



# Staff Sustainability Survey 2021

Summary Report

---

# Executive Summary

This reports presents the findings of the third Staff Sustainability Survey, carried out in June 2021 at the University of Surrey. The survey was conducted online, and a final sample of 167 responses (5.5% of the staff population) was achieved.

Although Covid-19 has respondents worried more than any other global or local issue, the vast majority think that sustainability should be a key consideration for universities in the UK, and that good sustainability credentials are important for an institution. That said, about half of respondents are not sure what Surrey is doing in different areas of sustainability, and are aware only of the more visible changes, for instance in the areas of waste management and biodiversity.

While the vast majority of respondents care about the environment, behave in an environmentally friendly way at work, and think that everyone should be responsible for implementing sustainability at Surrey, about half of them believe that their colleagues do not feel the same way. This indicates a lack of social norms, and one major challenge in the upcoming years will be to establish norms by effectively communicating with staff and providing opportunities for action.



# Table of Contents

01

Introduction

02

Energy and Waste:  
Attitudes and Behaviours

03

Local Problems  
and Global Issues

04

Sustainability at  
Universities in the UK

05

Sustainability at  
the University of Surrey

06

Conclusions



# 01 Introduction

# 1.1 Staff Sustainability Survey

In 2017, Surrey established a vision for sustainability, 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 goals for the upcoming years, and to achieve this, a better understanding of staff and students' perceptions towards sustainability and behaviours on campus was needed.

Therefore, in May 2019, the first Staff and Student Sustainability Survey was conducted at Surrey. To measure how perceptions and behaviour change over time, the Staff Survey was repeated in March 2020 and June 2021.

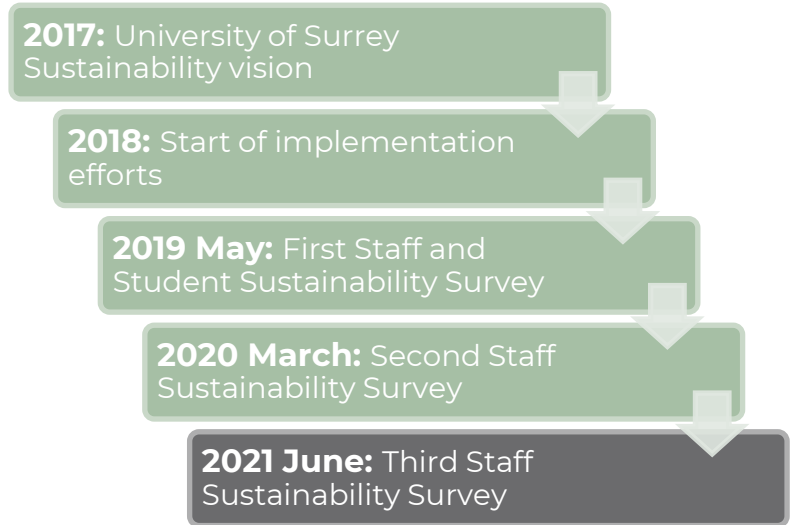


Figure 1: Sustainability surveys timeline

## 1.2 Data Collection

In the first week of June 2021, an email invitation was sent out to all faculty staff, and the survey was also promoted through other channels such as University Newsletters and the Intranet.

A total of 217 responses were submitted, and from those, 167 responses (5.5% of staff population) were used for analysis. While this is less than in 2020 and 2019 (372 and 448 responses), the analysis can still provide valuable insights into perceptions and behaviours regarding sustainability at Surrey over the last year.

Over a third (37%) of respondents<sup>1</sup> said that they took the Sustainability Survey in 2019 or 2020, and an additional report comparing results from all three surveys will be published by the end of 2021.



# 1.3 Survey Sample

The respondents' average age is 44 years<sup>1</sup>, and average time working at the university 7 years<sup>2</sup>.

Two thirds of respondents are female, and the majority of respondents live in Surrey.

Response numbers are evenly split between professional and academic staff. Of the latter, about half of responses come from FHMS, and about a quarter each from FASS and FEPS.

Figure 2: Respondents by gender

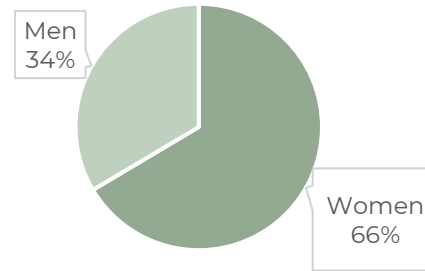


Figure 3: Respondents by county

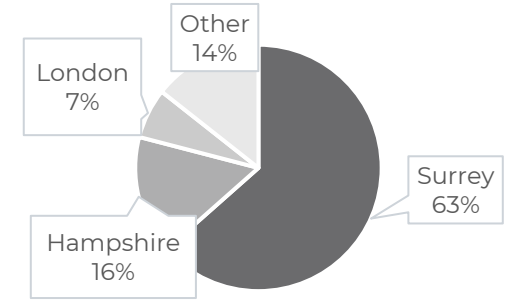


Figure 4: Respondents by occupation

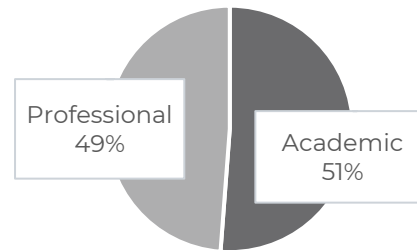


Figure 5: Academic staff by faculty

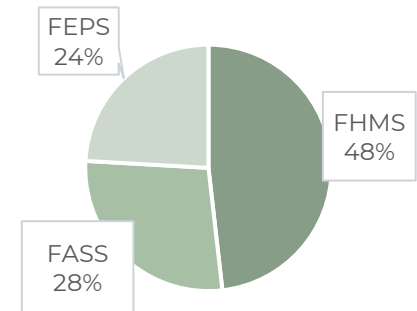


Figure 2: 167 responses (women response rate: 6.6% men: 3.8%); Figure 3: 167 responses

Figure 4: 167 responses (professional staff response rate: 6.1% academic staff: 5%); Figure 5: 85 responses (FHMS response rate: 6.7% FASS: 4.5% FEPS: 3.1%)

<sup>1</sup> based on 159 responses

<sup>2</sup> 164 response

# 1.4 Impact from Covid-19

Undoubtedly, Covid-19 had an impact on this year's staff sustainability survey, most obviously because of campus closures in 2020 and 2021, hybrid teaching, and a large number of staff working remotely.

Over half of respondents (52%) stated that between February and June 2021, they had not been working on campus.

Figure 6: Average frequency of respondents working on campus during a typical week: February - June 2021 (responses in percentage)

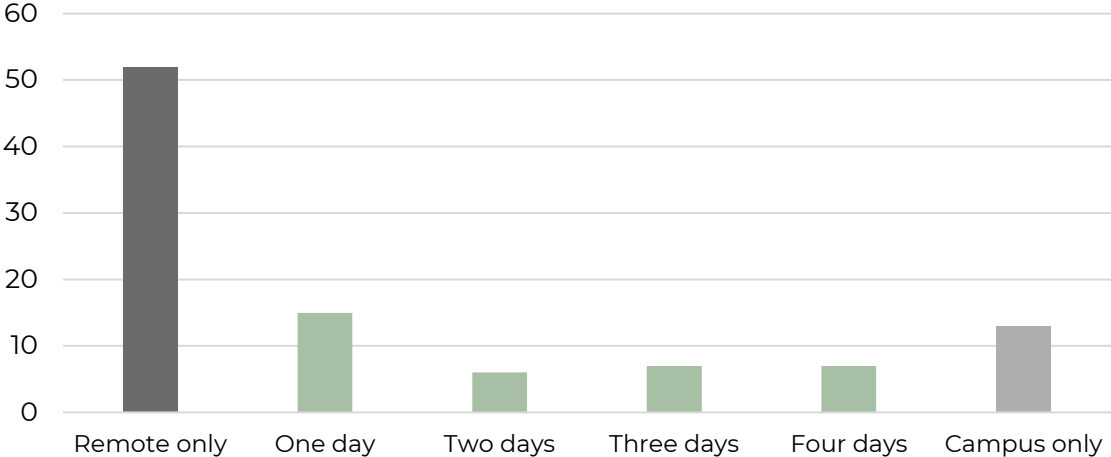


Figure 6: based on 149 responses





**02**

# **Energy and Waste**

Attitudes and Behaviours at the  
Workplace and at Home

## 2.1 Attitudes and Behaviours

The vast majority of respondents (avg. 88%) thought that pro-environmental behaviours at the workplace, such as switching off lights when leaving the office are extremely or very important.

In the same way, most respondents (avg. 81%) stated that they engage in pro-environmental behaviours at the workplace. The lower average value here is partly due to staff having limited control over the radiators in their office.

Figure 7: To what extent do you believe it is important to...  
(responses in percentage)

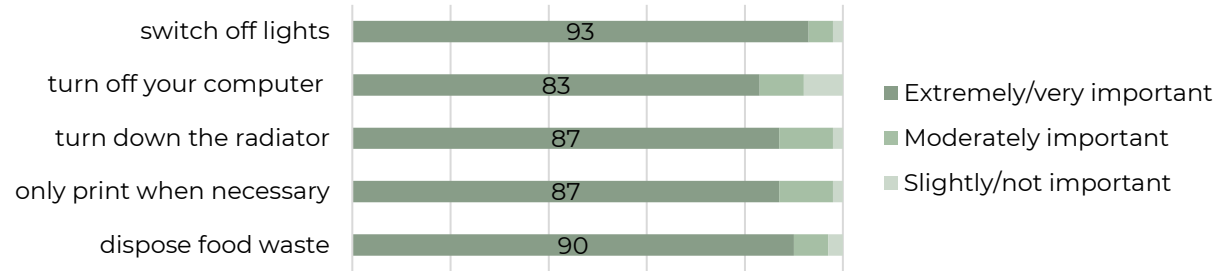
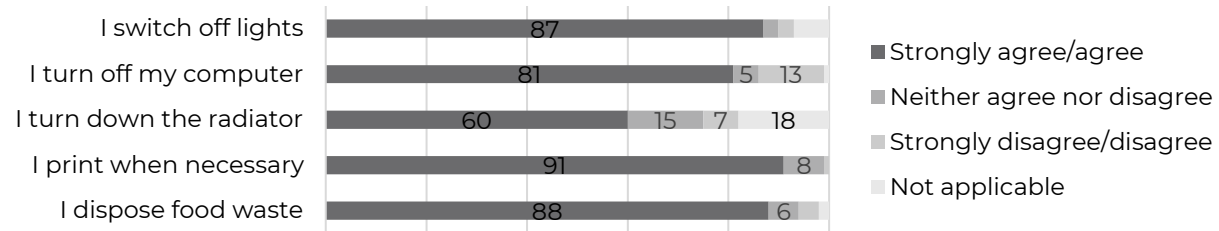


Figure 8: To what extent do you agree with the following statements:  
(responses in percentage)



## 2.2 Social Norms

Less than half of respondents (avg. 44%) thought that their colleagues and co-workers believed that pro-environmental behaviours are extremely or very important.

Similarly, less than half of respondents (avg. 45%) thought that most or a lot of people in their school or department behave in an environmentally friendly way.

Figure 9: To what extent do you believe other people in your school/department think it is important to... (responses in percentage)

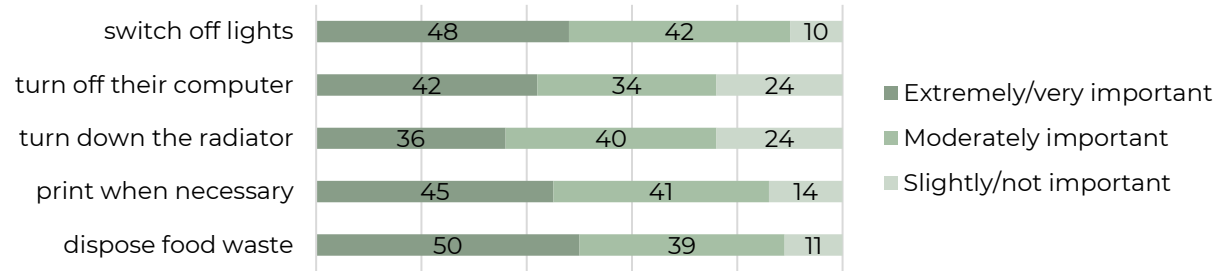
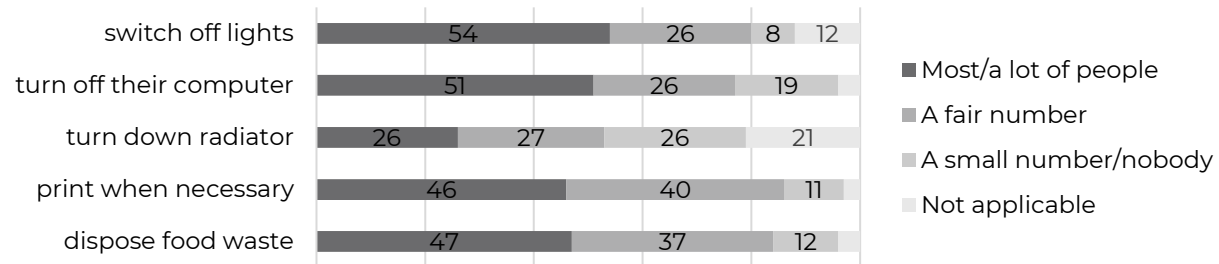


Figure 10: To what extent do you believe other people in your school/dept... (responses in percentage)

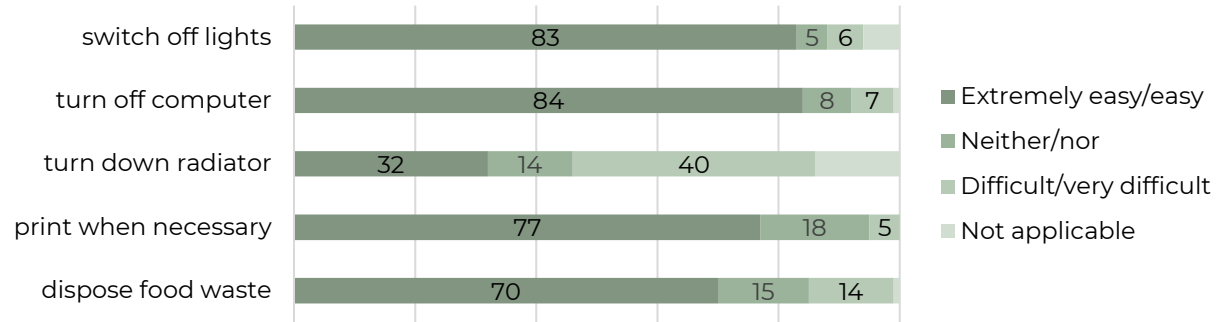


## 2.3 Perceived Behavioural Control

Most respondents stated that it was extremely easy or easy to behave in an environmentally friendly way at work.

An exception again is heating, which is often centrally controlled.

Figure 11: To what extent do you believe it is difficult or easy for you to... (responses in percentage)



### \* Full-length survey questions for Figures 6-10:

...switch off lights when leaving the office

...turn off the computer before going home

...turn down the radiator rather than open a window when it is too warm

...only print when necessary

...dispose food waste in designated bins

## 2.4 Norms and Behaviours at the Workplace

Around 70% of respondents feel responsible for energy and waste at the workplace, and over 75% said that they try to save energy and reduce waste.

Similarly, around 70% feel guilty when they waste energy or produce waste at their place of work.

While almost 80% feel in control over the waste they are producing, less than 40% felt the same about their energy use at work.

Figure 12: At my workplace, I feel responsible for... (responses in percentage)

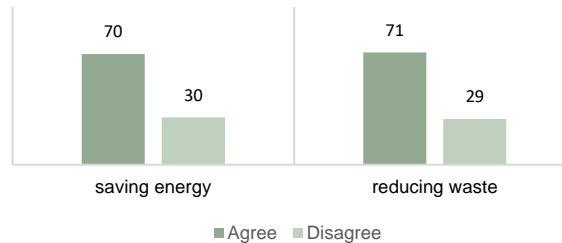


Figure 13: At my workplace, I try to... (responses in percentage)

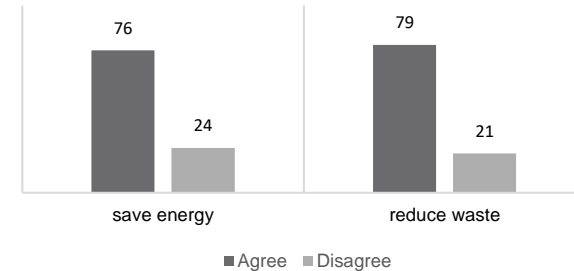


Figure 14: At my workplace, I feel guilty when I... (responses in percentage)

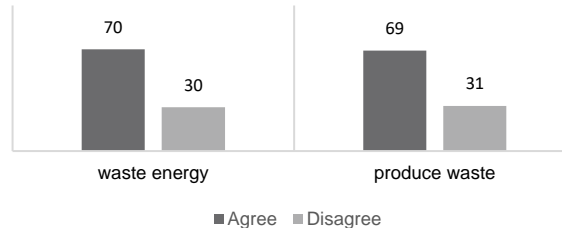
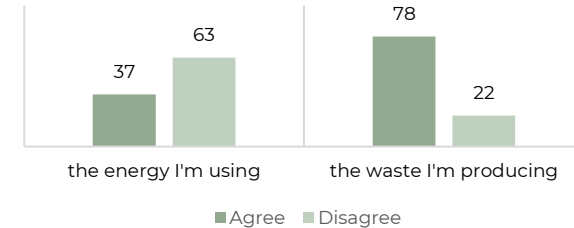


Figure 15: At my workplace, I feel in control over... (responses in percentage)



## 2.5 Norms and Behaviours at Home

Over 90% of respondents feel responsible for saving energy and reducing waste at home, and a similar number said that they try to save energy and reduce waste.

Over 80% feel guilty when they waste energy or produce waste at home, and almost 90% feel in control over their energy use and waste.

Figure 16: When I'm at home, I feel responsible for... (responses in percentage)

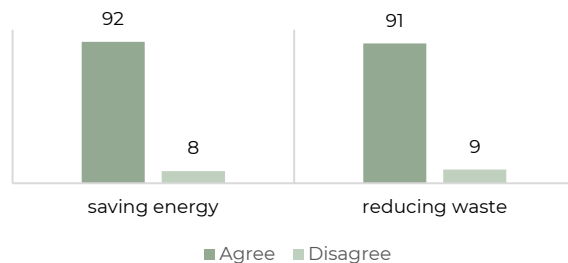


Figure 17: When I'm at home, I try to... (responses in percentage)

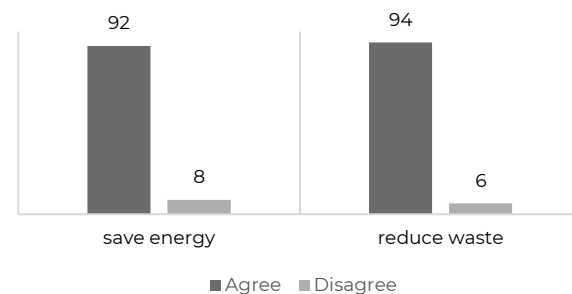


Figure 18: When I'm at home, I feel guilty when I... (responses in percentage)

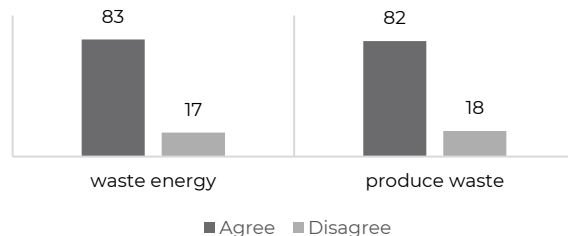
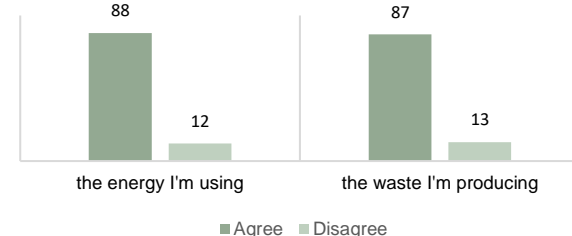


Figure 19: When I'm at home, I feel in control over... (responses in percentage)





03

# Local Problems and Global Issues



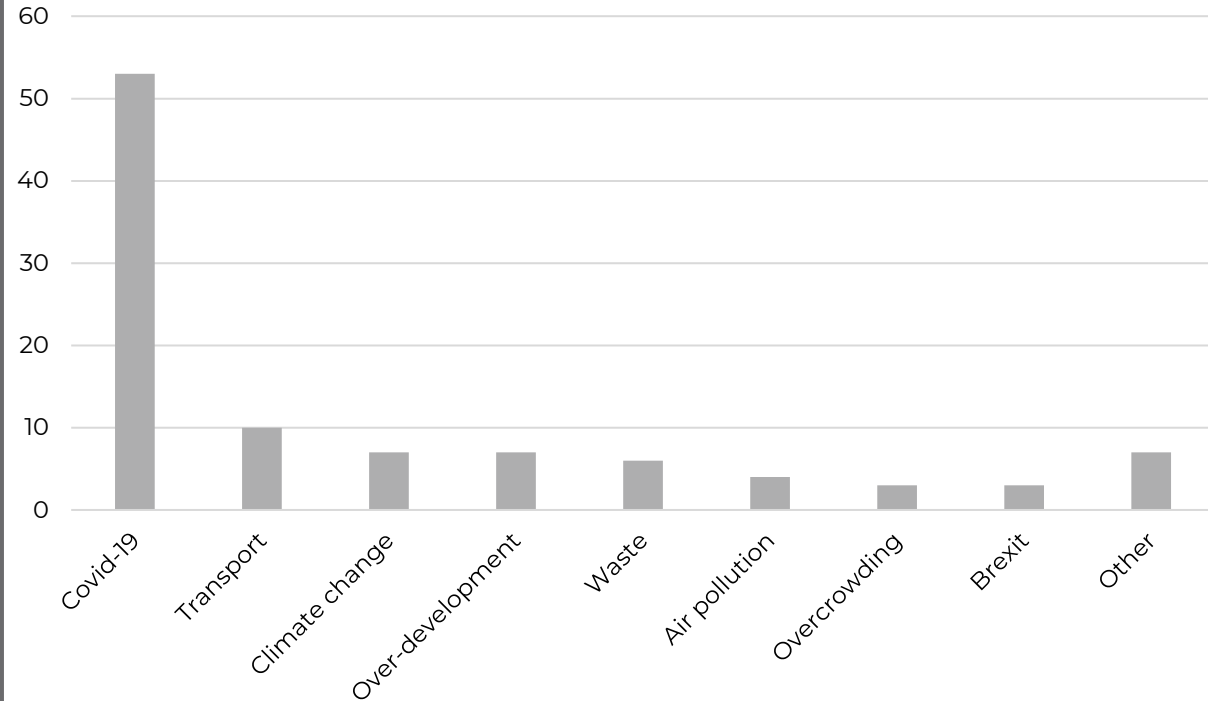


## 3.2 Local Problems

Over a half of responses (53%) were on Covid-19, with major subthemes including the lockdown and closure of local amenities, as well as concerns around job security and increased use of single-use items and littering.

Other problems were related to transport (10%), impacts from climate change (7%) and issues around over-development (7%), such as green belt loss and increased traffic congestion.

Figure 21: Local events that respondents associated with serious problems affecting them (responses in percentage)



# 3.3 Local Problems

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

The two issues respondents worried about the most were green belt loss in their area of residence (29%) and local air pollution (26%).

Figure 22: Which of the following do you consider the single most serious problem affecting you? (responses in percentage)

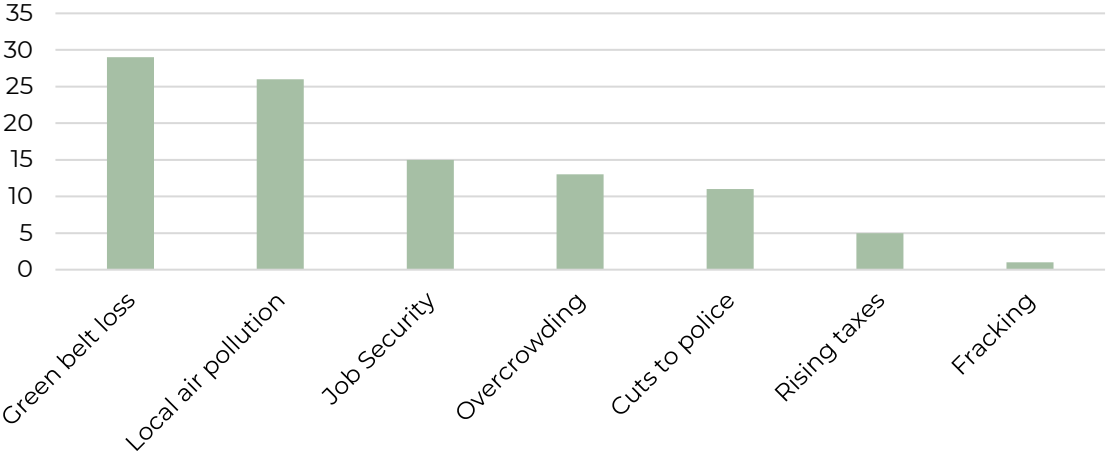


Figure 22: based on 143 responses

## 3.4 Global Issues Overview

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 issues facing the world.

A total of 98 responses were used for analysis. Responses were coded inductively into 7 overarching themes and 15 subthemes.

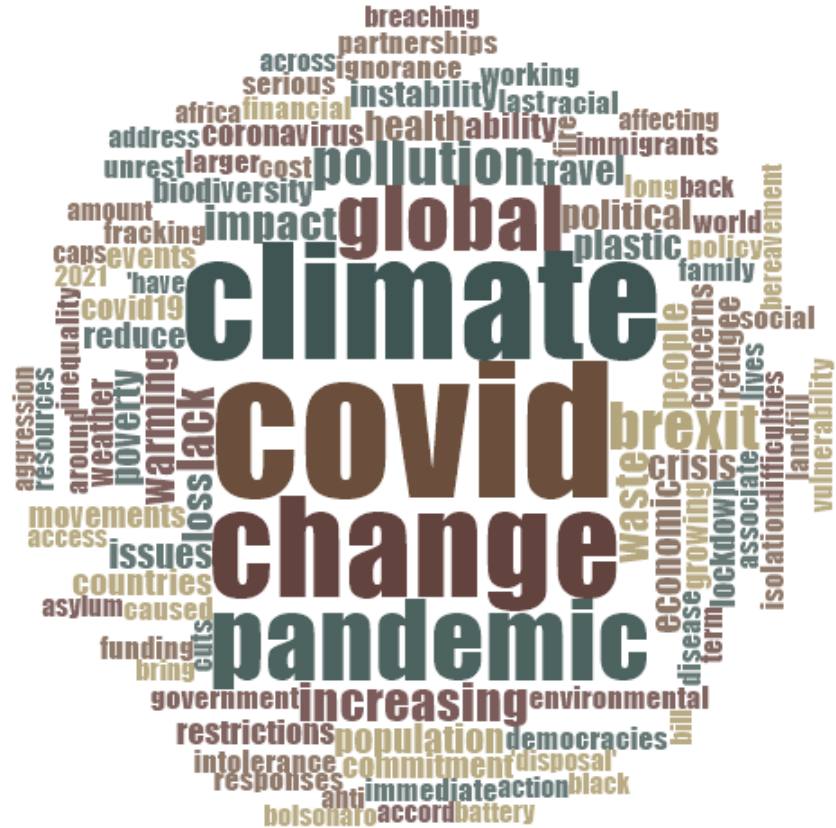


Figure 23: Global issues word cloud

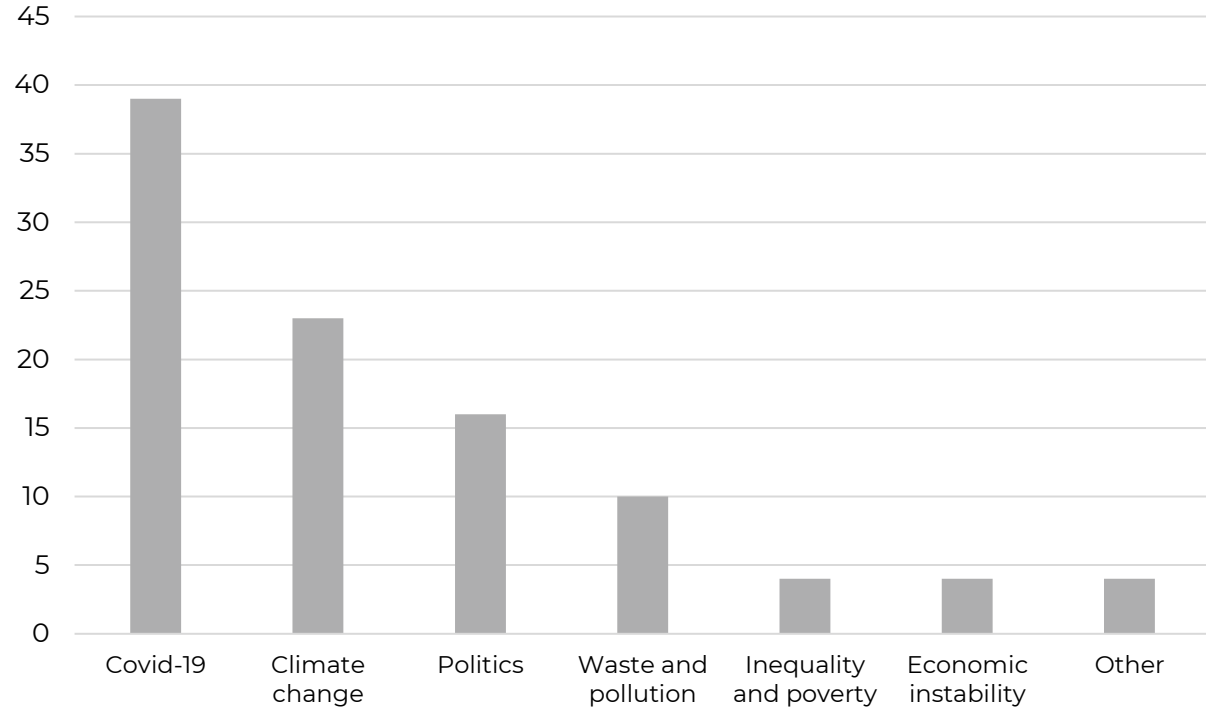
## 3.5 Global Issues

The majority of responses (39%) were related to Covid-19, followed by climate change (23%).

The third highest ranked category (16%) was on political issues, with major subthemes being Brexit, political turmoil, and the lack of global political action on climate change.

Other themes were waste and pollution (10%), inequality and poverty (4%) and economic instability (4%).

Figure 24: Global events that respondents associate with serious problems facing the world? (responses in percentage)



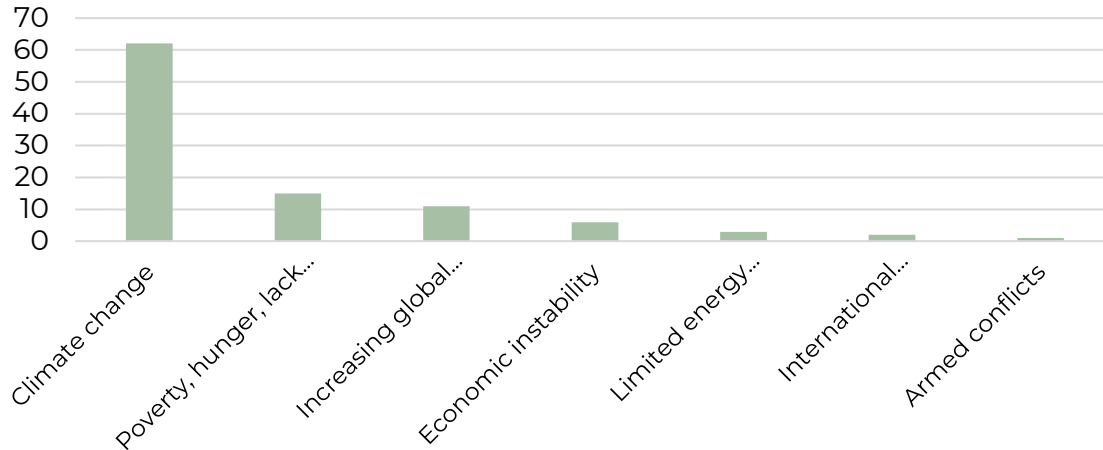
## 3.6 Global Issues

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

The majority of respondents (62%) said they worried most about climate change.

A smaller number stated that they were concerned about poverty, hunger and lack of drinking water (15%) or increasing global population (11%).

Figure 25: Which of the following do you consider the single most serious problem facing the world? (responses in percentage)





**04**

# **Sustainability at Universities in the UK**

## 4.1 Sustainability at Universities

The vast majority of respondents (99%) thought that 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 26: Sustainability should be a key consideration for all universities

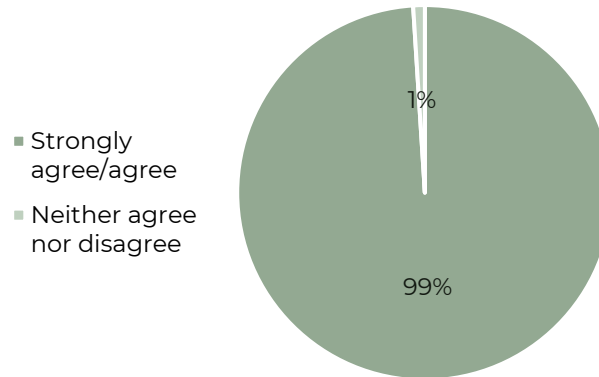


Figure 27: Good sustainability credentials make universities an attractive place to work

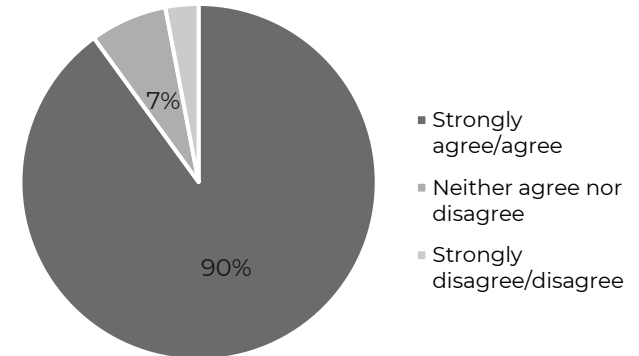
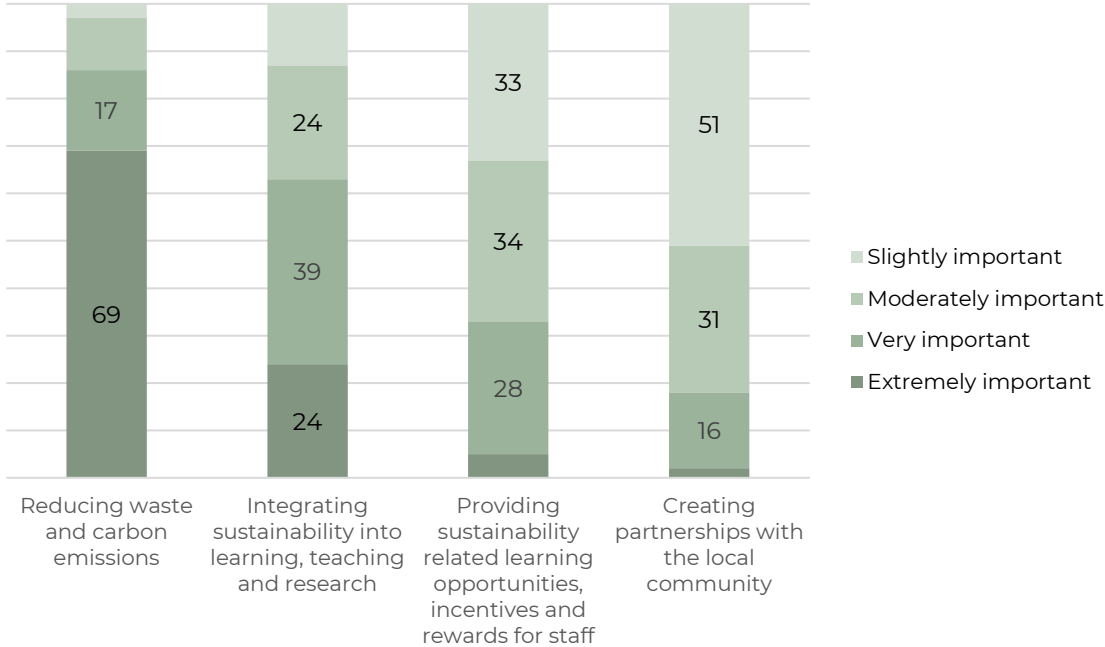


Figure 26: based on 156 responses; Figure 27: based on 156 responses

Figure 28: What are the most important characteristics of a sustainable university? (responses in percentage)



## 4.2 Sustainable Universities

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to rank the most important characteristics of a sustainable university.

The highest ranked characteristic was reducing waste and carbon emissions, followed by integrating sustainability into learning, teaching and research.

Figure 28: based on 156 responses





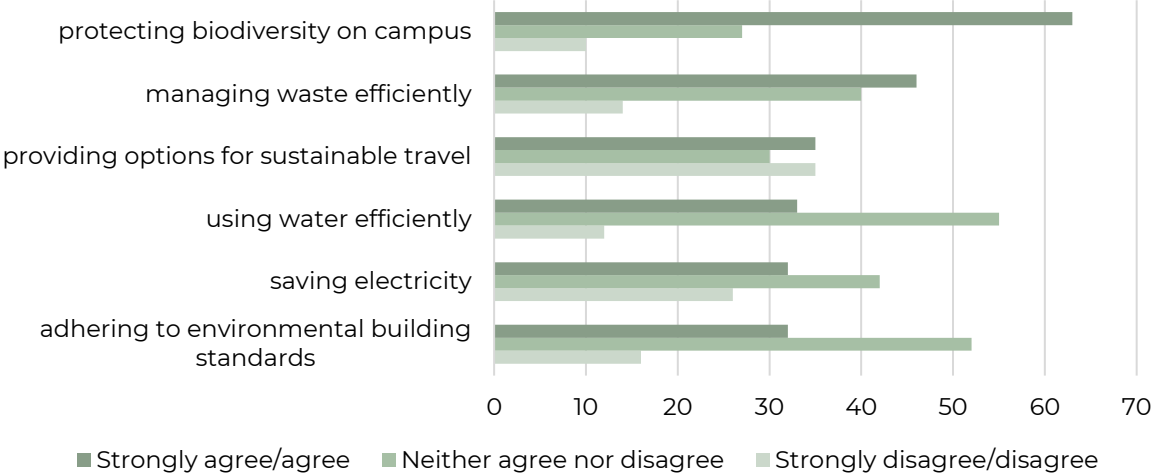
# 05 Sustainability at the University of Surrey

# 5.1 Estates and Operations

On average, about 40% of respondents think that the university's sustainability performance in operations is good, and another 40% remain neutral.

The majority of respondents (63%) agree that the university is protecting biodiversity, while only around a third of respondents think that the university performs well in areas such as transport, water, energy, and buildings.

Figure 29: I believe that the University of Surrey is...  
(responses in percentage)

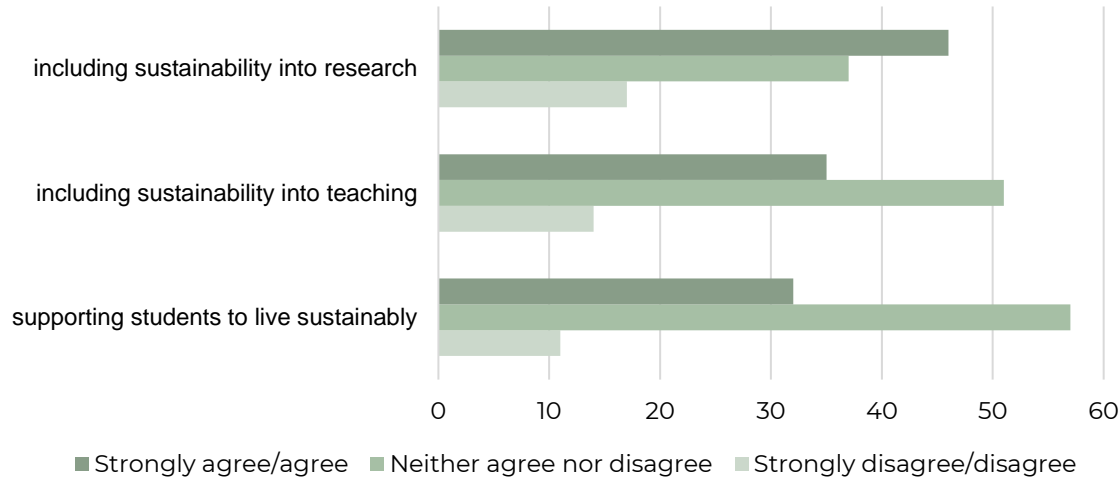


## 5.2 Learning and Teaching

On average, the largest percentage of respondents (48%) remain neutral on questions about sustainability in learning, teaching and research.

About 45% of respondents think that the university includes sustainability into research, while only about a third think that Surrey integrates sustainability into teaching, and helps students to live more sustainably.

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

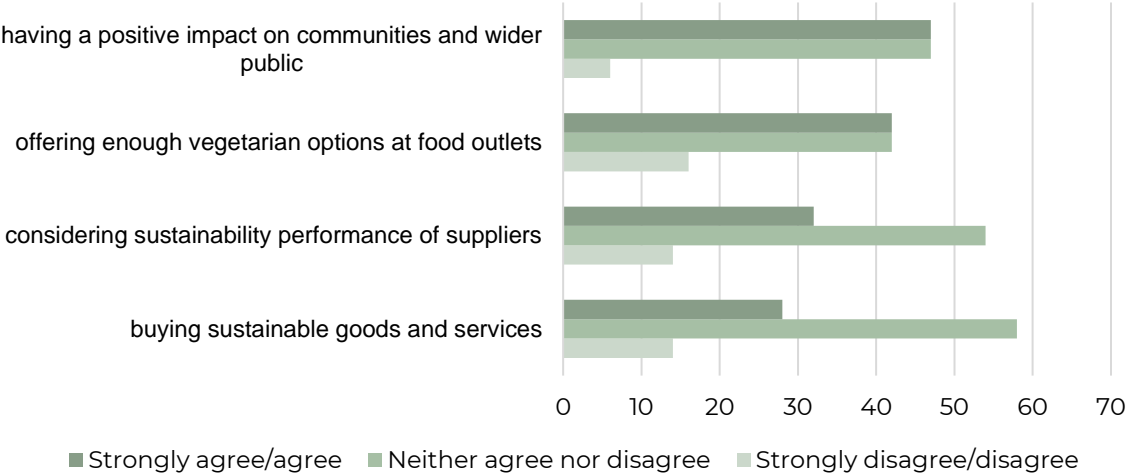


# 5.3 Partnerships and Community

On average, half of respondents are neutral on questions regarding sustainability in partnerships and community engagement, and over a third (37%) think that the university is performing well.

Almost half of respondents (47%) think that the university has a positive impact communities, but less than a third (28%) believe that the university considers sustainability in procurement.

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



## 5.4 Leadership

Over half of respondents (57%) agree that the university is promoting social mobility, equality and collaboration at work and supports wellbeing of staff.

However, only 15% think that the university acts as a responsible investor, with most respondents remaining neutral on this question.

Over 40% of respondents think that the university does not reward staff who lead on sustainability initiatives.

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

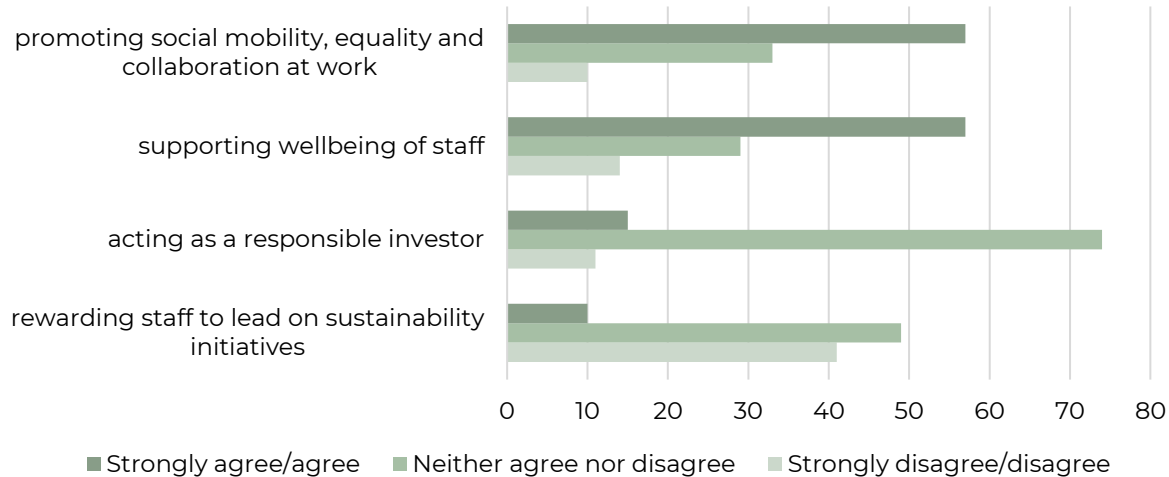
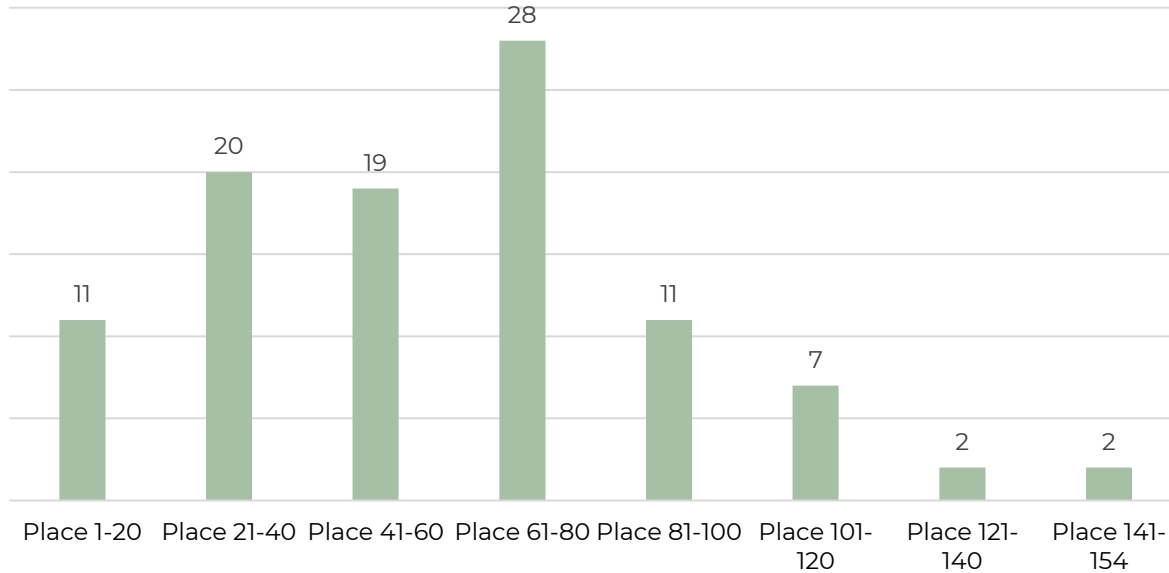


Figure 33: Out of 154 Universities in the UK, I believe that in terms of sustainability, the University of Surrey ranks:  
(responses in percentage)



## 5.5 Perceived Ranking

Half of respondents (50%) believe that, compared to all other Universities in the UK, the University of Surrey ranked higher than place 60 in terms of sustainability performance.

About a quarter of respondents (28%) ranked Surrey between place 61 and 80 and about another quarter (22%) lower than place 80.



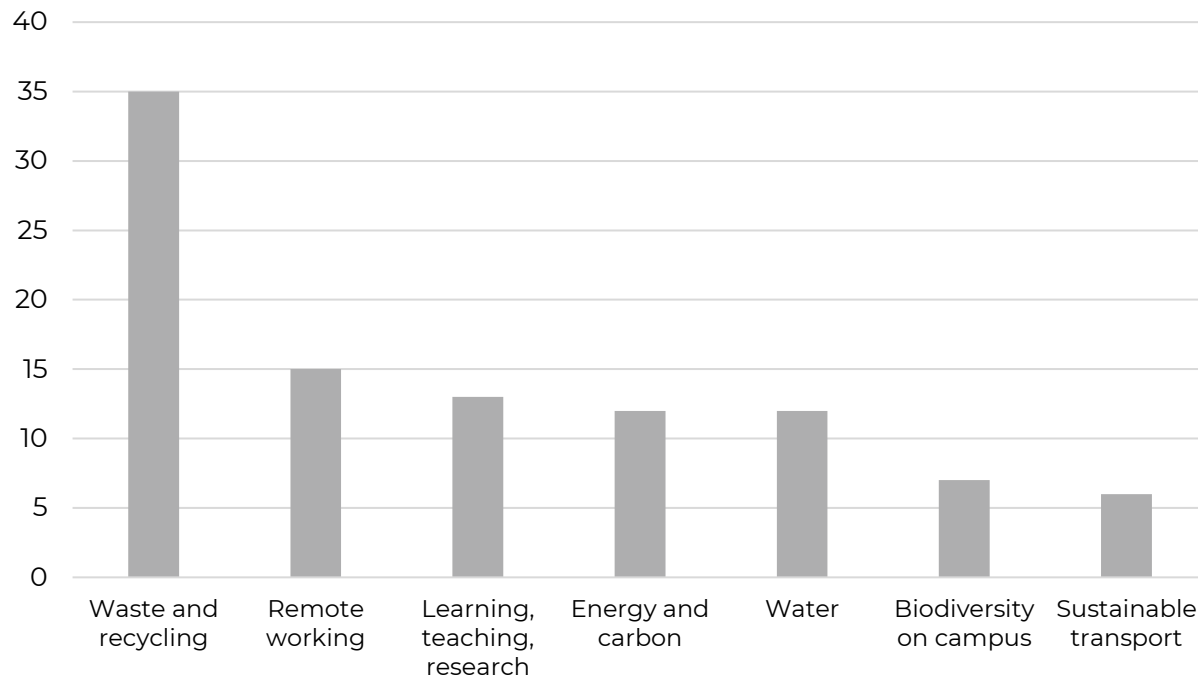
## 5.7 Changes at Surrey

The majority of responses (35%) was related to waste and recycling, with major subthemes being the planned phase-out of desk bins and the new bin labels.

The second most important topic was remote working (15%) and its potential benefits for the environment.

Other changes that were noticed related to integrating sustainability into learning and teaching, the net-zero carbon targets, and changes in lighting, heating and water use.

Figure 35: Can you recall any changes related to sustainability at the University of Surrey over the past year?  
(responses in percentage)





# 5.8 Implementing Sustainability

Respondents were asked to indicate the stakeholder groups that they thought *are currently* responsible, and stakeholder groups that ideally *should be* responsible for implementing sustainability at Surrey.

While most responses indicate that the Sustainability Team is currently responsible for implementing sustainability, most respondents think that it should be everyone's responsibility.

Figure 36: Perceived responsibility for implementing sustainability at Surrey (cited n times)

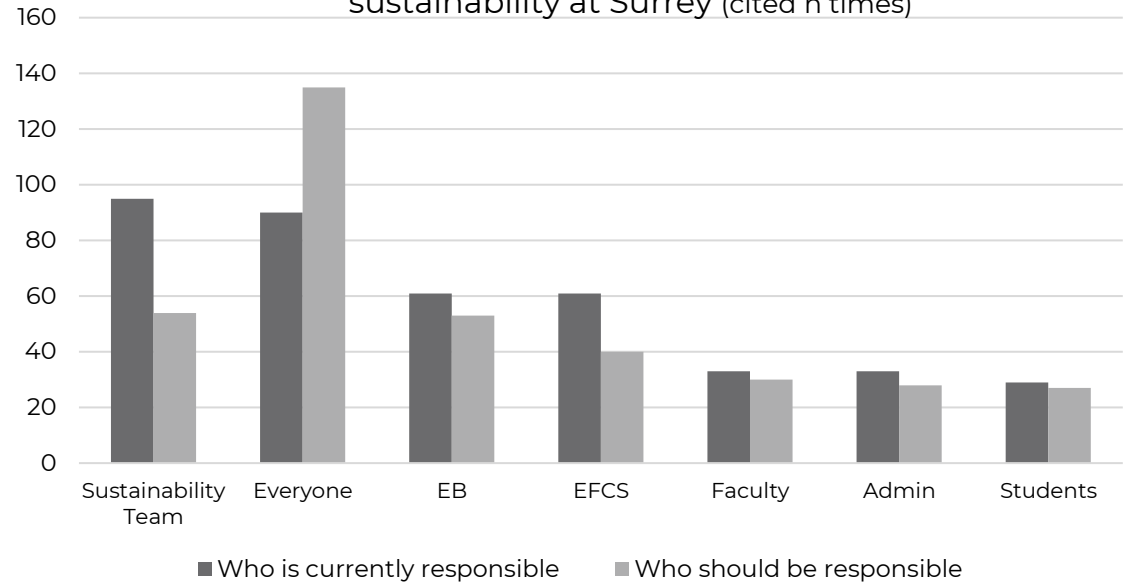


Figure 36: based on 155 responses

## 5.8 Sustainability Conceptualisation

The most popular definitions were sustainability as responsible use of resources (dark green, total n = 216), followed by reducing impacts on the planet (dark grey, total n = 199).

The third most popular definition was the holistic concept of sustainability (light green, total n = 178), and only a few responses defined sustainability in a negative way (light grey, total n = 29).

Figure 37: What does the term 'sustainability' mean to you? (cited n times)

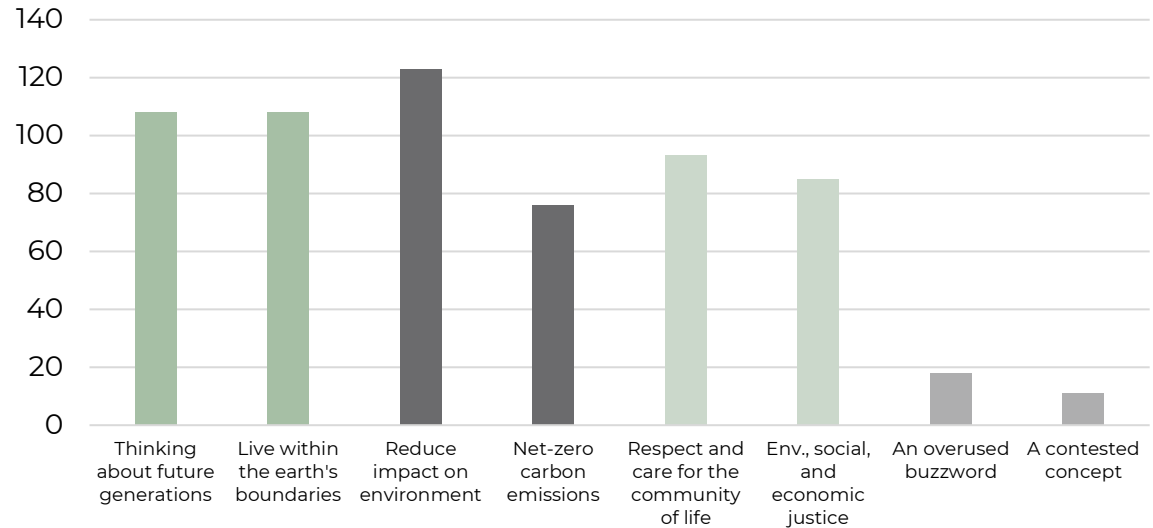


Figure 37: based on 155 responses



# 06

## Conclusions

## 6.1 Survey Summary

The majority of respondents stated that for them it is important, and that they try to, **save energy and reduce waste at the workplace**. Nevertheless, on average, less than half of respondents believe that their colleagues think and act in the same way.

As for **local problems**, the majority of respondents were concerned about the impact from Covid-19, particularly the lockdown and consequent isolation and loneliness. Similarly, most respondents worried about Covid-19 on a **global level**, while also being concerned about climate change and political issues.

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. According to the majority of respondents universities should prioritise reducing waste and carbon emissions.

Regarding **sustainability at Surrey**, about half of respondents are unsure of what the university is doing in terms of operations, teaching and research, partnerships and leadership. Most respondents would define sustainability as responsible use of resources, and think that there is a collective responsibility for implementing sustainability at the university.



# Any Questions?

You can find me at

[n.rieg@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:n.rieg@surrey.ac.uk)  
[surrey.ac.uk/people/nicola-rieg](https://surrey.ac.uk/people/nicola-rieg)  
[surrey.ac.uk/sustainability](https://surrey.ac.uk/sustainability)  
[surrey.ac.uk/pds](https://surrey.ac.uk/pds)

