



“Operating sustainably means acting in line with our values. We are creating a business which will shape a positive future for generations to come.”

**Richard Smith, CEO Unite Students**



Our future. Our commitment.

# Creating a responsible and resilient business

A commitment to “doing what’s right” is part of who we are at Unite Students. Over the years we’ve worked hard to reduce our environmental impact, to support the wellbeing of our student customers, and promote access to higher education through the Unite Foundation. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement which brought racism into sharper focus and mass climate protests and rising awareness of an environmental crisis, it was clear to us that we needed to do more on environmental and social issues. In late 2019, we set out to develop a new, ambitious and comprehensive sustainability strategy, building on what we had achieved already to address the most materially significant environmental, social and governance challenges we face.

Throughout 2020, we have developed this work – engaging with key stakeholders, understanding the risks and opportunities, and working out how we will do more to create a positive impact.

We’ll be announcing further details of our commitment towards sustainability in our 2020 annual report but wanted to give you a preview of some of the highlights.

## **Why sustainability matters**

We operate sustainably because it reflects our values, is the right thing to do but also because it makes good business sense. Students are concerned about a wide range of topics related to both climate change and how to make the world a fairer place, while environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) issues are of increasing interest to investors, partners and other stakeholders. Many recognise that an organisation’s ability to effectively manage risks and opportunities in these areas plays a key role in their long-term success. The regulatory and legislative landscape is also changing in the UK, with the UK Government increasing its ambition and commitment to a green and resilient recovery from the current crisis.

## Our new sustainability strategy

Having listened to our stakeholders and identified the most materially significant ESG issues we face, we have developed five overarching sustainability objectives, defining our new levels of ambition and showing how we'll work to make a real difference.



### Targeting net-zero carbon operations and construction from 2030

We will reduce carbon emissions from new and existing buildings in line with climate science, ahead of the timescale set out in the Paris Climate Agreement to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. We will do this following the net zero carbon hierarchy, with a strong focus on reducing energy consumption through improving our buildings, while also strengthening the way we buy renewable energy and investing in certified carbon offsets for any residual emissions.



### Creating resilient, resource efficient assets and operations

We will reduce the environmental impact of our new and existing buildings by improving energy and water efficiency, and also help our students to adopt lasting sustainable living habits



### Enhancing the health and wellbeing of our employees and students

Driving real improvements in physical and mental health and wellbeing based on an understanding of their needs, through improvements to our service model, physical assets and employee support programmes.



### Providing opportunities for all

Backed by new diversity targets- Including students, employees and in the communities where we work, where all can succeed, whatever their background, gender or ethnicity.



### Leading the student housing sector

We will work to raise standards across the student housing sector and deliver value to our customers and investors



## Transparency

We will be announcing latest details of exactly what these commitments mean, including targets, timescales and plans in our 2020 annual report, and are committed to sharing information on our progress and performance through regular and transparent reporting. During 2020 we formally signed up as a supporter of the Taskforce on Climate Related Financial Disclosure (TCFD) and will be publishing more details of our plan for full adoption in 2021, including our net zero carbon pathway.

We already disclose details of our sustainability performance via leading schemes including the Global Real Estate Sustainability Benchmark (GRESB), CDP and the EPRA sBPR, and have achieved steady year-on-year improvements culminating in a four-star Global ESG Benchmark for Real Assets (GRESB) rating in 2020 and a score of 81/100, well above the overall average score of 70.

Following a year dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we are more determined than ever to stay loyal to our value - "doing what's right". This experience has shown our ability to respond, do more than is required and as a result accelerate positive change. As we move forward, we will do so with an enhanced commitment on sustainability and our business will contribute on some of the most important issues of our generation.



For more information contact: [info@unitestudents.com](mailto:info@unitestudents.com)