

■ Agree ■ Disagree

Figure 16: When I'm at home, I try to...
(responses in percentage)

	save energy	reduce waste
Agree	95	96
Disagree	5	4

■ Agree ■ Disagree
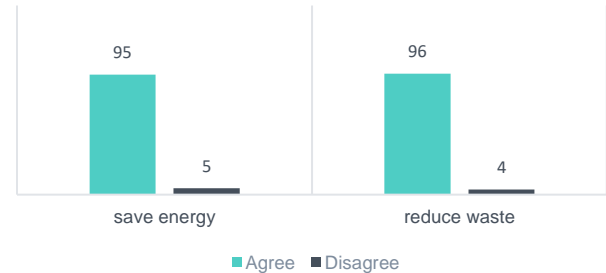
Figure 17: When I'm at home, I feel guilty when I…
(responses in percentage)

	waste energy	produce waste
Agree	91	90
Disagree	9	10

■ Agree ■ Disagree
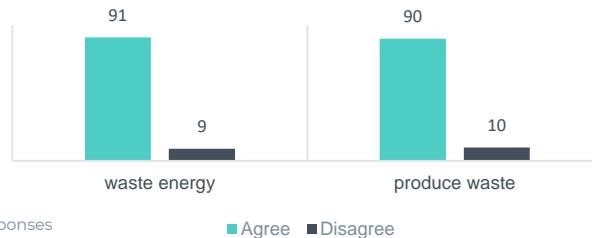
Figure 18: When I'm at home, I feel in control over…
(responses in percentage)

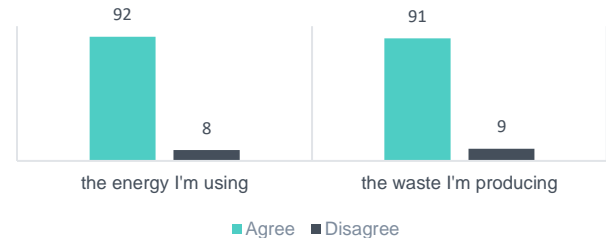|	the energy I'm using	the waste I'm producing
Agree	92	91
Disagree	8	9

■ Agree ■ Disagree

Figure 15: average of 260 responses; Figure 16: average of 296 responses
Figure 17: average of 305 responses; Figure 18: average of 308 responses

5.

Local Problems and Global Issues

5.1 Local Problems (A)

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to think about events that happened over the last year in and around the county where they live, and to describe the three most important events that they associate with serious problems affecting them.

A total of 202 responses were used for analysis. Responses were coded into 9 overarching themes, and 20 subthemes.


Figure 19: Local problems word cloud

5.1 Local Problems (B)

Over a third of responses were on transport, with major subthemes being traffic congestion, public transport being pricy and inconvenient, and poor road and air quality.

Over 25% of responses were on extreme weather events, mainly on flooding and storms, reflecting recent weather events in England.

Other themes included covid19, cost of living, job insecurity, Brexit, elections, and overcrowding.

Figure 20: Events that respondents associate with serious problems affecting them
(responses in percentage)
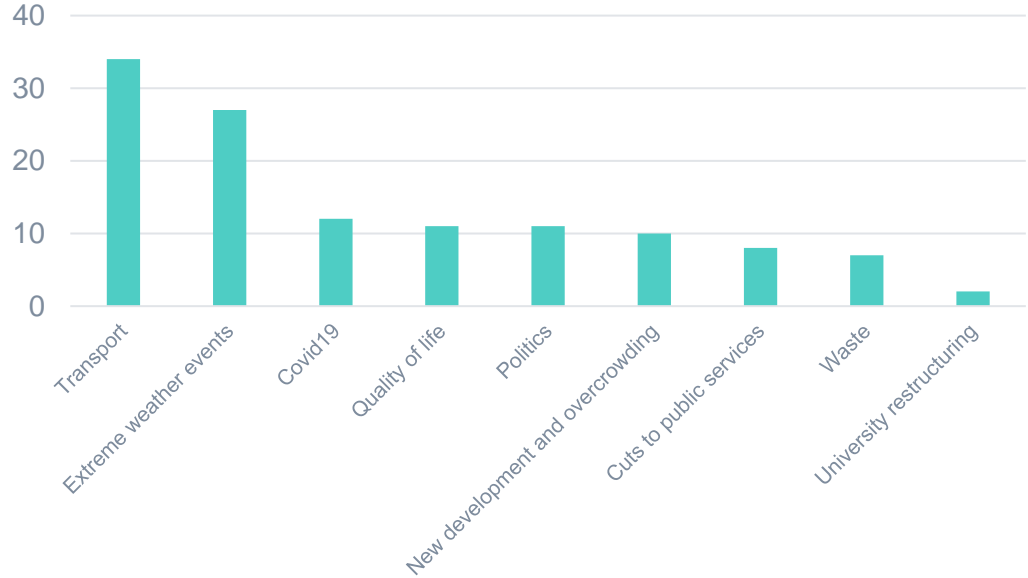
5.1 Local Problems (C)

Participants were asked to choose out of seven local problems the one that seemed most serious to them.

About a quarter of respondents said they worried most about job insecurity, almost 20% stated that local air pollution concerned them, and about 15% worried about green belt loss in their area of residence.

Figure 21: Which of the following do you consider the single most serious problem affecting you?
(responses in percentage)

5.2 Global Issues (A)

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to think about events that happened over the last year on a global scale, and to describe the three most important events that they associate with serious problems affecting them.

A total of 180 responses were used for analysis. Responses were coded into 8 overarching themes and 7 subthemes.



Figure 22: Global issues word cloud

5.2 Global Issues (B)

Over 40% of responses were on climate change, environmental degradation and plastic pollution.

Around 20% of responses were on political issues, with major subthemes being Brexit, the rise of right wing populism, political inaction on climate change and political instability in general.

Other themes included covid19, poverty and inequality, economic instability, overpopulation and fake news and misinformation.

Figure 23: Events that respondents associate with serious problems facing the world
(responses in percentage)
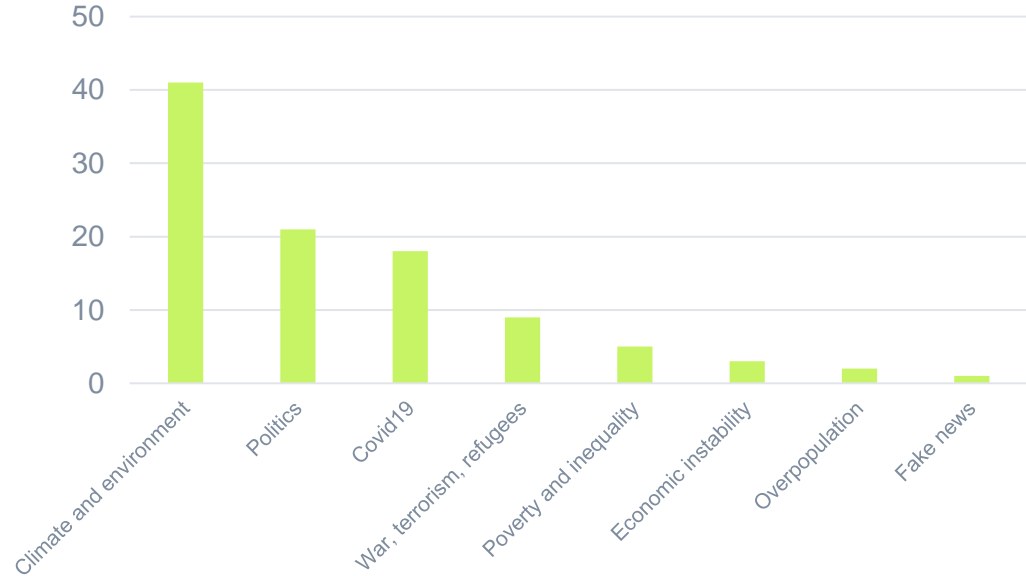
5.2 Global Issues (C)

Participants were asked to choose out of seven global issues the one that seemed most serious to them.

About half of respondents said they worried most about climate change, and about 15% stated that they were concerned about poverty, hunger and lack of drinking water. Another 15% worried about increasing global population, and about 10% about economic instability.

Figure 24: Which of the following do you consider the single most serious problem facing the world?
(responses in percentage)
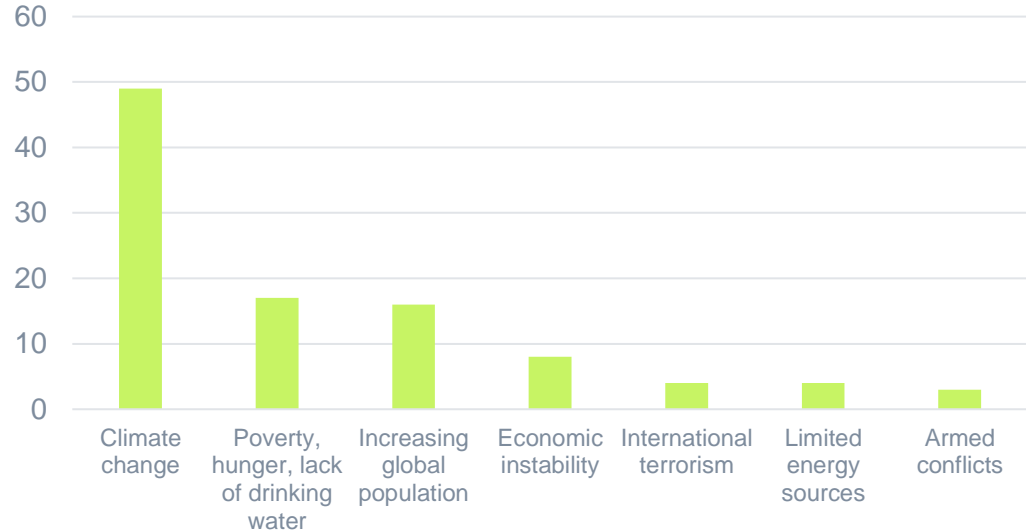
6.

# Sustainability at Universities in the UK

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6.1 Sustainable Universities

The vast majority of respondents thought sustainability should be a key consideration for all universities in the UK.

Over 80% said that good sustainability credentials are important to make a university a more attractive place to work.

Figure 25: I believe sustainability should be a key consideration for all universities in the UK

5%
94%
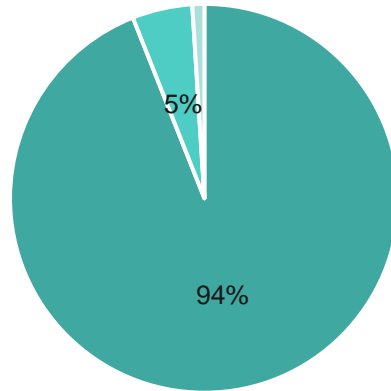
■ Strongly agree/agree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree
■ Strongly disagree/disagree

Figure 26: I believe good sustainability credentials at a university are important to make them an attractive place to work

11%
84%
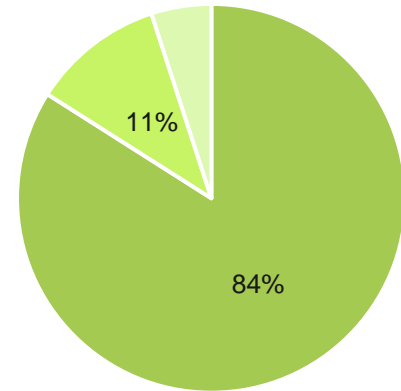
■ Strongly agree/agree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree
■ Strongly disagree/disagree

6.2 Characteristics of Sustainable Universities

The majority of respondents thought that reducing waste and carbon emissions was the most important characteristic of a sustainable university.

The second most important characteristic was said to be integrating sustainability into learning, teaching and research.

Figure 27: What are the most important characteristics of a sustainable university?
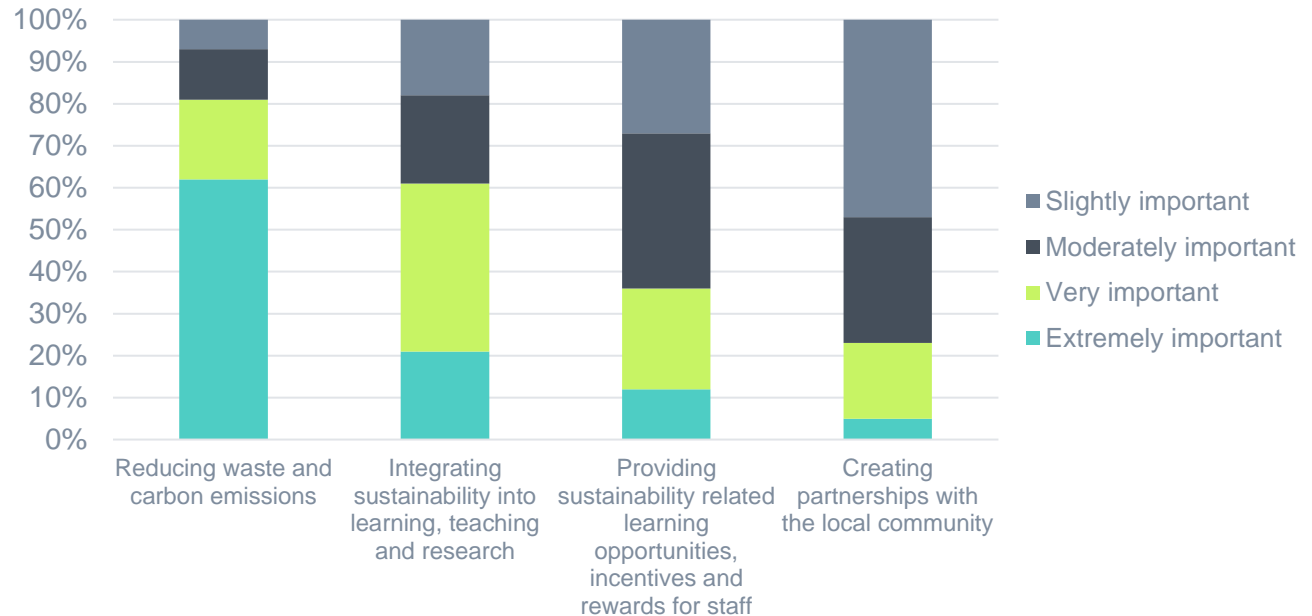
7.

Sustainability at the University of Surrey

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7.1 Sustainability at the University of Surrey

Over a third of respondents believed that, compared to all other Universities in the UK, the University of Surrey ranked between place 61 and 80 in terms of sustainability performance.

About a third of respondents ranks Surrey higher than place 60, and another third lower than place 80.

Figure 28: Out of 154 Universities in the UK, I believe that in terms of sustainability, the University of Surrey ranks:
(responses in percentage)

Place 1-20	Place 21-40	Place 41-60	Place 61-80	Place 81-100	Place 101-120	Place 121-140	Place 141-154
6	15	14	34	15	8	6	2

7.2 Changes at the University of Surrey (A)

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to recall any changes related to sustainability at the University of Surrey over the past year.

A total of 180 responses were used for analysis. Responses were coded into 4 overarching themes and 21 subthemes.

Overall, the dominating theme was waste and plastic reduction, more specifically the ban on single-use plastic cups and the financial incentives to bring your own cup when purchasing take-out coffee/tea.

Figure 28: Changes at the University of Surrey word cloud

7.2 Changes at the University of Surrey (B)

Over 50% of responses were on waste, with major subthemes being the promotion of reusable cups, the ban of single-use plastic cups, the introduction of compostable containers at catering outlets, recycling, the introduction of food waste bins and the reduction in paper use.

Around 20% of responses were on campus improvements, more specifically on energy and lighting, the new water fountains and initiatives to save water.

The third largest theme was transport, with about 15% or responses. The most important subthemes were the introduction of Nextbike and electric vehicles, university parking arrangements and the increasing acceptance of remote working.

Figure 29: Changes on campus related to sustainability that respondents could recall
(responses in percentage)
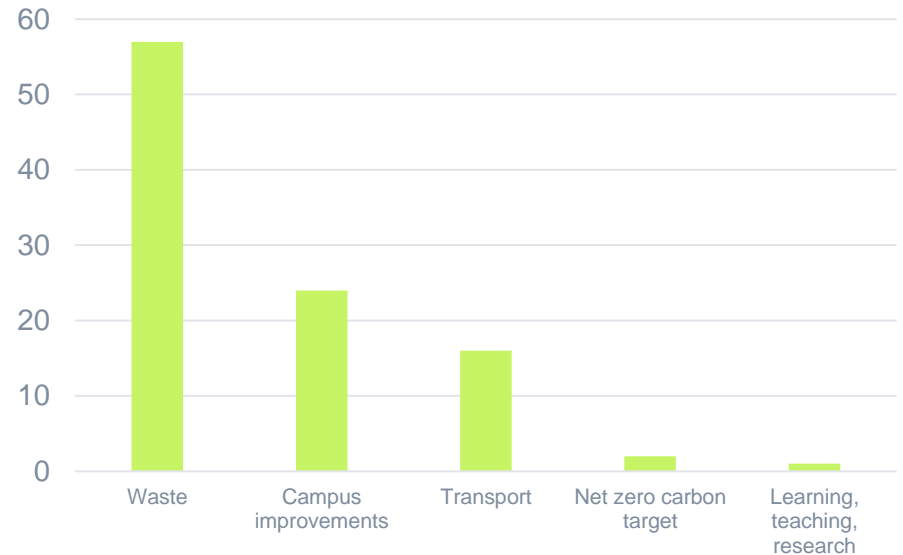
7.3 Sustainability in Estates and Operations

Respondents have mixed perceptions on Surrey's sustainability performance in operations.

While a large number of respondents remain neutral on most questions, over 60% think that the university is protecting biodiversity on campus, and over 40% stated that Surrey manages waste efficiently.

Figure 30: I believe that the University of Surrey is...
(responses in percentage)

- Strongly agree/agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Strongly disagree/disagree
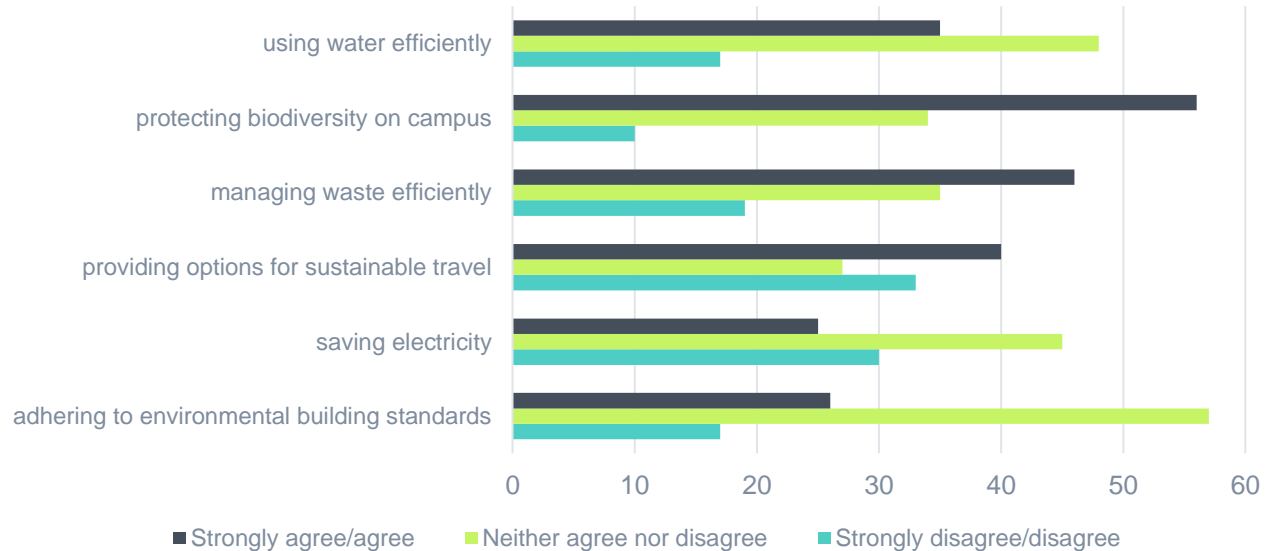
7.4 Sustainability in Learning, Teaching, Research

Over 50% of respondents remain neutral on questions about sustainability in learning, teaching and research.

About 40% strongly agree/agree that the university includes sustainability into research, and about a third of respondents think that Surrey includes sustainability into teaching and helps students to live more sustainably.

Figure 31: I believe that the University of Surrey is...
(responses in percentage)

■ Strongly agree/agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Strongly disagree/disagree
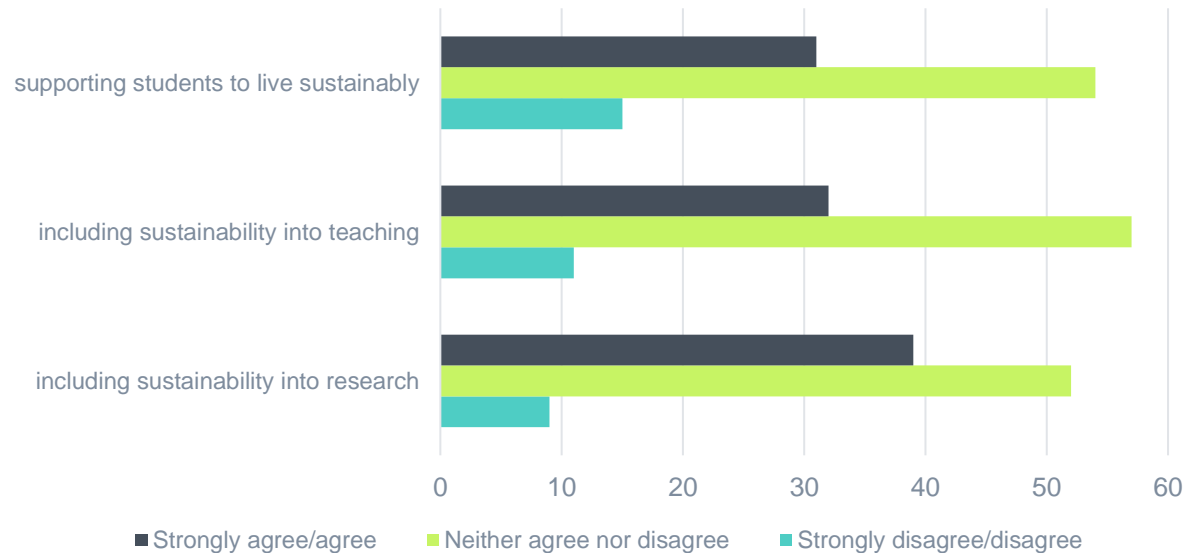
7.5 Sustainable Partnerships and Community

About half of respondents think that the university has a positive impact on communities and wider public, and that enough vegetarian options are offered at food outlets.

About a third stated that Surrey is embedding sustainability principles into procuring of goods and services.

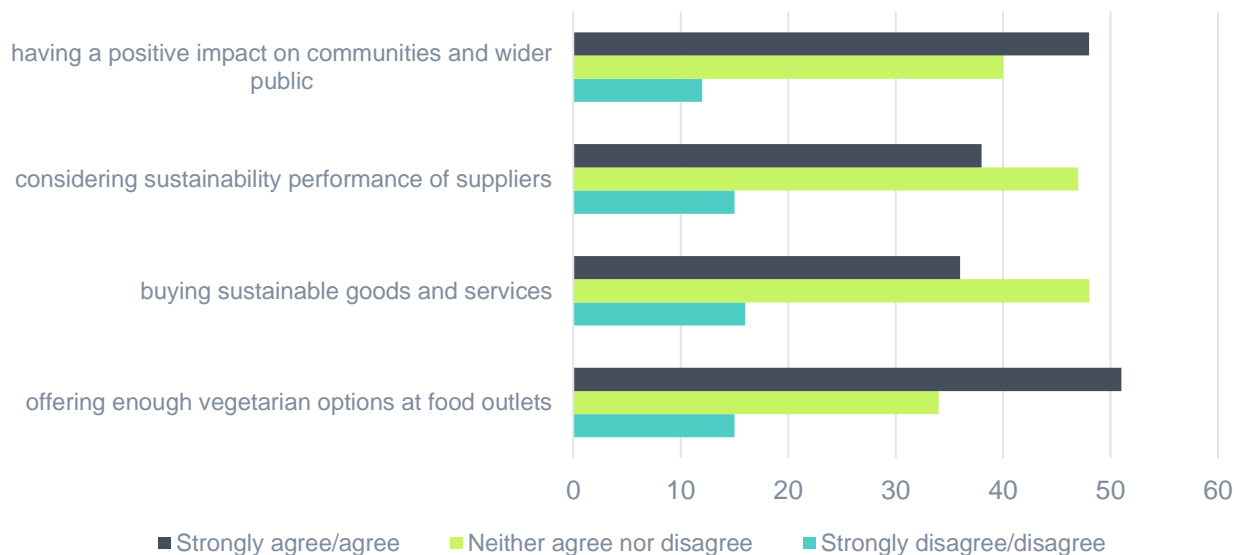Figure 32: I believe that the University of Surrey is...
(responses in percentage)

7.6 Sustainability Leadership

About half of respondents think that the university has a positive impact on communities and wider public, and that enough vegetarian options are offered at food outlets.

About a third stated that Surrey is embedding sustainability principles into procuring of goods and services.

Figure 33: I believe that the University of Surrey is...
(responses in percentage)

Legend:
- Strongly agree/agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Strongly disagree/disagree

Categories:
- promoting social mobility, equality and collaboration at work
- rewarding staff to lead on sustainability initiatives
- supporting wellbeing of staff
- acting as a responsible investor
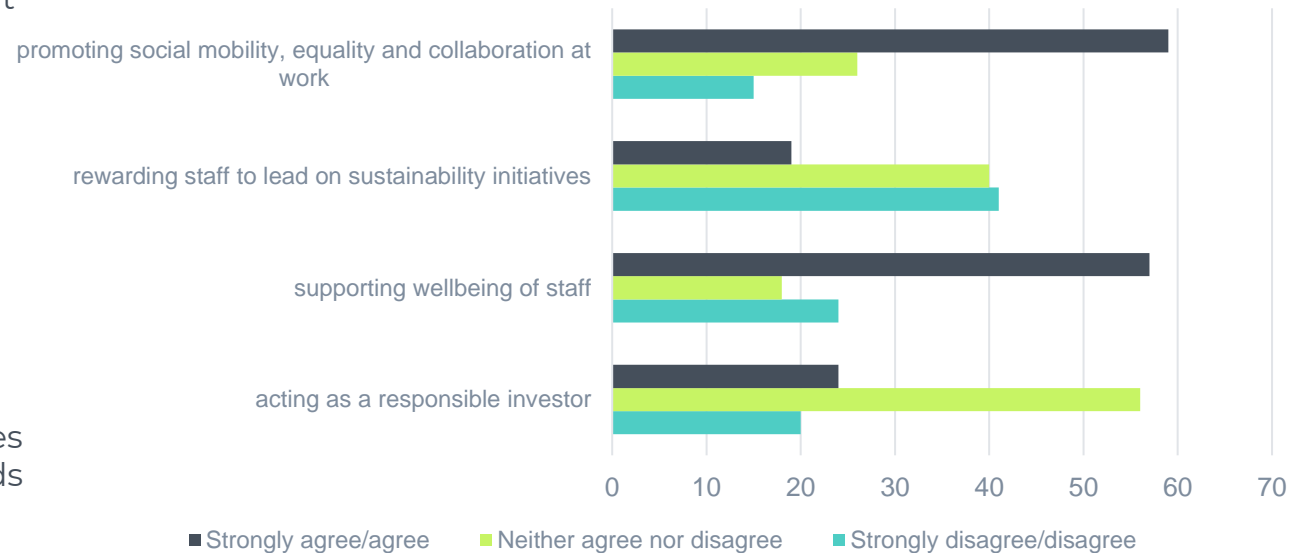
8.

Comments and suggestions

8.1 Comments and Suggestions

The last section of the survey asked staff to write a comment or a suggestions for the sustainability team. In total, 64 respondents chose to leave a comment.

Figure 34: Topics mentioned in the open comment section:

Waste	Transport	Energy	Engagement	Biodiversity	Partnerships	Food
32%	25%	25%	8%	6%	3%	1%

About a third of comments were on **waste and recycling**, with a large number of respondents expressing confusion over waste management practices. There were also suggestions to reduce paper and plastic waste, e. g. through uptake of technology or encouraging departments to order milk in glass bottles.

About 25% of responses were on **transport**. Suggestions included improving public transport to the university, promoting acceptance of remote working, and reducing academic air travel.

Another 25% of responses were on **energy**, more specifically on wastage from lights and equipment not being turned off over night, and lack of control with regard to the heating system.

9.

Conclusions

9.1 Survey Summary

The vast majority of respondents said that it is important for them to reduce their **energy use and waste at the workplace** and that they actively try to do so. However, less than half of respondents think that other people in their school or department believe that reducing energy use or waste is important or that others try to reduce energy use or waste.

When asked about **local problems**, most staff would mention congested roads and public transport being pricy and inconvenient. Another major theme were recent extreme weather events in England, such as flooding and storms. With regard to **global issues**, most respondents worry about climate change, environmental degradation and political issues, such as Brexit and right wing populism.

The vast majority of respondents think that **sustainability should be a key consideration for universities in the UK** and that good sustainability credentials make a university a more attractive place to work. For most respondents the focus should be on reducing waste and carbon emissions and integrating sustainability into learning, teaching and research.

With regards to **sustainability at the University of Surrey**, respondents appreciate progress so far, particularly efforts to reduce waste (e. g. single-use plastics), as well as energy and water use. However, a large number of responses also suggest that the university is not doing enough and could do much better. Results also indicate that communication of improvements has not reached a significant number of staff.

9.2 Recommendations: Energy and Waste

Results from the survey show that there is a clear lack of social and discursive norms at the university with regard to energy and waste. Most respondents think that only they care about and engage in pro-environmental behaviours, whereas the contrary is true.

Communication is key to establish norms, using both, university channels, but also direct communication, e. g. at departmental meetings.

Another way to create norms is to **use rewards** (see SurreyMoves) **that incentivise staff** to talk about energy and waste or to design structures, e. g. "lights off" stickers over switches, that help others reduce energy and waste.

Finally, **key stakeholders such as security and cleaners need to be involved** in a meaningful way to avoid sending counterproductive signals, e. g. buildings lit up out of hours.

Photo by Matthew T Rader on Unsplash

9.3 Recommendations: Local Problems and Global Issues

The problems described in the survey can have a negative impact on staff mental health and wellbeing, e. g. worries about climate change leading to eco-distress, but can also have a direct impact on health, e. g. air pollution from traffic.

While many of the problems described are out of the university's sphere of influence, and some of them are difficult to solve, e. g. transport being a wicked problem, **promoting acceptance of working remotely** could benefit staff significantly.

A good way to decrease distress caused by issues surrounding climate change is to **provide opportunities for staff to take action** as individuals or community. This can empower staff and can create multiple co-benefits, such as creating a better working climate and setting a good example for students.

Photo by Ryan Searle on Unsplash

9.4 Recommendations: Sustainability at Universities

Results from the survey show that the vast majority of staff thinks that sustainability is a very important aspect of a university. However, for most respondents sustainability seems to be mostly about environmental performance, and it seems that there is still a perception that sustainability is something that Estates or the University does for staff and students.

An increasing amount of topical literature and shared practical experience show that **to become a sustainable university, there has to be a shift in organisational culture**. That means that buy in from all staff at all levels is needed. While there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for embedding sustainability into organisational culture, following the recommendations outlined in this section would be a good first step in the right direction.

Photo by Leon Webb on Unsplash

9.5 Recommendations: University of Surrey

While there is clearly an appetite for the university to become more sustainable, progress so far has been very estates driven and communication has not reached all staff.

Making **communications more targeted and relevant** and investing times in **face-to-face interaction**, e. g. at departmental meetings could be a step in the right way.

Involving staff keen to be part of the sustainability journey is key. This can happen for instance **through policy consultations, or a framework tool that requires input from various departments**, e. g. the SDGs or the EAUC SLS. Coupling this with an **HR led incentive and reward system** (recognition rather than financial) could help spur action.

Identifying more areas where **visible and bold action** that sends a strong signal can be taken. A good example of this was the plastic cup ban or the cup charge, both measures widely supported by staff.

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Any questions?

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