



UNIVERSITY
of York



SUSTAINABILITY CLINIC

HIGHLIGHTS 2023-2024

SUSTAINABILITY CLINIC

A hands-on interdisciplinary module for all students.

The Sustainability Clinic is an elective York Interdisciplinary Module (YIM) offered in partnership between Environmental Sustainability at York (ESAY), Careers and Placements, and the Department of Environment and Geography. The Sustainability Clinic brings together students and our local community to tackle pressing sustainability issues. Working in teams, students are given a project brief that has been co-produced with an organisation, business or charity, focusing on a sustainability challenge.

All projects are designed to develop students' employability skills while helping local organisations find solutions to a real-life sustainability problem that matters to them.

The Clinic contributes directly to the University's mission to create a community without limits, and provide all students with an education that empowers and equips them to become leaders of change.

WHERE IT BEGAN

PILOTS: 2021 & 2022

In June 2021 and 2022, two Sustainability Clinic pilot schemes were offered as community volunteering projects beyond students' studies. These included an expert panel event where students had the opportunity to present their project ideas to a panel of academics and learned insights from their expertise.

A celebration event took place to mark the launch of the Clinic allowing staff, students and partners to join together and reflect on the pilot's success.

Sustainability action plans

Students worked in teams to create sustainability action plans using a sustainability audit tool for a variety of local organisations, including: Potions Cauldron, Rural Arts, and Park House Barns.

Biodiversity surveying

Students worked in teams to conduct baseline biodiversity surveys for Friends of Rowntree Park. They learned surveying and project management skills, and developed a better understanding of biodiversity.

“I worked in a small team to create a sustainability plan for a local charity who help young people with learning difficulties and mental conditions. We researched and presented ways in which the charity can become more sustainable.”

Amy Compton, 3rd Year Law Student
(Sustainability Clinic pilot, 2022)



Climate change resources

Students worked with the PGCE Science Team to create a set of climate change resources for school teachers to use, including material on water availability, and the composition of atmospheric gases.

Circular economy

Students worked in teams to provide the Recycle Project with valuable new insights to attract more customers. They also developed an understanding of circular economy principles and sustainability.



CASE STUDY: FRIENDS OF ROWNTREE PARK

In 2021, our student teams worked with the Friends of Rowntree Park to find out how the pollinator project in Rowntree Park was contributing to the pollinator population. They were also tasked with creating a method that would be simple enough for the general public to recreate in their own gardens. The project allowed students to gain key skills in conducting surveys, project management and working as a team with external partners.

"Friends of Rowntree Park feel really privileged to have a band of skilful and knowledgeable students collaborating with us. Volunteers' efforts to improve our green space are infinitely more likely to succeed with this kind of project."

Stu Small, Friends of Rowntree Park

WHERE WE ARE NOW: A MODULE FOR ALL

A module for all

Initially piloted as a voluntary activity, in September 2023 the Sustainability Clinic has been established as an elective module available to undergraduate and taught postgraduate students from all Departments and Schools across the University.



Interdisciplinary in nature

The Sustainability Clinic is part of our suite of York Interdisciplinary Modules (YIMs) and is available to choose as an elective module. This module is a collaboration between the Environmental Sustainability at York (ESAY), Careers and Placements, the Department of Environment and Geography, the Baroness Hale Law Clinic and York Environmental Sustainability Institute (YESI).

Environment and Geography: embedding in programmes

The Sustainability Clinic has been embedded as a core module for all 3rd Year students, enabling all students to experience real-life problem solving, teamwork and partnership working. The inclusion of the Sustainability Clinic within the department's curriculum demonstrates a true commitment to advancing sustainability efforts within and beyond the University community.

What's included

About the module

As part of a multidisciplinary team, students have the opportunity to work with local and regional organisations, government, community groups, charities or small businesses to help them find a solution to or better understand a real-life sustainability problem that matters to the organisation. Problems focus on a wide range of topics, including: biodiversity; education; sustainable business, policy and regulation; and heritage and culture.

Our student teams are supported throughout their projects by dedicated training, a project facilitator and access to a team of experts who are available to provide advice and specialist knowledge throughout the module.

Students are then assessed by creating a reflective report on their project outcomes, and on their individual contribution to the project.

“Participating in the Sustainability Clinic has given Environment & Geography students invaluable real-world experience. As well as the project-specific skills, they also developed a wealth of professional skills. Several of the students have highlighted to us how they have been able to refer to their experiences in the Clinic to help them with job applications and interviews.”

Laura Chapman

Module Convenor, Sustainability Clinic (Department of Environment and Geography)

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, our students should be able to:

- Work collaboratively in multi-disciplinary teams on pressing local or regional challenges.
- Define, plan and undertake a 'live' real-world sustainability project.
- Work professionally to understand the needs of a client, manage expectations and provide realistic, accurate and clear outputs.
- Analyse and evaluate complex information to provide outputs which consider all facets of sustainability and are designed to bring about positive change.
- Reflect on their own personal development, their role as social leaders and working for the public good.



“The sustainability clinic is an amazing opportunity for students to come together from different backgrounds and disciplines, to learn with each other about how much they have to contribute to driving a sustainable future.”

Professor Stephen Levett
Director of the Sustainability Clinic

Our Expert Advisors

Our Sustainability Clinic Expert Advisors have been available to support our student groups throughout the module, providing subject-specific expertise and general assistance to all staff and students engaged in the module.



Georgia Ramsay, Department of Education

“My background is in geography education, where I have 23 years experience of teaching in secondary schools. Sustainability has become an increasingly important aspect of education and through my work I have developed a considerable amount of links with schools and local communities around York.”

Dr Kelly Redeker, Department of Biology

“I am a lecturer in the Department of Biology. I work on implications of land-use change and management on ecosystem function and climate, specifically focusing on land-use change, climate change, biogeochemistry, metabolomics, and volatilomics.”



Dr Judith Krauss, Department of Politics & International Relations

“With a diverse team of colleagues, I work on global value chains, conservation and the Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting how environmental concerns such as limiting carbon and protecting biodiversity intersect with economic questions of who benefits, and socio-political issues of justice and decoloniality.”



The benefits of taking the Sustainability Clinic

Make a real difference

In the Sustainability Clinic, students work with a real partner organisation on a sustainability challenge that matters to them. This gives students the opportunity to make a real difference in the organisation they work with.

Collaboration and teamwork

The module encourages collaboration and teamwork among students from diverse academic backgrounds, which will develop students' communication skills and the ability to work effectively in multi-disciplinary teams.

Critical thinking and problem solving

Through engaging with complex problems and developing innovative solutions, students on this module enhance their ability to analyse, evaluate and think creatively in dynamic situations.

Interdisciplinary skills

By working with students from different disciplines, students develop interdisciplinary skills crucial for addressing complex sustainability issues. It is also a great opportunity to bring their own degree expertise to the conversation.

Hands-on learning

The Clinic provides project-based learning, allowing students to engage directly with sustainability issues through research, data analysis, fieldwork, and practical problem-solving activities.

Networking opportunities

Students have the chance to collaborate with external organisations, experts, and community stakeholders as part of their project, which provides valuable networking opportunities and potential pathways to future internships or employment.

“A benefit of the project was the work experience, which has been really beneficial in bolstering my CV and helped in securing postgraduate job opportunities.”

3rd Year Environment and Geography student, Rugby Football League project

2023-2024 SUCCESS STORIES



Since September 2023, our student teams have partnered with a wide range of local, regional, and national organisations, including the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, The Rugby Football League, Explore York Libraries and Archives, York Minster, Hollybank Trust, and North Yorkshire Moors Railway.

Lobbying for York Minster's greener heritage

About the project

York Minster has worked collaboratively with key stakeholders, including City of York Council and the local community, to create a Neighbourhood Plan. The plan aims to preserve its cultural and environmental value while making it a leader in sustainability for heritage sites. However, achieving this requires further funding and support.

Two student teams were given project briefs that aimed to support York Minster in their advocacy and lobbying work with the national government. Our teams worked collaboratively to research and produce a report outlining the current funding for sustainability in the heritage sector for York Minster to use as an evidence base to lobby the government.

Project outcomes

Our student teams produced two comprehensive reports aimed at enhancing the Minster's understanding of current government funding opportunities for heritage sustainability projects, as well as assessing the feasibility of generating additional financing for large-scale, ambitious sustainability initiatives.

The reports included case studies of other heritage buildings in the UK and internationally, highlighting projects they had undertaken to improve sustainability. Going forward, York Minster will use these reports to better understand the funding landscape and to strengthen future applications for government grants.

“I enjoyed making a difference to the sustainability of York Minster and having an active role within a live sustainability problem. The opportunity provided me with practical experience within sustainability consultancy which has increased my confidence and developed my problem solving skills.”

Georgia Lewis

4th Year Global Development student



Students help biodiversity at Crambe Grange Farm

The team

In Semester 1, a team of 3rd Year students from the Department of Environment and Geography worked with Crambe Grange Farm as part of the Sustainability Clinic module. The student team included George Warrick, Amelia Herschel-Shorland, Amy James, Ben Mather, Conah Doherty, Ellie Whitley, Ethan Booth, Izzie Burrows, Joseph Quance, Sammy Dowie, and Tayo Adeniyi.

We asked George Warrick, a member of the student team, to share his experience being involved in this project.

About the project

“Our project focused on determining the biodiversity data of various fields at Crambe Grange Farm. We met with Alison, our project partner, who wanted a base-line data set to determine whether, once they’d introduced certain biodiversity increasing initiatives, the fields had become more diverse and whether what they were doing was working.

To determine this, we visited the farm on multiple days to collect data from the fields using quadrats. The site was mapped using ArcGIS so that we knew the sites we were surveying. Once we had collated and analysed the data, we handed our findings to Alison, which she was very happy with.”

Impact

“The project’s impact for Crambe Grange Farm, Alison, and the local area is very important as she can use what we have done to improve the biodiversity of her farm, and can also pass on all that we have learned to local farms.

Future students can use what we have done when completing their own projects on the land. This means we’ve been able to help future students in the same position as us. When thinking on a larger scale, the impact of the project is one that has merit as we know that increasing the sustainability of farms worldwide is a key focus for ensuring the future of our society.”



Empowering eco-council in York Primary School

A team of 3rd Year Environment and Geography students partnered up with a local primary school in York to empower young minds with sustainability knowledge and action.

In Semester 1, Abigail Brown, Ellie Robbins, Heather Newman, Jackson Conway, and Kirstie McMaster, participated in the Sustainability Clinic module. Their project brief involved working closely with the eco-council of a York primary school to address important sustainability challenges.

Project objectives

- Conduct engaging sessions on sustainability with pupils from the eco-council.
- Develop the pupils' knowledge on sustainability topics.
- Empower the eco-council by using their ideas.
- Inspire the eco-council to continue implementing sustainable strategies going forward.

Project poster, exhibited at annual Student Sustainability Research Conference in Leeds (March 2024)

**SUSTAINABILITY IN EDUCATION
EMPOWERING ECO-COUNCILS**

Abigail Brown, Ellie Robbins, Heather Newman, Jackson Conway, Kirstie McMaster
University of York

Aims:

- 1) Conduct engaging sessions on sustainability with the eco-council
- 2) Develop the children's knowledge in on sustainable topics
- 3) Empower the eco-council by using their ideas
- 4) Inspire the eco-council to continue implementing sustainable strategies

1 INTRODUCTION
An Introductory Session where we got to know the Eco-Council, discussing their current knowledge on sustainability. We also considered ideas towards improving the sustainability of their school, those ideas are presented on the tree

2 BIODIVERSITY
The biodiversity session involved the Eco-Council using clinometers and measuring tapes to take measurements of different trees. Their data was put into an excel document with equations to find the carbon storage.

3 CARBON STORAGE
The carbon storage session involved the Eco-Council using clinometers and measuring tapes to take measurements of different trees. Their data was put into an excel document with equations to find the carbon storage.

4 ENERGY
Delivered Practicals & Activities

5 SUSTAINABILITY AUDIT
The sustainability audit was designed based on previous school audits using the Eco-Council's ideas. It allowed the Eco-Council to understand what was being done well and where they could improve. The audit can be repeated to measure improvements.

OUR SCHOOL'S SUSTAINABILITY
What did we investigate?
What do we do well?
What could we improve?

Interactive sessions

The project unfolded through several interactive on-site sessions with the school's eco-council. In the first session, the student team worked with the eco-council to explore biodiversity. This involved using quadrats and species identification guides from the University that the school could use to look at the differences in biodiversity across the school grounds.

The next session focused on carbon storage. Here, eco-council members actively participated in a practical session to measure carbon storage in the trees within the school's woodland. This activity empowered the pupils as they were able to see how their work can produce results.

The final session presented discussions on energy sources and conservation strategies, followed by a practical exercise where students built model wind turbines, showing the transition from theory to practice in renewable energy.

“The students were able to show the children the possibilities for the future. They were excellent role models and gave the children the opportunity to see that university provides lots of options for further study into science and ecology.”

Christine Banham
York primary school

A sustainability audit

In the final part of the project brief, our student team supported the eco-council to create and conduct a sustainability audit of the school. This comprehensive assessment involved the entire school community and provided insights into existing strengths and areas of improvement.

Impact

The Sustainability Clinic project not only enriched the pupils' knowledge but also honed essential skills such as teamwork, communication, and creativity. It also exemplified the potential of university community collaborations in fostering environmental stewardship from a young age.

In March 2024, the student team presented their Clinic project at the annual Student Sustainability Research Conference at the University of Leeds.



Rugby Football League partners with Sustainability Clinic

The Rugby Football League has partnered with Sustainability Clinic to spearhead their greener initiatives.

In a partnership aimed at fostering sustainability within the sport, the Rugby Football League (RFL) joined up with the Sustainability Clinic. This collaboration provided our Environment and Geography student teams with projects to promote a greener future for the sport.



© Sky Sports

Sustainability in the RFL

The foundation for this collaboration was laid with the commissioning of the The British Association for Sustainable Sport (BASIS)'s Environmental Sustainability in Rugby League Report by the RFL in July 2023. This report assessed the current state of sustainability within the league, covering various aspects such as energy usage, travel, biodiversity, and chemical usage.

A significant finding from the report highlighted a lack of awareness and education among RFL clubs regarding sustainability issues. To bridge this gap, the partnership with our Sustainability Clinic aimed to enhance awareness and education throughout the league's clubs, particularly focusing on issues of transport and travel, as well as biodiversity.



Student projects

Two key student projects under this partnership included the "Greener Rugby Project" focusing on transport and travel, and the "Greener Rugby Pitches" initiative targeting biodiversity. These projects focused on developing recommendations and action plans for clubs to measure and improve the sustainability of their transport arrangements and biodiversity efforts.

Impact

The clinic projects have had a significant impact on both the RFL and on the students who have been involved in the projects.

Victoria Sinacola, RFL project partner, spoke about her experience with the student teams: "The students worked with us on environmental sustainability within the Rugby League. They came up with two projects 'Sustainable Travel' and 'Sustainable Pitches'; they put so much work into the project with minimal support or guidance. The resources and reports they produced were exceptional. In addition to this we are able to roll out the resources they produced to the wider game to support our Environmental Sustainability agenda. The work was exceptional but more importantly the attitude, behaviours and knowledge shown from the group was impeccable. I really enjoyed working with the group."

The Sustainability Clinic projects also provided opportunities for students to develop key skills and experiences essential for life after graduation.

Trace Laskey, a 3rd Year Environment and Geography student said: "The Sustainability Clinic acted as a final opportunity at University to showcase everything I had learned thus far, and further enhance specific skills in a real-world project. The clinic taught general skills such as professional communication and adaptability as well as higher level research and analysis skills used in environmental consultancy. The project acted as a mini placement where as a group we got to work alongside professionals to make a change in the RFL."

"The RFL is delighted to be working with the University of York's Sustainability Clinic on a number of projects which educate and enable clubs, players and fans to meet this most important of challenges. We view this as a crucial issue for society and sport and this is also reflected in many of our partners' strategy views."

Tony Sutton

CEO of Rugby Football League

What our partners say:

The students undertook a survey of the biodiversity of six hedgerows on our farm. They looked at tree and plant species and also surveyed the invertebrate population of the hedgerows. As a consequence, and as a result of their findings, they were able to make some very sensible and achievable recommendations that will influence our future farming practice. This was presented to us when the students visited the farm to present their findings and also in a very professionally produced document which we will be able to refer to going forward.

Alison Foster-Lill, Crambe Grange Farm

We just wanted to say a big congratulations to the group, they produced a well researched presentation and report, and their initial meeting was also so well organised with clear evidence of prep in terms of the questions they were asking us. This gave us confidence right from the start that the group were committed to the project, their research and the wider field of sustainability.

This has really helped us start our journey in more actively engaging in our sustainability journey for the archive.

Partner organisation (anonymous)

It's been great to see the impact that the students have had on the team – bringing in a fresh perspective and enthusiasm to an area of work that was pretty new to us and where we have definitely benefited from their skills and knowledge. We learnt a lot working together and would definitely be interested in exploring the relationship further.

Sarah Garbacz, Explore York Libraries and Archives

It was great working with the students from University of York. They brought a fresh perspective to the subject of sustainability at Acomb Explore Library. I was impressed by the research they had done into funding streams, training courses and innovative projects. In a short space of time they managed to absorb the ethos of our organisation and they made suggestions which were well thought out and in line with our values.

Fiona Reilly, Acomb Explore Library

Hollybank Trust takes sustainability seriously and aims to build on the work that was undertaken last year to formulate our sustainability policy. The analysis of the students regarding our existing recycling practices and recommendations for improving engagement will be used to inform our decision making at both a practical and senior level. By having fresh ideas and building on our existing practices, it will help us to improve our environmental sustainability in the local community and beyond.

James Hook, Hollybank Trust

The students were able to show the children the possibilities for the future. They were excellent role models and gave the children the opportunity to see that university provides lots of options for further study into science and ecology.

Christine Banham, York Primary School





REACH & IMPACT

ACHIEVEMENTS



69

Partner organisations
have participated



493

Students have
taken part



27

projects have been
completed in
2023/24



**National
Collaborative Award
for Teaching
Excellence**



**Green Gown
Award winner**



**International
Green Gown
Award finalist**

Students from a range of disciplines:

Biology

Maths

Natural Sciences

Education

Interactive Media

Chemistry

Archeology

Law

Politics

Environment

Physics

Business & Society

Green Gown Award for student engagement

In December 2023, the Sustainability Clinic was recognised for its work in student engagement. The University was up against 14 other finalists for a Green Gown Award and was recognised at an awards ceremony in Liverpool, with guests from across education and sustainability sectors celebrating the exceptional stories and achievements of colleges and universities this year.

York has now progressed as a finalist for the international Green Gown Awards as a regional winner, which will be announced in October 2024.



What the judges thought

The Green Gown judges were impressed at the scale of engagement. The project clearly articulated the benefits to stakeholders and serves as an adaptable model for other institutions. A strong ethical message paying the PG facilitators for their time.

What it means to win

"Our vision is to be a university for public good, which is why we are proud to win this award for this initiative – engaging students with a chance to learn and put into practice sustainability skills, while also making a sustainable difference to local communities and businesses."

Professor Charlie Jeffery

Vice-Chancellor and President

Top 3 learnings

1. We work with the community to find areas where students can meaningfully add value.
2. We have worked to extend our reach to more rural areas within our region.
3. We provide students with structured learning opportunities and a high level of support.



“I am delighted that the Sustainability Clinic has received this award. The Clinic is the result of a fantastic collaboration between colleagues from across the University. We are hugely excited about the great work Sustainability Clinic students will do in the coming years to help solve sustainability issues within the City and the region. Well done to all involved in establishing and running this great initiative.”

Professor Claire Hughes

Associate Dean for Teaching, Learning and Students (Faculty of Sciences) and Interim Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching, Learning and Students

Students honoured with Volunteering Award

In May 2024, students from several Environment and Geography in-curriculum Sustainability Clinic projects received awards at the annual Student Community and Volunteering Awards ceremony at the Merchant Taylors' Hall in York. These awards recognise and celebrate the achievements, commitment and lasting impact of University of York students in the wider community.

During the ceremony, Vice Chancellor Professor Charlie Jeffery made specific reference to the Sustainability Clinic as a credit-bearing module, noting that the University is increasingly placing efforts to make a difference to the local community at the heart of its taught curriculum, using our long-standing experience of developing community projects that link to academic disciplines.



A Sustainability Clinic space on Campus West

In June 2024, we officially launched the Sustainability Clinic space on Campus West. Situated next to Nisa in Market Square, this space will host our clinic module teaching and serve as a venue for various sustainability and climate related events and activities throughout the year.

The Sustainability Clinic space has already hosted a number of drop-in sessions during University Open Days, and is regularly hosting sustainability events and acting as a hub for the Play for the Planet network, co-led by Prasad Sandbhor who is a current PhD student at the University.

We look forward to using the space as a central hub for the module and sustainability activities from the start of 2024/25.



HOW TO GET INVOLVED:

The Sustainability Clinic is running again in 2024/25 as part of our suite of York Interdisciplinary Modules available to both undergraduate and taught postgraduate students from all Departments and Schools (subject to timetabling availability/other constraints). It will also run as a core module for 3rd Year students within the Environment and Geography Department.

FOR STUDENTS

Want to explore sustainability beyond your current degree programme?

Find out how you can apply for the Sustainability Clinic and work on real, impactful projects with local, regional, or national organisations.

FOR DEPARTMENTS

Looking to expand your sustainability options for your students to study?

Consider adding the Sustainability Clinic in your list of optional modules available for students from your Department or School.

FOR PARTNERS

Want to make your business or organisational practices more sustainable?

Find out how our Sustainability Clinic can help by pairing you with a student team to tackle a sustainability problem that really matters to your organisation.

USEFUL INFO AND CONTACTS:

Find out more about the Sustainability Clinic and our suite of York Interdisciplinary Modules (YIMs):
features.york.ac.uk/york-interdisciplinary-modules/



Contact us

Whether you are a student, staff member or potential partner, please contact us if you have any questions about the Sustainability Clinic, please contact:

esay@york.ac.uk

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