

SUSTAINABILITY AND NON-FINANCIAL REPORTING

MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT THROUGH PEOPLE AND PLACES



"We have always tried to make a real positive impact, from our founding principle of providing safe, secure and affordable accommodation, through 10 years supporting the Unite Foundation, to our 2030 net zero carbon targets."

Richard Smith
Chief Executive Officer

Operating sustainably is crucial to our long term success, which is why making Unite a responsible and resilient business is one of our strategic objectives. To help us achieve this, particularly in relation to environmental and social issues, we've created a new sustainability framework focused on "creating a positive impact, through People and Places". Key ambitions include targets to be net zero carbon by 2030, invest 1% of profit in social initiatives, and create a consciously inclusive and equitable workplace that is representative of wider society and helps everyone fulfil their potential. Some of our achievements are set out below.

Progress made through 2022

Making a positive impact through People

- Launched new learning academy and delivered over 19,000 hours of training to employees
- Committed to invest 1% of profit in social initiatives aligned with our purpose, and delivered a £2.0 million investment in 2022
- Launched our new Support to Stay student support framework including our Winter Wellbeing programme to help vulnerable students through the cost-of-living crisis
- Relunched our Leapskills programme reaching over 10,000 young people in 2022
- Relunched our Positive Impact programme, achieving Bronze awards across all properties
- Announced a bumper intake of 100 new Unite Foundation scholars to celebrate its 10th anniversary

Making a positive impact through Places

- Completed detailed surveys of all properties and developed property-level asset transition plans, identifying c.£100 million of energy efficiency investments required to hit our 2030 net zero target
- Deployed £13 million on energy efficiency measures in the year, expected to deliver a c.5% cut in energy consumption
- Appointed dedicated Sustainability Construction Manager in a new role to help our Development Team hit our sustainability targets
- Started development of a new Sustainable Construction Framework including full life cycle carbon assessment (LCA) of all new developments
- Provided head office space for charity Streets of Growth on a peppercorn rent in our new Hayloft Point development

Our ambition is to make a real positive impact:

- Invest 1% of profit in social initiatives
- Equitable representation of minority groups
- 60:40 (male:female) senior management gender split by 2025
- 75% of managerial vacancies filled internally
- Zero reportable accidents and incidents
- Employee engagement score of 80 or higher
- Net zero carbon by 2030:
 - SBTi validated 1.5°C carbon target of a 56% cut in scope 1+2 emissions by 2030
 - CRREM-based operational energy efficiency target for a 28% cut in energy intensity by 2030
 - RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge-aligned targets for new-build embodied carbon and energy
 - RE100 commitment to buy 100% renewable electricity by 2030
- BREEAM Excellent for all new developments

To deliver on our ambition to make a real difference in the areas that are most materially significant to us we've developed our new sustainability framework:

Making a positive impact through People and Places



PEOPLE

Everyone is unique. Everyone is important. Everyone deserves to be safe, respected and included, and to be their best selves. At Unite, we strive to make that happen whether you stay with us or work with us.



PLACES

We want to create places that deliver a positive impact on our people, our communities and the planet. We're aiming for net zero carbon buildings, finding ways to use fewer resources, and helping build strong communities in and around our properties.

Opportunities for people to develop and grow

We're giving employees and students the support they need to grow and succeed. To do their best work, discover their passions and be their best selves.

Wellbeing - employees and students

We aspire to build a mindful culture, where supporting the mental, physical, financial and social wellbeing of students and employees is a priority for everyone.

Tackling climate change

We're playing our part in keeping global warming below 1.5°C, reducing greenhouse gas emissions from operations and new buildings in line with science based carbon targets and to be net zero carbon by 2030.

Greener, sustainable buildings

We're designing, constructing and managing our buildings to be sustainable, support nature, and provide a healthy inspiring environment for those who work or live there.

Diversity, equity & inclusion

We're creating a culture where being different is valued. A culture where our people and students can thrive and there's room for everyone, no matter what their background, identity or circumstances.

Health & safety

We don't take shortcuts when it comes to health and safety. We work hard to make our people and the students who live with us safe and supported.

Responsible use of resources

Reducing resource consumption and waste, working with suppliers to improve circularity, and helping students and staff adopt life-long sustainable behaviours.

Playing an active role in local communities

We're ensuring our actions have a positive impact on the communities and environments around us.

OUR APPROACH

Our goal is to lead on sustainability and raise standards in the living sector. Our governance and processes ensure that working responsibly and sustainably isn't optional, that we always operate with integrity and transparency.

Transparency and disclosure

We're committed to transparency when it comes to our sustainability targets, reporting progress and disclosing performance.

Operating with integrity

We do the right thing, always operating with integrity and expecting the highest standards.



The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) (see more details at <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>) set out the most important sustainability topics globally, and provide a framework to help focus attention and action where it is most needed. Our ambition to create a positive impact through People and Places is specifically aligned with 9 of the 17 UN SDGs where we are best positioned to support the goals and underlying targets, as indicated by the SDG icons on the graphic above.

SUSTAINABILITY AND NON-FINANCIAL REPORTING continued



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Opportunities for people to grow and develop

We're giving employees and students the support they need to grow and succeed. To do their best work, discover their passions and be their best selves.

LIFELONG LEARNING

In 2022, we launched our learning Academy with a commitment to provide our employees with lifelong learning opportunities. It's been designed to help everyone realise their potential, following a pathway to success based on five core principles:

- Talent: giving employees the power to realise their potential
- Learning: providing knowledge and skills within their role
- Development: building confidence to achieve
- Mentoring: share expertise and experience new perspectives
- Leadership: for their future career at Unite, and beyond

Through 2022, we provided over 19,600 hours of learning and development to employees covering a range of personal and professional development.

As part of our commitment to lifelong learning, in 2022 we offered four one-year industrial placements to students as part of their degree programme, as well as nine internships as part of the 10,000 Black Interns programme. These eight-week long placements spanned a range of areas including finance, procurement, HR and sustainability. Our apprenticeship programme also continued, with 54 apprentices working across the business through 2022 in roles including finance, estates, legal and energy management – an increase of 35 compared to 2021.

These programmes help build the skills, knowledge and confidence of participants, helping get their career off to the best possible start while also helping Unite identify, attract and retain the diverse talent we need to succeed.

CASE STUDY

INVESTING IN LIFELONG LEARNING FOR OUR TEAMS

Launch of The Academy



The Academy launched in October 2022 to enable on-the-job learning and development for every Unite employee, at every career stage. Lifelong learning can be accessed in the form of workshops, online courses, skill sessions, leadership programmes, mentoring and coaching.



As a part of it, in May last year, Unite launched its Grow Beyond leadership programmes, which includes Institute of Leadership & Management courses. Our Rising and Inspiring Leader six month fast-track programmes have supported our General Managers and Regional Leadership teams in transitioning into their new roles post consultation.

Victoria Andrews, Account Support Supervisor who is enrolled on the level 3 Grow Beyond leadership programme for aspiring leaders said: "I'm really glad I'm able to take part in my ILM course – it's helping me to develop and grow as a supervisor in my current role and I've enjoyed being able to meet other people in the Company through this."



For more about this project, go online to:
unitegroup.com/sustainability/positive-impact

EMPLOYEE VOICE

Our employee engagement forum, Culture Matters, is designed to put the employee voice front and centre in supporting the shaping of our People strategy. It provides a forum for two-way communication between the senior leadership team and the wider Company, involving and engaging employees through consultation, enabling them to contribute to the success of the business. Representatives from across the business are elected to sit on our Culture Matters forum, giving every colleague an opportunity to shape our People strategy and create an inclusive environment where people can fulfil their true potential. The Culture Matters forum is overseen by Ilaria del Beato, our independent Non-Executive Director for Workforce Engagement, who attends the quarterly sessions ensuring direct Board-level oversight. Culture Matters also includes a number of Employee Resource Groups supporting specific groups and topics including people of colour, women, LGBTQ+ colleagues, and employee wellbeing. More details are included in our Section 172 reporting (see page 66) and the Board Leadership and Purpose section of the Governance Report (see page 97).

HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE SUCCEED AT UNIVERSITY

Providing a Home for Success means helping young people access Higher Education, providing the best possible support throughout their studies, and signposting to opportunities when they complete their studies. The Unite Foundation has been facilitating access to university for students from care backgrounds or who are estranged from their family for 10 years.

In 2022, we relaunched our Leapskills programme, aiming to help students make a successful transition from school into independent living at university. Working closely with the University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) we launched an interactive game reaching more than 25,000 prospective students with resources and content designed to help build resilience, navigate new relationships, and manage finances while at university.

We also launched a partnership collaboration with Startup Sherpas (see <https://startupsherpas.org> for more information) providing students with support to get their own business ideas and innovations off the ground.

CASE STUDY

DOING THE RIGHT THING FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

Unite Foundation 10th anniversary

The Unite Foundation offers a unique accommodation scholarship for care leavers and estranged young people at university.

Since its inception, 10 years ago, we're proud to have been its partner and principal corporate donor after setting up the charity. To date, a total of 614 care leavers and estranged students have been supported in accessing Higher Education through the Unite Foundation.

This year, to celebrate its 10-year milestone, the Foundation announced an expanded cohort of 100 new scholarship students, with our support. All new scholarship students were provided with a welcome pack worth £200. For students who were eligible, but unsuccessful in their application for a scholarship, Unite provided over £10,000 to give each student a £50 gift card to support them in making their house a home.



Unite's financial contributions to the Foundation form part of our commitment to donate 1% of annual profits to social initiatives.

Since inception, the Unite Foundation has flourished into a wholly-independent charity, currently partnering with 26 universities across the country.



For more about this project, go online to:
unitegroup.com/sustainability/leapskills

SUSTAINABILITY AND NON-FINANCIAL REPORTING continued



PEOPLE continued



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

We're creating a culture where being different is valued. A culture where our people and students can thrive and there's room for everyone, no matter what their background, identity, or circumstances.

This year has been about creating our foundations, setting our goals for the next three years, and continuing to listen to the needs of our employees.

In April we launched our first Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging (DEIB) and Wellbeing strategy, We are US, which details our ambitions for 2022–2025, what we want to achieve, and how we are going to achieve it. At the heart of this is a focus on instinctive inclusion, creating a place where our people and students thrive and are at the heart of who we are and what we do every day. Key ambitions include achieving a 40:60 female:male gender split in senior management by 2025, and building a data-led understanding of wider diversity metrics so we can work towards a workforce that is truly representative of the communities we work in at every level.

We have continued to focus on two-way communication, through our employee forum, Culture Matters. Together, we have undergone a policy review process, which has highlighted the need for broader scoping policies, that better reflect the diversity of Unite. We have consulted the forum on the most meaningful ways to communicate, and ensured that our representatives are developed in their knowledge of business, finance, policy, and soft skills. One year on, it is evident in our agenda items that the business understands the importance of employee consultation, in order to deliver impactful and meaningful projects that land in the right way.

We have kept the messaging of DEIB and Wellbeing consistent, and started to build the knowledge of our employees. Utilising employee engagement, we used the responses from our annual DEIB and Wellbeing survey to influence the construction of our learning programme, improve our communications, and set out the behaviours expected of our employees, and senior leaders.

Looking forward to 2023, we will continue to work closely with our Culture Matters forum to ensure policies and procedures on important topics, such as family leave to support our DEIB ambitions.

CASE STUDY

LIVING BLACK AT UNIVERSITY

In February 2022, Unite published its "Living Black at University" Report, based on a research commissioned by Unite and carried out by Halpin Partnership that looked into the experience of Black students in UK student accommodation – the first report of its kind.

In response, Unite called on universities and student accommodation providers to collaborate across the Higher Education sector and take meaningful action in order to address those issues.

Unite launched a national commission, drawing from key national organisations and professional bodies. The initiative aims to support the higher education and private student accommodation sectors' response to the report, aligning with Unite's strong emphasis on social impact and its value of "creating room for everyone".



The commission have shared a number of free, accessible resources and toolkits with the wider Higher Education sector whilst Unite continues to bring insights on the subject to sector conferences. In partnership with Newcastle University, Unite hosted a cultural services trial and will host a Living Black at University conference in 2023.



For more about this project, go online to:
unitegroup.com/living-black-at-university



Wellbeing

We aspire to build a mindful culture, where supporting the mental, physical, financial and social wellbeing of students and employees is a priority for everyone.

We recognise our responsibility to create happier, healthier workplaces. Throughout 2022, we focused on four pillars of wellbeing: social, mental, physical and financial. We have developed a range of employee benefits to support these pillars including flexible working, eyecare vouchers and Medicash scheme, Employee Assistance programme, optional childcare vouchers and the opportunity to purchase additional annual leave. Engagement with our Culture Matters forum and focus groups through 2022 has helped us to understand the ongoing needs and expectations of our employees, and informed the development of a comprehensive new employee support framework which we'll be launching in Q2 2023.

In 2015, we were the first student accommodation provider to pay the Real Living Wage, a commitment we still make today. Recognising the strain that the cost-of-living crisis is having on our employees, we've committed to increase salaries in line with the requirements of the Real Living Wage in 2023, and paid all of our employees an additional £500 bonus in autumn 2022.



See [pages 56-61](#) for more information

Life at university can be challenging for young people in many ways, and so in 2022 we launched our Support to Stay programme to structure a proactive approach to supporting our students, whilst also being responsive to situations and experiences which challenge their wellbeing (e.g. mental, social, financial). We've partnered with Blackbullion (see <https://www.blackbullion.com> for more information) to provide students with sector-leading tools and advice to help students manage their finances; and we've invested in training to help staff identify and respond to a range of student needs including recognising the signs and symptoms of mental health difficulties, handling disclosures, and supporting students with disabilities, and are expanding opportunities to include first aid and mental health first aid.

CASE STUDY

HELPING STUDENTS FEEL WELL AND WELCOME

Resident ambassadors and mental health resources

We're championing an inclusive culture where our customers and people prioritise their wellbeing.

Our Resident Ambassador programme was relaunched this year. It has been designed to help new students settle in, make new friends, build confidence and improve their employability.

Our updated student support structure includes Support to Stay, a framework that we've developed in alignment with universities' initiatives to keep students on track and give them the best opportunity for success.



Unite and Bournemouth University are collaborating on a data-sharing approach to improve the allocation of suitable accommodation to students. The aim is to support students' welfare during their stay. Roundtable events have been held and results of our work will set the sector's best practice. Part of this important work includes guidance around safeguarding students, privacy and how we deal with critical incidents and signposts.



For more about this project, go online to:
unitegroup.com/sustainability/positive-impact

SUSTAINABILITY AND NON-FINANCIAL REPORTING continued



PEOPLE continued



Health and Safety

Health and Safety is at the core of everything we do. We are committed to providing a safe and secure workplace for our people and making sure our customers are safe and supported. Further details of progress are contained in the Health and Safety Committee Report in the Governance section (page 128).

In 2022, we introduced a new operating model based on an in-depth assessment of our customers' needs and expectations. This new model means that all our buildings have 24/7 staff presence, 365 days a year, across both frontline and management staff. 2022 also saw the launch of our Support to Stay framework which aims to provide a supportive living environment to help students fulfil their potential, despite any medical, physical or mental health difficulties.

Throughout 2022, we also continued to uphold our commitment to being leaders in fire safety standards, through a proactive, risk-based approach, which is embedded across our entire business, to ensure that students and our employees are kept safe. We have a dedicated fire safety team which has welcomed three new managers this year, bringing in knowledgeable and experienced professionals from the fire safety and fire authority sectors to continue to drive improvement, and progress significant projects, whilst ensuring we continue to deliver on our safe and secure promise during a rapidly changing fire safety and building safety landscape. We also undertook an independent fire safety organisational audit, the findings of which will help us continually improve our fire safety management processes, helping ensure it meets the highest standards.

CASE STUDY

FIRE SAFETY MANAGER AWARD 2022

Championing Fire safety

Last year, our Group Fire Safety Manager Emily Argent won Fire Safety Manager of the Year at the Women in Fire Safety awards, which honour the outstanding achievements and contributions of all women within the fire safety industry.

Emily, who comes from a background of construction and fire safety, was praised by multiple fire and rescue services. Commenting on Emily's work, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) described Emily's approach as "what we wish all organisations would do" and "the dream".



Emily was recognised for the way she ignites passion with key stakeholders and brings people together in a genuinely collaborative approach to ensure effective solutions are implemented to help keep our students and colleagues safe.

Speaking of her award, Emily said: "I'm absolutely elated about the fact I've won Fire Safety Manager of the Year, especially when I'm up against some absolutely phenomenal women within the industry who I look up to myself. Fire Safety is a passion for me. Unite is really great at looking after and nurturing that passion and that's what I love about working for Unite. In addition to that, I get to work with who I consider to be the best in the industry and that includes my absolutely amazing team."



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