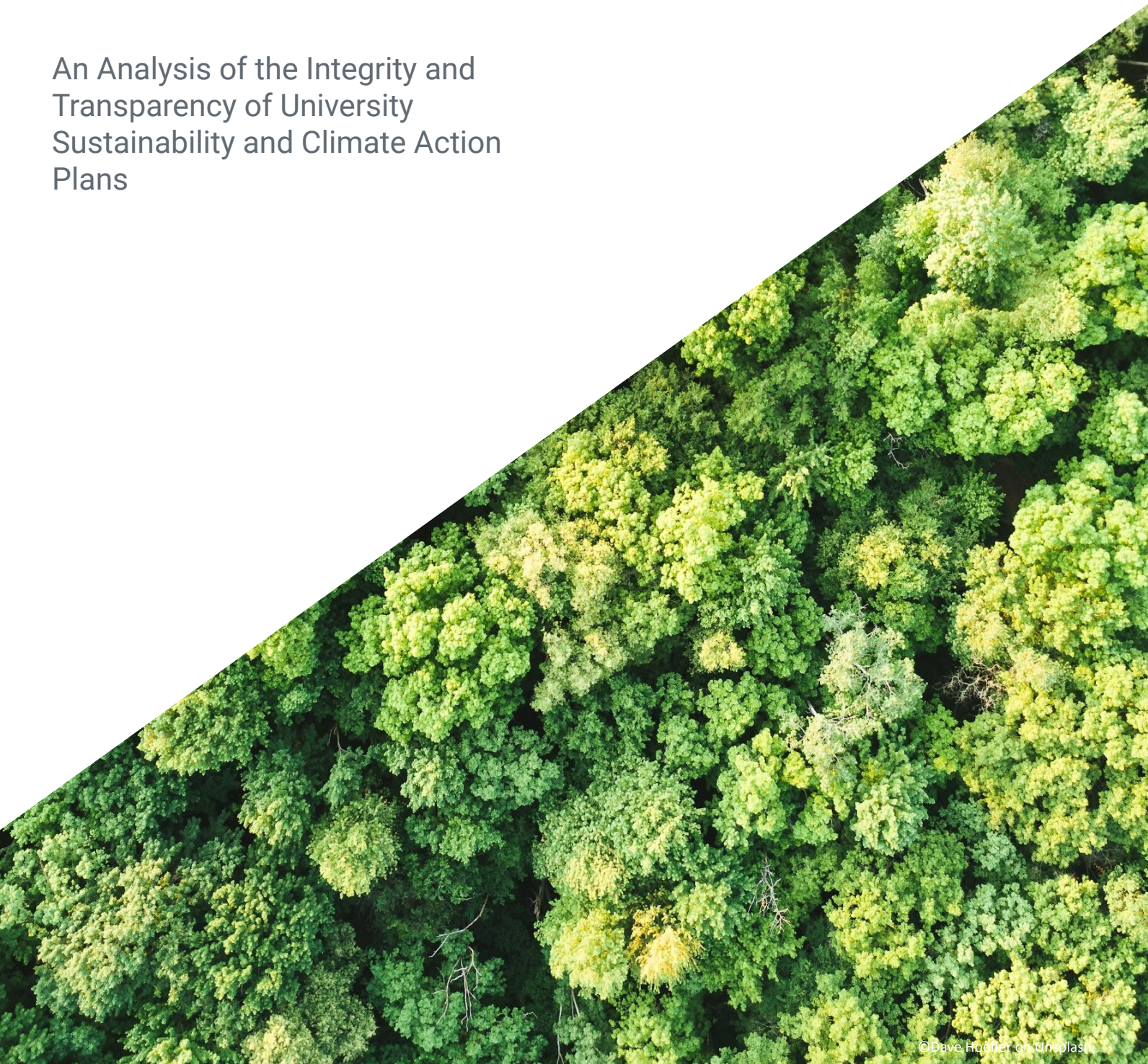
Transparency & Integrity Assessment 2022

ECIU Universities

An Analysis of the Integrity and Transparency of University Sustainability and Climate Action Plans



A Note on the Authors

The authors of this study are Master's students taking part in the ECIU Master's Challenge.

Shannen Plunkett (Dublin City University)
Juliane Kraskes (Linköping University)

June 2022

Disclaimer

The Transparency & Integrity Assessment 2022: ECIU Universities is part of the ECIU Master's Challenge: Climate Neutral Campus Europe. The report represents the authors' views and is based on data collected from publicly available university documents. The information in this report may be limited due to the availability and ambiguity of the data found. The authors assume no liability for information within or shared by third parties relating to this assessment.

Contents

1. Introduction & Aim 5
   a. The Integrity & Transparency Assessment 7
2. Methodology 10
3. Assessments 15
   a. Aalborg University 16
   b. Dublin City University 18
   c. Linköping University 20
   d. University of Stavanger 22
   e. Tampere University 24
   f. University of Twente 26
4. Framework for the Future 28
5. Conclusion 34
6. References 35

Executive Summary

With over 100,000 universities worldwide, their contributions to climate change are not to be underestimated. As with many other companies and organisations, universities are a source of GHG emissions and, in today's age, tackling climate change has never been higher on the agenda. Due to their teaching and research ability, as well as their direct link to people, universities can be assigned a key role in fostering sustainable change and transformation among society. As important as this is, this report is focussing on the transparency and integrity of climate pledges from universities, questioning whether they live up to their ambitions. Through 6 university assessments, this report seeks to scrutinise the measures and actions of universities so that the public can recognise the difference between **greenwashing** and real efforts.

The assessment results depict that the universities are at very different stages concerning the establishment of climate action plans and GHG emission reduction pledges and targets. Carbon footprint reports, as well as scope 1, 2, and 3 emission reduction targets and measures, are only accessible for a couple of universities. Sustainable development, however, appears to be recognised by all universities as part of future development strategies.

In order to overcome inconsistencies and associations with greenwashing, this assessment report highlights recommendations for the following areas:

- Standardisation
- Transparency
- Integrity
- Stakeholder involvement
- Social responsibility
- Research and education.

Introduction & Aim

In terms of tackling climate change and developing a sustainable future, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are a key priority, along with their sources and how to reduce them. Carbon dioxide (CO2) is the most abundant GHG and human activities, such as the use of fossil fuels, are significantly committing to the increase in CO2 emissions in the atmosphere, leading to a temperature increase on a global scale. Corporate attempts to decrease CO2 emissions often refer to scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions, which provide a categorisation for different kinds of carbon emissions. Scope 1 covers the direct emissions of a company, e.g., transportation and generating electricity and scope 2 covers indirect emissions from purchased energy. All other indirect emissions that occur due to company activities, e.g., business travel and the use of products, are covered in scope 3. According to the GHG protocol, only scopes 1-2 require mandatory reporting.

With more than 200,000 universities and 260 million students across the globe (de Wit and Altbach 2021), the GHG emissions generated by universities cannot be underestimated. Many universities are aware of their contribution to climate change beyond GHG emissions and have developed climate action plans, as well as sustainability reports, to demonstrate the actions they are taking to combat climate change. These action plans concern aspects of social sustainability alongside climate pledges due to the global ambition to achieve sustainable development. However, to reach the level of change that is required to prevent global warming and its consequences, accurate transformative goals and measures are needed.

With awareness around the climate crisis increasing, more attention is being paid to sustainability and climate measures. This has lead to the concept of greenwashing entering into focus, questioning the integrity and transparency of climate actions especially among corporations. However, greenwashing has so far only been associated with companies and brought closer to society through reports such as the Corporate Social Responsibility report (CSR) by the NewClimate Institute, in which they assessed the integrity and transparency of climate actions and pledges of selected companies.

This report sets out to investigate university actions, claims and pledges concerning climate change, with a strong focus on GHG emissions and climate neutrality claims. The purpose is to assess whether universities are living up to their ambitious climate pledges and doing their part in the climate crisis. Furthermore, the report also addresses university social responsibility in the context of sustainable development.

Our research objectives are:

1. To assess the extent to which university climate and sustainability plans have high transparency and integrity
2. To analyse the commonalities or differences within university climate plans
3. To identify and suggest best practices for sustainable universities.

The research provided in this assessment seeks to scrutinise the measures and actions of universities so that the public can recognise the difference between greenwashing and real efforts. The report begins with an explanation of the methodology employed, followed by the individual university assessments. At the end of the report, best practises and guidelines are proposed for universities going forward. It is hoped that this report will both inform and inspire its readers, as well as universities.

The Transparency & Integrity Assessment

The report assesses the transparency and integrity of climate commitments of members of the European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU). The ECIU is a network of 13 universities, who collaborate on and nurture a culture of innovation, entrepreneurship and expertise.

Not all universities in this network have publicly available climate plans and so only 6 ECIU universities were analysed in this report. Nevertheless these universities provide valuable insights into current trends in the higher education sector, that can help to establish a climate friendly framework for universities.

The ECIU universities. Source: eciu.org

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, warming must be limited to 1.5℃ by 2030 to reduce the adverse risks associated with anthropogenic climate change (WGIII 2022). The window for change is rapidly closing, with current climate model projections putting us on a course to exceed 1.5℃. Since 2010, net global emissions have increased across all sectors. Universities account for a high percentage of national emissions, with the biggest sources of emissions coming from energy in the form of electricity and heat production, and mobility from commuting and business trips (Helmers et al. 2021).

Many universities report annual carbon footprints, however there is a distinct lack of a common reporting framework which makes comparisons and standardised recommendations difficult (Valls-Val and Bovea 2021, Robinson et al. 2018). Universities use varying greenhouse gas calculations, some including only scopes 1 and 2, and others employing various definitions of, and even excluding, scope 3 emissions, such as staff and student commuting. The vast range of meanings and descriptions makes it problematic and time-consuming for the public to decipher real action from words, a challenge that this assessment attempts to overcome.

The challenge of deciphering real actions from words, tangible claims and strategies university visions is related by extension to the phenomenon of **greenwashing**. This multidisciplinary concept is often observed among corporations, and occured due to the public's and stakeholders' increasing concern about the environment, as well as their willingness to pay more for "green products" (Jog & Singhal 2019). As the economy is based on the principle of supply and demand, the question was not so much whether to respond to changing stakeholder demand, but rather how to respond. According to Freitas Netto et al. (2020) the answer was Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), a concept to integrate social and environmental concerns into day-to-day business, which implies that organisations are sustainable. In principle, this reaction to the changing stakeholder demands is in favour of the environment, however, the CSR approach came with a previously unanticipated side effect. With the increased focus on sustainability and greater production of environmentally friendly products and services, it became commonplace to establish green strategies but, at the same time, it became a challenge to decipher real actions from empty words. Thus, the phenomenon of greenwashing entered the picture and now describes the situation in which a company, organisation or institution paints a picture of environmentally friendly behaviour, claims and actions externally, while delivering a much worse or contradictory performance internally (Freitas Netto et al. 2020).

Greenwashing cannot necessarily be recognised at first glance, which is why it is always helpful to use criteria to recognise or indicate it as such. In 2007, TerraChoice, a consultancy operating as a subsidiary of Underwriters Laboratories (UL 2022), defined seven sins of greenwashing in an attempt to quantify the growth of greenwashing. It is said that the following sins aid consumers in identifying greenwashed products and claims (Aji & Sutikno 2015, UL 2022):

1) Sin of hidden trade-off: claim based on a narrow set of attribute
2) Sin of no proof: claims not evidence based, no provision of further information
3) Sin of vagueness: claims are broad, abstract and easily misunderstood
4) Sin of worshiping false labels: claim that falsely advertised the endorsement of third parties
5) Sin of irrelevance: claims providing unimportant information in terms of seeking environmental friendly products
6) Sin of lesser of two evils: claim distracting from the greater environmental impact of the product category
7) Sin of fibbing: claims that are just false

Exemplifying the urgency of the issue, one case study conducted by TerraChoice on greenwashing products in Canada and America reported that 95% of products claiming to be green committed at least one of the sins of greenwashing (Netto et al. 2022). As consumer concern for the environment grows, it is not surprising that trust issues surrounding green product claims can be developed, as the process of identifying greenwashing becomes much more complex and challenging.

There are many drivers of greenwashing and understanding these can aid the public in recognising it. Delmas and Burbano categorised four main drivers, namely non-market external drivers such as regulations and activism, market external drivers like consumer or investor demand and competitive pressure, organisational drivers such as firm structure and culture, and finally individual psychological drivers, for example optimistic bias or narrow decision making (2011). These drivers can explain why organisations choose to or feel pressured into greenwashing and misleading the public, but being aware of these underlying factors enables the public to distinguish these false claims and call out the organisations.

Despite occurrences of greenwashing, research indicates that firms can improve their stakeholders' perception by being transparent about their environmental performance (Delmas and Burbano 2011). This same research can be extended to universities and higher education institutions. Universities play a significant and positive role in contributing to knowledge on climate change through research into the climate crisis and through research into mitigation and adaptation measures, as well as by providing policy advice (ALLEA 2022). This report does not seek to put universities in a negative light, but rather acknowledges the potential that higher education institutes have to become changemakers within society. By conducting a comparative study on university climate action plans, this report identifies gaps for improvement and enables readers to identify misleading claims, or greenwashing, at a university level.

Methodology

Methodology

The methodology was inspired by the Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor 2022 published by NewClimate, that assessed the integrity and transparency of various companies and their climate pledges. The subjects of this report are universities and their climate actions, goals and pledges, as well as a brief consideration of their sustainability roadmap.

The following six universities are included in the assessment:

1. Aalborg University
2. Dublin City University
3. Linköping University
4. University of Stavanger
5. Tampere University
6. University of Twente

The database for the assessment were university documents and websites concerning universities position and commitment to climate change. The basic prerequisite for the selection was that documents or websites relevant to the topic were publicly accessible. Other selection criteria were the following:

- Report or website containing information about the university's climate or carbon footprint
- Report or website concerning climate actions, pledges, sustainable development

Following the selection, the sources were analysed according to the following criteria in order to identify in order to identify integrity and transparency:

- Connection to (inter)national policies/agreements
- Carbon footprint and scope 1, 2, 3 assessments

- Future strategy
- Wording used
- Carbon pledge and offsetting
- Historical emission data
- Detailed emissions + measures
- Baseline year, timeline of targets, interim targets
- Sustainability in education and sustainability in research
- Climate contributions (Financial support to others)
- Renewable energy
- Monitoring and auditing process
- Misleading claims or pledges
- Transparency - Amount of documents addressing sustainable development

Data was divided and compared under these headings and their corresponding subquestions:

Tracking and disclosure of emissions

- Is there an annual carbon footprint publicly available?
- Are scopes 1,2 and 3 included in their emissions breakdown?
- Is the data provided in a clear and transparent manner?

Emission reduction targets

- What is their emissions reductions pledge?
- What language is used to describe the pledge?
- Are there interim targets to achieve this goal?
- Are these targets in line with the paris agreement or other policies?
- What is the baseline used for setting targets and what is the reduction timeline?

Reduction Measures

- Are there comprehensive measures for emissions reductions?
- Will these measures achieve the carbon pledge?
- Is renewable energy included in their measures?
- Are there any offsetting claims?

Social Responsibility

- Is sustainability incorporated into the education and research at the university?
- Is there evidence of misleading claims?
- Are students and faculty involved in decision making?

The areas were defined according to key sustainability pillars. They seek to encompass all aspects of climate action plans and were inspired by similar sustainability assessments. As the report assesses universities, it was important to consider education and research an essential aspect of sustainability and add this as further assessment criteria. By analysing these four areas, the report aims to develop a comprehensive overview of the current sustainability and climate trends at the ECIU universities.

Integrity and Transparency Rating

A traffic light system of rating was employed, in order to judge university performance. Universities were rated on both integrity and transparency. In terms of the transparency, tracking of scope 1-3 emission is the highest ranked valuation factor. For integrity, scientifically and politically grounded measures and actions were prioritised, as well as comprehensiveness of emissions data and goals. Performance was classified as low, medium or high. The definitions of each are seen in the table below.

	Low	Medium	High
Integrity	Misleading claims, lack of comprehensive emissions data or reduction measures, limited links to policies.	No misleading claims, some evidence of data oriented goals, lacking in depth information regarding measures or goals. Clear links to policies and science.	No misleading claims, scientifically and politically backed pledges and achievable and effective goals.
Transparency	Little or no accessible and understandable documents. Limited tracking of emission scopes 1-3.	Accessible documents but insubstantial information or missing data. Scopes 1-3 tracked.	Clear and concise publicly accessible documents with detailed measures and data. Solid tracking of scopes 1-3.

Definitions

The different emissions scopes by the Greenhouse Gas Protocol are defined as such:

- Scope 1 emissions are direct emissions from controlled or owned sources, for example, fugitive refrigerants.
- Scope 2 emissions are indirect emissions from the generation of purchased energy.
- Scope 3 emissions are all indirect emissions that occur in the value chain of an organisation, for example, staff and student commuting or construction.

Limitations

There are some limitations noted in this report. This report considers the data available only at the time of writing. Some universities were in the process of establishing climate plans and carbon footprints and so, it was often difficult to find the information, due to the fragmented manner of the documents. Some universities did not have documents at all so this assessment had to rely on their websites for further information. Additionally, universities had varying definitions of emissions scopes and considered different sources in their calculations. This means that a concise comparison was difficult.

Assessments

Aalborg University (AAU)

Denmark

Emissions	Pledge	Transparency	Integrity
-	Climate Neutral by 2045, 70% GHG emission reduction by 2030	Medium	Medium

Tracking and Disclosure of Emissions

Transparency | Integrity

Coverage: No assessment of scopes 1, 2, and 3.
Transparency: Climate targets are displayed on the website and sustainability report publicly available.
Monitoring: Emissions are not reported but regular sustainability reporting.

Emission Targets

Transparency | Integrity

Scientific targets: Target is scientifically backed.
Interim Targets: No interim target.
Ambition: Ambitious net-zero claim but no clearly defined timeline, actions or measures and no mentioning of offsetting.

Social Responsibility

Transparency | Integrity

Education: Integration of sustainability pillars.
Research: Integration of sustainability pillars.
Stakeholder: Focus on cooperation with companies, other universities, and politicians. Sustainability coordinator.

Aalborg University

Aalborg University (AAU) is a higher education institute that was established in the north of Denmark in 1974. In their 40 year history, the university has expanded their educational and research focus and opened up departments across Denmark (Copenhagen, Esbjerg). The number of students has significantly increased, counting around 18,000 students today.

On their official website the university is very **transparent about their sustainable development roadmap**, including information on sustainability everyday, in education and research, and furthermore published a **sustainability report for 2019/20** in which they report on their engagement with the sustainable development goals of the United Nations.

However, the university is missing an assessment and report on their carbon emissions and footprint. There is **no tracking of scope 1-3 emissions** recorded and instead, they are just now starting to work on developing a **new greenhouse gas accounting methodology,** which is supposed to be a common danish model for Universities.

AAU's strategy for 2022 - 2026 includes the universities vision to be internationally recognised as a university contributing actively to sustainable development. In this context, **AAU pledges to reduce their GHG emission by 70% by 2030 and to become climate neutral by 2045.**

In the context of their carbon neutrality goal, AAU is using the words **green transition** and **greenhouse gas emissions**. In addition, they use **technologically**, **organisationally** and **humanly** to refer to ways of implementing policies and measures to achieve the goal. Offsetting as an implementation measure is not mentioned within the climate targets but rather that **actions will be prioritised according to the potential of emission reduction.** Therefore, high areas of interest are energy and transport. Overall, however, the university is very vague about their implementation measures, lack in depth information and do not provide sufficient historical and current emission data.

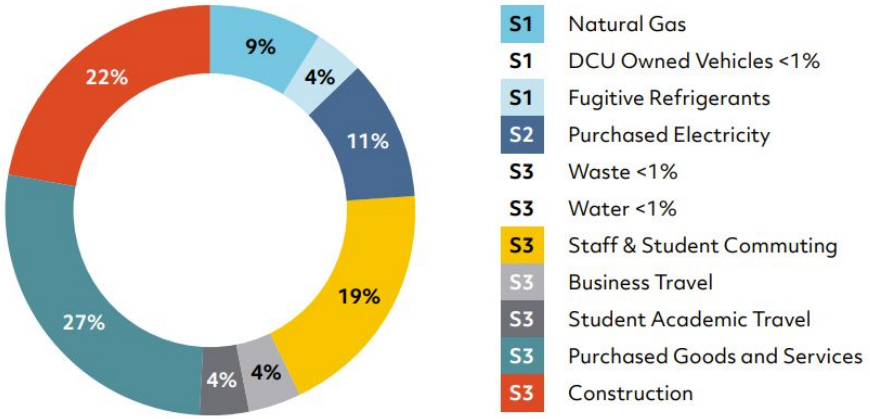
The university wants to be recognised as a mission-oriented university with a **significant contribution to sustainable development through the creation of knowledge** as captured in their **2022-2026 Strategy: Knowledge for the World.** The policy on balanced and sustainable development is geared towards the **integration of the sustainability pillars in education, research and operation,** as well as the **promotion of an open, inclusive, equal and diverse university.**

Dublin City University (DCU)

Ireland

Emissions	Pledge	Transparency	Integrity
52,000tCO2e in 2019	Net Zero by 2050	High	Medium

2019 →



Tracking and Disclosure of Emissions

Transparency | Integrity

Coverage: Scopes 1,2,3 are covered
Transparency: Carbon footprint and emission sources publicly accessible
Monitoring: Emissions are reported and monitoring on a regular basis

Emission Targets and Measures

Transparency | Integrity

Scientific Targets: Targets are scientifically backed
Interim Targets: Interim targets to achieving net zero are set
Ambition: Measures are ambitious and a timeline is clearly defined, but do not reach net zero

Social Responsibility

Transparency | Integrity

Education: Climate literacy and sustainability is emphasised in the curriculum
Research: Sustainability is prioritised in research
Stakeholders: There is a dedicated sustainability manager. Students and teachers are not explicitly involved in sustainability decisions

Dublin City University

Dublin City University is a higher education institute located on the Northside of Dublin and as a student population of over 18000 and 2500 staff members It was established in 1989 and consists of four campuses, all within a 2.5km radius: Glasnevin, St Patrick's College, All Hallows Campus, and Mater Dei Campus.

The three biggest carbon emitters at DCU are **purchased goods & services, construction and staff & student commuting**. In 2019, DCU emitted a total of **52,000tCO2e.**

The university pledges to become **carbon neutral by 2050,** with an annual reduction target of 4.2%. They connect their **Climate Action Plan and Sustainability Charter** to the **Irish Climate Action Plan** (CAP), as well as the 1.5 degree goals of the **2015 Paris Agreement** and the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**. Using 2018 as their baseline year, they reported emissions of 52,000tCO2e for 2019. They have an annually reported carbon footprint with **scopes 1, 2 and 3** covered, which increases the integrity rating in this report.

They use the words **carbon zero** and **net zero** to refer to their carbon neutrality goal. Offsetting is not mentioned in their Climate Action Plan and under the Irish CAP, offsetting is not allowed. Their **emissions data** is broken down in a detailed manner, however they do not have CO2 reduction projections accompanying all of their reduction measures. The clear and accessible data demonstrates the transparency of the university.

DCU aims to improve the offering of **education** that address and contain sustainability elements. **Sustainability micro-modules** are proposed under the **DCU Futures** programme, aimed at future-proofing learners and teaching transversal skills. **Research** in sustainability issues is fostered and supported.

Renewable energy measures taken by DCU are lacking in the Climate Action Plan, instead the responsibility is left to the Irish government's plan to electrify the grid 80% by 2030. A pilot heat pump programme is being implemented at the All Hallows Campus to provide 300KW of renewable energy. **Retrofit plans** are also proposed and funding has secured two thirds of the required amount needed.

DCU's Climate Action Plan, Sustainability Charter and Biodiversity **plans are accessible to the public** and easily found on their website. There is a dedicated **Sustainability Manager** at the university, however, students and faculty are largely excluded from climate action decisions, which lowers the integrity of their social responsibility rating.

DCU acknowledge that they are currently **not on track** to meet their 4.2% annual reductions target. Their current plan leads to a 4% emissions reduction if fully implemented. By not reaching their targets, the integrity measurement of DCU is downgraded to medium.

Linköping University (LiU)

Sweden

Emissions	Pledge	Transparency	Integrity
23.7, 28.4 and 26.2 kton CO2e/year in 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively	Air travel - 30% emission reduction by 2024	High	Medium

Tracking and Disclosure of Emissions

Transparency | Integrity

Covering: Scopes 1,2, and 3 are covered, excluding student and staff commuting emissions

Transparency: Carbon footprint report available but not on university website

Monitoring: Emissions are reported

Emission Targets and Measures

Transparency | Integrity

Scientific targets: Targets are scientifically backed.

Interim Targets: Interim targets are defined and set.

Ambition: In line with 1.5°C target by 2030 but no net-zero claim and only timeline for interim targets clear.

Social Responsibility

Transparency | Integrity

Education: Ambition to educate for and about sustainable development.

Research: Contribution to sustainable transformation of society.

Stakeholders: Part of a national joint initiative Climate Framework for Universities, communication of climate work to actors and citizens.

Linköping University

Linköping University (LiU) is a higher educational institution in southern Sweden that evolved 1975 out of what was formerly known as Linköping University College. Since then LiU expanded to Norrköping and Stockholm and has a total of four campuses with more than 35,000 students, 340 professors and 4,300 employees.

With the establishment of the Department of Thematic Studies in 1980 the university started to organise their education and research around interdisciplinary themes which include solving complex sustainability and climate change issues.

According to the carbon footprint report 2017 - 2019, the **three biggest emitters are products 23%, transport & travel 23%, and properties 20%.** Between 2017 and 2018 the total amount of emissions i**ncreased by 20% from 23.7 to 28.4 kton CO2e**. In **2019 the university had total emission of 26.2 kton CO2e, which is a 8% decrease** compared to the previous year.

With the **adoption of the Climate Framework**, a framework to engage higher educational institutions in Sweden in climate actions and sustainable development, **LiU committed to align their objectives with the 1.5°C degrees target** from the Paris Agreement. Furthermore, the university pledged that **by 2024 they reduce their emissions from air travel by 30% and from energy by 10%.**

LiU's carbon footprint report was prepared by an external company and is limited in the display of scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions as it does not include emissions for student and staff commuting. However, a **carbon footprint per full-time student and per annual workforce** was calculated and resulted in **1.5 ton and 7.4 ton CO2e between 2017 - 2019 respectively**. Additionally, on average emissions from energy were calculated to be 4.3 kton CO2e/year, for services 3.8 kton CO2e/year and for food and accommodation 0.8 kton CO2e/year.

In LiU's environmental targets report for 2022 - 2024 the university claims to want to **increase the knowledge as well as action for sustainable development** and furthermore, recognise the global role and influence universities can have in terms of sustainability. LiU has therefore included the **education for and about sustainability in their environmental targets report** and also elaborates on how this is measured.

University of Stavanger (UiS)

Norway

University of Stavanger

Emissions	Pledge	Transparency	Integrity
No assessment	No pledges	Low	Low

Tracking and Disclosure of Emissions

Transparency Integrity

Coverage: No assessment of scopes 1,2, and 3
Transparency: Carbon footprint and emission sources not publicly available
Monitoring: Emissions are not reported on a regular basis

Emission Targets and Measures

Transparency Integrity

Scientific Targets: No scientific targets defined
Interim Targets: No interim targets defined
Ambition: No net-zero claim but defined renewable energy as priority area

Social Responsibility

Transparency Integrity

Education: Aimed to contribute to sustainable development
Research: Aimed to contribute to sustainable development
Stakeholders: Ambition to be an attractive partner to society and economy

University of Stavanger

The University of Stavanger (UiS) is an higher educational institution that is located at the west coast of Norway, in the city which is declared to be Norway's oil capital. Founded in 2005, the university counts today around 12,000 students, 1,000 employees and 415 PhD candidates. They educate, research and operate with the mission of challenge what is known and explore the unknown of the future.

In its short history, UiS has developed several **priority areas**, among which are **green transition, energy, health and welfare, learning for life and being an open university.** In general, all these areas are guided by the proposition or ambition to take **responsibility for a sustainable transition.** However, tangible indications and information on how these areas should be addressed are largely lacking.

As part of the university strategy for 2030, the priority areas moreover represent **the strategic ambitions for 2030.** All priority areas aim to contribute to sustainable development via **contribute via education, research and innovation development.**

Looking at the areas green transition and energy, in particular, the wording used mainly addresses the **facilitation of the transition and sustainable society,** as well as to develop a broader energy profile. Offsetting as mechanism to reduce emissions has so far not been mentioned by the university.

With regards to GHG emissions, UiS **has yet to calculate and publish a carbon footprint**, as no historical or present data is available. Furthermore, the university has **no goals or targets set that aim for emission reductions in scope 1, 2, or 3** or pledged to be carbon neutral by a certain year. Reasons for this could be the young age of the university, lack of resources or the university did not consider it to be necessary until now.

Due to the circumstances, that the University of Stavanger is just now starting to increase their focus on climate and sustainability actions, their overall transparency and integrity is at this moment in time assessed as low. Nonetheless, by defining the priority areas and the ambition to link these to research and education the university is moving on the right path.

Tampere University (TAU)

Finland

Emissions	Pledge	Transparency	Integrity
29000 tCO2 in 2019	Carbon Neutral by 2050	Medium	Low

Tracking and Disclosure of Emissions

Transparency | Integrity

Coverage: Scopes 1,2 and partially 3 are covered
Transparency: Carbon footprint and emission sources publicly accessible
Monitoring: Emissions are reported and monitoring on a regular basis

Emission Targets and Measures

Transparency | Integrity

Scientific Targets: Targets are scientifically backed
Interim Targets: No interim targets are defined
Ambition: Ambitious net zero goal but no available strategy

Social Responsibility

Transparency | Integrity

Education: Some courses focus on sustainability
Research: Sustainability is seen in research
Stakeholders: There are research groups and communities focusing on sustainability

Tampere University

Tampere University was established in 2019 through a merging of the University of Tampere and Tampere University of Technology. It has **21,000 students and 4,000 staff** members and identifies as one of the most multidisciplinary universities in Finland.

The **largest sources of emissions** are **travelling (41%), properties (27%) and research infrastructure (23%)**. The total carbon emissions in 2019 were **29000 tCO2.**

Tampere University pledges to become **carbon neutral by 2030** and sets itself in line with the 2035 neutrality goal of the Finnish government, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the 2030 net zero goal from the Ministry of Education. Although the university does not have a formal sustainability or climate action document, there is a **dedicated web page** to sustainable development at the college.

The university has an annual **carbon footprint report**, using **2019** as a base year. As a guideline, Tampere University employs the calculation example of Turku, so that data can be comparable across Finland. **Scopes 1,2 and partially scope 3** are included. The university **chooses not to include staff and student commuting or food consumption on campus** in its emissions calculation, as they believe these are individual choices and emissions and thus, not university related emissions. The insufficiency of their emissions definitions and data strongly decreases their integrity and transparency score to low.

Renewable energy is provided to an extent within the district of Tampere, but not by the university itself. The University Properties of Finland (SYK) who own the Tampere campus **compensates the emissions** of their properties. The report acknowledges that compensations are not a free pass, however, intends to consider them. The use of offsetting rather than other possibilities reduces the integrity of the university.

No publicly available defined strategy for reducing emissions was found for the university, which decreases both the transparency and integrity rating. The university claims that carbon footprint reducing actions are included in the annual planning but this was not found. In this respect, the university is **not transparent.** A roadmap to support sustainable development was to be drafted in 2021.

The university notes that possible reductions could occur through increasing space efficiency, decreasing flying and providing low-emission food in event catering. The potential reduction of these actions is not disclosed. The university offers only a **surface level description of reduction measures**, with no substantial data or numbers provided.

The university includes sustainable development in some of its courses. It also has **research groups and communities focused on sustainable development.** This inclusion results in a medium integrity and transparency rating.

University of Twente (UT)

The Netherlands

Emissions	Pledge	Transparency	Integrity
28000 tCO2 in 2019	Carbon neutral by 2030. Carbon negative by 2050	High	Medium

Tracking and Disclosure of Emissions

Transparency Integrity

Coverage: Scopes 1,2 and 3 are covered
Transparency: Carbon footprint and emission sources publicly accessible
Monitoring: Current lack of monitoring and auditing

Emission Targets and Measures

Transparency Integrity

Scientific Targets: Targets are scientifically backed
Interim Targets: Clear interim targets are defined
Ambition: Ambitious net zero goal with defined measures, however offsetting is employed

Social Responsibility

Transparency Integrity

Education: Sustainability is highlighted in education
Research: A budget is allocated to sustainability research
Stakeholders: There is a green hub to involve students and staff, as well as a dedicated sustainability group

University of Twente

The University of Twente, located in The Netherlands and founded in 1961, has 12,544 students and 3,184 staff members.

In 2019, the university reported **28000 tCO2** of emissions and its biggest sources of emissions were from **electricity (52%), car travel (18%) and flights (13%).** The University of Twente pledges to **carbon neutral by 2030** and **carbon negative by 2050.** Additionally, it aims to reduce emissions by 15% by 2023, have a **waste free campus by 2030** and a **circular campus by 2050**.

The university has a **Sustainability Policy** and a separate **carbon footprint** document available online. It connects the documents and pledges to the goals of the **Paris Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals, the National Dutch Government Climate Plan** and the **Twente Climate plan**. It has a multilateral agreement with the Dutch government to improve energy efficiency.

The annually reported carbon footprint emcompasses **scopes 1,2 and 3.** It has historic emissions data since 2014 and uses the **GHG protocol** as a guideline for calculations. The base year for its reductions pledge by 2030 is 2020. Emissions are clearly broken down, however, listed **mitigation measures** do not include the amount of CO2 reduction potential. **Offsetting** is used to offset remaining fossil fuel emissions used for energy and the university aims to offset all work trip emissions. There is a plan to purchase and generate renewable energy.

The university acknowledges a current **lack in monitoring and auditing** of measures, and when it occurs, it is often department dependent. The lack of reporting lowers the integrity rating to medium.

A committee has been established to steer and support the future sustainability strategy of UTwente. There is also a **Green Hub** to be run by students and staff to create a sustainable campus, which leads to a high integrity and transparency rating for social responsibility.

In terms of **education**, courses which focus on sustainability are to be labelled to improve visibility and **sustainability certificates** are to be developed for students who complete sustainability related courses. In addition, projects and research reports can include a standard section as to how they impact sustainability. A **budget** is allocated to researchers for **sustainability research.**

Framework for the Future

Guidelines for Universities

Our recommendations are formed from gaps or inconsistencies identified through this project. They highlight a need for significant changes in the current education system, in order to achieve ambitious university climate pledges. Sustainability and social responsibility goes beyond carbon neutrality and should be a key part of education and research at universities.

Standardisation

The discrepancies observed between the universities analysed highlights the **need for a standardised approach**. Studies demonstrate similar findings and emphasise that the lack of a common framework makes it difficult to effectively compare university emissions (Valls-Val and Bovea 2021, Robinson et al. 2018). This analysis found that **not all scopes were covered, in particular scope 3** was often left out of carbon footprint calculations and monitoring. Moreover, definitions of scope 3 emissions, such as staff and student commuting, varied across institutions. A standardised format needs to be defined and employed across universities, so as to **aid comparisons** and **increase understanding** of the impact of universities on climate change.

Furthermore, wording needs to be carefully selected and harmonised across university documents. This review identified a disparity of wording (carbon neutral, net zero, carbon negative), which can cause confusion to readers who are not familiar with such terms. By **creating a homogenous wording scheme**, universities can avoid misleading readers and make texts more accessible.

This analysis has furthermore found that sustainability and sustainable development are moving more into the focus of development strategies and climate neutrality is rather included than placed as priority area. This indicates that a **bigger picture thinking** is applied and universities recognise that all three sustainability pillars are equally important, therefore it is recommended to **make the engagement with all pillars a standard.**

Transparency

Throughout the assessment, it became obvious that universities choose different approaches and channels to communicate their emission sources, climate actions and climate targets. Generally, information could be found either on university sustainability or strategy websites, or were provided in publicly available documents which were available for download. To achieve a high transparency, every university is **advised to provide public information and data on their emission sources** and carbon footprint to support claims and targets and avoid misleading and incomprehensible claims. This can be achieved through, for example a sustainability website page, that includes comprehensive information about climate claims, goals, targets and actions, as well as links to relevant reports, actions plans, etc. in which more detailed information is given.

Integrity

A high integrity is given when **pledges are scientifically and politically backed** and goals achievable as well as effective. Furthermore, claims should not be misleading for the reader. First of all, this requires that university **decision making processes are data driven,** as well as linked to policies and science. According to scientists, many negative impacts of climate change to the earth and humanity can be prevented or reduced if global warming is limited to 1.5°C, and preferably lower (IPCC WGIII). Universities are therefore strictly instructed to align their pledges and goals with the global 1.5°C target and consider related policies and research.

To avoid misleading carbon emission claims, universities must consider every policy and measure to reduce emissions before they look into offsetting. In the past, offsetting was critically reviewed as it demonstrated to create misleading claims (Watt 2021). For this reason, **universities should first work on reducing their emissions before considering offsetting as an option.** This particularly applies to university energy systems, which should be powered by renewable energy, such as solar and wind power. Additionally, universities are advised to **implement tangible and feasible small-scale measures,** for example vegetarian/vegan cafeteria meal options and local procurement.

A low integrity and sustainable development engagement can be due to many reasons, including the lack of resources or financial means. An **awards system can be developed for universities that links funding to sustainability**. Universities should be rewarded for their sustainability endeavours, thus encouraging them to allocate resources to this area. This, however, also requires universities to take a stand for sustainability and acknowledge the importance of dealing with and communicating related issues.

Stakeholder Involvement

Policies, measures, strategies and management systems, as well as organisational decisions are made by people, including the stakeholders. Among the biggest advantages of stakeholder engagement/involvement are the building of a better organisation, education and empowerment of people. It brings in new perspectives, ideas and interests, which in turn contribute to the organisation achieving better outcomes.

Universities have a wide variety of stakeholders, including students and faculties. Concerning a universities climate neutrality journey, the leaders and board members should **ensure that students and faculties can voice their interests and have a say in decisions.** Awareness about climate change and sustainability is growing among students and, as a crucial support system of universities their demands, concerns and perspectives have to be considered. In addition, this assessment has shown that there is a need for a **sustainability and climate change steering committee.**

Aside from students, it is also important for universities to **actively engage with business and government.** Despite its negative effects on the environment, the economic sector remains a crucial part of social development and can be beneficial for the climate through new innovative and green technologies. Cooperating with universities on developing new technologies is a great way for the economy to get new perspectives and a testing ground, and for students and staff to apply their knowledge in practice, bring in own ideas, and make useful connections. Universities furthermore can derive a **financial benefit** from this, as well as market and support the green transition of the economic sector.

The incentive to actively cooperate with the regional or national government lies in the fact that in this day and age, they can no longer avoid setting climate targets and measures to which unis can orient themselves and contribute to achieving them. It is also a way of politically backing up climate pledges.

Transport

Higher education institutes have an important role to play in terms of transport. **Commuting to and from the university contributes to a significant amount of GHG emissions** and therefore, **sustainable methods of transportation should be promoted.** Universities must **encourage cycling** and provide sufficient bike parking facilities on campus. Cars should be subject to high parking fees to incentivise alternative forms of transport and electric vehicle charging stations should be installed on campus.

Universities can **work with local municipalities to improve public transport** in the city. This can take the form of improved scheduling, better infrastructure and efficient connection possibilities. The university should lobby the local authorities to increase public transport options in the city. Offering student tickets, at a discounted price, is an opportunity to **make public transport more accessible and affordable for studen**ts.

Virtual conferences should be favoured over in-person events, so as to reduce emissions and additionally, increase diversity and accessibility at these conferences. **Remote learning possibilities** for students and teachers should be offered, and where this is not possible, **class timetabling should be improved** to reduce extra commuting to campus.

Social Responsibility

Universities should **consider their place in the community ecosystem,** as contributors to the local economy and home to a proportion of the population. HEIs can support their community through **research** for local authorities and fostering an **environment of exchange and innovation**, creating a **circular campus** that gives back to the community and becoming a living lab for change. Additionally, universities should use their influence and knowledge to **lobby for positive changes** in their community, such as improved transport infrastructure or cleaner energy supplies.

Research

University research actively informs policy changes and furthers knowledge on climate change. All universities should embrace this and seek to **prioritise sustainability and climate research.** Projects and dissertations that contain sustainability or climate aspects should be clearly acknowledged and where possible, made available to community members. These projects may have a standardised symbol or statement on them to indicate their sustainability focus.

Universities must **allocate sufficient funding** to researchers pursuing projects in climate change and sustainability, in order to encourage and improve research. Furthermore, the allocation of funds demonstrates the prioritisation of the subject at the university.

Education

Education has a transformative potential at universities, as students learn lifelong skills and knowledge to take with them into society. To accomplish this, universities should ensure that **courses include a sustainability and climate component** to demonstrate the wide reaching effects of climate change and its pervasiveness through different subject matters. Climate change should not only be taught in a separate and isolated curriculum.

Awareness of sustainability and climate change must be raised throughout the university and higher education institutes should ensure a **climate literacy** of all students graduating. Students should understand the causes, impacts and consequences of climate change. Education should **foster positive behavioural change** and **empower students** to take action.

Conclusion

Our review found that universities are taking positive and proactive steps towards mitigating their greenhouse gas emissions, a fact that should be emphasised here. This report does not seek to discredit the work that universities are currently taking, however, these steps are not as ambitious and holistic as is required in the fight against climate change. A unified approach by the academic system can help lead the way to climate neutrality. Universities should place the climate crisis at their core and consider all present and future strategies through this lens.

The guidelines presented in this report can support universities in their transition to carbon neutrality and overarching sustainability. The changes in this review may be regarded as difficult for universities and there are many barriers that will need to be overcome to implement them. Each measure taken will be a step forward for the higher education sector. Universities must adopt a transformative approach to climate change and sustainability, one that encompasses all aspects of university life. They should become ambassadors for change and lead the way for the generations passing through campuses.

Moreover, as awareness around climate change builds, students and faculty will be demanding more from their chosen university. Universities who want to attract a broad cohort of students and staff will have no choice but to lead climate action and sustainability, as prospective students will seek out and prioritise those institutions that put in the effort.

Finally, this report hopes to educate students and community members in understanding the integrity of university climate action plans. It is often intimidating and difficult for the public to decipher true actions from false promises and so this report highlights inconsistencies at the university level, making it easier for readers to interpret. Whilst acknowledging that universities may not have publicly available information or are currently taking the first steps in their climate neutral journey, the analysis in this report distinguishes university greenwashing from real action.

References

ALLEA (2022) Towards Climate Sustainability of the Academic System in Europe and Beyond. Berlin. DOI 10.26356/climate-sust-acad

Day, T. *et al.* (2022a) *Corporate Climate Responsibility GUIDANCE AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR GOOD PRACTICE CORPORATE EMISSION REDUCTION AND NET-ZERO TARGETS*. New Climate.

Day, T. *et al.* (2022b) *Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor 2022*. New Climate.

DCU (2019) 'Sustainability Charter and Climate Action Plan 2019-2022'. Available at: https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/ocoo/docs/dcu_climate_action_plan_2019_v2.7.pdf (Accessed: 9 November 2021).

de Freitas Netto, S.V. *et al.* (2020) 'Concepts and forms of greenwashing: a systematic review', *Environmental Sciences Europe*, 32(19). doi:https://doi.org/10.1186/s12302-020-0300-3.

Delmas, M.A. and Burbano, V.C. (2011) 'The Drivers of Greenwashing', *California Management Review*, 54(1), pp. 64–87. doi:https://doi.org/10.1525%2Fcmr.2011.54.1.64.

ECIU (no date a) 'Our Members', *ECIU*. Available at: https://www.eciu.org/member/eciu (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

ECIU (no date b) 'The European Consortium of Innovative Universities', *ECIU*. Available at: https://www.eciu.org/T (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

'Ecological responsibility' (no date) *TUNI*. Available at: https://www.tuni.fi/en/about-us/sustainable-development-at-tampere-universities/ecological-responsibility#:~:text=The%20overall%20carbon%20footprint%20of,and%20research%20infrastructure%20(23%25) (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

'Greenhouse Gas Protocol FAQ' (no date). GHG Protocol. Available at: https://ghgprotocol.org/sites/default/files/standards_supporting/FAQ.pdf (Accessed: 11 May 2022).

Helmers, E., Chang, C.C. and Dauwels, J. (2021) 'Carbon footprinting of universities worldwide: Part I—objective comparison by standardized metrics', *Environmental Sciences Europe*, 33(30). doi:https://doi.org/10.1186/s12302-021-00454-6.

IPCC WGIII (2022) 'Summary for Policymakers', in Shukla, P.R. et al. (eds) *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge UK and New York, NY USA: IPCC. Available at: https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg3/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf (Accessed: 19 April 2022).

IUA (no date) 'Dublin City University', *Irish Universities Association*. Available at: https://www.iua.ie/ouruniversities/university-profiles/dublin-city-university/ (Accessed: 25 April 2022).

Jog, D. and Singhal, D. (2019) 'Pseudo green players and their greenwashing practices: a differentiating strategy for real green firms of personal care category', *Strategic Direction*, 32(12), pp. 4–7. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/SD-07-2019-0143.

Kristensen, H.S. and Juul-Andersen, M. (eds) (2021) '2021 Sustainability Report'. Aalborg University.

Mustiko Aji, H. and Sutikno, B. (2015) 'The Extended Consequence of Greenwashing: Perceived Consumer Skepticism', *International Journal of Business and Information*, 10(4).

Robinson, O.J. *et al.* (2018) 'Towards a universal carbon footprint standard: A case study of carbon management at universities', *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 172, pp. 4435–4455. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.02.147.

'Sustainable development at Tampere Universities' (no date) *TUNI*. Available at: https://www.tuni.fi/en/about-us/sustainable-development-at-tampere-universities (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

'Tampere University' (no date) *TUNI*. Available at: https://www.tuni.fi/en/about-us/tampere-university (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

Tolvanen, K. (2021) *Tampere Universities Carbon Footprint 2019: Carbon Calculation Report*. Tampere University.

UiS (2021) 'Strategy 2030 for the University of Stavanger', *UiS*. Available at: https://www.uis.no/en/strategy-2030-university-stavanger#/ (Accessed: 2 May 2022).

UL (no date) 'Sins of Greenwashing', *UL*. Available at: https://www.ul.com/insights/sins-greenwashing (Accessed: 31 May 2022).

UT (2020) *Carbon Footprint Report: University of Twente 2020*. University of Twente.

UTrento (no date) 'Piano Di Sostenibilità Ambientale 2020-2021'. University of Trento.

UTwente (no date a) 'About UT', *UTwente*. Available at: https://www.utwente.nl/en/organisation/about/ (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

UTwente (no date b) 'Facts and Figures', *UTwente*. Available at: https://www.utwente.nl/en/facts-and-figures/#organisation (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

Valls-Val, K. and Bovea, M.D. (2021) 'Carbon footprint in Higher Education Institutions: a literature review and prospects for future research', *Clean Technologies and Environmental Policy*, 23, pp. 2523–2542. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s10098-021-02180-2.

Watt, R. (2021). The fantasy of carbon offsetting. *Environmental Politics*, *30*(7), 1069–1088. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2021.1877063

de Wit, H. and Altbach, P.G. (2021) 'Internationalization in higher education: global trends and recommendations for its future', *Policy Reviews in Higher Education*, 5(1). doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/23322969.2020.1820898.