



Trinity College Dublin  
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin

# Sustainability Strategy

2023-2030





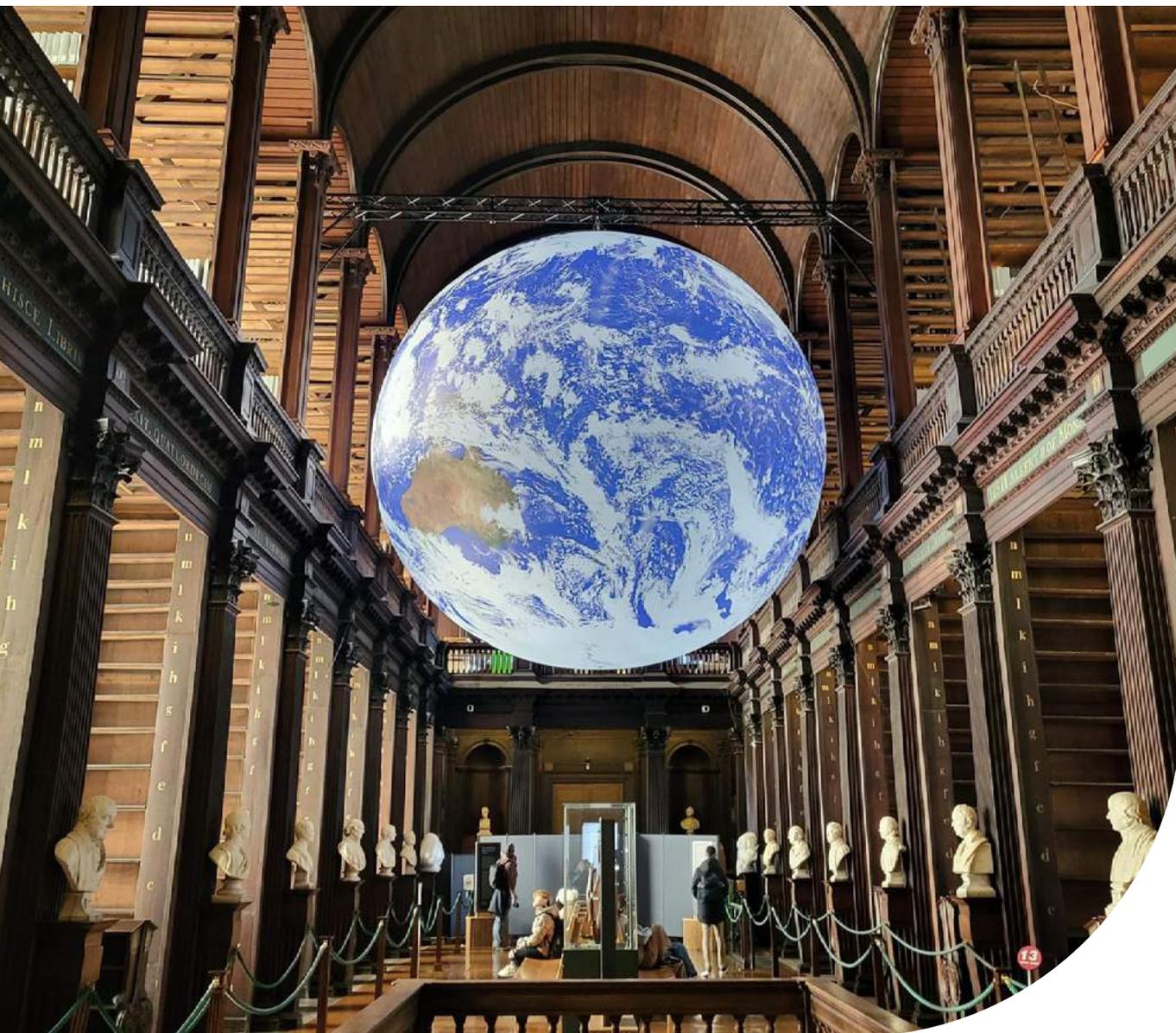
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# The Challenge

Sustainability is a long-term goal for the coexistence of people and planet, and the pathways and approaches to achieve it are thought of under the organising principle of sustainable development. Sustainability is often described in three dimensions: environmental, economic and social. The Sustainable Development Goals encompass all three. Trinity's Sustainability Strategy focuses on environmental sustainability, specifically climate change, biodiversity loss and human health.



1 Gaia by Luke Jerram in the Old Library



Climate change and biodiversity loss are two of the greatest challenges currently facing humanity, and their impacts exacerbate existing global and societal inequalities. These dual crises directly and indirectly impact our health, economic stability and way of life; their effects will have impacts for multiple generations to come.

There is no “business as usual” under these conditions – the world is on a path to massive social, environmental and economic upheaval. Without commitment to transformative action across all areas, Trinity’s contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and damage to the natural world will continue to increase. This risks our health and wellbeing, threatens our operations and functioning, exposes us to reputational damage, and creates or exacerbates greater challenges for the future.

It is imperative that we face these challenges head on, and focus our attention on cutting our emissions to limit the magnitude of warming, and on halting biodiversity loss, in a way that reduces societal inequalities. But we must also look at how we will adapt to these changes over the coming decades. It is essential that we put targets in place that align with our international commitments so that we can effectively monitor and measure how we are doing in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity gain.

## Our Commitments

Trinity’s Strategic Plan 2020-25 commits us to addressing the challenge of achieving a sustainable and healthy planet, both for people, and for the natural systems we share our planet with, and rely upon. Trinity has huge potential to make a difference and act as an agent for the cultural, technological, and societal changes that are needed.

We need to embed sustainability in everything we do, and to do it in a healthy and equitable way. By embedding these issues in the curriculum, we can prepare future generations to act as agents of change for sustainable development, in both their professional and personal lives. We can empower our world-class researchers to make discoveries that have positive consequences for policy and practice across disciplines and sectors.

We can demonstrate leadership and innovation on our campus and in how we operate. And we can co-create knowledge with communities across and beyond Trinity through partnership, collaboration and education for far-reaching, long-lasting change.



# This Strategy

This Strategy was developed by Trinity Sustainability following extensive stakeholder consultation, within and outside Trinity during 2022-23, bench-marking with comparative organisations, and in line with the 2020-25 Trinity Strategic Plan and other key university strategies and plans. The Strategy informs an Action Plan, which will be continually reviewed and revised.





# Vision

We will be a university, a place, and a community where climate change and biodiversity loss are addressed in a holistic, integrated and health-focused way to protect and restore our planetary home for future generations.

# Mission

To tackle climate and biodiversity challenges for a healthy planet and healthy people through our educational programmes, our research and innovation, and our day-to-day operations, both within Trinity and in partnership with external collaborators and communities.



2 Holistic sustainability infographic: <https://glasshape.co.nz/sustainability/>



# Values

To achieve our mission and vision, we will be;

- **Leaders and advocates** – we will provide expertise, evidence and inspiration from our research and from our operations, communicating our research and actions to promote positive changes.
- **Adaptable** – flexible plans, long term vision needs to be responsive to changing socio-economic-political and environmental context.
- **Optimistic and Radical** – envisaging a better future, environmentally and socially and doing things differently to enable transformative change.
- **Collaborative** – work with other actors and organisations in Dublin, nationally and internationally to develop coherent approaches, share experiences and implement best practice.
- **Responsible and inclusive** – play our part in the local, national and international efforts to achieve relevant targets and bring everyone along, and appreciating everyone’s contribution regardless of size.
- **Enabling health promotion** – embed a healthy planet and healthy people approach to biodiversity and climate action.





# Scope

This strategy addresses how environmental sustainability will be advanced across 1. Education, 2. Research, 3. Operations and 4. Communities. It rests on the key concept that planetary and human health are fundamentally interconnected, and so environmental and human health are embedded within the strategy. It provides an overarching ethos, with priorities and targets that can be integrated into every aspect of Trinity's work and adapted and implemented by academic and professional units across the whole university. This strategy applies to all of Trinity's distributed campus, including the city centre campus, as well as various hospitals, sports grounds, student accommodation and other sites. The development, refurbishment and repurposing of the Trinity East campus provides an exciting opportunity to enact this strategy and implement sustainability principles in everything we do there, operationally, as well as culturally.

Although environmental challenges require urgent action, the strategy takes a long-term view: Trinity is an institution which has evolved over four centuries, and actions taken now will help to ensure not only Trinity's future, but that of the wider world. Thus, this strategy includes targets to 2030 and 2040, but will be implemented via shorter-term Action Plans, the first of which includes actions to 2025. The strategy is a living document, which will be updated to reflect new findings and innovations, as well as changes in environmental, economic and societal contexts.





# Priorities

Our priorities reflect our obligations as an organisation, and as custodians for current and future generations.

## 1. Tackling Climate Change

In order to avert the worst impacts of climate change and ensure a liveable planet, global temperature increase needs to be limited to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (Paris Agreement UNFCCC 2015). Our current students face global temperatures that are unlike anything we or our predecessors have ever experienced (IPCC 2023).

Globally, we must **reduce** Green House Gas (GHG) emissions to net zero by 2050, requiring a global transformation in energy use, and a switch to fossil-fuel-free economies. The Irish Climate Action Plan requires public bodies to reduce their GHG emissions **by 51% by 2030**, and so our first priority is to meet this target and we will work toward Net Zero by 2040.

## 2. Restoring Biodiversity

Loss of biodiversity has wide-reaching impacts and affects our ability to tackle climate change. Globally, 75% of the earth's terrestrial surface has been very significantly altered by human activity and an estimated one million species are at risk of extinction (IPBES 2019).

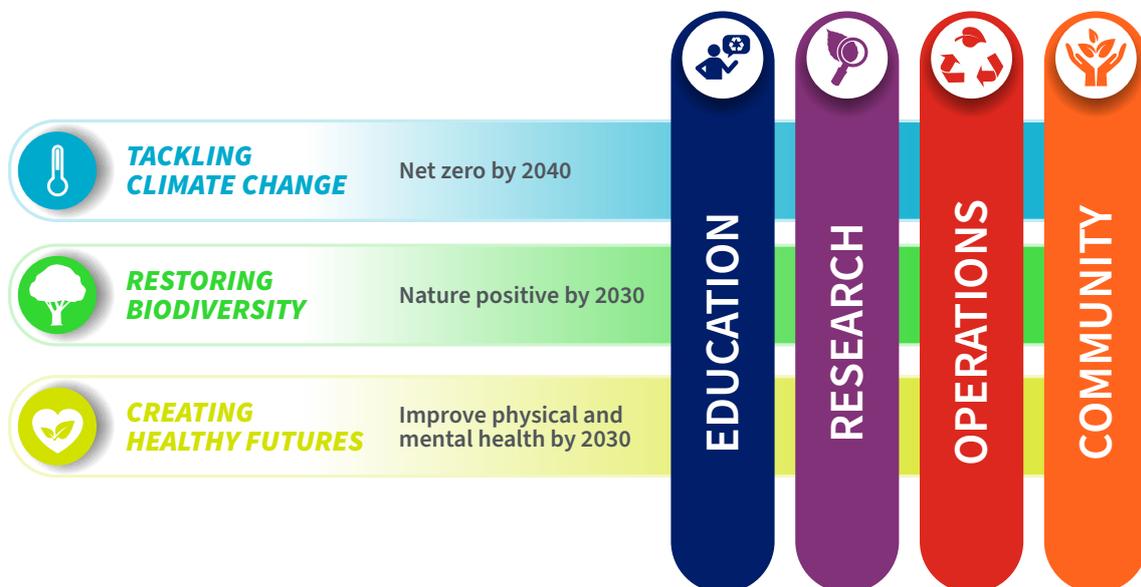
The Global Biodiversity Framework includes ambitious and necessary targets for 2030 including zero loss of high biodiversity areas. The EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and upcoming EU Nature Restoration Law have and will embed these targets into Irish law in the coming years, and so our second priority is to **become nature positive** (work towards protection and restoration of species and ecosystems).

### 3. Creating Healthy Futures

Resilience is the ability to recover from and adjust to change, and as a concept can be applied to individuals, populations and whole ecosystems. For a healthy thriving society, we need to develop just, equitable and accessible adaptation approaches to reduce the impacts associated with the increasing frequency and severity of climate change events, including mental, physical and social health stress. These adaptation approaches may not even exist yet, but by working together within and beyond the university, and by integrating ideas and techniques across disciplines, novel approaches will emerge to enable us to better cope with a changed future.

Trinity's future plans and activities should be conducted through a nature positive lens, aiming to enhance biodiversity and ecosystems, or at least ensuring no negative impact. The university will continuously seek practical nature-based and inspired solutions and responsibly utilise technologies, to cope with the sustainability challenges it faces together with the rest of the planet.

Therefore, a **holistic long-term approach** embedding a nature-positive and health-promoting culture is required to ensure we are fully prepared for the next 20+ years. We can't simply focus our thoughts on 2030 but must develop solutions for the longer term.





# Focus Areas

The priorities should be addressed across everything we do in terms of:

- The **education** we provide for all our students and staff,
- How we conduct our **research** and how we transfer and use knowledge for the benefit of the planet and people,
- Our day-to-day **operations** on all Trinity sites, and the
- Partnerships, collaborations and engagements with our **community**, within and outside Trinity.



EDUCATION



OPERATIONS



RESEARCH



COMMUNITY





## 1. Education

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### Strategic Vision

All students in Trinity will develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to think, plan and act with responsibility and compassion for themselves, each other and the planet. Staff and students will teach, learn and inspire one another through a lens that recognises humans as part of, and dependent on, nature and reflect upon their roles as global, ecological and intergenerational citizens. Trinity's education will be used as an opportunity to stimulate a willingness to take or demand action at local, national and global level to promote sustainable development within planetary boundaries, empowering learners to overcome the cognitive dissonance that comes from knowing about planetary crises but lacking the agency to act.

Using both discipline-specific and interdisciplinary approaches, Trinity's curriculum will be oriented towards ensuring the development of key competencies for sustainability, as identified by UNESCO<sup>3</sup> and the European Commission<sup>4</sup>. These competencies will empower learners to embody sustainability values in their daily lives, at home, at work, and in their communities. Such competencies will allow them to embrace complex systems, to generate visions for alternative sustainable futures, and to take or call for action that restores and maintains eco-system health whilst prioritising social justice.

To enable this transition, all Trinity teaching staff will gain time and access to collaborative, cross-disciplinary support networks, resources and developmental programmes to support their module or programme design and use of relevant pedagogical approaches, with a particular emphasis on transformative learning.



3 [https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/esd/ESD\\_Publications/Competences\\_Publication.pdf](https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/esd/ESD_Publications/Competences_Publication.pdf)

4 <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC128040>



### Strategic Objective

All Trinity students and teaching staff will be empowered to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to act as agents of change, individually and collectively, in working for sustainable development within planetary boundaries.

## 2. Research

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### Strategic Vision

High quality blue skies and applied research, within and across all disciplines and Faculties in Trinity, will transform our understanding of, and create solutions to, biodiversity loss and climate change for healthier and more equitable ecosystems and societies. The Trinity Living Research Excellence Strategy will be delivered in line with the priorities of the Trinity Sustainability Strategy, cherishing academic freedom, and defining and taking the lead for the long-term benefit of humanity. Our research, across the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Health Sciences, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, will inform our own culture, behaviours, policies and practices within Trinity.

Research will also be conducted with external stakeholders, and will be translated into national and international policy and practice across all sectors for maximum societal, economic and environmental impact.

In addition, research will be undertaken in an environmentally sustainable and health-promoting way, including how we work and collaborate, and how our data and ideas are generated, stored, analysed and communicated.





### Strategic Objective

To enable and support research of the quality, diversity, depth and novelty necessary to generate new understanding, insight and approaches for transformational change at local, national and global level to address historical, current and future biodiversity, climate and health challenges.

## 3. Operations

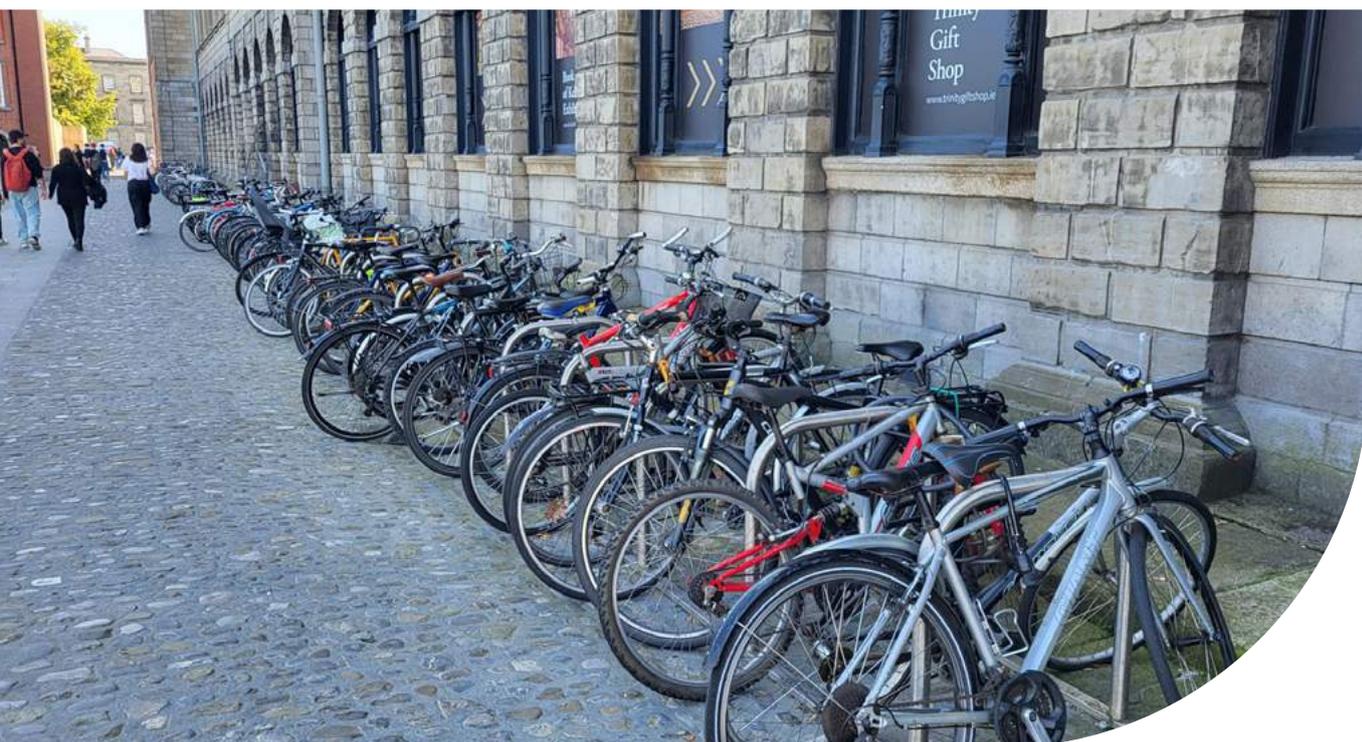
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### Strategic Vision

All policies, procedures and operations in Trinity that underpin our academic endeavours will be viewed through the priority areas of tackling GHG emissions, halting biodiversity loss and building healthy futures. This will require commitment from all staff and students across the university, as well as the time, training and recognition for this. We will work to communicate, share ideas, implement initiatives, and train and educate the key teams throughout the university so that they have the skills and capacity to work towards this common goal.

### Strategic Objective

To collaborate in multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary teams to enable our campus and day-to-day operations to be environmentally sustainable, with reduced carbon emissions from our infrastructure and activities, increased space for nature on site, reduced impact on nature off site, and long-term operational plans for a healthier, more resilient future.





## 4. Community

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### Strategic Vision

Collaboration between staff, students, local communities, businesses and authorities, as well as with national and international collaborators, corporates and governments, will help achieve biodiversity and climate priorities. We will encourage a culture where people feel respected, included and valued, both within and outside Trinity. We will learn from one another, be transparent, share ideas and experiences, enabling us to achieve the necessary transformational change within Trinity and throughout our society as a whole.

### Strategic Objective

To collaborate and engage with internal and external stakeholders across a broad range of disciplines and sectors to achieve institutional, local, national and international sustainability goals by 2030 and prepare for a more sustainable and healthy future in the long-term.





# Targets



## 1. Net Zero Emissions by 2040

- ✓ We will aim to reduce our GHG emissions by 51% by 2030 in line with our commitments under the national Climate Action Plan.
- ✓ We will aim to reach net zero (across all categories of emissions, not just from our buildings) by 2040, due to the urgency of our climate emergency and the radical actions that are required from all of us.
- ✓ We will aim to be a leader for our sector, city and country.



## 2. Nature Positive by 2030

- ✓ We will monitor, assess and disclose risks, dependencies, and impacts on biodiversity.
- ✓ We will conserve, manage and restore at least 30% of Trinity's land area for nature, with emphasis on areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functioning that deliver benefits and values to people, and contribute to conservation and restoration beyond Trinity's grounds.
- ✓ We will reduce our impacts on terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity in Ireland and globally including responsible sourcing/supply chains, and reduction of food waste by 50%.



## 3. Healthy Trinity by 2030

- ✓ We will promote health by measuring, informing, embedding and championing, and supporting a culture shift in behaviours that promote and recognise the interrelatedness of planetary and human health and well-being. This will include improved access to and uptake of healthier plant-based diets; expansion of the current Tobacco Free campus to include Tobacco and Vape by 2030; and reduction of sedentary behaviours, as well as an increase in physical activity.
- ✓ We will enhance mental health and well-being in individuals, communities and systems to deal with our increasingly complex environment and challenges.
- ✓ We will create healthier and more environmentally-sustainable policies and operational practices that support health and well-being on campus, including increasing the proportion of staff and students engaging in active travel in and around Trinity by 25%; increasing access to sexual and reproductive health supports and awareness around consent; and addressing institutional practices to support healthy habits (including reducing consumption of alcohol, tobacco, ultra-processed food).



# Enabling the Vision/Strategy

## ■ Governance

An **Environment and Sustainability Principal Committee of Board** will be established as the main decision-making body, which will address strategic issues with regards to environmental sustainability and its links with critical infrastructure, people and culture, and other strategic priorities. This committee will also review and update Trinity's Sustainability Policy, in line with existing internal and external policy obligations, and cognisant of the changing policy landscape.

A **Sustainability Management Group** will be the responsible management group for implementation and reporting on the Action Plan associated with this strategy. This team will comprise key managers across the four focus areas (education, research, operations, community).

The **Green Campus Committee**, comprising staff and student volunteers, will act as a forum representative of the campus community, enabling them to meet, discuss, provide ideas and contribute actions to progress the action plan.

## ■ Reporting

The EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) will require Trinity to prepare non-financial reports alongside financial ones, based on European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) on climate change, pollution, water and marine resources, resource use and circular economy, and biodiversity and ecosystems. Standards will be applied for the financial year 2025 and reports published in 2026.

The Government of Ireland Climate Action Plan requires Trinity to complete annual progress reports on meeting the requirements of the Climate Action Mandate, including progress on targets (GHG emissions and energy efficiency) and gap to targets; teams, training and workshops; digitising and accreditation; and buildings and vehicles.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland requires Trinity as a public body to report their energy performance annually, using their Monitoring and Reporting system.



Progress on this strategy's Action Plan will be reported regularly by the Sustainability Management Group to the Environment and Sustainability Principal Committee of Board, and will feature in that committee's annual report to Board. Where appropriate and to streamline the reporting, this will reference the reports prepared for external bodies.

Ultimately data flows will benefit from centralised systems under development by Trinity's Data Analytics and Strategic Unit – this system will receive data from different areas of College, and contribute those data into Sustainability reports, and eventually a live sustainability dashboard.





# Potential Challenges

Delivery of this strategy and the action plan will require significant commitment, capacity and resources, both in terms of human resources (expertise, skills, time) and financial capital (funding for delivery of actions). It will also require cultural and behaviour change, in line with Trinity values.

Environmental sustainability issues are inseparable from broader sustainability issues, which can result in challenging complexities and trade-offs. Delivering the strategy, aiming to operate within our planetary boundaries, whilst retaining a strong, equitable and just social foundation, particularly with financial pressures in the third level sector, is going to be challenging. Identifying conflicts and trade-offs is key in successfully delivering this strategy.

As a public body, Trinity's strategy will be delivered in line with public mandates, including those from the Office of Government Procurement and the Government's Climate Action Plan. Thus, the strategy and action plan may evolve and change in line with new regulations and guidelines that arise from these external bodies as necessary.





# Appendix - Glossary

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## Adaptation

Adapting to life in a changing climate – this involves adjusting to actual or expected future climate. The goal is to reduce risks from the harmful effects of climate change (like sea-level rise, more intense extreme-weather events, or food insecurity). It also includes making the most of any potential beneficial opportunities associated with climate change (for example, increased diversity of Irish-produced food, or increased ability to attract students).

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## Biodiversity net gain

Biodiversity net gain is the term used to describe the process of increasing the overall biodiversity value of a development site. This means that site-level development must enhance the biodiversity value of a site by completion of a project, rather than decreasing it. Biodiversity net gain can be achieved both onsite and offsite depending on a case-by-case basis.

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## Greenhouse gas (GHG)

An atmospheric gas that absorbs solar energy and emits thermal radiation, effectively trapping some of the heat radiated from the planet's surface in the atmosphere. This causes the greenhouse effect. The primary greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere are water vapor, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and ozone. Reducing GHG emissions reduces global warming.

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## Interdisciplinary

Integrating disciplinary perspectives, insights, knowledge and methods from different disciplines, and analysing, synthesising and harmonising approaches across disciplinary boundaries for an interactive effect.

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### Mitigation

Reducing climate change – this involves reducing the flow of heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, either by reducing sources of these gases (for example, the burning of fossil fuels for electricity, heat, or transport) or enhancing the sinks that accumulate and store these gases (such as the oceans, forests, and soil). The goal of mitigation is to avoid significant human interference with Earth’s climate, stabilise GHG levels and allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, whilst ensuring a sustainable food supply and economic development. Achieving net-zero emissions and biodiversity net gain are mitigation strategies.

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### Multidisciplinary

Different disciplines working together, each drawing on their disciplinary expertise and approach for an additive effect, but staying within their disciplinary boundaries.

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### Nature positive

Nature positive means halting and reversing biodiversity loss so that species and ecosystems start to recover. In the university context, this means restoring species and ecosystems that have been harmed by activities of the university (including teaching, research, and operations), and increasing the university’s positive impacts on nature.

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### Net-zero

Net-zero means reducing GHG emissions in line with latest climate science and balancing remaining residual emissions through carbon removal credits. Having net-zero emissions means balancing the whole amount of greenhouse gas released with the amount removed from the atmosphere. It means:

Reducing all GHG emissions (scope 1, 2 and 3), i.e. direct emissions from burning fuel in vehicles or heating systems, and indirect emissions from energy suppliers, and as a result of buying, using and disposing of products, business travel, commuting, etc.)

Working to change our operations with respect to energy, waste, water, food, packaging, etc.

Utilising offsetting where emissions can’t be cut, but only as a last resort.

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### Offsetting

Carbon credits are purchased to compensate for emissions. This means that the organisation continues to emit greenhouse gases, but can claim credit for reduced emissions or carbon capture/removal elsewhere.

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### Regeneration

Sustainability focuses on minimising damage to the environment and human health and using resources more efficiently to limit the degradation of earth's natural systems. Regenerative approaches, however, seek to go beyond simply minimising damage, instead reversing the degradation of the planet's living systems and seeking to restore a healthy relationship between humans and other life. Regenerative development encourages us to design human systems that co-evolve with ecological systems to generate mutual benefits and greater expression of life and resilience.

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### Restoration

Ecological restoration means repairing sites where species or ecosystems have been degraded, destroyed or are threatened with extinction. Restoration focuses on repairing the damage human activities have caused to ecosystems with the aim that they are healthy and functioning so they can support a multitude of plant and animal species.

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### Transdisciplinary

Different disciplines working in an integrated way with society and/or practice to achieve and implement solutions to a complex problem for transformative change.

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### Trinity Campus

This strategy applies to all of Trinity's distributed campus, including the city centre campus, Trinity East, as well as various hospitals, sports grounds, student accommodation and other sites.

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