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SUCCESS STORY

University of Gothenburg: involving students and staff in environmental management and sustainability in research and education



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

The **University of Gothenburg** is a multidisciplinary university that dates back to 1891. We consist of eight faculties and 38 departments. We also have a large number of centres of research and expertise that span across several academic disciplines. These disciplines serve as a meeting point for students, researchers and representatives from the commercial, industrial, and public sectors. Around 55 000 students and 6 600 staff study and work here, making us one of the largest universities in Northern Europe.

Industry:
Higher Education

Size:
around 55.000 students and 6.600 staff



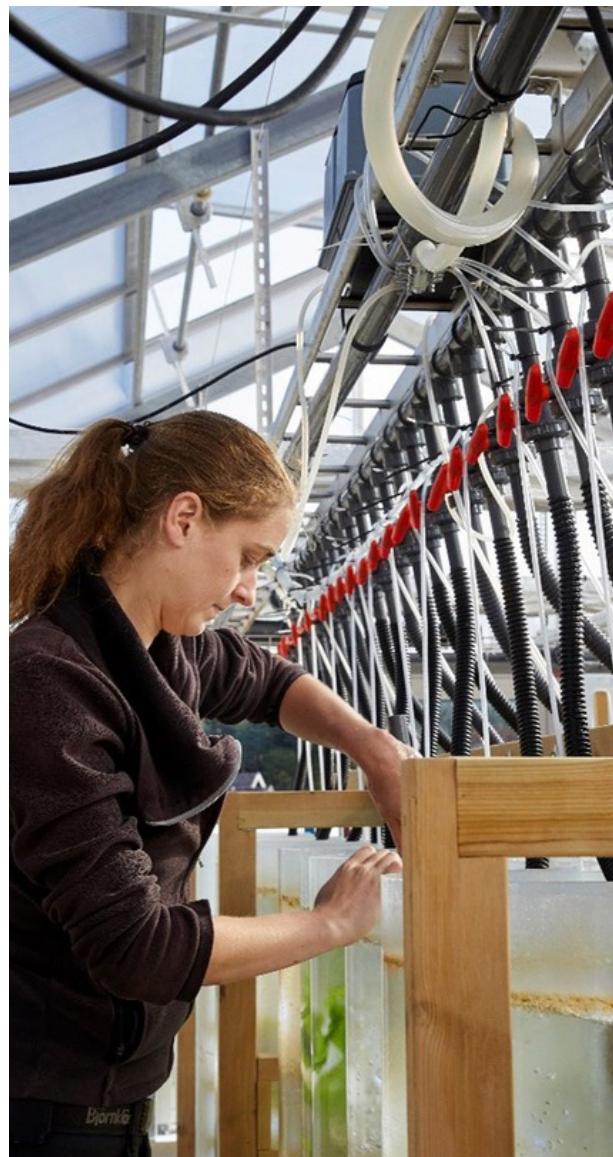
What is your approach towards sustainability?

Research, education and collaboration for sustainable development is a vital part of the University of Gothenburg's vision. This means we endeavour to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental dimensions, into the university's activities and to collaborate and work with society towards achieving the UN Goals for Sustainable Development.

The University of Gothenburg has a long tradition of both extensive research and education in environmental science as well as a successful environmental management work. The environmental aspects have recently been more and more integrated into the broader concept of sustainable development as defined in the Brundtland Commission Report and in Agenda 2030. In addition to traditional environmental issues such as climate, recycling and energy use, equality and work environment are also examples of important aspects of sustainable development. Sustainability issues concern the entire university and the responsibility is distributed over many different parts of the organisation.



*Laser research at department of physics.
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*Algae research at Tjärnö Marine Laboratory.
© University of Gothenburg - photo: Anna-Lena Lundqvist*



Why did your company join EMAS?

As an organisation, the University of Gothenburg has a major environmental impact and thus has a responsibility to develop its internal work for sustainable development. An Environmental Management system is a great tool to make our workplaces and learning environments more sustainable for our 6.600 staff and our 55.000 students.

We have been registered according to EMAS since 2004 and are the first university in the world being certified under both ISO 14001 and EMAS. This means that the university is constantly working to improve its operations in order to reduce its negative environmental impact and strengthen its positive impact on sustainable development through research, education and collaboration. Our Sustainable Development Action Plan has been is a central part of the Environmental Management System (EMS) and several strategic improvements have been implemented based on it, such as sustainability labelling of education and efforts to stimulate research in line with the 2030 Agenda. Today sustainable development is integrated in the faculties' strategic plans. We pursue a wide range of sustainability initiatives and actively involve our students. The Student Sustainability Hub gathers, coordinates and supports student initiatives and activities focused on sustainable development.

Within the University, the Unit for Property and Sustainable Development is responsible for the environmental work. The unit closely collaborates with the Gothenburg Centre for Sustainable Development (GMV) that brings academic disciplines together to create new knowledge and collaborates with other actors in society for its practical implementation.

The environmental management system covers all activities within the university: research, education at basic and advanced level, collaboration with the surrounding society, administration and other support activities, except the University Board and internal audit. It also covers all physical locations where these activities take place.



Marine research with remotely operated underwater vehicle (ROV).
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Department of Conservation
© University of Gothenburg - photo: Stefan Svensson



Main results so far?

In 2021, the University of Gothenburg was **ranked 49th in the Times Higher Education Impact Ranking (THE)** on the Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the world's higher education institutions based among 1.118 higher education institutions from 94 countries.

A Sustainable Development Goals Impact Assessment Tool was developed by the Gothenburg Centre for Sustainable Development (GMV) with partners and is now freely available online for anyone to use. Several departments have used this to map research and other activities related to these goals. The tool identifies both positive and negative contributions to the 2030 Agenda and can be used as a basis for research funding applications, sustainability elements in courses and programmes, and collaborative projects in sustainable development.

Concrete examples of sustainable development targets we achieved or exceeded in 2021:

- 18% of courses (835 out of 4.669 courses) and 21% of programmes (44 out of 205 programmes) obtained the university's sustainability label, which shows the increased integration of sustainable development in education.
- Total CO2 emissions from business travel were reduced by 91% since 2019 (in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic). A step towards halving the University's carbon emissions by 2030.
- Electricity and heat use per m2 decreased by 14% compared to 2015.
- The total amount of waste was reduced by 39% since 2015.



Department of Conservation © University of Gothenburg - photo: Anna-Lena Lundqvist



What do you have in mind for the future?

Our goal is that by 2024, the University of Gothenburg will have strengthened its position as a leading university for sustainable development.

Our university has gained international recognition for its work on sustainability issues in education and research and for its environmental management work. The University will further develop and strengthen sustainability work and increase relevance as a social actor and partner, thereby contributing to Agenda 2030 and the global goals for sustainable development, including economic, social and ecological dimensions.

With this comes a responsibility to develop both specialist expertise and new knowledge through cross-border educational and research collaborations.

The university has decided on five profile areas for research that might be supported through a government decision; *A Sustainable Digital Society, Age-related Disease and Therapy Development, Cultural Heritage and Sustainability: Towards an Integrated Approach, Molecular Life Science and UGOT Ocean*.

Collaboration with other societal actors will also be developed so that students and employees can together develop knowledge and contribute to common solutions. During the period 2021–2024, the University of Gothenburg will:

- clarify the University's role in the work for sustainable development,
- strengthen the development of sustainability perspectives in education and research,
- initiate and improve collaboration with organisations and other actors in the surrounding world, in order to contribute to sustainable social development,
- reduce its own negative environmental impact by continuing to develop long-term systematic sustainability work.

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