Birkbeck, University of London

Sustainability Report

2024-25

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Introduction

This report sets out Birkbeck's approach to improve our environmental sustainability as we work towards becoming a net zero organisation.

Following on from our first annual report last year, we have seen some significant improvements in our carbon footprint with decreases in emissions throughout scope 1 and 2. However, we recognise that we still have a way to go in fully analysing our scope 3 emissions. These emissions have increased significantly this year, although this is largely due to better access to and understanding of data rather than to changes in activities. Our scope 3 emissions may continue to increase over the next two to three years as we continue to incorporate emissions from further sources.

We've seen a significant reduction in energy use across our whole estate, in gas and electricity use and heat from the Bloomsbury District Heat Network. Our gas consumption has seen the biggest decrease and has more than halved since last year. We are investigating our energy consumption to ensure figures are correct and while we think this year may be an outlier, we expect our general trend in energy consumption to be an overall decrease over the coming years as we continue to make energy efficiency improvements in our buildings.

We have also made some steps towards infrastructure improvements. We are in the process of upgrading all lighting at our Gordon Square building to LED, which is expected to significantly reduce electricity use in the building. This year, we've also joined two sustainable labs certification programmes – LEAF Labs for our wet labs (those that use chemicals) and Green Disc for dry labs (those that focus on computing).

Our business travel has been a point of focus, with a new working group developing a Business Travel Policy focused on reducing the distance travelled by air and introducing carbon offsetting for unavoidable travel. This year, we've seen a rapid decrease in the distance travelled by air, and more uptake of railway journeys outside the UK and Eurostar for travel to Western Europe.

Our ongoing approach will be a pathway of continual improvement, embedded in our mission and values with the expectation that our sustainability goals will continue to support the institution to deliver positive environmental, social, and economic outcomes.

Leadership and System Change

Birkbeck has pledged to reach net zero across scopes 1, 2, and 3 by 2050 at the latest, and will work towards meeting earlier dates of 2040 for scope 1 and 2 and 2045 for scope 3. We expect to publish our Energy & Carbon Management Plan (which is being developed using standardised reporting frameworks) in 2025-26. This plan outlines our pathway to net zero with an initial focus on lower investment, high-impact projects and embedding sustainability throughout the heart of our operations.

Summary of annual progress

ISO14001 recertification

In June, Birkbeck, alongside neighbouring institutions SOAS and LSHTM, participated in a full ISO14001 re-audit, achieving joint recertification for the next 3 years. The 3 universities have shared a certification since 2016 and were among the first higher education institutions to achieve ISO14001, recognising our commitment to continuous improvement of our environmental impacts. The certification process examines areas such as waste management, energy management, health and safety, and staff training.

Research Centre for Environment & Sustainability launched

In October 2024, Birkbeck officially launched its new Birkbeck Research Centre for Environment and Sustainability (BRCES). BRCES welcomes and showcases the work of all those within Birkbeck who research and teach on themes relating to environment and sustainability, one of Birkbeck's five strategic themes in the 2024-2030 research strategy.

The centre has the following aims:

- Encourage publication of high-quality environment and sustainability related research in disciplinary and interdisciplinary fora
- Catalyse interdisciplinary collaborations to create new research and secure funding to address key issues in environment and sustainability
- Increase opportunities for consultancy and continuing professional development, so that colleagues can maximise the impact of their research
- Build a network of partners with whom we can share insights and opportunities and from whom we can source opportunities for our research and students
- Seek funding for partner-based PhD studentships, to build a cohort of engaged researchers in the field of environment and sustainability.

In 2024-25, the centre undertook the following activities:

- Our launch event in October 2024 saw approximately 50 attendees, around 50% of whom were external. The event included speakers Dr Lesley McFadyen (Historical Studies), Dr Konstantinos Chalkias (Business), and Dr Becky Briant (Social Sciences)
- Supported Ben Gidley's successful EU HERA grant on liminal waterways, exploring resilience to migration and climate change in Europe's waterside communities
- Collaborated on Hive Heroes: the game test – an interdisciplinary, 'more-than-human' hive event using digital art and performance to communicate changing ecologies, and humans' role in that process, with Birkbeck Interdisciplinary Research in Media and Culture
- Our postgraduate research showcase November 2024 welcomed 10 speakers and took place in a hybrid format. Projects spanned the disciplines from soil science to art made in response to research on mining in China
- Catalysed research links allowed Heike Bauer (Cultures, Languages, Communication) to secure a Bloomsbury Studentship with RVC 'Who cares? The rise of veterinary specialist care in twenty-first century Britain' following networking
- BRCES was tagged in an event on environmental law December 2024
- BRCES was named in Chao-Yo Cheng and Roberto Murcia's BA Conference application 'Governance and Development in the Age of AI' in spring 2025
- BRCES featured in Birkbeck's alumni magazine in April 2025
- BRCES applied with Birkbeck Institute for Social Research to the Research Centres Collaboration Fund to plan a series of events, leading to a grant application on Utopias (since moved away from including ecology, so grant application happened without BRCES)

Environmental Education

This year, the Environmental Studies Minor Pathway was launched. This is an option designed to allow students on programmes from a range of disciplines to take Environment and Sustainability modules as part of their programme.

Climate Festival

This year saw the second year of Birkbeck's Climate Festival. The Climate Festival was also nominated for a Green Gown Award, and was selected as a finalist in the 'Creating Impact' category.

For the Birkbeck Climate Festival, BRCES co-badged 3 online events:

- Sustainable Pet Care: Examining the environmental impact of pet treatments (Dr Wendy Hein, Business School, and external collaborators)
- Humans' Relationship with Nature in Early Greek Thought: Exploring early philosophical ideas on the relationship between humans and nature (Dr Sophia Connell, Historical Studies, and a US collaborator)
- Urban Food Systems: Rethinking city food chains for a just transition (Professor Alex Colas, Social Sciences)

BRCES also organised their own event for the Climate Festival. This was titled 'Why Do We Need Each Other?' and explored interdisciplinary sustainability research with experts from science and business, including Dr Pam Yeow (Business) and Professor James Hammond (Natural Sciences).

Energy & Carbon Management Plan

In 2025, Birkbeck finalised our new Energy & Carbon Management Plan, with sign-off on the plan approved in May. The plan is due to be published in the 2025-26 academic year and will set out Birkbeck's pathway top meeting net zero through our scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions no later than 2050.

New web pages

In May 2025, our new Sustainability at Birkbeck webpages were launched. These pages will be updated regularly with information about our ongoing activities and targets. From these pages, you can also find our past sustainability reports.

New sustainability role

A new role was created and advertised in October 2024, with the new role holder joining Birkbeck in December 2024. The Sustainability and Energy Manager will focus primarily on delivery of the Energy & Carbon Management Plan and coordination support of any associated activities between different teams and directorates.

Next steps

Improve the visibility of our sustainability work

In the 2025-26 academic year we will work to make colleagues, students and the local community more aware of the sustainability actions that are already taking place across Birkbeck's campus.

Business Travel Policy working group

In 2024-25, a Business Travel Working Group has been established to begin work to draft a sustainable travel policy. In 2025-26, the group will shift its focus to looking at our travel approval processes to ensure that these processes are also synergistic and ultimately support the delivery of the policy.

Wellcome Sustainability Policy and the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice

During the 2025-26 academic year, we expect Birkbeck to become a signatory of the Wellcome Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice. The Concordat is voluntary and looks at six priority areas for action to reduce and eventually eliminate negative environmental impacts and transition to sustainable practices. This report will be the mechanism by which we report on our progress towards those priority areas and indicate our future plans.

Environmental Impacts

As a large institution, Birkbeck recognises that some of its activities have significant impacts on the environment and has pledged to reduce these impacts by reducing its carbon footprint, energy use, waste, and water use. We have been publishing some of this data via HESA for over a decade now and for the first time in 2023-24 we expanded our carbon footprint to include more information in Scope 3. We will continue to publish this data both via HESA and on our webpages and reports, while working towards mitigating our impacts.

Carbon footprint

Since last year, our total carbon footprint across scopes 1, 2, and 3 has increased by 3,679.5 tCO_2e. This is largely due to improvements in data availability throughout scope 3. In practice, we don't expect our carbon footprint to have increased significantly, but we are seeing higher numbers across several categories because have improved our data gathering to identify further sources of emissions and therefore include these in our carbon footprint where they were previously omitted (see Table 1).

Table 1: Birkbeck's carbon footprint

All figures in tonnes of CO2e (Aug-Jul)	**2021-22**	**2022-23**	**2023-24**	**2024-25**
Scope 1 total	**749.4**	**832.8**	**858.1**	**354.5**
Gas use	749.4	832.8	689.0	347.5
Refrigeration & other gases (estates)			169.1	7.1
Scope 2 total	**1,336.0**	**1,455.9**	**1,343.8**	**1,105.3**
Grid electricity	1,299.1	1,379.9	1,233.8	1,044.2
District heat network	36.9	76.0	110.0	61.1
Scope 3 total	**586.3**	**613.0**	**5,322.4**	**9,744.0**
1. Purchased goods and services	3.4	4.6	2,280.5	5,036.6
2. Capital goods			157.5	691.7
3. Fuel- and energy-related activities	578.7	603.8	523.1	467.4
4. Upstream transportation and distribution				2.5
5. Waste disposal	4.2	4.6	4.8	3.6
6. Business travel			981.6	578.2
7. Employee commuting			698.6	654.5
9. Downstream transportation and distribution			676.2	2,309.4
Total	**2,671.7**	**2,901.7**	**7,524.4**	**11,203.8**

When looking at the areas in which we have been gathering data for several years and have had reliable data available to us for longer periods (i.e. utilities and waste), our carbon footprint has decreased by 637.1 tCO_2e (see Table 2).

We are assessing our scope 1 and 2 emissions against a 2005-06 baseline of 4,370 tCO_2e.

A full carbon footprint report is available internally for colleagues. This provides the methodology we have used and gives a further breakdown of scope 3 data.

Table 2: Comparative carbon footprint

All figures in tonnes of CO2e (Aug-Jul)	**2021-22**	**2022-23**	**2023-24**	**2024-25**
Scope 1	**749.4**	**832.8**	**689.0**	**347.5**
Gas use	749.4	832.8	689.0	347.5
Scope 2	**1,336.0**	**1,455.9**	**1,343.8**	**1,105.3**
Grid electricity	1,299.1	1,379.9	1,233.8	1,044.2
District heat network	36.9	76.0	110.0	61.1
Scope 3	**586.3**	**613.0**	**531.4**	**474.3**
Water supply	3.4	4.6	3.5	3.3
Wastewater treatment	2.1	1.8	4.0	2.8
Waste disposal	2.1	2.8	0.8	0.8
Well to tank: gas	127.7	137.4	113.8	63.6
WTT: electricity	304.8	321.4	273.5	270.8
Transmission and distribution: electricity	116.6	115.5	109.0	109.3
WTT for T&D: electricity	27.9	25.6	23.7	23.4
Distribution: district heat network	1.8	3.9	3.0	0.3
Total (tonnes of CO2e)	**2,671.7**	**2,901.7**	**2,564.2**	**1,927.1**
Change since last year	N/A	+229.96	-337.44	-637.1
Percentage change from previous year	N/A	8.6%	-11.6%	-24.8%
Scope 1 and 2 change from 2005 baseline	-52.3%	-47.6%	-53.5%	-66.8%

Summary of annual progress

Scope 1

Our reduction in emissions is largely due to a significant decrease in gas consumption since last year (see section 'Energy' for further details). This is currently under investigation both internally and with our energy provider as we seek to understand why this year has seen such a large decrease in gas consumption. At the time of writing this report, we expect gas consumption for 2024-25 to be an unusually low outlier and our gas

consumption is expected to increase again next year before we see a future downward trend as we make energy efficiency improvements to our estate.

Scope 2

Our reduction in emissions is largely due to a significant decrease in electricity consumption since last year (see section 'Energy' for further details), as well as the ongoing decreases in the conversion factor for electricity use due to an increased share of low carbon electricity entering the UK grid.

Scope 3

For our 2024-25 carbon footprint we have re-categorised items in line with the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, which also matches presentation of scope 3 in our Energy & Carbon Management Plan. We have particularly focussed on the Standardised Carbon Emissions Framework provided by EAUC. This is based on the GHG Protocol but lays out how universities and colleges should categorise their scope 3 emissions for standardised reporting across the sector. This will allow for easier comparison with other universities using the same methodology.

Purchased goods and services

We have seen an increase in our supplier carbon footprint due largely to an increase in the amount of spend categorised. Last year, £18 million of spend was categorised under Scope 3 while this year £29 million was categorised. However, our spending year-on-year has not changed significantly. Due to some uncertainty around data, it was not possible to categorise last year's full spend, whereas we have improved our understanding of the data and scope 3 supplier categories this year to be able to categorise more of our total spend. We have used the HESCET methodology to calculate supplier emissions, which is a spend-based method allocating a conversion factor per pound of spend under different categories.

Where we have actual data for certain goods and services, we have excluded them from the spend-based methodology and used data provided by suppliers. This is generally thought to be a more accurate method as you are using actual data based on the goods or services you have purchased, rather than the spend-based methodology that looks at a national average carbon footprint per pound spent across a sector.

Capital goods

This year has seen an increased spend on capital goods and therefore an increased carbon footprint, largely due to completion of work at Birkbeck Central and Malet Street during

2024-25. Both projects introduced new student lounges, and opened a new cafe on the ground floor of Birkbeck Central.

Fuel- and energy-related activities

This covers well-to-tank, distribution, and transmission and distribution. This has decreased in line with our overall decrease in energy consumption across the estate.

Upstream transportation and distribution

This includes transport of goods to Birkbeck from our suppliers. Currently we only have data available for transport emissions for catering purchases. We will aim to improve this data in the future.

Waste disposal

This category includes emissions from waste disposal and water treatment (sewage). This has decreased largely due to lower conversion factors for waste disposal across the UK as major waste providers switch more of their fleets to electric vehicles.

Business travel

This category includes travel for business purposes (e.g. field trips, attending conferences, attending meetings), well to tank, and hotel stays. This has decreased year-on-year due to significantly less distance travelled by air, and a reduction of about a quarter to a third in the UK-wide conversion factors for air travel. As aviation is returning to pre-pandemic levels, planes are fuller on average, so the average per passenger footprint has decreased since last year.

Employee commuting

This includes staff commuting, well to tank for transport, and staff home working. This has not changed significantly last year due to minimal changes to staff numbers and no update this year to our staff commuting survey. For future years, we will aim to issue a new staff commuting survey at least every two years (ideally annually) to ensure that we are calculating the staff commuting and home working footprint as accurately as possible.

Downstream transportation and distribution

This covers student commuting, international student travel, and Halls of Residence. This has increased significantly since last year due to improved access to data covering international student travel, meaning that while the number of international students has not increased significantly, our understanding of the data has improved and therefore it has been possible to include more journeys. The footprint from student commuting has not

changed. As with staff commuting, we are using the same methodology as last year, so we've only seen a slight change in line with student numbers.

Halls of Residence has seen its carbon footprint increase by around 25% since last year. We have fewer students staying in the University of London owned and/or managed Halls, this year than we did last year (140 in 2023-24 vs. 111 in 2024-25); however, this year we have access to further data, allowing us to create a more accurate per-room carbon footprint for each of the Halls students are staying in.

Investments

While Birkbeck recognises that our investments will have carbon impacts, we are not yet reporting on this due to the complexity of the data. We will aim to report at least partial data under this category for the first time for the 2025-26 academic year.

Excluded categories

There are several Scope 3 categories not applicable to Birkbeck. These are:

- Upstream leased assets
- Processing of sold products
- Use of sold products
- End-of-life treatment of sold products
- Downstream leased assets
- Franchises

Should Birkbeck begin any future activities that fall under any of these categories, they will be included in future carbon footprints and sustainability reports.

Carbon offsetting

Currently, we only offset a small amount of emissions each year as we do not have a formal plan in place for offsetting. One of our travel providers offers 1 tCO_2e offset per trip booked, and some of our academics also use All Things Small and Green to offset emissions from business travel on an ad hoc basis. We will be reviewing procurement options to appoint an offsetting provider and to create a formal process this during the 2025-26 academic year as part of our approach to developing a new Business Travel Policy.

Next steps

Data

We will continue to improve our access to and understanding of data to help analyse our carbon footprint. One of the things we will be looking at is how we gather information relating to business travel. At the minute when people claim travel on expenses our system does not necessarily provide the full information, we would need to estimate the carbon footprint of each trip. We will work with the Finance team to see if we can make changes to the system or to the expense claims process to address these gaps.

We have also used estimates to produce commuting figures for both staff and students. While we had a reasonably good response to a staff survey (around 10% response rate) allowing us to create a framework of commuting habits, we only received a very small number of responses from students and therefore had to use a UCL survey to create an estimate of how our students travel. In 2025-26 we will aim to re-issue these surveys to update staff information and to create a Birkbeck-specific profile. Due to the nature of our teaching, it is likely that there are significant differences between our students' and UCL students' commuting habits.

Behaviour change

Because so much of scope 3 is out of Birkbeck's direct control and relies on day-to-day decisions and actions from different stakeholders, one of the ways we will aim to influence this is through behaviour change. To begin to address this through 2025-26, we will aim to influence behaviour change through a number of campaigns relating to energy use, waste disposal, and procurement. These are expected to begin as smaller scale internal communications campaigns involving nudging (i.e. gently promoting sustainable choices).

Carbon 'foodprints'

One of the nudging campaigns we expect to introduce in 2025-26 is carbon 'foodprints'. We will begin by showing a carbon rating for each meal served in the Terrace 5 restaurant to ensure customers are informed about the carbon impacts of what they are eating. This is expected to be introduced in Semester 2.

Energy

Birkbeck currently uses energy from four sources in its buildings. These sources are gas and electricity purchased from providers Corona and EDF respectively via the TEC framework, energy generated onsite and used at 373 Euston Road via a rooftop PV installation, and our Birkbeck Central building is heated via the Bloomsbury District Heat Network (DHN).

Energy use figures for 2024-25 can be seen in Table 3. Energy use intensity (EUI) per square metre of useful internal space for each of our buildings can be seen in Table 4.

Table 3: Birkbeck's energy use

Figures in kWh (Aug-Jul)	**2021-22**	**2022-23**	**2023-24**	**2024-25**
Total gas use	4,105,232.0	4,548,227.0	3,767,279.0	1,899,062.0
Total electricity use	6,717,981.0	6,663,997.2	5,958,903.3	5,899,714.2
Electricity generated onsite	24,000	24,000	24,000	24,000
Total district heat network	202,395.0	415,270.0	321,392.0	178,485
Total energy use	**11,049,608**	**11,651,494.2**	**10,047,574.3**	**8,001,261.2**
Change since last year	N/A	601,886.2	-1,603,919.9	-2,046,313.1
Percentage change since last year	N/A	5.45%	-13.77%	-20.37%

Table 4: Energy use intensity by building, 2024-25

Building Name	**Electricity use, kWh per m²**	**Gas use, kWh per m²**	**Heat network, kWh per m²**	**Total energy use, kWh per m²**
Malet Street (inc. Extension)	194.7	39.4	0	234.1
Birkbeck Central Building	49.8	0	18.3	68.2
Clore Management Centre + Basement and Baby Lab	57.3	78.7	0	135.9
373 Euston Road	112.5	49.8	0	162.4
39-47 Gordon Square	73.0	49.7	0	122.7
25-28 Russell Square	55.9	52.1	0	108.0
30 Russell Square	36.2	111.9	0	148.1
Toddler Lab	291.8	129.3	0	421.1
04 Gower Street	36.3	0	0	36.3
10-20 Gower Street	38.8	0	0	38.8
32 Tavistock Square	15.1	76.6	0	91.7

Summary of annual progress

Energy use reduction

Birkbeck has seen an overall decrease in energy use across its whole estate. Our annual gas consumption decreased by almost 60% across all our sites combined during the two-year period from July 2023 to July 2025.

We were already investigating a 17% overall decrease in gas consumption from 2022-23 to 2023-24 when monitoring revealed an overall 75% decrease in gas consumption via the main Malet Street meter over the two-year period of year ending July 2023 to year ending July 2025.

To investigate this, we first worked with consultancy LCMB to carry out some modelling on the expected energy consumption of the Malet Street building. They found that while the 17% decrease seen from 2022-23 to 2023-24 was realistic based on better energy management at the building, which has been carried out since 2023 by our Estates and Facilities team (e.g. more careful monitoring of use of heating in rooms not in use; switching boilers on later and off earlier each day; ensuring full boiler shutdown during university closure periods), the full 75% reduction could not be explained within existing models. Birkbeck has been in touch regularly with our energy providers about this and they have assured us that as we've been providing monthly meter readings they expect the available data to be accurate; however, investigation is ongoing.

We do not expect our gas consumption to continue to be as low as this in the future as the 2024-25 year appears to be an outlier. However, while gas consumption may increase in the short term, we expect the overall future trend to be a continued decrease (depending on weather conditions and building use and occupancy) as we make energy efficiency improvements to building fabric in the future and further electrify the estate.

We have also seen a sharp drop in consumption from the heat network in the Birkbeck Central building, which has decreased by around 45% in the past year. We are again exploring the reason for this as building use has increased in this time, and we will publish any findings in next year's sustainability report.

We have calculated EUI (energy used per square metre of useful internal floor area) for each of our buildings for the first time this year and will use it as an additional metric to compare energy use year-on-year in the future. For buildings that are joined and/or share metering, EUI has been combined.

Metering

This year has seen several updates and upgrades to metering, including new meters fitted for both gas and electricity at several of our buildings. This new metering will help to ensure our energy consumption data is accurate and up-to-date and will help to improve our carbon footprint analysis in the future. As we move to a half-hourly metering system across the estate for gas and electricity in the future, we will be able to better identify unnecessary energy consumption and hope to be able to further reduce our energy use through this monitoring.

Next steps

Gordon Square lighting

A plan is in place to replace existing lighting with LED lighting throughout Gordon Square as part of a relocation project. Currently, there are a mixture of lighting types at Gordon Square, most of which is older, less energy efficient types of incandescent bulbs with only limited LED lighting in place. This project will introduce new energy efficient lighting throughout the site.

LEAF Labs energy monitoring

A project is underway with LCMB to produce an estimated energy footprint of four of our labs to understand what their baseline energy use is, and how we may be able to work to reduce this in the future. This is expected to complete during the 2025-26 academic year, with any potential interventions to follow dependent on budgets and scheduling.

Kitchens to remove gas

The kitchen at the Terrace 5 restaurant in Malet Street is expecting to replace gas cookers with electric alternatives in September 2025. This will help to support the gradual switch away from gas at all sites.

Waste

Birkbeck aims to recycle as much of its waste as possible. Waste streams currently collected at Birkbeck can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Birkbeck's waste streams

Recycling	
• Plastics • Paper and card • Glass • Wood • Batteries • Chemical and clinical waste from labs	• Cooking oil • Toner cartridges • Confidential waste • WEEE (electronic and electrical waste) • Construction waste
Anaerobic digestion	**Incineration**
• Food waste	• General waste • Sanitary waste

Birkbeck has sent no waste to landfill for at least the past four years.

In 2024-25, our total waste footprint increased by almost 90 tonnes, from 18.0 tonnes in 2023-24 to 102.7 tonnes in 2024-25. This is largely due to a significant increase in construction waste as works continued on the ground floor of Birkbeck Central to open a new cafe. We have also seen small increases in the total amount of both recycling and general waste collected. When excluding construction waste, more than half of the waste produced onsite was recyclable. Figures can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6: Birkbeck's waste disposal figures

Figures in tonnes (Aug-Jul)	**2021-22**	**2022-23**	**2023-24**	**2024-25**	% of total
Recycling	50.6	68.9	54.7	58.9	52.0%
Incineration (energy from waste)	46.8	57.1	43.4	45.8	40.4%
Anaerobic digestion	0	0	18.6	8.6	7.6%
Landfill	0	0	0	0	0.0%
Total waste, tonnes	**109.4**	**134.5**	**128.3**	**113.3**	
Change since last year	N/A	25.1	-6.2	-15	
Percentage change since last year	N/A	22.94%	-4.61%	-11.69%	

Summary of annual progress

This year, we saw a significant decrease in food waste sent to anaerobic digestion, despite the introduction of food waste caddies in all staff and student kitchens and social spaces. This is largely due to improved processes in the restaurant and cafe kitchens, where our catering team have put in a significant amount of effort to reducing food waste from their operations, leading to our food waste collections more than halving by weight.

The food waste caddies were introduced in these locations as part of the Simpler Recycling legislation that came into force in March 2025, which required businesses with 10 or more full-time employees to separate food waste and dry recyclables for collection. While we have seen good uptake of these in some areas, there has been significant contamination of food waste in other places.

Next steps

Reduce contamination

In 2025-26, we will aim to reduce contamination of food waste and recycling. Currently, any contaminated waste (e.g. food waste that has packaging put into it; recycling that has food waste put into it, etc.) is sent to incineration instead of to anaerobic digestion or recycling. By helping to improve people's understanding of what can be included in which bins, we will aim to reduce the amount of waste sent to incineration and improve our recycling rates.

Simpler Recycling legislation

In March 2027 the next steps of the Simpler Recycling legislation will become law, meaning that for certain businesses plastic film must be collected for recycling and green garden waste collections must be organised. We will begin to analyse whether Birkbeck is required to participate in these schemes and if so, how to address this during the 2025-26 academic year.

Water

Birkbeck uses and disposes of a considerable amount of water across its campuses each year. From 2023-24 to 2024-25 our water supply decreased by 1,656 m^3 while our wastewater treatment (sewerage) increased by 8,800 m^3. Unfortunately, we have not been

able to discuss these changes with our water supplier, so it is unclear exactly what has caused such a significant increase in water treatment.

Table 7: Birkbeck's water supply and treatment

Figures in cubic metres (Aug-Jul)	**2021-22**	**2022-23**	**2023-24**	**2024-25**
Water supply (m^3)	22,495.0	25,869.0	22,667.21	21,010.61
Change since last year	N/A	3,374.00	-3,201.79	-1,656.60
Percentage change since last year	N/A	15.00%	-12.38%	-7.31%
Wastewater treatment (m^3)	7,837.0	9,054.2	7,513.05	15,314.72
Change since last year	N/A	1,217.20	-1,541.15	8,799.84
Percentage change since last year	N/A	+15.53%	-17.02%	117.13%

Summary of annual progress

While we've seen a 7% decrease in water supply, our water treatment rates have more than doubled in the last year. The exact reason for this is unclear. We have queried reporting with our supplier but have not received a response. A breakdown of the figures can be seen in Table 7.

Next steps

Switching provider

In the 2025-26 academic year, we will switch to the TEC framework for water. Our gas and electricity are already provided via this framework so this will help to align our utilities reporting and billing. As part of this switch, we will also aim to carry out a full review of water metering to improve this across the estate.

Rainwater harvesting

Although there is a small rainwater harvesting system in place at our Euston Road site, it is not currently metered. In the coming year we will aim to add metering to analyse the effectiveness of this system and consider whether similar systems could be implemented at other buildings.

Infrastructure

We expect to encounter challenges in decarbonising Birkbeck's estate, partly due to the conservation status of most buildings in Bloomsbury and also because of the significant disruption and expense of any large-scale works. We will begin by incorporating improved sustainability measures into any refurbishment projects such as introducing LED lighting during office moves in areas that do not already have energy efficient lighting. In 2024-25, we have already made good progress working towards sustainability certifications in our labs.

Summary of annual progress

Gordon Square LED lighting

A project has been initiated to replace all lighting at our Gordon Square building with more energy efficient LED lighting throughout. Currently, there is a mix of LED and incandescent lighting. This switch is expected to have a significant impact on our overall electricity use at this site.

LEAF Labs

We have registered an account with LEAF Labs to improve the sustainability of our wet labs and have begun focusing on four labs initially to achieve Bronze certification. Our lab managers and lab leads have been in close contact with the Sustainability Manager and with the UCL LEAF team about what sensible first steps they can take and have made significant progress towards achieving certification.

Next steps

LEAF Labs and Green Disc

We will carry out our first round of LEAF Labs audits in November 2025, and expect four labs to gain certification of at least Bronze level by the end of 2025. Following on from this, we expect all wet labs (those that use chemicals) to eventually take part in the LEAF Labs programme (or a similar programme) and we will eventually aim for at least silver certification in all labs. Green Disc is similar to LEAF Labs but designed for computing (dry) labs. We will submit our first set of evidence to Green Disc for assessment in November 2025 and expect the Faculty of Science to gain certification of Bronze level as a Central

Team in early 2026. From there, we will speak to other internal research groups and teams to encourage other groups to participate in the programme.

Procurement

In 2024-25 we have seen several activities take place through procurement to improve sustainability at Birkbeck. As well as being able to include more of our spend data in our scope 3 supplier emissions calculations, we have made changes to our tender processes to consider a wider overview of sustainability-related impacts from suppliers. We have also begun issuing specific procurement guidance for labs to help them in their decision-making processes.

Summary of annual progress

Procurement process changes

Following changes in our processes in 2023-24, selected contractors are now required to consider the sustainability actions they will demonstrate when awarded a contract by Birkbeck. In 2024-25, work for our student wellbeing lounge and at Birkbeck Central was completed by a contractor on the Constellia framework, which includes sustainability as an award criteria. We have also continued to roll out our Hyflex solution across classrooms. This contract was awarded to GVAV. The award criteria for our mini competition used a UKUPC framework, which included a section on sustainability.

New travel provider

In 2024-25, a tender exercise took place to select a new travel provider for Birkbeck. Several sustainability questions were considered as part of the tender process. We will aim for more of our colleagues to use the travel provider rather than booking trips directly, which will be able to support them in determining lower carbon travel options and will provide Birkbeck with improved access to data. The contract will be awarded in late 2025.

TUCO food procurement

We have continued to use The Universities Catering Organisation (TUCO) for all food procurement throughout 2024-25. Through this framework, all of our fruit and vegetables come from Angry Monk, who specialise in 'wonky veg' and items that would otherwise go to waste.

Labs

One of the categories under both LEAF Labs and Green Disc is sustainable procurement. This has led Birkbeck to explore several options, including:

- Development of sustainable procurement guidelines for lab managers

- Development of a lifecycle energy use calculator to help support decisions when purchasing energy-hungry equipment such as ultra-low temperature freezers
- Supplier takeback schemes
- Joint procurement or consolidated deliveries with LSHTM labs to reduce transport emissions

Next steps

Labs

In 2025-26 we expect to finalise procurement guidelines for labs and roll these out to any labs participating in LEAF or Green Disc. After we have completed the first rounds of audits, we will begin working with further labs to encourage them to participate in the certification schemes and to adopt procurement guidance.

Business Travel

As a university with a global reach, a significant amount of travel takes place within our research and academic operations each year. In 2024-25, our carbon footprint from business travel decreased significantly compared to the previous year due largely to decreased mileage from air travel (see Table 8). In the same time, we have seen an increase in emissions from hotel stays. This has been caused by both an increase in the number of hotel stays, and more nights in countries that have a higher conversion factor per night for hotel accommodation (see Table 9). Examples of this include:

- China (about 40 more nights than last year)
- Greece (about 55 more nights than last year)
- India (about 40 more nights than last year)
- Japan (about 65 more nights than last year)
- Nigeria (about 47 more nights than last year)
- Turkey (about 47 more nights than last year)

All these countries have a conversion factor of 25kg or more per night for hotel stays, whereas many other countries that we tend to book more hotel stays in (the UK, France, the USA) have conversion factors of about 6-16 kg per night.

Summary of annual progress

Decrease in business travel emissions

In 2024-25 Birkbeck's staff travelled approximately half the distance in air travel that they travelled in 2023-24 (see table 8). While we haven't seen significantly fewer journeys (see Table 10), journeys have on average been shorter. We have also seen a significant increase in use of Eurostar and international rail, suggesting that our staff are choosing more sustainable travel options for shorter journeys where possible (see Table 8).

Conversion factors

Changes in conversion factors have also played a part in our lower carbon footprint from flights. The 2025 conversion factors for air travel state approximately one quarter to one third fewer emissions per passenger kilometre for flights across all classes of travel, compared to 2024's figures (see Table 11). This is because of improved efficiencies as we return to pre-pandemic passenger numbers. There are more passengers per flight, decreasing the average carbon footprint per passenger

Table 8: Birkbeck's business travel distances and emissions

	2023-24		2024-25	
Mode of transport	**Estimated km travelled**	**Total tCO_2e inc WTT**	**Estimated km travelled**	**Total tCO_2e inc WTT**
Air	3,317,131.92	912.45	1,612,107.53	497.87
Bus	3,951.15	0.53	2,903.24	0.38
Car hire	17,818.62	3.77	8,037.16	2.81
Coach	14,656.69	0.49	45,227.00	1.55
Eurostar	3,247.49	0.02	25,791.78	0.14
Ferry	429.96	0.06	460.21	0.06
Metro	3,705.92	0.13	4,798.00	0.17
Mileage	24,288.40	5.13	9,959.38	3.48
Rail, international	265,916.28	11.81	297,299.61	12.83
Rail, UK	56,273.43	0.32	38,541.00	0.22
Taxi	2,599.35	0.64	4,773.30	1.24
TfL	2,953.23	0.10	7,383.85	0.26
Tram [1]	1,148.92	0.04	0.00	0.00
Totals	**3,714,121.38**	**935.50**	**2,863,875.73**	**521.01**

Table 9: Birkbeck's hotel stays

	2023-24	2024-25
Total nights stayed	3,320	3,578
Total emissions, tCO_2e	45.8	73.3

Table 10: Number of flights booked

	2023-24	2024-25
Direct bookings	306	271
Key Travel	200	214
Study Link	1	0
Total flights	**507**	**485**

[1] Included in either 'metro' or 'TfL' depending on location for 2024-25

Table 11: UK conversion factors per average passenger kilometre, flights

	2024 conversion factor	2025 conversion factor
Domestic, to/from UK	0.27257	0.22928
Short-haul, to/from UK	0.18592	0.12786
Long-haul, to/from UK	0.26128	0.15282
International, to/from non-UK	0.17580	0.14253

Next steps

Expense claims data

For 2024-25 we were unable to include over 80 trips and had to produce an estimate for 50 flights due to a lack of data provided. When a traveller makes an expense claim for their trip, Birkbeck relies on them describing their travel in the finance system to be able to analyse the claim for carbon footprinting purposes. In some instances, we do not receive sufficient information (e.g. someone just stating 'air travel' rather than giving their start and end locations). To avoid this in the future and to ensure we can include as close to 100% of all expense claims as possible the Sustainability and Energy Manager will work with the Finance Team and expenses approvers to determine the best approach to data gathering.

Carbon offsetting

Although we do not expect to have a business travel carbon offsetting plan fully in place within the next year, we will begin exploring the different offsetting options available to us and assess what other universities re doing to begin considering approaches that might be a best fit for Birkbeck.

New travel provider

A process is underway to appoint a new travel provider (see Procurement). The provider will be appointed in 2025-26.

Sustainable Development Goals

How does Birkbeck's activity contribute to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Please note this section is not comprehensive. It is intended to highlight some of the key research publications, projects, and events that have taken place during the 2024-25 academic year that support work towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals

SDG 1: No poverty

Brighter Futures Grants

In 2024-25, Santander offered Birkbeck students the chance to win a £1,000 grant on two occasions. In the second round, ten students were selected at random and could spend the grant to support their university experience, for example on textbooks, learning equipment, or towards their ongoing professional development.

SDG 2: Zero hunger

Food pantry distributes 10,000 meals

The Birkbeck Students' Union Food Pantry has now distributed over 10,000 free meals to students. The service offers non-perishable food and essential hygiene items and was created in response to the increasing financial pressures faced by students during the cost-of-living crisis.

Food Politics: Belonging, Identity, and Sustainability

A roundtable at the 2025 Social Sciences Festival featured faculty, alumni, and doctoral students from Birkbeck's School of Social Sciences and beyond, engaging in a cross-generational, multidisciplinary conversation on food politics. The discussion explored how food connects to questions of identity, belonging, and sustainability in everyday life. The panel examined how food practices shape—and are shaped by—social, cultural, and environmental forces.

SDG 3: Good health and wellbeing

Birkbeck study reveals lasting impacts of Covid lockdowns

A study from Birkbeck found that repeated COVID-19 lockdowns in England had a significant and lasting impact on mental health, with symptoms remaining elevated even after restrictions eased. Led by Dr Rashpal Dhensa-Kahlon, the research analysed data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study spanning 2009 to 2023, and found that mental health symptoms were significantly higher during the three national lockdowns in 2020–2021 than in the decade prior. Although symptoms declined once restrictions were lifted, they remained elevated up to May 2023, particularly for women, remote workers, those with health conditions, and individuals aged 30-45.

Grant secured to combat drug-resistant tuberculosis

A groundbreaking research initiative led by Professor Sanjib Bhakta received significant funding from UK Research and Innovation and the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. This project, that brings together leading researchers, aims to speed up the discovery of new drugs to combat tuberculosis and other similar infections.

Birkbeck research suggests new MND treatment pathways

Research led by Bonnie Ann Wallace, Professor of Molecular Biophysics in Birkbeck's Department of Biological Sciences, has revealed critical insights into how future drugs might be developed to improve the lives of those living with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). ALS, also known as a motor neurone disease (MND), is a progressive neurodegenerative disorder.

SDG 4: Quality education

'Choose your own timetable' launched

In March 2025 Birkbeck launched a 'Choose Your Own Timetable' selection of courses. These will allow undergraduate students to choose whether they attend classes in the evening, daytime, or a combination. This will allow our students to study at times that suit their schedules, allowing people to balance work, study, and personal lives.

Birkbeck listed among most prestigious university brands

This year, Birkbeck was ranked in the top 300 most prestigious university brands in the Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings. This is assessed based on three core

pillars of evaluation: vote counts, pairwise comparison and voter diversity, with all three considered in relation to research and teaching.

SDG 5: Gender equality

45% of doctors experience sexual harassment

Research from Birkbeck has found that 45% of doctors experience sexual harassment by patients, with female doctors reporting a significantly higher rate of harassment than male doctors. The research was the first global systematic review of the issue.

Book launch by Dr Daanika Kamal

Dr. Daanika Kamal launched a book titled 'Domestic Violence in Pakistan: The Legal Construction of 'Mad' and 'Bad ' Women'. The book examines the increasing pursuit of legal avenues by Pakistani women against acts of domestic violence, and how their claims are often dismissed through character allegations that label them as 'bad' women in need of control, or 'mad' women not to be trusted.

Social Sciences Festival 2025 event

An event at the Social Sciences Festival 2025 titled 'Carceral Diagonalism: The Punitive Safety Politics Linking Left and Right Anti-gender Mobilisations in Britain' examined the rapid escalation of 'gender critical' politics in Britain and the backlash against transgender rights. In this talk, Professor Lamble discussed how carceral safety claims – namely political assertions that see the safety of one group as contingent on the punishment and unsafety of others – have driven cross-political anti-trans alliances in Britain.

SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation

Birkbeck graduate specialises in water needs

Christopher Birks, who studied MSc Environment and Sustainability at Birkbeck, now works for the Environment Agency following completion of his award-winning thesis 'Changes in the nutrient flux of a wastewater-impacted reach of river when subjected to combined sewer overflow discharge'. His role now focuses on balancing the water needs of the natural environment with those of the human population.

SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy

Climate Festival event: Disrupting the energy industry

During our second Climate Festival in March 2025, Birkbeck hosted an event featuring keynote guest speaker Greg Jackson, CEO of Octopus Energy, to explore the role of innovation and disruption in transforming the energy sector. Focusing on sustainability, equity, and the future of energy access, Greg reflected on Octopus Energy's mission to reshape the industry by creating cleaner, more affordable, and more accessible energy solutions for all.

SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth

Entrepreneurship and Innovation group

Birkbeck's Entrepreneurship and innovation research leads, impactful research and knowledge exchange activities. The group leads a leading research centre - the Centre for Innovation Management Research (CIMR) - which combines international academic research on innovation with stakeholder engagement, to provide practice-informed evidence.

Apprenticeships event

In February 2025, an event titled 'Supporting Learners on to Apprenticeships' took place. The event provided a brief overview of some of the resources and support available at Linking London, including a publication on Apprenticeship provision across London colleges and universities, HE checklists and a jobs and apprenticeship resource.

SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure

Royal Society Industry Fellowship for Dr Becky Briant

Birkbeck academic, Dr Becky Briant, Reader in Quaternary Science in the School of Social Sciences, has been awarded a Royal Society Industry Fellowship, running from 2024 to 2026. The fellowship, which is part of the Royal Society's wider Science and Industry Programme, strives to promote the value and importance of science by connecting academia, industry and government.

Birkbeck launches new AI courses

In September 2024 Birkbeck announced the launch of a range of new undergraduate and postgraduate courses designed to meet the growing demand for expertise in artificial intelligence (AI), entrepreneurship, and environmental science. Most of the courses will start in Autumn 2025.

SDG 10: Reduced inequalities

Conference: Reparative Justice, Diaspora and Responsibility

In June 2025, Birkbeck hosted a conference titled 'Reparative Justice, Diaspora and Responsibility – Black Women's Narratives in Higher Education'. The conference presented Black women's narratives in an area where they remain largely unheard yet continue to bear the brunt of responsibility for 'taking care' of the day-to-day impact of colonial injustices.

Neofeudalism book launch

In June 2025, a book titled 'Capital's Grave: Neofeudalism and the New Class Struggle by Jodi Dean' was launched at Birkbeck. Professor Jodi Dean, Emeritus Professor Maria Aristodemou, Dr Camille Barbagallo, Professor James Martel, and Dr Ashok Kumar discussed Dean's new book, which brings together analyses from different fields to explore capital's drive to accumulate, and how many are trapped in new forms of servitude.

SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities

New student lounges

In May 2025 Birkbeck's two new student lounges were unveiled. The spaces are designed with the aim of enhancing student experience at Birkbeck and creating a student-centred campus, introducing social and study areas to allow students to connect and collaborate.

SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production

Food waste

In March 2025, Birkbeck introduced new food waste bins in all social spaces and restaurant areas for use by students and staff. This is to align our campus with new legislation relating to waste, with the aim of reducing the amount of waste sent to

incineration and landfill and improving recycling, composting, and anaerobic digestion rates across England and Wales.

Throughout 2024-25, Birkbeck decreased its total food waste collections by approximately 10 tonnes. This is largely due to the hard work of our catering team who have implemented several changes to improve food waste management in our restaurant and cafes.

SDG 13: Climate action

Green Gown Awards

In 2025, Birkbeck's Climate Festival became a finalist in the 'Creating Impact' category of the UK and Ireland Green Gown Awards. This category focuses on projects that have a significant positive impact on sustainability within educational institutions. The awards will be announced in November 2025.

SDG 14: Life below water

Birkbeck academic leads first global effort to reduce crocodile attacks

Dr Simon Pooley, Lambert Lecturer in Environment and Applied Herpetology at Birkbeck, is leading a new global effort to help communities live more safely alongside crocodilians, while supporting their protection (an order of reptiles including crocodiles, alligators and caiman). The research has received backing from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and a first worldwide survey of crocodile attack mitigation strategies has been launched.

SDG 15: Life on land

Ecological legacy of war

A new exhibition opened in 2025 at The Vimy Visitor Education Centre in Givenchy-en-Gohelle, Pas-de-Calais, France. The exhibition formed part of Dr Esther Breithoff's UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Future Leaders Fellowship project, Ecologies of Violence: Heritage and Conflict in More-than-Human Worlds. The research examined how war and state violence leave lasting scars on people, landscapes and ecosystems.

Birkbeck researchers rediscover squirrel species

Dr Rajith Dissanayake has played a key role in rediscovering and renaming a species of squirrel in South Asia. For over a century, the Dusky striped squirrel was thought of as a single species, but Dr Dissanayake's work has confirmed that there were actually two distinct species, now known as the Dusky Striped Squirrel (Funambulus obscurus) in Sri Lanka and the Pygmy Striped Squirrel (Funambulus sublineatus) in India.

SDG 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions

World Prison Brief receives new funding

Since 2016, the Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research (ICPR) - based at Birkbeck's School of Social Sciences– has raised awareness of rising prisoner numbers through its World Prison Research Programme. Thanks to philanthropic support from the Blanes Trust, the programme received a £21,500 boost to overhaul its prison population database The World Prison Brief.

NATO funding for cybersecurity research

A research project led by Dr Paul Yoo, in Birkbeck's School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences has secured funding from NATO's Science for Peace and Security programme. The initiative aims to transform how nations predict and mitigate cyber threats, placing Dr Yoo and Birkbeck at the forefront of global efforts to enhance cybersecurity. Dr Yoo's project 'Explainable Forecasting of Cyber Threats and Pertinent Alleviation Technologies' is aimed at forecasting cyber threats and aligning them with mitigating solutions, known as Pertinent Alleviation Technologies.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals

Birkbeck and CSSA UK host competition launch

In June 2025 Birkbeck hosted the Opening Ceremony of the 18th Chinese Students & Scholars Association UK (CSSA-UK) High-Level Talent Entrepreneurship Competition and the 20th Chunhui Cup Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition (UK Division). The Chunhui Cup is a leading international platform designed to support overseas Chinese professionals in realising their entrepreneurial and innovative ambitions.

Glossary

Carbon footprint: the total amount of carbon emissions produced by an organisation, activity, geographic area, or individual.

Conversion factor: a figure produced annually by the UK government that can be applied to a unit of activity to calculate its carbon footprint. For example, when calculating your carbon footprint from electricity use, the conversion factor per kWh of electricity used can be applied to calculate the carbon footprint of your electricity use.

Distribution: this term refers to the emissions associated with transporting heat through a heat network to the building where it will be used.

Heat Network: a heat network supplies heat from a central source to consumers via a network of underground pipes carrying hot water. The Bloomsbury District Heat Network has been operational for well over 20 years and currently heats the Birkbeck Central building.

Scope 1: emissions produced from burning fuels onsite or directly in your own activities, e.g. using gas boilers or petrol vehicles.

Scope 2: emissions caused by purchased energy, such as grid electricity.

Scope 3: emissions produced indirectly through an organisation's value chain, for example by suppliers providing goods or services, business travel, and commuting.

Transmission & Distribution: this term refers to emissions associated with electricity that is lost through the grid as electricity is transported from its source to the end user.

Well to Tank: this term refers to the emissions produced by producing and transporting gas from a well to its point of use.