

# UN Global Compact Communication on Engagement



2022-2023





# Statement of Continued Support

In the two years since our last Communication on Engagement, the landscape of social and environmental challenges we face as part of a global community continues to evolve. While we have gradually returned to the 'old normal' after the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic (including a large-scale return to in-person teaching and learning in Semester 1, 2023), we are confronted with the emergence of new and old forms of conflict and the ever-present problem of climate change. Consequently, there is no better time to reaffirm the University of Sydney's support for the United Nations Global Compact. The Compact's 10 principles represent foundational guidelines for how businesses and organisations should act in the areas of human rights, labour, environment, and anti-corruption. As an education and research institution – and Australia's first university – we have a special obligation to lead in these spaces. The world-class research and education we facilitate are essential components to building a more just and sustainable future. We are actively working to promote research and educational opportunities for our students, in areas directly related to the Global Compact's 10 principles and the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), more broadly.

While we are promoting solutions to some of our most pressing problems through our research and education efforts, we must also acknowledge that the University of Sydney itself – though our day-to-day operations – has a sizeable ecological and social impact. We must 'walk the talk' to ensure that we are promoting the values of responsible global citizens and practising good environmental stewardship in everything we do. To this end, we are continuing to improve our performance in all areas covered by the Global Compact's 10 principles, including through our ongoing implementation of several strategies and commitments. These include our *Sustainability Strategy 2020*, *One Sydney, Many People 2021-2024 Strategy* (outlining our commitment to Australia's First Peoples), and *Modern Slavery Policy 2020*.

This Communication on Engagement highlights several of our achievements from our last report to the end of 2023. While much remains to be done, I am proud of the progress the University of Sydney has made in the last two years. As we look to the coming years, and what more we can hope to achieve, I reaffirm our commitment to the Global Compact and its principles.

**Professor Mark Scott AO**  
**Vice-Chancellor and President**

# Activities and outcomes to support the Global Compact's 10 principles

Our work since our last Communication on Engagement (CoE) has been marked by ongoing efforts to embed social justice, human rights, and sustainability principles and actions more firmly into who we are and what we do as an organisation. As outlined in this CoE, we have made significant progress towards implementing and promoting the Global Compact's 10 principles across our education and research activities, and our everyday operations. Our work in these areas is increasingly influenced by the ongoing implementation of our suite of strategies and commitments including our [One Sydney, Many People Strategy 2021-2024](#), [Sustainability Strategy 2020](#), [Modern Slavery Policy 2020](#), and [Biodiversity Management Plan 2021-2025](#). As a university, the research and education we facilitate is foundational to the contribution we make to the local, national, and international communities we are a part of. Highlights of our work in these areas since our last CoE in 2021 are summarised in the following sections, along with our efforts to promote collaboration, knowledge sharing, and engagement. Our work to improve our everyday operations which support our research and education efforts are summarised subsequently under each of the Global Compact's four themes (Human Rights, Labour, Environment, and Anti-Corruption).

Although we recognise that much remains to be done, and that improving our performance in all areas related to the Global Compact is a journey, we are proud of our efforts to date, which have been recognised through our reporting to external ratings organisations. For instance, we achieved a silver rating in our inaugural submission to the Sustainability Tracking Assessment & Rating System (STARS) program and received a bronze rating by EcoVadis in 2023. We are especially proud of being ranked seventh globally and first in Australia in the [QS World University Rankings: Sustainability 2024](#). Closer to home, we are proud that our efforts to take meaningful action on addressing modern slavery were recognised as sector-leading in Australia, with the University of Sydney being ranked first in the RMIT Business and Human Rights Centre's Evaluation of Modern Slavery Reporting in the Higher Education Sector. We strive to build on the work completed in the last two years to continually improve in all areas related to social justice, human rights, and environmental sustainability.

## Education at the University of Sydney and the Global Compact

We recognise the critical role we play as a tertiary institution passing on knowledge, experience, and skills to thousands of our students every year. We aim to equip our students with the capabilities to make real and positive change in their communities – and the wider world – both while they study with us and when they leave to pursue their careers. We continue to offer learning opportunities in a wide range of areas, including human rights, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Our students can study subjects such as [Green Engineering](#) (CHNG5003), [Gender, Security, and Human Rights](#) (GOVT3986), [Creating Shared Value and Inclusive Business](#) (SMBA6123), and [The Environment, Law and Business](#) (CLAW3209). Our students can take these subjects as part of several sustainability, social justice, and human rights focused degrees, ranging from our [Bachelor of Advanced Studies \(Taronga Wildlife Conservation\)](#) and [Master of Social Justice \(Human Rights\)](#), to our [Master of Sustainability](#) and [MBA program](#).

Since our last Communication of Engagement in 2021, we are pleased to report the following highlights of our educational activities:

- The launch of our [Major in Sustainability](#) allowing undergraduate students to gain expertise in sustainability from a range of disciplines across the University with over 60 units of study offered.
- [Sydney Business Insights](#) (an initiative of our Business School), launched its [SDG portal](#) at the end of 2022, offering access to more than 140 curated articles and podcasts covering issues related to one or more of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The establishment of a dedicated Modern Slavery expert unit, including the appointment of Australia's first university based Modern Slavery Director, to lead our business and human rights due diligence.
- The growth in popularity of our Masters of Sustainability. The degree received 166 enrolments during 2023 with 56 students completing capstone projects.
- A collaboration with the University of Queensland to utilise its accredited [Carbon Literacy](#) Training course to educate staff and students on issues relating to climate change and the importance of emissions reductions.
- A partnership with the University of New South Wales to adapt its SDG Toolkit to employ a similar resource to help academics increase awareness of the SDGs and embed them into their courses.
- The launch of the Shared Value and Inclusive Business course ([SMBA6123](#)) as part of our MBA Program. This course focuses on teaching future leaders the role of business in identifying and addressing a range of environmental and social issues, including climate change, inequality, and slavery.
- The recognition of the work of the University of Sydney Business School's PRME team, who received a [Faculty Recognition Award for Excellence in SDG Integration in 2023](#).
- The creation of a sustainability stream for our [Student Life Grants](#) program to provide funding for student projects aligning with our *Sustainability Strategy*. This stream is intended to help students take an active role in enabling and embedding sustainable practice on campus.

## Research at the University of Sydney and the Global Compact

The University of Sydney continues to be a hub of innovative research, much of which is aimed at tackling the most pressing global issues including all areas covered by the Global Compact's 10 principles. Our research in these areas is conducted by a range of individual scholars across the University and is also coordinated within several of our multidisciplinary research centres, including [Sydney Nano](#), [Sydney Environment Institute](#), [Sydney Policy Lab](#), and the [Sydney Southeast Asia Centre](#). In addition, work is also coordinated within a plethora of research centres and groups, including our [Australian Centre for Climate and Environmental Law](#), the [Sydney Centre for Healthy Societies](#), and the [Centre for Sustainable Energy Development](#). Some of the highlights of our research work relating to the Global Compact in the last two years, include:

- The establishment of the [Net Zero Initiative](#) (NZI), a multi-disciplinary initiative based in the Faculty of Engineering. The NZI is promoting the development and deployment of new technologies to facilitate global decarbonisation.
- The continuation of our [Living Labs](#) project to utilise our campuses as incubators for innovative solutions to environmental issues.



- The establishment by our Office of Global and Research Engagement of an [awards scheme](#) in 2022 to fund research on sustainability and the SDGs. [Twelve projects](#) were selected for the 2022 cohort, covering topics from gender bias in artificial intelligence to sustainable cities.
- The launch of the [Heat and Health Research Incubator](#) in 2022 as a multidisciplinary initiative to tackle the growing challenge posed by extreme heat and hot weather on human health.
- The launch of the Sydney Environment Institute's [Collaborative Research Fellowships](#) in 2022, with projects examining youth mental health and climate anxiety, renewable energy transitions in the Pacific, and the validity of metrics used in carbon accounting.
- The University has been leading research into equality and the gender pay gap for over ten years through the Women, Work and Policy Research Group and the newly formed [Gender Equality in Working Life](#) (GEWL) Research Initiative.
- Our engagement with the [My Green Labs](#) certification program in 2023 to help improve the sustainability of our laboratory spaces. Four labs participated, with three achieving the highest Green Certification level and one achieving a Platinum Certification (second highest).
- The success of our Integrated Sustainability Analysis (ISA) group and Sydney Institute for Astronomy (SIfA), who won the [Anti-Slavery Australian Freedom Award](#) for their Open Analysis to address Slavery in Supply Chains (OAASIS) Project. OAASIS involves developing an open-access tool that organisations can use to identify modern slavery risks in their supply chains.
- The awarding of several prestigious Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage grants to University of Sydney researchers. Our [2022](#) cohort included projects exploring issues such as safe hydrogen storage and urban rewilding, while projects examining the impact of immigration detention and the effects of large-scale infrastructure on coastal habitats received funding in [2023](#).
- Our receipt of the [2023 Green Gown award](#) for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for our *Mapping, protecting and enriching Aboriginal Cultural Heritage landscapes* project. A collaboration with the Narrabri Local Aboriginal Land Council (NLALC), ARC Heritage, and University staff from the Faculty of Science and Open Spaces team, this project was designed to protect culturally significant sites while regenerating the landscape of our Llara Farm near Narrabri.

## Collaboration, Knowledge Sharing, and Engagement

While our individual progress as an organisation – as captured in our ranking and ratings achievements – is important, we also recognise that the range of social and environmental challenges we face cannot be tackled alone. Collaboration and knowledge sharing between diverse groups and stakeholders (both internal and external) is essential. As such, we continue to engage as an active member and collaborator in several relevant networks, including as:

- A signatory to the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME).
- A member of the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) (led by the International Labour Organization (ILO), UN Women, and the OECD).
- A member of Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS).
- A participant in the Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association (TEFMA) benchmarking survey.

- A member of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).
- A member of the Australian Government Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Research Network.
- A regular participant in the Group of Eight (Go8) Sustainability Forums.
- A member of the International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN).

We are proud that many of our staff, as leaders in their field, are active participants with a range of organisations and networks dedicated to promoting work related to the Global Compact's principles. A recent highlight in this space was the appointment of Professor Ben Saul, the Challis Chair of International Law at the Sydney Law School, to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counter-terrorism in 2023. In this role, Professor Saul will focus on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in efforts to combat terrorism. Additionally, our Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Emma Johnston, was a co-author of the latest State of the Environment report released by the Australian Government. On the business and human rights front, we are proud of the appointment of the Modern Slavery Unit Director, Esty Marcu and Sydney researchers, Associate Professor Anna Boucher and Scarlet Franks, to the NSW Anti-slavery Commissioner Advisory Panel, to provide expert guidance to the Commissioner.

The promotion of activities relating to the Global Compact is also essential within our immediate community and more broadly. We regularly host events on topics related to the Global Compact's 10 Principles. A sample of these events are listed in the following table:

| Event  | Host/organiser  | Year |
|--|---|------|
| Business and Human rights: Recent Developments and Comparative Lessons   | Sydney Centre for International Law   | 2023 |
| The 2023 Kim Santow Law and Social Justice Panel: Is there a looming crisis in social justice recruitment?               | Sydney Law School   | 2023 |
| The International Sociological Association (ISA)'s Research Committee of Labour Movements (RC44) Asia Pacific Conference | Sydney Southeast Asia Centre  | 2022 |
| Respect@Work: Making it happen   | University of Sydney Business School  | 2022 |
| Business, human rights and development: A case for course correction   | ANZIL International Human Rights Law Interest Group and the University of Sydney Law School | 2023 |
| Human Rights and Business in Myanmar   | Sydney Southeast Asia Centre  | 2022 |
| Congress of the Humanities   | Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences   | 2023 |
| SSEAC Roundtable – Human Rights and Sustainability   | Sydney Southeast Asia Centre  | 2023 |



|  |   |      |
|--|---|------|
| Australian Government Modern Slavery Act Review Panel                                  | Sydney Law School and Modern Slavery Unit                           | 2023 |
| Reimagining environmental responsibility after the State of the Environment report     | Sydney Environment Institute  | 2022 |
| The power of multidisciplinary research in addressing UN Sustainable Development Goals | Sydney Environment Institute and the Faculty of Medicine and Health | 2023 |
| Sydney Summit III: Universities and the SDGs: a half-time report                       | Office of Global and Research Engagement                            | 2023 |

Other Global Compact-related engagement activities include:

- The establishment of the Student Human Rights Network and a Modern Slavery Student Newsletter in 2023 to share knowledge and raise awareness of modern slavery issues amongst our student cohort.
- The completion by nearly 9,000 students of our voluntary online Anti-Slavery awareness training module. Additionally, 15,000+ current and former staff and affiliates have completed the University's online Anti-Slavery training program.
- The continuation of the University of Sydney Union's Enviro Fair.
- The running of several 'Sustainability Trail Tours' highlighting locations on our main campuses where sustainability initiatives have been introduced.
- The establishment of a monthly sustainability newsletter and Instagram account.

## Human Rights

- *Principle 1: Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights*
- *Principle 2: Make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses*

The University of Sydney is committed to respecting human rights across our research and education activities, supply chain, investments, partnerships, and community. As a higher education institution occupying a unique space at the intersection of public and private enterprise, we recognise the significant role the University, and the sector, can play in tackling human rights challenges. The University is taking meaningful action when and where we can within the legal, policy, operational, and management settings we control, and using our influence and leverage to effect change.

Through research, education, and due diligence the University is working to advance human rights best practices. The University applies the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human rights to inform its due diligence approach and framework to addressing human rights, with a key focus on identifying and addressing risks to people. The framework includes:

- Policy Commitment – See our [Modern Slavery Policy](#).
- Risk Analysis, Risk Saliency, and Risk Prioritisation Framework.
- Training, collaboration, and engagement of our staff, suppliers, and key partners.

- Providing access to grievance mechanisms and remediation.
- Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting on our effectiveness and impact through our annual Modern Slavery Statement to the Australian Government.

The University has a dedicated expert team (Modern Slavery Unit) to identify and address modern slavery risks. The Modern Slavery Unit works closely with the Science and Gender Equality Team, Indigenous Strategy Services, and other related teams focusing on implementing our commitment to human rights. More information on the approach taken to modern slavery due diligence is available in the Modern Slavery Statement 2022 and on our [Modern Slavery page](#).

Additional University-wide initiatives in the human rights space include:

- Our [Disability Inclusion Action Plan](#).
- Support for [gender equity](#) and [LGBTQIA+ inclusion](#).
- Widening access to university through [scholarships for diverse communities](#).
- Recognition and support for [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples](#).

## Labour

- *Principle 3: Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining*
- *Principle 4: The elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour*
- *Principle 5: The effective abolition of child labour*
- *Principle 6: The elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation*

The University of Sydney is deeply committed to the rights of all workers to enjoy freedom of association, fair pay, and a safe working environment. We are also committed to equal opportunity for all our staff and students and to ending discrimination in all its forms. The pay and conditions of our staff are set predominantly through our Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs). Our EBAs are negotiated with the unions representing our workforce and are compliant with all relevant legislation. Our latest EBA (2023-26) embodies our commitment to our staff, their rights at work, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Its overarching objectives include: “providing a rewarding, fair, flexible and inclusive working environment for staff” and “maintaining a healthy and safe working environment that is free from bullying and harassment including by ensuring compliance with all relevant work health and safety legislation and University policies” (*The University of Sydney Enterprise Agreement 2023-2026*, p. 1).

Some highlights from 2022 and 2023 (and our latest EBA) include:

- Reinforcing our commitment to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait colleagues as outlined in our [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Plan 2022-2024](#).
- Updating our Anti-Racism Pledge in 2022 based in collaboration with several groups including our Mosaic Network and [National Centre for Cultural Competence](#). Our Anti-Racism Pledge is an online learning module designed to empower staff to commit to actions to reduce racial discrimination.



- Admission as a member of the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) in 2023. The EPIC Secretariat is composed of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UN Women, and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
- Achieving a Gold Employer award for the second consecutive year in 2022 in the [Australian LGBTQ+ Inclusion Awards](#) recognising top organisations for inclusion based on the Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI).
- The introduction of several new categories of leave to better support our staff across a range of issues. New leave categories allow staff to take time off work for gender affirmation, menstruation and menopause, assisted reproduction, and when affected by natural disasters. We also introduced paid sick leave for our casual staff.
- The extension of the coverage of existing categories of leave to better support our staff taking parental leave, dealing with domestic violence, or facing a bereavement.

We also recognise that our responsibilities to combat coercion and support labour rights go beyond our relationships with our immediate staff and students. Since the University started on its modern slavery journey in 2020, we have taken tangible steps to identify and address modern slavery risks in our operations, supply chain, and value chain. We publish a Modern Slavery Statement annually that reports on the activities that the University has undertaken to identify and address modern slavery. These activities include embedding best practice due diligence into our operations, creating a culture of continuous improvement and learning, designing and implementing solution-focused research and education, supporting students at risk of experiencing modern slavery, and contributing to the global effort to eradicate modern slavery.

## Environment

- *Principle 7: Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges*
- *Principle 8: Undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility*
- *Principle 9: Encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies*

The University of Sydney continues its journey of improving our environmental stewardship, with much of this work being implemented through our *Sustainability Strategy* and associated commitments. Our education, research, and engagement work (summarised above) speak directly to Principles 7-9 of the Global Compact. Additionally, as an organisation consisting of multiple campuses and tens of thousands of staff and students, we are also striving to reduce our own environmental footprint. Since our last Communication on Engagement, we have made progress on several fronts in this space, including:

- The implementation of our first Power Partnership Agreement (PPA) in July 2022. Our PPA provides 100% renewable energy to all University campuses.
- Continued progress towards reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. To the end of June 2023, we have seen an almost 94% reduction in our Scope 1 and 2 emissions from our 2018-19 financial year baseline (with our PPA covering all our Scope 2 emissions).
- In 2023 we reached around 1.7MW of on-site renewable energy generation capacity with a further capacity currently being installed.
- Instigated work to measure our Scope 3 emissions as a first step to incorporating these emissions sources into our reduction strategies.

- We have several energy, water, and waste saving initiatives which are being planned and currently implemented. This includes our Hydrowise smart irrigation system, which in the 2023 financial year saved over 14.5 million litres of water. In 2023, we also installed LED lighting across 15 buildings on our main campus, saving around 3,985MWh.
- In 2022, we pledged to become a Nature Positive University, committing to restoring ecosystems impacted by our activities. We also published our [Biodiversity Management Plan](#), which outlines 7 principles and 24 targets for conserving and improving the biodiversity across the physical spaces the University is responsible for. A newly created role of Biodiversity Management Officer has been tasked with overseeing the implementation of this plan.

As an organisation, our commitment to improving our environmental sustainability and living up to our goal of ‘Caring for Country’, has been promoted through the significant expansion of our Sustainability Team. This team is dedicated to implementing our *Sustainability Strategy* and tracking and promoting sustainable actions across the University. Most notably, a new position of ‘Director of Sustainability’ was created in 2022 to oversee this team and help lead the University on its sustainability journey. Further information and the latest updates on our efforts to promote environmental sustainability at the University of Sydney is available [here](#).

## Anti-corruption

*– Principle 10: Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery*

The University of Sydney is committed to upholding the highest standards of ethical behaviour across all areas of our operations. We have clear expectations – embedded within a suite of interrelated [policies](#) – regarding the appropriate behaviour of our students, researchers, and professional staff. This includes clear guidelines on reporting conflicts of interest, when it is – and is not – acceptable for staff to receive gifts and benefits, and our zero-tolerance approach to fraud and contract cheating.

We regularly update our policies to ensure they remain relevant and appropriate as social, technological, and external regulatory changes create new areas where guidelines are required. Some of our recently updated/introduced policies include our [Reporting Wrongdoing Policy 2023](#), [Academic Integrity Policy 2022](#), and [Research Code of Conduct 2023](#). Our *Reporting Wrongdoing Policy 2023* was introduced to outline our commitment to a “speak up” culture where anyone concerned about potential wrongdoing is empowered to report it. It also identifies our commitment to manage any complaints with impartiality and confidentiality and our zero-tolerance approach to any detrimental actions taken against a reporter.

While we are committed to ensuring ethical behaviour in our own activities, we also recognise that some members of our community are particularly vulnerable to issues such as scams, extortion, and bribery. We are vigilant of these risks and dedicated to providing all support we can to our community. For instance, we have recently become aware of an increase in scams targeting our international student cohort. These scams were aimed at extorting money from students and their families. In response, we established a Scams and Student Safety Working Group and [distributed information](#) to



our community to raise awareness of these issues. We also alerted staff, especially those in student-facing roles in regular contact with those within our community, who may be most vulnerable.

## Contact

**The University of Sydney**

[university.sustainability@sydney.edu.au](mailto:university.sustainability@sydney.edu.au)

[sydney.edu.au](https://sydney.edu.au)

CRICOS 00026A